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THE PIRKE DeRABBI ELIEZER:

A STUDY OF A PARTICULAR MIDRASHIC IMAGINATION

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DIGEST

This paper is an effort to describe some of the characteristics which make the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer unique in midrashic literature. Writing pseudonymously in the name of Rabbi Eli'ezer, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is often bold and polemical. At times it stands firmly within the traditional midrashic framework, at other times it stands closer to the pseudepigraphic literature. This paper examines some of the passages in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer which reflect both elements.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is characterized as a midrash rich in rabbinic mysticism and mythic imagination. The treatment of the Work of Creation, angelology, the secret of the Ineffable Name, the esoteric speculations surrounding Creation, the fall of angels, and the fall of humans are discussed and the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer placed within rabbinic or other traditions on these themes.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is also characterized by the validation of customs, rites, beliefs, and laws because they recapitulate the behavior of the Patriarchs. The conflation of time and place on a mythical plane, where heaven, earth, and heroes meet and interact, is also characteristic of the midrash.

Some of the well known aggadic traditions which are taken up by the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer are examined, pointing out along the way that which makes this volume individual in midrashic literature. The compiler of the Pirḳe deRabbi

Eli'ezer often manipulated sources, extended or tailored well known aggadic traditions, and rarely preserved the names of the Rabbis associated with even the most celebrated controversies.

The extended narrative feature of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, its attention to detail, the presence of angels in the narrative, and its bold anthropomorphic character all attest to an individual style. The mythic flavor and the narrative flow make the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer a colorful midrash of many interesting and individual features.

INTRODUCTION

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is a pseudepigraphic midrash attributed to the celebrated Palestinian Tanna Rabbi Eli'ezer ben Hyrḳanos. It is also known as the Baraitá deRabbi Eli'ezer or the Haggadah deRabbi Eli'ezer in medieval rabbinic literature. In its present form it consists of fifty-four chapters,[1] most of which are a narrative commentary on the books of Genesis, Exodus, and the beginning of Numbers.

The first two chapters, describing the call of Eli'ezer, seem to be a later addition, probably prefixed to justify Eli'ezer's authorship. Some of the manuscripts, for example the manuscript fragment in the British Museum and some of the fragments in the Bodleian Library, begin with the third chapter.[2]

Rabbi Eli'ezer, in whose name our midrash is written, was a great scholar and is frequently quoted in the Mishnah and Talmud. He was known as a mystical authority by the Merkavah mystics.[3] In the school of his famous teacher R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai, Rabbi Eli'ezer discussed the cosmological and theosophical topics which were favorite subjects of speculation. Ultimately, Eli'ezer was excommunicated, in spite of his great reputation.[4]

The choice of Rabbi Eli'ezer as the author for this pseudonymous midrash reveals something of its character. It often dares to speak in a voice of its own; it is bold and polemical, and dares to explore some of those secret teachings that were only transmitted privately between teacher and student when Rabbi Eli'ezer sat and listened to his teacher Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai expound.

The form of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is uneven--some chapters interrupt the narrative continuity of the midrash,[5] some chapters read like homilies devoted to specific days or subjects,[6] and some material is repeated or confused.[7] Friedlander divided the book into three originally distinct sections. One section describes the ten descents of God from heaven to earth. Another section is devoted to a detailed description of rabbinic mysticism, particularly the Ma'aseh Bere'shit (the Work of Creation), Ma'aseh Merkavah (the Work of the Chariot), Sod ha'Ibbur (Secret of the Calendar), and Sod Ge'ulah (Secret of Redemption). The third section is what is left of a midrash on the Shmoneh 'Esre, of which only eight of the benedictions are treated.

The areas of speculation alone link the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer with mystical traditions that go back to the Second Temple period, where esoteric doctrines were taught in Pharisaic circles dealing with Ma'aseh Bere'shit and Ma'aseh Merkavah.[8] Around these subjects arose a hesitation, even a prohibition, to discuss them in public. There was an air of danger associated with such speculations, as evidenced in the

famous story of the four who entered Pardes.[9] By the time of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, this type of mysticism was fully developed and perhaps even declining. Its classical period came in the fourth to the sixth centuries, though the leading figures of these speculations remain unnamed to us.[10]

These speculations are given great attention in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, particularly those dealing with Ma'aseh Bere'shit. Chapters three through eleven deal with the six days of Creation, with special emphasis on Day Two, a day of particular polemical valence.[11] We must be careful, however, not to confuse every rabbinic exegetical footnote with Ma'aseh Bere'shit. Much of the early chapters in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer deal with the typical kind of rabbinic exegesis of the order of first things, of great interest to the exegete but certainly not esoteric. In the realm of the unmistakeably esoteric speculations, however, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is especially energetic.

It is no surprise, then, that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is one of the most important sources of aggadah for the Zohar.[12] One must be careful not to read the more sophisticated speculations of the Zohar into the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer --the material will simply not sustain it. But to study the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is to realize that the emerging mythic sensibility of our midrash makes it a suitable resource for a later, more elaborate mystical inquiry, for as Scholem has pointed out: to some extent, mysticism represents a revival

of mythical thought.[13]

This paper begins with an examination of some of the mythic characteristics of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. Using the Friedlander translation and the Vilna text with notes by David Luria, the writer went through the text, lifting from it examples of the various mythic elements. The first chapter is devoted to the validation of rites, customs, and beliefs by grounding them in the paradigmatic (Patriarchal) stratum.

The second chapter treats another aspect of the mythic imagination: the conflation of people, objects, and events outside of time and place. Examples are brought from the text to indicate the character of this kind of thinking.

In the third chapter, several of the better known aggadic traditions are selected and studied, pointing out along the way that which makes the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer distinct in midrashic tradition.

The fourth and fifth chapters take up the subject of some of the esoteric speculations that are so central to this midrash. The place of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer in the tradition associated with Ma'aseh Bere'shit is examined, as well as some of the notions which lie behind an historical understanding of such speculations.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the second day of Creation and the polemics associated with it. The treatment of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is analyzed and evaluated in relation to other traditions on the same theme.

The last chapter deals with the resolution of evil and the historical underpinnings of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer's treatment. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is analyzed according to which tradition it seems to follow.

The compiler of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer probably was a Palestinian. Many of the customs to which he refers were exclusively Palestinian ones. Also, nearly all the authorities cited in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer are Palestinian, with the exception of R. Mesharshia and R. Shemaiah.[15] The direct quotes from the Talmud come only from the Palestinian recension.[16] Notwithstanding these clues, there has been some disagreement among scholars over a Palestinian origin of the midrash.[17]

Friedlander cites evidence that the work was written in an Arabian atmosphere.[18] In chapter thirty, two brothers of the children of Ishmael arise, after whose reign the Messiah will come. In the early ninth century c.e., the two sons of Harun al-Rashid, El-Amin and El-Mamun, were ruling over the Islamic realm. This is also a clue to the dating of our midrash.

Jost was the first to point out that in the same thirtieth chapter, the author of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer alludes to the three stages of Mohammedan conquest: that of Arabia, of Spain, and of Rome, which took place in 830 c.e.[19] This also indicates a ninth century date for our text.

Zunz believed that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer was written no earlier than the beginning of the eighth century.[20]

Friedlander puts its final redaction, based on some of the above evidence, in the second or third decade of the ninth century.[21] Scholem dated it in the eighth century.[22]

The first to quote the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer are Geonim of Babylon. It is quoted in the Siddur of Rav Amram (c. 850 c.e.). The Mahzor Vitry quotes our midrash by the title "Peraḳim." In Tosafot to Ketubot 99a, R. Tam refers to it as "Haggadot de R. Eli'ezer ben Hyrḳanos." The Shulḥan Arukh calls it the "Baraita deRabbi Eli'ezer."[23]

Much of the midrashic lore found in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer has been borrowed by the payetanim for liturgical use. Also, the Musaf Ḳedushah for Sabbaths and Holydays is to be found in its earliest form in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.[24] The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer seems to have other liturgical connections: for example, some of the chapters read like homilies on the occasion of certain Holydays.[25]

At one time, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer must have enjoyed considerable popularity, for it has come down to the present day in more than two dozen editions. There is also a Latin version with an elaborate commentary by Vorstius dated 1644; evidence that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer had some interest for non-Jewish readers as well.

The first edition was published in Constantinople in 1514, the second edition in Venice in 1544, and the third edition in Sabbioneta in 1567. The folio edition of Vilna (1837), upon which David Luria appended his commentary, is the one which is cited throughout the course of this paper

and the best extant.

The translations reproduced in the text of this paper are from Friedlander's 1916 translation. I have chosen to cite them within the text of the paper itself for the benefit of the reader. The numbers refer to the Hebrew text of the Vilna edition, with the commentary by David Luria, as it seems to be the best text extant. I have also chosen to make all citations from the Bible within the text. They are taken from the 1917 Jewish Publication Society translation.

Footnotes: Introduction

[1]The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer in its present form is incomplete. Of ten descents of God to earth, only eight are discussed in the text as we have it. Of the nineteen benedictions of the Shmoneh 'Esre, only eight are derived midrashically in the text.

[2]Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, trans. and annotated by Gerald Friedlander (New York: Hermon Press, 1970), p. 1, n. 1.

[3]Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 182.

[4]B.T. Baba Metsia 59b.

[5]Chapters six through eight, for example, interrupt the narrative concerning the first six days of Creation.

[6]Chapter ten in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer seems to be a homily for Yom Kippur.

[7]See chapter six below, for a discussion of the confusion between the ten things created at dusk on the first 'erev Shabbat and the creations of the second day.

[8]Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 42.

[9]See B.T. Ḥagigah 14b.

[10]Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 43.

[11]See chapter six below.

[12]Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 170.

[13]Ibid., p. 8.

[14]Two examples are the checking out of virginity with the index finger (etsba') on p. 38b, and the custom of covering the blood and foreskin of the brit milah with dust on p. 76a.

[15]Jewish Encyclopedia, 1901, s.v. "Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer," by Schulim Ochser.

[16]Friedlander, PRE, p. liv.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid. The names Fatimah (PRE 78b) and ʿAyeshah (PRE 78a) as wives of Ishmael betray an Islamic influence.

[19]Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer."

[20]Leopold Zunz and Hanokh Albeck, HaDerashot BeYisrael (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954), p. 134.

[21]Friedlander, PRE, liii-liv.

[22]Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 170.

[23]Friedlander, PRE, p. xviii.

[24]Ibid., p. xx.

[25]See note six above.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VALIDATION OF RITES, CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer shares more than pseudonymity with the non-canonical Jewish literature of the inter-testamental period, particularly with the Book of Jubilees. The Book of Jubilees is known for its grounding of subsequently revealed laws of Moses in the activities of the Patriarchs, particularly Adam to Jacob.[1] In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, too, there are numerous examples of this kind of validation, and of not only laws, but of customs, rites, and beliefs. They are all secured in the primary Patriarchal stratum.

Rituals and Customs mentioned in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer are demonstrated to recapitulate exemplary models or paradigms: the Patriarchs, God, and even angels. Human behavior is legitimized through extra-human models, or validated by Patriarchal analogy. Sometimes this legitimization has a decidedly didactic thrust, reflecting a polemic often hidden in the time period to which it pertains. But this is not central to the activity of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and receives no special attention. What is central is attributing laws and customs to the primary stratum, and of that there are many examples.

When Cain and Abel brought their individual offerings before the Lord, our book (quoting R. Joshua ben Ḳorḥah) comments:

> The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said: Heaven forbid. Never let the offerings of Cain and Abel be mixed up [with one another], even in the weaving of a garment, as it is said, "Thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff, wool and linen together" (Deut. 22:11). And even if it is combined, let it not come upon thee, as it is said, "Neither shall come upon thee a garment of two kinds of stuff mingled together" (Lev. 19:19), (PRE 49a).

When Adam realized the power of the Sabbath day (it had saved him from judgement in Gehinnom), he began to observe the Sabbath and especially observed it by uttering the psalm for the Sabbath day, Psalm 92 (PRE 44a, 46a). Ginzberg points out that only the later sources report that Adam was delivered from Gehinnom by Shabbat; in earlier sources, it is only known that Adam, when he repented, composed Psalm 92 on the wonder of repentance.[2]

When Eleazer returned from Ḥaran with a wife for Isaac, Abraham took his son aside and passed on to him (in the way of fathers and sons) the appropriate behavior. Because servants in general had such a nasty reputation: "This servant is suspected of immorality and deceit is in his hand (PRE 38b)." Abraham says:

> See, lest he [Eli'ezer] has violated her [tsinor--euphemism for vagina], therefore bring the young girl into the tent and check for her virginity with [your] finger, if her virginity is pure, behold she is yours by the mouth of the Almighty. He took her into the tent and checked her virginity with **his** finger and he showed it to Abraham his father.

"Thus hence the Israelites have the custom of producing the tokens of the damsel's virginity" (ibid.). Friedlander traces this custom to Palestine;[3] a clue to the environment of the redactor of our midrash.

"From whom do we learn [that there should be] seven days of [the wedding] banquet? From our father Jacob, who made a banquet with rejoicing for seven days, and he took Leah [as his wife]" (ibid). Jacob also rejoiced for seven days when he took Rachel as his wife. Likewise Samson rejoiced for seven days when he took a wife from among the Philistines (ibid).

By analogy we also learn in this chapter that the "bridegroom is like a king," in typical midrashic style:

> just as a king is praised by everybody, so is the bridegroom praised by everybody [during] the seven days of the feast. Just as a king is dressed in garments of glory, so the bridegroom is dressed in garments of glory. Just as a king is rejoicing with feasts in his presence, all his days, so the bridegroom is rejoicing and has feasts before him all the seven days of the banquet. Just as the king does not go into the marketplace alone, likewise the bridegroom does not go into the marketplace alone. Just as the face of a king is shining like the light of a sun, so the face of the bridegroom is shining like the light of a sun, as it is said, "And he is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing to run his course." (PRE 39a).

"Whence do we learn of the service of loving kindness for bridegrooms? We learn this from the Holy One Praised Be He for He Himself bestowed loving-kindness upon Adam and his helpmate" (PRE 37a). God did so by mobilizing the ministering angels who descended in a great nuptial party with the

Holy One to "show loving-kindness to Adam and his helpmate." It is characteristic of the kind of imagination that informs this work to encounter God stories, splendid and magnificent, everywhere. And, of course, angels.

The Holy One Blessed Be He not only attended Adam and Eve's wedding, but presided over it: "the Holy One, Blessed Be He was like a precentor [ḥazan]" (PRE 31a). The ministering angels walked to and fro like friends guarding the ḥuppah, and the Holy One Blessed Be He stood under the ḥuppah, like a good ḥazan, and blessed the bride (ibid.).

"Whence do we learn of the service of loving-kindness to mourners? From the Holy One who showed loving-kindness to Moses His servant and buried him with His own hand" (PRE 39a). The Holy One showed loving-kindness to Aaron also. "He took Aaron's coffin and brought it above the camp of Israel, and all Israel saw Aaron's coffin flying and moving in the air" (PRE 39b). One might wonder if this shows gemilut ḥasadim to mourners or to the deceased, but the homily continues. From Jacob is derived the seven days of mourning, "for thus did his son Joseph unto him" (ibid.).

We learn gemilut ḥasadim to mourners from the model of Jezebel, whose flesh was booty for dogs: "In the portion of Jezreel shall the dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel" (2 Kings 9:36), except for the limbs which she used to express loving-kindness to the dead, over which the dogs had no power (ibid.). We learn of the duty of showing gemilut ḥasadim to mourners from all the people of Israel who mourned for Saul and Jonathan his son. When God saw that all Israel had displayed

such gemilut ḥasadim to Saul, "He was forthwith full of compassion, and He sent rain upon the land, as it is said, 'And after that God was entreated for the land' " (PRE 41a).

We learn that "mourners are comforted with bread and wine, as it is said, 'Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul' (Prov. 31:6)" (PRE 40a). We learn that "the sages instituted [the rule] that the bridegrooms and mourners should go to the synagogues and to the houses of study" (PRE 41b). This is another custom that yields a Palestinian origin.[4] "The men of the place see the bridegroom and rejoice with him; and they see the mourner and sit with him upon the earth, so that all the Israelites may discharge their duty in the servide of loving-kindness" (ibid.).

