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GNOSIS AND GNOSTICISM:  
A REDACTION CRITIQUE OF  
GENESIS RABBAH, CHAPTERS 1-8

FRED BOUGESS GUTTMAN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion  
New York, N.Y.

April 1, 1979

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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by Fred Bougess Guttman  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

This thesis examines the relationship between Gnosticism and the creation traditions embodied in the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah. However, in broader terms, it is an attempt to understand the relationship between Gnosticism and Rabbinic Judaism.

To this end, the author began by closely defining Gnosticism in addition to describing the nature of Genesis Rabbah and its redaction. He then proceeded with an in-depth analysis of the traditions in the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah and a comparison of them with parallel traditions in PT Hagigah 2:1. Finally, he delineated the major themes in the two sources and analyzed them using redaction critical methods.

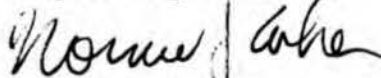
This thesis, the text of which is nearly 300 pages, is divided into seven long chapters, with an Introduction, which surveys the scholarship on the relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism, a Conclusion, two Appendices and Notes. Chapter One outlines the origins of Gnosticism, draws a distinction between Gnosis and Gnosticism and enumerates the major aspects of a typical gnostic myth. In Chapter Two, the author summarizes the modern scholarly debate over Jewish Gnosticism and concludes that certain passages in Rabbinic Literature represent 'Jewish Gnosis,' as do the Hekhalot tractates, but are not Jewish Gnosticism. Chapter Three contains an analysis of Genesis Rabbah from the point of view of Source Criticism and Form Criticism, and suggests a redaction critical approach as a possible alternative. Chapter Four involves the close analysis of all the common traditions between Genesis Rabbah, chapters 1-8, and PT Hagigah 2:1. In each case, the author presents a translation of the parallel passages at the outset. Chapter Five presents a redaction critique of the material in PT Hagigah 2:1 which shows a tremendous concern over the threat of unbridled esoteric speculation to the Jewish community. In Chapter Six, Mr. Guttman outlines the thematic concerns of the redactor of the first portion of Genesis Rabbah, which focus upon speculation concerning the nature of man and the cosmos. The final chapter (Seven) presents an overall redaction critique of the material from Genesis Rabbah.

Mr. Guttman has succeeded in showing that chapter 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah contain both anti-gnostic polemics and a sort of esoteric speculation which he aptly labels as 'Jewish Gnosis.' Since Genesis Rabbah lacks the notions of Dualism and a divine tragedy which leads to the creation of the world, which are the chief characteris-

tics of Gnosticism, it is improper to label the knowledge of the creation of the world in Genesis Rabbah as Jewish Gnosticism. The author also has suggested that the first portion of Genesis Rabbah originally constituted a separate and earlier literary unit than the rest of this midrashic corpus. This suggestion seems to merit great consideration and is highly innovative.

Though this thesis only deals with the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah, the author is to be highly commended for his painstaking research, his truly insightful text analysis and his thought-provoking conclusions. This thesis is an example of text analysis of the finest quality and of effective cross-cultural study.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Norman J. Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Norman" being more prominent than the last name "Cohen".

Norman J. Cohen  
Rabbi

April 1979

### Acknowledgments

To Rabbi Randall Falk and Rabbi Lou Silberman whose inspiration and teaching nurtured within me the desire to learn more about my heritage and people.

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May God bless all of us and all of the people of Israel with happiness and health, meaning and understanding, strength and peace.

Amen.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the relationship, if in fact one exists, between the broad and varied historical phenomenon known as Gnosticism, and the creation traditions of Genesis Rabbah. This study is limited to the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah. The intention of the study is to examine the creation traditions found within these chapters with an eye to testing the assertion that within these traditions there are anti-gnostic polemics and a sort of Jewish gnosis. I shall also attempt to understand the difference between Jewish gnosis and Jewish Gnosticism.

One might ask, "Is not such a study obscure? What interest could there possibly be in such a topic? In addition to the described purpose and intention of this thesis, I will attempt to demonstrate its significance in terms of the history of religion. It is hoped that this thesis will be relevant to students of Rabbinic Literature, especially students of Midrash, and to political and religious historians who are interested in the Hellenistic-Roman world in which Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism arose.

In discussing the relationship between Gnosticism, Judaism, and Christianity, it should be pointed out that no specific religious sect went by the name of "Gnostic" or was known by others as "Gnostic". Gnosticism is rather a theological and philosophic way of looking at the world in which we and those before us live. This way of looking at the world was assimilated by several religious groups and became manifest in their thinking. Gnosticism as a philosophy-theology crosses geographical and religious borders. As a result, one may speak of Jewish Gnosticism, Christian Gnosticism, and pagan Gnosticism.<sup>1</sup>

Interest in this phenomenon called Gnosticism is

comparatively recent. The earliest mention of sects which may be labeled 'gnostic' is to be found in the writings of the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries, C.E. These writings include the works of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origin, Clement, and Irenaeus. Justin Martyr was born in Samaria in 110 C.E. His most famous work is his Dialogue with Tryphon which records polemics from the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt. These polemics seem to have been written down by Justin from 156 to 161 C.E.<sup>2</sup> He died as a martyr in 165 C.E. during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Tertullian (140-220 C.E.) generally considered to be the founder of Latin Christianity, lived in North Africa and Rome. Of particular relevance to us are his "Prescription Against Heretics" and the "Five Books Against Marcion." Origin (185-254 C.E.) lived in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Alexandria. He was a prolific writer. Of particular interest to us is his polemical treatise entitled "Contra Celsum." Clement of Alexandria (late second century) is important in this area since among his writings are found the "Excerpts of Theodotus." Theodotus was a member of the Valentinian school of Gnosticism which flourished in Northern Africa. Irenaeus (120-202 C.E.) writes about the heresies in the entire Roman world in his work "Against Heresies."<sup>3</sup>

The writings of the above Church Fathers are most explicit in their identification of gnostic sects and doctrines. They indicate that there was a high degree of communication in the Roman world. They show that it was possible to have a large knowledge of the events and religious sects of that world. Furthermore, they reflect the serious concerns of the Church Fathers over gnosticising tendencies in Christian sects, especially as they appeared in the sect led by Valentinus. Finally, it is important to remember that these writings are polemical. Having a pro-Roman church bias for the most part, they seek to

refute, defuse, and denigrate gnostic arguments and positions.

Unlike those of the Church Fathers, the writings of the Rabbis were not precise in their identification of gnostic sects and doctrines. As a result, one can only hypothesize that the target of a particular rabbinic polemic is a gnostic sect or a gnostic tendency within Judaism itself. Such a hypothesis is based upon the nature of the heresy evidenced by the polemics. The prime candidate for rabbinic anti-gnostic polemics are the traditions of the Rabbis which express concern over and attempt to limit esoteric speculation. The evidence for this assertion will be manifest shortly. At this point, however, we may ask the question of how to account for the difference between the identification of Gnostic sects and beliefs by the Church Fathers, contrasted with the non-identification by the Rabbis. Unlike the Church Fathers, the Rabbis never compose special tractates against certain heretical sects, nor do they quote their opponents. Therefore, we may surmise that the rationale behind rabbinic non-identification could be that the Rabbis did not want to give greater legitimacy to heretical sects, and felt that to identify and characterize their opponents would be tantamount to spreading false doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of identifying heretical sects and doctrines specifically, the Rabbis seem to have lumped together all heresies under the term "minim." The usage of this term in Genesis Rabbah will be discussed in detail in chapter VI of this thesis. At this point, let it be made clear that the term "minim" may not represent a single group. At different times and places, the term minim could apply to a Roman, a Jewish or Christian gnostic, a pagan or Jewish Christian, a pagan, or a Jew who possessed heretical beliefs. For the most part, polemics using the term "minim" are unclear as to whom or to what heresy

the polemic is being addressed.<sup>5</sup>

To these secondary reports or non-reports of the Church Fathers and Rabbis, we may add accounts of gnostic or mystery religion sects by pagan writers. Foremost among these accounts is that of Plotinus, a neoplatonic philosopher of the third century C.E. His account is found in polemical treatise entitled "Against those who say that the Creator of the World is Evil and that the World is Bad."<sup>6</sup> There are only a few primary sources or sources attributed to gnostic sects themselves which were known prior to the twentieth century. One is the pagan "Hermes Trismegistus" or "Pormandres" as it is often called. Another source is certain gnostic writings in the Apocrypha, such as the "Acts of Thomas" and the "Odes of Solomon."<sup>7</sup>

For the most part, however, the study of Gnosticism up until the 1930's and 1940's was based upon secondary not primary writings. This was due to the fact that it was in the secondary writings, especially those of the Church Fathers, that a wealth of information was to be found. As a result, knowledge of Gnosticism prior to the 1930's and 1940's consisted of an hypostatization of Gnostic sects and their philosophy and theology.

Archaeological discoveries during the thirties and forties were to provide scholars with an entirely new set of data for the study of Gnosticism. The 1930's saw the discovery in Egypt of the Manichaean papyri. These papyri date to the fourth century C.E. and are pagan in nature.<sup>8</sup> It was, however, later discoveries which were datable to an early period and which related to either Judaism, Christianity, or both, which opened the floodgates of gnostic studies.

The first discovery was that of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in 1947. Shortly after their discovery, scholars began asking whether or not there exist gnostic elements within the scrolls, and whether or not the scrolls reflect

a gnostic-Jewish sect. Common to both Qumran and Gnosticism is the idea that knowledge, specifically esoteric knowledge, leads to redemption. For example, the Qumran initiate in a psalm in praise of God asks that he

may be lifted out of the dust  
to the height of eternal things  
and rise from a spirit perverse  
to a holy understanding  
and stand in one company before Thee  
with the host everlasting and the spirits of  
knowledge  
and the choir invisible  
to be for ever renewed<sup>9</sup>  
with all things that are.

The Qumran initiate wishes to ascend to God and to stand with His host, the invisible choir and "spirits of knowledge." This desire is also expressed by the following in which he wishes to be like the

men who heard the glorious voice  
and saw the holy angels; Men whose  
ears are opened and who hear deep  
things.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this similarity between the Qumran sect and Gnosticism, Menahem Mansoor, through a comparative analysis of the idea of knowledge in Qumran and in Gnosticism, has concluded that the idea of knowledge in Qumran is not gnosis in its strictest sense.<sup>11</sup> In addition, D. Flusser has noted the lack of theological dualism in the Qumran sect. In his view, the Jewish notion of divine unity is never compromised in Qumran. He summarizes his view when he states:

Despite a certain spiritual kinship between the writings of the sect and the world of Gnosticism, the former are not records of a "gnostic Judaism", but rather reflect certain general attitudes of mind shared at that time by others including Jews, which could be the point of departure for truly gnostic speculations.<sup>12</sup>

Further discussion in the area of the relationship or lack thereof between Qumran and Gnosticism is beyond the scope of this work.

The second archaeological discovery which opened the floodgates of gnostic studies was the discovery of thirteen papyrus Coptic manuscripts in 1945 in Egypt. These manuscripts contained among them fifty-three tractates. Scholars seem united in the view that these manuscripts were translations of Greek originals. Most, but not all, of the manuscripts are clearly gnostic. The manuscripts seem to have been buried by 400 CE, and thus are believed to record very early traditions. Because the manuscripts were found in Egypt in the vicinity of a place named Naq Hammadi, the manuscripts as a whole are usually referred to as the "Naq Hammadi Library."<sup>13</sup>

The new archaeological evidence, when coupled with the other scholarly advances, in the field of early Christianity and Judaism, have caused a renewed interest in the study of Gnosticism. It is clear that a relationship did exist between gnostic Christian sects and Orthodox Christian sects. This relationship seems to have been expressed by polemics by both sides. Understanding the nature of this relationship is now helping scholars of early Christianity to understand better how and in what direction orthodox Christianity developed. One is tempted to ask whether or not the same might also be true in terms of Judaism. Might not a similar relationship have existed between gnostic Jewish or Christian sects on one side, and Judaism on the other. If so, understanding this relationship might help to explain to a degree, how and in what direction orthodox or rabbinic Judaism developed. Consequently, many scholars have felt that the study of the relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism is historically valid. Let us now continue with an examination of their positions and understanding in this area.

Prior to the archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century, there were two scholars who suggested a relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism. The first of these was Heinrich Graetz. In 1846, Graetz became the first scholar to discuss this relationship in his book Gnosticismus and Judenthum (Gnosticism and Judaism). Graetz's study centered on the traditions of Elisha ben Abuyah and the tradition of the four who entered Pardes.<sup>14</sup> Elisha ben Abuyah, or Aher (another), as the rabbis disdainfully referred to him, was, in the view of Graetz, an antinomian gnostic. Graetz felt that the Pardes tradition illustrated the proper Jewish perspective, contrasted with three heretical possibilities. It is not clear whether or not Graetz viewed these possibilities as arising from within Judaism or from the outside. Graetz felt that these heresies arose because of the fact that during the Hadrianic persecutions in the first half of the second century, observance of Jewish law was difficult. Therefore, antinomian sects had a natural appeal to masses of Jews for by joining such a sect, life under Roman rule would be easier.<sup>15</sup>

The second scholar to suggest a relationship between Judaism and Gnosticism was Moritz Friedlander. Fifty-two years after Graetz's work, Friedlander published Der Vorchristliche Jüdische Gnosticismus (Pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism). In this work, he maintained that the origin of Gnosticism may be traced to antinomian circles within Alexandrian Jewry. In his view, the rabbinic designation of 'minim' was a designation of gnostics. Friedlander was the first to distinguish between true and false gnosis, the latter being characterized by a lack of respect for the honor and unity of God. False gnosis came to Palestine as early as the second half of the first century. The significance of Friedlander's work is that he was the first to suggest that Gnosticism was a pre-Christian phenomenon

which originates from within Judaism. As a result, Christian gnosticism is to be seen as a later revision of an older Jewish Gnosticism.<sup>16</sup>

It was another fifty years or so before scholars renewed the study of the possible relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism. The stimulus for this new interest was the archaeological discoveries mentioned above, especially that of the Nag Hammadi Library.<sup>17</sup> The first of these scholars was Gilles Quispell. Quispell was instrumental in deciphering the Nag Hammadi Library when it was first discovered, and in raising money from the Jung foundation for the purchase of the papyri. Truly gnostic systems seem to have a concept of a supernatural being who creates the world and who is subordinate to or ignorant of the Supreme God. This being is usually referred to as the "demiurge". The mother of the demiurge in gnostic systems is often known as Sophia. The word Sophia in Greek means wisdom. Quispell feels that both the concept of the demiurge and that of the Sophia arise out of a Jewish milieu. He saw the demiurge as being a Jewish answer to the problem of biblical anthropomorphism. Therefore the Supreme God is not anthropomorphic for it is one of his angels, the demiurge, who physically created the world. The concept of the Sophia, according to Quispell, is derived from Jewish adulation of the biblical concept of wisdom. Thus Quispell argues that Gnosticism is an early Jewish heresy which originates on the fringes of Judaism.<sup>18</sup>

G.W. MacCrae, like Quispell, feels that the gnostic Sophia myth arose out of the Jewish concept of wisdom. He notes, however, that in gnostic myth, the wisdom of the God of Israel represents nothing but a cruel form of self-deceit. Gnosticism represents not only a revolt against Judaism, but also a revolt within Judaism. This, according to MacCrae, is evidenced by the gnostic familiarity with

Jewish thought. MacCrae felt that such familiarity could only point to Jews as originators of Gnosticism. MacCrae states:

The familiarity which Gnostic sources show toward details of Jewish thought is hardly one that we could expect non-Jews to have.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, MacCrae sees the core of Gnosticism as an internal revolt against Judaism. To this core certain foreign elements such as Iranian anti-cosmicism were added.<sup>20</sup>

Gershom Scholem also discusses the relationship of Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism. Scholem deals extensively with this subject in his book, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition. Scholem maintains that the crucial issue is whether or not there existed within Judaism a religious movement analogous to the Gnosticism found within early Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Scholem feels that the remnants of such an analogous religious movement may be found within early Jewish speculations on the account of the chariot in chapter one of the book of Ezekiel. These speculations became known as "ma'aseh merkabah" (literally "the account of the chariots"), or merkabah mysticism.

Scholem states:

Notwithstanding all the deep differences in theological approach, the growth of Merkabah mysticism among the rabbis constitutes an inner concomitant to Gnosis, and it may be termed Jewish and rabbinic Gnosticism.<sup>22</sup>

These speculations were highly esoteric and were the possession of a select group of people. Scholem feels that the idea of esoteric knowledge possessed by the "elected" was either borrowed from Gnosticism by Judaism or originated within Judaism itself only to be borrowed later by gnostic sects.

The three scholars mentioned above all postulate a definite relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism. However another scholar, Hans Jonas, takes a position which opposes Quispell, MacCrae, and Scholem. Jonas's scholarship in the field of modern gnostic studies is well founded. His book, The Gnostic Religion, is regarded as the first full-scale study of the topic. Jonas maintains that Gnosticism did not originate within Judaism, but rather is a product of religious syncretism. In other words, Gnosticism did not originate from within any one religious or philosophical heritage. Attempts to assign its origin to one particular source may be supportable, but are not entirely satisfactory.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Jonas feels that the anti-Jewish nature of Gnostic writings indicates that their source was outside of Judaism, not from within. Jonas even goes as far as to label Gnosticism as 'metaphysical anti-Semitism.'<sup>24</sup>

A similar position is taken by E. Yamauchi. Yamauchi studied the proposed evidence for the existence of pre-Christian Gnosticism and examined the problems of limiting and defining such a phenomenon. Yamauchi feels that pre-Christian Gnosticism, if such a phenomenon exists, could have existed in either a pagan or a Jewish form. Pagan pre-Christian Gnosticism would emphasize the actual salvation of the individual, and not merely the knowledge of the secrets of salvation and of the nature of the world. In contrast, Jewish pre-Christian Gnosticism would consist of esoteric knowledge of eschatology.<sup>25</sup> Yamauchi then examines the proposition that pre-Christian Gnosticism originated within Judaism. Support for this contention is found in the fact that gnostic authors made ample use of verses from the Hebrew Bible. Yamauchi maintains, however, that the usage of the Hebrew Bible was limited to the first few chapters of the book of Genesis, the chapters dealing with the creation of the world. In his view, the God of Israel's history was of no interest to the gnostics.

Furthermore, it is difficult to define the possible relationship between pre-Christian Jewish esoteric speculations and later gnosticism. In other words, Gnosticism was not an early Jewish heresy.<sup>26</sup>

A different approach to the study of the relationship of Gnosticism and Judaism was that of Alexander Altman. Altman felt that the issue was not how much Judaism influenced Gnosticism, but how much Gnosticism influenced Judaism. Altman sees a large degree of influence of gnostic thought within rabbinic literature. This influence appears in the form of certain thematic concerns which Judaism "borrowed" from Gnosticism. These themes include the concepts of light and pre-existent chaos. Their appearance within Rabbinic Literature may be traced to as early as the tannaitic period. (First and second centuries C.E.).<sup>29</sup>

Still another approach to this problem is that of Birger A. Pearson. His is a linguistic and textual approach. It is based primarily upon a comparison of the language and forms of Gnostic writings with those in Rabbinic Literature. Pearson makes two points. First, certain gnostic writers seem to have had an extensive knowledge of Aramaic. This is evidenced by the appearance of Aramaic word plays in gnostic texts. Second, Pearson noticed the similarity of Targumic and certain midrashic forms with literary forms in gnostic writings. These two points led Pearson to conclude that "Gnosticism is a pre-Christian Jewish phenomenon which developed on Jewish soil,"<sup>28</sup> particularly that of Alexandrian Jewry.

The most recent approach to the study of the relationship of Judaism and Gnosticism is that of Alan Segal. Segal sees a type of Gnosticism arising out of a purely Jewish milieu. Jewish gnostics debated with the Rabbis concerning the usage in the Hebrew Bible of plural words to designate God and concerning the meaning and nature of angelic and

theophanic texts. The most intense part of this debate concerned the gnostic assertion that a primary angel of God was involved in the creation of the world. Eventually in Segal's view, this debate led to the Rabbis excluding Jewish gnostics from the synagogue. The gnostic response to this exclusion was to maintain that the God of the synagogue was not the Supreme God. Either in the post 70 CE or post 135 CE period, this debate took on added significance in that it was also a struggle by two or more groups for the right to speak to the Romans as representatives of the entire Jewish people.<sup>29</sup>

Thus far we have examined the approaches of established scholars in dealing with the relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism. The approach taken by this author will be a unique one. It is unique in that no one else has examined the traditions in one particular rabbinic work, and compared them with gnostic traditions and themes. Before proceeding with the examination of the midrashic traditions, let us examine the historical phenomenon known as Gnosticism. Once we have finished this exposition, we will proceed to the examination of the creation traditions in the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah. This comparative examination will help us to define the relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism and will help us to understand the principle concerns of the redactor of these chapters in Genesis Rabbah.

CHAPTER I

GNOSIS AND GNOSTICISM: DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

#### A. The Origins of Gnosticism Within the World of Hellenism

Prior to the twentieth century, most scholars felt that Gnosticism arose out of Hellenism. Adolph Von Harnack even went as far as to call Gnosticism "The acute Hellenization of Christianity."<sup>1</sup> In the 1930's, Hans Jonas made what was for his time a radical assertion. Jonas asserted that Gnosticism seemed to possess a primacy of myth over philosophy. Such a primacy of myth would seem to indicate an oriental, rather than a Hellenistic milieu. Jonas found that Gnosticism was syncretistic in that it seemed to have borrowed material from a variety of oriental cultures, but its origin could not be attributed to any one of these cultures. Thus Jonas concluded that Gnosticism was a syncretism of Babylonian, Egyptian, Iranian and perhaps Jewish culture, and not Hellenism.

However, Jonas did attempt to place the rise of Gnosticism within a Hellenistic historical framework. He divided Greek culture into two periods. The first period extended from the rise of classical Greece to the beginning of the common era. During this period, Greek culture was dominant, and oriental culture was secondary. The second period extended from the beginning of the common era to the end of the Byzantium empire. During this period, oriental culture enjoyed a resurgence, and eventually became dominant.<sup>3</sup> Each period had two stages. The watershed of the first stage was Alexander the Great. Before Alexander the Great, Greek culture was in its national and classical stage. After Alexander the Great, Greek culture spread throughout the world as a secular and cosmopolitan culture. The first stage of the second period is marked by the increased influence of pagan religious culture upon Hellenism. The second stage of this period begins with the rise of Christianity (which Jonas sees as a phenomenon with oriental roots) as the religion of the state and the

masses (The fourth century).<sup>4</sup>

In the second period, oriental and Hellenistic culture tended to meld together. A manifestation of this melding process would be Hellenistic Judaism, especially as found in Alexandria. Other religious movements which arose in this period would include the eastern mystery cults, Christianity, and Gnostic sects.<sup>5</sup>

Syncretism is a major characteristic of the second period. None of these movements can be considered as having been self-generative, for they seem to share common and interrelated aspects. The influence of Greek thought enabled many oriental ideas to be expressed for the first time in a highly cogent and rational fashion.<sup>6</sup> However one aspect of oriental religious philosophy could not be expressed in Greek terms. This aspect was that of esoteric knowledge. Most of the time, the myths, images, and symbols from the oriental past were inadequate tools of expression. Greek rationality and logic also proved inadequate. Therefore, the oriental religious movements during the second period had to create their own language to express esoteric knowledge.

#### B. The Distinction between Gnosis and Gnosticism

Certainly the expression of esoteric knowledge is one of the fundamental aspects of Gnosticism. The word "gnosis" is a Greek word which means "knowledge." If we speak in broad terms of the need to express esoteric knowledge which was present the oriental movements of period two, then we can say that all of these movements possessed a certain concept of 'gnosis.' This gnosis would have been reserved for an elite who claimed to possess it. Possession of this type of gnosis would ultimately lead to salvation.

The Church Fathers viewed Gnosticism as a Christian heresy. Their concerns centered upon those gnostic sects,

such as the Valentinians, which sprouted from Christianity. Gnostic writings show that not all groups that were gnostic were also Christian. Just what constitutes Gnosticism is not clear even today. In 1966 in Messina Italy, a group of scholars met for the purpose of defining Gnosticism. Many important academic papers presented at that conference were published in 1967 as The Origins of Gnosticism, edited by Ugo Bianchi. This book begins with the colloquium's "Final Document" which represents the conclusions agreed upon by the participants. In this "Final Document", Gnosticism is defined as

a certain group of systems in the second century AD...a concrete fact determined by historical and typological methods.

In other words, even world-renowned scholars found that it was difficult to define in specific terms what constitutes Gnosticism. Let us, however, attempt to distinguish between the terms "Gnosis" and "Gnosticism". Let us return the original Greek meaning of the word "gnosis," namely, gnosis as esoteric knowledge. In contrast, Gnosticism with a capital G shall refer to certain groups or sects in which one finds certain characteristic myths.

Gnostic sects contain gnosis, but the existence of gnosis does not ipso facto indicate Gnosticism. According to T.P. van Baaren, one of the scholars at the colloquium at Messina, we should be wary of a particular type of phenomenological approach to Gnosticism. In speaking of this approach, Van Baaren writes;

This approach has tended to isolate the element of 'knowledge that brings salvation' as the essential characteristic (of Gnosticism), and to speak of Gnosticism everywhere we encounter this element.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, such an approach would label as 'Gnostic' any sect which had a concept of gnosis as knowledge which brings salvation. Thus Rabbinic Judaism, if shown

to have its own concept of gnosis or esoteric knowledge which brings salvation, could be considered a Gnostic sect. It is obvious to this writer that it is a mistake to define Gnosticism solely in terms of gnosis. Such a definition would be so broad as to render it meaningless, for such gnosis or knowledge is often an essential characteristic of many religions throughout the world. In short, while gnosis is a concept, Gnosticism is a historic form of religion.<sup>11</sup>

Gnosis as knowledge which brings salvation is one of several elements which are to be found within Gnostic sects. Other elements within Gnostic sects may have been shared by other religious movements. Therefore we may conclude that Gnosticism is not determined by its individual elements, but rather by the way these elements fit together. The "fitting together" of these elements in a specific way leads to the integrated phenomenon called Gnosticism.

The gnosis in Gnosticism is not merely knowledge which brings salvation, but also includes, in the words of the "Final Document" at Messina, the "idea of divine consubstantiality of the spirit that is in need of being awakened and reintegrated."<sup>12</sup> What this means is that Gnostic gnosis understands that a part of the Supreme Being has been accidentally cast down into the physical world. This part of divinity is to be found within the soul or spirit of man. A person who possesses gnosis in a Gnostic sect is aware of the divine origin of this part of his soul, awakens it by his awareness, and seeks to reintegrate this part of divinity with the Supreme Being. The person who has such an awareness may be termed a 'Gnostic.' Gnosis in a Gnostic sense therefore is not only a means to salvation, but also a means to awakening the divine in man and reuniting it with the divine in God.

### C. Characteristics and Aspects of the Typical Gnostic Myth

Possession of gnosis is gained through an understanding of gnostic myths concerning the creation of the world. Gnostic sects, therefore, almost always have well-developed myths in this area. Often these myths possess a high level of tragedy and drama. Individual deities within the myths are personal and concrete agents who in some way or another account for the creation of the world.<sup>13</sup> The myth itself seeks to account for the physical world which is seen as lacking divinity. In other words, the present state of the cosmos is evil, corrupt, and non-divine. After establishing this point, the myth then proceeds to explain how things got to be the way they are. In such a manner, the myth imparts to the gnostic a specific vision of reality. Through this vision of reality the gnostic possesses gnosis, and with this gnosis, salvation may be attained.<sup>14</sup> This type of gnosis, being highly mythological, possesses many divine hypostases and other semi-divine beings. One should not, however, dismiss these myths as being musings of primitive people. On the contrary, gnostic myth uses its narrative and its symbols as means by which a sophisticated and well-developed metaphysical and ontological theory is communicated.<sup>15</sup>

The typical gnostic myth, therefore, possesses a definite structure, which is marked by two stages; a pre-cosmic or cosmogonic stage, and a cosmic stage. The pre-cosmic stage usually begins with a description of the Supreme God in a state of purity. For some reason, however, this purity becomes corrupted. This corruption is described in detail in the myth. As a result of this corruption, the unity and integrity of the Supreme Being is compromised. This loss of divine unity and integrity leads to the emergence of lower gods, angels, or powers who create and rule the physical world. The cosmic stage

of the typical gnostic myth presents a picture of the cosmos as being polarized and removed from the Supreme Being.

The myth continues by describing the creation of man. This description is usually quite lengthy. Though created by the lower powers, man possesses a spark of the divine of the Supreme Being. Through gnosis, man may overcome the remoteness of the cosmos from the Supreme Being and may reintegrate his divine spark with the divine in the Supreme Being.<sup>16</sup> This then is the basic structure of the gnostic myth.

Certain aspects of this myth deserve greater attention. The highest or Supreme God is totally transmundane and alien to this world. To use the parlance of Rudolf Otto, he is "the wholly other." His existence is unknown to the majority of creatures in the physical world, for he neither created nor governs that world. Nevertheless, certain divine sparks have fallen into the physical world and these sparks are held captive in man. Gnostic myths often refer to the Supreme God as Life, Spirit, Father, the Good and Light, but never is he referred to as Ruler, Creator, or Lawgiver.<sup>17</sup>

The lower powers who do rule the earth consistently try to prevent the divine sparks in man from reuniting with the Supreme God.<sup>18</sup> These lower powers are called archons, and their realm is usually labeled as the pleroma. Often the pleroma is described as seven to ten spheres which surround the Supreme God. The lowest of these spheres is the earth. Each of the spheres between the earth and the Supreme God is ruled by an archon. These archons often have Hebrew names, such as Sabaoth, Elohim, El Shaddai, and Adonai. Each of the archons guards his sphere and seeks to bar the way to the souls who seek to ascend to Supreme God after their deaths. The leader of the archons is the demiurge.<sup>19</sup>

The demiurge together with the archons created the physical world. He is often described as being an evil, imperfect, and blind creator. He is never presented by gnostic myths as a positive figure. He is often equated with the god of the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes he is depicted as being evil and arrogant, while at other times he is depicted somewhat less harshly as being merely ignorant.<sup>20</sup> The laws and institutions of the demiurge are not necessarily just. On the contrary, their main function is to maintain the tyranny of the demiurge in his governance of the cosmos.<sup>21</sup> Given such a view it is easy for us to understand why gnostics were contemptuous of the cosmos.

Elohim as a demiurge is reflected in Hippolytus' account of the Book of Baruch.<sup>22</sup> Yet the concept of Elohim there is that of a principle angel of creation. Elohim ascends with his angels to the abode of the Supreme God sits next to him. In such a way, he realizes his subordinate nature to the Supreme Being. Therefore, the concept of the demiurge here is not that of an ignorant and arrogant creator. It is possible that this lack of ignorance and arrogance marks the demiurge concept in the Book of Baruch as an earlier concept than the arrogant demiurge of later Gnosticism.<sup>23</sup>

In later Gnosticism, the demiurge often makes statements which show his ignorance of the Supreme God and his arrogance in claiming to be the most lofty of all beings. Nils Dahl has examined what he calls this "vain claim" in the writings of the Nag Hammadi Library. The vain claim according to Dahl is often expressed using language similar to that found in Isaiah 45:6, 45:18, or 46:9. The Nag Hammadi tract entitled the Hypostasis of Archons expresses the vain claim as "It is I who am God. There is none apart from me."<sup>24</sup> Through his analysis of the material which surrounded the vain claims, Dahl was able to constrict a mythic, or in some ways, exegetic form

for the vain claim in gnostic myth. The first element of this form tells us how the demiurge came to be or some other information about him. The second element consists of the introduction to the vain claim. The third element is the vain claim itself. The fourth element consists of a comment on the vain claim, and the fifth element consists of a rebuke of the vain claim of the demiurge. The following is an example of this form in gnostic writings, as taken from On the Origin of the World from the Nag Hammadi Library:

- (1. Setting)-(Since) that (day), the heaven has been consolidated along with its earth by means of the Sophia of Yaldabaoth, the one which is beneath them all. But after the heavens and their powers and all their government set themselves awright, the First Father exalted himself and was glorified by (the) whole army of angels. And all the (gods) and their angels gave him praise and glory.
- (2. Introduction)-And he rejoiced in his heart, and he boasted continually, saying to them,
- (3. Vain Claim)-"I do not need anything." He said, "I am god and no other one exists except me."
- (4. Comment)-But when he said these things, he sinned against all of the immortal (imperishable) ones, and they protected him. Moreover, when Pistis saw the impiety of the chief ruler, she was angry.
- (5. Rebuke)-Without being seen, she said "You err Samael," i.e. "The blind god." <sup>25</sup>

Pistis here is the mother of the demiurge. She is often referred to as Sophia. The demiurge is called the "First Father" and "Samael, the blind God." On the Origin of the World was probably composed at the end of the third century CE, in Alexandria.<sup>26</sup> Dahl's work in this area is significant because it marks the beginning of an effort to analyze the Nag Hammadi material according to form rather than according to content.<sup>27</sup>

Scholars have drawn several conclusions concerning gnostic theology as it appears in gnostic writing. The first is that an arrogant vain claim by the demiurge is the mark of a later text than one which presents the demiurge as merely being ignorant.<sup>28</sup> Second, the greater the degree of speculation, the later the text would seem to be.<sup>29</sup> Third, the concept of the demiurge is crucial to Gnostic sects. A sect which lacks a demiurge concept can hardly be called Gnostic.<sup>30</sup> Finally, a dualistic outlook towards the world is a crucial part of the writings of truly Gnostic sects.<sup>31</sup> It is to this dualistic outlook which we now turn.

The nature of gnostic dualism is varied, but it is often expressed in terms of a rift between God and the world, the world and man, spirit and matter, the soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil, and life and death. Jonas has found two major types of gnostic dualism, Iranian and Syrian-Egyptian. In Iranian dualism, the dualism is caused by outside forces which force themselves upon the Supreme Being. Thus the tragedy of the divine originates within the forces of darkness which come to engulf the forces of light. In the Syrian-Egyptian type, the Supreme Being is originally undivided. The dualistic rift however originates within the Supreme Being himself. The common result of these two types of dualism is that darkness or the demiurge rules the physical world.<sup>32</sup>

The soul of man is caught between the dualism of the world, the rift between cosmos and spirit. Genesis 1:26 is often quoted by Gnostic writers to show that man is an inferior imitation of the divine.<sup>33</sup> As a result, of its being an imitation, man's soul possesses a spark of the Supreme Being. This spark, as we have seen, desires to return and it is through gnosis that the soul is able to return and to escape the dualism of the world.<sup>34</sup>

Gnostic writings have an anti-cosmic attitude towards the world. The physical world is described as either

darkness or a mixture of light and darkness. In Manichaeism, gnosis means having the ability to unmix, to separate the elements of light from the elements of darkness.<sup>35</sup> Often the world is considered to be ordered, but the order of the world is always suited to the designs of the demiurge, and never to the wishes of the Supreme Being. For the gnostic, this world is considered to be only a temporary dwelling place, a place which is to be transcended as soon as possible.<sup>36</sup> Thus the gnostic rejects the created world, and his rejection of and attitude towards that world is often one of violence and vituperation.<sup>37</sup>

The anti-cosmic attitude of gnostic writers is best exemplified by the way these writers treat the creation myths of the Hebrew Bible. The idea of good and evil as found in the Hebrew Bible is often reversed by the gnostic writers. The following passage from "The Testimony of Truth" from the Nag Hammadi Library illustrates such a reversal:

It is written in the Law concerning this, when God gave (a command) to Adam, "From every (tree) you may eat, (but) from the tree which is in the midst of Paradise do not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will surely die." But the serpent was wiser than all the animals that were in Paradise, and he persuaded Eve, saying, "On the day when you eat from the tree which is in the midst of Paradise the eyes of your mind will be opened." And Eve obeyed, and she stretched forth her hand; she took from the tree; she ate; she also gave to her husband with her. And immediately they knew that they were naked, and they took some fig leaves (and) put on girdles.

But (God) came at the time of (evening) walking in the midst (of) Paradise. When Adam saw him he hid himself. And he said, "Adam, where are you?" He answered (and) said, "(I) have come under the fig tree." And at that very moment God (knew) that he had eaten from the tree of which he had commanded him, "Do not eat of it." And he said to him, "Who is it who has instructed

you?" And Adam answered, "The woman whom you have given me." And the woman said, "The serpent is the one who instructed me." And he cursed the serpent, and he called him "devil." And he said, "Behold, Adam has become like one of us, knowing evil and good." Then he said, "Let us cast him out of Paradise lest he take from the tree of life and eat and live for ever."

