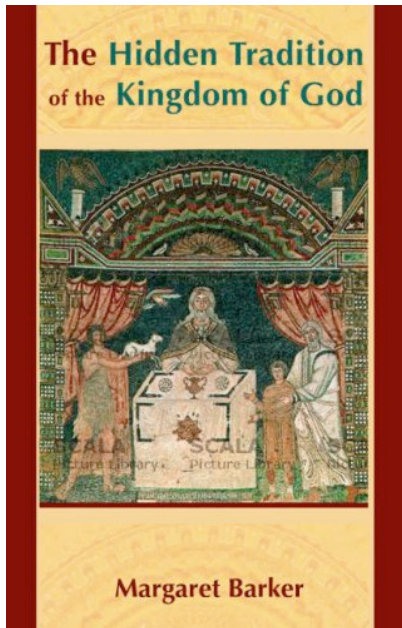


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Barker, Margaret

*The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*

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Although this book is short and clearly written, it is difficult to review. It emphasizes an esoteric, hidden stream within and outside the Bible rather than the exoteric, public, mainstream dimension of the Bible. This hidden stream raises flags and alarms, but the results, while debatable, are less alarming.

The book begins with an introduction (1–3) and concludes with a postscript that is a quotation from J. H. Newman’s sermon “The Invisible World” (129–30). Within this frame one finds five chapters: (1) “The Traditions of the Jerusalem Temple” (mostly on the Hebrew Bible, especially the late prophets); (2) “The Enoch Traditions”; (3) “The High Priesthood” (mostly on Qumran, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the figure of Melchizedek); (4) “The Book of Revelation” (which includes some treatments of the Gospels); (5) “Living the Vision” (wide-ranging).

This book represents the summary of a life’s work. It could be seen as the synthesis of five or six earlier works. In this sense, it serves as a useful and helpful first orientation to the work of an author with a somewhat original point of view. The summary character also implies, however, that the author will not refer to all the secondary literature that she has cited in her earlier books.

The introduction makes several claims that are crucial if the book is to be understood and accepted. For Barker, the book of Revelation is the climax of the New Testament, and Revelation culminates in a vision of the coming of the kingdom of God to earth. Since John's visions are all set in the temple, the kingdom concept must have originated in secret temple traditions. She then sets up an opposition between the original priesthood with its secrets (Num 18:7) and the reformed priesthood under King Josiah with its public revelation (Deut 29:29 [quoted three times in the book] and 30:11–12.). For Barker, much of the secret tradition is lost. Fragments remain. These can be pieced together and expanded by Hebrew wordplays. Melchizedek and Enoch help to fill in the gaps. The visions received by John the Baptist and Jesus are the visions recorded in the book of Revelation. The Bride they see is the heavenly city, the holy of holies, the kingdom, and also Wisdom (which had been rejected by Josiah). "Recovering the original kingdom vision enables us to glimpse again the original vision."

Here we may pause to note that Barker uses Scripture as totally interconnected. As the rabbis say, there is no before or after in Torah (for Barker). One could also think of Northrup Frye's *The Great Code*. It seems that John the Evangelist is also the author of Revelation and the letters (*passim*). Peter is the author of 2 Peter (101). Barker does not insist on these points; she is too busy making other points.

The first chapter, on the Jerusalem temple (4–28), contains her main study of the Hebrew Bible. It begins with a quotation from Merkavah mysticism that states that the great mystery is in "my heart ... my soul ... everyday." This already gives us a clue as to where Barker thinks the kingdom is. She then makes the nonobvious assertion that "the original of all Kingdom imagery lies in Solomon's temple." This temple was first destroyed by Josiah's reform, before the Babylonians got to it. Israel's true faith was lost with Deuteronomy. In the "secret temple tradition," the holy of holies is a fiery cube, the heart of creation (as in Pythagorean imagination). The royal high priest was Adam, the original temple Eden. The true priest's title was David, which means "beloved." The four throne names of Isa 9:6 LXX become the names of four archangels in Enoch, but they are aspects of the Lord and they anticipate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. With Josiah's reform, the temple, the Bride (Queen Ashratah = Wisdom?), and the kingdom were all lost—but they were all restored in Christianity.

In my view, this approach to the early biblical tradition seems idiosyncratic, although not all need be discarded. That Wellhausen disliked the Priestly strand in the Hebrew Bible is generally admitted. Many authors have sought to correct this bias. There are the great commentaries of Propp on Exodus and Milgrom on Leviticus and Numbers. There is, further, the major essay by Norbert Lohfink, in his *Theology of Deuteronomy*, on the theological values of the Priestly source in the Pentateuch (e.g., the appreciation of

creation, of peace, of blessing, of women). There is abundant Priestly material in the Hebrew Bible, much of which purports to describe the First, not the Second, Temple. Yet Barker prefers the hidden to the available. The Mishnah also has an abundance of temple material. Again, the idea that, to be fully understood, the New Testament requires the longer Jewish canon of the Greek Bible, is not in itself an unreasonable position. Nor that the biblical pseudepigrapha and Qumran literature both have a contribution to make. Nor that there is a certain rich complexity in the Hebrew Bible's presentation of the deity that sometime goes beyond a simple absolute monotheism (see my *Trinity—Kingdom—Church* [NTOA 48; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001]; 3–20). But all these positions can be maintained without any appeal to a hidden tradition and without delegitimizing Josianic or postexilic or Second Temple Judaism *in globo*. Certainly early Christianity drew upon all of these bodies of tradition, selecting what it found most helpful, passing over in silence or explicitly criticizing what it did not.