We learn that "lentils are the food of mourning and sorrow". Adam and Eve ate lentils when Abel was killed. The parents of Ḥaran ate lentils when he was burned in the furnace of the Chaldees. Jacob ate lentils in sorrow over the loss of the birthrite, the kingdom, and the dominion. Not only that, but on the same day, Abraham, his grandfather, died. "Israelites eat lentil fold in mourning and sorrow on account of the mourning and sorrow for the Temple, and on account of the exile of Israel" (PRE 81b). Genesis Rabbah also connects lentils with sadness and mourning, but there the custom is derived differently. Lentils represent sadness and mourning because they have no slit, or mouth, like the mourner who is speechless.[5]

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer we learn that Adam was the first to celebrate the Havdalah ceremony.[6] After having been deceived by the serpent, Adam was sent a miraculous pillar of fire to illumine the area about him and protect him from the attack of the evil serpent. Adam rejoiced and said a blessing to mark the miraculous appearance of the pillar of fire and said: "Blessed Art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the flames of fire" (PRE 46a,b). In Genesis Rabbah, the blessing over fire during Havdalah is also traced back to Adam.[7] The reason given there is that human-made light was created for the first time at the end of Shabbat: God allowed Adam to make light from two flints which he found and struck together. The imaginary, miraculous, almost fairy-tale quality of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer stands in contrast to the more naturalistic treatment in Genesis Rabbah.

Another characteristic difference is that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account has a distinctive narrative flow to it: it is indeed told like a story, by a story-teller. The miraculous appearance of the pillar of fire leads to the culmination of events in which Adam puts forth his hands to the light of the fire and says: "Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the flames of fire." In Genesis Rabbah, Adam makes the discovery, and "says a blessing."

As the story continues in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, Adam discovers the significance of the Havdalah and derives

the notion of separation from the miracles about him, "and in that hour he said: Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who divides the holy from the profane, the light from the darkness" (PRE 46b). This is story-telling in a most terse and effective style.

In Genesis Rabbah, Rebecca's relatives were not eager to bless her and tried to prevent her marriage.[8] Rebecca's relatives are treated much kinder in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer--they recognize that the marriage is Divinely ordained ("The thing proceedeth from the Lord" PRE 37b), moreover they speak the marriage benedictions to her themselves before she leaves.[9]

There are other gestures of reconciliation with the nations of the world in Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. It is favored to make covenants with the people of the land of Canaan; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all made covenants with the people of the land (PRE 84a).

There is a teaching about the mores of the time and place of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer that appears in the protest against nudity and immorality during the generations of Cain (PRE 50b). The Book of Jubilees, also, has a strong statement to make against nudity.[10] Just as there was great wickedness in the generations of Cain, so there is great wickedness in the recapitulation of such behavior.

The circumcision of a son is to be celebrated with great festivity, as did Abraham when he circumcised Isaac (PRE 65a,b). We learn a good deal more about circumcision

in our midrash from the ancestral paradigm. Abraham's circumcision occurred on Yom Kippur (PRE 74a). In a parallel talmudic passage, Abraham's circumcision occurs on Passover.[11]

"Hence the Sages instituted that they should cover the foreskin and the blood with the dust of the earth" (PRE 76a). This is another Palestinian custom; the Babylonian Jews used water to cover the blood and the foreskin.[12] The law of covering the blood and foreskin is attributed to Noah in The Book of Jubilees.[13]

The custom of having a chair for Elijah at the Brit Milah is traced back to the Sages, and Friedlander points out that it is in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer that one finds one of the earliest expressions of this custom, which obtains to this day.[14]

From Moses, one learns about the custom of synagogue worship. "The Shaliaḥ Tsibur is prohibited to officiate unless there are two standing with him, one on his right and one on his left". So stood Moses, with Aaron and Hur, before the battle with Amalek (PRE 104a). We also learn that the congregation is to repeat what the Shaliaḥ Tsibur does.

> All the Israelites [were standing] outside [their tents]; they had gone forth from their tents, and saw Moses kneeling on his knees. He fell on his face to the ground, and they fell on their faces to the ground. He spread out the palms of his hands towards the heavens, and they spread out their hands to heaven. Just as the precentor [ḥazan] officiates, in like manner all the people answer after him (PRE 104a, 104b).

In the highly aggadic treatment of the Creation story in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, we learn something about

affairs of state. The Holy One, Blessed Be He, counselled with the Torah concerning the creation of the world. The Torah's advice is a paradigm to represent that "every government which has no counselors is not a proper government" (PRE 6b). One may infer that the redactor was living in a place where, in his opinion, the government did not take advantage of its advisors.

One of the advantages and raisons d'etre of pseudonymity is the opportunity to legitimize doctrines in the name of authoritative sources. The doctrine of the two ways is important enough to our volume that Rabbi Eli'ezer, the putative author of this midrash, heard with his own ears God speaking the verse from Deuteronomy that suggests the two ways (PRE 35a): "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil" (Deuteronomy 30:15). The two ways is also suggested by Jeremiah 21:8: "Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death." According to Friedlander, these verses refer only to the second stage in the doctrine of the two ways. The first stage affirms that paradise, eternal life, is open to all who seek to enter there.[15] In the Talmud, Yoḥanan B. Zakkai is on his death-bed, surrounded by his disciples. He begins to cry.

> "Why do you weep?" they ask. "Because I am about to appear before God, the Eternal Judge. Two ways are before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehenna."[16]

The sin of Adam and Eve is not hereditary. Gunkel demonstrates that the latest apocalyptic literature of the

Jews taught that in the future Paradise, eternal life, was available to all good people.[17] In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, this idea is represented by the doctrine of the "two ways."

The earliest reference to the two ways in post-Biblical Jewish literature occurs in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. "Two ways hath God given to the sons of man and two inclinations...for there are two ways of good and evil."[18]

In 2 Enoch (Slavonic Enoch), the two ways is also invoked, but here it is connected with Adam:

> And I called his name Adam, and showed him the two ways, the light and the darkness, and I told him: "This is good, and that is bad," that I should learn whether he has love towards me, or hatred, that it be clear which in his race love me.[19]

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, we learn from the example of Samuel, who placed himself between the two ways, that "everyone who doeth righteousness and showeth the service of love, shall inherit three good gifts, and they are: life, righteousness, and glory" (PRE 35b). Of Jacob and Esau, it is said "that one went by the way of life and the other by the way of death" (PRE 73a).

It is characteristic of the imagination of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer that the "two ways" are depicted with a visual representation and dramatis personae: the way to evil has four doors, at each door are seven angels, four outside and three inside. The outside angels are merciful; the inside angels cruel. The merciful angels importune the

the misguided soul as he proceeds from one door to another, trying to call him to repentance. The closer the soul gets to the point of no return the more impassioned the angels become, until he reaches the fourth door, where the angels say to him:

> Behold, thou hast entered these doors, and thou hast not hearkened nor returned. Thus far the Holy One, Blessed Be He receives the penitent, thus far the Holy One, Blessed Be He pardons and forgives (PRE 36a).

The cruel angels then take over, and cause his spirit to depart. The doctrine of the two ways acquires an externalization, of narrative quality, in addition to its internal, ethical teaching. In our midrash, the "two ways" is a teaching with all the embellishments we expect from the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: angels, drama, dialogue, narrative, color, and imagination.

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, rituals have exemplary models or paradigms. Rites and beliefs are validated by securing them in primary strata, or in the words of authoritative sources. Human actions are legitimized by analogy or identification with extra-human models. These are characteristic of a mythic imagination, present somewhat in most midrashic literature, but especially developed in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

Footnotes Chapter 1

[1]Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:259.

[2]Ibid., 5:112.

[3]Friedlander, PRE, p. 111, n.4.

[4]Ibid., p. 123, n.1.

[5]Genesis Rabbah 63:14.

[6]In the same chapter, a custom is described concerning havdalah in which the person saying the blessing over light does so looking at the reflection of the light in his/her fingernails. This custom obtains only if there is no wine; if there is wine, one need not look at the fingernails. According to Sol Finesinger, in "The Custom of Looking at the Fingernails at the Outgoing of the Sabbath," HUC Annual vol. 12-13 (1937-1938):348, the earliest recorded reference to this custom occurs in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, in the name of R. Mani (a Palestinian teacher of the fourth century). Finesinger traces a variety of attitudes to this custom in the halakhah, and it eventually found its way into the Shulḥan Arukh, as a fixed part of the havdalah ceremony. Finesinger interprets the custom as a means of divination, acknowledging that the departure of the Sabbath is considered to be the proper time to ask for a good and fortunate week. Furthermore, he connects the "spirits of nails", which are represented by the light reflecting in the fingernails, with other bright and shiny objects popularly used in divination, such as coins. Finesinger suggests that divination was originally the chief objective of most of the methods of performing the havdalah ceremony. Thus the PRE tells us that one need not look at the fingernails if there is wine; with wine one can divine by the spirits of the cup. If one has no fire, he stretches his hand toward the stars and looks at the fingernails.

[7]Genesis Rabbah 11:2.

[8]Genesis Rabbah 60:12.

[9]Friedlander, PRE, p. 109, n.10. There was a controversy among the Rabbis whether both bride and bridegroom had to be present in order to speak the marriage benedictions.

[10]The Book of Jubilees 3:30, 31 and 7:16.

[11]B.T. Baba Metsia 86b.

[12]Joel Mueller, Ḥiluf Minhagim (Vienna: G. Breg and P. Smolenskin, 1878), p. 18.

[13]The Book of Jubilees 7:31.

[14]Friedlander, PRE, p. 214.

[15]Ibid., p. 102.

[16]B.T. Berakhot 28b.

[17]Hermann Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis, trans. W. H. Carruth (New York: Shocken Books, 1964), p. 21.

[18]Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Test. Asher 1:3.

[19]2 Enoch 30:15.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MYTHICAL PLANE

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer falls within the midrashic tradition and as such is characterized by an exegetical method common to this type of literature. Yet there are qualities of that method which are especially prominent in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. Just as "Moses wrote many things in the Torah without explaining them; it was left to David to clarify them,"[1] so the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, by methods anyone familiar with the literature of midrash will recognize, plumbs and expands the Biblical text to yield subtleties of meaning.

The midrashic method in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is characterized by the conflation of time and place on the mythical plane. There is the implicit metaphorical identification of people, places, and events which are independent of history, causality, and temporality. Moses and David do indeed meet on that plane, in illo tempore, outside of history, and they are often accompanied by angels, met by pillars of fire, and advised by talking books. The two great conceptual principles of this type of activity are analogy and identity,[2] and they lend to a strong narrative style an almost fairy tale-like quality to the text.

Early on the morning Abraham and Isaac left for Moriah, Abraham saddled his ass. This ass was the offspring of the miraculous ass created at twilight on the first 'Erev Shabbat. This is the same ass Moses would ride into Egypt in the future. This is also the same ass on which the Messiah will ride.[3] The altar, which God points out to Abraham with a finger, is the alter which Cain and Abel used. It is the same altar on which Noah and his sons brought sacrifices. The remains of the ram which were offered up in place of Isaac were used by David, who played the strings of his harp made from the sinews of the ram. The ram's skin made the girdle around the loins of Elijah (PRE 70a). These identification occur in illo tempore, they occur outside of time, of place, and since those categories are vitiated, we might expect the miraculous.

After Jacob's celebrated dream, he set up a pillar; oil descended from heaven, and he poured the oil over it. God, with His right foot, sank the pillar to the very center of the earth, whereby it is called "the foundation stone." It is at the navel of the earth, the place from which the whole earth evolved, and on it the Sanctuary of God stands. Jacob said a prayer and the earth jumped from Mt. Moriah to Haran for him (קפיצת הדרך), and "in the twinkle of the eye he came to Haran" (PRE 82b).

Before Jacob's dream, he made for himself a pillow by taking twelve stones from the very same altar on which his father Isaac had been bound. These twelve stones symbolize

the twelve tribes that were destined to emerge from him (ibid.).

When Moses was reviewing the work of the Israelites in Egypt, he saw two Hebrew men fighting with each other. These were the same two men who would later rise up against Moses in the Wilderness along with Korah: Dathan and Abiram.

There is a mythic geography in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. When Adam was driven out of the garden of Eden, he walked right onto Mt. Moriah, because the gate of the garden opens on Mt. Moriah (PRE 45b).

Noah planted a vineyard. On the same day it was planted, it produced ripe fruit. The vine he planted was a vine he found which had come out of the garden of Eden (PRE 54b). Ginzberg claims that the identification of the grapes (which inebriated Noah) with a vine from the garden of Eden occurs only in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and the Targum Yerushalmi.[4] The point of the midrash, according to Friedlander, is to connect the fall of Noah with the fall of Adam.[5]

All the connections and identifications that are made in this midrashic world are still pulsing with the vitality of mythic identification. In this world, not only do men and women of different times meet in an independent dimension free of time and place, but natural law is suspended as well. So it is not unusual here for a vineyard to produce fruit the same day it is planted, or even a woman to bear a child on the same day it is conceived, or that any natural law which is bound up in the here and now to be suspended; in a word, for a miracle to occur.

After Rebecca had been barren for twenty years, Isaac took her to Mt. Moriah, the very place where he had been bound on the altar, and prayed to the Holy One on that same place. He prayed for Rebecca's womb to be opened, and the Holy One heard his prayer. In the next sentence, the children were struggling within her like warriors, so she went to pray in that very same place, on top of Moriah, at the site of the altar where her husband had been bound and where the Holy One had opened her womb (PRE 73a).

The garments of Adam and Eve, which the Holy One, Blessed Be He, had made for the first couple, were passed down and came to Nimrod (PRE 56b). This accounts for the power and ascendance of Nimrod to authority; he was, in fact, the second ruler (after God at Creation) of the world (PRE 28b). Nimrod was a slave, and the son of a slave, still he was a mighty hero as symbolized by the coat of Adam which he wore. Nimrod gave his first born son Eli'ezer to Abraham as a perpetual slave (PRE 38b). Eli'ezer is Og, king of Bashan (ibid.), who was left out of the Ark for lack of room (PRE 53b).

Abraham's circumcision took place on the tenth of Tishri, Yom Kippur, on the same spot that the altar of the Temple would be built in the future. Every year the Holy One sees the blood of Abraham's circumcision, and forgives all the sins of Israel (PRE 64a).

Friedlander points out that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer stresses Passover, as opposed to the Book of Jubilees which

stresses Shavuot and Sukkot.[6] Cain and Abel brought up their offerings on Passover night (PRE 48b), Sarah was taken on Passover night (PRE 61a), and the night of the punishment of Pharaoh (his house afflicted with leprosy) occurred also on Passover (ibid.). At a later time, God would visit the Egyptians again, on Passover night. The Holy One, Blessed be He brought Abraham out of his house to make a promise to him on Passover night (PRE 63b). Isaac, in his hunger for savory meats, called to his son Esau on Passover night (PRE 73b). This same night, Rebecca said to her son Jacob: "On this night the treasuries of dew will be opened and on this night the angels utter a song" (ibid.).

The above examples illustrate the kind of imagination that informs the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. It is an imagination in which places, events, and characters meet and interact on a mythic plane independent of history. In this world, identifications and analogies are made everywhere, independent of time and out of place, often accompanied by extraordinary and miraculous (which in context seem quite ordinary) events. What can be miraculous in a world where time and place no longer obtain? The natural world gives way and the miraculous becomes the ordinary. It is a world where one might well expect angels, demons, and mythic fantasy; it is into that kind of world one enters in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

Footnotes Chapter 2

[1]Exodus Rabbah 15:22.

[2]Northrup Frye, Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963), p. 32.

[3]Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, He is triumphant, and virtuous, Lowly, and riding upon an ass, Even upon a colt the foal of an ass."

[4]Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:190. Ginzberg cites Targum Yerushalmi, Genesis 9:20: "And he found a vine which the river had brought away from the garden of Eden."

[5]Friedlander, PRE, p. 170, n. 3.

[6]Ibid., p. 153, n. 1.

CHAPTER THREE

TREATMENT OF AGGADIC TRADITIONS

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is an aggadic midrash, with a strong narrative flavor, and as such shares most of the characteristics one expects from classical aggadic midrashim. Much of the aggadic material found in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is similar, if not identical, to material found in older sources such as Genesis Rabbah, or to aggadic material in the Talmud. There are, however, differences in content between the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and classical midrashim, often pointing to the pseudepigraphic literature as source for many of the divergent teachings in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

It is not within the scope of this paper to trace the sources from which the compiler of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer drew; it is, however, central to this enterprise to characterize the imagination of the compiler by analyzing the sorts of material that was chosen and included in this particular midrash.

There are also peculiarities of form and style which mark the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer's treatment of even well-known aggadic traditions. In this chapter, we will analyze the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer's treatment of some of these

well-known aggadic traditions, pointing out along the way the scenery that makes the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer special and individual.

When Adam and Eve were married, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, made ten ḥuppot in the garden of Eden (PRE 31a). The verse that occasions this midrash is Ezekiel 28:13: "Wast thou in Eden the garden of God; was every precious stone thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold?" Both Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah record a controversy which arose over the number of ḥuppot which were set up in the garden of Eden.[1] Simeon B. Lakish derived eleven; R. Ḥama bar Ḥanina said there were thirteen. The Rabbis said: there were ten.[2]

It is typical of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer that this first generation, Palestinian Amoraic controversy is not included in any of its dialectical depth. This is encountered again and again in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer; our compiler rarely preserves even the most celebrated controversies. This is one of the advantages of pseudepigraphy--our compiler can be as bold as he likes. He picks the opinion that most suits his own exegesis. Such notions as fealty to the sources are vitiated once one dares to write in a voice other than one's own.