But of what sort is this God? First (he) envied Adam that he should eat from the tree of knowledge. And secondly he said, "Adam, where are you?" And God does not have foreknowledge, that is, since he did not know this from the beginning. (And) afterwards he said, "Let us cast him (out) of this place, lest he eat of the tree of life and live for ever." Surely he has shown himself to be a malicious envier. And what kind of a God is this? For great is the blindness of those who read, and they did not know it. And he said, "I am the jealous God; I will bring the sins of the fathers upon the children until three (and) four generations." And he said, "I will make their heart thick, and I will cause their mind to become blind, that they might not know nor comprehend the things that are said." But these things he has said to those who believe in him (and) serve him!

And (in one) place Moses writes, "(He) made the devil a serpent (for) (those) whom he has in his generation." In the other book which is called "Exodus," it is written thus (cf. 7:8-12): "He contended against (magicians) when the place was full (of serpents) according to their (wickedness; and the rod) which was in the hand of Moses became a serpent, (and) it swallowed the serpents of the magicians."

Again it is written (Numbers 21:9), "He made a serpent of bronze (and) hung it upon a pole (...) which (...) for the (one who will gaze) upon (this) bronze (serpent) none (will destroy) him, and the one who will (believe in) this bronze serpent (will be saved)."

This passage, which seems to be devoid of Christian influence very possibly reflects a Jewish gnostic writer. Its restatement of the biblical narrative seems to resemble

Targum. Furthermore, the exegete of the passage uses a specifically Jewish hermeneutical principle called a "gezerah shavah." This principle involves a comparison of verses in which the same word appears. Here, the "gezerah shavah" is based upon Genesis 3:5, Exodus 7:8-12, and Numbers 21:9 all of which contain the word "serpent." The gezerah shavah is used to show how the serpent in the garden of Eden is an agent of the Supreme God. The serpent desires to give gnosis to Eve. The God of the Hebrew Bible is depicted as an ignorant creator. Eve disobeys the creator in order to receive gnosis. After eating and receiving gnosis, Adam and Eve turn away from the Creator. In such a way, the ideas of good and evil are reversed and the narrative of Adam, Eve and the serpent becomes a symbolic tale of redemption and salvation.

Gnosis is a pre-requisite for salvation. In other texts, this gnosis in addition to consisting of knowledge of the creation of the cosmos and its corrupt nature, consists also of a knowledge of magic, sacraments, and secret names which are to be used by the gnostic in his ascent after death to the Supreme God. Thus existence in the created world is characterized by ignorance.<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion, we should stress that knowledge as gnosis has a specific nature and status within the gnostic myth. It has a particular essence and may accomplish certain specified goals. It is the antithesis of ignorance which is the essence of existence within the created world. Gnosis is able to transform the human condition. It has both an objective and theoretical content. Its objective content is that it imparts to the gnostic information regarding the universe and his place within it. Its theoretical content is that this knowledge has the potential to bring redemption and salvation to the soul.<sup>40</sup>

## CHAPTER II

THE MODERN DEBATE: IS THERE SUCH A PHENOMENON AS  
JEWISH GNOSTICISM?

Having defined the terms gnosis and Gnosticism and having discussed the nature and aspects of a typical gnostic myth, we are now ready to deal with the fundamental question asked by scholars: 'Was there an historical phenomenon which may be classified as Jewish Gnosticism?' To begin to answer this question, it is imperative that we recognize that there are three possible hypothesis which may account for the relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism.

The first is to see Gnosticism and Judaism as being completely separate entities. Because both were widespread phenomenon, Gnosticism and Judaism often encountered one another. When such an encounter occurred, the reaction by both sides was often vituperative. This of course holds more true for Gnosticism than it does for Judaism. Judaism never actually identifies the gnostics as the target of its polemics. Gnosticism, on the other hand, was often violently anti-Jewish. The irrelation may therefore be characterised as one of antagonism. Due to the widespread nature of both Gnosticism and Judaism, it is impossible to deny the validity of this hypothesis.<sup>1</sup>

The second hypothesis is to view Gnosticism as arising out of a reaction to Judaism. Such a process would have taken place in a non-Jewish community. Thus for example, early pagan, as opposed to Jewish or Christian gnostics, might have developed their Gnosticism as a reaction to the Jewish community which they confronted in many places. Such a hypothesis would see Judaism as the generative cause for Gnosticism. It is, however, too narrow to make Gnosticism into a merely reactive phenomenon. As we saw in Chapter I, Gnosticism seemed to possess a high degree of its own spirituality. As a result, it is difficult for this writer to see Gnosticism arising in such a manner.<sup>2</sup>

A third possibility is to see Gnosticism as a phenomenon originated by Jews. According to Hans Jonas, two

criteria must be met before this hypothesis may be considered as being historically accurate. The first of these criteria is that there must exist Gnostic writings in Hebrew. These writings should be Gnostic in the sense that some sort of dualism is present. The second criterion is that there must be Jewish names among the recorded teachers and authors of Gnostic doctrine.

Regardless of which of the three hypothesis one chooses to accept, it is clear that there was some type of relationship between Judaism and Gnosticism. Gershom Scholem, in his book Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition, demonstrated a unique approach to the analysis of this relationship. Scholem feels that the Hekhalot tracts represent a special form of Jewish Gnosticism. It would have to be considered as a special form in that its myths would not fit snugly into the typology of the typical gnostic myth described in Chapter I. The Hekhalot tracts, according to Scholem, were composed not later than the third century.<sup>4</sup> The great majority of the Hekhalot tracts deal with the revelations concerning the heavenly chariot in Ezekiel I. Consequently, these tracts reflect what may be called as "Merkabah" or chariot mysticism. The special nature of this type of Gnosticism is that it is not dualistic, but remains monotheistic. It is also reflective of Rabbinic Judaism in that it goes to great lengths to stress the validity of Jewish laws. Nevertheless, Scholem labels this type of mysticism as "Gnostic" in that it includes the concept of an elect who possess a type of esoteric knowledge which will bring salvation. He feels that this type of Gnosticism could have served as point of departure for the Christian gnostics.<sup>5</sup> Scholem's view that early Merkabah mysticism represents Jewish Gnosticism is illustrated by the following statement:

Notwithstanding all the deep differences in theological approach, the growth of

Merkabah mysticism among the rabbis constitutes an inner concomitant to Gnosis, and it may be termed "Jewish and rabbinic Gnosticism."<sup>6</sup>

David Flusser agrees with Scholem that a source of Christian Gnosticism lies in the Rabbinic esoteric speculations of Rabbinic Judaism, especially those found in the Hekhalot tracts. Flusser takes exception, however, to Scholem's labeling early merkabah mysticism as "Jewish Gnosticism." According to Flusser, Scholem has blurred the term "Gnosticism" by incorrectly applying it to merkabah mysticism. The Gnostic sects as described by the Patristics possess a negative attitude towards the God of Israel. As this attitude is lacking in Scholem's Jewish Gnosticism, Flusser feels that Scholem has transformed a clear concept of what constitutes Gnosticism into a blurred one. Accordingly, a religious group which lacks a definite doctrine of an ignorant or arrogant demiurge cannot be termed a 'gnostic' group or sect.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars seem united in pointing out that the concept of the demiurge does not appear in Scholem's description of merkabah mysticism. Nevertheless, scholars have wondered whether or not such a concept could have originated within Jewish circles. One scholar who asks this question is James M. Robinson, the editor of The Nag Hammadi Library in English. Robinson goes even one step further and wonders how the Jews could have designated their God, the God of the Hebrew Bible, as an ignorant, blundering and arrogant creator. It would seem that such a view would be a contradiction in terms. Yet, Robinson attempts to prove that Jews could have originated or held a concept of a demiurge. First he states that Christian Gnosticism is a given in that its existence is well-founded. He then maintains that Jews and Christians worship the same God, yet if this is so, then how could a demiurge concept be part of Christian Gnosticism? Christian Gnosticism however

is a given. Therefore by analogy, Jewish Gnosticism with a demiurge concept may exist.<sup>8</sup> Robinson's argument is circular. Though he asks the same question asked by Scholem, 'whether or not there existed within Jewish circles a religious movement analogous to what is generally known in the Christian church as Gnosticism,'<sup>9</sup> argument itself however is weak. While it is true that Jews and Christians worshipped the same God, any cursory examination of the Patristic writers must lead one to conclude that orthodox Christians and Gnostic Christians did not worship the same God. Gnostic Christians had little use for the God of Israel, whereas orthodox Christianity retained the God of Israel by seeing the Church as being the "new Israel."

The possibility that the concept of the demiurge originated within Judaism can not be dismissed as easily as it was in relation to Robinson's argument. Gilles Quispell, one of the greatest scholars of Gnosticism, has maintained that the origin of the concept of the demiurge is to be found within Judaism. His argument is based on two points. The first is his discussion of the pre-existent angel of the Magharians. In the tenth century CE., a Karaite scholar known as Al Qirqisani wrote an account of Jewish sects and Christianity. In this account, he describes Jewish and Christian sects. Chronologically and according to their beliefs. His chronological ordering of these sects is as follows:

1. Rabbanites (Pharisees)
2. Sadducees
3. Magharians
4. Yeshua - (Christianity)<sup>10</sup>

In his discussion of the beliefs of the Magharians, Al Qirqisani writes:

David ibn Marwan al-Magammis says in one of his books that the Sadducees ascribe corporeality to God and understand all the Scriptural descriptions of Him which imply anthropomorphism in their literal sense.

The Magharians are said to be opposed to this, i.e., they do not profess anthropomorphism; yet they also do not take these descriptions (of God) out of their literal meaning, but assert instead that these descriptions refer to one of the angels, namely to the one which created the world.<sup>11</sup>

H.A. Wolfson found in another Medieval source by Shahrastani an account of the Magharians in which they are said to believe that the law of the Torah was revealed through the pre-existent primary angel and that this angel is the real subject of biblical anthropomorphisms attributed to God.<sup>12</sup> Wolfson feels that these accounts of the Magharians and their beliefs are historically reliable. Quispell also considers them to be reliable. He feels that the Magharians merely attributed creation to the "malach adonai," "the angel of the Lord" of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>13</sup> According to both Wolfson and Quispell, the Magharians eventually became a gnostic Christian sect. Nevertheless, the sect was originally a Jewish heresy. The pre-existent angel for the pre-Christian Magharians was not antagonistic to God, but was rather His anthropomorphic tool of creation and communication to man. When the sect became a Gnostic Christian sect, the pre-existent angel became the antagonistic demiurge. Thus, both Quispell and Wolfson see the concept of a demiurge as originating within a pagan Jewish heresy, the Magharians.

Two objections may be raised to the position of Wolfson and Quispell. First, how plausible is it to build such a case for the origin of the demiurge concept upon a tenth century Karaite document? This document purports to record the beliefs of a sect almost one thousand years earlier. Second, the entire case is built upon secondary sources. No primary sources of the Magharians have been found. Certainly then, we may express our reservations as to the methodology of Quispell and Wolfson.

The second point of Quispell's argument that the concept of the demiurge originates within Judaism, is based upon the

doctrine of the demiurge as expressed by Cerinthus. Cerinthus lived in the first half of the second century in Ephesus in Asia minor. The Church Fathers, considering him to be a Gnostic, often noted his opposition to Pauline Christianity. According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus

taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power for separated from Him, and at a distance from that Principality who is supreme over the universe and ignorant of him who is above all.<sup>14</sup>

Tertullian describes Cerinthus as maintaining

that the world was created by those angels... affirming also that the Law was given by angels; representing the God of the Jews as not the Lord, but an angel.<sup>15</sup>

As was the case with Magharians, Quispell feels that the issue here is one of anthropomorphism. In the system of Cerinthus, monotheism is retained. God remains as one, and the bible is interpreted to be a bearer of truth. This is done of course by attributing anthropomorphisms such as creation and law giving to a subordinate angel or angels. Quispell feels that Cerinthus was a Jewish Christian.<sup>16</sup> Thus the doctrine of the demiurge originates within a Jewish or a Judeo-Christian community as an attempt to explain biblical anthropomorphisms.

Once again however we may question the validity of Quispell's assertion. The weakness of his position here is his belief that Cerinthus was a Jewish Christian. Neither Irenaeus nor Tertullian specify that Cerinthus was a Jewish Christian. Quispell merely states this as an hypothesis. Another Church Father, Hippolytus, writing in the third century states:

That Cerinthus, in no wise indebted to the Scriptures, formed his opinion (not out of them), but from the tenets of the Egyptians.<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere, Hippolytus specifically states that the doctrine of the demiurge was not derived from Jewish sources, but from Egyptian:

But a certain Cerinthus, himself being disciplined in the teachings of the Egyptians, asserted that the world was not made by the primal Deity, but by some virtue which was an offshoot from that Power which is above all things and which (yet) is ignorant of the God that is above all.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt then that Cerinthus was a gnostic Christian, but his Gnosticism was derived not from a Jewish milieu as Quispell maintains, but from a pagan-Egyptian milieu as indicated clearly by Hippolytus.

Thus we may conclude that Quispell's assertion that the origin of the demiurge, based upon the Magharians and Cerinthus, may be attributed to a Jewish milieu, is highly questionable.

Another source of debate among scholars is the significance of anti-Jewish remarks within gnostic writings. Gnostic writings are filled with animosity towards the Jewish people and their scriptures. According to Quispell, this animosity does not rule out the possibility that the authors of the texts were originally Jews. On the contrary, it is possible that these writers were Jews who, influenced by the culture of others, were excommunicated by the Rabbinic Jewish establishment, and became violent in their opposition to that establishment.<sup>19</sup>

Jonas does not completely rule out the possibility that Quispell's view is correct. Jonas states:

Nothing is impossible in human psychology, even anti-semitism among Jews.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Jonas feels that the violent anti-Jewishness in Gnostic writings makes it improbable that these writings were written by Jews. The inferiority of the Jewish God

and "turning upside down" of the Jewish creation myth are labeled by Jonas as "metaphysical anti-semitism." Therefore Jonas maintains that it is doubtful that this type of anti-semitism and hatred would have originated among people who had been Jews. Anti-semitism in gnostic writings is, according to Jonas, a result of the fact that Gnosticism originated in a close geographical proximity to Judaism, often being violent and acrimonious.

It is this author's opinion that we may legitimately speak of Jewish gnosis, but not of Jewish Gnosticism. It is Jewish gnosis which is represented by merkabah mysticism. This Jewish gnosis, to borrow Rudolf Otto's term, consists of a desire to apprehend part of the "mysticism tremendum." It consists of the secrets of the divine majesty, ascent narratives, and descriptions of the heavenly chariots, thrones, and palaces. It is an esoteric knowledge reserved for the elite and the elect. Its potential as knowledge is its capability of bringing salvation, redemption, and eternal life to him who possesses it. It provides its possessor with an understanding of the nature of the world as created by God. This understanding helps the possessor to function in a productive manner in the created world by doing God's will therein. This then is what we mean when we speak of Jewish gnosis.

Jewish gnosis, however, as described here, is not Jewish Gnosticism. If we wish to consider it as Jewish Gnosticism, then it must possess many of the non-Christian elements of Gnosticism in general. In other words, it must possess a dualistic outlook upon the universe. It must possess a sense of cosmological opposition between God and created matter, viewing the cosmos pessimistically as being inherently corrupt and evil. It must have an account of divine tragedy which in turn accounts for the existence of evil within creation. Finally, it must possess a

revolutionary stance towards the orthodox religious establishment and its literature.<sup>21</sup> Merkabah mysticism as Jewish gnosis fails on all these counts. It lacks all of the above, being in its essence monotheistic and part of the establishment. It views the created world as the blessed creation of God, and views evil in that world (as we shall see in Chapter VI of this thesis) as the result of man's folly.

Moreover, the 1966 colloquium at Messina felt that the major characteristic of Gnosticism was the idea that the Supreme God's power is in some way diminished and corrupted, resulting in the creation of the physical world by the demiurge. This idea was labeled by the scholars at the colloquium as "the devolution of the divine." These scholars felt that Judaism and the Christianity of the New Testament were completely lacking in any trace of this idea and, as a result, they stated in the final document:

It is impossible to classify Gnosticism as belonging to the same historical and religious type of Judaism or Christianity of the New Testament.<sup>22</sup>

Based upon all of this discussion it is possible for us to draw certain conclusions concerning the relationship of Gnosticism and Judaism. Judaism in the second and third centuries was a ubiquitous phenomenon. This was the result not only of the spread of the Hebrew Bible, but possibly the result of the spread of proto-Mishnaic, semi-codified material. Consequently, Judaism and Gnosticism frequently encountered one another. The pro-cosmos spirit of Judaism as expressed by the Genesis account of a monotheistic creator made Judaism a natural target for Gnostics. Gnostics tended to see the world as a corrupt and evil place, a place full of suffering and persecution. It is quite possible that their world view more adequately reflected reality than the idealism of the Rabbis. Therefore, Judaism's major contri-

bution to Gnosticism was that of a thought provoker and catalyst.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it is historically accurate to view the Hekhalot tracts and certain passages in Rabbinic Literature as representing Jewish gnosis, but not Jewish Gnosticism.

Thus far we have attempted to describe the nature of Gnostic myth in general, and to distinguish Jewish gnosis from Jewish Gnosticism. We are now ready to proceed to an examination of Jewish gnosis, and the Rabbi attempts to restrict and limit its exposition. For reasons which will soon become obvious, we have chosen Genesis Rabbah Chapters I-VIII as the locus of our study. It is to this midrashic text which we now direct our attention.

## CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF GENESIS RABBAH AND ITS REDACTION

#### A. Genesis Rabbah: The Locus of this Study

As we have seen in the previous two chapters, an integral part of gnostic myth was the way in which that myth sought to describe the creation of the world. Gnostic myth views creation as a divine tragedy. It stresses that an evil, ignorant, and arrogant demiurge created the earth, and that the created world is remote, removed, and alien to the Supreme Being. We have also seen how gnostic writers made use of the beginning chapters of the book of Genesis. As a matter of fact, gnostic exegesis of the Hebrew Bible was usually limited to these chapters, and rarely extended beyond them.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is only logical that we concentrate on the Rabbinic interpretation of the first chapters of the book of Genesis. The "locus classicus" of the early Rabbinic exegesis and eisegesis of these chapters is Genesis Rabbah, the focus and primary rabbinic text in this study.

We have chosen to examine only the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah.<sup>2</sup> Concerning esoteric speculation, we encounter in these chapters two basic types of statements. The first are those which seek to limit or curtail speculation, while the second are those which in and of themselves seem to be esoteric expositions. For example, many of the expositions in chapter III of Genesis Rabbah deal with the nature of light within the universe. These expositions are often highly mystical in content. It is a difficult task to attempt to comprehend the way in which these two seemingly contradictory types of statements were woven together. This of course raises the even more fundamental question of just how and by what rationale the varied traditions of Genesis Rabbah were compiled and redacted. To begin to answer this question of course is to begin to paint a composite of this redactor himself. Therefore, let us examine what is known about the redactor of Genesis

### Rabbah.

According to tradition, the redactor of the Midrash was the author of the first proem in chapter I, R. Hoshaya. R. Hoshaya was a first generation Palestinian amora who lived in the late second, early third century. It is impossible, however, to consider R. Hoshaya to be the redactor of the Midrash, for Genesis Rabbah mentions authorities who lived at least 100 years later.

As a matter of fact, the earliest title of the Midrash was also taken from the first line of the first proem. Genesis Rabbah was known as Bereshit de Rabbi Hoshaya Rabbah. Another early title was Bereshit Rabbah, Hebrew title by which Genesis Rabbah is known today. There are at least three theories which seek to explain why the Midrash was called "Rabbah." **The first** is that the redactor or later authorities wanted to distinguish the Midrash from the book of Genesis.<sup>3</sup> The second theory states that the redactor or later authorities wanted to distinguish the Midrash from other prior Midrashim on the book of Genesis.<sup>4</sup> The third theory is to see the first chapters of the Midrash, chapters 1-18 or 1-29 as being originally a separate midrashic compilation on the book of Genesis.<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine which of the above theories makes the most sense. Albeck prefers the first theory, while this author has a preference for the third theory. The point here is that the assignment of a title to the work may also tell us something about the intention of the redactor of the midrash itself, depending on which theory we like the best.

From where did the redactor obtain his material? Did he merely draw upon oral traditions known to him or did he draw upon written traditions unknown to us. If he drew upon written traditions, did he draw upon written tradition related to another biblical text or did he have a written work before him, a sort of "proto-Genesis Rabbah," which interpreted the book of Genesis. Finally to what extent did

he draw upon traditions found in other literary sources which are known to us today, and which are considered to have been compiled before Genesis Rabbah. These are the sort of questions the answers to which may help us understand the intent of the redactor of Genesis Rabbah. Let us begin with the last of these questions. Let us examine the possibility that the redactor of Genesis Rabbah drew some of his material from extant, and thus earlier, literary sources.<sup>6</sup>

## B. Source Criticism

The usage of simplistic Aramaic translations within Genesis Rabbah points to an early period of redaction, and perhaps to a common ancient source used by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah and Targum Onkelos. Albeck for example, feels that there is no doubt that the source of Genesis Rabbah was a certain ancient Targum which the editor knew from either oral or written transmission.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, we often find instances wherein simple Aramaic translations of individual words are shared by Targum Onkelos and Genesis Rabbah. For example Genesis Rabbah 1:1 interprets the Hebrew word "omen" by the Greek word "pedagogue." This same interpretation is to be found in the Aramaic Jerusalem Targum. Another example is the interpretation of Genesis 37:7 in Genesis Rabbah 1:5. This interpretation is based upon the Aramaic translation of this verse in the Jerusalem Targum. It should be stressed that these translation parallels are of individual words, not of entire verses.

The earliest Targum extant today in a complete literary form is Targum Onkelos. This targum was redacted in Babylonia in the third century C.E.<sup>8</sup> It reflects in its halachic (legal) and aggadic (legend) portions the influence of the Akibaite school of the second century C.E. in Palestine.<sup>9</sup> Targum Onkelos contains many entire verse translations, explanations and stories which are paralleled in Genesis Rabbah. These numerous parallels are listed by Albeck in his introduction to Genesis Rabbah.<sup>10</sup> However, there are no parallels in the first eight chapters. Is this mere chance or is there an underlying reason for this phenomenon? Moreover, if we examine the first eighteen chapters of Genesis Rabbah, we find that there are no parallels here either.<sup>11</sup> When we examine the parallels in the later chapters of Genesis Rabbah, we find a certain similarity of style, form, and language, yet when we contrast the interpretations of Genesis 1-2 in Genesis Rabbah with those in

Targum Onkelos, we find an interesting phenomenon. Not only are there no parallel interpretations, but the very style language and form seems to be radically different in each source. Targum Onkelos is basically a verse by verse interpretation of Genesis 1-2. Genesis Rabbah 1-18 exhibits much more of a sermon or homiletic style and form. Often in Genesis Rabbah 1-18 the interpretation of one verse is expansive.<sup>12</sup>

Thus we are faced with the problem of explaining the difference, vis a vis the Targum, between Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-18 and the remainder of the text. The solution to this problem is to view chapters 1-18 as constituting originally a separate, earlier work. As noted above, the interpretation of the first two chapters of Genesis in Genesis Rabbah 1-18 went far beyond mere translation. It included a great deal of what we have classified as being Jewish gnosis. Perhaps the material in these chapters was originally not meant for public consumption, but rather was meant for study within the walls of the academy. The fact remains that the first eighteen chapters of Genesis Rabbah did not borrow from Targum Onkelos. This could suggest that these chapters were redacted at an earlier date than the later chapters. In other words, it is possible that the reason the redactor did not use Targum Onkelos was due to the fact that at the time of his redaction of these chapters, Targum Onkelos was either non-existent or too new a work in Babylonia to have reached the academies of Palestine. Understood in all of this is the theory that the first eighteen chapters of Genesis Rabbah underwent two stages of redaction. The earliest stage was by a redactor whose efforts consisted entirely of the first eighteen chapters. The second stage was that of the redactor of the entire work. Evidence of these two stages of redaction will be provided in chapter VII of this work.

Let us now proceed to examine other possible literary sources for Genesis Rabbah.<sup>13</sup> In general, Genesis Rabbah does not seem to have made extensive use of the Mishnah as a source. Often when a passage from the Mishnah is cited, it is not cited in toto or verbatim. Often it occurs in the midst of a larger interpretation.<sup>14</sup> There are only four references to the Mishnah in chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah,<sup>15</sup> and usage of the Mishnah is not overly important to our discussion at this point. ~~This is~~ because none of the four references seem to express a concern over the threat of Gnosticism or esoteric speculation, nor do they seem to offer their own form of Jewish gnosis.

Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 do not seem to draw upon the Tannaitic Midrashim to any great extent. There are two parallel traditions found in the Mechilta de R. Ishmael, and one each in the Sifra and Sifrei to Deuteronomy.<sup>16</sup> There are no parallels in chapters 1-8 from the Sifrei to Numbers. In general material from Tannaitic Midrashim is not a source for chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah. Where parallels do exist however, it is difficult to ascertain whether the editor of Genesis Rabbah drew upon the works themselves or upon some other common and earlier oral tradition or literary source. None of these parallels express a concern over the threat of Gnosticism, nor do they represent a form of Jewish gnosis.

We cannot determine with any degree of certainty whether or not the redactor of Genesis Rabbah used the Tosephta as a source. This is due to the fact that in most of the places where a parallel does exist, the redactor seems to have taken an entire tradition from the Palestinian Talmud. This led Albeck to conclude that the redactor of Genesis Rabbah did not see or use our Tosephta.<sup>17</sup> There are only two parallels in chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah. One of these, the Ben Zoma tradition of Genesis Rabbah 2:4, is

found in Tosephta Haggigah 2:5. It is also found however Hagigah II:1, 77a of the Palestinian Talmud. The second parallel is found at the end of Genesis Rabbah 1:15 and in Tosephta Keritot 4:6. As we shall see in chapter VII of this work, this tradition as found in Genesis Rabbah seems to be an editorial addition to the main text, its purpose being to end chapter 1 with a moral lesson.

Perhaps the most intriguing and most plausible literary source for many of the traditions of Genesis Rabbah is the Palestinian Talmud. The material which is common to both sources is usually in the form of an entire tradition. In all of Genesis Rabbah, there are 225 traditions which are also found in the Palestinian Talmud, 22 of these traditions appear in chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah. Of these 22 traditions, 7 are taken **directly** from Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud.<sup>18</sup> These statistics have led scholars to postulate a definite relationship between Genesis Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud. Frankel, for example, felt that Genesis Rabbah represented an expansion of certain traditions of the Palestinian Talmud.<sup>19</sup> Albeck argued that Genesis Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud each drew upon a common source, a sort of "proto-Yerushalmi" or "proto-Palestinian Talmud." We shall examine the relationship of these two sources in much greater detail in the next chapter wherein we shall examine the common traditions of Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 and Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud.

Due to a similarity of language, style, technical terminology, and historical context, Genesis Rabbah seems to be related to Leviticus Rabbah and the Pesikta de Rav Kahana. Leviticus Rabbah and Pesikta de Rav Kahana have an extremely close relationship, even to the point of their being 5 identical homilies in these two works. It is possible that they were composed by the same author or the same school.<sup>20</sup> Both of them have homilies which possess a specific form. This form is characterized by a number of

proems or introductory discourses, followed by a body of material, ending with a messianic peroration. Both sources have proems which seem to show greater development than those of Genesis Rabbah. For the most part (25 out of 31) the chapters in Leviticus Rabbah seem to follow the triennial cycle of Torah reading of Palestine. These last two observations have led scholars to conclude that Genesis Rabbah was redacted at an earlier date than either Leviticus Rabbah or Pesikta de Rav Kahane. The primary importance of these two texts for this study is that they (especially Pesikta de Rav Kahane) can often help us to clarify the form and meaning of parallel traditions where they exist.

One of the advantages of source criticism is that it may help us to isolate and discover certain historical facts about the text studied. We noticed, for example, the similarity of language, style, and technical terminology between Leviticus Rabbah, Pesikta de Rav Kahana and Genesis Rabbah. The language used by Genesis Rabbah also bears a close resemblance to that used by the Palestinian Talmud. In both Genesis Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud, the Hebrew portions resemble mishnaic Hebrew while the stories and parables of both sources are often written in Galilean Aramaic. Greek terms and expressions are often found in both works.<sup>21</sup> The authorities cited in Genesis Rabbah are all Palestinian. The latest authorities are from the early fourth century.<sup>22</sup> Within Genesis Rabbah, there are many historical allusions which point to the realia of the land of Israel.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, scholars have found evidence which suggests that the Babylonian Talmud borrowed traditions from Genesis Rabbah, but no evidence that Genesis Rabbah borrowed from the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>24</sup> Most of these observations grew out of source criticism. They lead us to only one obvious conclusion: Genesis Rabbah was composed in Palestine.

Nevertheless, source criticism cannot account for the redaction of Genesis Rabbah. Even with the Palestinian Talmud as a possible exception, it is clear that Genesis Rabbah was not merely a "rewrite" of the Palestinian Talmud, for there is too much material in Genesis Rabbah which is totally lacking in the latter source. Moreover, Genesis Rabbah possesses a wealth of material which may not be attributed to any earlier source. Source criticism is limited in its usefulness in the case of Genesis Rabbah because of its seeming originality.

Yet, source criticism does show us that there could be some support for seeing Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 as originally being a separate and early midrash on the first two chapters of Genesis. This hypothesis is based on the lack of Targum parallels in these chapters, contrasted with their presence in the later chapters. It remains to be seen whether form or redaction criticism will also support this hypothesis. Finally, concerning the original material in these chapters, we can only hypothesize that the redactor had in his possession either a knowledge of oral traditions or written sources which were not preserved.

C. Form Criticism as a tool for accounting for the  
Redaction of Genesis Rabbah

In 1885, J. Theodor suggested that the homiletic and exegetic material of Genesis Rabbah was based upon the triennial cycle of Torah readings. Theodor was immediately confronted by the obvious problem that there are 101 chapters in Genesis Rabbah and only 48 "sederim" (divisions according to the three year cycle).<sup>25</sup> He therefore suggested that the chapters were divided according to the "Petuchot" and "Setumot" (open and closed) divisions found in the Torah.<sup>26</sup> Both Albeck and Herr agree with Theodor's suggestion.<sup>27</sup>

Joseph Heinemann agrees that the division does have something to do with the triennial cycle. Of the first 94 chapters of Genesis Rabbah, only 41 chapters are based upon the triennial cycle.<sup>28</sup> The remaining chapter divisions, he felt, occur due to the abundance of material at given points, not according to the "open" and "closed" verses. Heinemann feels that the proem provides the clue to the understanding of the divisions of Genesis Rabbah.<sup>29</sup> Before proceeding with his theories, let us briefly examine the nature of the proems in Genesis Rabbah.

In Genesis Rabbah there are 246 proems. These proems relate two verses from the Hebrew Bible. The proem usually begins with a verse which is taken from the Hagiographa, the third of the three Jewish divisions of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>30</sup> This verse, which may be labeled as the 'proem verse,' is then related to a verse from Genesis. The Genesis verse may be labeled as the 'pericope verse.' The part of the proem which weaves together or connects the proem verse to the pericope verse is called the 'charuzah.' There are, of course, many different ways in which this 'weaving' may take place, discussion of which being beyond the scope of our interest.<sup>31</sup> At any rate, the 'charuzah' in a complete proem always returns to the pericope verse. Occasionally,

the pericope verse is missing. There are several possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, the pericope verse could be missing due to the faulty copying of the text. Second, it could be missing because it has been mistakenly connected to the following proem which is based upon the same pericope verse.<sup>32</sup> Third, there just may not be a satisfactory explanation as to why it has been omitted.

76 out of 246 proems are attributed to a Rabbinic authority. These attributions, to a particular Rabbinic authority are questionable. In many proems, it is clear that the proem itself has been constructed by a preacher (if originally oral) or by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah. In either case, the author possesses a statement attributed to a particular Rabbinic authority, bases the entire proem on this statement, and attributes the entire proem to him. Often it is possible to show that the authority to whom the proem is attributed could not possibly have been the author of the entire proem.<sup>33</sup>

Let us now direct our attention to the problem of determining whether the author of the proem was the attributed authority, a later preacher, on the redactor of Genesis Rabbah. To begin to answer this problem, let us examine the purpose of function of the proem as it relates to its authorship.

The majority of Jewish scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have felt that the proem served as an introduction to the full homily form. This position was first expounded by German scholars of the late nineteenth century. These included Maybaum, Bacher, and Theodor. Later scholars have also held this view, even to the point of taken its veracity for granted. Albeck for example maintained that even in the tannaitic period, a preacher would begin his sermon with a short and simple proem.<sup>34</sup> Israel Bettan held a similar view as evidenced by the following:

Whether the proem was devised to familiarize the people with those portions of the Bible rarely used in synagogal worship, or to stimulate greater interest and attentiveness in the congregation, certain it is that the novel method provided the sermon with a unique introduction.<sup>35</sup> (underlining mine)

Bettan wrote the above prior to 1939. Even as late as 1970, Ben Zion Wacholder maintained a similar position when he stated that the purpose of the proem was to "enhance the authoritativeness" of the homily through the citation of a famous preacher.<sup>36</sup> Wacholder makes this statement in relation to Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, and Pesikta de Rav Kahana. Whether Wacholder uses the word "homily" in an oral or literary sense is unclear.

Therefore at this point we may ask whether the proems of Genesis Rabbah were the creation of an editor, redactor or other person who wanted to create an introduction to his own homily, or whether the proems of Genesis Rabbah may be viewed as self contained units? Is the major function of the proem that of an introduction or is it possible that the proem reflects not only an early statement of a particular authority, but also an early form of tradition transmission used by the Rabbis of the particular authority's generation?

Joseph Heinemann raised serious objections to the theory that the proem represents an introduction to the full sermon. Heinemann observed that the so-called body of the sermon

lacks all form or shape, and is made up of a 'hotch-potch' of individual comments, joined together mechanically.<sup>37</sup>

By contrast, Heinemann noted that the structure of the proem was more clearly defined. According to the Heinemann, the proem itself represents and reflects an

oral sermon, displaying various rhetorical devices intended for a listening audience. Therefore the creation of all of the proems in Genesis Rabbah cannot be ascribed to the redactor of the compilation.<sup>38</sup>

In the Amoraic period, preaching in Palestine was based for the most part upon the triennial cycle of Torah readings, and upon special readings for holy days, festivals and special Sabbaths.<sup>39</sup> We do not know just how fixed was the time for preaching. Textual evidence supports the following three times for the delivery of sermons of the synagogue:

1. Friday night-Palestinian Talmud Sotah 1:4, 16 d
2. Saturday morning after the reading of scripture-Luke 4:16f. and other New Testament passages
3. Saturday afternoon-Yalkut on Proverbs, Remez 964

Heinemann believes that there were also sermons which were delivered before the scriptural reading on Saturday morning.<sup>40</sup> He never really tells us, however, on what basis he reaches this position. He merely uses it as an hypothesis to account for what he terms the 'upside down arrangement of the proems.'<sup>41</sup> The proem, ending as it does with the pericope verse, the first verse of the weekly scriptural reading, served as an introduction to that reading. The word "batah," therefore, should be translated as 'opening or introducing the scriptural reading.' The obvious flaw in Heinemann's theory is that there is no textual evidence to support his contention that sermons were given before the reading of the Torah.

If, as Heinemann suggests, the proem was originally an oral vehicle of tradition transmission, then these proems and traditions must have eventually been written down. We do not know who wrote them down. It is possible that it could have been the redactor of Genesis Rabbah or an earlier author who created a literary work unknown to us. At any

rate, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah used these proems to serve as introductions to his exegetic material.

Thus, Heinemann's theory concerning the redaction of Genesis Rabbah may be summarized in the following manner. Due to the immense quantity of material before him, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah chose to create 'artificial' chapters; artificial in that these chapters did not agree with the triennial cycle. These artificial chapters, when added to the triennial chapters, represent the total number of chapters in Genesis Rabbah. These artificial chapters, being the result of an immense number of traditions, were divided according to the thematic content of the Genesis narrative. Finally, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah created proems to serve as introductions to the artificial chapters.<sup>42</sup>

The proems which introduce the artificial or non-triennial chapters are sometimes defective because they do not return to the pericope verse, or because their 'charuzah' is either non-existent or extremely brief. Using such criteria for a defective preom, Heinemann proceeded to locate the defective proems of Genesis Rabbah. He found these proems in chapters 2, 5, 8, 11, 29, 30, 42, 47, 62, 72, and 86.<sup>43</sup> Of these chapters, only two, chapters 30 and 86, are attested to on any of the lists as being 'triennial' chapters.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the overwhelming majority of defective proems occur in non-triennial chapters. This led Heinemann to conclude that the defective proems were the creation of the redactor(s) of Genesis Rabbah.