Chapter 2 enthusiastically praises the Enoch tradition because it contains a rich angelology and is older than Moses and the exodus and is normative Scripture for early Christianity and because the fall (Gen 3) in Enoch describes the good priests being expelled from the temple (by Josiah). This expulsion is reversed in 1 Cor 15:22–24; Rev 2:7; and Irenaeus. Noah's brother Nir gave birth to Melchizedek (*2 En.* 70–71). The Day of Atonement, crucial for Enoch, is left out of Deut 16. Yet for Enoch it is on this day that the kingdom is established. Enoch's ascent implies a First Temple ritual in which the king-priest-god receives revelation. The Divine Name dwells in him. The *ehyeh asher ehyeh* ("I who cause to be") of Exod 3:14 is the great secret of the temple of the kingdom, of *theosis* (the divinization of humans), the three words of Gos. Thom. 13. Isaiah knew Enoch but not Moses. Enoch is transformed into the son of man (*1 En.* 71:14). Enoch should be used as a guide to interpret Isaiah, especially his servant passages. Of course, I must ask, if Exod 3:14 contains the divine name, how is it secret? This divine name is revealed to Moses. How, then, can Moses be irrelevant or negative? To be sure, In Deuteronomy itself it is frankly admitted that Moses is flawed (Deut 1:27; 3:23–27) and it is narrated that he dies outside the promised land (Deut 34).

The third chapter, on the high priest, reports the temple criticism to be found in Enoch, Third Isaiah, Zechariah, and Qumran's references to the Wicked Priest. Some Jews must have thought that Ezra's rule was illegitimate, since he is not mentioned in Sir 49:11–13. The story of Miriam and Aaron (Num 12) is a parable of power shifts in the Second Temple. Miriam represents Wisdom, which is replaced by the law of Moses. Priests were venerated as angelic teachers, the presence of God. Melchizedek represents an older priesthood than Aaron's. It goes back to Noah before the flood, which is code for exile. Melchizedek, king of justice, was a name for the Lord. This royal priesthood is claimed by Christianity as a whole (1 Pet 2:9). Psalm 110, about Melchizedek, is the most frequently

used text in the New Testament. Early Christians such as Justin and Tertullian loved Melchizedek because he was not circumcised and did not observe the Sabbath. There was a debate over Gen 14:20. Did Abraham pay a tithe to Melchizedek or vice versa? Melchizedek was Yahwel-El, the guardian angel of Israel, a high priest, so in meeting him Abraham experienced a theophany. The Qumran Melchizedek text connects him with the biblical Jubilee year, proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. This tradition led to the Christian interpretation in the Letter to the Hebrews where his priesthood superseded that of Aaron.

Chapter 4 concerns the book of Revelation but actually treats many other texts, especially the Synoptic Gospels, but also texts from Qumran and Thomas. Thematically it tries to come to an understanding of the kingdom of God, so it begins with Mark 1:15. This would be normal practice, but we are immediately off on a chase from 1 Pet 1:12, “things into which angels longed to look.” These turn out to be the mysteries of the holy of holies, the divine presence, the kingdom of God, Jesus himself, the true temple, revelation—everything, in fact, except what the term *kingdom* normally means, namely, a certain kind of sociopolitical arrangement. (In the Bible, the kingdom of God is usually connected with justice and peace: Matt 6:33; Rom 14:17). The kingdom is the incarnate Word’s visible glory dwelling among us (John 1:14), but it is not of this world or else it is within us (John 18:36; Luke 17:21). In the Psalms the kingdom means the renewing of creation at the enthronement of the king. The book of Revelation contains the visions that Jesus saw at his baptism and throughout his ministry. That is why the Gospels must be read through the lens of that book, not vice versa. Jesus’ temptation in the desert and his transfiguration on the mountain were spirit journeys. What he sees is the giant golden cube, the holy of holies, the heavenly city, the kingdom. Jesus relives Ezekiel’s experience. The Qumran Temple Scroll also imagines the ideal temple and the holy city. Knowledge and wisdom are shared. Eden is restored. The kingdom becomes the living temple of the Church.

The fifth and final chapter is called “Living the Vision”; I am tempted to call it “catching the vision.” That is, to be persuaded the reader must catch or accept Barker’s vision of how the texts are to be read. On page 104 Barker expresses impatience with an approach that looks at kingdom passages in the Bible, while on 105 she sketches earlier ways of understanding the kingdom. But instead of choosing one as historically more adequate, in the sense of being closest to the express intention of the biblical authors, Barker feels sure that all are based on the “the original vision” of the holy of holies. The view that I hold as most adequate she summarizes thus: “the hope for a political and physical reality, a transformed earth where the saints would reign.” But she does not embrace it, although she recognizes that this hope inspires Christians worldwide and can have an economic and environmental impact. She then reports on how the fiery inner sanctum became

fused with Aristotle's Empyrean, due to Anselm of Laon, and gained currency with Dante's *Paradiso*. The eclipsing of the early Christian hope begins with John, is taken up by Origen, and is completed by the late works of Augustine. The kingdom is etherealized as eternal life in heaven, grace in the soul, and the church. Barker adds the view that the kingdom can be interpreted as Sabbath rest and respect for creation and concludes with William Blake's "Jerusalem."

Overall, I conclude that Barker's loose associations and slides from temple to kingdom terminology suggest a certain eccentricity. However, the conclusions it serves are rather tame: a purely realized eschatology (C. H. Dodd lives on), a liturgical spirituality, a keep-England-green environmentalism. What I would judge as weaknesses—no hope for a future divine intervention to realize the kingdom on earth; a vague ethics—others might regard as strengths. But Barker's efforts to blur or homogenize the biblical promise and hope of the kingdom of God still to come to earth does not do justice to those texts that do speak about the kingdom.