The wedding of Adam and Eve demonstrates some of the qualities of the distinctive imagination that pervades this work. The ministering angels stood by like groomsmen

(שומרים) who guard the huppah, and God, like a hazan, stood and blessed the bride in the midst of the huppah (PRE 31a). There is a constant interpenetration of the human and the Divine in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, and no hesitation concerning anthropomorphism. God appears everywhere in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, as one of the visitors to Abraham (PRE 64b), or as a hazan at Adam's wedding--there is no timidity to depict God in human terms. God's arms, hands, knees, appear in many narratives in the book;[3] the anthropomorphic thrust is dramatic and God's holy hands are busy throughout the volume.[4]

There is also a developed narrative quality to the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer which separates it from many of its sources. During the post-talmudic period to which the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer certainly belongs, Jews were stimulated by Christian martyrologies and eulogies of saints to produce narratives about biblical figures or celebrated Tannaim. Also, shortly after the rise of Islam (the period in which most scholars have dated the Pirke deRabbi Eli ezer), Muslim Ḳuṣṣas (storytellers) influenced Jews to expand the narrative quality of their aggadic midrashim.[5] Since there arose no specialized literature devoted to dogmatic and ethical subjects in the early post-talmudic period, the aggadah absorbed most of the intellectual energies of the Jews.[6]

All this places the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer in its proper historical context. The narrative element is, in parts of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, highly developed, and many of

the aggadot read like stories, with description, imagery, and even depiction of internal states of characters. The narratives also often have a fairy tale quality to them--highly colorful, often involving angels, and an easy accessibility to Divine regions.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is also characterized by its attention to detail. In the treatment of Noah and the ark, for example, the reader is almost given a walking tour of the vessel. On each of three floors, there are one hundred and fifty rooms along the left side of the ark, thirty-three rooms across the inside, thirty-three rooms across the outside, ten compartments in the center for food storage, five cisterns on the right side, and fifty cisterns on the left side for the water pipes (PRE 52a). It is a description of a very sea-worthy vessel.[7]

The first floor housed all the cattle and animals. The second floor was for the fowl. The third floor housed the reptiles and the human beings. There is a strikingly similar description in the Book of Adam and Eve, where there are also three stories: the first story given to lions and beasts and animals, the second to birds and creeping things, and the third to humans.

The angel appointed over each animal went down and gathered that animal to the ark. Similarly, the Book of Adam and Eve reads: "I will command my angel to blow the horn from heaven, and all those animals shall be gathered unto thee."[8] Ginzberg suggests that the Pirḳe deRabbi

Eli'ezer is unique: all the other sources emphasize that the animals went by their own accord and by God's command into the Ark, except in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and the Targum Yerushalmi (Genesis 5:20), they were assembled by the angels.[9] One might add the Book of Adam and Eve to Ginzberg's list.

Such attention to detail was a characteristic of Jewish preaching at the time of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. The Moslem tradition was to search out and explicate every obscurity. Jewish preaching may not have been that conscientious,[10] but the author of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer did indeed know the names of Lot's wife, "'Edit" (PRE 60a) and daughter "Pelotit" (PRE 59a).

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account of the Flood, the waters were brought on by some sort of sexual impropriety. Noah had warned the wicked generation, and they promised to restrain themselves from reproducing.

> What did they do? When they came to their wives they spilled the issue of their seed upon the earth, so as not to produce offspring of the children of men, as it is said, 'And God saw the earth, and behold, it was spilled' (Genesis 6:12) (PRE 51b).

The Flood, in a form of punishment measure for measure, was formed out of a sexual union of male and female waters (PRE 53a,b). This motif appears several times in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: the rain from the heavens is the male principle, and the waters from the depths of the earth are the female principle (PRE 22b). They joined together to make the Flood. This union is also depicted in the Ethiopian Enoch[11] where "that which is above the heavens is

the masculine, and the water which is beneath the earth is feminine."[12]

In the biblical account (Genesis 9:20ff), Noah sees what his youngest son Ham has done to him, but curses Ham's son Canaan. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer solves the textual problem by making Canaan the one who emasculates Noah (PRE 25a). This is also the version given by some of the Church Fathers.[13] In Genesis Rabbah, there are three explanations to account for the curse falling on Canaan.[14] Because Noah's sons had been blessed in Genesis 9:1, they cannot be cursed. Secondly, because Ham prevented Noah from begetting another son, Ham's son was cursed. Thirdly, Canaan at least shares responsibility for the deed by drawing Ham's attention to Noah's condition. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer circumvents such explanations by making Canaan the culprit, thereby deserving the curse he receives.

After Noah made offerings on the same altar Cain and Abel used, "the sweet savour ascended before the Holy One, blessed be He, and it was pleasing to Him, as it is said, 'And the Lord smelled the sweet savour' (Gen. 8:21)." God put forth His right hand and swore that there would be no more flooding (PRE 55b). There is no anthropomorphic shyness about the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, and God's right hand is one of our author's favorite expressions of holy corporeality (PRE 55b, 100b, 105a).

In Genesis Rabbah, "And God smelled the sweet savour" is taken to mean that God accepted Noah's sacrifice for the

sake of Noah's pious descendants who were willing to sacrifice themselves for God's Holy Name: Abraham, Ḥananiah, Mishael, and ʿAzariah, and the martyrs of the Hadrianic persecutions.[15] Genesis Rabbah dilutes the anthropomorphic character of the Genesis image ("And God smelled the sweet savour"), while the Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer extends it with God stretching forth His hand and making a promise to Noah.

The tenth trial of Abraham, the binding of Isaac, is given a thorough treatment in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer (PRE 69aff). It is written in a highly developed narrative style: there is dialogue, description of internal states, and an internal narrative integrity which keeps the story flowing.

Abraham is characterized through a dialogue with God. On the night before the journey, the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared and instructed Abraham to take Isaac to the mountain. Abraham tries to dodge the inevitable--"which son," he asks. God says: "Thine only son." Abraham says: "Isaac is the only son of his mother, and Ishmael is the only son of his mother." God says: "The one, whom thou lovest." "I love them both," Abraham says. God says: "Even Isaac." Genesis 22 becomes a midrash in dialogue as Abraham tries to postpone the inevitable. Like a disingenuous child in a hopeless argument with a parent, Abraham asks: "how will I know which mountain?"

Abraham, Ishmael, Eliʿezer, and Isaac are off early in the morning. Abraham saddles his ass, which is the offspring

of that ass created on the eve of the first Shabbat, at twilight. By virtue of the kind of mythic identification described above in chapter two, this is the same ass which will be ridden by Moses when he rides into Egypt (Ex. 4:20), and the same ass which will be ridden by the son of David in the future (Zech. 9:9).

On the way to Moriah, Eli'ezer and Ishmael have an argument over who will inherit the possessions of Abraham once Isaac is gone. The holy spirit (רוח הקדש),[16] the deus ex machina, settles it by saying to them: neither of you will have such an inheritance.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer identifies the mountain on which Isaac is to be sacrificed with Mt. Zion, on which the Temple was built, as does the Book of Jubilees.[17] They see the glory of the Shekhinah on top of the mountain, as a pillar of fire which extends from the earth to the heavens. The Pirke deRabbi Eli'ezer identifies "place" (המקום) in Genesis 22:4 with the Shekhinah.[18]

The pillar of fire was a sign to Abraham that his son had been accepted as a perfect sacrifice. In both Genesis Rabbah and Tanḥuma, Abraham saw a cloud enveloping the mountain;[19] in Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer the sign is bold and miraculous, nothing less than a pillar of fire appears as a sign for Abraham's eyes alone.

God points out the altar with His finger. Again it is an altar outside of narrative time and place--it is the same altar which Cain and Abel used, also the same altar

upon which Noah and his sons brought sacrifices. It is an altar which exists in a separate, mythic dimension; outside of our story, independent of events.

Abraham, as in Leviticus Rabbah,[20] is compared to the High Priest bringing us offerings. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, however, the interpenetration of the human and the Divine is so complete that "the Holy One, blessed be He, was sitting and watching as father bound his son with all [his] heart and the son bound with all [his] heart" (PRE 71a). The narrative is sophisticated enough here to include a description of the internal states of the characters: בכל לב -- "with all [his] heart." This is more than a primitive narrative technique.

The blade touches Isaac's neck and his soul flees. After Isaac's soul departs, he hears God's voice from between the two cherubim (a reference to the vision of Ezekiel and the chariot) saying: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad" (Gen. 22:12), and hearing those words, Isaac's soul returned to the body. Isaac then knew first-hand how the dead would be resurrected in the future, and he opened his mouth and said: ברוך אתה יהוה מחיה המתים - "Blessed are Thou, O Lord, who revivest the dead (PRE 71b)."[21]

The ram is accepted as if it were Isaac. The ashes of the ram would later form part of the inner altar upon which Aaron would make atonement. The sinews of the ram would be used as strings for David's harp. The ram's skin would girdle the loins of Elijah. The left horn would be blown by God on

Mt. Sinai. The right horn would be sounded at the ingathering of the exiles.

As the chapter ends with a homily about the merit of worship, one wonders whether this was a later addition to the aggadic material or a clue to its first uses and the forum for which it was written. Might it be the work of a darshan who weaved tales around the biblical narratives, to teach and entertain the people? Certainly, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is a composite work, incomplete and at times inconsistent, and the footprints of a good darshan are not difficult to trace.

"When Abraham returned from Mount Moriah in peace, the anger of Samma'el was kindled, for he saw that the desire of his heart to frustrate the offering of our father Abraham had not been realized (PRE 72b)." The Book of Jubilees also records the frustration of Samma'el in the 'Aḳedah episode: "And the prince of the Mastema was put to shame; and Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a single ram caught."[22] In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer version, Samma'el exacts vengeance by going to Sarah and telling her that Abraham had sacrificed Isaac.

The simple tale of Sara's death, poignant in its simplicity but with the dramatic power of mythopoesis, is unequalled in the classical midrashim. When she heard about the death of her son from the vengeful Samma'el, "immediately she began to weep and to cry aloud three time, corresponding to the three sustained notes [teki'ot] and [she gave forth]

three howlings corresponding to the three disconnected short notes [teruʿah], and her soul fled, and she died (PRE 72b)."

In the treatment of the revelation on Sinai, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer once again demonstrates the qualities that separate this midrash from others of its genre. When the voice of the first commandment went forth, heaven and earth quaked, the waters and the rivers fled, the mountains and the hills moved, the trees fell, the dead revived and the future yet unborn appeared to witness the theophany at Mount Sinai. Those who were alive thereupon fell dead, and were revived by the voice of the second commandment (PRE 97a)."[23]

The Holy One, blessed be He, sent the angels Michael and Gabriel to fetch Moses. They grabbed him and brought him into the thick darkness against his will. The rest of the commandments God spoke through the mouth of Moses (PRE 97b).

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer mimics the grand midrashic style of the mashal, and often marks itself by following the simile with a kind of explanatory note in order to clarify all the proper connections. For example, the question arises in the text: "Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, cause His voice to be heard out of the midst of the darkness, and not out of the midst of the light?" The answer is given in the form of a mashal (ibid). It is compared to a king whose son is being married. The king hangs dark, instead of light, curtains in the wedding chamber. The king knew his son would remain loyal to his wife for only forty days, so the Holy

One blessed be He knew Israel would only remain loyal to Torah for forty days. "So with the king, who is the Holy One, blessed be He, and His son is Israel, and the bride is the Torah (PRE 98a)."

Friedlander remarks that this is not the usual analogy in midrashic literature.[24] God and Israel are typically analogized as groom and bride; in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, God is the father of the groom (Israel) which is wedded to the bride (Torah). Also, in the PRE the analogies do not speak for themselves. The mashal is often accompanied in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer with an explanation of terms, so that all the connections are made specific in the text. "So with the King, who is the Holy One, blessed be He, and His son is Israel, and the bride is the Torah."

This might betray the imitation of a style. The pseudonymous writer of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is mimicking a standard midrashic tradition, the mashal, but because it is imitation, it brings into the tradition a characteristic of its own: an explanation of terms. The writer of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is mimicking a style, but it explains more than it needs to, and it uses imagery that only approximates the high midrashic style it is imitating.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer has another way of individualizing the classical mashal style: it extends the simile to give it more depth or a different thrust.

After forty years in the wilderness, Moses wanted to remind the children of Israel of their unfaithfulness at

Refidim.

> But Moses said: If I speak thus to Israel, behold I will put them to shame, and whosoever puts [his fellow] to shame will have no portion in the world to come. But I will tell them the story of Amalek, and they will understand what is written [immediately] preceding this story. A parable--to what is the matter to be compared? To a king who had a garden and a dog chained at the entrance to the garden. The king was sitting in his upper room, watching and looking at all that [transpired] in the garden. The friend of the king entered to steal [fruit] from the garden, and he incited the dog against him, and it tore his garments. The king said: If I say to my friend, Why didst thou enter my garden? behold I will put him to shame; therefore, behold, I will say to him: Didst thou see that mad dog, how it tore thy clothes? And he will understand what he had done. Likewise spake Moses: Behold, I will tell Israel the story of Amalek, and they will understand what is written before it; therefore Moses said: "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, as ye came forth out of Egypt" (Deut. 25:27). (PRE 105a).

In the Tanḥuma, there is the same mashal. It is given in the name of R. Levi.[25] The point of the mashal in the Tanḥuma is much simpler. Moses is not involved in this simile at all. The nimshal of the King is God, not Moses, and it is the son who comes and breaks into the garden. Thereafter, whenever the king wanted to remind his son of his disobedience, he would remind him of the dog. Likewise, whenever God wanted to remind Israel of its disobedience at Refidim, God would say to them: "Remember what Amalek did to thee" (Deut. 25:17). In the Tanḥuma, the story has nothing to do with shaming a friend, or the delicacy of a reminder of a past infidelity. These are all additions made by the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is marked by differences in style and form, as well as content, from other midrashim of

its genre. We have seen that the compiler of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer rarely includes any of the dialectical controversies which were associated with many of the midrashic traditions.

The narrative quality of the material in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is especially developed. It often includes great detail. The stories are spirited by a healthy amount of imagination and color. God appears in an unabashedly active form, and there seems to be no timidity concerning anthropomorphism.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer also manifests its own stylistic mark on many of the celebrated aggadot it has inherited from older sources. Our compiler tailors or extends traditional aggadot to fit his own exegetical purposes. These are some of the stylistic qualities which mark the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer as unique in midrashic tradition.

Footnotes Chapter Three

[1]Genesis Rabbah 18:1 and Leviticus Rabbah 20:2.

[2]According to the reading of R. Simeon B. Laḳish, "every precious stone" signified one more ḥuppah. R. Hama bar Hanina counted "precious," "stone," and "covering" as three separate ḥuppot.

[3]See PRE 32b, 47b, 56b, 112b, and 116a.

[4]In PRE 116a, the five fingers of the right hand of God is identified with the mystery of the Redemption (סוד גאולה). God's little finger pointed out to Noah how to make the ark. With the ring finger, God smote the firstborn Egyptians, as it is said, "The magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). With the middle finger, God wrote the tablets of the Law, as it is said, "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him...tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18). With the index finger, God showed to Moses what the children of Israel should give for the redemption of their souls (a half shekel), as it is said, "This they shall give...half a shekel for an offering to the Lord" (Ex. 30:13). With the thumb and the entire hand, the Holy One, blessed be He, will smite all the children of Esau in the future, and the children of Ishmael, for they are enemies, as it is said, "Let thine hand be lifted up above thine adversaries, and let all thine enemies be cut off" (Micah 5:9).

[5]Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 17 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952-1980), 8:26.

[6]Baron, 6:168.

[7]The number of rooms adds up to 366, which is also the number of days in the solar year of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

[8]The Book of Adam and Eve, ed. Malan, 3:8, p. 154.

[9]Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:177.

[10]Baron, 4:168.

[11]2 Enoch 54:8.

[12]Ginzberg, 5:182. The view that the Flood came from the union of masculine and feminine waters goes back to the Babylonian myth of Apsu and Tiamat.

[13]Ibid., 5:191.

[14]Genesis Rabbah 36:7.

[15]Genesis Rabbah 34:9.

[16]The רוח הקדש (holy spirit) appears also to settle the celebrated controversy between the houses of Hillel and Shammai over which was created first: the heavens or the earth. See Chapter Five below. In PRE 42a, the first editions have שכינה (Shekhinah), while the Oxford manuscript used by Friedlander for his translation, retains the רוח הקדש (holy spirit).

[17]The Book of Jubilees 18:13, "And Abraham called that place 'The Lord hath seen', so that it is said [in the mount] the Lord hath seen: that is Mount Zion."

[18]"on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off," Genesis 22:4. Friedlander (PRE, p. 226, n. 9) makes the point that Philo has the same identification in De Somniis.