Heinemann then felt that he would find more proems in the triennial chapters than in the non-triennial chapters. He noticed that of the chapters which appear on all the lists of the triennial cycle, only five had one proem or less. 28 out of 33 chapters had two or more proems. Of the chapters which appear on some of the lists, 13 out of 18 chapters have two or more proems. These figures support Heinemann's theory

that the proem was originally an oral sermon or part of one. The redactor of Genesis Rabbah collected these 'sermons' and used them as introductions to the triennial chapters upon whose verses the proems were based. Where no such sermons existed, i.e. the non-triennial divisions, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah composed his own proem to serve as introduction to his exegetic material.

The flawed nature of Heinemann's theory when applied to the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah becomes apparent. In the first appendix of this thesis, the reader will find form analysis charts of the first 18 chapters of Genesis Rabbah. In the entire midrash, there are seven chapters which totally lack proems. These are chapters 13, 15, 17, 18, 25, 35, and 37. None of these chapters are based upon the triennial cycle. We may ask why the abundance of the non-proem chapters are found near the beginning of the midrash? If we view chapters 1-18 as a possible unit, then 22% of these chapters lack proems. In the entire work, 7% of the chapters lack proems. In chapters 19-94 only 4% of the chapters lack proems. This does of course suggest that there is a difference in the principles of redaction between chapters 1-18 and chapters 19-94. Heinemann's theory was that the proems are the key to understanding the chapter divisions of the redactor of Genesis Rabbah. While this theory may have some validity in chapters 19-94, we can safely state that it may not be used to account for the chapter divisions of chapters 1-18.

Neither does Albeck's theory of "open" and "closed" verses mentioned previously in this chapter account for the chapter divisions of chapters 1-18. Of these chapters 10 (chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15) chapters are based upon open and close verses. Of these chapters, only chapter 1 is also a triennial chapter. Thus only 9 chapters out of 18, would support the "open" and "closed" verse theory. This number of course is too small to be conclusive.

One cannot account for the division of these chapters by citing the length of the material. If it were the case that the editor of Genesis Rabbah divided the chapters according to the amount of the material before him, then one would expect to find chapters of roughly equal length. This however, is not the case. The longer chapters, chapters 1 and 12, are roughly three times longer than the shortest chapters, chapters 2 and 7.

Neither can natural break according to the Genesis narrative account for the chapter divisions. 10 out of 18 chapters meet this criteria. When one subtracts the triennial chapters, only 8 out of 16 chapters meet the natural break criteria. Like the previous criteria, this evidence is not conclusive.

The total number of proems in chapters 1-18 is 26. Of these, 31% (8) occur in the 2 triennial chapters, chapters 1 and 12. This of course supports Heinemann's contention that the proem was originally an oral sermon or part of one which was related to the triennial cycle. Yet it does not account for the chapter divisions. **In addition,** the internal structure of the individual triennial chapters contains for the most part a higher percentage of proem material than ~~do~~ the individual non-triennial chapters. Moreover the proems in the triennial chapters are better developed. The average length of a proem in a non-triennial chapter is only 63% of the length of a proem in an average triennial chapter.

Therefore our form critical analysis leads us to the following conclusions. In terms of the internal structure of the chapters, form criticism tells us little regarding the redaction of the midrash. The only exception to this is that we have learned that the redactor used a greater number of proems in the triennial chapters than in the non-triennial chapters. None of the criteria of form criticism can adequately account for the chapter divisions

of chapters 1-18 of Genesis Rabbah. Whether or not any or all of these criteria are valid in the remaining chapters of Genesis Rabbah is beyond the scope of our interest. If they seem to be more valid in the later chapters, and one has reason to believe that they might be when one analyzes Heinemann's article, then we have a further justification for viewing the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah as a separate unit.

It should be noted that Heinemann himself recognized the unique nature of the beginning chapters of Genesis Rabbah. He noted that the beginning chapters of Genesis Rabbah have no connection to the triennial cycle of Torah reading, or to the "open" and "closed" verses of the Torah.<sup>45</sup> He also noted that the beginning chapters of Genesis Rabbah are quite expansive in that often a great deal of information is brought forth in discussion of only one verse.<sup>46</sup> This led Heinemann to conclude that in the beginning chapters the redactor of Genesis Rabbah sought to include as much material as he could. This, according to Heinemann, accounts for the artificial chapter divisions.<sup>47</sup>

We do not need to accept Heinemann's theory of the artificial chapter divisions as being true. In reality, this hypothesis seems to be an attempt by Heinemann to explain that which did not fit his theories. Moreover, as we shall see in chapter VII, there was a rationale for the redaction of these chapters, for their division, and for their internal make up. In order to arrive at this rational, source and form criteria are not sufficient. They must be supplemented by redaction criticism, and it is to this type of criticism that we now direct our attention.

#### D. Redaction Criticism: A Unique Approach

**Redaction criticism provides us with a unique approach to the study of Genesis Rabbah.** Moreover, **because the focus** of this thesis is the creation traditions of the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah and their relationship to Gnosticism, redaction criticism also gives us a unique insight into the relationship between Judaism and Gnosticism. Before proceeding with our analyses, however, let us first explain just what constitutes a redaction critique.

As we have seen, source criticism attempted to isolate separate traditions within Genesis Rabbah. It sought to determine to what extent the redactor of Genesis Rabbah used traditions from earlier literary sources and **to what extent** the **redactor** did not use previous sources. Form criticism emphasized the role of oral transmission in the creation of a literary genre. For example, Heinemann felt that the proem was **originally** an oral sermon which later was recorded in a literary form. Thus the oral and the written forms of a particular tradition are inseparable. Form criticism also emphasized the "sitz im Leben" in which the literary form developed. In this regard, Heinemann felt that proem originally developed as a ~~sermon~~ given in the synagogue before the reading of the Torah on the Sabbath. The weakness of form criticism was that it tended to concentrate too much on the form of ~~the~~ tradition, and not enough on the usage of that form to express certain ideas. Another weakness was that it tended to see the traditions as individual units, and rarely went beyond the units ~~742~~ themselves. For example, it never dealt with the question of how and why two particular traditions were united in a literary compilation.<sup>48</sup> In other words, form criticism did not deal with the fact that these traditions in their literary forms were parts of complex literary works which had their own special characteristics.<sup>49</sup>

Redaction criticism seeks to correct the tendency of atomization present in form criticism. It seeks to understand the biases or outlook of the people who preserved a tradition. It tries to find some unifying purpose or points of view by which the individual units are brought together. It asks whether or not the literary work was meant to serve some historical or religious purpose.<sup>50</sup> In most instances, a redaction critique takes it for granted that the redactor had a philosophy of history and religion which influenced the redaction of the work.<sup>51</sup>

Redaction criticism is a unique approach to the analysis of the relationship between Gnosticism and Judaism. Of the previous studies which have maintained that a definite relationship exists, none have studied the relationships in terms of a redaction critique of one particular text. Graetz concentrated on the sets of traditions which are interconnected: the traditions of Elisha ben Avuyah and the tradition of the four who entered pardes. Friedlander made the presumption that the term "minim" ("heretics") in Rabbinic texts referred to Gnostics and proceeded to study these texts. Quispell and MacCrae attempted to derive conceptual parallels within the two religious groups. All of the above operate on the "source" level only. Birger Pearson's approach was both a linguistic approach (Aramaic word plays in Gnostic texts), and a form critical approach (the similarity of form between Gnostic texts and midrash.) Scholem and Segal both use a historical and thematic approach which seems to operate only on the level of source criticism. Scholem's approach centered on merkabah as esoteric knowledge, studying the texts which illustrate this phenomenon. Segal isolated the passages that refer to "two powers" or "many powers" and studied these texts in reference to Christianity and Gnosticism. None of the above scholars have ever undertaken a study of the relationship of Gnosticism and Judaism in terms of a redaction

critique of particular Rabbinic text.

It is clear, however, that form and redaction criticism must complement one another. We must first attempt to understand the traditions themselves and the oral contexts out of which they arose. After this task has been undertaken, we may be able to attempt to comprehend the significance of the way in which a particular tradition has been preserved and the way in which this tradition becomes part of a larger literary work which possesses its own special characteristics. Therefore in our redaction critique of the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah, our first goal will be to understand the traditions as individual units. We will assume that every tradition had an oral genesis, "sitz in leben," and history which preceeded its literary form. By comparing the literary preservation of the traditions in various Rabbinic sources, we will attempt to resurrect the oral traditions (ur text), and to understand the environment in which they might have arisen. Foremost in our minds at this point are the following questions. First, is it possible that any particular passage represents a response to or a polemic motivated by the presence of Gnostics in Palestine? If not, then we shall seek to determine to what extent, if at all, a particular tradition represents rabbinic esoteric speculation or Jewish gnosis? In addition, we shall also discuss what, if any, form considerations exist within the traditions themselves.

In our redaction critique of the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah, we shall attempt a careful analysis of the placement and arrangement of the individual traditions within the larger work. In addition, given the fact that many of these traditions also appear in Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud, we shall attempt to analyze the placement and relationship of these common traditions within the talmudic source and to contrast the redaction of these

traditions within the two sources.

It is hoped that this method will achieve four major results. First by comparison with their parallels, this method will help us to clarify the original meaning and intent of the individual traditions. Second, it is felt that this method will help us to understand how, perhaps even before their literary transmission, certain traditions become associated one with another. Third, through this method, we shall attempt to answer the question of why and when such coupling took place. Finally, it is hoped that it will help us to understand the historical development of the traditions and the schools of redaction which they reflect.

Based upon the evidence, we then propose that the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah, possibly chapters 1-18, originally constituted a literary unit separate from and earlier to the entire corpus of Genesis Rabbah. Thus, the redactor of these chapters was not the same as the final redactor of the entire work. These chapters were at a later date appended to the remaining chapters. Therefore, it is possible that the redactor of the final chapters viewed himself as completing a work begun previously. In summary, the evidence for the proposition of two separate redactions is as follows. First, the lack of Targumic parallels in chapters 1-18, in contrast to the existence of such parallels in the later chapters. Second, in the early chapters of Genesis Rabbah, one notices the high percentage of parallels from Maqilah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud. Third, we know of no rationale which would account for the chapter divisions of the earlier chapters. Neither the proems, the "open" and "closed" verses, nor the natural break in the Genesis text account for the division of these chapters. Fourth, Heinemann and Albeck, both of whom are well respected scholars in the field of midrash, recognized the unusual nature of these chapters. Fifth, the fact that 22% of these chapters lack proems, compared with 4% of the remaining

chapters, further suggests their unusual nature. Finally, there is within chapters 1-18 evidence which suggests a second level of redaction. For example the addition of Tos. Keritot 4:6 to the end of chapter 1 probably reflects the hand of the later redactor who desired to have chapter 1 conclude with a moral lesson.<sup>53</sup>

Scholars have overlooked the hypothesis that there are two levels of redaction in Genesis Rabbah and that the first chapters were redacted at an earlier period. We feel that this hypothesis will be an aid in accounting for the redaction of these chapters. In addition, the redaction critique which we are about to undertake desires to test the theory these chapters exhibit in several places two overriding concerns which help to account for the redaction process. The first is the concern over **the threat** of Gnosticism, unbridled esoteric speculation, and/or speculation which in the opinion of the Rabbis would lead to the dishonor of the God of Israel. The second concern is the desire to provide Jews with a "proper" or acceptable form of Jewish gnosis. The goal of such gnosis would be to account for the creation of the world while protecting the honor of the God of Israel.

Let us begin to examine these propositions. We shall first attempt to understand the specific traditions in and of themselves, and then we shall attempt to understand how and on what basis the redactor put these specific traditions together in Genesis Rabbah. With this in mind, we shall now proceed with an examination of several specific traditions, beginning with the common traditions of Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 and Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud.

## CHAPTER IV

THE COMMON TRADITIONS: GENESIS RABBAH CHAPTERS 1-8  
AND THE PALESTINIAN TALMUD HAGIGAH II:1

## A. Introduction

We have noted the predominance in Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 of parallel traditions from the Palestinian Talmud (hereafter referred to as PT) Hagigah II:1. The significance of these parallels for our study of Genesis Rabbah is that they might help us to understand some of the specific concerns of the redactor of the midrash who chose to include them within his work.

Within the Palestinian Talmud, the framework for these parallel traditions is Mishnah Hagigah II:1 which states:

The forbidden decrees of marriage may not be expounded before three persons, nor the account of creation before two, nor the account of the chariot before one alone, unless he is a sage who understands of his own knowledge. Whoever thinks about four things, it were better for him if he had not been born: What is above? What is below? What is before? And what is after? And whoever is not sensitive to the glory of his Creator, it were better for him if he had not been born.

This Mishnah lists three categories of forbidden decrees of marriage or sexual relations. It is probable that the original intent of this Mishnah at this point involved a concern for modesty. The early Rabbis felt that things directly related to forbidden sexual acts should not be openly discussed. This feeling was probably due to the fact that they did not want to encourage such acts, nor did they want to sexually arouse young men by their discussion. As we shall see, however, the interpretation of the gemara seems to revolve around an entirely different concern.

The account of creation, the "maaseh bereshit," was not to be discussed before two people. Here quite clearly, the Mishnah is discussing the realm of esoteric speculations. One obvious factor here could be Rabbinic concern over the threat of Gnostic cosmogonical and cosological speculations.

The third category of forbidden expositions is the category of "maaseh merkabah," the account of the chariot. These speculations were based on the description of the throne on its chariot as described in the first chapter of Ezekiel. In his studies, Gershom Scholem has shown that there were groups of Rabbis who studied the mysteries of the throne of God and who desired to perceive that throne. As was mentioned previously, Scholem felt that these speculations reflect a Jewish concomitant to Gnostic speculations.<sup>1</sup>

The next section of the Mishnah is a prohibition against speculation on what is above, below, before and after. Neither the language nor the concern here is clear. We shall discuss this issue in much greater detail later in this chapter.

The final section deals with the honor or glory (kavod) of God, which is to be retained at all times. How would one not retain the honor of God? In the time of the Mishnah, this could have been a reference to those who postulated the existence of a demiurge. In sum, it is clear to this writer that most plausible possibility for the concern of this Mishnah is the threat of Gnosticism to Jewish beliefs. This is a proposition which we shall examine in considerable detail in this and in the next chapter.

The gemara to this Mishnah as found in the Palestinian Talmud begins with the discussion of the forbidden decrees of marriage:

R. Ba in the name of R. Judan: It (the halacha of the Mishnah) is according to R. Akiba. Perhaps it is according to R. Ishmael who taught prohibitions against an illicit sexual act. From this injunction, R. Ami sat teaching that a prohibition not to have an illicit sexual act (with another, active) is also a prohibition not to be the subject of such an act (by another, passive). Thus the halacha is according to R. Ishmael.<sup>2</sup>

Jastrow maintains that the issue here is sodomy.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is sodomy which, according to R. Akiba, is not to be discussed before three people. The specific nature of the forbidden sexual act however **is** not of great significance to us. What is being established here is a general principle. This general principle is established through the opinion of R. Ishmael who is seen by the gemara as an alternative to R. Akiba. It is said that R. Ishmael taught prohibitions or warnings against illicit sexual acts. What the Mishnah intended to say here is that R. Ishmael discussed these acts in public, thus violating the Mishnah which is said to be the opinion of R. Akiba. R. Ami then presents an active/passive argument. The import of this argument is to show that if warnings against **the** forbidden sexual deeds are to be taught at all, they must be taught before three people. This is due to the fact that such a warning must be both active and passive. The active warning is that person A must not lay with person B. The passive warning is that person A must not be laid by person C. Thus, according to R. Ami, a minimum of three people are involved in teaching a warning against forbidden sexual relations.<sup>4</sup> The gemara appears convinced by R. Ami's reasoning of R. Ishmael's position, and accepts it as being legally binding. Thus in this case, the gemara representing the opinions of R. Ishmael and R. Ami contradicts the Mishnah representing the opinions of R. Akiba, R. Judah and R. Ba.

The gemara then returns to the Mishnah by citing the prohibition against teaching the account of creation, "Maaseh Bereshit," before two people.

R. Ba in the name of R. Judah. It (the halacha of the Mishnah) is according to R. Akiba. Perhaps it is as R. Ishmael interprets the prohibition. From this, R. Judah b. Pazi sat and explained that in the beginning the world was water in water. This shows that the halacha is according to R. Ishmael.

We notice that the gemara again sets up an Akiba-Ishmael controversy, again preferring the opinion of R. Ishmael. In this case, R. Ishmael permits the public exposition of "Maaseh Bereishit." As before, the authorities who uphold the Akiba's position are R. Ba and R. Judah. R. Ba or R. Abba b. Zabda was a second generation Palestinian amora who lived in the third century CE. R. Judah here is probably R. Judah b. Ilai, a tanna of the mid-second century C.E. It is clear that the gemara prefers the Ishmaelite interpretation, for immediately following its acceptance, the gemara brings forth an exposition of creation in the name of R. Judah b. Pazi. R. Judah b. Pazi was a fourth generation Palestinian amora. His exposition, having been taught in public,<sup>5</sup> contradicts the Mishnah and the halacha according to R. Akiba.

The redactor of Genesis Rabbah chose not to repeat this first section of the gemara in the Palestinian Talmud. Genesis Rabbah 1:14, however does have a trace of the disagreement between Akiba and Ishmael. Therein, R. Ishmael questions R. Akiba's usage of the Hebrew particles "ak" (except), "rak" (only), "et," and "gum" (also) as they are used in the opening of Genesis. R. Akiba's answer to R. Ishmael is that

If it had said, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), we might have maintained that heaven and earth too, are divine powers.

In this passage, we are never told what constitutes the position of R. Ishmael. It is clear, however, that Akiba's position arises out of a concern that people might interpret that something other than God or that something in addition to God was responsible for the creation of the earth. Akiba's desire, therefore, could be to refute and dismiss the Gnostic view of demiurgical creation. This passage is

not found in the Hagigah section which we are about to study, **but** is found in Berachot 11b and Sotah 20c of the Palestinian Talmud.

The function of the first part of the gemara to PT Hagigah II:1 is to set up a conflict between two schools of thought, the Akibaite school and the Ishmaelite school. The preference of the gemara for the interpretation of the latter school is clear.

Let us now proceed to the analysis of the common traditions of PT Hagigah II:1 and Genesis Rabbah, chapters 1-8. Our main objective at this point will be to discuss to what extent these traditions are alike and to what extent they are different. We also shall attempt to demonstrate how these traditions reflect the concerns of their authors and of the redactors of the greater literary works in which they appear.

## B. The 'Lying Lips' Polemic

### Passage 1

#### Genesis Rabbah 1:5

Kaopara's name opened: "Let the lying lips be dumb" (Psalm 31:19). This means, 'Let them be bound, made dumb, and silenced.' 'Let them be bound,' as in the verse, "For behold, we were binding sheaves." (Genesis 37:7). 'Let them be made dumb, as it is said, "Or who made a man dumb." (Exodus 4:11) 'Let them be silenced' is its literal meaning. "Which speak arrogantly (atak) against the righteous" (Psalm 31:19). Meaning, against the righteous One concerning matters which He has withheld from his creatures. "With pride!" (Ibid) In order to boast and say, 'I discourse on the account of Creation!' "And contempt!" (Ibid) To think that he is contemptuous of My Honor! (or Glory!) For R. Yosi b. R. Hanina said: Whoever elevates himself at the cost of his fellow. Man's degradation has no share in the World to Come. How much the more in terms of the honor of God. And what is written after it? "Oh how abundant is Your goodness, which You have stored away for them that fear You" (Psalm 31:20). Rav said: Let him have none of Your abundant goodness!

#### Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1, 77c lines 20-28

Rav said, "Let the lying lips be dumb" (Ps. 31:19). Let them be made dumb, bound, and silenced. "Let them be made dumb" as it is written, "And the Lord said to him, "Who has made a man's mouth?" (verse continues, "Or who makes a man dumb or deaf, sighted or blind; Is it not the Lord") (Exodus 4:11). "Let them be bound" as it is written, "For behold we were binding sheaves" (Gen 37:7). "Let them be silenced" should be interpreted literally. "Which speak (Atak) arrogantly concerning the righteous One of the world, things which He has withheld from His creatures. "With pride and contempt" (Ibid). This he who boasts 'I discourse on the account of creation!' thinking that he is as one who labors (in Torah), when (in truth) he is as one who is contemptuous (of it).' R. Josi ben Hanina said, 'Whoever elevates himself at the cost of his fellow man's degradation has no share in the world to come. Is this not even more true concerning he who elevates himself (at the expense) of the glory of the Lord of Worlds?' Is it not written after it, "Oh how abundant is your goodness, which you have laid up for them that fear you" (Ps. 31:20). Let him not partake of your abundant goodness.

In each source, the tradition begins with an interpretation of Psalm 31:19. In Genesis Rabbah, this verse serves as the proem verse.<sup>7</sup> The word "te'alamnah" is interpreted in Genesis Rabbah to mean that those with lying lips should be bound, made dumb, and silenced. The order in the Hagiqah passage is slightly different, "Let them be made dumb, bound, and silenced." Each source interprets each verb in this phrase according to its order within the source itself. The interpretations are the same in each source. Genesis 37:7 is quoted as a proof text for "itourkan." This is based upon the Aramaic translation of this verse which used the Aramaic root "ררר" for the Hebrew root "לך." Thus we may conclude that the Aramaic translations of certain biblical passages were well known. Exodus 4:11 is used as a proof text for the Aramaic "itcharshan." In Exodus 4:11, the words "ilem" and "cheresh" stand side by side as synonyms. The word "ishtatkan" is interpreted according to its literal meaning. This means that the Rabbis viewed Psalm 31:19 as stating: "Let the lying lips be silenced." By this interpretation, the Rabbis were demonstrating that the word 'te'alamnah' had three meanings, and the last of these meanings was the one commonly accepted as the real meaning of the word. Thus, an interpretation is necessary in the first two meanings, but not in the case of the third.

The interpretation of the proem verse continues through the discussion of "Which speak (Atak) arrogantly against the righteous." The "tzadik" or "righteous One" in this verse is taken to be God. Speaking arrogantly against God, we are told, means speaking about things which God has chosen to withhold from his people. Returning to Psalm 31:19, "With pride and contempt," the tradition identifies those who speak arrogantly against God as people who speak about and boast of their gnosis concerning the account of creation. By espousing such gnosis, a person is, according to the

Rabbis, guilty of insulting the glory of God.

The statement by R. Josi b. Hanina should be looked at as the key to the entire issue. R. Josi b. R. Hanina lived in Palestine in the second half of the third century C.E. It is clear from his statement that he viewed those who discoursed on the creation of the world as not only offending the glory of God, but also not having a share in the world to come. In terms of third century Jewish society, this type of polemic, which threatened to deny the offender a share in the world to come, was an extremely harsh and severe one.

The tradition continues by citing Psalm 31:20, a verse which follows the proem verse. This verse is used by Rav to show that the offenders against God's glory, those who discourse on the creation of the world, will not enjoy that which God has stored up for the righteous in the world to come. This could be a reference to the concept that God stored away the primeval light for the enjoyment of the righteous in the world to come.<sup>8</sup> This concept shall be discussed in greater detail in chapter VI of this thesis.

Let us now proceed to examine the meaning and significance of this passage. First, we notice that the passage represents a harsh attitude towards esoteric speculation on the creation of the world. It is possible that the author of this interpretation felt that he was following the interpretation of R. Akiba vis-a-vis such speculation. The three passages quoted, Psalm 31:19-20, Genesis 37:7, and Exodus 4:11 are all interpreted so as to attempt to silence those who engage in creation speculation.

It is also clear that the emphasis of the passage is R. Yosi b. Hanina's assertion that those who engage in this speculation degrade the honor or glory of God, thereby losing their share in the world to come. Notice the similarity of R. Josi b. Hanina's statement to the statement

at the end of Mishnah Hagigah II:1.

Whoever has no regard for the honor of his Creator, it were better for him if he had not been born.

In both PT Hagigah II:1 77c and Genesis Rabbah 1:5, this tradition is followed by another tradition which speaks of the glory or honor of God. In PT Hagigah 77c, the tradition is followed by an interpretation of R. Levi in which the "glory" of God is identified as the events prior to the creation of man. God is said to have chosen to conceal knowledge of these events from man. In Genesis Rabbah 1:5, the concept of God's glory is discussed in terms of the good, not evil, state of the world. This latter passage shall be discussed shortly.

R. Yosi b. Hanina studied in the academy at Tiberias under R. Yochanan. Rabbinic sources record many instances wherein he disagreed with R. Yochanan, and later teachers in Babylonia looked upon his opinions with disdain. For example in BT Sanhedrin 17b we read that wherever it states "They ridiculed it in the West (Palestine)." The text is referring to R. Yosi b. Hanina. His strict attitude towards speculation therefore could have had a possible political implication. While it is likely that R. Yosi directed his polemic at those who held different beliefs who were not from his own circle, it is also possible that he directed his polemic at those within his own circle who engaged in esoteric speculation on the creation of the world.

The authority who is cited at the beginning of the tradition is different in each version. In Genesis Rabbah 1:5, the authority cited is R. Huna in Rav Kappara's name. In PT Hagigah II:1 77c, the authority cited is Rav. Rav Kappara lived in Palestine in the beginning of the third century C.E., and was the author of a compilation of basically legal traditions which sought to explain obscure passages within the Mishnah of Judah ha-Nasi. In many

instances, Bar Kappara disagreed with the rulings found in Judah ha-Nasi's Mishnah. Rabbinic tradition refers to Bar Kappara's compilation as "The Mishnah of Bar Kappara" or "The Great Mishnayot of Bar Kappara."<sup>8</sup> Bar Kappara was also the head of an academy in the "south" of Palestine, possibly in Caesarea.<sup>9</sup> R. Huna is probably the R. Huna who lived in the mid-third century in Sura. His name is mentioned with great frequency in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds.<sup>10</sup> Rav, a third century authority who founded the academy in Sura, studied in the academy of Judah ha-Nasi and was ordained by him. In large measure his opinions seem to be derived from his early experience in Palestine with Judah ha-Nasi and his uncle R. Hiyya.<sup>11</sup>

In compiling or creating the proem, the redactor of this part of Genesis Rabbah, connected this tradition with a tradition which discusses the nature of the created world. This latter tradition ends with a statement by R. Huna in Bar Kappara's name. Because of this, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1:5 then assigned the entire proem to Bar Kappara. Furthermore, in PT Hagigah II:1 77c, Rav is not cited as the author of the statement, "Let him have none of your abundant goodness," whereas in Genesis Rabbah 1:5, Rav is considered to be the author. It is possible that the redactor of Genesis Rabbah assigned this statement to Rav, for Rav could have been the author of the original 'lying lips' polemic itself. In other words, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1:5, had in front of him a tradition similar to the one in PT Hagigah II:1, 77c. He then melded this tradition with the one which follows, with the result being the proem in Genesis Rabbah 1:5.

Bar Kappara was not the author of this polemic, for Bar Kappara seems to have allowed for greater freedom in speculating on the creation of the world. Statements in Genesis Rabbah 1:5 (end) and 1:10 make it clear that Bar

Kappara allowed for this type of esoteric speculation. If we are correct in seeing these two rabbis as holding opposite views on speculation, then it is clear that Bar Kappara could not have been the author of the "Lying Lips" polemic. If Bar Kappara had been the author, we would then have faced the impossible task of explaining how opposite opinions could have been held by the same authority within the same version of a tradition, the proem in Genesis Rabbah 1:5.

In addition, it is clear that Rav's name was associated with the interpretation of Psalm 31:20. In the Midrash Tehillim 31:6, we read:

Rav said: He who puts his faith in a battered idol shall not behold God's goodness, for it is said, "O how abundant is your goodness, which You have laid up for them that fear you."  
(Psalm 31:20)

We notice the similarity of theme in this tradition and in Genesis Rabbah 1:5. The Midrash Tehillim passage possibly points to an early oral tradition which associated Rav with a particular interpretation of Psalm 31:20. Thus it is possible that Rav was either the original author of the entire interpretation or the author of only its last part. This writer prefers the latter possibility. First, how can we account for the fact that Rav, a Babylonian, appears in a tradition within the Palestinian Talmud or for that matter within in Genesis Rabbah wherein most of the authorities are from Palestine? The answer to this question is provided by Z. Frankel who maintains that R. Yosi b. Hanina was Rav's spokesman in Palestine.<sup>12</sup> If this was the case, then it is possible that the author of this tradition was none other than R. Yosi b. Hanina, the authority who makes the most important statement within the entire polemic. The mini-tradition cited by R. Yosi b. Hanina with the words, "And what was written after it?" was none other than the

tradition recorded in Midrash Tehillim 31:6!

Finally, there are certain linguistic differences between the tradition as recorded in PT Hagigah II:1 77c and Genesis Rabbah 1:5. The first is the usage of the word "etmahe" in Genesis Rabbah. This word is found throughout Genesis Rabbah and is felt by Albeck to reflect the redactor of the work.<sup>13</sup> Genesis Rabbah also uses the word "petach" in the beginning of the proem. This word is common to the proem form and its appearance within Genesis Rabbah, a midrash which has many proems, is not surprising. Finally there is the usage of the hermeneutic 'kal vahomer' in both sources. Genesis Rabbah introduces the 'kal-vahomer' by the phrase "al achat kuma vikhama," whereas PT Hagigah II:1 77c introduces it by the phrase "lo kol sheken." In either instance the meaning remains the same. The usage of different introductory phrases could be evidence of different schools of redaction.

As mentioned previously, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah attached the "Lying Lips" polemic to another tradition. This second tradition also dealt with the glory or honor of God, but from an entirely different perspective. This tradition is also found in PT Hagigah II:1 77c, but it is not found following the "Lying Lips" polemic. At this time, we now direct our attention to this tradition.

## Passage 2

Genesis Rabbah 1:5

In human practice, when an earthly king builds a palace on a site of sewers, dung, and garbage, if one says, 'This palace is built on a site of sewers, dung, and garbage,' does he not discredit it! Thus whoever maintains that this world was created out of 'tohu,' 'bohu,' and darkness, does he not discredit (it) (either this world or God's glory). R. Huna said in Bar Kappara's name: If the matter were not written, it would be impossible to say, "God created the heaven and earth;" (Genesis 1:1) out of what? "And the earth was 'tohu' and 'bohu'" etc. (Genesis 1:2).

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1, 77c lines 63-67.

R. Eliezer said to him: Your teacher did not interpret it this way. Rather he likened it to a king who built a palace in a place of sewers, garbage and dung. He who comes and says, 'This palace is built on a place of sewers, garbage, and dung,' does he not **insult** (the palace and the king)? Likewise, he who says that in the beginning the world was water in water, does he not also insult (the world and God)?

This tradition, found in Genesis Rabbah, is in the form of an allegory of an earthly king who builds his palace on a dung heap. This allegory is used to illustrate that the world was not created out of 'Tohu' and 'Bohu,' and to emphasize that a person who holds such a position is mistaken. Such a person would insult the glory of God. It is the idea of 'the glory of God' which provides the thematic connection of the allegory to the "Lying Lips" polemic. R. Huna in Bar Kappara's name disagrees with the position of the allegory. Bar Kappara's position is that 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' were the first creations of God, after which God created the world. Thus Bar Kappara's position could be that 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' were primordial substances.

The PT Hagigah II:1 77c version of the tradition is slightly different. In this version, the allegory is attributed to R. Eliezer. It is not clear however to which R. Eliezer this refers. In any event, the allegory in Hagigah is not anonymous as was the case in Genesis Rabbah 1:5. The earthly king allegory is basically the same. However, in the Hagigah version, there is no direct mention of 'Tohu' and 'Bohu.' This could be merely a chance omission. On the other hand, the omission of 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' could reflect the desire of the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud that heretics not be provided with an argument based clearly on scripture. A clear reference to 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' as primordial substances would be supported by Genesis 1:2, "And the earth was Tohu and Bohu," before God began to create. The Hagigah version instead of using the words 'Tohu' and 'Bohu,' uses the words "water in water." In its view, a person who maintains that the world was originally "water in water" discredits both the world and God as its creator. Therefore, 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' in the Genesis Rabbah version seems to equal "water in water" in the Palestinian Talmud's version. As we shall see later in this chapter, water was seen by some authorities as being the primordial substance

out of which other substances were created.

In terms of its literary style, the version in Genesis Rabbah seems to be less wordy and repetitious than its counterpart in the Palestinian Talmud. For example, in the Hebrew text of the allegory, the Hagigah version repeats the word "bimakom" six times, whereas the Genesis Rabbah version repeats it only twice.

One of the issues at stake in this discussion is the issue of 'creation ex nihilo,' 'creation out of nothing.' The Rabbis are dealing with the question of whether or not there existed some sort of hyllic matter before the creation of the world. This issue is also found in the discussion between the philosopher and R. Gamaliel in Genesis Rabbah 1:9. It is possible that the issue which prompted the creation of the allegory was the anti-cosmic view of the world held by Gnostic sects. 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' are assuredly negative or even possibly evil elements in the view of the Rabbis. In the view of Gnostics, a world created out of 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' would certainly have to be considered a flawed, corrupt, and evil world. 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' therefore could have been seen by Gnostics as being synonyms for the demiurge or at least as the materials used by him to create the physical world. It is possible, therefore, that the omission of the words 'Tohu' and 'Bohu' in the Hagigah version indicates that the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud had a greater sensitivity and concern over the threat of Gnosticism than did the redactor of the parallel passage in Genesis Rabbah.<sup>14</sup>

Let us now examine the placement of the "Lying Lips" polemic and the allegory of the king's palace within the two sources. In FT Hagigah II:1 77c, the "Lying Lips" polemic is preceded by a rule by Ben Sira which limits esoteric speculation. It is followed by a statement by R. Levi to the effect that God's glory has concealed from man knowledge of things prior to the creation of the world.

Thus all three passages seem to have a thematic unity. All stress that man should not speculate concerning the nature of the events which preceded his creation by God. R. Levi's comment about God's glory continues the same theme expressed within the "Lying Lips" polemic by R. Yosi b. Hanina.

The allegory of the king's palace in PT Hagigah II:1 77c appears in the midst of a series of analogies which compare the functions and desires of an earthly king to those of God. The first analogy stresses that God is the ruler of the entire world. The last analogy stresses the protective nature of the king vis-a-vis his personal garden. The intent of this passage seems to be to limit speculation on the events of creation. The thematic unity and flow of these passages do not seem to be as clear as they were in the passages which included the "Lying Lips" polemic. These analogies seem merely to be attached one to another. If a common thematic concern exists within these passages, it would be the concern over an anti-cosmic attitude towards the created world, rather than the concern for 'creatio-ex-nihilo.' Therefore, the recurrent theme of these passages would be a stress on the fact that the God of Israel was the creator and ruler of the world.

As mentioned previously, the "Lying Lips" polemic and the allegory of the king's palace are combined within Genesis Rabbah 1:5. To these traditions is added a saying by R. Huna in Bar Kappara's name. This latter statement reflects a pro-speculation attitude. It would seem that the desire of redactor to create a literary proem overrode his desire for thematic unity. The proem welds together two contradictory positions: the "Lying Lips" polemic and the earthly king allegory, both of which are anti-speculation, are coupled with the pro-speculation tradition of Bar Kappara. The lack of thematic unity within the proem becomes even more apparent when one considers that the first statement by Bar Kappara, which as we have seen, was not

originally his position, was contradicted by the last statement of the proem which is in his name. In this case, therefore, it is clear that the redactor of this passage in Genesis Rabbah was motivated more by considerations of form than by the desire to have thematic unity within the traditions which he preserved.

C. The Rabbis who Possess Gnosis

## Passage 3

Genesis Rabbah 1:6

R. Judah b. R. Simon said: From the commencement of the world's creation, "He reveals deep things" (Daniel 2:22), for it is written, "IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN" (Genesis 1:1), but it is not explained how. Where is it explained? Elsewhere, "That stretches out the heavens like a curtain" (Isaiah 40:22). "AND THE EARTH" (Genesis 1:1) which is also not explained. Where is it explained? Elsewhere, "For he says to the snow, Become earth" (Job 37:6). "AND GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT" (Genesis 1:3), which is also not explained. Where is it explained? Elsewhere "Who covers Yourself with light as a garment" (Psalm 104:2).