[19]Genesis Rabbah 56:1 and Tanḥuma VaYera #23.

[20]Leviticus Rabbah 29:9.

[21]This is the second benediction of the Shmoneh ʿEsre. There are eight such midrashically derived benedictions in the PRE; there are also eight (of ten) descents of God. Both of these facts attest to the incomplete nature of the midrash as we have it.

[22]The Book of Jubilees 18:12.

[23]In Exodus Rabbah 29:4, the souls of the Israelites also fled, but it was Torah that pleaded for mercy to the Holy One, blessed be He, and the souls returned.

[24]Friedlander, PRE, p. 326, n. 7.

[25]Tanḥuma, Ki Tetse, #9.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN...

Chapters three thru eleven of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer deal with the esoteric subjects Ma'aseh bere'shit and Ma'aseh Merkavah, speculations that have lent the moniker "mystical" to most descriptions of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. Such speculations go far back in rabbinic tradition, at least to the tannaitic stratum.[1] Both the Mishnaic and the Talmudic periods were times of great speculative activity in these areas. Such speculations flourished as well in the later Geonic era to which the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer belongs (the seventh to the eleventh centuries)[2], but little substantially new material is found in the speculations of that era. The different strains of existing mystical speculations thrived and intermingled during the Geonic period, when the center of such speculative activity shifted from Palestine to Babylon, but the continued influence of mystical speculation in Palestine is preserved in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

Alexander Altmann believes that as early as the Tannaitic period, Jewish esoteric speculations were influenced from two directions: Plato's Timaeus, known to Jews through the writing of Philo of Alexandria, and various

Gnostic writings.[3] Jewish reaction to Gnosticism was vigorous and of two varieties. The first was a polemical contradiction of Gnostic influence and ideas, particularly to what the Jews perceived as the heretical dualism of the highest, unknown God as differentiated from the Demiurge or Creator God, the antinomian tendencies which diminished the validity of the Law, and the doctrine that God had help in Creation. The second Jewish reaction to Gnosticism took the form of an ingestion of the doctrines themselves, and the formation of a kind of rabbinic Gnosis of its own, which is known as Ma'aseh Bere'shit, only fragments of which survive in the literature.

Plato's cosmology is reflected by the speculation of whether the world was created out of primordial matter or ex nihilo, as well as the characterization of Torah as blueprint. The version in Genesis Rabbah[4] is called by Altmann: R. Oshaya's adaptation of Timaeus 29a, in which "the artificer looked for a pattern to that which is eternal."[5]

Hellenistic Judaism already records both views: creatio ex nihilo and creatio prima. In the Wisdom of Solomon, creation is depicted as the shaping of the world "out of unformed Matter"--ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης .[6] The first literary record of the Jewish doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is found in 2 Maccabbees, where God made the world "out of nothing"--ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων .[7] It is also found in the Slavonic Enoch: "I call all things from non-being into being."[8] In 4 Ezra: "Thy word accomplished this work"[9] refers to the

creative power of the Word, which Altmann also includes in the category of creatio ex nihilo. There is also a third kind of creative dynamism in rabbinic tradition.

A number of midrashic sources record a conversation between R. Simeon ben Yehotsadeḳ and R. Samuel bar Naḥman, the famous haggadic Amora of the late third and early fourth century. In Genesis Rabbah 3:4, for example:

> Master of Haggadah tell me whence the light was created? He replied: the Holy One, Blessed be He wrapped Himself therein as in a robe and irradiated with the luster of His majesty the whole world from one end to the other. Now he had answered him in a whisper [בלחישה],... there is a verse which states it explicitly: 'Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment' (Ps. 104:2).[10]

"Speaking in a whisper" is technical terminology for the communication of an esoteric teaching.[11] The question ("whence was the light created?") is probably very old.[12] That the question is asked at all and preserved for us in the literature means that the Peshat of Genesis 1:3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" was not considered self-evident. The answer given by R. Samuel bar Naḥman implies that the light was not created by Divine fiat or by the Word of God but as an effulgence from the splendor of the Divine glory, that is, from the "garment" in which God wrapped Himself. This is the doctrine of emanation, a third conception of Creation, and it is a decidedly different cosmogonic conception than the Word as the creative cosmogonic power. It is also distinct from creation from prime matter, and later in history it will

give rise to more elaborate theories of emanation, influenced by neo-Platonism, and incorporated into the Kabbalah.[13] We will see below how the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer also belongs to this emanationist tradition.

In the early homilies of the Amoraim, the question which instigates the discussion is: Whence was the light created?[14] However, in the Tanḥuma,[15] the question is: How did the Holy One, blessed be He, create the world? Urbach points out that many scholars have taken this to be the original recension of the question and have construed it to mean: Out of what did the Holy One, blessed be He, create the world? They also interpreted R. Samuel bar Nahman's answer as another expression of creatio prima (ש'מ ש'); the primeval matter out of which the world was created was light. Urbach, however, rejects that interpretation and maintains that the meaning of the question has to do with method and order, and that the answer puts the creation of the light first.[16]

Certainly the question of the order of the creation of light and darkness had already occupied the rabbinic imagination on the tannaitic level.[17] At that level what seemed to concern the Rabbis was the problem which the Biblical narrative presented: what was the relationship of the light of Genesis 1:3 (the last creation on the first day), with the luminaries, which were created on the fourth day? So the issue is not from what material was the light created. Furthermore, we have reason to believe that the

light to which the Tannaim were referring in, for example, the following passage from Ḥagigah, is not the physical light of Genesis 1:3 at all, and it is written in the name of the Tanna R. Jacob, the teacher of the Patriarch R. Judah:

> By the light that the Holy One, blessed be He created on the first day one could look and see from one end of the world to the other. The Sages disagreed with him: They are the very same luminaries that were created on the first day, but they were not hung until the fourth day. The Amora R. Eleazar accepted R. Jacob's opinion and added an explanation of the fate of the light of the first day: "When the Holy One, blessed be He observed the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Tower of Babel and saw that their deeds were corrupt, He arose and concealed it from them,as it is said: From the wicked their light is withheld (Job 38:15). And for whom did He hide it away? For the righteous in the time to come.[18]

It is clear that the light in the above-mentioned passage is not the physical light of Genesis 1:3. What is this light, then, and what does it signify?

In Genesis Rabbah, it is written:

> In an anonymous baraitha it was taught: the light which was created in the six days of Creation cannot illumine by day, because it would eclipse the light of the sun, nor by night, because it was created only to illumine by day. Then where is it? It is stored up for the righteous in the Messianic future, as it says, "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days" (Is. 30:26). Seven! Surely there were but three seeing that the luminaries were created on the fourth day. It is like a man who says, "I am providing so much for the seven days of my [wedding] feast. R. Nehemiah said: It refers to the seven days of mourning for Methuselah, when the Holy One, blessed be He, lavished light upon them.[19]

The light which eclipsed the sun is the light which came into existence by Divine fiat (the אור of Gen 1:3-5), and it is not the light that is shed by the sun. The primordial light served for three days only, then it was stored away for a special purpose, and on the fourth day of Creation the sun was created.

It is not an issue of light as materia prima, but primordial light which was created and then stored away for the righteous in some future time. It is the doctrine of אור הגנוז "Or haganuz." It is not expressly mentioned in the Bible, but the sources agree that R. Yehuda b. Simon was the first to introduce the doctrine.[20]

Altmann identifies the reason given for the withdrawl of light in Genesis Rabbah 3:6 (that it could not give light by day, lest it eclipse the light of the sun) as insufficient: if this is so, why did God create the first light at all?[21] Unless we return to the possibility that the light represents some sort of primeval matter, so that the expression יהי אור --let there be light in Genesis 1:3 is followed by acknowledgement of an existing condition: ויהי אור -- and there was light (already). We have seen how Urbach rejects this interpretation on this (the tannaitic) level.[22]

Altmann links the notion of the primordial light eclipsing the light of the sun with the description of the Adam Kadmon in early midrashic sources, according to which the splendor of Adam eclipsed that of the sun. He traces the merger of the two notions in rabbinic literature, which

is already present in Gnostic mythology.[23]

This is the background to the exegesis found in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, but our midrash belongs to another rabbinic tradition concerning the light of Creation. The plain sense (peshat) of the Genesis text tells us that the creation of light took place after the creation of the heavens and the earth. Philo[24] and the Book of Jubilees[25] agree that seven things were created on the first day: heaven, earth, darkness, the abyss (תהומות), the spirit, water, and light. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer belongs with this tradition as well, if one identifies the תהו and בהו of Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer with תהומות . In Philo, the Logos is identified with the light which was created in the beginning. God is the archetype of all light, which is the Logos, and so the light (which is the Logos) was the first creation.[26] We find also in the Slavonic Book of Enoch an expression of light preceding the creation of heaven and earth. There the light from Adoil is the first act of Creation.[27]

The midrash also records this tradition. In Exodus Rabbah, it is written:

> Moses wrote many things in the Torah without explaining them: it was left for David to clarify them. In the creation story it says: after He created heaven and earth, He created lights. But David explained: after He created light He created the heavens: 'Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment and who stretches out the heavens like a curtain' (Ps. 104:2): proof that the heavens were created after He created light.[28]

So also, in Genesis Rabbah, when R. Simeon ben Yehotsadaḳ asks the question: whence was the light created?[29] --we are to take this as referring to the primordial light, and because R. Samuel bar Naḥman's answer had to be communicated in a whisper, the speculation carried highly mystical undertones with it.

Altmann points out a fondness for the motif of God's garment in other statements of R. Samuel bar Naḥman. For him, the term "garment" denotes an "attribute" or "aspect" of God. So that "putting on the garment" must denote the revealing of a hidden aspect of the Divine. Altmann suggests that the "garment" of God mentioned in the midrash is God's Wisdom (חכמה), or Logos, and that the splendor which shines from it is the primordial light.[30] Urbach also identifies the light as the emanation of the Logos.[31] Altmann traces this theme in Hellenistic thought, where it was widespread, and identifies it of Iranian origin, in the conception of the god Zarvan. Zarvan is represented in Hellenistic speculations as Aion, representing time and space, and containing the five elements or realms of light which are his garments.[32]

An echo of Zarvan-Aion as the bearer of light Altmann finds in the creation myth in the Slavonic Enoch. There the first act of Creation is depicted as the bursting of the belly of Adoil and a great light coming out.[33] The Zarvan-Aion motif is also reflected in Philo's Logos doctrine. Philo describes the Logos as "illumined by a

brilliant light" and "putting on the garments," which are the cosmos.[34]

The description of R. Samuel bar Naḥman of God putting on the garment of light depicts God as clothed in the Logos or Wisdom or primordial Light. The garment is the Logos, and saying that God put on a garment of light is saying that God revealed God's Logos by the light which radiated from that garment.

This is why Samuel b. Naḥman's midrash was communicated in a whisper. Light was an effulgence, an emanation of God's garment, and God's garment represented a hidden attribute of God. The imagery of Ps. 104:2 for this is just right; the explanation has keen metaphorical integrity--God's garment retains God's holy profile in the language of attributes. What is so esoteric about these speculations is that they seem to be part of a tradition which surpasses the ordinary level of insight into God; here much remains a mystery, but we do know that what is expressed in Isaiah 40:22 and Job 37:6 and Psalm 104:2 is taken to indicate something very penetrating and subtle about the Divine.

There has always been a hesitation in Jewish tradition concerning such speculations. In the famous injunction against such speculation in the Mishnah, the first part of it states that the Ma'aseh Bere'shit is a subject not to be expounded in public (not to be expounded before two people). The second part of the Mishnah says: "whoever put his mind to these four matters it were better for him if he had not

come into the world: what is above, what is below, what is beyond, what is in the opposite beyond."[35] It seems to say: keep away from mystical speculations. The second part is directed against any such speculation, while the first part seems only to inveigh against public speculation.

The four prohibited matters in Ḥagigah 2:1 are, of course, the very characteristics of Gnostic speculations, but such prohibitions were largely ignored--there are many tannaitic and amoraic statements which do in fact deal with just these questions throughout the talmudic and midrashic literature.

Nevertheless, we find esoteric teachings being discussed and delivered in a whisper in Ḥagigah[36] and in Genesis Rabbah,[37] we find that there are age limits and qualities of character necessary to receive such teachings[38] --all of which attest to the continued esoteric nature of such speculations.

These speculations, beyond the fringe of approved religious speculation, are a major concern of the author of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer, who was fully aware of the sort of ground on which he was treading.[39] How do we know this? Because we encounter the same hesitation associated with cosmological speculations in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer as we do in the older esoteric literature of the Talmud and Midrash. In the chapter which introduces these speculations in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eliʿezer, it begins with an apologia.

"Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord, or show

forth all His praise (Ps. 106:2)...Not even the Ministering Angels are able to narrate [the Divine praise]" (PRE 5a). From a familiarity with the gnostic/rabbinic polemic,[40] we know that the ministering angels are especially unable to narrate the Divine praise. We will have many occasions in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer to point out the polemic associated with the place of the angels in Creation.[41] That this polemic goes far back into antiquity and is a part of all gnostic speculation is incontrovertible. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is eager throughout the work to diminish any hint of co-creation by the angels.

Now that it has been established that the task about to be undertaken is an impossible one, how will our author proceed?

> But to investigate a part of His mighty deeds with reference to what He has done, and what He will do in the future [is permissable], so that His name should be exalted among His creatures, whom He has created from one end of the world to the other... (ibid.).

As with all forbidden speculations in Jewish mysticism, which deal with ultimate and delicate issues, the approach is deliberate and careful. One approaches gingerly, and with great humility. In recognition of the subtlety and humility associated with esoteric speculation, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer begins with an <u>apologia</u>; it tells us that what we are about to discuss is esoteric, part of secret lore, and that some of these speculations may be beyond acceptability.

In the same chapter, (PRE 7b), is a midrash very much like the emanationist midrash encountered above and it is introduced with the same kind of humility the tradition associates with such speculations.

> Whence were the heavens created? From the light of the garment with which He was robed. He took [of this light] and stretched it like a garment and [the heavens] began to extend continually until He caused them to hear, It is sufficient [די]. Therefore is He called God Almighty [אל שדי]. who said to the world: It is sufficient, and it stood [firm]. Whence do we know that the heavens were created from the light of His garment? Because it is said, "Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain [עטה אור כשלמה נוטה שמים כיריעה] (Ps. 104:2), (PRE 7b, 8a).

It is typical of the style of the Pirke deRabbi Eli ezer to abstract this quite well-known discussion and not credit any of the participants by name. There is no fealty to preserve the names of the Tannaim or Amoraim in whose names these traditions and discussions were passed down. Nowhere else do we find this midrash without any of the names associated with the discussion. It is no longer told in a whisper, but nonetheless it is an esoteric teaching.

The Pirke deRabbi Eli ezer belongs to the emanationist tradition of Creation, and in its version of the famous light motif, the primordial light from the garment of God was spread out, and the heavens began to extend continually (מותחין והולכין): an unmistakeable form of the doctrine of emanation. The emanation of the primordial light from the Divine Logos is mythically described as God's garment.

That later medieval Jewish philosophers lost the keys which would unlock the meaning of this imagery is obvious in Maimonides' reaction to the version in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: "I have seen a statement of R. Eliezer the Great (in)...the Chapters of R. Eliezer, which is the strangest statement I have seen made by one who follows the Law of Moses our Master."[42] Maimonides also wants to know what the light of God's garment signifies. He confesses that "no persuasive figurative interpretation has come to me," and so he takes it to refer to a doctrine of creation from prime matter--light (as did a number of scholars many centuries later).[43] On the other hand, R. Isaac the Blind and the mystics of Gerona were not in the least bewildered by the imagery in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer; it conformed with their own emanationist doctrine of Creation.[44]

So the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer falls neatly within the third, the emanationist, doctrine of Creation. Now that we have traced the creation of the universe to the emanation of the Divine Logos, what can we say about the creation of the earth?

Chapter Four Footnotes

[1]Encyclopedia Judaica, Third ed., s.v. "Creation," by Louis Isaac Rabinowitz.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Alexander Altmann, "A Note On The Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," The Journal of Jewish Studies, vol. 7, nos. 3 and 4 (1956): 195.

[4]Genesis Rabbah 1:1, "Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world."

[5]Altmann, "A Note On The Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," p. 195.

[6]Wisdom of Solomon 11:18.

[7]2 Maccabees 7:28.

[8]2 Enoch 24:2.

[9]4 Ezra 36:54.

[10]See J. Theodor, Bere'shit Rabbah, p. 19 (on Genesis Rabbah 3:4) where all parallels are listed.

[11]Altmann, "A Note On The Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," p. 197.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., p. 206.

[14]Ephraim E. Urbach, The Sages, trans. Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 2:780, n. 15. Urbach points out that when the question is introduced by "whence" (מאין), it usually means out of what material was the subject created.

[15]Tahuma, ed. Buber, Bere shit #10.

[16]Urbach, The Sages, 1:209.

[17]Ibid., 1:192. According to Urbach, the Tannaim did not expressly deal with the question: "whence" (out of what material) was the light created. He claims there is no reference in tannaitic writings to the notion of materia prima at all.

[18]B. T. Hagigah 12a.

[19]Genesis Rabbah 3:6.

[20]Alexander Altmann, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology," Essays In Honour of the Very Reverend Dr. J. H. Hertz, ed. I. Epstein, E. Levine, and C. Roth (London: Edward Goldston, 1942), p. 30.

[21]Ibid.

[22]See note 16 above.

[23]Altmann, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology," p. 28-32. Altmann makes a good case for the merger of these two conceptions in rabbinic lore: the primordial light (אור הגנוז) and the primordial human (אדם קדמון). In midrashic thought, the conceptions of primordial light and the conception of Adam become mixed, caused by the identity of these two motifs in Gnostic mythology. There the primordial human is the symbol for the primordial light. The difference is, however, that in Gnostic thought, the light and darkness mix and the activity of the Divine is thereafter connected with the redemption of the light from the darkness. It is the fundamental dynamic of history: the process of gathering light out of darkness. The Midrash teaches that, from the beginning, the light is withdrawn; it rests with God, stored up for the righteous in the future world. The light is with God, awaiting the righteous in the world to come.

[24]Philo, De opificio mundi 26:29.

[25]The Book of Jubilees 2:2.

[26]Philo, De Somniis 1:75.

[27]2 Enoch 25A.

[28]Exodus Rabbah 15:22.

[29]Genesis Rabbah 3:4.

[30]Altmann, "A Note On The Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," p. 201.

[31]Urbach, The Sages, 1:210.

[32]Altmann, "A Note On The Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," p. 201-202.

[33]2 Enoch 25A.

[34]Philo, De fuga 110.

[35]Ḥagigah 2:1. This is a formulation reminiscent of Ecclesiasticus 3:21-22, "Seek not [to understand] what is too wonderful for thee, and search not out that which is hid from thee."

[36]B. T. Ḥagigah 13b.

[37]Genesis Rabbah 19:20.

[38]B. T. Ḥagigah 14b.

[39]It is not to be assumed that everything having to do with the first days of Creation in rabbinic literature was part of an esoteric teaching referred to as Ma'aseh Bere'shit. Much of what appears in rabbinic literature seems to be a sort of cataloging of the first six days of Creation, and the order of that which was created. There seems to be no esoteric teaching associated with such a cataloging, but merely the kind of exegetical attention one expects in rabbinic literature.

[40]See Chapter Six below.

[41]See chapter six below.

[42]Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:26, p. 330-332.

[43]Urbach, The Sages, p. 209, in which Urbach rejects this interpretation of the midrash (the primeval matter from which the world was created was light) in favor of the interpretation that light is the emanation of the Divine Logos.

[44]Altmann, "A Note On The Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," p. 206.

CHAPTER FIVE

". . . AND THE EARTH"

Now that we have established from "whence were the heavens created" (PRE 7b), the next question is: "whence was the earth created?" (PRE 8a). Ginzberg claims that the view found in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, "that snow is the primeval component of the earth," is mentioned only in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and sources dependent upon it.[1] Perhaps it is not such an isolated tradition.

In Genesis Rabbah, where we are again clearly in the realm of deep and secret things (עמיקתא ומסתרתא), we read:

> In the beginning, God created the Heavens, but it is not explained how. Where then is it explained? Elsewhere: "That stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain" (Is. 20:21); And the Earth, which is likewise not explained. Where is that explained? Elsewhere: "For He saith to the snow Fall thou on the earth," etc. (Job 37:6). "And God said Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), and the manner of this, too, is not explained. Where is it explained? Elsewhere: "Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment" (Ps. 104:2).[2]

In the Tanḥuma, as well as the Talmud Yerushalmi, it is stated that the heavens were made of dust, and the earth from snow,[3] citing Isaiah 40:22 to indicate the former, and Job 37:6 to indicate the latter.[4]

As with the creation of the heavens, Maimonides was

also bewildered by the words of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer regarding the creation of the earth.[5] The gross anthropomorphism in the description of the creation of the earth begged Maimonides for interpretation.

> He took of the snow [or ice] which was beneath His Throne of Glory and threw it upon the waters, and the waters became congealed so that the dust of the earth was formed, as it is said, "He saith to the snow, Be thou earth" (Job 37:6). (PRE 8a)[6]

Maimonides reads into the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer an acknowledgement of two matters in the world, a high matter and an inferior matter. This, of course, is Maimonides' own agenda, and has little to do with the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

Unlike Maimonides, however, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is not at all bothered by the anthropomorphism that occasioned the Targumic or Maimonidean reading. On the contrary, such gross anthropomorphic imagery is characteristic of the imagination which informs the entire midrash. The speculations in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer connected with the beginnings of heaven and earth are given in an imagery which profiles, shapes, and images in mythic language the mysteries of Creation.

The famous controversy between the schools of Hillel and Shammai over the order of the creation of the heavens and the earth is also preserved in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer (PRE 42a). The School of Shammai taught that the heavens were created first (as did Plato and Philo), citing Genesis 1:1 as prooftext: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The School of Hillel maintained

that the earth was created first, citing Ps. 102:25 as prooftext: "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands." In Genesis Rabbah and the Talmud, the argument is resolved by the Sages who, quoting Is. 48:13, "Yea, mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spread out the heavens; when I call unto them they stand up together," assert the simultaneity of Creation.[7]

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, however, the conflict is resolved by the Shekhinah: "the Shekhinah rested between them, and they both agreed that both [heavens and earth] were created in one hour and at one moment" (ibid.).

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer appends an epilog to this celebrated controversy:

> What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He put forth His right hand and stretched forth the heavens, and He put forth His left hand and founded the earth, as it is said: "Yea, mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spread out the heavens: when I called unto them, they stood up together" (Is. 48:13). (PRE 42b).

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, not content to let the controversy lie resolved by the spirit of God, prefers to extend the resolution with a characteristically physical image depicting God's hands in the work of simultaneous creation: the earth by the left hand of God, and the heavens by the right hand of God.

Concerning the creation of the four quarters of the world (PRE 8b), the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer has to be understood in

the context of the Hebrew conception of the earth as a disc surrounded by an ocean. Heaven is a vault over-arching the ocean. The four ends of the earth are taken as parallel to the four ends of heaven, and the winds come from the four corners (or quarters) of the earth, and from the four ends of the heavens.[8] Parallel passages in Pesiḳta Rabbati and Numbers Rabbah agree with the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer that from the east light comes into the world, from the south rains and beneficient dews come into the world, from the west snow and hail come into the world, and from the north comes darkness.[9]

The north represents all that is evil and unfinished in Creation. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer invites anyone who thinks that Creation can be completed to come and do so, by completing the north quarter, which God purposefully left incomplete. From the north emerges that which keeps Creation incomplete, unfinished, and imperfect.[10] The challenge is to the Gnostic doctrine of demiurge--that lower, imperfect God who is responsible for the world as we know it.[11]

There is another angle to the act of Creation in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, in which Creation begins as an almost technical exertion of God's activity. It is the familiar image of God as an artisan, or a fashioner of Creation. In Genesis Rabbah, there is the image of God and the blueprint,[12] which is the record of God's holy calculations. A working record--a living, technical remnant of God's activity in Creation; Torah as blueprint and God as architect of Creation.

Thus, as Creation is about to begin in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, appears this most interesting passage:

> He began to trace [the foundations of] the world before Himself, but it would not stand. They told a parable, to what is this matter like? To a king who wished to build a palace for himself. If he had not traced in the earth its foundations, its exits and its entrances, he does not begin to build. Likewise the Holy One, blessed be He was tracing [the plans of] the world before Himself, but it did not remain standing until He created repentance (PRE 5b, 6a).[13]

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account is reminiscent of the celebrated Genesis Rabbah account, which is given in the name of R. Hosh'aya.[14] In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, there is no citation of names, no proof-texting, just the simile. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the creative activity is quick and spontaneous--(היה מחרטט)--God etched the world before Himself. In the Genesis Rabbah account, Creation is more planned. Torah is characterized as blueprint; there is more methodology to Creation than is found in the spontaneity of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account.

In the Genesis Rabbah, the king uses Torah as a working tool, כלי אמונתו , of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the simile is of a king who is building a palace, just as God created the earth. The king does not build until he consults the Torah. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the simile is also of a king, who does not build until he traces its foundations, but there is no consultation. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the creation is quick, spontaneous, and entirely the effort of God and God alone.

However, before the thought to create the world even jumped into intentionality, God and his Name alone existed (PRE 5b). This is the first mention in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer of a theme which runs throughout the volume, and which belongs to the esoteric tradition having to do with the significance of God's Holy Name. Cohon points out that in the idiom of the ancients, one of the terms for the discovery of the being and essence of the Divine is the significance of the Divine Name,[15] the Tetragrammaton in particular. Though theology taught that God cannot be named as people and things are named, still popular piety clung to the notion that God could be known through knowledge of God's name.[16]

The hesitation to utter the Ineffable Name of YHWH is a characteristic of rabbinic theology. The four-lettered name YHWH was withdrawn from spoken parlance and invested with awe and majesty. By a play on the word לעלם , written defectively in Ex. 3:15, the Rabbis teach that the divine Name must be kept secret. It is also interesting to note that essential to the Gnostic system of salvation was the knowledge of the names of the demons and gods.[18]

Notwithstanding rabbinic opposition to theurgic uses of the Name of God, the practice spread among Jews. Indeed, Scholem, in connection with the thirteenth century Spanish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, elevates the contemplation of God's Holy Name to the zenith of Jewish mystical speculation:

> For thus is the real and, if I may say so, the peculiarly Jewish object of mystical contemplation: The Name of God, which is something absolute, because it reflects the hidden meaning and totality of existence; the Name through which everything else acquires its meaning and which yet to the human mind has no concrete, particular meaning of its own.[19]

Certainly the passage in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: "Before the world was created, the Holy One, blessed by He, with His Name alone existed..."(PRE 5b) is already an expression of this form of mystical activity. That the סוד שם המפורש (Secret of the Ineffable Name)[20] gripped popular imagination in the post-talmudic period is certain, though we do not have a denunciation of such speculation from the philosophic quarter until Maimonides.[21]

Scholem further reduces this form of mystical speculation into language which gives us some insight into the significance that the secret of the Ineffable Name must have held for people in the post-talmudic and medieval periods:

> All creation--and this is an important principle of most Kabbalists--is, from the point of view of God, nothing but an expression of His hidden self that begins and ends by giving itself a Name, the holy name of God, the perpetual act of Creation. All that lives is an expression of God's language--and what is it that Revelation can reveal in the last resort if not the name of God?[22]

The theurgic use of the Ineffable name of God is a theme which runs through the entire Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. The Cuteans are excommunicated "with the mystery of the Ineffable Name" (PRE 91a). Moses begins to curse the taskmaster with "the sword of his lips" (PRE 115a), which Friedlander believes probably refers to the invocation of the Ineffable Name.[23]

Phineas put a herem (excommunication) on Israel by the mystery of the Ineffable Name (PRE 113a). Jacob put a golden, talismanic plate with the Holy Name engraved on it around the neck of Asenat, who was destined to become the wife of Joseph (PRE 88a). The suggestion in the text is that the power of the plate, plus the help of the angel Michael who came down in order to take Asenat to Egypt, were instrumental in bringing Joseph and Asenat together.[24]

The rod, one of ten things created at twilight on the eve of the first Sabbath (PRE 44a), was taken by Adam who gave it to Enoch, who gave it to Noah, and on down to Joseph, from whom it was stolen after his death and put in the palace of Pharaoh. Jethro, a magician of Egypt, saw the rod "and the letters which were upon it." He took it and planted it in the garden of his house. No one could even approach it.

> When Moses came to his house he went into the garden of Jethro's house, and saw the rod and read the letters which were upon it, and he put forth his hand and took it. Jethro watched Moses and said: This one in the future will redeem Israel from Egypt. Therefore he gave him Tsipporah his daughter to wife, as it is said, "And Moses was content to dwell with the man; and he gave Moses Tsipporah, his daughter" (Ex. 2:21). (PRE 94a).

In Exodus Rabbah, it is the initials of the ten plagues which are engraved on the rod.[25] But in PRE 98b, when Moses and the children of Israel are standing at the sea, God tells Moses to lift up the rod and stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it. Moses did but the sea refused to be divided.

> He then showed it [the Sea] the covenant of circumcision and the coffin of Joseph, and the staff on

> which the Ineffable Name was engraved, but it did not consent. Moses returned before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: Sovereign of all worlds! The sea will not listen to me. Forthwith was the Holy One, blessed be He revealed before him in His glory at the sea. And the sea fled (PRE 98b-99a).

In Exodus 3:13-14, Moses says to God: "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me: What is His name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses: 'I am that I am'." The Pirke deRabbi Eli'ezer derives the fourth benediction of the Shmoneh 'Esre from this exchange between God and Moses. "The angels saw that the Holy One, blessed be He, had transmitted the secret of the Ineffable Name to Moses, and they rejoined: Blessed are thou, O Lord, who graciously bestoweth knowledge" (PRE 95a).

When the Holy One, blessed be He, descended on Mt. Sinai to give the Torah to the children of Israel, sixty myriads of ministering angels also descended. They held swords and crowns in their hands, and they crowned the Israelites with the Ineffable Name (PRE 112a).

> Moses said: On the Day of Atonement I will behold the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, and I will make atonement for the iniquities of Israel. Moses spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: Soverign of all the Universe! "Show me, I pray thee, thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Moses! Thou art not able to see My glory lest thou die, as it is said, "For men shall not see me and live" (Ex. 33:20); but for the sake of the oath which I have sworn unto thee I will do thy will. Stand at the entrance of the cave, and I will make all the angels who move before Me pass before thy face. Stand

> in thy might, and do not fear, as it is said, "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee" (Ex. 33:19). When thou dost hear the Name which I have spoken to thee, there am I before thee, as it is said, "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee" (Ex. 33:19). (PRE 11b).

After God and the Name alone existed, but before God called into existence the visible world, the conditions by which the world would function were established. The world could not exist without laws and conditions, such as Torah, Gehinnom, the Garden of Eden, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, Repentance, and the Name of the Messiah (PRE 6a): conditions which represent Divine Providence, Law, Order, Good Deeds, Reward and Punishment, Prayer, and Redemption.

Once these principles were established, the Holy One, blessed by He, took counsel with the Torah "whose name is Tushiyah (תושיה) with reference to the creation of the world" (PRE 6b). Tushiyah is a common term in Proverbs and Job, and appears to signify the act of establishment or arrangement--a technical term of Wisdom literature.

The idea of tehom in the sense of primordial waters which threaten to engulf the world, and the stone which holds them back is a familiar one in rabbinic lore. The shetiyah (שתיה) stone is one of the primordial stones which dam the threatening chaos. It is the foundation stone of Zion, a symbol of formation, and as such it appears in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

> And Jacob returned to gather the stones, and he found them all [turned into] one stone, and he set it up for a pillar in the midst of the place, and oil descended for him from heaven, and he poured it thereon, as it is said, "And he poured oil upon the top of it" (Gen. 28:18). What did

> the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He placed [thereon] His right foot, and sank the stone to the bottom of the depths, and He made it the keystone in an arch; therefore it is called [the foundation stone] אבן השתיה, for there is the navel of the earth, and therefrom was all the earth evolved, and upon it the Sanctuary of God stands, as it is said, "And this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house" (Gen. 28:22). (PRE 82b).

Altmann describes the cosmological idea of the shetiya stone as a stay against the abyss of Tehom, where deep below, demonic potencies reside. In Naassenic Gnosis, there are living waters above which are good and represent the formative element of Creation. There are also the chaotic waters below. The primordial human (Adam Kadmon) is also a symbol of the formative element.

The shetiyah stone sunk into the deep is an expression of the Gnostic image of the pneumatic element, belonging to the upper world of light, which has sunk into the depths of the bitter waters of the earthly world.[27] The stone is often identified with light, with the corner-stone, with the navel of the earth, and with the foundation stone of Zion. In the Pirke deRabbi Eli ezer, it is referred to as the "keystone [סניף לארץ] of the earth," and "the foundation stone [אבן השתיה]," and it is at the "navel of the earth טבור הארץ" (PRE 82b).

The mythical memory of the primordial waters is found in chapter five of the Pirke deRabbi Eli'ezer.

> Forthwith the waters became proud and they arose to cover the earth as at first, when the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked them and subdued them, and placed them beneath the soles of His feet, and

> measured them with the hollow of His hand, that they should neither decrease nor increase. He made the sand as the boundary of the sea, just like a man who makes a fence for his vineyard. (PRE 11b-12a).

God appears as the formative element of light, and the ancient conflict between the containing forces of control and the primordial forces of chaos is set up before history, on the stage of myth.