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1, 77c lines 4-15

NOR THE STORY OF CREATION BEFORE TWO. R. Ba in the name of R. Judah. It (the halacha of the Mishnah) is according to R. Akiba. Perhaps it is as R. Ishmael interprets the prohibition (or deed). From this, R. Judah b. Pazi sat and explained that in the beginning the world was water in water. This shows the halacha is according to R. Ishmael. R. Judah b. Pazi interpreted, 'In the beginning the world was water in water? What is the support for this? "And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters"' (Genesis 1:2). After which he made the snow from it. "He casts forth His ice like crumbs." (Psalm 147:17). After which He made the earth, "For He says to the snow, Become earth" (Job 37:6). And the earth stands on the water, "To Him that spread forth the earth above the waters" (Psalm 136:6). And the water stands on the mountains, "The water stood above the mountains" (Psalm 104:6). And the mountains stand on the wind (ruah). "For lo, He that forms the mountains and creates the wind" (Amos 4:13). The spirit hangs in the winds. "Stormy fulfilling (carrying) his word" (Psalm 148:8). God made the storm as an amulet and hung it on His arm as it is said, ("The eternal God is a dwelling place and) underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27)

The commonality between these two passages is the usage of Job 37:6, "For he says to the snow, Become earth!" This verse is used to account for the creation of the earth from snow. It is found in conjunction with other verses all of which seem to impart information concerning the creation of the world. The way in which these verses are interpreted, therefore, constitutes a type of esoteric speculation or Jewish gnosis. In each passage, the underlying theological principle seems to be the same; namely, that knowledge concerning the events of creation as described in Genesis 1, may be found in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible. In other words Genesis 1 was seen by the Rabbis as giving a general "outline" of creation, and the remainder of the Hebrew Bible was seen as a source from whence the specifics of creation could be culled.

As we shall see, the gnosis in these passages runs counter to the Rabbinic attempt to limit esoteric speculation as found in the "Lying Lips" polemic. There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, this type of gnosis, being based upon verses from the Hebrew Bible, did not demean the honor of God. The second explanation is one which recognizes that in the second through fourth centuries C.E., there were two schools of thought, each possessing a different attitude towards esoteric speculation. In this chapter, we have seen evidence of the more lenient attitude of Ishmael and of Bar Kappara concerning esoteric speculation. Their attitude is contrasted with the stricter approach of Akiba, R. Yosi b. Hanina, and Rav. We do not know whether these varying opinions existed continually in academies from the second through the fourth centuries C.E. Nevertheless, we do know, based on the evidence, that there were two approaches to the question of esoteric speculation. With this in mind, let us now proceed with an examination of the context and content of these

passages, each of which seems to present us with an example of Jewish gnosis on the creation of the world.

The passage from Hagigah II:1 77a illustrates how the strict attitude of Akiba towards esoteric speculation on creation was rejected in favor of the more lenient attitude of Ishmael. The gemara states, "Perhaps it is as R. Ishmael interprets the prohibition." The tradition which follows, which is brought forth in the name of R. Judah b. Pazi, serves as an example of Ishmael's position. It is clear that this tradition contradicts and violates the prohibition of the Mishnah that speculation concerning the creation of the world should not be discussed before two people.

This tradition, which represents Jewish gnosis, is attributed to R. Judah b. Pazi. R. Judah b. Pazi lived in Lod in Palestine in the late third and early fourth century C.E. His real name seems to have been R. Judah bar Simeon b. Pazi. The Palestinian Talmud refers to him as R. Judah b. Pazi, whereas Genesis Rabbah refers to him as R. Judah b. R. Simon.<sup>15</sup> In the PT Hagigah II:1 77a passage, he maintains that originally the world was "water in water." This phrase, regardless of its meaning, illustrates clearly the two different attitudes toward speculation which existed among the Rabbis. In the allegory of the king's palace which was discussed in the last section of this chapter, we read in the name of R. Eliezer:

Likewise he who says that in the beginning the world was water in water, does he not also insult (the world and God)?

As stated in the last section, we do not know who this R. Eliezer was. It is clear however that his opinion was the exact opposite of the opinion held by R. Judah b. Pazi.

After Judah b. Pazi's opening statement, the gemara quotes his account of creation. His account of creation

consists of assertions concerning the order and nature of creation. Each of the assertions is based upon a biblical proof text. The following illustrates Judah b. Pazi's order and nature of creation, and the scriptural verses which he used in support of this order.

1. Water - Genesis 1:2
2. Snow - Psalm 147:17
3. Earth - Job 37:6
4. Earth stands on water - Psalm 136:6
5. Water stands on mountains - Psalm 104:6
6. Mountains stand on "ruach" (wind or spirit)  
Amos 4:13
7. "Ruach" hangs in the winds - Psalm 148:8
8. The wind is symbolic of God - Deuteronomy 37:27

The final step in this order was not stated because it was considered to be obvious. This step would have been to relate the idea of the wind as symbolic of God to Genesis 1:2 "and the ruach (wind or spirit) of God hovered over the water(s)." In such a way, the interpretation returns to the verse by which it began. Genesis 1:2 serves as the "chapter heading" or "general category" which the entire speculation is based. Seven verses from the rest of the Hebrew Bible give us the "particulars" concerning the "general category" of Genesis 1:2. The basic theological assertion of R. Judah b. Pazi's speculation seems to be that God is the supporting, as well as the creating, agent of the universe.

The tradition in Genesis Rabbah 1:6 once again is an example of Jewish gnosis concerning the creation of the world. Here the interpretation is based upon Daniel 2:22 and Genesis 1:2. The idea that Genesis 1:2 serves as the general category with the rest of the Hebrew Bible providing the particulars of creation is clearly stated in this tradition. Daniel 2:22, "He reveals deep and secret things," is used by the tradition as a proof of this type of methodology. In other words, Daniel 2:22 is read as, "God reveals in the rest of the Hebrew Bible the deep and secret events

of creation which He only intimated in Genesis 1."

As in the tradition in the Palestinian Talmud, R. Judah bar Simeon b. Pazi is the author of the interpretation in Genesis Rabbah 1:6. In Genesis Rabbah 1:6, R. Judah b. Simon's interpretation is slightly different than that in the Palestinian Talmud. The account in Genesis Rabbah 1:6 is much shorter. It begins with the assertion based on Genesis 1:2 that "In the beginning God created the heaven." The manner in which the heaven was created is explained by Isaiah 40:22. The manner in which the earth and light were created is explained by Job 37:6 and Psalm 104:2 respectively.

In Genesis Rabbah 1:6, the tradition discussed above is preceded by the following tradition:

R. Judah b. Simon began his interpretation with, "And He reveals deep and secret things" (Daniel 2:22). THE DEEP THINGS refers to Gehenna, as it is written, "But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the nether-world" (Proverb 9:18). "THE SECRET THINGS" refers to the Garden of Eden, as it is written: "and for a refuge and shelter" (Eden) (Isaiah 4:6). Another interpretation, "AND HE REVEALS DEEP THINGS." This refers to the actions of the wicked, as it is written, "Woe to those who hide from the Lord their counsel" (Isaiah 29:15). "HE KNOWS WHAT IS IN THE DARKNESS" (Daniel 2:22). This too refers to the actions of the wicked, as it is written "Whose deeds are in the dark" (Isaiah 29:15). "AND THE LIGHT DWELLS WITH HIM" (Daniel 2:22). This refers to the actions of the righteous, as it is written "Light is sown for the righteous" (Psalm 97:11). R. Abba of Serungayya said, "AND THE LIGHT DWELLS WITH HIM" (Daniel 2:22). This refers to the messianic king.

These two traditions are recorded together in Yalkut Shimoni Daniel Remez 1060. For the most part, however, the latter tradition in Genesis Rabbah 1:6 is recorded separately as in Yalkut Shimoni Genesis Remez 3, Yalkut

Shimoni Psalms Remez 862, Yalkut Shimoni Job Remez 922, Yalkut Shimoni Isaiah Remez 446, and Yalkut Hamakhiri 40:22. In all of these sources, except for Yalkut Shimoni Job Remez 922, Daniel 2:22 is the starting point for the interpretation. Thus based upon the literary evidence, we may conclude that the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1:6 purposely chose to attach these two traditions. Let us see if it is possible to understand both why and how the redactor did this.

The first tradition in Genesis Rabbah 1:6 seems to stress knowledge. God has revealed to the person who possesses knowledge (or gnosis), the path of good and the path of evil. Once a person "knows" the path of good and the path of evil, it then is up to him to choose. The path of good is symbolized by the "secret things" of Daniel 2:22, whereas the path of evil is symbolized by the "deep things" of the same verse. The interpretation is divided into three sections, each of which contrasts good with evil. The following chart outlines the tradition.

Good	Evil
"Secret things"	"Deep things"
A. Garden of Eden	Gehenna
B. (no parallel)	actions of the wicked
C. Light, the actions of the righteous	Darkness, the actions of the wicked

It is probably that part of this tradition is lacking given the fact that there is no parallel in level B. Yalkut Shimoni Daniel Remez 1060, being a later text than Genesis Rabbah, attempts to solve this difficulty by dividing the first part of the Isaiah 29:15 proof-text. In other words, part of Isaiah 29:15 refers to "deep things" and part refers to "secret things."

Another interpretation: "HE REVEALS DEEP THINGS" (Daniel 2:22). This refers to the deeds of the wicked, as it is written "Woe to those deep from the Lord" (Isaiah 29:15). "Secret things" (Daniel 2:22) refers to "hide their counsel" (Isaiah 29:15).

This interpretation of Yalkut Shimoni "works" linguistically from the standpoint of the common Hebrew roots used in the two verses. However, it does not "work" in a thematic sense, for the prooftext for "secret things" does not apply to the concept of good as did the other prooftexts, Isaiah 4:6 and Psalm 97:11. In short, the interpretation of Yalkut Shimoni Daniel Remez 1060 sought to solve the problem of a missing part of the tradition by providing such a part. However, in its conjecture of what was missing, Yalkut Shimoni Daniel Remez 1060 ended up with a rather forced interpretation which does not follow the thematic flow of the tradition.

The first tradition in Genesis Rabbah 1:6 concludes with a messianic comment by R. Abba of Serringayya. Most likely the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1:6 added this interpretation to the tradition discussed above. As proof of this, we may cite the following tradition found in Lamentations Rabbah 1:16.

R. Biba of Senguriah said:  
His name is Nehirah, as it is written  
"And the light dwells with him" (Daniel 2:22)  
The word is written 'Nehirah.'

The word for light in Daniel 2:22 is written as "Nehirah," yet read as "Nehorah." R. Biba of Senguriah interprets Daniel 2:22 in such a way which permits him to maintain that the name of the Messiah is 'Nehirah.' This tradition is not connected in this source to either of the traditions of Genesis Rabbah 1:6.

It should be clear by now that it is Daniel 2:22 which serves as the tie between the two major traditions of Genesis Rabbah 1:6. Both traditions are attributed to R. Judah b. Simon, **and it** is possible that he actually was the author of both traditions. On the other hand however, it is also possible that only the second tradition may be attributed to him and that his name was appended to the first tradition by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah. We have

already seen evidence of the penchant by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah for taking the last authority in the proem and making it appear as though this authority was the author of the entire proem. We saw this in our discussion of Bar Kappara and the "Lying Lips" polemic in the last section of this chapter.

Finally, it should be noted that Daniel 2:22 was considered to be one of the most important verses in the Hebrew Bible in terms of Merkabah (chariot) mysticism. In this regard, note the following tradition which appears in Seder Olam Rabbah chapter 30.

"He reveals deep things and secret things" (Daniel 2:22). "Deep things." This refers to the depth of the Merkabah. "Secret things" This refers to the account of creation (Ma'aseh Bereishit) "He knows what is in the darkness." (Daniel 2:22). This is (his) giving of punishment to evil doers. "And the light dwells with him" (Daniel 2:22). This is (his) giving of reward to the righteous in the world to come.

Seder Olam Rabbah records very early traditions. It is mentioned frequently within the Babylonian Talmud. In BT Yebamot 82 b, R. Yochanan, a third century Palestinian authority, says that the author of Seder Olam Rabbah was Yosi b. Halaftha, a second century authority in Palestine.<sup>16</sup> Thus it is possible that this text indicates that Daniel 2:22 was seen by certain second and third century Rabbis as a mystical text which alluded to esoteric knowledge or Jewish gnosis.

In the two traditions of Genesis Rabbah 1:6 and the tradition of PT Hagigah II:1 77a (discussed above in this section), one finds the common underlying assumption that the Rabbis saw themselves as being heirs to the traditions of the biblical prophets. As a result, they felt that they possessed the authority of the latter as well. Mishnah Avot 1:1, for example establishes clearly that the chain of transmission

of God's will began with Moses, was passed to the prophets, who eventually passed on this knowledge to the men of the Great Assembly or the Rabbis themselves. This knowledge was not only a knowledge of the commandments, but was also a knowledge of things concerning the creation and nature of the world and of the relation of God to it. Knowledge concerning the creation of the world may be obtained from the Rabbis who possess it. The content of this knowledge which the Rabbis possess is their ability to show how the prophets and the writings illustrate and clear up the vagueness and ambiguity present in the account of creation in Genesis 1.

This type of interpretation may be considered to be Jewish gnosis. As noted earlier, such interpretation seems to contradict the dictum of the Mishnah concerning public speculation on the account of creation. It is possible, therefore, that these traditions reflect only the more lenient side of a conflict between two groups of Rabbis concerning esoteric speculation. Moreover, the passage could reflect an attempt by this particular group of Rabbis to provide their followers with a Jewish concomitant to Gnostic speculation. It is likely that a text such as Daniel 2:22 was used by Gnostics to support their claim that they were the sole possessors of knowledge. A Gnostic interpretation of Daniel 2:22, for example, would see the Supreme God as the subject of the verse. It would see the "deep and secret things" as being a reference to gnosis; the "darkness" ("He knows what is in the darkness") as symbolic of the created world; and the "light" as being the primordial light of salvation which coexists with the Supreme God. Thus the desired effect of this type of Jewish gnosis could have been to combat the Gnostic speculation which it resembled, and to provide the Jewish people with what the Rabbis felt was the proper understanding of these verses and the ideas behind them.

D. The "Above, Below, Before and After" Phrase

Passage 4

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

R. Jonah said in R. Levi's name: Why was the world created with a "Bet?" Just as the "Bet" is closed on the sides but open in front, so you are not permitted to investigate what is above and what is below, what is before and what is after.

Palestinian Talmud, Hagigah II:1, 77c lines 41-44.

R. Jonah said in the name of R. Levi: The world was created with a "Bet." Just as a "Bet" is closed on all its sides and open on one side, thus you are not permitted to investigate what is above and what is below, what is before and what is after. Rather only from the day the world was created (May you investigate).

Mishnah Hagigah II:1

Whoever thinks about four things, it were better for him if he had not been born: What is above? What is below? What is before? And what is after?

This tradition seems to be based upon the shape of the Hebrew letter "Bet," which is closed on three sides and open on one. The shape of this letter may account for the "above," "below," and "before" limitations, but not the "after." Just what the word "le'echor" or "after" refers to vis-a-vis the "Bet" is not clear. However, we may ask what it means only if we take the image presented by the phrase, "above, below, before and after" to be a literal image. As a literal image, the phrase presents us with the problem of applying a four dimensional prohibition to a letter whose shape would only "limit," so to speak, three of the four dimensions. It is possible, however, that the phrase in this tradition was meant to be taken as a whole unit which would limit speculation in general, instead of four units limiting four types of speculation. The significance of this possibility will become apparent shortly.

It is possible that the earliest Jewish source in which the phrase "above, below, before" is mentioned is Mishnah Hagigah II:1. As in the first two sources in this passage, the meaning of the phrase in the Mishnah is not readily apparent. Its placement (see appendix #2) suggests that it has something to do with public speculation on "Ma'aseh Bereishit" (the account of creation), and/or "Ma'aseh Merkabah" (the account of the chariot). This is the concern of the passage which precedes it within the Mishnah. After the phrase, the Mishnah concerns itself with the honor or glory of God. What specific offense the author of the Mishnah had in mind in his usage of the phrase is not clear. What is clear is that he had a definite offense in mind as evidenced by the severity of the punishment. According to the author of this Mishnah, a person who is guilty of such an offense should never have lived. In other words, the exact nature of this offense may not be clear to us, but it certainly was a specific offense in the eyes of he who used the phrase.

The earliest appearance of a form resembling the "above, below, before and after" phrase appears in a non-Jewish source. We find this phrase in an Akkadian letter of the king of Arrat to the king of Assyria. In this letter, the king of Arrat describes himself as he

Who rules what is before, what is after, what is to the right, what is to the left, what is above and what is below; the most high, extolled and exalted king.<sup>17</sup>

The letter describes six realms, dimensions, or directions, contrasted to the four described in the Mishnah. This description is used by the king as a claim to hegemony over his realm.

There is also reason to believe that biblical Judaism viewed God in a similar manner. God according to the Bible was the ruler of every place. Psalm 139:7-10 states;

Where shall I go from Your ruah (spirit)?  
Or where shall I flee from Your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, You are there!  
If I make my bed in the nether world, You are there!  
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the farthest parts of the sea  
Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.

In this passage we have four dimensions described. They are

1. up-"heaven"
  2. down-"netherworld"
  3. east-"wings of the morning"
  4. west-"farthest parts of the sea"
- (according to the perspective of a person in Palestine)

Let us now return to the Mishnah. It is possible that the offense which the Mishnah originally had in mind was the offense of one who through his earthly hegemony, presumes to liken himself to God. We have seen how the earliest usage of the "above, below, before and after" phrase seems to have been as a designation of dimensions of space. Thus the

words "before" and "after" could have originally referred to space dimensions. For example, it is possible to say in both English and Hebrew, "He is standing before me," or "You will follow after me." If this was the original meaning of the "above, below, before and after" phrase, then it is clear that we should view the phrase as a complete expression with one meaning: God's realm. As such, it would be an injustice to the original meaning of the phrase to break it down literally into its constituent parts, and to attempt to analyse each part individually.

There were three possible interpretations of the "above, below, before and after" phrase.

The first is to see the phrase as indicating a dimension of place. In Hagigah 11b of the Babylonian Talmud, Rashi interprets "before" as being "outside the curtain of the firmament to the east," and "after" as being "outside the curtain to the west." Thus the interpretation of the phrase as indicating dimensions of space was not only the earliest interpretation, but also one reflected in the Middle Ages. In the late Amoraic period, this interpretation could have been a referent to Shiur Komah and Merkabah (chariot) mysticism, both of which discuss the nature and dimensions of the heavenly realm. It is possible that authorities within the Amoraic community looked with disdain upon this type of mysticism.

The second interpretation is to see the phrase as reflecting to dimensions of time. It is possible that the phrase was applied negatively to either Gnostics or Jews who engaged in speculation on the creation of the world. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a non-linear concept of time. Therefore if we interpreted the phrase as four individual restrictions, we would have problems explaining how the words "above" and "below" apply to time. On the other hand, when the phrase applied to dimensions of place, we saw that the entire phrase may be viewed as a

unitary metaphorical expression. If so, then why not view the entire phrase as a metaphorical expression referring to a time designation? This apparently was the view of either the redactor of Genesis Rabbah or a later copyist of the midrash, as evidenced by the following variant. In the Paris and Oxford manuscripts of Genesis Rabbah, the clause "Rather only from the day that the world was created (may you speculate.\*)" appears after the "above, below, before and after" clause. If we take the phrase as four individual units, then the placement of this clause should have been after the word "before" and not following the word "after," the last word in the phrase. Whether the clause in the variant was an original part of Genesis Rabbah or not, it is clear that the author of this comment viewed the entire phrase as a metaphorical expression which prohibited speculation on the events which preceeded the creation of the world.

The third possibility is to view the first two words of the phrase, "above" and "below," as applying to a place limitation, and the last two words of the phrase, "before" and "after," as applying to a time limitation.

It is possible that these three ways of interpreting the "above, below, before and after" phrase could have existed simultaneously in any one historical period. In other words, a time or a place interpretation of the phrase or a combination of the two could have existed at the same time. Given the hypothesis of three possible interpretations, let us now direct our attention to the ways in which the tradition itself interprets the "above, below, before and after" phrase.

## Passage 5

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

R. Jonah said in R. Levi's name: Why was the world created with a "bet?" Just as the "bet" is closed on its sides but open in the front, so you are not permitted to speculate upon what is above and what is below, what is before and what is after. Bar Kappara said: "For ask now of the days past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth" (Deuteronomy 4:32). You may speculate from the time that days were created, but you may not speculate on what was prior to that. "And from one end of the heaven to the other" (Ibid), you may investigate, but you may not investigate what was before this. R. Judah b. Pazi speculated on the account of creation in accordance with Bar Kappara.

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1, 77c lines 32-44

R. Jonah in the name of R. Ba. It is written "For ask now of days past which were before you" (Deuteronomy 4:32). Are you able to speculate from before the act of creation? It is written, "Since the day that God created man upon the earth" (Ibid). Is one able (to speculate) from the sixth day onward? It is written "The first days." We have here an instance of Scriptures making a general statement and then limiting it. Thus we learn from the sixth day. Just as the sixth day possesses a special character from among the six days of creation, so too you should bring me only that which is similar to the sixth day. Is it possible to know that which is above the heavens and that which is below the deep? It is written, "from one end of the heavens unto the other end of the heavens" (Deut. 4:32). In short you may speculate in your heart until the time of creation, from the time of creation on, you and your voice (publically) may speculate from one end of the world to the other. Bar Kappara taught: "Since the day" (that God created man upon the earth) (Deut. 4:32). R. Judah b. Puzi lectured (on the account of creation) in accordance with Bar Kappara. R. Hiyyah lectured in accordance with the opinion of R. Ba. R. Jonah said in the name of R. Levi. The world was created was a "bet." Just as a "bet" is closed on all its sides and open on one side, thus you are not permitted to investigate what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind. Rather (only) from the day that the world was created.

## Passage 5 Continued

Tosephta Hagigah 2:7

Whoever puts his mind to four matters, it is better for him if he had not been born. What is above, what is below, what is before, what is after. The Torah states, "Since the day that God created man on earth" (Deut. 4:32). Are you able (to speculate) until the celestial bodies were created for the Torah states "From one end of heaven to the other" (Ibid)? What does the Torah state? "Since the day that God created man on the earth" (Ibid), you may speculate on what is above, what is below, what was in the past, and what will be in the future.

Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 11b-12a

NOR THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION IN THE PRESENCE OF TWO.  
From where do we infer this? This Rabbis taught: "For ask now of the days past" (Deut. 4:32), one may inquire, but two may not inquire. One might have thought that one may inquire concerning the precreation period. Therefore Scripture teaches: "Since the day that God created man upon the earth" (Ibid). One might have thought that one may (also) not inquire concerning the six days of creation. Therefore Scripture teaches: "The days past which were before you" (Ibid). One might have thought one may (also) inquire concerning what is above and what is below, what is before and what is after. But now this is inferred from, "From one end of heaven to the other" (Ibid). Why do I need "Since the day that God created man upon the earth" (Ibid)? To illustrate that which R. Eleazar taught. For R. Eleazar said: The first man (extended) from the earth to the firmament, as it is said: "Since the day that God created man upon the earth" (Ibid). As soon as he sinned, the Holy One, blessed be He, placed His hand upon him and diminished him, for it is said: "You have fashioned me after and before and laid Your hand upon me" (Psalm 139:5).

Pesikta Rabbati 21:21

R. Jonah said in the name of R. Levi: The world was created with the letter "bet." Even as the "bet" is closed on three sides, but is open on one side, so exposition of what is above the world and what is beneath it, what preceded the creation of man and what is to follow after it, is closed off to you, (and only exposition of events in this world after the creation of man is open to you). Bar Kappara derived the degree of limitation upon exposition from the verse, "For ask now of the first days, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon earth" (Deut. 4:32). Offhand, one might suppose, according to this verse, that one is permitted to ask questions in public only about events

since the sixth day of creation and after it. But since the verse begins with ask now of the first days, we have here an instance of Scripture's making a general statement and then limiting it. Accordingly we are to infer the degree of limitation upon exposition from the limiting phrase since the sixth day. What is the special character of the sixth day? It is one of the six days of creation. Hence in exposition you are not to refer to any days other than those which are like the sixth day. In short, you are days of creation. You might think one is permitted to expound publically on what is above the heavens and what is below the deep. Hence the verse goes on to limit you, saying, "Ask now... from the one end of heaven unto the other" (*Ibid*). In short, you are not to expound publicly on anything except the world in which you live. In keeping with the opinion of Bar Kappara, R. Yudan b. Pazzi expounded Scripture publicly in regard to the six days of creation.<sup>18</sup>

The traditions which comprise passage 5 all point to the association of the "above, below, before and after" phrase with Deuteronomy 4:32

For ask now of first days which were before you,  
Since the day that God created man on the earth  
and ask from one end of heaven to the other,  
Whether such a great thing as this has ever  
happened or was ever heard of.

The interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:32 in these passages is based only upon the first half of the verse. For the sake of discussion, we shall further divide the first half of the verse into three distinct parts, a, b, and c: 4:32a- "For ask now of first days were before you," 4:32b- "Since the day God created man upon the earth," and 4:32c- "Ask from one end of the heavens to the other."

In the Hagigah II 77c version, the interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:32 precedes the citation of the phrase. The interpretation of Deut. 4:32 is attributed to R. Jonah in the name of R. Ba. R. Jonah was the head of the academy in Tiberias in 350 C.E. R. Ba was probably R. Abba bar Zabdai a late third century Palestinian authority who, in his day, was also one of the leading scholars in the academy in Tiberias. Thus the tradition of interpretation of Deut. 4:32 seems to have originated in Palestine, possibly within the academy at Tiberias.

The PT Hagigah II:1 77c version of this tradition begins by quoting 4:32a. 4:32b is interpreted as a time limitation, limiting the acceptable period of speculation to things which occurred after man's creation on the sixth day. The text then returns to 4:32a and asks itself whether this could refer to events prior to the sixth day. If it could, then its interpretation of 4:32b, "since the day that God created man on the earth," would be incorrect. The text answers itself, maintaining that "the first days" of 4:32a is a general statement applying to the first days of the creation

of the world. 4:32a is then specifically limited by 4:32b which applies to the sixth day. Both 4:32a and 4:32b are interpreted as time limitations.

At first glance, Deut. 4:32c appears to be interpreted as a place restriction: one may speculate only upon the created physical world and not upon the heavenly realm of God. However, upon investigation it becomes apparent that 4:32c is also a time limitation, as seen from the conclusion derived from it by the text:

In short you may speculate in your heart  
until the time of creation, from the time  
of creation on, you and your voice (publically)  
may speculate from one end of the world to the  
other.

The intent of this passage seems to be that from the first through the sixth day, one may interpret the account of creation only in private, whereas from the sixth day on, one is free to discourse on the account of creation in public.

The text then states that Bar Kappara taught another opinion based upon 4:32b, and that R. Judah b. Pazi lectured in accordance with him. R. Hiyyah is said to have lectured in accordance with R. Ba. From what we have seen in sections B and C of this chapter, we can hypothesize that Bar Kappara interpreted "Since the day" as referring to the first day of creation even though this is not clear to line 40 of BT Hagigah II:1, 77c. We know that both Bar Kappara (Genesis Rabbah 1:5 end) and R. Judah b. Simon b. Pazi (Genesis Rabbah 1:6) held the more lenient opinion and felt that it is possible to study and lecture on the account of creation of the world prior to the creation of man.

It is at this point that the Palestinian Talmud's version brings forth the "above, below, before and after" phrase. The phrase is stated in the name of R. Jonah in R. Levi's name. R. Levi lived in Palestine in the late

third century. . . the basis of the preceding interpretation of Deut. 4:32, it is clear to this writer that the phrase was interpreted by the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud to be a time prohibition and limitation. We have seen no evidence based upon the interpretation of Deut. 4:32 that a place limitation is intended here.

It is easy to see from this passage two distinct groups of opinions regarding speculation on the account of creation. The stricter view, as held by R. Jonah, R. Ba, R. Levi and R. Hiyyah, maintained that one could speculate only from the sixth day on. The more lenient view, held by Bar Kappara and R. Judah b. Pazi, held that one could speculate on the events of creation from the first to the sixth days. R. Jonah's interpretation attempts to work out the contradiction between "the first days" of Deut. 4:32a and "since the day that God created man" of Deut. 4:32b. He attempts to solve the apparent contradiction between the first day and the sixth day in terms of speculation on the account of creation. The last sentence in this tradition which follows the "above, below, before and after" phrase reads:

Rather from the day that the world was created  
(you may speculate).

If we desire that the position of R. Jonah be consistent with his previous position, then this sentence should be interpreted to mean "the day that the world was completed."

In the Genesis Rabbah version of the tradition in passage 5, we once again see evidence of two distinct positions. This time, however, the "above, below, before and after" phrase precedes the interpretation of Deut. 4:32.

As in the version in the Palestinian Talmud, the phrase is said by R. Jonah in the name of R. Levi. Deut. 4:32 is interpreted by Bar Kappara, and not by R. Jonah or R. Ba as in the Palestinian Talmud. This fact allows us to see how

the same verse could serve as a proof-text for two contradictory opinions.

Bar Kappara interprets both 4:32a and 4:32b as a time limitation, being that one may speculate on the account of the creation of the world from the first day of creation itself. 4:32c is also given a "time" interpretation: "From one end of the heaven to the other" is taken by Bar Kappara to be a synonym for the created world. After citing 4:32c, Bar Kappara states:

You may investigate, but you  
may not investigate what was before this.

This means that one may speculate on the created world from the time when God began to create it; namely, from the first day. However, one is not permitted to speculate upon events which preceded the time when God began to create the world. It is clear, therefore, that Bar Kappara interprets Deut. 4:32 strictly in terms of a "time" limitation. Once again we see that R. Judah b. Simon b. Pazi followed Bar Kappara in permitting speculations from the first day. Finally, given the interpretation of Deut. 4:32 in Genesis Rabbah 1:10, it is clear that the "above, below, before and after" phrase which precedes it, is to be taken as a "time" rather than "place" limitations on esoteric speculation.

The Tosephta version of the tradition in passage 5 also begins with the "above, below, before and after" phrase which is followed by the interpretation of Deut. 4:32. In this version, no authorities are listed. In addition, the form of the "above, below, before and after" phrase is the form found in Mishnah Hagigah II:1, not the form associated with the interpretation of the shape of the letter "bet." The London manuscript of the Tosephta adds "What was and what will be" to the "above, below, before, and after" phrase. It is doubtful that this addition records part of the original tradition. However, the

addition does record what someone considered to be the bias of the entire phrase. It was an attempt to limit speculation according to a "time" consideration.

Deut. 4:32a is omitted in the Tosephta version. 4:32b is used as a **prooftext** for the "above, below, before and after" phrase. 4:32c, "From one end of heaven unto the other," is raised as an objection to the interpretation of 4:32b. Basing itself on 4:32c, the text suggests that one may speculate on the account of creation of the world from the time when the heavenly bodies were created, or, in other words, from the fourth day of creation. The Tosephta then repeats 4:32b which it sees as refuting the objection raised by the interpretation of 4:32c. This version ends with a restatement of the "above, below, before and after" phrase which omits "before and after" in favor of "what was in the past and what will be in the future." Thus, the restatement illustrates that the redactor of the Tosephta interpreted the mishnaic version of the "above, below, before and after" phrase as a "time" limitation. Moreover, as was the case in the versions of Genesis Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud, it is clear that Deut. 4:32 is interpreted as a "time" limitation. However, unlike Genesis Rabbah and like the Palestinian Talmud, the Tosephta follows the stricter view allowing speculation only from the sixth day on.

In the Babylonian Talmud's version of the tradition in passage 5, the interpretation of Deut. 4:32 precedes the citation of the "above, below, before and after" phrase. 4:32a, the "first days," is used by the text to show that the concern is for "Ma'aseh Bereishit," the account of the creation, and not "Ma'aseh Merkabah," the account of the chariot in Ezekiel 1. It does this by stating that only one person and not two may inquire into the account of creation. This, of course, is the position taken by Mishnah Hagigah II:1.

The Babylonian Talmud's version interprets 4:32a as a

reference to the first day of creation and 4:32b as a reference to the sixth day. Its position is that 4:32a, "the first days," is to be taken as legally binding. Therefore, one person alone may speculate from the first day of creation. Notice that this interpretation contradicts the interpretation of the Palestinian Talmud which saw 4:32b as a limitation of 4:32a. It is also clear that by this interpretation, the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud created another problem. His problem was how to explain why the Torah saw fit to make the statement in 4:32b at all, seeing that it was overridden by 4:32a. He solves this problem by reciting R. Eliezer's "giant Adam" tradition which is to be found at the end of this version.

The "above, below, before and after" phrase is cited along with 4:32c. It may be interpreted as either "time" or a "place" limitation. In terms of context, given that which precedes and follows the phrase, it would seem that the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud viewed 4:32c as being synonymous with creation itself, and the "above, below, before and after" phrase as a "time" limitation.

In terms of its legal position, the Babylonian Talmud's version seems to be an attempt at compromising the strict and lenient views. It does this by stating that one may interpret from the first day of creation in accordance with the lenient view of Bar Kappara and R. Judah b. Simon b. Pazi. However, one may not lecture publically on the six days of creation. This accords with the strict interpretation of Mishnah Hagigah II:1, PT Hagigah II:1, 77c, R. Akiba, and most likely R. Jonah.

The most recent version of the tradition in passage 5 is found in Pesikta Rabbati. Pesikta Rabbati is a Palestinian collection of midrashim. It was redacted in either the sixth or the seventh century.<sup>19</sup> Its traditions are attributed for the most part to Palestinian authorities

of the third and fourth centuries C.E. The version in Pesikta Rabbati 21:21 begins with the "above, below, before and after" phrase which is derived from the exposition of the shape of the letter "Bet." As was the case in Genesis Rabbah 1:10 and Palestinian Talmud versions, R. Jonah in the name of R. Levi is the attributed author of this interpretation.

The interpretation of Deut. 4:32 is brought in the name of Bar Kappara. 4:32a and 4:32b are interpreted as a "time" limitation. Up to this point, the redactor of Pesikta Rabbati has quoted the tradition as he found it in Genesis Rabbah. The redactor realized, however, that Bar Kappara's position was not clear due to the fact that 4:32a and 4:32b are quoted together and not separately. Furthermore, the redactor also desired to refute Bar Kappara's lenient attitude. He does this by citing part of the Palestinian Talmud's version which (see above) sees 4:32a as a general statement which is limited by 4:32b. As this is the most recent version of this tradition which we will discuss, it seems to this writer that the Pesikta Rabbati version may indicate that those who favored the stricter interpretation eventually prevailed, and public and private speculation on creation was permitted only from the sixth day.

Deut. 4:32c is interpreted in terms of "place." Of all the versions, only Pesikta Rabbati can be said unequivocally to hold a "place" interpretation. If we apply the interpretation of Deut. 4:32 to the "above, below, before, and after" phrase, then it would seem as though this phrase was both a "time" and a "place" limitation on esoteric speculation. Thus the redactor of Pesikta Rabbati 21:21 maintains that one may only understand the extant, completely created world in terms of both place and time. One may not interpret the events prior to the sixth day. Finally, it is clear that the editor of Pesikta Rabbai knew both the "place" and

"time" interpretation of the "above, below, before and after" phrase, and knew of the Genesis Rabbah and Palestinian Talmud versions of the tradition in passage 5.

In contrasting the various versions of this tradition, we will observe several important points. Before proceeding with the conclusions concerning the association of the "above, below, before and after" phrase with the exegesis of Deut. 4:32, let us examine the following chart which outlines the extant literary forms of this tradition, and the legal position of each form vis-a-vis speculation on the account of creation.

text	4:32a	4:32b	4:32c	legal position and authority
BT Hagigah II:1 77c, lines 32-34	Time: 1st day as a general condition	Time: 6th day as a specific limitation	Time	6th day in public, 1st-6th in private R. Jonah in the name of R. Ba
<u>Genesis Rabbah</u> 1:10	cited together Time: 1st Day		Time 1st Day being the time of crea- tion it- self	1st day, Bar Kappara
<u>Tosephta</u> 2:7	omitted	Time: 6th day	Time: 4th day as an objection	6th day Anonymous
BT Hagigah IIb	Time: 1st day but only in pri- vate	Time: 6th day as an objec- tion	Time- 1st day being the time of creation itself	6th day in pub- lic 1-6 in private Anonymous

text	4:32a	4:32b	4:32c	legal position and authority
<u>Pesikta</u> <u>Rabbati</u> 21:21	cited together 1st day 1st day as a gen- eral condition	6th day a speci- fic limita- tion	Place: only the created world	Bar Kappara-1st day (quoted) redactor of <u>Pesikta Rabbati</u> 21:21 6th Day in public 1-6 in private

The chart illustrates the interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:32. The fact that each of the literary versions of this tradition also contain the "above, below, before and after" phrase enables us to use the interpretation of Deut. 4:32 to understand the redactor's interpretation of the phrase. We have seen how the original meaning of the phrase applied to God's realm. This meaning was found in both the Hebrew Bible and the Akkadian letter cited above. In the Rabbinic period, however, the predominant interpretation of the phrase was a "time" interpretation. In the late Amoraic and Saboraic periods as evidenced by Pesikta Rabbati 21:21, the phrase was interpreted both as a "time" and "place" limitation on speculation.