Pre-history is as we would expect it in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer--alive with myth and colorful, often esoteric, lore about Creation, alluding to the mysteries which lie virtually intact at the beginning of things. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer preserves many of the esoteric traditions associated with speculation about origins, as we have seen in its treatment of the creation of heaven and earth.

Chapter Five Footnotes

[1] Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:8, n. 18.

[2] Genesis Rabbah 1:6.

[3] Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 17 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952-1980), 8:22. To Baron, the motif of snow under the Throne is merely a variation of the ancient cosmological motif of water as a primordial principle.

[4] Tanḥuma, ed. Buber, Mikets 16 and T.J. Ḥagigah 2, 1, 77a.

[5] Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:26, P. 331.

[6] The Targumists were also bothered by the anthropomorphism of God's feet, as it were, and interpreted God's feet as the Throne of Glory. For example, Ex. 24:10, "and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet the like of the whiteness of sapphire stone"; Onkelos translates "under his feet" as "under the throne of His glory."

[7] Genesis Rabbah 1:13 and T.B. Ḥagigah 12a.

[8] Maurice H. Farbridge, Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism (New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 115.

[9] Pesiḳta Rabbati Piska 46 and Numbers Rabbah 2:10.

[10] That the forces of evil dwell or emerge from the North is an old Semitic notion: "out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the earth" (Jeremiah 1:14). In the PRE 8b, the north is the abode of destroying spirits, earthquakes, winds, demons, lightning, and thunder.

[11] Friedlander, PRE, p. 17, n. 8.

[12] Genesis Rabbah 1:1.

[13] David Luria, in his commentary to the PRE, p. 6a, n. 13, points out the similarity between the language of this simile and Ezekiel 43:11, "And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known unto them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof, and write it in their sight..."

14 Genesis Rabbah 1:1.

15 Samuel S. Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology," HUC Annual, vol. 23, part 1 (1950-1951): 579. Cohon claims that the power of the Ineffable Name of God may go back as far as Egyptian magic, and from there found its way into the practices of the Hasidim, Essenes, and Pharisees.

16 Ibid., p. 581.

17 Exodus Rabbah 3:7. In Ex. 3:15, זה שמי לעלם --this is my name forever [לעלם]. The letter "waw" has been omitted, so that one should never pronounce the Name according to its letters.

18 Cohon, "The Name of God..." p. 593.

19 Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 133.

20 Cohon, "The Name of God..." p. 590, n. 56 explains the term שם המפורש(Ineffable Name) in two possible ways: "expressed distinctly" or 2) "to separate" or "to set aside." Cohon concludes that whatever the etymology, the name is to be taken as שם המיוחד -- the special, distinct, unique name for God. Joshua Trachtenberg, in Jewish Magic and Superstition (New York: Atheneum, 1977), p. 288, n. 21, points out that the name was applied in post-talmudic times not to the Tetragrammaton alone, but also to the twelve, forty-two, and seventy-two letter names of God.

21 Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:62, p. 150 .

22 Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 17.

23 Friedlander, PRE, p. 379, n. 6. Friedlander says that the reference is probably to the invocation of the Ineffable Name, as in Exodus Rabbah 1:29, where it is asked: with what did he slay him? The Rabbis answered that he pronounced God's name against him and thus slew him.

24 The Rabbis were troubled that in Gen. 41:45, "and he [Pharaoh] gave him [Joseph] to wife Asenat the daughter of Potiphera priest of On." Joseph marries an Egyptian wife, and to mitigate that Asenat in rabbinic literature becomes the child of Dinah, born from the violence done to her by Shechem. In the PRE, Jacob puts the magic plate around Asenat's neck. Michael takes her to Egypt, where Asenat grows up as the daughter of the barren wife of Potiphera.

25 Exodus Rabbah 8:3 and Exodus Rabbah 5:6, where the initials of the ten plagues דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב are engraved on the rod.

26

Alexander Altmann, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology," in Essays in Honour of the Very Reverend Dr. J.H. Hertz, ed. I. Epstein, E. Levine, and C. Roth (London: Edward Goldston, 1942), pp. 19-32.

27

The stones which seal the depths symbolize the powers of light. Altmann also reads the well-known passage in B.T. Ḥagigah 14b with this symbolism, in which Akiba warns his associates: "when you come to the אבני שיש טהור , do not say מים מים because it is written: 'He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes' (Ps. 101:7)." Altmann suggests that אבני שיש טהור ("Pure marble stones") is symbolically the equivalent of the Adamas stone (ὁ Ἀδαμας) in Naassenic Gnosis.

Furthermore, this stone is often imaged in another metaphor: the precious stone, the pearl, for example, lost in the lower waters of chaos, or in still another metaphor, the inner person (soul) inserted into the outer person (body). The motif of the lost pearl appears frequently in Gnostic literature--a symbol of the spark of light hidden in the darkness of matter. This motif is recognized in the midrash, where the pearl gave light to Noah in the ark in the midst of the great flood. "One pearl was suspended in the ark, and shed light upon all the creatures in the ark, like a lamp which gives light inside the house, and like the sun yonder which shines in his might, as it is said, 'A light shalt thou make to the ark' (Gen. 6:16)." (PRF 53a) Also, see Genesis Rabbah 31:11.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SECOND DAY

The creations on the second day[1] are important to our midrash as they carry a polemical valence which resounds through the intervening centuries between the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and the Book of Jubilees. In the Book of Jubilees, the creations of the first day are heaven, earth, the waters, the spirits, angels, the abysses, and the darkness.[2] The angels were created on the first day, and moreover, "The Law was given through the ministry of angels."[3]

The significance of such speculation is outlined for us by Palestinian Amoraim at the beginning of the third century, in a famous midrash from Genesis Rabbah[4] in which the question is asked: when were the angels created? R. Yoḥanan claims they were created on the second day, and derives that opinion from Ps. 104:3 and 4, where it is written: "Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters," and followed by, "Who makest the spirits Thine angels" (Ps. 104: 3-4).

"Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters" (Ps. 104:3) is taken as a description of the dividing of the upper from the lower waters, which according to Gen. 1:6-8, took place on the second day of Creation. Therefore,

the verse which follows: "Who makest the spirits Thine angels" (Ps. 104:4) is taken to refer to the same day.

R. Ḥanina, however, places the creation of the angels on the fifth day, because it is written in Gen. 1:20, "And let fowl fly above the earth," which happened on the fifth day. Because from Is. 6:2 ("And with twain he did fly"), it is known that angels fall within the category of beings that fly, angels must have been created on the same day as all flying creatures--day five. However, the real polemical purpose of these speculations is given in the same midrash, in the name of R. Isaac:

> Whether we accept the view of R. Ḥanina or that of R. Yoḥanan, all agree that none were created on the first day, lest you should say, Michael stretched [the world] in the south and Gabriel in the north, while the Holy One, blessed be He, measured it in the middle; but "I am the Lord, that maketh all things; that stretched forth the heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by Myself [מאתי] (Is. 44: 24)": [מי אתי] (who was with Me) is written: who was associated with Me in the creation of the world? Ordinarily, a mortal king is honoured in his realm and the great men of the realm are honoured with him. Wherefore? Because they bear the burden [of state] with him. The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is not so, but He alone created His world, He alone is glorified in His universe. R. Tanḥuma quoted: "For Thou art great and doest wondrous things." Wherefore? Because "Thou God art alone": Thou alone didst create the world. Hence, "In the beginning God created."[5]

These Amoraim assert that not only did the angels not create the world, but they had no responsibility in the act of Creation at all. The homilies having to do with angels and Creation reflect an old exegetical tradition. The Rabbis were aware of the antinomian element, present in all Gnostic

speculation, that the world was created, in part, by lower partners in Creation--be they angels, a trinity, or some sort of demiurge.[6]

Though the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer prefers not to include any of the Rabbinic dialectic behind these speculations, it affirms the opinion of R. Yoḥanan: "On the second day the Holy One, blessed be He, created the firmament, the angels, fire for flesh and blood, and the fire of Gehinnom (PRE 4a),[7] and opposes the doctrine of the Book of Jubilees.

The problem of the place of angels in Creation was made more difficult for ancient exegetesby the famous plural in Gen 1:26, where God says: "Let us make [נעשׂה] man in our image, after our likeness." With whom is God consulting?

> R. Samuel b. Naḥman said in R. Jonathan's name: When Moses was engaged in writing the Torah, he had to write the work of each day. When he came to the verse, "And God said, Let us make man in our image," etc., he said: "Sovereign of the Universe! Why dost Thou furnish an excuse to heretics?" "Write," replied He; "whoever wishes to err may err."[8]

The heresy is the presence of a plurality of powers at Creation, challenging the rigorous Rabbinic monotheism. The challenge is real enough to inspire no less than five explanations in Genesis Rabbah:[9] God consulted with the souls of the righteous, the ministering angels, or the plural is a figure of speech (a kind of royal "we"), the plural is negated in the next verse, and the plural is meant to include man, woman, and the Divine Spirit.

So the midrash is by no means unanimous in agreeing with the Amoraim in Genesis Rabbah 1:3, and one does find God

consulting with the ministering angels at Creation in several places.[10] But in the exegesis of Genesis 1:26 in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, God consults with the Torah (PRE 27b); an explanation of the plural which is not included in the Genesis Rabbah account.

What follows the appeal to Torah in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is significant and separates our midrash from mainstream rabbinic tradition.

> The Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to the Torah: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). [The Torah] spoke before Him: Sovereign of all the worlds! The man whom Thou wouldst create will be limited in days and full of anger; and he will come into the power of sin. Unless Thou wilt be long-suffering with him, it would be well for him not to have come into the world. (PRE 27b)

The tension between the angels and Adam is a very prominent motif in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, one to which Urbach attributes the influence of stories and traditions which came to the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer from apocalyptic literature.[12]

In the above-mentioned midrashim, in which God consults with the angels, the angels want to know: after this human is created, what kind of nature will he possess? God replies that his wisdom will be greater than the wisdom of the angels. God demonstrates this by gathering together all the beasts and Adam names them all, names himself, and names God.[13]

Urbach[14] makes the point that in the early midrashim, the angels become reconciled to the creation of Adam and recognize his wisdom.[15] In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, however, the angels are jealous of Adam, and they conspire to

bring him down. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer also has a version of the "naming" midrash, but there is no reconciliation in it; on the contrary, it is precisely the envy of the angels which brings about the fall of Adam.

> The ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: Sovereign of all Worlds! "What is man, that thou shouldst take note of him?" (Ps. 144:3). "Man [אדם] is like unto vanity" (Ps. 144:4), upon earth there is not his like. [God] answered them: Just as all of you praise Me in the heights of heaven so he professes my Unity on earth, nay, moreover, are you able to stand up and call the names for all the creatures which I have created? They stood up, but were unable [to give the names]. Forthwith Adam stood up and called the names for all His creatures, as it is said, "And the man gave names to all cattle" (Gen. 2:20). When the ministering angels saw this they retreated, and the ministering angels said: If we do not take counsel against this man so that he sin before his Creator, we cannot prevail against him. (PRE 31a, 31b)

The next sentence in the midrash introduces Samma'el, who comes down to deceive humankind. The tension between Adam and the angels precedes the story of the fall of humankind.[16]

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer would not be true to its own imagistic integrity if it did not devote some description to the abode of the angels.

> Which firmament was created on the second day? Rabbi Eli ezer said: It was the firmament which is above the heads of the four Ḥayyot [living creatures], as it is said, "And over the head of the Ḥayyot there was the likeness of a firmament, like the color of the terrible crystal" (Ezek. 1:22). What is the meaning of [the expression], "like the color of the terrible crystal?" It means like precious stones and pearls; it illuminates the whole house and like the sun which is shining with maximum intensity at noonday, as it is said, "The light dwelleth with him" (Dan. 2:22); and like this in the future will the righteous shed light, as it is said, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament" (Dan. 12:3). (PRE 9a,b)

The motif of the precious stones and pearls, and the

light as a positive, pneumatic element is familiar to us from the discussion of the shetiyah stone above.[18] There are also many similarities between the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, where the firmament is described as: "a wall which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire. . .a large house built of crystals."[19]

We have now moved into another area of esoteric speculation taken up by the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: the vision of the Merkavah. That the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer demonstrates a concern for the description of the Merkavah at all and for the systematization of its angelogy,[20] links it with the apocalyptic literature.

Four classes of ministering angels are identified in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: led by Michael on God's right, Gabriel on God's left, Uriel before God, and Raphael behind God, and in the center is the Shekhinah of the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting on a throne (PRE 9b).[21]

> [As for] the angels created on the second day, when they are sent [as messengers] by His word they are changed into winds, and when they minister before Him they are changed into fire, as it is said, "Who maketh his angels winds; his ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4). (PRE 9b)

Friedlander[22] mentions that this verse (Ps. 104:4) was often used by the Church Fathers to describe the nature of the angels, as it is used in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. Fire is identified by Ginzberg[23] as "the peculiar heavenly element" out of which angels are fashioned. In other sources, water and snow (also hail) are mentioned as material out of which

angels are made.[24]

Fire and hail are also used to describe God in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer: "one half [of His glory] is fire and the other half is hail" (ibid.). Fire and snow, as two primeval elements, are also mentioned in the Ethiopian Enoch in relation to the heavenly throne:

> And from underneath the throne came streams of flaming fire so that I could not look thereon. And the Great Glory sat thereon, and His raiment shone more brightly than the sun and was whiter than any snow.[25]

Thus we see that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer preserves, in some form, many of the polemical traditions associated with the mysteries of Creation as known to rabbinic literature. We have also seen how the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer reflects the influence of the apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic literature in some of these speculations. We have heard it speak in a voice of its own as well.

Chapter Six: Footnotes

[1]There is some confusion in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer concerning the creations on the second day. In chapter three (p. 7a), the following eight creations are enumerated: the well, the manna, the rod, the rainbow, the art of writing [הכתב], the written characters [המכתב], the garments, and the destroying spirits. According to Pirḳe Avot 5:9, all the things enumerated in our text, except the garments, were created at twilight [בין השמשות] on the eve of the first Sabbath. This tradition is also recorded in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, on p. 44a, where the following ten things are listed as creations on the eve of the first Sabbath, at twilight: the mouth of the earth, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the ass, the rainbow, the Manna, the Shamir, the art of writing [הכתב], the written characters or instruments [המכתב], the tables of the law [הלוחות], and the ram of Abraham. Appended to this list is the destroying spirits, the sepulchre of Moses, and the tongs. The confusion of the two traditions points to the composite nature of our midrash.

[2]The Book of Jubilees 2:2.

[3]Ibid., 1:27.

[4]Genesis Rabbah 1:3. See also Genesis Rabbah 3:8.

[5]Ibid.

[6]There were also the teachings of Philo, who maintained that God created the Good (the soul) in the person, while the angels were responsible for creating the evil. There was also the dualistic teaching of the Persians, which held that Ahriman as well as Ormazd participated in the creation of humans.

[7]The Rabbis concluded that the fire of Gehenna must have been created on the second day, because "it was good" [כי טוב] was not said concerning that day. The "fire of flesh and blood" [אשו של בשר ודם] is confusing. According to Pesaḥim 54a and Genesis Rabbah 11:2, human fire was made at the end of the first Sabbath, when Adam found two flints, struck them together, and produced artificial light.

[8]Genesis Rabbah 8:8.

[9]Ibid., 8:7-8.

[10]See Pesiḳta de R. Kahana 34a,b, Genesis Rabbah 8:8 and 17:4.

[11]In PRE 6a, we have learned that Torah is one of seven primordial conditions necessary for the existence of the world. Leo Jung, in Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature (New York: Ktav, 1974), p. 51, points out thatthis is a remnant of hellenistic thought: the personification of Wisdom, Logos, and thus Torah.

[12]Ephraim E. Urbach, The Sages, trans. Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 1:167-168.

[13]See note 10 above.

[14]Urbach, The Sages, 1:167. See Sanhedrin 38b.

[15]Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:69. According to Ginzberg, the opposition of the angels to the creation of humankind is well documented in talmudic and midrashic literature, and already appears in tannaitic sources. However, Leo Jung, in Fallen Angels, etc., p. 57, n. 66 adds to Ginzberg by noticing that the angels object to the creation of Adam, but on seeing his achievement are silent, and we can assume, become reconciled to the creation of Adam.

[16]See chapter seven.

[17]This is not the firmament in which the luminaries are hung; we are obviously in another realm here, else the question: "which firmament was created on the second day"--need not have been asked. In B.T. Ḥagigah 12b, R. Judah tells us that there are two different firmaments. According to Resh Laḳish, thereare seven.

[18]See chapter five.

[19]Book of Enoch (Ethiopic) 14:9. Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 44. Scholem points out that the fourteenth chapter of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch contains the oldest description of "throne mysticism" in all of this literature. "The throne-world is to the Jewish mystic what the pleroma, the fullness, the bright sphere of divinity with its potencies, aeons, archons and dominions is to the Hellenistic and early Christian mystics of the period who appear in the history of religion under the names of Gnostics and Hermetics."