Given the fact that Deut. 4:32c lends itself to a place interpretation, one may ask why it was interpreted at all in terms of a time limitation? One possible answer is that the redactors of these passages in the Palestinian Talmud, the Tosephta, Genesis Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud, all desired to make a unified reply to only one particular heresy which they viewed as a threat to Jewish belief. In other words, these passages seem to be directed at only one type of heresy; namely, those who interpreted "Ma'aseh Bereishit," the account of creation. The most likely candidate for the target of such a polemic would be Gnostics whose cosmogonic speculation on primordial events led to the assertion that the world was the creation of an evil demiurge.

It appears that in the second and third centuries in Palestine, there was no unanimity among the Rabbi's concerning the limits of esoteric speculation on the account of creation. All of the literary versions of the tradition discussed above agree that speculation on events prior to the first day of creation is prohibited. Nevertheless, the Tosephta, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud adopt the stricter position that public speculation on creation be limited to the events which followed the sixth day of creation. Genesis Rabbah, reflecting the more lenient position of Bar Kappara, allows for speculation to begin with the events of the first day. In addition to having the more lenient attitude towards speculation, Genesis Rabbah 1:10 is also the least explicit version of this tradition. This fact could reflect the lenient attitude of the redactor of this part of Genesis Rabbah who did not feel it necessary to be more explicit in presenting a lenient position.

We have already seen evidence of the historical significance of this tradition vis-a-vis the threat of Gnosticism. Before proceeding with our final conclusions, let us for the sake of completeness examine the traditions in Rabbinic literature wherein the "above, below, before, and after" phrase appears, but not in conjunction with the exegesis of Deut. 4:32.

One such tradition is the following passage which is found in BT Hagigah 16a.

Whoever speculates upon four things, it were better for him if he had not been born. Granted as regards what is above, what is beneath, and what will be after. That is well! But as regards to what was before, what happened, happened! Both R. Yochanan and R. Lakish say, It is like a human king who said to his servants, 'Build me a great palace on a dunghill.' They went out and built it for him. It is not the king's wish to have the name of the dunghill recalled.

This tradition is a direct comment upon part of Mishnah Hagigah II:1. That which "was before" is seen as referring to a period in time. The interpretation which follows is similar to the allegory of the king in Genesis Rabbah 1:5. From this interpretation, it is clear that the period of time in question is prior to the first day when God created the world out of Tohu and Bohu. In other words, prior to the first day of creation, the world consisted of primordial chaos, Tohu and Bohu. After creation, the world becomes the ordered non-chaotic palace of God. The tradition seeks to discourage speculation on the nature of the world prior to creation. Therefore, creation is seen as a process by which God ordered the universe.

The "above, below, before, and after" phrase is also found in the following tradition from BT Megillah 25a, b,

Our Rabbis taught: Some portions (of Scripture) are both read and translated. Some are read but not translated. Some are neither read nor translated.

At this point the tradition gives a list of these portions. Included in this list is the "Ma'aseh Bereishit," the account of creation. The tradition continues:

The account of creation is both read and translated? Certainly! But one might think that by hearing it, people might be led to inquire into what is above, what is below, what is before and what is after.

This tradition makes a direct connection between the phrase and the words "Ma'aseh Bereishit." It shows that the entire phrase was interpreted as a "time" restriction or limitation. The tradition does not analyse the phrase in terms of its constituent parts. The phrase here seems to be a well-known metaphorical expression which sets the limits on the domain of speculation concerning the account of creation. From this tradition, it would seem that the phrase was not applied to speculations about the realm of God, His chariot,

or His throne.

Another tradition in which the "above, below, before, and after" phrase appears is the following passage from BT Talmud 32a:

Alexander of Macedon put ten questions to the sages of the south. He asked: Which is further, from heaven to earth or from east to west? They replied: From east to west. The proof is that when the sun is in the east all can look at it, and when it is in the west all can look at it, but when the sun is in the middle of the sky, no one can look at it.

This is followed by further discussion of the answer to Alexander's question, after which Alexander asks a second question.

Were the heavens created first or the earth? They replied: The heavens were created first, as it says "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He said to them: Was light created first or darkness? They replied: This question cannot be solved. Why did they not reply that darkness was created first since it is written, "Now the earth was Tohu and Bohu and darkness" (Genesis 1:2) and after that "And God said, Let there be light and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). They thought to themselves: Perhaps he will go on and ask what is above and what is below, what is before and what is after. If that is the case, they should not have answered his (first) question about the heaven either? At first they thought that he just happened to ask that question, but when they saw that he pursued the same subject, they felt that they should not answer him lest he should go on to ask what was above and what was below, what was before and what was after.

In this tradition, the "above, below, before, and after" phrase is divided into two parts. The first part, "above and below," applies to speculation on the nature of God's realm. The second part, "before and after," would apply to creation speculation. Therefore, both a "place" and a "time"

interpretation exists within this tradition.

It is possible that the questions in this tradition were originally the questions of Ben Zoma, and not Alexander the Great. This is because of the fact that the next question in the tradition is the question "Who is wise?" The answer given is "He who learns from every man." In Mishnah Avot 4:1 which is an earlier source than the Babylonian Talmud, this latter question is ascribed to Ben Zoma. The relation of Ben Zoma to Gnostic thought will be discussed in section H of this chapter. At this point however it is possible that the question "Who is wise?" would be interpreted by a Gnostic to mean, "Who among you possesses gnosis?" At any rate, this tradition **presents** the "above, below, before, and after" phrase as a well known maxim which seems to have been used by the Rabbis against the overly inquisitive in esoteric matters. This was recognized by Rashi in his commentary on this passage, wherein he states:

They answered him with this expression which was not interpreted further. After this he (the questioner) was restrained for he knew that he should not ask them anything else concerning "ma'aseh bereishit" (the account of creation).

The predominant usage of the "above, below, before and after" phrase in each of the three traditions discussed above is its application to the restriction of speculation on the account of creation. It would seem that this phrase was a well-known, oral maxim which was used in reference to "Ma'aseh Bereishit," the account of creation. In each of the above three traditions, Gnostics must be considered as likely candidates for the source of Rabbinic concern.

It would also appear that we have a clear example of the type of speculations referred to in the phrase. In the "Excerpts of Theodotus" (see above "Introduction"ii) paragraph #78, Theodotus, a Valentinian Gnostic, writes:

Therefore up until the act of Baptism, it is true, as the astrologers maintain, that things happen according to chance. However, after Baptism, the opinion of the astrologers is no longer truthful. Besides this, it is not the immersion alone which liberates one from the clutches of fate, but also gnosis. (meaning) Who are we? What is going to become of us. Where were we? From where did we evolve? Towards what goal are we hastening? From where are we to be redeemed? What is creation? What is re-creation?<sup>20</sup>

In this passage from Theodotus, we see an example of **Valentinian** doctrine which expresses the importance of knowing "what is above, what is below, what is before, and what is after."

Having examined the traditions in which the "above, below, before and after" phrase appears, whether in conjunction with the exegesis of Deut. 4:32 or not, it is now possible to make the following observations. First, the overwhelming majority of traditions use the phrase as an oral maxim dealing with a time limitation on creation speculation. Second, we have seen no evidence which would suggest that this expression was not used against Jews with Gnostic tendencies (such as Ben Zoma in BT Tamid 32a above) or against non-Jews. When applied to Jews, the intent of the phrase was, in most instances, to prohibit public speculation on the events of creation which preceded the sixth day. When applied to non-Jews or even former Jews, the intent of the phrase would have been to act as a counter to the threat of Gnosticism or of Gnostic speculations concerning the genesis and nature of the created world. Third, we may surmise that the original interpretation of the phrase was a "place" interpretation. The change to a "time" interpretation could have ensued as part of the general Rabbinic reaction to Gnosticism. In the hands of the Rabbis, the phrase became an anti-Gnostic polemical device. Finally, it seems likely that the eventual legal position adopted in the Jewish community was that public expositions on the first

to sixth days of the account of creation was prohibited. There is, however, clear evidence that authorities such as Bar Kappara and R. Judah b. Simon b. Pazi permitted such expositions to be made in public. Speculation by the individual in private on the events of the first through the sixth days seems to have been permitted by all authorities. The connection of the phrase to the interpretation of the letter "Bet" seems to have been for the purpose of emphasizing that the limit to all speculation, whether public or private, would be the events of the first day which begin with the "Bet in Bereishit," the first word of the Torah. The specific details concerning the generalities of Genesis 1 are to be found in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible, and knowledge regarding the creation of the world is to be obtained from the Rabbis who possess knowledge of the specifics as found in the Hebrew Bible. As such, it may be safely assumed that the Rabbis viewed the Hebrew Bible as the source of Jewish gnosis concerning the creation of the world.

## E. The "Bet" in Bereishit and the Limitation of Esoteric Speculation

### Passage 6

#### Genesis Rabbah 1:10

Why was it created with a "bet?" To teach that there are two worlds.

#### Tanhuma Nidpas Bereishit #5

Furthermore, why was it created with a "bet?" To teach man that there are two worlds, this world and the world to come. He who performs deeds of goodness in this world will partake of goodness in this world and in the world to come.

#### Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit Remez #2

R. Yehuda ben Pazi interpreted. Why with a "bet?" To show you that there are two worlds, this world and the world to come.

The letter "bet," being the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is interpreted in these traditions to be symbolic of two worlds. The later versions, the Tanhuma and the Yalkut Shimoni, identify the two worlds as this world and the world to come. The Tanhuma also adds a moralistic maxim to the interpretation. Eugene Mihaly, in his book entitled A Song to Creation, interprets the world to come in this tradition as being not a world after death, but a world in the process of becoming.<sup>21</sup> As we saw earlier, Gnostics also postulated the existence of two worlds, the world of the demiurge or the created world, and the world of the high God. These two worlds are almost entirely unrelated. The Rabbinic conception of the two worlds sees them as being related in that the world to come is God's ideal to which man is to strive in this world. To an extent, the world to come may be achieved in this world. God as creator has a relationship to both the ideal and the extant world. By their seeing the two worlds as related, the Rabbis could have been attempting to counter Gnostic anti-cosmos positions with statements in favor of the cosmos and God as its creator. By affirming the good in the created world, in effect the Jew would be attempting to bring the world to come, the world of becoming into the world as created by God.

This tradition is not found in PT Hagigah II:1.

## Passage 7

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

Another interpretation: Why with a "bet?" Because it connotes blessing (beracha). And why not with an "alef?" Because it connotes cursing (arirah). Another interpretation: Why not with an "alef?" In order not to provide a justification for heretics to plead, 'How can ~~the~~ world endure seeing that it was created with the language of cursing.' Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Lo I will create it with the language of blessing and perhaps it will endure!'

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1, 77c lines 46-50

Another interpretation: Why with a "bet?" Because it connotes blessing. And not with an "alef?" Because it connotes cursing. God said, 'I will create my world only with a "bet" so that all of the people of the world will not say, 'How can the world endure seeing that it was created with the language of cursing.' In short, I will create it with a "bet," the language of blessing, in order that it endure!

Pesikta Rabbati 21:21

Another interpretation: Why with the letter "bet?" Because it connotes blessing. But not with the "alef?" Because it connotes cursing. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, In order not to provide a justification to the people of the world to plead, 'How can the world endure seeing that it was created with the language of cursing?' Therefore, I will create the world with a "bet" which connotes blessing and perhaps it will endure!

For the most part, the versions of the tradition in passage 7 are almost identical. Genesis Rabbah refers to "minim" or "heretics," whereas the other two versions both refer to "the people of the world." Both Genesis Rabbah and Pesikta Rabbati use the term "pitchon peh," "justification," whereas the Palestinian Talmud does not. These differences however are all only minor differences of style.

The letter "bet" is said to connote "blessing." This is because the Hebrew word for "blessing," "berachah," begins with the letter "bet." The "alef" is said to connote "cursing" for the Hebrew word for a "curse," "arirah," begins with the letter "alef." The "alef" is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and being the first letter, it should have been the first letter of the creation of the world. Instead, the "bet" at the beginning of the world "bereishit," ("In the beginning") is the first letter of creation. The Torah does not testify to the corrupt nature of the world, but rather to its blessed nature. This clearly is a polemic against Gnostics who held anti-cosmic views and would have questioned the durability, permanence, and inherent goodness in the created world.

## Passage 8

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

Another interpretation: Why with a "bet?" Just as the "bet" has two projecting points, one pointing upward and the other backward, so when we ask it, 'Who created you?', it shows them with its upward point, 'He who is above created me.' And what is his name? It shows them with its back point, 'The Lord is His name.'

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1 77c lines 44-47

And to those who say to the "bet," 'Who created you?', it shows them with a point above and says, 'He who is above.' 'And what is his name?' It shows them with a point behind it and says, 'The Lord ('hashem') is His name. The Lord (adon) is His name.'

Pesikta Rabbati 21:21

Another interpretation: What is the "bet." It has one point above and one point after. They say to the "bet," 'Who created you? It shows them with its point above, 'He who is above created me.' 'And what is his name?' It shows them with its point after, 'The Lord is his name.'

Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit Remez #2

Another interpretation: Why with a "bet?" Because the "bet" has two projecting points, one above and one below it on its after side. He says to the "bet," 'Who brought you into the world? It shows them by its projecting point above, and says to them, "The Lord is one and His name is one."

There are many possible interpretations of this passage depending on how one defines the "points" in the letter "bet." The points could refer to the scribal marks on top of the letter "bet" in the first word of the Torah. On the other hand, the points could refer to the actual shape of the letter "bet." The following diagram illustrates the various possibilities according to the actual shape of the letter



The versions in the Palestinian Talmud and Pesikta Rabbati both use the term "nekudot" which means "points" or "strokes." The "point above" could be either point A or B. The point behind or after could be either points B, C, or D. If it is points B or C, then the intention of the interpretation is to say that God existed prior to creation. This "firstness" is symbolized by the "priority" or "firstness" of God is symbolized by the word "Lord," "adon," which begins with an "alef," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This appears to be the intention of the interpretation in Genesis Rabbah.

A variant tradition in the London manuscript of Genesis Rabbah coincides with the version of the tradition in the Yalkut Shimoni. In these versions, the second point is described as below on its after side. This would refer to either points C or D on the "bet." If it refers to point C, then the intention of the interpretation remains the same as above; namely, to state that God is "first" in creation. If point D is meant, then the intention of the tradition could be to refer to the word "elohim" or God in Genesis 1:1. The Hebrew of this verse begins "bereishit bara elohim." Thus the word "elohim" follows the "bet" in the word "bereishit" in this verse.

Regardless of the specific interpretation, the intention of this tradition seems to be to emphasize the fact that God is the creator of the cosmos.

## Passage 9

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

R. Leazar b. Abinah said in R. Aha's name: For twenty six generations the "alef" complained before the Holy One, blessed be He, pleading before him; Sovereign of the universe, I am the first of the letters, yet You did not create your world with me! God answered: The world and its fullness were created for the sake of the Torah alone. Tomorrow when I come to reveal My Torah at Sinai, I will begin with you: "I ("anoki," which begins with an "alef") am the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:2)

Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12:24

R. Aha said: For twenty-six generations, the 'alef' complained before the Holy One blessed be He saying: Though I am the first of the letters, You did not create the world with me but with a "bet," as it is said, "In the beginning God created" ("bereishit" begins with a "bet"). The Holy One blessed be He answered, As you live, I will make it up to you. For two thousand years while the world was still uncreated, the Torah dwelt in My presence only. When I come to give the Torah to Israel, I will begin with an "alef" as it is said, "I ("anoki" which begins with an "alef") am the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:2)

The "alef," being the first of the letters, complains to God because He did not begin to create the world with an "alef," but with a "bet." In other words, the first word of the Torah begins with a "bet" rather than an "alef," and this fact serves as the source of the tradition. The tradition tells us that the "alef" complained for twenty-six generations. Twenty-six generations is, according to Rabbinic tradition, the number of generations from Adam to Moses. God answers the "alef" with a promise that it will be the first letter of the first word by which God will reveal the Torah to Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

Anti-cosmicism is not the thematic intention of this tradition. The intention of this tradition is to show that God created the world in order that the Torah may be actualized. The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai is more important than even creation itself. The Rabbis here are not demeaning creation, but rather giving to it a specific purpose. The tradition could have served as a polemic against those who rejected Jewish law as found in the Torah, and in the Rabbinic interpretation of the Torah (Oral Torah).

This tradition is also to be found in Pesikta Rabbati 21:21, Tanhuma Buber Yitro # 16, Song of Songs Rabbah 5:8, Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit Remez 2, and Yalkut Hamakhiri Psalm 105:7. For the most part, there is very little change in the recording of this tradition in the Rabbinic sources. Pesikta Rabbati cites within its version Jeremiah 33:25. Song of Songs Rabbah cites Proverbs 3:9. The thematic function of these verses is to indicate that the Torah is the foundation and support of the earth. The authorities to whom this tradition is attributed, are either R. Eleazar b. Abina in R. Aha's name or simply R. Aha. It is not clear who R. Eleazar b. Abina was or when he lived. R. Aha was a fourth century Palestinian who was a recognized authority in legal matters. The target for this polemic

could have been Jewish gnostics, Christian gnostics or apostolic Christians.

Why is it called "alef"? Because it is the first of a thousand (as it is written), "The Lord is remembered for a thousand alef generations."

## Passage 10

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

Bar Huta said: Why is it called "alef?" Because it denotes the sum of a thousand (as it is written), "The word which he commanded for a thousand (elef) generations" (Psalm 105:8).

The Hebrew root alef-lamed-be (which spells the "alef") can also mean to teach. Thus many versions of the tradition state that God intends to teach the Torah to the world for one thousand generations. One thousand in this instance means "for all time," rather than a limited period. The thematic concern for this passage is that of the preceding passage in that the act of creation seems to have been to actualize the world of Torah within the world.

This is a very short but well-known tradition which discusses the meaning of the "alef" as stemming from the number one thousand. This concept is found frequently within Rabbinic sources.<sup>22</sup> A play on words is involved here because the Hebrew root alef-lamed-pe (which spells the letter "alef") can also mean to teach. Thus many versions of this tradition state that God intends to teach the Torah to his people for one thousand generations. One thousand generations in this instance means "for all time," rather than for a limited period. The thematic concern for this passage resembles that of the preceding passage in that the purpose of creation seems to have been to actualize the existence of Torah within the world.

#### F. The Editorial Process in Genesis Rabbah 1:10

In this section, let us examine the way in which the various traditions in Genesis Rabbah 1:10 came to be associated with one another. All of these traditions discuss the "bet" in the word "bereishit," the first word of Torah. It is possible that the editor of this passage collected traditions which interpreted the "bet" in "bereishit," and threw them together in a rather 'hodge-podge' way. However, if this were the case, then we could ask why the editor chose not to include in section 1:10 a tradition which interprets the meaning of the "bet" as being "for the sake of." In Genesis Rabbah 1:4, the "bet" is interpreted in such a way. The theme of this tradition is that the world was created for the sake of the Torah, Moses, and the Rabbis. The tradition in 1:4 certainly resembles thematically the last two traditions in 1:10. Thus it is impossible to maintain that the editor of this passage in 1:10 merely threw things together in a haphazard way, for there seems to have been some criteria of selection by which he chose not to include the tradition in 1:4 or for that matter other traditions which discussed the "bet" in the word "bereishit."

We have examined the individual traditions of Genesis Rabbah 1:10. In many of these traditions, it is apparent that the version of the tradition found in Genesis Rabbah 1:10 is often the least explicit and least wordy of all the versions. Does this mean that the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 had a faulty or incomplete knowledge of the tradition; or does it mean that the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 had an awareness of style and content, an awareness similar to that of any modern day editor? Preferring the latter explanation, it is clear to this writer that Genesis Rabbah 1:10 is highly edited and reflects certain specific concerns held by its editor.

Let us recall that Genesis Rabbah 1:10 arose in and reflects

a community where there was no unanimity concerning the limits of creation speculation. We have seen how Genesis Rabbah 1:10 reflects the more lenient view towards the limits of such speculation. The significance of this fact will become apparent in chapters VI and VII of this thesis.

At this point, however, we may state that the overall thematic concern of the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 seems to have been to illustrate that God in heaven is the creator of the cosmos, and created it with a definite purpose. The connection between the exegesis of Deut. 4:32 (which includes the "above, below, before and after" phrase and which is discussed in section D of this chapter), and the traditions which discuss the letter "bet" is simple. The editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 viewed speculation about the letter "bet" in the word "bereishit" to be synonymous with speculation about the creative process. As such, speculation on the letter "bet" in the word "bereishit" was in effect speculation about the first day of creation. This is due to the fact that the word "bereishit" in Genesis 1:1, in addition to being the first word of Torah, is also the first word in the description of the events which took place on the first day of the creative process. If the position of the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 had been that speculation on the account of creation may begin only with the creation of man on the sixth day, then the "bet" is "bereishit" traditions which followed the interpretation of Deut. 4:32 would have been contrary to such a view. The position of the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 is clear; the limit of speculation on creation is the first word in the first day of the account of creation in Genesis 1. It is for this reason that Bar Kappara, representing the first day view, is the authority who interprets Deut. 4:32, and not R. Jonah or R. Ba who represents the sixth day view as found in the Palestinian Talmud. Having established his legal position

by his citation of Bar Kappara's exegesis of Deut. 4:32, the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 proceeds to give his own speculation on creation. This speculation is esoteric to the highest degree, for it is based upon only one letter of Torah, the "bet," the first letter of the first word of Torah.

The following chart outlines the traditions and concerns of Genesis Rabbah 1:10.

Genesis Rabbah 1:10

<u>Tradition</u>	<u>Concern or Position</u>
The "above, below, before and after phrase and the exegesis of Deut. 4:32 Passages 4 and 5	The limit of public speculation on creation is the events of the first day
2 Worlds Passage 6	Relationship of the creator to this world; pro-cosmos
Blessing not curse Passage 7	The world created out of blessing; pro-cosmos
The shape of the " <u>bet</u> " Passage 8	God in heaven is the creator God; pro-cosmos
The complaint of the " <u>alef</u> " Passage 9	Purposeful creation; the actualization of Torah in the world. Pro-cosmos and against antinomianism
One Thousand Generations Passage 10	Purposeful creation is understood. God will teach Torah to one thousand generations.

As we can see from the chart, over-arching concern of the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 is to prove two points by means of creation speculation. First, he desired to prove that the highest God is the creator of the cosmos. Second, he wanted to show that there is a specific purpose to the created cosmos; namely, that the Torah should be actualized within it. When we constrast this concern with our discussion of nature of Gnosticism in Genesis Rabbah 1:10, the

intention of the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1:10 becomes clear. In chapter 1, we saw how Gnostics deprecated the cosmos and viewed the Torah as the corrupt tool of the demiurge. The pro-cosmos, pro-Torah statements in Genesis Rabbah 1:10, which are diametrically opposed to the Gnostic arguments in this area, allow us to classify Genesis Rabbah 1:10 as a well-edited anti-Gnostic polemic.

## G. The Creation of Heaven and Earth

### Passage 11

#### Genesis Rabbah 1:15

Bet Shammai maintains: The heaven was created first. Bet Hillel maintains: The earth was created first. In the view of Bet Shammai, this is analogous to a king who first made his throne and then his footstool, for it is written, "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool" (Isaiah 66:1). In the view of Bet Hillel, this is analogous to a king who builds a palace; after building the lower portion, he builds the upper, for it is written, "In the day that the Lord God made earth (first) and (then) heaven" (Genesis 2:4). R. Judah b. R. Ilai said: This verse supports Bet Hillel, "Of old You established the earth;" which is followed by "the heavens are the work of your hands" (Psalm 102:26). R. Hanin said: From the text which supports Bet Shammai, Bet Hillel refutes them. "And the earth was" (Genesis 1:2), meaning that it existed (prior to heaven). R. Yochanan, reporting the opinion of the sages (said); As regards creation, heaven was first; as regards completion, earth was first. R. Tanhuna said, I will state the basis of this opinion. As regards creation heaven was first, (as it is written), "In the beginning God created the heaven" (Genesis 1:1). As regards completion, earth took precedence (as it is written), "In the day that the Lord God made (completed) earth (first) and (then) heaven" (Genesis 2:4). R. Simeon observed: I am amazed that the fathers of the world engaged in controversy over this matter, for surely both were created (simultaneously) like a pot and its lid (as it is written), "When I call to them (Heaven and earth), they stand up together" (Isaiah 48:13). R. Eleazar b. R. Simon observed: If my father's view is correct, then why is the earth sometimes mentioned before the heaven, and sometimes the heaven is mentioned before the earth (in scriptural verses)? In fact it teaches that they are equal to each other.

#### Genesis Rabbah 12:5

R. Nehemiah of Sikni said: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all **that is** in them" (Exodus 20:11). These three things constitute the fundamental elements of creation. They each waited three days and then produced three things. The earth was created on the first day according to Bet Hillel. He then waited three days; the first, second, and third, and then produced three offspring: trees, herbs, and the Garden of Eden. The heaven (*rakia*) was created on the second day. He waited three days; the second, third, and fourth, and then produced three offspring: the sun, the moon, and the luminaries. The seas were created on the third day. He waited three days; the

the third, fourth and fifth, and then produced three offspring: birds, fish, and the Leviathan. R. Azariah said: It is not so for "In the day that God made earth and heaven" (Genesis 2:4). This teaches that two things constitute the fundamental elements of creation. They each waited three days and their potential was fulfilled on the fourth. Heaven was created on the first day as taught by Bet Shammai. Then he waited three days; the first, second and third and fulfilled its potential on the fourth. And what was the fulfilling of its potential? The luminaries which were what the world lacked, as it is said, "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven" (Genesis 1:17) the creation of the earth was on the third day, as it is said, "And the earth brought forth" (Genesis 1:12) and "Let the dry land appear" (Gen. 1:9). He waited three days; the third, fourth, and fifth, and fulfilled its potential on the sixth day. And what was the fulfilling of its potential? Man, as it is written, "I, even I, have made the earth, and created man upon it" (Isaiah 45:12).

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1 77c line 68-77d line 27

Bet Shammai says that the heaven were created first and afterwards the Earth. Bet Hillel says that the Earth was created first and afterwards the heaven. Each side brought support for its views. What was the reasoning of Bet Shammai's position. "In the beginning God created the Heaven (and then the Earth (Gen. 1:1). It is similar to a king who makes a throne. After he had done this he made his footstool. (As it is written) "The Heavens are my throne and the Earth is my footstool" (Isaiah 66:1). What was the reasoning of Bet Hillel's position? "In the day that the Lord God made (first) Earth and (then) Heaven" (Gen. 2:4). It is similar to a king who makes a palace. After he had built the bottom part, he made the upper part (as it is written). "My own hand founded the Earth (first) and (then) my right hand spread out the Heaven" (Isaiah 48:13). R. Judah bar Pazi said, 'Surely this supports Bet Hillel "Of old you did lay the foundations of the Earth (first) and the Heavens (second) are the work of your hands" (Ps. 102:26). R. Hanina, From the text that Bet Shammai brings as support for its position, from it Bet Hillel refutes them. What is the support of Bet Shammai? "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth" (Gen. 1:1). From here Bet Hillel refutes them. "And the Earth was" (Gen. 1:2) meaning that it had already existed (before heaven). R. Yohanan said in the name of the sages, 'Regarding the creation, Heaven was first. Regarding the completion, Earth was first.' Regarding creation, Heaven was first (as it is written), "In the beginning God created the Heaven (first) and (then) the Earth. (Gen. 1:1). Regarding the completion, the Earth was

first (as it is written) "In the day that God made earth and heaven" (Gen. 2:4).

Heaven was created on the first day according to Bet Shammai. Then he made three days and made offspring (from the Heaven). (He made) the first, **second**, and third days, and on the fourth day (he said) "Let there be lights in the firmament" (Gen. 1:14). The sea was created on the second day, then he made three days and made offspring (from the sea). (He made) the second, third, and fourth days, and on the fifth day (He said) "Let the waters swarm" (Gen. 1:20). Earth was made on the third day according to Bet Shammai. Then he made three days and then made offspring (from the Earth). On the sixth day (He said), "Let the Earth bring forth the living creature etc." (Gen. 1:24).

The Earth was created first according to Bet Hillel. Then he made two days and made offspring (from the Earth). (He made) the first and the second days and on the third, (He said) "Let the Earth put forth grass" (Gen. 1:11). The Heaven was created on the second day according to Bet Hillel. Then He made two days and made offspring (from the Heaven). (He made) the second and third days and on the fourth day (He said) "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven" (Gen. 1:14). The sea was created on the third day according to Bet Hillel. Then He made two days and made offspring (from the sea). He made the third and fourth days, and on the fifth day, (He said) "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures" (Gen. 1:20).

R. Simeon b. Yohai said, 'I am amazed at how the fathers of the world engaged in such a controversy regarding the creation of the world, for I say that the Heaven and the Earth were created as a pot and its cover. What is the proof? "My own hand founded the earth and my right hand spread out the heaven" (verse continues: "When I call to them, they stand up together") (Isaiah 43:13). R. Eliezer b. R. Simeon, 'If father's view is correct, then why sometimes does it happen that the Heaven is given precedence over the Earth, and sometimes it happens that the Earth is given precedence over the Heaven? Only to teach that the two of them are equal to each other.' (End of Hagigah II:1)

Hillel and Shammai were authorities who lived at the end of the first century B.C.E. Their schools, Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai, existed from the time of Hillel and Shammai to the end of the first century C.E.<sup>23</sup> In both versions of this tradition, Bet Hillel maintained that the earth was created before the heavens, and Bet Shammai maintained the opposite view. Each school brought allegories in support of their position. Accordingly, Bet Shammai felt that just as a king has his throne built before its footstool, so God built heaven first and then the earth. Bet Hillel felt that just as a king builds the first floor of his palace and then the second, so God built the earth (the first floor) first and then heaven. The version in Genesis Rabbah 1:15 then tells us that R. Judah b. Ilai, a second century C.E. Palestinian authority supported the view of Bet Hillel. In the version of the Palestinian Talmud, R. Judah b. Pazi, a Palestinian authority of the late third century is the authority who is said to support Bet Hillel's opinion. R. Hanina, another late third century C.E. Palestinian authority, cites Genesis 1:2 in support of Bet Hillel.

A notable shift in the tradition occurs at this point, for from here on in the tradition, **the** authorities attempt to compromise the two views. R. Yochanan, a third century Palestinian authority, and R. Tamhuma, a fourth century Palestinian authority, share the view that though the heaven was first in creation, the earth was first in completion. R. Shimon b. Yochai and R. Eleazer his son, both of whom lived in the second century seem to have felt that the heaven and earth were created simultaneously as is a pot and its cover. Accordingly, Scripture sometimes places heaven before earth and sometimes earth before heaven in order to show that the two are equal to each other and were created at the same time.

This passage illustrates how traditions seem to have a life of their own. Here in one tradition we see a three hundred year development beginning with the first century and extending through the fourth. The basis of the tradition is the question of why scripture sometimes mentions heaven before earth and vice versa. Was the tradition really this simple? Was such an exegetic discussion really all that **was at** stake for Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai?

The answer to this question is that there was probably something more at stake here. It is possible that the dispute between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai was over how to interpret Jewish law. Earth, therefore, was symbol of man's physical existence, whereas heaven was a symbol of God's decree. Bet Hillel, by stressing that earth was created first, was in effect stating that the divine law should be adjusted to society. Bet Shammai by stressing that heaven was created first, was in effect stating that God's law is unchangeable and that society should adapt itself to it.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the earliest level of this tradition consists of a dispute over the interpretation of the written law. The later level of the tradition, represented by the authorities of the third and fourth century might have operated differently. For these later Rabbis, the tradition could have reflected an implicit assumption that esoteric speculation was permitted on the events of the first day of the creation of the world. Therefore, their statements belong in the same category as R. Judah b. Simon b. Pazi's account of creation discussed in section C of this chapter.

It is not clear to which level we should assign R. Shimon b. Yochai and his son Eleazar. If their statement belongs to the earlier level then its significance is that it is an effort to reach a compromise between the strict interpretation of Shammai and the more lenient interpretation of Hillel. The second century C.E. was a time of extreme

hardship for the Jewish people. The failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 C.E. took a tremendous toll on the Jewish community. Perhaps R. Shimon b. Yochai and R. Eleazer attempted to mediate the dispute in order to prevent an already weakened community from becoming divided and weakened further. On the other hand, the statements of R. Shimon b. Yochai and R. Eleazer could also be taken as part of the second level of speculations concerning the creation of the world.

The two versions of the tradition as discussed above are for the most part identical. A tradition from Mishnah Keritot 6:9 is added to the end of Genesis Rabbah 1:15. This tradition illustrates how discrepancies in precedence in scripture signify equality, giving scriptural references to the patriarchs, Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, and "father" and "mother" as examples. This passage was probably added by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah who wanted the chapter to end with the moral maxim that one's parents should be treated with equal respect. Later versions of the tradition on heaven and earth omit the Mishnah Keritot tradition.<sup>25</sup>

The version in the Palestinian Talmud has a section in the middle of the tradition which is also to be found in Genesis Rabbah 12:5. This section consists of a continuation of the discussion of the account of creation by Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai. The basis of the interpretation is that a general category is created, followed by a period of time, after which the particulars are created which fill the general category. Another way of viewing this is that God creates something "in potentia," after which the thing is created. By either interpretation the results are the same.

Bet Hillel's position is that the earth is **created** on the first day of creation, and then the trees and herbs fill the earth on the third day; the heaven is created on the second day, and then the luminaries fill the heavens on

the fourth day; the seas are created on the third day and then fish fill the seas on the fifth. While the Palestinian Talmud counts the elapsed time as two days, Genesis Rabbah 12:5 counts the elapsed time as three days, including the day on which the general category was created. The following chart represents the opinion as recorded in each version:

version	general creation	day of creation	particular creation	day of creation
<u>Genesis Rabbah</u> 12:5	heaven earth	1 3	luminaries man	4 6
<u>Palestinian Talmud</u> <u>Hagigah</u> II:1 77d	heaven sea earth	1 2 3	luminaries sea crea- tures living crea- tures on earth, includ- ing man	4 5 6

In each version according to Bet Shammai, the time lapse is three days. Each school supports its view with scriptural prooftexts from Genesis 1.

It is possible that these Bet Hillel-Bet Shammai traditions might have originally formed a separate corpus. The redactor of the version in the Palestinian Talmud chose to keep the traditions together. The redactor of Genesis Rabbah chose to split the traditions, using the first tradition in his exegesis of Genesis 1:1, and the second in his exegesis of Genesis 2:4. Whether these two traditions were originally together or not, the order of creation according to the two schools remains the same.

Nevertheless, the specificity of the time lapse tradition leads this writer to see it as a later tradition. Regardless of the original meaning of the dispute between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai, it eventually became the point of departure for a myriad of speculations concerning the

creation of the world. The time lapse tradition reflects the concerns of a later period when such speculations were common and had a specific purpose. This purpose was to provide Jewish gnosis concerning the significance of the account of creation in Genesis 1. If we accept this hypothesis, then it makes sense to view the attribution of the time lapse tradition to Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai to be a later and pseudepigraphic attribution.

Another interesting possibility is suggested by an examination of the allegory of king who builds the first floor of his palace before building the second. As we saw previously, this allegory is used by Bet Hillel to support its view that the earth was created first. The version in the Palestinian Talmud reads:

After he had built (banah)  
the bottom part, he made ('asah)  
the upper part.

The Yalkut Hamakhiri (Isaiah 48:13), which claims to quote Genesis Rabbah 1:15, states:

He built (banah) the bottom part,  
after which he created (bara)  
the upper part.

The Yalkut Hamakhiri can be viewed as a Medieval literary recording of the Genesis Rabbah 1:15 version. The word for "upper part" in the Palestinian Talmud, the Yalkut Hamakhiri, and in the Paris manuscript of Genesis Rabbah is "elyonim." In Rabbinic texts, including the Palestinian Talmud and Genesis Rabbah, the word "elyonim" may also refer to the heavenly retinue of angels. Thus the intent of this allegory could have been (either originally or as interpreted later) to show that the angels were created after man, for earth, created first, included man. If the Yalkut Hamakhiri version is an accurate reflection of the original Genesis Rabbah version, then the usage of the word "bara," he created, would further stress that the earth and man were

created before the angels. As a result, it would be incorrect to assert that the principal angel of the Supreme God, the demiurge, created both man and the physical world.

As stated earlier, this writer does not see the original debate between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai as being a debate about the account of creation. Therefore, the original intention of this allegory was probably not the intention described immediately above. By changing the wording of the allegory from, "he made the upper part" to "he created the upper part," a later redactor could have had the threat of Gnosticism as his concern, and as such the above interpretation becomes plausible.

The tradition concerning the creation of the heaven and the earth is a tradition with a long history of development. In its early stage, it involved a dispute over the interpretation of the written law. In its later stage, it represents speculation concerning the creation of the world, providing, if you will, a Jewish concomitant to Gnostic creation speculations. As such, the tradition concerning the creation of the heaven and the earth may be viewed as Jewish gnosis.

H. The Tradition of Ben Zoma and R. Joshua

## Passage 12

For the purposes of analyses, the versions of this tradition are listed comparatively.

<u>Tosephta</u> <u>Hagigah</u> 2:5	<u>Genesis</u> <u>Rabbah</u> 2:4	<u>Palestinian</u> <u>Talmud Hagigah</u> II:1 77a, b	<u>Babylonian</u> <u>Talmud</u> <u>Hagigah</u> 15a
1 It happened that R. Joshua was walking in public and Ben Zoma was coming toward him	Once, Shimon Ben Zoma was standing and was confused. R. Joshua passed	Further it happened that R. Joshua was walking along the road and Ben Zoma was coming towards him	The Rabbis taught: It happened that Joshua b. Hanina was standing on the step of the Temple mount
2 When he approached him, he (Ben Zoma) did not greet him	He (R. Joshua) greeted him once and a second time, but he did not respond	He (R. Joshua) greeted him, but he did not respond	and Ben Zoma saw him and did not rise in his presence.
3	At the third time, he (R. Joshua) answered him in confusion		
4 Said (R. Joshua) to him: From nothing to nothing (or From where to where) Ben Zoma?	He said to him: What is this Ben Zoma? Where are your feet?	R. Joshua said to him: From nothing to nothing (or From where to where) Ben Zoma?	(R. Joshua) said to him: From nothing to nothing (or From where to where) Ben Zoma?
5	He said: Not from nothing Rabbi.		
6	He (R. Joshua) said to him: I call upon heaven and earth to witness that I		

<u>Tos</u>	<u>Genesis</u> <u>Rabbah</u>	<u>PT</u>	<u>BT</u>
6 ont.	shall not move from here until you let me know, where are your feet?		
7 He said to him: I have been looking (mistakel)	He said to him: I have been looking (mistakel)	He said to him: I have been looking (mistakel)	He said to him: I have been looking (tsofeh)
8 into the account of creation	into the account of creation	into the account of creation	between the upper waters and the lower waters
9 and be- tween the upper waters and the lower	and between the upper waters and the lower	and between the upper waters and the lower	and between this and that
10 there is not even a handbreadth	there is only two or three fingers	there is only an open hand	there are only three fingers
11 as it is said: "And the 'ruach' of God hovered over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2)	It is not written here "And the 'ruach' of God blew but rather "hovered,"	It is said here "hover- ing," (refer- ence to Gen. 1:2)	As it is said, "And the 'ruach' of God hovered on the face of the waters
12 and as it is said: "Like an eagle stirring up its nest hovering over its young" (Deut. 32: 11)		and as it is said, "Like an eagle stirring up its nest hovering over its young" (Deut. 32:11)	

<u>Tos</u>	<u>Genesis</u> <u>Rabbah</u>	<u>PT</u>	<u>BT</u>
13 just as an eagle flies over its next, touching but not touching	as a bird which flies and flaps its wings, and its wings touch but do not touch	Just as hovering in the latter case means touching but not touching	like the dove that hovers over its young and does not touch
14 so there is only a handbreadth between the upper and the lower waters		So hovering in the latter case means touching but not touching	
15 (At the same time), R. Joshua turned and said to his students	R. Joshua turned and said to his students	R. Joshua said to his students	R. Joshua said to his students
16 Ben Zoma is already on the outside	Ben Zoma has gone	Behold, Ben Zoma is on the outside	Ben Zoma remains on the outside
17 It was only a few days until Ben Zoma was taken away	And it was only a few days and Ben Zoma was (not) in the world	And it was only a few days until Ben Zoma died.	

When comparing the four versions of the Ben Zoma - R. Joshua tradition, one is struck by the fact that of our four texts, the Genesis Rabbah text seems to be the most unique version, having less in common with the other three versions. In Genesis Rabbah 2:4, the question asked by R. Joshua to Ben Zoma is, "Where are your feet?" In the other versions, the question is "From where to where" or "From nothing to nothing." Ben Zoma's enigmatic answer in Genesis Rabbah, "Not from nothing Rabbi," is not found in the other versions. It is indeed difficult to understand the question, its answer, and R. Joshua's angered response. On one hand, the intent of the question could have been simply to ask Ben Zoma where he was walking. Notice that in the Tosephta and Palestinian Talmud versions, Ben Zoma was walking towards Rabbi Joshua. Thus the question, "Where did you come from?" could have been legitimate. On the other hand, the intent of the question might not have been so simple. The question in Genesis Rabbah could have been a way of asking a question of doctrine. In other words, the intent of the question could have been, "Where do you stand on this particular matter?" or "What is your opinion?" Likewise, the intent of the question in the other three versions also could have been to ask a question of doctrine. The question may also read as "From nothing to nothing?" The exact meaning of the question read this way is not clear. It is clear, however, from the Genesis Rabbah version that Ben Zoma's response was an evasive response to the question, for R. Joshua then proceeds to try to elicit from him details of his position or opinion.

There is also a tone of shock and indignation in R. Joshua's reaction in the Genesis Rabbah version. Perhaps Ben Zoma's answer was not meant to be evasive. Perhaps Ben Zoma's intention was to maintain that he did not come from nothing. In a tradition in Avot de Rabbi Natan B,

chapter 32, R. Simeon b. Eleazer, a second century Palestinian authority, asks:

From where did he come? From a place of fire and he returns to a place of fire. From where did he come? From a place to the outside and he returns to the place to the outside (or "outside").

The Hebrew text in the Schechter edition of Avot de Rabbi Natan is defective in that it is not clear what sort of preposition should precede the word "chuts" or "outside" at the end of the passage quoted. The following passage from the Gospel of Thomas, paragraph 50, may help us understand the first part of R. Simeon b. Eleazer's answer:

Jesus said: "If they say to you, Where did you come from?" say to them, "We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established itself."<sup>26</sup>

The implication here is that R. Simeon b. Eleazer's fire is equivalent to the place of light spoken of in the Gospel of Thomas. The clue to understanding the second part of R. Simeon b. Eleazer's answer lies in the phrase "from the place to the outside." The end of the phrase, which as noted above is defective, should be translated "and he returns to the place from the outside." The passage in Avot de Rabbi Natan has a Gnostic tone. The 'place' in this passage may mean probably the seventh heaven from which the essence of the Gnostic is drawn and to which he desires to return.<sup>27</sup>

Let us now return to the Ben Zota-R. Joshua tradition, and let us for the sake of argument accept the Tosephta Palestinian Talmud, and Babylonian Talmud version of the question of R. Joshua according to its simple meaning. R. Joshua according to its simple meaning. R. Joshua rather innocently asks Ben Zoma who was coming towards him, "From where to where?", meaning "Where have you been and where are you going?" Ben Zoma, as the text states, had been considering

the account of creation. With this on his mind, he interpreted the question as "From nothing to nothing?" His answer to R. Joshua becomes (as reported in Genesis Rabbah), "Not from nothing, Rabbi!" In such a way, Ben Zoma intended that his answer be a negation of the question as he understood it. If Ben Zoma had answered positively, might not his answer have been, "From the place to the outside and from the outside to the place " as R. Simeon b. Eleazer suggested. Another answer could have been, "From a place of light" or "From a place of fire." In addition, because this tradition speaks of the upper waters in contradistinction to the lower waters, his answer could have been, "From the place of the upper waters." In other words, it is possible that Ben Zoma saw the upper waters as being part of the seventh heaven. We shall discuss this in greater detail shortly. At this point, however, it is clear that Ben Zoma did not want to give a positive answer to R. Joshua's question. A positive answer might have shown Ben Zoma to have had Gnostic tendencies, and possibly could have led to his excommunication from the community.

It is possible that those Jews who had been influenced by Gnostic thought used the word "chuts," "outside," to describe earthly life. If this was so, then we can begin to understand why the word "chuts" was not used at the end of the Genesis Rabbah version of the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition. In this version we read:

Ben Zoma has gone,  
And it was only a few days that Ben Zoma  
was (not, Oxford Ms.) in the world.

From the other versions, it is clear that the intent of this passage is to state that it was only a few days until Ben Zoma died. However why then does it say that Ben Zoma had gone? To where did he go, for he certainly was still alive? "Ben Zoma has gone" could have meant many things.

Perhaps it meant that he had lost his mind, or perhaps it meant that, because of his views he was no longer considered to be a Jew. The other three versions all refer to Ben Zoma as being on the "chuts" "outside."

It is possible that the absence of the word "chuts" from the Genesis Rabbah version was not an accident. In the opinion of this writer, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah seems to have had a greater understanding of Gnostic thought than his counterparts in the other versions. The redactor of Genesis Rabbah might have understood that to say that "Ben Zoma is on the outside" would be a statement with which a Gnostic would agree, ~~for~~ to a Gnostic, "being on the outside" would be the equivalent of non-cosmic existence. By contrast, the other versions which use the word "chuts" did not have the same awareness of the Gnostic usage of the word "outside." This is not to say however that the redactors of these versions were not concerned with the threat of Gnosticism, but to say that for them the word "outside" probably meant that Ben Zoma held beliefs which were "outside" the accepted Rabbinic view of the account of creation.

Ben Zoma's exposition on the nature of the upper and lower waters seems to be the core of this tradition. Each of the versions gives a slightly different answer as to the distance between the upper and lower waters. However, the intention of each version seems to be to state that Ben Zoma felt that the distance between the upper and lower waters was a short distance.

The distance in the Babylonian Talmud is three fingers. This led Samson Levey to maintain that Ben Zoma was a Christian. In his article, "The Best Kept Secret of the Rabbinic Traditions," Levey asserts that the definitive "three fingers (in the Babylonian Talmud's version of this tradition) indicate or represent the Christian trinity. In addition, the "dove that hovers over its young" in this version represents a veiled reference to Mark 1:9-11,

wherein Jesus is identified as a dove.<sup>28</sup>

Much of Levey's argument is based upon the following passage from BT Hagigah 14b-15a:

Ben Zoma was asked: May a high priest marry a virgin who has become pregnant? Should we take into consideration Samuel's statement that he could have repeated sexual intercourse without rupturing the hymen or was his ability rare? He (Ben Zoma) replied: The ability of Samuel is rare, but we do consider (the possibility) that she may conceive in a public bath (into which a male had discharged semen). Nevertheless Samuel maintained that an emission of sperm which does not shoot forth like an arrow cannot impregnate. In the first instance, it also had shot forth like an arrow.

The meaning of this passage is quite obscure. Levey felt that the question referred to the virgin birth of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Solomon Zeitlin, in his article, "The Plague of Pseudo-Rabbinic Scholarship," has attempted to show that the question to Ben Zoma does not refer to the virgin birth of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> Frankly, neither Zeitlin nor Levey is convincing concerning the meaning and importance of this passage. Nevertheless, the conflated nature of the text is demonstrated by the fact that Ben Zoma, who lived near the end of the first century and early second century in Palestine, speaks with Samuel, who lived in the third century in Babylonia.

Samson Levey feels that the Babylonian Talmud's version of the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition "records the original Tannaitic statement in its most accurate form."<sup>31</sup> However when we analyze the differences between the four versions, we notice in at least three places the inferiority of the Babylonian Talmud's version. First, this version, unlike the other three, omits the words "Ma'aseh bereishit," "the account of creation." There is no doubt in this writer's mind that the fundamental issue of this passage is how man was created, and perhaps how he is to be redeemed. Seeing

Christianity as the concern of this tradition seems to be a molding of the facts to fit a desired end. Second, it is only the Babylonian Talmud's account in which the distance between the upper and lower waters is described as being "three fingers." In the Tosephta and Palestinian Talmud, the distance is a handbreadth, whereas in Genesis Rabbah the distance is two or three fingers. As mentioned above, the primary importance of these distances is to show that the distance between the lower and upper waters is small. Third, it is only the Babylonian Talmud's version which mentions a "dove." In the Tosephta and the Palestinian Talmud, an "eagle" is mentioned, whereas in Genesis Rabbah a "bird" is mentioned. These three differences, which are all related to crucial points in Levey's theory, lead us to conclude, contra Levey, that the least reliable of the four versions of this tradition is the version recorded in the Babylonian Talmud.

Levey neglected for the most part to use redaction criticism and when he did, as in the case of the "virgin pregnancy," he did so only for his own purposes. Perhaps the greatest mistake of Levey was that he neglected to attempt to analyse each of the four versions in its own particular context. Thus far in examining the shared traditions of Genesis Rabbah and PT Hagigah II:1, we have yet to come across any clear reference to Christianity. Moreover in the following two chapters, we shall see that one would be hard pressed to prove that the overall thrust of Genesis Rabbah chapter 2 or chapters 1-8 and Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud is that of an anti-Christian polemic.

In addition, with the exception of the "pardes" or the "four who entered paradise" tradition which he examines at the beginning of his article, Levey fails to examine other traditions which are ascribed to Ben Zoma. Evidence of Christian influence in these passages, would certainly

bolster Levey's position.

Thus far, this writer has not attempted to give his interpretation of the meaning and significance of the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition. In attempting to undertake such an interpretation, this writer has chosen to use a method which:

1. will attempt to understand the Ben Zoma traditions and thus to paint a composite of him
2. will use all four sources, not just one
3. will in the next chapters use redaction criticism to indicate the overall concerns the Palestinian Talmud-Genesis Rabbah versions of this tradition

It is to the first of these which we now direct our attention.

The character of Shimon Ben Zoma is one of the most difficult to understand in the entirety of Rabbinic Literature. First and foremost, there is a paucity of both legal and non-legal statements ascribed to him. The total number of traditions seems to be 18, 10 legal and 8 non-legal. These traditions are best classified into two groups, those dealing with esoteric knowledge and those which do not.

We shall begin with the latter category. In Mishnah Sota 9:15, Ben Zoma is called the last of the "darshanim," "interpreters." It is apparent that Ben Zoma was admired for his scholarly ability. In BT Berachot 57b, it is stated that one who sees Ben Zoma in a dream could hope to achieve wisdom. Moreover in BT Sanhedrin 17b, we read:

It was discussed before the sages. This refers to Shimon b. Zoma, Hunan the Egyptian and Hanina b. Hakinai.

The common element of all of these men was the fact that none of them was ordained. The significance of the Sanhedrin passage is that these men were allowed to join in legal discussions in the presence of ordained Rabbis.<sup>32</sup> On occasions, Ben Zoma apparently acted as a legal decisor.

If Shimon Ben Zoma participates in legal discussions and offers his opinions, then why was he not ordained?

The traditional answer to this question may be found in Rashi's commentary on BT Kiddushin 49b. Therein Rashi writes,

Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma were students and were boys who did not receive ordination and there were not any like them in Torah in those days.

By calling them "boys," Rashi probably felt that Ben Zoma and Ben Azzai died at a young age. Similarly Bertinora in his commentary on Mishnah Avot 4:1 writes:

Ben Zoma did not live a longlife and did not receive ordination.

Both statements seem to indicate that the reason for the non-ordination of Ben Zoma lay in the fact of his early and untimely death. This view would also account for the naucity of statements ascribed to Ben Zoma.

In an article entitled, "Shimon Ben Zoma," Meir Waxman questions this traditional assumption. In a rather complex argument, Waxman seeks to prove that Ben Zoma lived a long life. The two key elements of this argument are as follows. First, in BT Berachot 58a, we see that Ben Zoma was alive before the destruction of the Temple. From this passage, Waxman asserts that Ben Zoma must have been 15-20 years old at that time. Thus he must have been born around 50 C.E. Second to establish a "terminus ad quem," Waxman cites Mishnah Berachot 1:8 which states that R. Eleazar b. Azaria heard an interpretation of Ben Zoma's when Ben Zoma was old. From this passage Waxman asserts that Ben Zoma must have been alive in the period immediately preceeding the Bar Kochba revolt (135 C.E.). Thus Ben Zoma lived around 80 years.<sup>33</sup> If Ben Zoma did live to be 80 years old, then why was he not ordained? Frankly, this writer does not have a theory which would adequately answer this question.

Equally as puzzling is the statement in Mishnah Sota

9:15 that Ben Zoma was the last of the 'darshanim'.<sup>34</sup> Akiba and Ishmael, Ben Zoma's younger contemporaries, established schools which were to create sets of tannaitic midrashim. If anyone deserved to be referred to as a 'darshan,' Akiba and Ishmael would certainly have been prime candidates. For some reason or other, the term 'darshan' fell into disuse. As a matter of fact, Ben Zoma was not the "last of the darshanim." This title belongs to Eleazer b. Simeon, a late second century Palestinian authority. In Leviticus Rabbah 30:1, Eleazer b. Simeon is eulogized as:

a reader of Scripture, a teacher of Mishnah,  
a paytan and a darshan.

Moreover, we have no evidence which would suggest that the title 'darshan' became a pejorative term. If we did possess such evidence, then it would help us to understand why the title fell into disuse.

The latest 'darshanim' are Ben Zoma, Ben Azzai, and Eleazer b. Simeon. In Genesis Rabbah 5:4, Ben Zoma and Ben Azzai are referred to as the "last of the darshanim." This reference occurs in a passage which has a definite esoteric and mystical tone. As this is not the only esoteric or mystical tradition in which Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma are mentioned, it is possible that the title 'darshan' fell into disuse because it became associated with unbridled mystical speculations. We do not need to see this as a conscious process, but rather unconscious cultural process which occurred over a long period of time.

Let us now proceed to the Ben Zoma traditions which deal with esoteric speculation, the purpose of which was the achievement of knowledge or gnosis. The function of knowledge, in Rabbinic tradition is exactly the same as the function of knowledge in Gnostic myth. In each religious/philosophical system, knowledge has the potential to bring redemption and salvation. Within the Jewish community during the first three centuries C.E., certain factors (as we have seen in

section D of this chapter) determined the allowable limits of such speculation. This is an important concept, for one aspect of the conflict between the Rabbis and Ben Zoma concerned the type of esoteric speculation permitted. The issue never involved a perfunctory 'yea' or 'nay' vis-a-vis the esoteric. Rather, the issue seems to have been one of degree, method, and interpretation.

In BT Berachot 12b, we see Ben Zoma's attitude towards redemption. In this tradition, Ben Zoma maintained, against the Rabbis, that the coming redemption would obliterate the memory of the redemption of the people from Egypt. The existential reality of the Jewish people, then as now, is that the redemption from Egypt, as important as it was, was an incomplete redemption. Redemption from Egypt is to serve as a paradigm for future redemption. In their answer to him, the sages do not deny the importance of the exodus, but rather ascribe to it a secondary status. Ben Zoma's disagreement in this tradition is one of small degree. For this reason, Ben Zoma is not chastized for his opinion. Ben Zoma's efforts seem to be aimed at hastening the future redemption. It is possible that within the normative Jewish community, there existed a group of people who, like Ben Zoma, wished to hasten the future redemption.

Let us take an example from early Christianity which will illustrate the significance of such a group. In Against Heresies I:13, 1-5, Irenaeus accuses a heretic by the name of Marcus of all sorts of misdeeds.<sup>35</sup> One of these misdeeds is described as being that

They are accustomed to draw the  
lot and bid each other to prophesy.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, the followers of Marcus felt that knowledge of the redemptive process was something that was available to all people, including women. Politically speaking, such a belief would have undermined the very structure of the church with its bishops and deacons. Might something

similar to this have occurred in Judaism?

Waxman, in his article, states that Shimon ben Zoma believed that legitimate Rabbi or sage did not possess any special quality of the soul, but rather draws his knowledge from all quarters. In other words, the real sage learns from all people, and the difference between the sage and the masses is only one of quantity of knowledge. Waxman mistakenly concludes that these beliefs are definitely anti-gnostic.<sup>37</sup> On the contrary, these beliefs may show a great deal of Gnostic influence. According to Ben Zoma, knowledge could be discovered by all people. The institutionalization of esoteric knowledge would maintain Rabbinic authority only if it assumed that the novice seeking enlightenment must obtain it from a Rabbi. Ben Zoma's attitude would have been in opposition to this institutionalization. It would also have reflected a definite Gnostic tendency, given the fact that descriptions of organized hierarchical or institutional structures are completely lacking in Gnostic literature.

The Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition speaks of the upper and lower waters. If, as this writer believes, the major concern of this tradition is how to bring about redemption, then it should not surprise us to see a discussion of water in this tradition. The usage of water as a symbol of redemption is well-attested in Rabbinic thought. The Genesis Rabbah version of the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition (in 2:4) is immediately preceded by the following tradition:

"And the 'ruach' of God hovered":  
(Gen.1:2) This alludes to the 'ruach' of the Messiah, as you read, "And the 'ruach' of the Lord shall rest upon him" (Isaiah 11:2) By what merit will it serve and come? (For the sake of that which) "hovered over the face of the waters;" by the merit of repentance which is likened to water, as it is written, "Pour out your heart like water" (Lamentations 2:19). R. Haggai said in the name of R. Pedat: A covenant was made with the water that even in the hot season a breeze stirs over it.

The 'spirit of the Messiah' in the above passage is equivalent to redemption. This redemption is to be brought about by repentance which is symbolized by water. Each of the two traditions in Genesis Rabbah 2:4 discusses the "spirit of God," the "ruach elohim" from Genesis 1:2. The connection between the two traditions is not merely exegetic, but could also be thematic. Each part seems to stress that redemption has some connection to water. R. Haggai's statement that a breeze always stirs over the water means that repentance, which leads to redemption, is always possible. In such a way, the tradition provides the believer with a calculus for redemption. This calculus is, 'Repent, the Messiah will come, and you will be redeemed from your suffering.'

We shall now attempt to prove that the Ben Zoma - Rabbi Joshua tradition in Genesis Rabbah 2:4, in addition to being related exegetically to that which preceeds it, is also related thematically in that it seeks to deny the ease with which the Messiah may be brought. The preceeding tradition seeks to encourage man to work for the bringing of the Messiah. In light of this assertion, we suggest that the relationship between Ben Zoma and water as a symbol of redemption has not been fully understood.

The tradition of seven heavens found in BT Hagigah 12bf helps us to understand the relationship between Ben Zoma and water as a symbol of redemption. This tradition is also found in non-Jewish sources.<sup>38</sup> The Hagigah 12b passage is cited in the name of Resh Lakish. Simeon ben Lakish, or Resh Lakish, was a third century Palestinian authority who studied in the academy of R. Yochanan in Tiberias. Thus the seven heavens tradition existed in Tiberias 100 years after Ben Zkoma.

For the purposes of our discussion, the most important "heavens" are the sixth and the seventh. The sixth heaven called "machon," consists of snow, hail, harmful dews,

harmful rain, whirlwinds, storms, and harmful vapors. The doors to the sixth heaven are made of fire. By contrast, the seventh heaven consists of righteousness, the treasures of peace, life, and blessing, the souls of the righteous and those yet to be born, and the dew with which God will revive the dead. When one compares the imagery of water (or dew) in the two heavens, one is struck by the apparent contrast of good and evil. Similarly, in BT Hagigah 14b of R. Akiba warns:

When you come to the place of pure marble plates, do not say "Water! Water!" for it is said, "He that tells lies shall not tarry in My sight."

This passage may be understood in terms of a Hekhalot text which states:

At the gate of the sixth palace, it seemed as though hundreds of thousands of waves of water were storming against him, and yet, there was not a drop of water, only the ethereal glitter of the marble plate with which the palace was tessellated.<sup>39</sup>

In one version, the doors to the sixth heaven are made of fire and in the other the doors are marble. In both versions, the mystic has the impression that the composition of the sixth heaven is harmful waters.

For the most part, Jewish tradition emphasizes water's more positive symbolic aspects. This is certainly related to the climate of Palestine. We have nevertheless seen how water was viewed in negative terms vis-a-vis the sixth heaven. Hippolytus of Rome (170-236 C.E.) in The Refutation of All Heresies V:15 attempts to refute thirtytwo heresies extant in his time. In speaking of Sethian Gnostics, he writes:

But not as regards the tenet that the subjacent water below, which is dark, ought, because the light has set (over it) to convey

upwards and receive the spark borne down from (the light) itself; in the assertion of this tenet, I say, the all wise Sethians appear to derive (their opinion) from Homer "By earth I swear, and the heaven above and Stygian stream beneath, the weighty oath Of solemn power, to bind the blessed gods." <sup>40</sup>  
(Iliad XV, 36-38)

The Sethian Gnostics believed that good and evil were commingled with each other. In their system, wine is often the symbol of good, whereas water is definitely a negative symbol. Hippolytus also reports that they asserted the following:

In like manner, the ray of light which has been commingled with the water, having obtained from discipline and instruction its own proper locality, hastens towards the Logos. <sup>41</sup>

Thus the Sethians seemed to have believed that in this corrupted world, light, the force of good, had been commingled with the dark water below which is destructive. The key to separating the commingled forces is gnosis, which tells the knower to

Learn that all things which have been commingled may be separated in their proper places. <sup>42</sup>

Even in Jewish tradition, one sees that the lower or subterranean waters are considered to be potentially harmful. They are said to be held back by either clay, the mountains, giants, or the Torah. <sup>43</sup> Whether we see the lower waters as being subterranean or part of the sixth heaven, they are always separated from the water of the spiritual world or the seventh heaven. Therefore, it is possible that the term 'lower waters' in the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition could have referred to the waters which existed in the sixth heaven.

In Genesis Rabbah 5:4 we read the following:

R. Levi said: Some interpreters, Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, interpret: The voice of the Lord became Metatron to the waters as it is written,

"The voice of the Lord is over the waters"  
(Psalm 29:3).

The concept of Metatron, according to Scholem, originates in the early second century.<sup>44</sup> The origin of the concept is found in 3 Enoch wherein we are told of Enoch's ascension to heaven, the protest of the angels, and how Enoch became Metatron.<sup>45</sup> Enoch becomes known as Metatron after his flesh was seared by flaming torches. His place is said to be above all the angels.<sup>46</sup> The name 'Metatron' never occurs in non-Jewish sources, although the concept of a principal angel is, as we have seen, widespread. Thus it is not surprising to learn that Graetz considered Metatron to be the Jewish demiurge or principal angel of creation.<sup>47</sup>

The word 'Metatron' is usually interpreted to mean a "guide," but a guide to what? In Sifre Deuteronomy 34:4 we read:

The finger of God became a Metatron to Moses  
and showed him the land of Israel.

In 3 Enoch, Metatron becomes R. Ishmael's guide in his vision of the divine throne (Merkabah).<sup>48</sup> In apocalyptic literature, Metatron is seen as a special angel who had beheld the face of God.<sup>49</sup> In BT Hagigah 12bff, there were no angels above the fifth heaven. The implication here is that Metatron was considered to be a special angel above the fifth heaven whose task was to guide the righteous through the harmful waters of the sixth heaven to the dew of the seventh heaven (which revives the dead). In BT Hagigah 15a, Elisha b. Abuyah, or Aher as he was known, says upon seeing Metatron, "perhaps there are two powers." Aher, therefore, viewed Metatron as a second deity, and as a result, both Aher and Metatron were punished. We should contrast this latter tradition with the tradition in Genesis Rabbah 5:4 quoted above. It is clear that Ben Zoma had a concept of Metatron. Nevertheless, he did not consider Metatron to be a second power as did Aher, for no chastisement of Ben Zoma's statement in Genesis Rabbah 5:4

is to be found. Whatever it was which constituted the heretical views of Ben Zoma as indicated in his discussion with R. Joshua, it is clear that Ben Zoma was careful not to carry his "non-Orthodox" ideas to the same extreme as did Aher.

One of the most intriguing of all esoteric passages in Rabbinic Literature is the following tradition of the four who entered paradise or "pardes." This version of the tradition is taken from Tosephta Hagigah 2:3-4:

Four entered pardes. Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher and R. Akiba. Ben Azzai looked and died. Concerning him it is written, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his righteous ones" (Psalm 116:15). Ben Zoma looked and was smitten. Concerning him it is written, "Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you" (Proverbs 25:16). Aher looked and mutilated the shoots. Concerning him it is written, "Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilts" (Ecclesiastes 7:12). R. Akiba entered in peace and went out in peace. Of him it is written, "Draw me; we will run after you" (Song of Songs 1:4).

This tradition, which is also found in Hagigah II:1, 77b of the Palestinian Talmud and Hagigah 14b of the Babylonian Talmud, describes four sages who entered a "pardes" or who engaged in esoteric speculation. From the passages which follow this tradition in the Palestinian Talmud, it is clear that the phrase "mutilated the shoots," which is written in reference to Aher, is intended to mean that Aher became an apostate. Ben Azzai is said to have gazed and died, whereas Ben Zoma gazed and was smitten or became demented. Of the four sages, only Akiba entered and descended unscathed.

Graetz viewed this tradition as a paradigm of the different sectarian possibilities the early second century. In his view, Aher represented the anti-nomian wing of Gnosticism; Ben Zoma and Ben Azzai represented Jewish Gnosticism, and Akiba represented Jewish anti-gnosticism.<sup>50</sup> Henry A. Fischel

saw this tradition as being related to Jewish epicureanism.<sup>51</sup> Manuel Joel saw the word "pardes" as a metaphor for gnosis, since the tree of knowledge which, as we saw in chapter I in the passage from the Testimony of Truth, is the purveyor of gnosis and is said to exist within "pardes."<sup>52</sup> Origen, in Contra Celsum VI:33, relates that the Gnostic sect called the Ophites used the same metaphor. The Ophites, who could have been the authors of the Testimony of Truth passage and who might have originally been Jewish Gnostics, derived their name from the Greek word for serpent. They felt that the serpent, by encouraging Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge, was in effect encouraging Eve to obtain gnosis.

The word "pardes" is not used in the Targum, but is used in the Septuagint as the translation for the "garden of Eden." It is evident that the word 'pardes' eventually entered Aramaic culture due to its usage in the four who entered "pardes" tradition. David Flusser feels that the Targum rejected the term "pardes" because it was associated with mystical ascent narratives which were too often felt to be heterodox.<sup>53</sup>

In the BT Hagigah 14b version of the "pardes" tradition, R. Akiba warns the other three sages with the words:

When you come to the place of pure marble plates, do not say 'Water water, for it is said, "He that tells lies shall not tarry in my sight."' (Psalm 101:7)

We have already seen that the palace of pure marble plates was the entrance to the sixth heaven. Two manuscripts of the Lesser Hekhalot provide us with a further understanding of the entrance to the dangerous sixth heaven. In Ms. Oxford 1531, Ben Azzai, upon seeing the gates, says "Water! Water!" Immediately he was decapitated and the text concludes saying,

This shall be a sign for all generations that no one should err at the gate of the sixth palace.

In the second manuscript, Ms. J.Th. Sem. 828 fol. 16b, Ben Azzai asks, "What kind of waters are these?" after which he died. In this manuscript, Ben Zoma sees the marble plates and

he took them for water and his body could not bear it to ask them, but his mind could not bear it and he went out of his mind.

If Scholem is correct in his early dating of the Lesser Hekhalot, we can begin to understand the type of esoteric mysticism that existed in the second century.<sup>54</sup>

In the "pardes" tradition, Elisha b. Abuyah could have been a dualistic Gnostic. Akiba seems to represent Rabbinic Judaism's view of what constitutes acceptable speculation and the type of person who may engage in it.<sup>55</sup> The tradition as a whole seems to restrict esoteric speculation by saying that only the great among the great, R. Akiba, may engage in such speculation without harmful consequences.

Having examined the Ben Zoma traditions in Rabbinic Literature, let us now return to our analyses of the conversation between Ben Zoma and Rabbi Joshua. In our critique of Samson Levey's position we had noted that the Babylonian Talmud's version of the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition seemed to be the least reliable version. The other three versions all explicitly state that Ben Zoma was contemplating the account of creation. All four versions maintain that, in Ben Zoma's speculation, the distance between the upper and lower waters was a short one. As a whole, this tradition is extremely enigmatic. Why, for example, was Ben Zoma concerned with stating that the distance between the upper and lower waters was short? Why was his view considered heretical by R. Joshua? How does this tradition relate to the other Ben Zoma traditions? These are questions to which there are no firm answers. Nevertheless, it is possible that an aid to understanding

the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition is to view Ben Zoma's interpretation as arising out of Gnostic seven heavens mysticism. We have seen, for example, how only the sixth and the seventh heavens possess water in Jewish tradition. The waters in the sixth heaven are viewed as negative and harmful. The waters in the seventh heaven, the dew of redemption, are positive and good. Therefore what was Ben Zoma speaking of when he spoke of the distance between the lower and upper waters? One possibility, given the esoteric nature of many of the other statements attributed to him, is that the lower and upper waters were the waters in the sixth and seventh heaven.

As we have seen, Ben Zoma seemed to be concerned with learning the secrets of ultimate redemption. These secrets were to replace the memory of the Exodus from Egypt in the consciousness of Israel. If Ben Zoma's vision as told to R. Joshua really is concerned with the distance between the two heavens, then the shorter that distance, the greater the chance of all the people of reaching the dew of resurrection, bringing the Messiah, and achieving redemption and eternal life.

It must be stressed that this hypothesis is a product of Ben Zoma's and not the Rabbis' interpretation of the account of creation in Genesis 1. There is no evidence which would suggest that the Rabbis viewed the upper and lower waters as being equivalent to the sixth and seventh heavens. The biblical view of the cosmos is expressed by the verse, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters" (Genesis 1:6). This view of the cosmos indicates that there are waters above and below the firmament. However when we look at the text in Genesis 1, we notice that the firmament is called 'heaven' or 'sky' (rakia) and not earth. Therefore the concept of lower and upper waters as being representative of the sixth and seventh heavens need not necessarily contradict the Genesis narrative. Continuing in the narrative,

one notices that while nothing is done with the upper waters, the lower waters are made into physical things; namely, earth and the seas. The distinction between the material of the sixth heaven, and the spiritual of the seventh heaven **is thus** supported by the biblical narrative.

This writer realizes the rather tentative nature of this hypothesis, and acknowledges that its major weakness is the association of the lower waters with the sixth heaven. Nevertheless, the hypothesis does explain certain things. For example, R. Phinehas, in Genesis Rabbah 4:3, maintained that there was a void between the firmament (rakia) and the upper waters. Such a passage could have been meant to counteract those, like Ben Zoma, who said that the distance between the sixth and seventh heaven is short. It could also refer to the belief that it is difficult if not impossible for man to reach the seventh heaven. As we saw in the "pardes" tradition, only Akiba was able to enter and descend in peace.

Waxman is correct when he states that the issue in the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition is a theory of emanation. The emanationism of Ben Zoma and the Rabbis was not out of necessity derived from Neoplatonic thought as Waxman maintained.<sup>56</sup> In the cosmology of Gnostics, especially in the Myth of the Sophia, it is possible to see a leveled emanation of God. This leveled emanation may be reflected in the seven heaven's theory. The goal of the mystic would be to transcend the various levels and to ascend to the highest level. By ascending to the highest level, man would leave behind his material self, and become a spiritual being. Thus the four who enter "pardes" are desirous of ascending to the last and highest level.

A second century document from Nag Hammadi, The Apocalypse of Paul, shows how a Gnostic-Christian group dealt with the idea of emanationism. This document details the ascent of Paul through the various levels of heaven.