[20]The process of systematization of angels began in the Book of Daniel and continued in apocalyptic literature to a tremendous degree. The writer of the Book of Daniel was the first to individualize and name and title angels. However,

the organization of the heavenly court did not become very well systematized, and tremendous aggadic variations of the פמליא של מעלה --the upper household, exist, varying according to the exegetical needs of the darshan.

[21]In The Book of Enoch (Ethiopic) 71:7ff, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Phanuel lead four troops of angels who stand near the crystal throne of God, glorifying the Head of Days who is seated in the midst of them. That Gabriel is situated on the left hand of God is found also in the Slavonic Book of Enoch 24:1.

[22]Friedlander, PRE p. 22, n. 1.

[23]Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 5:22, n. 63.

[24]See Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:12, where Michael is made of snow, and Gabriel of fire.

[25]The Book of Enoch (Ethiopic) 14: 19-20. This is probably taken from the Book of Daniel 7:9-10, where "His raiment was as white snow. . .His throne was fiery flames." Fire and hail, which never exist together in nature, are compatible in the presence of things Divine.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RESOLUTION OF EVIL

THE FALL OF ANGELS AND THE FALL OF HUMANS

Part 1: The Fall of Angels

> And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives, whomsoever they chose. And the Lord said: My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for that he also is flesh; therefore shall his days be a hundred and twenty years. The Nefilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them; the same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. (Genesis 6:1-4)

The Biblical story of the "sons of God" marrying the daughters of human beings, the notion of angels lusting and sinning, suggested a fall of angels in addition to the fall of human beings. Indeed, in a theology in which there is no independent principle of evil (such as the Persian Ahriman), the fall of both angels and humans serves an important mythic function in resolving the origin of evil. Even so, Ginzberg points out that there are not many passages in rabbinic literature which takes up the fall of the angels.[1]

The legend is, however, taken up in the Jewish pseudepigraphic writings, becomes a very popular subject among the Church Fathers, and (as we might expect) finds its way into

the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer as well.

> The angels who fell [Nefilim][2] from their holy place in heaven saw the daughters of the generations of Cain walking about naked, with their eyes painted like harlots, and they went astray after them, and took wives from amongst them, as it is said, "And the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose (Gen. 6:2)." (PRE 50b, 51a)

The myth of the cohabitation of the angels with the daughters of humankind is treated in the pseudepigraphic literature, and from it we might expect influence to have seeped into the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. In the Ethiopian Book of Enoch, for example:

> And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children...[3]
> And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, . . .And they became pregnant, and they bore great giants. . .[4]

In the Book of Jubilees, the reason for the descent of the angels is a bit more noble.

> . . .for in his days the angels of the Lord descended on the earth, those are named the Watchers, that they should instruct the children of men, and that they should do judgement and uprightness on the earth.[6]

While the angels were instructing the children of humankind, they began to lust after the daughters of flesh and blood, and then defiled themselves with them.

There is a slightly different account in the Slavonic Book of Enoch. There the angels who came down to sin with

the daughters of humankind were among those who participated in an original revolt of angels in heaven. Three of these Grigori came down and:

> took to themselves wives, and befouled the earth with their deeds, who in all times of their age made lawlessness and mixing, and giants are born and marvelous big men and great enmity. . .[7]

In the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the women are held responsible for tempting the angels to sin.

> For thus they [the women] allured the Watchers who were before the flood; for as these continually beheld them, they lusted after them, and they conceived the act in their mind; for they changed themselves into the shape of men, and appeared to them when they were with their husbands. And the women lusting in their minds after their forms, gave birth to giants, for the Watchers appeared to them as reaching even unto heaven.[8]

The legend is also referred to in Fragments of a Zadokite Work.

> Because they walked in the stubbornness of their heart the Watchers of heaven fell. By them were they caught because they kept not the commandment of God. And their children whose height was like the loftiness of the cedars and whose bodies were like the mountains fell thereby.[9]

The legend shows several variations throughout the pseudepigraphic literature. In the Book of Jubilees, for example, the angels are sent to earth to instruct humankind, and only after falling victim to their lust do they go astray. No mention is made of the rebellion of the angels in the Book of Jubilees. It also should be noted that the Book of Jubilees ascribes the origin of evil to the demons which are the offspring of the union of the angels with the daughters of humankind, a notion which appears full blown in later Kabbal-

istic writings. Consider the idolatry described in the Book of Jubilees:

> And they made for themselves molten images, and they worshipped each the idol, the molten image, which they had made for themselves, and they began to make graven images and unclean simulacra, and malignant spirits assisted and seduced [them] into committing transgression and uncleanness. And the prince Mastema exerted himself to do all this, and he sent forth other spirits, those which were put under his hand, to do all manner of wrong and sin, and all manner of transgression, to corrupt and destroy, and to shed blood upon the earth.[10]

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, it is Samma'el (in later editions, Satan) who roars out of the mouth of the golden calf to seduce Israel to idolatry (PRE 107a).

As might be expected, rabbinic literature tries to demythologize the Genesis myth of the cohabitation of the sons of God and the daughters of humankind, to the extent of denying that it ever occurred. The pseudepigraphical writings cited above takes "sons of God" quite literally, but rabbinic literature derives other, theologically more acceptable meanings.

In Genesis Rabbah, R. Simeon b. Yoḥai calls them the "sons of nobles" and curses all who call them the "sons of God." According to R. Ḥanina and Resh Laḳish, they were called the "sons of God" because they lived a long time without pain or suffering (the ante-diluvian generations, who lived long, happy lives, like the angels).[11] Elsewhere in Genesis Rabbah, Nefilim is taken as a hifil form instead of a kal form, meaning: "they hurled the world down."[12]

There is strong opposition in the authoritative rabbinic

sources to the doctrine of the fall of the angels. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer departs from authoritative rabbinic tradition, and unhesitatingly affirms the cohabitation of angels and daughters of human beings (PRE 50b, 51a), as did the pseudepigraphic writings prior to it. Like the Testament of Reuben, in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer the angels acquired human form when they fell to earth (we know from Ps. 104:4, "Who makest winds Thy messengers, The flaming fire Thy ministers" that angels are flaming fire). So there was fire which accompanied the coition of the angels with the daughters of flesh and blood, but it did not burn the body (PRE 51a).

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer also acknowledges a typically rabbinic teaching as well: "Rabbi Joshua said: the Israelites are called 'Sons of God' as it is said, 'Ye are the sons of the Lord your God' (Deut. 14:1)." It is followed by its opposing teaching:

> The angels are called "Sons of God," as it is said, "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7); and whilst they were still in their holy place in heaven, these were called "Sons of God," as it is said, "And also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them; the same became the mighty men, which were of old, men of renown" (Gen. 6:4). (PRE 51a)

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, though it gives the traditionally rabbinic interpretation of the "sons of God," still falls within the pseudepigraphic tradition by following the literal account of Genesis and affirming the cohabitation of the angels with the daughters of humankind. By doing so, the

Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer offers a mythic resolution of the problem of the origin of evil which links it with the pseud-epigraphic literature.

Part 2: The Fall of Humankind

The fall of the angels has to be linked with the fall of humankind--both are mythic attempts to work out the problem of the origin of evil. Did evil originate within the Godhead (as some hellenistic speculations insisted), or is there a separate (but consistent with a vigorous monotheism) source for evil in the world? In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the reader is treated to several rather thorough attempts to come to grips with this problem.

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the fall of humankind follows Samma'el's[1] appearance on earth, and is a consequence of the angels envy of Adam. The fall of humankind is treated as a direct result of that conflict.

> They [the angels] stood up, but were unable [to give the names]. Forthwith Adam stood up and called the names for all His creatures, as it is said, "And the man gave names to all cattle" (Gen. 2:20). When the ministering angels saw this they retreated, and the ministering angels said: If we do not take counsel against this man so that he sin before his Creator, we cannot prevail against him. Samma'el was the great prince in heaven; The hayyot had four wings and the Serafim had six wings, and Samma'el had twelve wings.[2] What did Samma'el do? He took his band and descended and saw all the creatures which the Holy One, blessed be He, had created in His world and he found among them none so skilled to do evil as the serpent...(PRE 31b).

In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, Samma'el is the real seducer, and it is an act of pure evil. According to Ginzberg, the treatment of the fall of humankind in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer can be characterized as a transition from the old, literal conception of the Bible to the allegorized account

of the Fall which identifies the serpent with sensual desire, corporeality or the like.[3]

The conception of the "old serpent" is a serpent which before the Fall resembled humankind in both mind and body. It became jealous and resorted to trickery and deception. This is the view of the old rabbinic literature.

The transition doctrine (to a fully allegorized account) is exemplified by the Pirke deRabbi Eli'ezer and the Apocalypse of Moses, where the fall is brought about by Satan who makes use of the cunning serpent. The last stage is exemplified by the allegorists such as Maimonides, where the cause of the Fall is sensual desire, and goes as far back as Philo.[4]

In the Apocalypse of Moses, the devil is making the deal with the serpent: "The devil saith to him [the serpent]: Fear not, only be my vessel and I will speak through thy mouth words to deceive him."[5]

In the Book of Adam and Eve, another possible source of lore for our midrash, the devil sometimes appears as the instigator, and sometimes as the alias of the serpent.[6]

Charles even suspected a double source of the narrative,[7] but in either case the Book of Adam and Eve also falls within this transition doctrine of the Fall.

The Samma'el / serpent of the Pirke deRabbi Eli'ezer, the devil / serpent of the Apocalypse of Moses, and the Satan/ serpent of the Book of Adam and Eve all belong to the transition doctrine of the Fall--from the older literal conception of the biblical story to the allegorical interpretation which

identifies the serpent with an impulse or a desire.

The identification of the serpent with Satan or Samma'el is explicit in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, but the tradition goes back at least to the Wisdom of Solomon, where "it was the devil's spite that brought death into the world."[8] The identification is also made in the Revelation of John,[9] "the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan; this ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος (the old serpent), Ginzberg identifies with the נחש הקדמוני of rabbinic literature.[10]

According to Urbach, there is no trace of the identification of the serpent and Satan in the early midrashim, and Satan does not appear at all during the episode of the serpent.[11] Still he claims that the myth of the identification of the serpent and Satan or Samma'el as it appeared in the apocryphal literature is certainly familiar to the rabbinic writers, even to the Tannaim. But little is left of the rebellious character of Satan in the rabbinic literature.

Here we find the influence of the pseudepigraphic and apocryphal literature more prominent in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer than the mainstream midrashic tradition. As with the cohabitation between angels and the daughters of humankind in part one of this chapter, the place and identity of Samma'el in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer links the volume with the pseudepigraphic tradition.

In the Slavonic Enoch, for example, "Satanail with his angels was thrown down from the height," because Satan thought that he "would make his throne higher than the clouds of

the earth, and would be equal in rank to God."[12] It is in this tradition that the evil Samma'el, in the form of the serpent, plots revenge against humankind in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

What makes the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer unique is the characteristic mixture of old mythological motifs with an attempt at allegorization. The mythological component is especially strong in the Fall narrative: the description of Samma'el with twelve wings, his descent with his band of heavenly compatriots, the appearance of the serpent (like a camel),[13] which Samma'el mounts and rides, and the opposition of the Torah to the scheme just as if Torah was another character in the narrative, all point to a highly developed mythic imagination behind the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

Yet there are also qualities about the Fall narrative in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer which place it well on the way to allegorization. These qualities are demonstrated in the use of two interesting mashalim brought to describe the Samma el and serpent relationship.

The first one compares the activity of Samma'el to that of a man in whom there is an evil spirit (רוח רעה). Everything that the man does is ordered by the evil spirit within him. The evil spirit rules the actions of the man from within. So it was with the serpent, who was controlled by the Samma'el within it (PRE 32a).

The mashal makes explicit the rabbinic identification of Satan with Yetser haRa' , but it is also an intimation

that the serpent, the evil, is internal. The next stage, which appears in a Maimonides for example, would be the overt identification of the snake with an internal state.

The second mashal is one more familiar in rabbinic literature, and at first examination, seems to follow the typical rabbinic style of simile. It is told in almost the same form in Genesis Rabbah, where it is told in the name of R. Levi:[14]

> Imagine a woman borrowing vinegar, who went in to the wife of a snake-charmer and asked her, "How does your husband treat you? He treats me with every kindness," she replied, "save that he does not permit me to approach this cask which is full of serpents and scorpions. "It contains all his finery, "said the other; "he wishes to marry another woman and give it to her." What did she do? She inserted her hand into it, and they began biting her. When her husband came he heard her crying out [with pain]. "Have you touched that cask?" he demanded. Similarly, "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou should st not eat?"

The simile also appears in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer:

> A parable, to what is the matter like? To a king who married a woman and made her supreme over all that he had. He said to her: All that I have shall be in thy hands, except this cask, which is full of scorpions. A certain old man visited her; he asks, for instance, for vinegar. He said to her: How does the king treat thee? She said to him: All that he possesses has he given to me and left in my hands except this cask. [The old man] said to her "Is not all the jewelry of the king indeed in this cask? But he wishes to marry another woman, and to give them to her. The king is the first man [Adam], the woman is Eve, and the one who asked for vinegar is the serpent; and concerning them [the text] says, "There are the workers of iniquity fallen, they are thrust down, and shall not be able to rise" (Ps. 36:12). (PRE 32).

The simile also appears in the Avot deRabbi Natan, in

the name of R. Simeon b. Yoḥai:[15]

> I shall tell thee a parable; to whom may Adam be likened? To one who had a wife at home. What did the man do? He went and brought a jar and put into it figs and nuts, a definite number of them. Then he caught a scorpion and put it at the mouth of the jar. The jar he sealed with a tight-fitting lid and put it in a corner. "My dear," he said to her, "everything I have in this house is in thy hands except this jar which thou mayest not touch at all." What did that woman do? As soon as her husband left for the market place, she arose and opened the jar, and stuck her hand into it, and the scorpion stung her. She started back and fell on her couch, when her husband returned from the market place, he exclaimed, "What is this?" "I put my hand in the jar," she replied, "and a scorpion stung me, and now I am dying!" "Did I not tell thee so in the beginning," he demanded, "everything I have in the house is in thy hands, except this jar which thou mayest not touch at all?" Forthwith he grew angry with her and sent her away [divorced her]. This is what Adam was like when the Holy One, blessed be He said to him: "of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer tacks on an epilog of sorts which explains all the connections, the mashal and the nimshal, which is typical of the style of the compiler of our midrash. Also, the Adam figure in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account is a king, in Genesis Rabbah he is a snake-charmer, and in the Avot deRabbi Natan he is simply a man. If one were writing pseudonymously, and imitating the traditional mashal style of the Rabbis, there is no more typical mashal than the language of the kingdom.

The chapter in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer dealing with Cain and Abel, chapter twenty one, illustrates better the transition, or proto-allegorical, posture of our midrash in

the development of Jewish lore. Friedlander noted that "this alegorical interpretation of the Paradise narrative is exceptionally bold."[16]

> "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden" (Gen. 3:3). It was taught in a Baraitha, Rabbi Ze'era said: "Of the fruit of the tree"--here "tree" only means man, who is compared to the tree, as it is said, "for man is the tree of the field" (Deut. 20:9). "Which is in the midst of the garden"--"in the midst of the garden" is here merely an euphemism. "Which is in the midst of the garden"--for "garden" means here merely woman, who is compared to a garden, as it is said, "A garden shut up is my sister, a bride" (Cant. 4:12). Just as with this garden whatever is sown therein, it produces and brings forth, so [with] this woman, what seed she receives, she conceives and bears through sexual intercourse. (PRE 48a).[17]

This interpretation certainly approaches the complete allegorization of the Paradise narrative: here what was forbidden in the Garden was cohabitation.

> [Sammael] riding on the serpent came to her, and she conceived Cain; afterwards Adam came to her, and she conceived Abel, as it is said, "And Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen. 4:1). What is the meaning of "knew"? [He knew] that she had conceived. And she saw his [Cain's] likeness that it was not of the earthly beings, but of the heavenly beings, and she prophesied and said: "I have gotten a man with the Lord." (Ibid.)

The sexual motif, between the serpent and Eve, is an old one. In Genesis Rabbah for example, "he [the serpent] saw them engaged in sexual intercourse and he lusted for her."[18] It also appears in the pseudepigraphic literature, for example, in the Slavonic Book of Enoch:[19]

> And he [the devil, Satonail] understood his condemnation and the sin which he had sinned before, therefore he conceived thought against Adam, in such form he entered and seduced Eve, but did not touch Adam.