However, the virtues associated with the seventh heaven in Jewish tradition are in this document assigned to the tenth heaven. When Paul reached the seventh heaven, he was confronted by an old man who is identified as the creator. The goal of Paul is a Gnostic-Christian is to ascend beyond this old man, who may be the God of the Hebrew Bible, the demiurge, or a combination of the two. This document might have been composed by the Valentinian Gnostics, who considered the demiurge to be a lower and different emanation of the Supreme Being. As Jonas noted, Syrian-Egyptian dualism, such as Valentinianism, sees the dualism as emanating out of the Supreme Being himself.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that the various levels of heaven in The Apocalypse of Paul represent, for the early Gnostic, the differing emanations of God. The goal of the Gnostic became to transcend the various levels of physical emanations in order to reach the highest non-material level. For a Jewish Gnostic, possibly Ben Zoma, the goal would be to transcend the physical waters of the sixth heaven and reach the dew of resurrection in the seventh.

It is possible then that the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua passage may be understood by seeing Ben Zoma as a Jewish Gnostic. If so, he would represent a rather "mild" form of Gnosticism; "mild" in that it lacked a dualistic notion. Ben Zoma's gnosis was open to all, not only to the great Rabbis such as Akiba. For those who possessed it, the distance between the sixth and seventh heaven is short.

This hypothesis, as mentioned earlier, is only one plausible and admittedly rather challenging way of viewing an extremely enigmatic tradition. Even if the reader chooses to deny the validity of this writer's hypothesis, it is clear that the issue in the Ben Zoma tradition is esoteric speculation (Jewish gnosis) on the account of creation, and not Christianity as maintained by Samson Levey. R. Joshua's negative reaction to Ben Zoma and the labeling

of Ben Zoma as being demented (in the "pardes" tradition) only point to the heretical nature of Ben Zoma's beliefs according to the Rabbis. Esoteric speculation on the account of creation became an important issue within the Jewish community due to the fact that certain people within that community were influenced by Gnosticism. One of these people could have been Shimon Ben Zoma. In chapters V and VI of this thesis, we shall examine the larger context in which the versions of the Ben Zoma-R. Joshua tradition in the Palestinian Talmud and in Genesis Rabbah are placed. The context of both of these versions seems to indicate that the main issue of discussion was the type, extent, and degree of speculation on the account of creation.

# I. The Prohibition of Ben Sira

## Passage 13

### Genesis Rabbah 8:2

"Know you this of old time" (Job 20:4). The Torah knows what was before the creation of the world, but you have no business inquiring (into the account of creation except) "Since (from the time when) man was placed upon the earth" (Deut. 4:32). R. Leazar said in Bar Sira's name: Do not speculate on that which is too great for you. Do not investigate into that which is too hard for you. Do not know that which is too wonderful for you. Do not ask concerning that which is hidden from you. Build upon (study) that which you are permitted. You have no business with esoteric things.

### Palestinian Talmud, Hagigah II:1 77c, lines 18-20

R. Eleazar said in the name of Bar Sira: What should you know concerning that which is too wonderful for you? What should you investigate concerning the depths of the nether-world. Inquire (only) into that which has been transmitted to you. You have no business with esoteric things.

The obvious intention of the statement of Ben Sira is the limitation of esoteric speculation. The usage of this statement by the redactors of Genesis Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud is an example of a redactor using an earlier well-known source to demonstrate the validity and authority of a later tradition. This statement may be found in The Wisdom of Ben Sira 3:21-22 :

Do not speculate on the things which are too  
wonderous for you.  
Do not investigate that which is hidden from you  
Build upon (study) that which you are permitted  
You have no business with esoteric things.<sup>61</sup>

Ben Sira, or Simeon b. Jesua b. Eleazer b. Sira, lived in either the third or second century B.C.E. He is the attributed author of the book of Ecclesiasticus, or The Wisdom of Ben Sira. This book consists of poetic maxims like those in the book of proverbs, historical poems, a description of daily life in Jerusalem at that time, assorted psalms and hymns, and passages which stress the importance of wisdom.<sup>62</sup> The book, which apparently was widely read and well-known, was translated into Greek in the second century B.C.E. Despite its popularity, The Wisdom of Ben Sira was not included in the canon of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>63</sup>

The Ben Sira warning preceeds the "lying lips" polemic in the Haqiqah II:1, 77c version. In this version, Ben Sira is quoted by R. Eleazer as if he (Ben Sira) were one of the Rabbis. The "lying lips" polemic in Genesis Rabbah 1:5 does not include Ben Sira's warning. Job 20:4 which is connected to the Genesis Rabbah 8:2 version, is not mentioned contiguously to the Haqiqah II:1 77c version.

Ben Sira or the book of Ben Sira is mentioned four times in Genesis Rabbah.<sup>64</sup> In Genesis Rabbah 8:2, Ben Sira's warning concerning the limits of speculation appears as part of a proem based upon Job 20:4:

Know you this of old time  
Since man was placed upon the earth.

This proem lacks a pericope verse, but seems to relate to the creation of man in Genesis 1:26. The proem discusses the events which preceded the creation of man on the sixth day. In the proem, a story by R. Hana b. Hanina ends with the statement that the Torah preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years. This statement is proved by Proverbs 8:30:

I was His delight day after day.

The repetition of the word "day" in this verse is interpreted to mean two days. The subject of the verse is considered to be the Torah. Then Psalm 90:4

For a thousand years in Your sight  
Are as yesterday when it is past.

is used to prove that one day for God is one-thousand years for man. Thus the Torah preceded the creation of the world by thousand years.

The idea here is that because it preceded creation, the Torah knows what occurred in creation. One who wishes to know what occurred prior to the creation of man should look into the Torah for his answers. The legal position of this passage is that one should not speculate upon what occurred prior to the creation of man on the sixth day. To support this belief, the author of the proem repeats Job 20:4. The words, "mini ad" which means "of old time," can be interpreted to mean "from God" since the word "ad" can in Rabbinic Literature be a synonym for God.<sup>65</sup> The definite article in "hazot," "this," is interpreted to mean the specific Torah given by God. The Hebrew text in Job 20:4 reads "hazot yadata," "know you this." The Midrash reads the Hebrew as "hazot yadaat," "this knows." Thus when we put together the entire interpretation of Job 20:4 by the Midrash, we obtain: "This (the Torah) knows from God (what occurred prior to the time) when man was placed upon

the earth." It is at this point that the author of the proem cites Ben Sira's limitation of esoteric speculation in support of his interpretation of Job 20:4.

It is important to note that Ben Sira's warning is always used to support the more strict interpretation that one may not speculate concerning the events of creation which preceeded the creation of man. This warning, like the "above, below, before and after" phrase, might have been well-known among the general public. Both were used by teachers who desired to limit the degree and nature of permissible speculation concerning the creation of the world. Although it might be merely coincidence, it is also interesting to note that both Ben Sira's warning in Genesis Rabbah 8:2 and the "above, below, before and after" phrase in Genesis Rabbah 1:10 each contain four specific prohibitions.<sup>66</sup>

J. Common Traditions in Genesis Rabbah chapters 9-94 and  
Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud

Passage 14

Genesis Rabbah 9:1

R. Levi in the name of R. Hama b. Hanina began his discourse with the verse: "It is glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). R. Levi said in R. Hama b. Hanina's name: From the beginning of the book (of Genesis) up to this point, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Ibid), but from this point onward, "The glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Ibid). It is the glory of the words of the Torah, which are likened to kings, as it is said, "By me kings reign" (Proverbs 8:15), "to search out a matter." Therefore, "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1 77c lines 29-30.

R. Levi said, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," prior to the creation of the world; "But the glory of kings to search out a matter," from the time of creation.

In this section we shall examine the common traditions of PT Hagigah II:1 and Genesis Rabbah which do not occur in chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah. Due to the limited nature of this study, these passages will not be analyzed to the same depth as the previous passages in this chapter. We have already discussed in section G of this chapter the interpretation of the account of creation by the schools of Hillel and Shammai which occurs in Genesis Rabbah 12:5 (passage 11).

Passage 14 presents us with R. Levi's limitation of esoteric speculation. R. Levi was a third century Palestinian authority who studied in R. Yochanan's academy in Tiberias. In the Genesis Rabbah version, which is in the form of a short proem based upon Proverbs 25:2 and Genesis 1:31, R. Levi quotes R. Hama b. Hanina, an earlier third century Palestinian authority.

Genesis Rabbah 9:1 identifies the point where speculation may begin as Genesis 1:31, the pericope text of the proem. The PT Hagigah II:1 77c passage identifies the point as the time of creation of the world. As a whole, the interpretation found in both versions seems to be rather fragmentary.

## Passage 15

Genesis Rabbah 12:10

R. Judan the Nasi asked R. Samuel b. Nahman: As I have heard that you are a master of interpretation, tell me the meaning of "Extol Him who rides upon the sky, 'be-yah' is his name" (Psalm 68:5). He answered: There is no place which lacks a ruler. (For example) a governor of a state is appointed to rule it (and) a magistrate in a state is appointed to rule it. Similarly, who is appointed to the rulership of the world? The Holy One, Blessed be He, Be-yah is His name, the ruler is His name. (In Greek the word Bia is "ruler" or "governor") He said: Woe to those who are lost and will not return. I asked R. Eleazer and he did not answer thus. But the verse ("Trust ye in the Lord for ever,") for Be-yah the Lord is an everlasting rock" (Isaiah 26:4). This means: By these two letters, the Lord created His world. Now we do not know whether this world was created with a "he" or the world to come with a "yod," but R. Abbahu said in R. Yochanan's name, "Behibbaram" means with a "he" he created them (b'he-barram). It follows that this world was created with a "he." Now the "he" is closed on all sides and open underneath: This is an indication that all the dead descend into sheol. Its upper hook is an indication that (those who descend) are destined to ascend; the opening at the side is a hint to sentence. The world to come was created with a "yod:" Just as the "yod" has a curved back, so the faces of the wicked: their posture shall be bent and their faces blackened in the messianic future, as it is written, "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down" (Isaiah 2:17). What will he (the wicked) say? "And the idols shall utterly pass away. Be-hibbaram: R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Judah b. R. Simon. The Holy one, Blessed be He, did not create the world by means of labor or toil, but "By the word of the Lord" (Genesis 2:4), and the heavens were already made. Be-hibbaram: With a "he" He created them. It was like a king who rebuked his servant, so that he stood still in bewilderment; even so, "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at His rebuke" (Job 26:11).

Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1 77c, lines 50-63

R. Abbahu in the name of R. Yohanan. With two letters, two worlds were created: This world and the world to come. One (was created) with a "heh" and one (was created) with a "yod." What is reasoning? "For the Lord (Bet-yod-heh) is God an everlasting rock" (Isaiah 26:4). (read here as "For with a "yod" and a "heh" the Lord created Worlds) Do we not know which was created with a "heh" and which was

created with a "yod?" Yes, from that which is written, "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created" (Gen. 2:4). (Be-hibbaram read as Be-heh-baram) with a "heh," he created them. Thus this world was created with a "heh" and the world to come with a "yod." Now the "heh" is open underneath. This is an indication to all the people of the world that they will go down to Sheol. Now the "heh" has a point above it (which means that) from the time they descend they (are destined) to ascend. Even as the "heh" is open on all sides, as a hint to all would be penitents (that they may still repent), so the "yod" is bent as all the inhabitants of the world are bent (as it is written): "All faces are bent low with shame" (Jeremiah 30:6). When David saw this, he began to praise the two letters, "Halleluyah. Praise O ye servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord" (Psalm 150:1).

R. Judah (II) Nesiah asked R. Samuel b. Nahman: 'What is the law concerning that which is written, "Extol him that rides upon the skies, Be-yah is His name, and exult ye before him" (Ps. 68:5). He answered, 'You will not find a single place which lacks someone appointed to rule over it. And who is appointed to rule over it all? The Holy one bless be He. Be-Yah (the ruler) is his name, for "Yod-heh" is his name.'

This tradition represents a speculation on the creation of the world based upon the letters "he" and "yod." The bases of the tradition is the interpretation of "be-hibbaram," "when they were created" in Genesis 2:4. "They" in this verse represents the heaven and the earth. The Midrash interprets "be-hibbaram" as "be-heh-baram," with the letter "heh" God created the heaven and the earth.

Each version also cites Psalm 68:5;

Extol Him that rides in the skies  
Be-yah is His name.

From this verse the letter "yod" is added to the letter "heh" as one of the letters of creation. Each letter is said to have created a world. The "heh" is said to have created this world. The shape of the "heh" is discussed. The bottom opening of the "heh" is said to signify that the dead go down to the nether-world; the upper hook signifies that they who go down will ascend; and the opening at the side is said to be a hint to the wicked that repentance is always a possibility. The "yod" is said to have been the agent of creation in the world to come. Its shape is said to be symbolic of people in the world to come who are bent with shame because of their sins. In both versions, this interpretation is said to be the position of R. Yochanan (died 270 C.E.) and his pupil, R. Abbahu. Each in his time was the head of an important school; R. Yochanan in Tiberias, and R. Abbahu in Caesarea. Each also was known for his polemics against Christian and Gnostic claims.

Also common to both versions is the conversation between R. Judah II Nesia and R. Samuel b. Nahman, each of whom lived in the second half of the third century. The interpretation of the word "Be-yah" in this conversation is a play on the Greek word "Bia" which means "rulership" or "governorships." In the Genesis Rabbah version, this conversation precedes the interpretation that two letters created two worlds.

(discussed immediately above). In the Palestinian Talmud's versions, the conversation follows the interpretation of the two letters.

Unique to the version in Genesis Rabbah is a speculation which maintains that the letter "heh" created this world without effort. As the letter "heh" is said without effort, so this world was created without effort. This interpretation is also brought as the position of R. Abbahu and R. Yochanan. Genesis Rabbah 12:10 ends with two more interpretations of the word "be-hibbaram." In the first, R. Berekiah in the name of R. Judah b. R. Simon repeats the idea that the letter "heh" signifies that the world was created without toil. Following this interpretation is a reference to Genesis Rabbah 8:8, wherein God tells the world to cease its expansion before it destroys itself. This occurs during the creative process itself. The letter "heh" is seen as a rebuke, similar to the English, "Hey what are you doing?" Therefore, the Hebrew letter "heh," being a wordless sound, is also an utterance of contempt.

The tradition in passage 15, given its highly speculative nature, reflects a more lenient view towards speculation on the events which preceeded man in the creation of the world. The fact that Genesis Rabbah includes more interpretations within this tradition could signify that the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 12:10 had a more lenient attitude towards speculation than the redactor of PT Hagigah II:1. With this in mind, we will now proceed to examine the non-common traditions in each literary source. In this examination, we shall attempt to analyze the overall attitudes of the redactors to Genesis Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud towards speculation on the creation of the world.

CHAPTER V

THE TRADITIONS OF HAGIGAH II:1 IN

THE PALESTINIAN TALMUD:

A REDACTION CRITIQUE

Having examined the common traditions of Genesis Rabbah and Hagigah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud, let us now examine the Hagigah traditions as a whole unit, taking especially into account the traditions which do not appear in Genesis Rabbah.<sup>1</sup> The overall structure of the traditions in Hagigah II:1 77a-d is determined to an extent by Mishnah Hagigah II:1. The beginning of the gemara in Hagigah II:1 77a-d appears to be based upon the first sentence of the Mishnah. The remainder of Mishnah Hagigah II:1, although related thematically, is not mentioned in the gemara to the first halacha.

The gemara begins with a discussion of the forbidden decrees of marriage. The gemara uses this discussion to set up and give its view of the conflict between Akiba and Ishmael concerning the validity of the first sentence in Mishnah Hagigah II:1 which reads:

The forbidden decrees of Marriage may not be expounded before three persons, nor the account of creation before two, nor the account of the chariot before one alone.

Akiba, along with R. Ba and R. Judah II Nesia, felt that the prohibition of the Mishnah was valid. R. Ishmael and R. Ami, a late third century Palestinian authority in Tiberias, disagreed with the Mishnah and consequently permitted the speculation and exposition of that which the Mishnah prohibited. The gemara accepts the Ishmaelite position.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of the account of creation, the gemara again upholds the more lenient interpretation of R. Ishmael. As if to prove its point and illustrate its legal position, the gemara presents R. Judah b. Pazi's discourse on the account of creation, which by its very nature, denies the view in the Mishnah that the account of creation may not be discussed before two people.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, his discourse, which we may label as a form of Jewish gnosis,

does the honor and unity of God through its support of every assertion by a biblical proof-text. In such a way, it may be argued that the position of the PT Hagigah II:1 77a-d redactor is that speculation is permitted when it is done with the understanding that the Hebrew Bible is the source for all gnosis. With such an understanding, speculation on the account of creation is not only permissible, but even desirable in that it shows what type of speculation is acceptable and the method by which acceptable speculation may be done.

One of the verses used by R. Judah b. Pazi in his discourse is Amos 4:13;

For lo, He that forms the mountains  
and creates the wind.

This verse serves as the connecting link to the next tradition in which six verses are listed which are said to be verses that R. Judah ha-Nasi would read and over which he would weep. In addition to Amos 4:13, R. Judah ha-Nasi is said to have wept at Zephaniah 2:3, Amos 5:15, Lamentations 3:29, Ecclesiastes 12:14, and I Samuel 28:15. All of these verses seem to stress God's power to bring the world to judgment. God's ledger is also discussed here. This tradition seems to have had nothing in common with Mishnah Hagigah II:1. Furthermore, it is not an example of creation speculation. Its placement here seems to be the result of Amos 4:13's appearance in this and the previous tradition (R. Judah b. Pazi's discourse on creation).

The next tradition in the gemara is brought forth by R. Judah b. Pazi in R. Yosi b. Judah's name. This tradition consists of a discussion between Hadrian and Aquila in which the latter proves that the world stands upon the wind (ruach). This discussion is probably related to the account of creation, quite possibly to Genesis 1:2, "and the 'ruach' of God hovered over the face of the waters." The term "ruach" here may be seen as being synonymous

with God himself. Therefore, the purpose of R. Judah b. Pazi's discussion was to show that the God of Israel was not only the creator of the world, but the supporting agent of the world as well.<sup>4</sup>

The gemara's discussion of the Mishnaic phrase, "Nor the account of creation before two," seems to lack both thematic and exegetic unity. The connection of the six verses tradition to R. Judah b. Pazi's discourse on creation seems to have been done without consideration of theme. This discussion between Aquila and Hadrian seems to be rather haphazardly placed here, for no principle of redaction known to this writer is able to account for its placement.

The remainder of Hagigah II:1 77a-d is given over to a discussion of the Mishnah's "nor the account of the chariot before one."

In this section, the gemara once again tells us that the Mishnaic prohibition represents the position of R. Akiba. The gemara also brings forth an argument at the end of the Mishnah; namely, that man should be sensitive to the honor of God. The gemara tells us the method by which an authority would actually teach the account of the chariot, or "ma'aseh merkabah." It seems that the teacher would only tell the student the general areas of concern. If at this point, the teacher felt that the student possessed sufficient understanding of these "chapter headings," the student could then continue on his own to study the account of the chariot. However, a student who studied without his teacher's approval was subject to punishment by God. The intent of this passage is clear in that it not only places a certain limit on chariot speculation, but it also establishes and upholds a theocratic-political structure for the transmission of such speculation. The tradition ends by saying that the teachings concerning the chariot are like two paths, one of fire and one of snow. The only way to speculate on the chariot and survive is to take the

middle way between these two paths. Only a great and knowledgeable Rabbi, one who possesses the knowledge of the middle way, may serve as one's guide in chariot or "Merkabah" speculations.

The next tradition in Hagigah II:1 relates how R. Yochanon b. Zakkai permitted his student, R. Eliezer b. Arak, to expound on the account of the chariot. As such, it serves as an illustration of the preceeding limitation of chariot speculation. Eliezer b. Arak's description of the chariot is not found within the text. Nevertheless, the text tells us that his description of the chariot was so correct that an angel acknowledged its veracity and the trees began to sing. After this occurred, Yochanan b. Zakkai blessed his student and praised him for the fact that his words were in accordance with his actions. This tradition shows the care and caution with which one of the greatest Rabbis approached esoteric speculation on the account of the chariot with his student.<sup>5</sup>

The gemara continues with a description of the speculations of R. Yosi the priest and Simeon b. Nathaniel. The connection to that which it follows is not merely a thematic one, for like Eliezer b. Arak, R. Yosi the priest and Simeon b. Nathaniel were also disciples of R. Yochanon b. Zakkai. R. Yosi and Simeon also seem to have speculated on the nature of the chariot ("Merkabah"). During their speculation, a Bat Kol, a heavenly voice, came and told them that their place in the world to come had been prepared and that they were to sit in the third group before the Divine Presence. The third group was considered by "merkabah" mystics to have been the wisest of three groups which sits before the divine presence and studies the divine chariot. Both of the preceeding two traditions illustrate that only a very great Rabbi, R. Yochanan b. Zakkai, and certain selected students of his were worthy of receiving and transmitting teaching on the account of the chariot. In the

overall context of the traditions in PT Hagigah II: 1 77 a-d, the traditions concerning R. Yochanan b. Zakkai and his students seem to uphold both the stricter view towards esoteric speculation and the idea that the transmission of esoteric knowledge is done only in the context of a theocratic-political structure. As we shall see, this latter idea appears frequently in PT Hagigah II:1, 77 a-d.

It is at this point that the conversation between R. Joshua and Ben Zoma appears.<sup>6</sup> There is no obvious connection with the previous traditions concerning Yochanan b. Zakkai and his students. As a matter of fact, the former traditions explicitly deal with the account of the chariot as opposed to the Ben Zoma - R. Joshua tradition which deals with the account of creation. As noted earlier, it is clear that Ben Zoma's speculation is unacceptable. This is seen by the fact that R. Joshua considered Ben Zoma to be "outside" the academy. Furthermore, the fact that Ben Zoma died a few days after his conversation with R. Joshua could have been interpreted as a warning to those who speculate incorrectly, without the permission of their teacher, or who who speculate at all. In other words, Ben Zoma's death could have been seen as evidence of divine judgment. As such, the Ben Zoma - R. Joshua tradition could have been, in the view of the redactor, a contrast to the acceptable speculations of Yochanan b. Zakkai and his students.

Esoteric knowledge concerning the account of the chariot may be transmitted and held by only the very greatest of scholars. R. Judah b. Pazi illustrates this fact when he, in the name of R. Yosi, presents us with a chain of transmission concerning esoteric knowledge. The chain consists of pupils who presented their speculations before their teacher. R. Joshua of the Ben Zoma tradition is said to have presented his discourse to his teacher, R. Yochanan b. Zakkai. Akiba is said to have presented his discourse before R. Joshua, and R. Hanania b. Hanina is said to have

presented his discourse before R. Akiba. After this chain of transmission, the text presents us with the rather awkward statement, "From this time on their minds were no longer pure." The meaning of this statement is not entirely clear, yet the intent is clearly negative. Once again, we see how the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud stressed the peril of esoteric speculation, as well as the great stature and knowledge of the authorities who participated in it.

It is at this point that the "pardes" tradition is discussed.<sup>7</sup> This tradition seems to uphold the Akibaite position on esoteric speculation found in Mishnah Hagigah II:1. Akiba is seen as the legitimate representative of acceptable mysticism within the parameters of Rabbinic Judaism.

From the beginning of the discussion of the account of the chariot to this point, it may be said that all of the traditions seem to reflect the stricter view towards speculation. As such, the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud by assembling these traditions in this order could be telling us of his negative attitude towards mystical or esoteric speculation on either the account of creation or the account of the chariot. At this place in the text, the redactor brings forth a whole series of traditions concerned with Elisha ben Abuyah, or Aher. The connection of these traditions to the "pardes" tradition is obvious, for Elisha b. Abuyah was one of the four who entered the "pardes." Aher, as mentioned previously, could have been a dualistic Gnostic. The collection of 'Aher' traditions is indeed impressive in terms of size. The redactor of the Palestinian Talmud provides us with the largest single collection of negative 'Aher' traditions in all of Rabbinic Literature.<sup>8</sup> This fact, as we shall see shortly, helps us to understand the overall concerns of the redactor of PT Hagigah II:1 77a-d. If we include the "pardes"

tradition in which Aher appears, then Aher is discussed from page 77b line 8 through page 77c line 18, a total of 86 Hebrew lines!

The redactor begins this discussion by identifying Elisha ben Abuyah as Aher. Aher is accused of destroying the Rabbis' Torah and of misleading students. We are told that he attempted to predict the occupations of his students, but that God confounded his predictions. He is said to have forced Jews to desecrate the Sabbath by forcing them to carry burdens on that day. For emphasis, this incident is said to have occurred during a period of religious persecution. The incident also reflects Aher's anti-nomianism.

R. Meiris said to have been Aher's student. Once, while lecturing in the academy in Tiberias, Meir was informed that Aher was outside. When Meir went out to greet his teacher, Aher asked him with what proem verse he had begun his lecture. Meir attempts to use the conversation as a vehicle for obtaining Aher's repentance, but is unsuccessful in this effort.

Another tradition regards Aher's circumcision as a child. We are told that his father, Abuyah, was one of the prominent citizens of Jerusalem. At his circumcision, Eliezer and Jushua, both of whom were students of Yochanan ben Zakkai, were in another room studying the Hebrew Bible. Their study session was said to be so intense that they almost caused the house to burn down. Their Torah was likened to the Torah given to Moses on Mount Sinai in that it was given in fire. Abuya, Aher's father, upon seeing this miraculous feat of learning, pledged that if his son lived to be an adult, he would dedicate him to the study of Torah. Aher tells us that his father lacked the proper intention upon making this vow. As a result, according to Aher, the vow lacked meaning, and he (Aher) lacks Torah. At this point, R. Meir once again attempts to obtain Aher's

repentance, and once again is unsuccessful in his effort.

The text then records another R. Meir-Aher tradition. Aher is said to have been able to have measured the Sabbath boundary by the hoof steps of his horse. In answer to Meir's diligence in trying to obtain his repentance, Aher relates a story that one time he rode past the Temple on Yom Kippur. Symbolically, this was an extremely grave offense which stresses Aher's antinomianism. Aher appears to have been both adamant and vehement in his non-observance of the commandments. This tradition ends with a comment that even if he had wanted to repent, Aher's repentance would not have been accepted by God.

The redactor of PT Hagigah II:1 77a-d then brings forth several traditions which attempt to account for Aher's having become an apostate. The first tradition says that Aher became an apostate because he saw that people who observed the commandments, suffered in this world. The second states that he became an apostate when he saw R. Judah the Baker's tongue in the mouth of a dog. (Obviously the result of religious persecution). At the root of each of these traditions appears to be Aher's lack of belief in divine providence. In the late first and early second centuries, such beliefs must have been common among the general Jewish populace. Against this background, many scholars have seen a fertile ground on which Christianity developed. It also should be considered fertile ground for either Jewish or Christian Gnosticism. Gnosticism offered the believer a way of understanding the sufferings in this world. The lack of faith in a God whose Temple had been violently destroyed, and whose people seemed to have been chosen only to suffer, must have been great. Therefore against this historical backdrop it would have been easy for many Jews to have viewed the God of Israel as the demiurge.

A third tradition does not seem to be related to the previous two traditions. It ascribes Aher's apostasy to his mother who is said to have apostatized when pregnant with Aher.

The redactor of PT Hagigah II:1 77a-d then returns to the relationship between Aher and R. Meir. On Aher's deathbed, Meir once again tries to convince Aher to repent. After Aher died, Meir felt that Aher had repented before his death. Either Aher did not repent or his repentance was not accepted, for after his burial, his grave was burned. Meir is credited with extinguishing the fire and with saving Aher from eternal punishment in the world to come. The redactor seems to stress that Aher was saved only by the merits of R. Meir. It is not clear why, after making Aher into such a negative example, the Rabbis chose to stress Meir's saving of Aher.

Two other short traditions concerning Aher end the section on him. In the first, Meir demonstrates his respect for Aher by stating that he would prefer to visit Aher before he visited his own father in the world to come. In the second tradition, Aher's daughters ask for charity from R. Judah ha-Nasi. At first, R. Judah ha-Nasi seems reluctant to give them charity, but later is said to have changed his mind and given the fatherless girls charity.

At this point, let us attempt to draw some conclusions regarding this rather large collection of Aher traditions by the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud. The redactor began this collection by seeking to justify the appellation of "Aher," "another," for Elisha b. Abuyah. Elisha b. Abuyah was truly "another" in terms of the Rabbinic community, given the activities which he is reported to have done, the beliefs which he is reported to have held, and the general attitude of disdain towards him by the Rabbis. Aher seems to have actively attempted to encourage and force his antinomian beliefs upon the Jews. This we

saw when he desecrated the Sabbah and tried to encourage others to do the same. It is quite possible that he attempted to appeal to others like himself who had a lack of faith in reward for observance of the commandments. Aher's apostasy is never actually spelled out in detail. To do so would have, in the Rabbis' eyes, given credence to a non-credible system of belief. The only clue which we have as to the nature of Aher's apostasy would be the placement of these traditions within PT Hagigah II:1. On one hand, the placement of this collection of traditions could have been due solely to the fact that the collection follows the "pardes" tradition. Aher, the reader will remember, was one of the "four who entered pardes." On the other hand, his apostasy might have been related to the concerns expressed in the other traditions in this section. With this in mind, let us now proceed with our examination of the remaining traditions in PT Hagigah II:1.

The remaining traditions in this source have been discussed in detail in chapter IV. We shall merely cite them here in order to show their order of appearance:

1. Ben Sira's limitation of esoteric speculation- 77c lines 18-20. Passage 13.
2. The "lying lips" polemic. 77c lines 20-28. Passage 1
3. R. Levi's limitation of speculation. 77c lines 29-30. Passage 14
4. R. Levi's interpretation of Job 20:4. 77c line 31. Passage 13.
5. R. Jonah and R. Ba's interpretation of Deut. 4:32. 77c lines 32-41. Passage 5
6. R. Jonah and R. Levi's interpretation of the shape of the letter "bet." 77c, lines 41-44. Passage 4
7. The projecting points of the "bet." 77c lines 44-46. Passage 8.
8. The "bet" connotes blessing. 77c lines 46-50. Passage 7
9. Speculation on the letters "heh" and "yod." 77c lines 50-63. **Passage 15.**
10. R. Eliezer's earthly king who builds a palace on a dung heap. 77c lines 63-68. Passage 2

11. The Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai controversy over which was created first, the heaven or the earth. 77c line 68-77d line 21. Passage 11

The order of the common traditions in the Palestinian Talmud and Genesis Rabbah is significantly different, as the following chart using the numbers above suggests:

<u>Palestinian Talmud</u>	<u>Genesis Rabbah</u>
1	8:2
2	1:5
3	9:1
4	8:2
5	1:10
6	1:10
7	1:10
8	1:10
9	12:10
10	1:5
11	1:15 and 12:10

To this we may add the interpretation of Job 37:6 in PT Hagigah 77a lines 4-15 and Genesis Rabbah 1:6; and the conversation between Ben Zoma and R. Joshua in PT Hagigah 77a line 63 through 77b line 5 and Genesis Rabbah 2:4.

It is only natural that we should expect a different order in the two sources. Genesis Rabbah, being an exegetic work, had a totally different basis of organization than the Palestinian Talmud. In addition, the proemial form used by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah generated its own set of principles of redaction. For example, in the "lying lips" polemic we saw how these principles of redaction led to the attribution of two contradictory statements to the same authority, Bar Kappara.<sup>9</sup>

There are three possible ways of explaining the relationship between these two sources. The first would see the redactors of PT Hagigah II:1 and of Genesis Rabbah 1-12 as possessing a common source of traditions which each used in a different manner as demanded by their own principles of redaction. The second possibility is to see the editor of Genesis Rabbah 1-12 as having PT Hagigah II:1 as a source.

The third possibility would reverse this scenario, having the Hagigah redactor using Genesis Rabbah as a source. In all three cases, it is clear that the redactor of each source had his own principles and parameters of redaction. It is however beyond the scope of this thesis to determine which of the three possible relationships mentioned above seems to be the most viable.

Because of the fact that each of the common or shared traditions in the two sources have, for the most part, a similar attitude towards speculation, it is the non-common traditions in the Palestinian Talmud Hagigah II:1 which tell us the most about redactors attitude towards esoteric speculation and Gnosticism. The redactor of PT Hagigah II:1 was intent upon presenting the different positions of Akiba and Ishmael vis-a-vis speculation. Akiba, representing the stricter view, is said to have been the author of the position held by Mishnah Hagigah II:1. Ishmael represents the more lenient view. The redactor of Hagigah II:1 seems to have followed the more lenient view concerning public discussion on the forbidden decrees of marriage and public speculation on the account of creation. However, in terms of speculation on the account of the chariot, the redactor seems to have followed the Akibaite position. As a matter of fact, the redactor never gives us any evidence as to whether or not Ishmael actually disagreed with Akiba vis-a-vis speculation on the account of the chariot.

It is clear regarding the chariot speculations, that the redactor seemed intent upon **upholding** the theocratic-political structure of the Rabbis. Gnosis on the chariot is not readily available to all, nor are all worthy of receiving it. There is a certain way in which it is to be taught, and there are certain prerequisites that must be met by the student before he is allowed to speculate. The result of these restrictions is that only the very greatest of scholars, such as Yochanan ben Zakkai, his

selected students and their selected disciples, could engage in such speculation. The authorities listed who were able to engage in this speculation are Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, R. Eliezer b. Arak, R. Yosi the priest, Simeon b. Nathaniel, R. Joshua b. Hananiah, R. Akiba, and R. Hanania b. Hanina. It is not clear whether these authorities also engaged in speculation on the account of creation, but it is certainly possible that they did.

The collection of Aher traditions seems to stress the danger of speculation. These traditions display a harshly negative tone towards the heresy represented by Aher. Aher's heresy was not just that he violated Jewish law and encouraged others to do so, but it included the belief that neither divine providence nor reward arises out of the performance of the commandments. Furthermore, Aher is said to have been one of the four who entered the pardes, the realm of esoteric knowledge. This fact plus the general placement of the Aher traditions in the framework of Mishnah Hagigah II:1 seems to indicate the Aher engaged in unbridled speculation. This seems to have been the root of his heresy. From the placement of the Aher traditions within PT Hagigah II:1 77 a-d, we see that it was not just antinomianism which made Elisha b. Abuyah into an Aher (another).

The history of the Rabbis' concern for limits on esoteric speculation begins in the post 70 C.E. period and extends at least through the beginning of the fourth century. It begins with Rabban Yochanan b. Zakkai who, as evidenced by this conversation with Eliezer b. Arak, seems to have known of a prohibition similar to that of Mishnah Hagigah II:1. Nevertheless, his students and their students seem to have engaged in such speculation. During this period, there were variant views concerning the limits of acceptable speculation on the account of creation. The more lenient view seems to have been held by Ishmael, R. Judah b. Pazi, and Bar Kappara. The stricter view seems

to have been held by R. Akiba, R. Levi, R. Jonah and Rav. It is impossible to know whether these views reflected merely the views of individuals or the views of variant schools of thought over a two hundred and fifty year period.

The redactor of PT Hagigah II:1 77c upheld the more lenient position of Ishmael concerning creation speculation. He indicates this by his inclusion of creation speculation. However, he did not permit public expositions on the account of the chariot. His limit on creation speculation seems to have been that such speculation must be based on the Hebrew Bible and, if done in public, should begin only with the creation of man on the sixth day. In general, he seems to have believed that speculation could only be undertaken by the greatest of Rabbis. Knowledge concerning the account of creation may be obtained only from them. In such a way he upheld the theocratic-political structure of the Rabbis regarding speculation. His overall attitude towards speculation seems to be a negative one. The inclusion of the Aher traditions, together with the 'lying lips' polemic and the strict interpretation of Deut. 4:32, would seem to support this observation. The dangers of speculation seem to be both spiritual and physical. In order to speculate one must 'walk between fire and snow.' Ben Zoma is said to have died due to his speculation. The redactor tells us that the dangers extend even to the great sages "whose minds were no longer pure" after engaging in speculation.

In conclusion, the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud expressed a considerable concern over the threat of unbridled esoteric speculation to the Jewish community. Certainly, Gnosticism and Gnostic speculations rank as prime candidates for the generative cause of this concern.



#### A. The Nature of Heresy in Genesis Rabbah 1-8

In this chapter, we shall examine the over arching thematic concerns of Genesis Rabbah 1-8. This examination will attempt to prove that these thematic concerns seem to have had a relationship to Gnosticism or seem to seek to provide the believer with Jewish gnosis. If this hypothesis is shown to be valid, then we will be able to begin to understand the concerns of the redactor of these chapters.