The one element of the Paradise narrative that has generated the most controversy among commentators to the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is the penitence of Adam, told in chapter twenty. Many of the commentators of this century and the last have concurred that the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer owes its inspiration, at least, to a similar episode in the Book of Adam and Eve.[20]

Israel Lévi[21] maintained that the story of Adam's penitence, in which Adam went into the waters of the upper Gihon and fasted for seven weeks, and then asked and received penitence, is a story unique in midrashic tests to the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer (PRE 45b ff). Furthermore, Lévi asserts that there is unanimity in the other midrashic texts that Adam refused to repent. So where does the story in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer come from? Lévi traces it to the Book of Adam and Eve, and furthermore identifies it as a Christian legend.

That the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer goes back to the Book of Adam and Eve for this aggadic tradition is not so much in dispute, as is the Jewish or Christian nature of the source. Both Ginzberg and Charles assert the Jewish character of the work (with certain Christian interpolations) and the independence of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer from Christian sources.[22] Let us compare the two narratives.

> On the first day of the week he [Adam] went into the waters of the upper Gihon until the waters reached up to his neck and he fasted seven weeks of days, until his body became like a species of seaweed. Adam said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of all worlds! Remove, I pray Thee, my sins from me and accept my repentance, and all the generations will learn that repentance

> is a reality. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He put forth His right hand, and accepted his repentance, and took away from him his sin, as it is said, "I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah" (Ps. 37:5). (PRE 47b).

In the Book of Adam and Eve,[23] Adam instructs Eve to stand in the water up to her neck, as does Adam in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. In the Book of Adam and Eve, Adam suggests that he spend forty days fasting; in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the fast is for seven weeks. The story is basically the same.

Ginzberg, however, rejects the complete dependence of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer on the Book of Adam and Eve. He points to the existence of legends within mainstream rabbinic literature which suggest Adam's repentance. He also maintains that the old legend that Adam and Eve are buried in the same sepulchre with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob presupposes that they repented and died in favor.[22]

This is a highly favorable view of Adam, but there is a more unfavorable one in rabbinic literature. Perhaps this is the motif to which Lévi[24] was referring. In Genesis Rabbah, R. Yoḥanan and Simeon b. Laḳish argue over Adam's fate in the world to come. Yoḥanan says that God is severe and that Adam can never return to the garden of Eden, even in the next world. Simeon b. Laḳish says the God is more lenient than that.

Ginzberg links the unfavorable view of Adam expressed in some parts of rabbinic literature with the Jewish opposition to the glorification of Adam in Gnostic circles and in early Christianity.[22] The tendency in much of rabbinic literature

is to minimize Adam's stature, in reaction to the exaggeration of Adam's greatness in Christian and Gnostic writings.

One can feel this tension at work in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

> And [Adam] was at his leisure in the garden, like one of the ministering angels. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I am alone in My world and this one [Adam] also is alone in his world. There is no propagation before Me and this one [Adam] has no propagation in his life; hereafter all the creatures will say: Since there was no propagation in his life, it is he who has created us. It is not good for man to be alone, as it is said, "And the Lord God said, It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a help meet for him..." (Gen. 2:18). (PRE 29b).

Also, in the previous chapter, just after Adam's creation, is written:

> Adam stood and he began to gaze upwards and downwards. He saw all the creatures which the Holy One, blessed be He, had created; and he was wondering in his heart, and he began to praise and glorify his Creator, saying, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" (Ps. 104:24). He stood on his feet and was adorned with the Divine Image. His height was from east to west, as it is said, "Thou hast beset me behind and before" (ibid, 139:5). "Behind" refers to the west, "before" refers to the east. All the creatures saw him and became afraid of him, thinking that he was their Creator, and they came to prostrate themselves before him. (PRE 28a).

The problem being addressed is the ascendance of the human to the Divine, reflected in the heresy of the first Adam and the second Adam, which became so important in early Christianity (because the second Adam was identified with Jesus). The first Adam was a lower God, a demiurge, and the second Adam was the Messiah, the Creator. The doctrine is given a Christian expression in I Corinthians 15:45-49:

> If there is such a thing as an animal body, there is also a spiritual body. It is in this sense that Scripture says, "The first man, Adam, became an animate being", whereas the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. Observe, the spiritual does not come first; the animal body comes first, and then the spiritual. The first man was made of "the dust of the earth": the second man is from heaven. The man made of dust is the pattern of all men of dust, and the heavenly man is the pattern of all the heavenly. As we have worn the likeness of the man made of dust, so we shall wear the likeness of the heavenly man.

We can feel this polemic at work in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, where the notion that Adam was worshipped is opposed by tales designed to diminish his stature. In so doing, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer belongs to the older rabbinic tradition which tended to do the same thing.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, though it certainly can be characterized as a transition piece between the more literal approach of the Rabbis and the allegorized approach of the medieval Jewish philosophers, sacrifices little of the mythic quality of the biblical narrative. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer in no way de-mythicizes the biblical report; it preserves the mythic integrity of the narrative because it is comfortable with that level of imagination.

The account of the Fall in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer bears some resemblance to the pseudepigraphic literature, and some to the mainstream rabbinic literature. The narrative of Samma'el and the serpent definitely falls within the tradition represented by such works as the Apocalypse of Moses and the Book of Adam and Eve. The repentance of Adam also seems to owe allegiance to the Book of Adam and Eve.

However, the polemic against the doctrine of the second Adam, and the fall of Samma'el link our midrash to the rabbinic tradition.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account of the fall of the angels and humans is an elaboration of the biblical, mythical report. It is neither an allegorization, as is found in more hellenistically influenced literature such as Philo or the later medieval philosophers, nor is it a literalization of the biblical myth as we often find at the rabbinic level. It is very much an elaboration of the mythic element, steering clear of the Greek and Persian dualisms, to account for the presence of evil which is not God, but subjugated to the will of God, thereby exonerating God from primary responsibility for that evil.

Chapter Seven (Part One): Footnotes

[1]Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:171.

[2]The angels who fell are not mentioned by name in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, but in Targum Yerushalmi 6:4, they are called Shemḥazai and Uzziel. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer 51a, the offspring of the union of the Nefilim and the daughters of humankind are identified as 'Anakim.

[3] The Book of Enoch (Ethiopic) 6:1-3.

[4] Ibid., 7:1-3.

[5] In some places of the pseudepigraphic literature (e.g. chapter 14 of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch), the Watchers are identified with the fallen angels. In other places, they are archangels. The name first occurs in the Book of Daniel 4:13, 17, 23.

[6] The Book of Jubilees 4:15.

[7] Slavonic Book of Enoch 18:5-6.

[8] Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Testament of Reuben 5:6-7.

[9] Fragments of a Zadokite Work 3:3-5.

[10] The Book of Jubilees 11:4-5.

[11] Genesis Rabbah 26:5.

[12] Ibid., 26:2.

Chapter Seven (Part Two): Footnotes

[1] In Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:9, Samma'el is the head of all the Satans. Samma'el is interchangeable with Satan in rabbinic literature, and synonymous with the Angel of Death. In Baba Batra 16a, Simeon b. Laḳish says: הוא שטן הוא יצר הרע הוא מ"ח . The etymology of the name "Samma'el" is generally supposed to be composed of סם "poison" and אל "God." See Alfred Phillip Bender, "Death, Burial, and Mourning," The Jewish Quarterly Review, vol. 6 (1894): 327. Bender traces this etymology to the belief that Samma'el puts an end to life by the infusion of a drop of gall or wormwood, "the poison whereof his spirit drinketh up" (T.B. Avodah Zara 20b). In some manuscripts, especially those of Yemen, the name Samma'el is sometimes derived

from שמאל --"left" representing the evil inclination that turns people away from the right path, and is therefore identical to Satan, in the sense of "to turn away" (שטה). Others connect Samma'el with סמא --"blind"--Samma'el is that which blinds one to truth.

[2]In Isaiah 6:2, the Serafim have six wings. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, Samma'el, prince of the angels, has twelve wings. In the Slavonic Enoch 12:1, Enoch, in the fourth heaven, sees flying spirits of the suns--Phoenixes and Chalkydri, each of which has twelve wings.

[3]Louis Ginsberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-1967), 5:123-124, n. 131.

[4]Ibid. I have condensed Ginzberg's five stages in the development of the serpent to three; the second, third, and fourth are all transitions from the literal to the allegorical.

[5]Apocalypse of Moses 16:5.

[6]The Book of Adam and Eve, ed. Malan, Part 1: chap. 17, p. 19.

[7]The Books of Adam and Eve, ed. Charles, p. 123.

[8]The Wisdom of Solomon 2:24.

[9]Revelation of John 20:2.

[10]Ginzberg, Legends, 5:94.

[11]Ephraim E. Urbach, The Sages, trans. Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 1:167-168.

[12]Slavonic Book of Enoch 29:4-5.

[13]The serpent appears like a camel elsewhere in rabbinic literature, see Eruvin 18a, Sanhedrin 59b and Genesis Rabbah 19:1. With the kind of mythic integrity characteristic of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, not only does the serpent look like a camel, but Samma'el mounts it and rides it.

[14]Genesis Rabbah 19:10.

[15]Avot deRabbi Natan (a) 1, p. 3b.

[16]Friedlander, PRE p. 150, n. 4.

[17]David Luria, in his notes to the PRE, p. 48a, finds something of this interpretation in the Zohar which has borrowed (as in many other cases) aggadic material from the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

[18]Tosefta Sotah 4, 17, p. 301. "So, too, we find in the case of the serpent, who set his mind on killing Adam and taking Eve to wife." Also Genesis Rabbah 18:6, "he [the serpent] saw them engaged in sexual intercourse and he lusted for her." In B. T. Shabbat 14a, "the filth with which the serpent infected Even clung to the rest of humanity, but was removed from Israel as soon as they received Torah"--a midrashic refutation of original sin.

[19]Slavonic Enoch 31:6.

[20]Ginzberg, Legends, 5:114, n. 106.

[21]Israel Lévi, "Éléments Chrétians dans le Pirké Rabbi Eli'ezer," Revue Études Juives, vol. 18 (1889): 86 ff.

[22]Ginzberg, Legends, 5:114, n. 106.

[23]Book of Adam and Eve, ed. Malan, 1:32-34.

[24]Genesis Rabbah 21:18.

CONCLUSION

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is rich in rabbinic mysticism and mythic imagination. It is sometimes bold and polemical, daring to venture outside mainstream aggadic tradition to make a statement of its own. Because it is pseudonymous, it has the advantage of the status of the authoritative source.

One of the mythic features which the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer shares with the Book of Jubilees is the validation of laws, customs, rites, and beliefs because they recapitulate the behavior and beliefs of the Patriarchs. Rituals have exemplary models or paradigms. Rites and beliefs are validated by securing them in primary strata, or in the words of authoritative sources.

Another feature of the mythic imagination suffusing the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is what Patai calls "the complete disregard for time,"[1] in which heaven, earth, and heroes meet and interact on a mythical plane, outside of history. It is a world of metaphor, of the conflation of time and place, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else.

Strengthened by a strong narrative framework, the imagery in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is often colorful and compelling. God is depicted, without hesitation, in bold corporeality, reflecting the simple Jew's undiminished need for expression through anthropomophism.

The compiler of the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer manipulates well known aggadic traditions and exegetical controversies,

rarely preserving the names associated with them in the tradition, and combines them freely to suit the purposes of his own work. The hand of our compiler, cutting and combining, is felt throughout the volume.

The extended narrative feature to even well known aggadic traditions, its great attention to detail, the presence of angels in the narratives, and the unabashed anthropomorphic character of much of the volume all attest to the individual style of the compiler. There are individualities of form such as the explanation of terms appended to the mashal form, and the deletion of names in the dialectical controversies which also separate this midrash from others of its genre.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer sometimes falls within and sometimes without rabbinic tradition. Our compiler draws upon the tannaitic literature, the Jerusalem Talmud, the Midrash Rabbah, the Babylonian Talmud, and the Aramaic Targum known as the Yerushalmi or the Pseudo-Jonathan ben Uzziel.[2]

In its treatment of Ma'aseh Bere'shit and Ma'aseh Merkavah, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer falls within an esoteric tradition that goes back at least to the tannaitic period.[3] It takes up speculations in areas of high polemics in rabbinic literature, with somewhat less hesitation than many of its predecessors.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer expresses an emanationist version of Creation, an area of inquiry which carried highly mystical undertones with it in older rabbinic literature. In later kabbalistic literature, emanationism appears more

developed and quite at home, but in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer there is only an abbreviation of a much larger tradition.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer begins with an acknowledgement of the hesitation associated with esoteric speculations. The Work of Creation, the Work of the Chariot, the secret of the Ineffable Name of God, the secret of the Redemption, and the secret of the Calendar are themes which run throughout the midrash.

However, the Work of Creation is different in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer than in, for example, Genesis Rabbah. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, Creation is quick, spontaneous, and entirely the effort of God's lonely work. In Genesis Rabbah, Creation is more methodical. There is a certain spontaneity to the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer account which makes it unique in midrashic literature.

The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer also maintains traces of ancient and mythical speculations in its treatment of the Work of Creation. The mythical memory of the primordial waters, dammed by the shetiyah stone, the symbol of formation and control, is present in our midrash.

The creations of the second day reflect an old polemic. The Rabbis were aware of the antinomian element, present somewhat in all Gnostic speculation, that the world was created in part by agents other than God, or by a lesser God. In the Book of Jubilees, for example, the angels were created on the first day. This was a disturbing intimation to rabbinic sensibilities that God received help in Creation.

To oppose these kinds of speculations, the Rabbis insisted that the angels were created either on the second or fifth day. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer assigns the creation of the angels to the second day, in keeping with the position given in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan.[4]

The problem of the place of angels in Creation was made more problematic by the plural in Genesis 1:26, in which God says: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The Rabbis felt compelled to explain this peculiar plural in a theologically acceptable way. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer explains that the plural signifies God's consultation with the Torah.

There seems to be some sort of literary connection between the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, especially the Book of Jubilees and the Books of Enoch. Friedlander, in his translation and notes, has especially stressed this connection.[5] The influence of the Enoch books is felt in the angelology and description of the Throne in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer.

That the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer demonstrates a concern at all for the description of God's Throne, God's heavenly messengers, and any kind of systematization of its angelology links it with the Pseudepigrapha. That these concerns are so prominent in our midrash makes it unusual in rabbinic literature.

In its treatment of the fall of angels, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer demonstrates more similarities to the

pseudepigraphic literature than does to mainstream rabbinic literature. Rabbinic literature tended to demythologize the Genesis myth (Genesis 6:1-4) of the cohabitation of the sons of God and the daughters of humankind.

There is strong opposition in the rabbinic literature to the doctrine of the fall of the angels. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, though acknowledging the authoritative rabbinic teaching, departs from it by affirming the cohabitation of the angels with the daughters of human beings, as did the pseudepigraphic literature before it. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, in its mythic resolution to the problem of the origin of evil, reflects the influence of the pseudepigraphic literature.

The fall of angels and the fall of humankind are both mythical attempts to work out the problem of the origin of evil. In the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer, the fall of humankind follows Samma'el's appearance on earth, as a consequence of the angels envy of Adam's abilities.

In our midrash, Samma'el is the real seducer. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer exemplifies a transition doctrine of the serpent in Jewish literature. It is no longer the more literal version of the old rabbinic literature, in which the serpent became jealous and resorted to deception. Nor is it the more allegorized account of Maimonides, for example, where the serpent represents an internal state, an impulse or a desire.

The transition approach is found in the Pirḳe deRabbi

Eli'ezer, the Apocalypse of Moses, and the Book of Adam and Eve, where the fall is brought about by Samma'el/Satan who makes use of the cunning serpent. Again, the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer reflects the influence of the pseudepigraphic literature.

What makes the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer's treatment of the fall unique is the mixture of old mythological motifs with an attempt at allegorization. The fall is in no way demythologized in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer. Yet there is a proto-allegorical thrust to the fall narrative, especially apparent in the chapter about Cain and Abel (chapter twenty-one).

The penitence of Adam in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer has been linked to similar stories in the Book of Adam and Eve. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer seems to have been influenced by the Book of Adam and Eve. The Jewish or Christian nature of this influence has been a subject of some controversy.

The account of the fall in the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer bears traces of both the pseudepigraphic literature and mainstream rabbinic literature. It does not sacrifice, in any case, any of the mythic quality of the biblical narrative. It preserves the mythic integrity of the narrative; indeed, it expands it. The Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer is an elaboration of the mythic element, steering clear of the Greek and Persian dualisms, to account for the origin of evil in a highly mythic way.

These are the characteristics which mark the Pirḳe deRabbi Eli'ezer as unique in the tradition of midrashic

literature. Alternating between traditions, with a style of its own, it is a fascinating volume and a stimulating subject of inquiry.

Footnotes

Conclusion

[1] Raphael Patai, "What is Hebrew Mythology?", Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences (Nov. 1964), p. 80.

[2] Friedlander, PRE, p. xix.

[3] Encyclopedia Judaica, third ed., s.v. "Creation," by Louis Isaac Rabinowitz.

[4] Genesis Rabbah 1:3.

[5] Friedlander, PRE, p. xxi ff.

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