The word for "heretic" in Rabbinic Literature is "minim." Scholars have long debated to whom the Rabbis were referring in their usage of the word "minim." It seems to have been used in both the tannaitic and amoraic periods (from the first century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E. at the very least!).<sup>1</sup> Adolf Buchler, in an article entitled "The Minim of Sephoris and Tiberias in the Second and Third Centuries," has shown that a "min" may be either a patriotic Roman, a Gnostic such as Simon Magus, or a heathen Christian, such as Justin Martyr. He sees the year 135 C.E., the year of the Bar Kochba revolt, as being a watershed year. Before 135 C.E., the term "min" could apply to a Jew who denied the world to come, resurrection, and the divine origin of the Torah. Sometime during the late first and early second centuries C.E., Rabban Gamaliel II instructed Shmuel ha-katan to compose a "birkat ha-minim," a "blessing against heretics," which was to be included in the daily prayers.<sup>2</sup> This blessing sought to exclude "minim" from the synagogue, and was composed prior to 135 C.E. In the period after 135 C.E., Buchler feels that the term "minim" was applied to heathen Christians, to Bible-reading heathens who opposed Judaism, and to antinomian Gnostics. According to Buchler, there is no evidence that in this period the term "minim" referred to either Jewish Christians or Jewish Gnostics. In the period following 135 C.E., the "minim" in Tiberias and Sepphoris maintained that: 1) Judaism and Jews had been rejected by God in light of the political situation

of the Jewish people; 2) the Hebrew Bible gave testimony to a plurality of gods; 3) God is indifferent to repentance; and 4) there is no resurrection of the dead.<sup>3</sup> This concludes our summary of Buchler's position.<sup>4</sup>

Up until recently most scholars disagreed with Buchler and tended automatically to consider the "minim" to be Christians. Travers Herford did exactly this in his book Christianity in the Talmud and the Midrash.<sup>5</sup> Harris Hirschberg, in his article "Once Again- the Minim," argued that the term "minim" applies to Pauline Christians and not to Jewish gnostics.<sup>6</sup>

Even Buchler's argument above based as it is upon the date 135 C.E. as a watershed, is not without its flaws. Two post 135 C.E. traditions make it clear that even during this period, the term "min" could be applied to Jewish sectarians. In Hulin 13b of the Babylonian Talmud, "min" is defined as a Jew who ignored Jewish law. In PT Sanhedrin 10:6 29c, R. Yochanan (died 279 C.E.) states that the of Israel did not go into exile until they had become twenty-four different groups of "minim." Most probably R. Yochanan is referring in this passage to the Jewish sectarians of his own time.<sup>7</sup>

In light of the evidence above, this writer believes that the term "minim" could refer to many different groups. It is wrong, therefore, to attempt to identify the term "minim" as only applying to any one particular groups of heretics.<sup>8</sup> The key to understanding to whom the term "minim" applies, is to attempt to understand, where possible, the context of the arguments presented by or attributed to the people to whom the Rabbis refer as "minim." We must remember that the Rabbis, with their ethnocentric outlook upon the world, could have used the term "minim" in reference to all groups outside Rabbinic Judaism. With this in mind, let us now proceed to examine the usage of the term "minim" by the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1-8.

## Passage 16

Genesis Rabbah 8:8

R. Samuel b. Nahman said in R. Yonatan's name: When Moses was writing the Torah, writing down the account of each day, he came to the verse, "And God said: Let us ("na'aseh") make man etc." (Genesis 1:26). He said, Sovereign of the Universe! Why do you furnish an excuse to the heretics ("minim")? He said to him: write! Let he who wishes to err, err!

The term "minim" appears twice in these chapters. In each tradition wherein it appears, it appears in relation to Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image etc." In Genesis Rabbah 8:8, the term "minim" is applied to those who maintained that there was more than one God. R. Samuel b. Nahman, a late third century authority, said in R. Yonatan's name that when Moses was writing the Torah, he came to the word "na'aseh," "Let us make," (Genesis 1:26), and complained to God saying "Why do you give an excuse to the heretics?" The memory of this question is why, by using a plural verb "na'aseh," do you give the heretics an opportunity to maintain plurality.<sup>9</sup> In this passage, God answers Moses by saying that those who wish to err will do so anyway. In other words, R. Samuel b. Nahman and R. Yochanan chose here merely to ignore the heretical interpretation of Genesis 1:26. In the following tradition, we see how R. Simlai took a different approach to the problems of heretical interpretations of Scripture.

## Passage 17

Genesis Rabbah 8:9

The heretics ("minim") asked R. Simlai: How many dieties created the world? He answered them: You and I must inquire of the first days, as it is written, "For ask now of the first days etc." (Deut. 4:32). It is not written here, 'the dieties created ("baru," plural) man, rather "God created" ("bara;" singular). They again asked him, what is the meaning of "In the beginning Elohim (plural)? Baru (plural) is not written here, but bara (singular) Elohim the heaven and the earth.

Palestinian Talmud Berachot 12d

The heretics ("minim") asked R. Simlai: How many Gods created the world? He said to them: Do you ask me? Go and ask the first man as it is written, "Ask now of the first days which were before you, since God created (bara) man upon the earth" (Deut. 4:32). "Baru" (plural) "they created," is not written here, but "bara," "He created." They said to him: It is written, "In the beginning Elohim (plural) created." Is it written "they created" (baru)? (No) It is only written "He created" (bara singular).

Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:13

The heretics ("minim") asked R. Simlai: How many powers created the world? He said to them: You and I must ask the six days of creation. They said to him, Why is it not written, "In the beginning God created" (singular) instead of "the beginning Elohim (plural) created?" He said to them: It is not written here "baru" (plural), but "bara," "He created" (singular).

The second place in which the term "minim" appears is in Genesis Rabbah 8:9. Once again the term is found in relation to the exegesis of Genesis 1:26. As in the previous passage, the concern seems to have been that based on Genesis 1:26, the "minim" postulated a second figure present with and perhaps even aiding God during the time of creation.

In Genesis Rabbah 8:9, we find a conversation between R. Simlai and the "minim." R. Simlai lived in the second half of the third century C.E. He was a member of Judah II Nesia's circle and was known for his excellence in "aggadah." In this tradition, the "minim" are said to have asked R. Simlai, "How many dieties created the world?" R. Simlai answers, "I and you must inquire of the first days." In the PT Berachot 12d version of the same tradition, R. Simlai's answer is, "Go and ask the first man." In Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:13, his answer is, "I and you must inquire into the six days of creation." In each version, we are told to seek the answer based upon the authority of Deuteronomy 4:32. Deuteronomy 4:32 is, of course, the same verse used in Genesis Rabbah 1:10 to define the limits of creation speculation.<sup>10</sup> The different answers possibly reflect an uncertainty by the redactors as to the proper legal position regarding creation speculation. Nevertheless, the intention here is not to define limits, but rather to use the verse as a justification to investigate the history of the world prior to the creation of man. R. Simlai's legal position follows the position of Bar Kappara allowing for creation speculation from the first day of creation.

The answer to the "minim" in all versions is based upon Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning Elohim created (bara).<sup>11</sup>" The word "Elohim" could be understood as a plural noun, but the usage of the singular verb "bara," "he created" shows us that the word "Elohim" is to be considered as a singular noun. Thus only one diety, the God of Israel, was responsible

for the creation of the world. Note also that the question itself varies. In Genesis Rabbah 8:9 and in PT Berachot 12d, the question that the "minim" asked R. Simlai was, "kama elohot?", "How many dieties?" By contrast, in Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:13, the question is "kama reshuyot?", "How many powers?" In addition, both Genesis Rabbah and PT Berachot 12d use Deuteronomy 4:32 to support the reading of Genesis 1:1. This is done by showing how the seemingly plural noun "elohim" is once again used with the singular verb "bara" in Deuteronomy 4:32, "since the day that God created man etc." Thus, it is clear that the "minim" of concern to the redactor of Genesis Rabbah seem to have stressed the seeming plurality of the word "Elohim" in their polemics against Jews and in the statements of doctrine.

## Passage 18

Genesis Rabbah 8:9b

R. Simlai stated: In every place wherein one finds an answer of the "minim" (a point which supports them), one finds its refutation at its side. They asked him again. What is meant by, "And God said Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26). He said to them: Read that which follows, "And Elohim created (plural) man" is not written here, but "and Elohim created (singular) man" (Gen. 1:27). When they went out, his students said to him: You have driven these men away with a reed, but what will you answer us? He said to them: In the past, Adam was created from dust and Eve was created from Adam. But from here on, "In our image and in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Neither a man without a woman nor a woman without a man, nor the two of them without the divine spirit.

In the second half of Genesis Rabbah 8:9, R. Simlai states his rule for dealing with the faulty interpretation of scripture by the "minim." R. Simlai's rule is that where a verse appears in the Torah which may be construed to support the "minim," its refutation is to be found in a verse close by. It is clear that the issue here is that the grammatical plural was used by the "minim" to illustrate either duality or plurality in the diety. Whatever the exact nature of the heresy, the remedy, a grammatical singular, is to be found close at hand. Therefore, R. Simlai used Genesis 1:27, "and God made" (singular), to interpret Genesis 1:26. Genesis 1:26 reads "Let us make man," "na'aseh adam." R. Simlai seems to have changed the vocalization of the Hebrew verb in Genesis 1:26 to "ne'esah adam" which would render, "man (singular) was made" (singular verb).

It is not clear who authored this rule for dealing with the "minim." In BT Sanhedrin 38b, we read:

R. Yochanan said: In all passages which the minim have taken (as grounds for their heresy), their refutation is found near at hand.

However, whether we attribute the authorship of this rule to R. Simlai or to R. Yochanan really does not matter. This is because of the fact that both R. Simlai and R. Yochanan lived in Palestine in the third century C.E., and both were involved with refuting polemics based upon the faulty interpretation of verses.

The tradition in Genesis Rabbah 8:9 b (passage 18) gives the impression that the heresy of the "minim" caused "doubts" within the Jewish community itself, specifically among the students of R. Simlai. This is seen by the fact that R. Simlai's principle is sufficient to drive away the "minim," but not sufficient in terms of giving the proper understanding to those within the academy. The very fact that such a further explanation was needed indicates that the issue of "how many powers or dieties?" was a live issue

within the Jewish community itself. It is also interesting to note that the "proper" understanding seems to have been reserved for the walls of the academy itself, and not for consumption by the Jewish community as a whole. Several manuscripts of Genesis Rabbah, specifically the Munich, Paris, and Oxford manuscripts, include the following variant reading at the end of 8:9:

They asked him again: What is meant by, "God (El), God (Elohim), the Lord He knows" (Joshua 22:22). He answered them, "They know" is not written here but, "He knows." His students said to him: You have driven away these men with a reed, how will you answer us? He said to them, the three of them are names of God, just as the man who has synonymous names, Basilogous, Caesar, Augustus Caesar. They asked him again What is meant by "For He is holy" (kedoshim, plural noun) (Leviticus 6:10 and elsewhere). He said to them, "For they are holy" is not written here, but rather "for He is holy."

This variant illustrates another of the heretical arguments used by the "minim." More important however is its illustration of the phenomenon described above.

In Tanhuma (Nidpas) Kedoshim #4, we read:

"You shall be holy" (Lev. 19:2). See what is written, "For He is a holy God" (Joshua 24:19). Is it not that this verse is an opening for the "minim," for it would seem to them to be two powers. The "minim" asked R. Simlai: What is the meaning of "For He is a holy God." (Ibid)? You do not maintain that there is only one power, for behold from this verse there are two powers.

The Hebrew of Joshua 24:19, "ki Elohim kedoshim hu," was read by the "minim" as a reference to two powers, due to the fact that "kedoshim," "holy," is a plural adjective modifying a plural noun, "Elohim." Of all of the traditions involving R. Simlai and the "minim," only this version identifies the heretical doctrine as a belief in two powers. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not this was a later identification or one present as early as the third century.

It is certainly possible that the heresy spoken of in Genesis Rabbah 8:8 and 8:9 was a "two powers" heresy. However, even here we may not conclude whether or not the heresy to which R. Simlai addressed himself was binitarian Christianity or dualistic Gnosticism. It may seem strange in an age when Christianity is decidedly trinitarian, but it is quite possible that Christianity was originally more binitarian than trinitarian, emphasizing the "Father" and the "Son" only.<sup>11</sup>

For example, we know from the following passage that Justin Martyr (110-165 C.E.) viewed Jesus as the high God's messenger in the world of men and His agent of punishment against Sodom and Gemmorah:

And He (Jesus) is Lord, receiving from the Lord who is in heaven, the duty of bringing those punishments on Sodom and Gemmorah which the word enumerates, saying thus: "The Lord rained on Sodom and Gemmorah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven (Gen. 19:24).

In this passage, the corporeal son, Jesus, was seen as the instrument of punishment. Jesus, for Justin, solved the problem of how an incorporeal God could relate to the physical world. Therefore, the subject of Genesis 19:24, the "Lord" who destroys Sodom and Gemmorah, is Jesus and not the God in heaven. This passage proves that binitarian Christians could have been among those who were seen as "two powers" heretics.<sup>13</sup> This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that the "two powers" heretics could have been dualistic Gnostics, especially in the later periods when Christianity became more trinitarian.

On the other hand, it is possible that the identification of the "minim" as "two powers" heretics, as found in Tanhuma (haNidpas) Kedoshim #4, is a later interpretation. As such, the heresy in the "minim" - R. Simlai traditions is a "many powers" heresy. This hypothesis is supported by the question which the "minim" asked R. Simlai, namely,

"How many dieties (or powers) created the world?"

Whether we chose to view the "minim" in the R. Simlai traditions as a "two powers" or a "many powers" heresy, it is clear that in either case Christianity or Gnosticism or a combination of the two could have been likely candidates for R. Simlai's questioners. We know, for example, that the Gnostic Simon Magus was referred to in the Pseudo-Clementine homilies as one who believed that there were many gods in heaven. Simon and/or his followers interpreted Genesis 1:26 as indicating a plurality of creators.<sup>14</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine homilies are attributed pseudepigraphically to St. Clement of Rome.<sup>15</sup> Clement, a Roman, goes to Judea upon hearing of the birth of Jesus. The homilies, however, record Christian traditions from Palestine and Syria from the first half of the third century.<sup>16</sup> In these writings, Peter says in reference to Simon Magus

While I betake myself to the heathen who says that there are many gods, to preach and proclaim the one and only God who made heaven and earth and all that is therein, that they may love and be saved. Wickedness has anticipated me... and has sent Simon ahead in order that those men who rejecting the gods assumed to exist on the earth, speak no more of their great numbers, may believe that there are many gods in heaven. Thus would men be brought to dishonor the monopoly of God and to meet severe punishment and eternal perdition.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that in this passage that the term "many gods in heaven" refers to Simonian Gnosticism. Thus, the questioners who asked R. Simlai, "How many dieties created the world?" could have been Simonian Gnostics.

Therefore, we may conclude that the references to 'minim' in Genesis Rabbah 8:8 and 8:9 may refer to either binitarian Christians, such as Justin Martyr, to later trinitarian Christians, or to Gnostics, such as Simon Magus. The only clue to determining the real concern of these passages may be found through the examination of the attitudes

found in the remaining traditions in Genesis Rabbah 1-8. Through such an examination, we may be able to suggest whether for the redactor of these chapters in Genesis Rabbah, the term "minim" was a phrase which applied to all heretics, or whether it applied only to one particular type of heresy.

B. Angels and Other Powers in Genesis Rabbah 1-8 Polemics

Passage 19

Genesis Rabbah 1:7

R. Isaac began his discourse with the verse: "The beginning of Your word is truth" (continues, "and all Your righteous ordinances endure for ever" Psalm 119:160). R. Isaac said: From the beginning of the creation of the world, "The beginning of Your word is truth." (Ibid) "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1). "And the Lord is a true God" (Jeremiah 10:10). Therefore, "And all Your righteous ordinances endure forever" (Psalm 119:160). For every single decree which You decree concerning Your creatures, they (the creatures) affirm righteousness of the judgment on them, and receive it in faith. And no person can dispute this by saying that two powers gave the Torah (or) two powers created the world. For "And Gods spoke" is not written here, but rather "And God spoke" (Exodus 20:1). "In the beginning Gods created" is not written here, but rather "In the beginning He created" (Genesis 1:1).

The form of this tradition is that of a proem based upon Psalm 119:160 followed by a short "haruzah" or "weaving" to the pericope verse, Genesis 1:1. R. Isaac here is probably the R. Isaac b. Nappaha (250-320 C.E.) who was a student of R. Yochanan.

Let us begin by examining the first half of the proem. In Rabbinic Literature the word for God in Genesis 1:1, "Elohim," is usually associated with God's attribute of justice, while the Tetragrammaton is usually associated with God's attribute of mercy. Therefore, in the first half of his proem, R. Isaac was desirous of stating that the God who created the world was a just God. This, in itself, could have been an anti-agnostics maintained that the Creator was unjust, having created a world of senseless suffering and cruelty.<sup>18</sup>

In the second half of the proem, we find an argument similar to the argument of the "minim" in Genesis 8:9. In the latter passage, we saw how the "minim" interpreted the word for God, "Elohim," as a plural noun, and used this as a polemical weapon against Jews. Genesis Rabbah 1:7 acknowledges existence of such a polemic and combats it with Exodus 20:1, "va-yidaber Elohim," "and God spoke." The singular verb "va-yidaber" is used to prove the singularity of the noun "Elohim," and the singularity of God as the creator of the world and giver of the Torah.<sup>19</sup>

## Passage 20

Genesis Rabbah 1:14

R. Ishmael asked R. Akiba: Since you have studied twenty years under Nahum of Gamzo who taught that the "akhs" (the "excepts") and the "raks" (the "onlys") are limitations while the "ets" (Hebrew direct object particles) and the "gams" (the "alsos") are extensions, what is the significance of the "et" here (in Genesis 1:1)? He answered: If it had stated, "In the beginning God, heaven, and earth created," we could have maintained that heaven and earth were dieties. He said to him, "For it is no empty thing from you," and if it is empty from you, it is because you do not know how to interpret (correctly), for "Et the heavens" is meant to include the sun and moon, and "et the earth" is meant to include trees, grasses, and the Garden of Eden.

We have noted previously the disagreement between Akiba and Ishmael concerning the limits of creation speculation. In this passage, Ishmael questions Akiba's usage of the Hebrew particles "akh" (except), "rak" (only), "et" (the Hebrew direct object particle), and "gam" (also). The particles "akh" and "rak" are said to be limiting particles while "et" and "gam" are said to be extending particles.

It is possible that the original disagreement between Akiba and Ishmael was based on a statement by Ishmael that "The Torah speaks in the language of men" (BT Sanhedrin 64b). His position was opposed by Nahum of Gamzo and Akiba, who felt that every "jot and tittle" of the Torah had meaning.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the Hebrew particles mentioned above were meant to be either "limitations" or "extensions." The fact that the original disagreement was not concerned with a pluralistic interpretation of Genesis 1:1, as shown by the usage of the same Nahum of Gamzo tradition in Genesis Rabbah 22:2 and 53:15 in interpretations of Genesis 4:1 and 21:20.

It is the second part of this tradition, the interpretation of Genesis 1:1, is of particular interest to us. In this part, we are never told what constitutes the position of R. Ishmael. It is clear, however, that Akiba's position arises out of a concern that people might interpret Genesis 1:1 to mean that a deity other than or in addition to the God of Israel, was responsible for the creation of the world. The particle "et" is in Genesis 1:1 an "extension" of the verse which makes "heaven" and "earth" into direct objects. Without the "et," the verse could have been read with the words "heaven" and "earth" being subjects. This would have led to several possible heretical interpretations. First would be the interpretation which would see three gods, "Elohim," "earth," and "heaven," as the subject agents of creation. This is the interpretation found in Genesis Rabbah 1:14. A second possibility would have been to see

the words "heaven" and "earth" as appositive names for "Elohim." This interpretation is to be found in BT Hagigah 12 a and 40 a. In this interpretation, the verse would read "In the beginning God, (who was named) heaven and earth, created." The third interpretation is to see the word "Elohim" as a plural noun and the words "heaven and earth" as appositives of this noun. This would render, "In the beginning the gods, heaven and earth, created." This interpretation is to be found in Tanhuma ha Nidpas Bereishit #8.

It is impossible to know whether or not the interpretation of Genesis 1:1 found in Passage 20 was originally the interpretation of R. Akiba. Such a possibility may not be ruled out. However, it is also possible that the original disagreement over the Hebrew particles was reinterpreted by later third or fourth century Rabbis as a method of dealing with the Gnostic interpretations of this verse.<sup>21</sup>

Whichever possibility we choose to accept, it is clear that Gnostics in the late second century did interpret "heaven" and "earth" as dieties. For example, in Against Heresies I:18, Irenaeus (120-202 C.E.) describes the view of the Marcosian Gnostics who believed that the tetrad of primary "elements," earth, air, fire and water, was based upon emanations from an invisible tetrad of creators. This invisible tetrad is derived from Genesis 1:1-2, as the following passage indicates:

Moses, then, they (the Marcosian Gnostics) declare, by his mode of beginning the account of creation, has, at the commencement (of the Bible), pointed out the mother (or source) of all things when he says: "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), for, as they maintain, by naming these four-God, beginning, heaven, and earth,-he set forth the Tetrad. Indicating also its invisible and hidden nature, he said, "Now the earth was invisible and unformed" (Genesis 1:2).<sup>22</sup>

The passage from Irenaeus illustrates that a second century dating may be attributed to the heresy described in Genesis Rabbah 1:14. Whether or not R. Akiba was the original author of this interpretation of Genesis 1:1, it is a given that this interpretation became a tool for dealing with Gnostic heretical interpretations of Genesis 1:1, and, as such, its inclusion here shows the concern of the redactor of this part of Genesis Rabbah over the threat of Gnosticism.

## Passage 21

Genesis Rabbah 1:3

When were the angels created? R. Yochanan said: They were created on the second day, as it is written, "Who lays the beams of Your upper chambers in the waters" (Psalm 104:3), followed by, "Who makes the spirits (ruchot) his angels" (Psalm 104:4). R. Hanina said, "They were created on the fifth day, as it is written, "And let fowl fly above the earth" (Gen. 1:20, part of the description of the events of the fifth day). And it is written "And with two he would fly" (Isaiah 6:2). R. Luliani b. Tabri said in R. Isaac's name: Whether we accept the view of R. Hanina or that of R. Yochanan, all agree that none were created on the first day; in order that you should not say: Michael stretched out (the world) in the south and Gabriel in the north, while the Holy One, blessed be He, measured it in the middle. Rather, I am the Lord who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens alone and the earth by Myself. (me-itti) (Isaiah 44:24) (Mi-itti), who collaborated with me in the creation of the world? In worldly affairs, a mortal king is honored in his state and the great men of his state are honored with him. Why? Because they bear the burden (of state) with him. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, is not so, for He alone created His world, and He alone is praised in His world. R. Tanhuma said: "For You are great and do wonders" (Psalm 86:10). Why? (Because) "You are God alone" (Ibid) "You alone created the world." In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1:1).

The major question of the tradition in Passage 21 concerns which day the heavenly angels were created. The most important statement in the tradition is R. Luliani b. Tabri's statement in R. Isaac's name that all authorities agree that the angels were not created on the first day.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Michael and Gabriel had no part in the creation of the world.

R. Yochanan's interpretation, that the angels were created on the second day, is based upon seeing the "laying the beams" in Psalm 104:3-4 as being equivalent to "dividing the waters," which God did on the second day (Genesis 1:6-8). Thus, according to R. Yochanan, the angels in Psalm 104:4 were (according to Psalm 104:3, the preceding verse) created on the second day. In contrast, R. Hanina sees the angels as being created on the fifth day. His interpretation is based upon seeing angels as the flying winged creatures referred to in Genesis 1:20 and Isaiah 6:2.

It is at this point that R. Luliani b. Tabri make the key statement in the tradition. We should also take note of the fact that Michael and Gabriel are said to have "stretched out" the world, while only God is said to have "made" the world (in Isaiah 44:24). An allegory is then brought forth which is based upon the changed vocalization of "me-itti," (in Isaiah 44:24) "by myself," to "mi-itti," "who collaborated with me?" The allegory **reinforces** R. Luliani b. Tabri's point that God alone, without the help of Michael, Gabriel, or any other angels, created the world.

The issue of whether the angels had participated in the creation of the world was a live issue for many reasons. First, Christianity interpreted the "spirit of God" in Genesis 1:2 as being a reference to Jesus. There is also evidence that Michael and Gabriel were believed to be dieties by other sects. In Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:34, we read,

Thus when the Holy One, blessed be He went down to Sinai, groups of angels came down with him,

Michael and his group (and) Gabriel and his group. Some nations of the world chose Michael as their patron, while others chose Gabriel, but Israel chose the Holy One, blessed be He. "The Lord is my portion" (patron) (Lamentations 3:24). Behold, "Here O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4).

It is difficult to tell whether or not the Deuteronomy Rabbah passage refers to Jews or non-Jews. However, in Seder Eliahu Rabbah 31:1, it says that the angels (cherubim) existed prior to the creation of the world. This would suggest that even among Jews, there were those who believed that the angels assisted God in creating the world.

### C. Angels and Advisors to God

In the previous two sections of this chapter, we saw the ways in which the Rabbis acknowledged and dealt with the polemics arising out of the Hebrew reading of Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:26. We saw how in Genesis Rabbah 8:8 and 8:9, the word "na'aseh," "Let us make (man)" (Genesis 1:26), was dealt with by R. Simlai. As a result, we hypothesized that R. Simlai read the verse as "Man was made" (ne'esah adam), thus eliminating the problem of plurality caused by "Let us make man."

In this section, we shall deal in a brief form with traditions in which the Rabbis attempted to maintain the reading of "naaseh adam," "Let us make man." By maintaining the plurality of the Hebrew verb in Genesis 1:26, the question then becomes, "Who else, besides God, was involved in the making of man?," or "With whom did God consult in the process of making man?" These traditions represent speculation on the events of creation on the sixth day. Their speculation would be in accordance with the more lenient view of Bar Kappara concerning the limits of creation speculation. These traditions may be considered to be Jewish gnosis.

Genesis Rabbah 8:3 says that God consulted with the works of heaven and earth or the works of each day prior to the creation of the world. These opinions are those of R. Joshua b. Levi, a Palestinian authority of the first half of the third century C.E., and R. Samuel b. Nahman, who lived during the same period in both Palestine and Babylonia. Both of these authorities attempt to solve the problem of "na'aseh" in Genesis 1:26 by saying that God consulted with the things which he had previously created. God, therefore, is seen as the "commander-in-chief" so to speak, of the elements by which man is created.

Genesis Rabbah 8:3 also says that God consulted his own heart before creating man. In such a way, God's

heart becomes the architect of the universe. The problem of "naaseh" in Genesis 1:26 is solved by considering the first person plural, "Let us," to be like a royal "we." This argument therefore maintains that only God was responsible for the creation of man. This view is said to have been the view of R. Ammi, a Palestinian authority who lived in the last half of the third century.

God is said to have consulted the angels regarding the creation of man. According to Genesis Rabbah 8:4. God tells the angels only of his plan to create righteous men, but hides from them the fact that evil men will also come from Adam. What is perhaps the most striking about this passage is that similar to a typical Gnostic myth, it seeks to explain the origin of evil in the world. In order to create man, God is said to have sublimated his attribute of justice. If it had been predominant, God would not have been able to create Adam, a man whose offspring were destined to commit unjust acts.

This tradition, in agreement with Gnostic myth, maintained that the world was not created by an entirely just God. However, this is where the similarity ends, for Genesis Rabbah 8:4 argues that if God had created the world out of his absolute standard or attribute of justice, he would have had to destroy it. For a just God to have created an unjust world would have been a contradiction in terms. Therefore, the God of creation is not only a just God, but a merciful God whose attribute of mercy is predominant in the creation of the world. It is also obvious that the cause of injustice in the world is man, the descendants of Adam, who, given his capacity of free will, may choose to be either righteous or wicked. In contrast, Gnostic myth felt that the world was created by an unjust demiurge who is, himself, the cause of evil in the world.

Genesis Rabbah 8:5 continues along the same line as

8:4. Here, God is said to have consulted the angels. Also implicit in this tradition is the understanding of man's free will to choose between good and evil. One-half of the angels are said to have recommended that man be created, while the other half is said to have recommended that God not create man. In this tradition, the names of the angels are "Love" (hesed), "Truth" (emet), "Righteousness" (tsedek), and "Peace" (shalom). After his decision to create man, God casts "Truth" to the earth. "Truth" is also known as God's seal. The tradition tells us that man must act in order for "Truth" to be present. It is the actions of man which will enable "Truth" to blossom and to return to God.

The second half of Genesis Rabbah 8:5 indicates that, while the angel's were arguing over whether or not God should create man, God went ahead and created man without their knowledge. This section reads "na'aseh" as "ne'esah," as did R. Simlai in Passage 18. Thus the function of Genesis 1:26 is to state, "Man had already been created in our image and likeness." It is possible that this tradition was originally an anti-gnostic polemic and was meant to act as a counter to the previous traditions by maintaining that God really did not consult with the angels in creating man. It goes without saying that the second half of Genesis Rabbah 8:5 was concerned with the heretics who read plurality into Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man."

In Genesis Rabbah 8:8b, in a section which follows the version in Passage 16, God is said to have taken counsel with the angels before creating man. By analogy, God is said to be like the great man who accepts the advice and counsel of those less important than He. Once again, however, we find a counter argument, this time in the name of either R. Levi or R. Hila. This argument likens God to a king who asks his subjects what course of action to take, only later to do and act as he wishes.

As we have seen, the problem caused by the plural "Let us make man" in Genesis 1:26 was dealt with in one of two ways. The first way involved the denial that the verb in Genesis 1:26 was a plural verb. The second way accepted "na'aseh" as a plural verb and attempted to account for its plurality.

The more fundamental issue here is the function of angels in God's relation to His people. Justin Martyr, as we have seen, believed Jesus to have been the angel of punishment at Sodom and Gemorrah. For Justin, Jesus was certainly the chief angel. For the Gnostics, the chief angel, the demiurge, is considered to have created the physical world. Rabbinic Judaism, by contrast, chose to maintain that God Himself related to and interacted with the created world. It did this through the usage of the phrase, "Not by means of an angel and not by means of a messenger."

Judah Golden has studied the appearance of this phrase in Rabbinic Literature. He has concluded that according to the Rabbis, God did or does the following five things without the help of an angel: 1) redeemed Israel from Egypt; 2) punishes Israel; 3) communicates the Torah directly to Moses on Mt. Sinai; 4) provides for Israel on its land; and 5) instructs Israel concerning the Sabbath.<sup>24</sup>

The reader will notice that in Goldin's five categories, the category of man's creation is curiously missing. This is because of the fact, as recorded in Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8, that two opinions regarding this question actually did exist. One opinion maintained that God did not consult with the angels. The people who held this opinion were probably motivated by a concern over the assertions of the "two powers" or "many powers" heretics. As seen earlier, a variety of groups could be considered to have been such heretics. The point is that for both the heretics and the Rabbis who maintained this view, man, if created by an angel, would be tainted and evil. The second opinion sought

to explain the "na'aseh" of Genesis 1:26 in a way which would account for the plurality of this verb. It did this by attempting to answer the question, "With whom did God consult?" These passages tend to be highly moralistic, emphasizing man's, rather than God's, responsibility for evil in the world.

The importance of the rabbinic treatment of angels should not be overlooked. Whether it takes the form of a polemic or the form of Jewish gnosis concerning the nature of the angels, the intention of this treatment remains the same. This intention was the insulation of the Jewish community from the beliefs and speculations concerning angels of those who were outside of that community. The most likely candidates for those "outside" the community would be either Christians or Gnostic sects of any persuasion (Jewish, Christian, or Pagan).

In order to examine the possibility that Christianity was the target of rabbinic concern, we must begin with Philo of Alexandria. Philo (20 B.C.E - 50 C.E.) attempted to harmonize Judaism with Hellenistic thought by expressing the former in the language of the latter. Philo postulated the existence of what he called the "Logos." The "Logos" may best be described as the mind and will of God. The "Logos" was in a way God's partner in creation. Philo often refers to the "Logos" as "the Beginning," the "ruler of the angels," or "the name of God." The "Logos" for Philo is in a way an emanation of God. It also is referred to as the Torah, and was considered by Philo to be the blueprint by which God created the world.<sup>26</sup> It seems likely that Philo viewed the "Logos" as the active agent of creation itself, referring to it as the "world creating power." If this is indeed the case, then the philosophical purpose of the "Logos" would have been to explain how the unchanging and incorporeal God could make his presence known in the the world.<sup>27</sup> Further discussion of Philo,

given his early dates and his geographical location, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

What is of interest to us, however, is the way in which Justin Martyr, one hundred years after Philo, interpreted Philo's concept of the "Logos." In the Dialogue With Trypho, a Jew paragraph #61, Justin writes:

I shall give you another testimony, my friends," said I, "from the Scriptures, that God begat before all creatures a Beginning, a certain rational power (proceeding) from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos.<sup>28</sup>

In this passage, Justin identifies Philo's concept of "Logos" with Jesus, who was seen by Justin as preceeding the creation of the world, and as being the principle angel of creation. In addition, it is also clear that Justin believed that Jesus was the "angel of the Lord" who appeared to Moses.

The Scripture, in announcing that an Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, and in afterwards declaring him to be Lord and God, speaks of the same one, whom it declares by the many testimonies already quoted, to be minister to God, who is above the world, above whom there is no other God.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, we may conclude that based on the evidence of Justin Martyr, Christianity in the second century C.E. viewed Jesus as a primary angel who mediates between God and the world. As the mediator, Jesus, not God himself, was the active agent of creation. Consequently, Rabbinic polemics which stress that the angels did not participate in creation could have been directed against early Christianity.

Gnostic sects, however, also provided a possible target for such polemics. In a typical Gnostic myth, the primary angel of creation is, of course, the demiurge. He is usually ignorant of both the High God and his low rank

in the pleroma (the heavenly realm). As such, he is often arrogant in that he claims lordship for himself. The Mosaic Law which issues from him is considered to be corrupt. Thus any truly Gnostic sect could have been the target of the rabbinic polemics.

We have also seen how pre-Christian Magharians seemed to have believed in an angel who was responsible for creation and the anthropomorphisms of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>30</sup> According to Al Qirqisani,

The Magharians are said to be opposed to this, i.e., they do not profess anthropomorphisms, yet they also do not take these descriptions (of God) out of their literal meaning, but assert instead that these descriptions refer to one of the angels, namely to the one which created the world.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, according to Irenaeus, in Against Heresies I:23:2, the Gnostic Simon Magus is said to have believed that the angels were completely ignorant of the highest God.

The Jewish community itself seemed to have been divided on the issue of the role of the angels in creation. This we have seen within Genesis Rabbah itself. In addition, the following passage from the Tripartite Tractate of the Nag Hammadi Library illustrates the sectarian nature of the Jewish community as seen through the eyes of a Valentinian Gnostics.

By interpreting them (scriptures), they established many heresies which have existed to the present among the Jews. Some say that God is one who made a proclamation in the ancient scriptures. Others say that he is many. Some say that God is simple and was a simple mind in nature. Others say that his activity is linked with the origin of good and evil. Still others say that he is the creator of that which has come into being. Still others say that it was by his angels that he created.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore even within the Jewish community itself, there were those who felt that angels and not God had created the world. These possibly were Jewish-Gnostics.

Whether we see the target of the rabbinic polemics as being Christianity or Gnosticism, it is clear that the passages in Genesis Rabbah chapter 1-8 concerning angels seem to indicate that the Judaism represented therein was not Judaism in a vacuum. At this point, however, we can say that based upon the general concerns of the redactor of these chapter, the evidence seems to suggest that Gnosticism (Jewish or Christian) seems to be the target here.

# D. Adam Speculations

## Passage 22

### Genesis Rabbah 8:1

R. Jeremiah b. Leazar said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam (the first man), he created him as an androgynous being, as it is said, "Male and female created he them" ("and called their name Adam") (Genesis 5:2).

R. Samuel bar Nahman said: When the Holy one, blessed be He, created Adam (the first man), he created him double faced and then split him and made him of two backs, one back on one side and another on the other side...

R. Tanhuma in the name of R. Banayah and R. Berekiah in the name of R. Leazar said: He created him as a golem (a lifeless mass) extending from one end of the world to the other...R. Leazar said: He was the latest work of the last day and the earliest work of the last day...

R. Simeon b. Lakish maintained: He was the latest work of the last day and the earliest work of the first day.

### Genesis Rabbah 8:6

R. Huna said in R. Aibu's name: He created him with due deliberation, for he first created his food requirements, and only then did He create him.

### Genesis Rabbah 8:10

R. Hoshaya said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam (the first man), the ministering angels mistook him (for a divine being) and wished to say before him, "Holy"... What did the Holy One blessed be He do? He caused sleep to fall upon him, and so all knew that he was a (mortal) man.

In this section, we shall examine the Adam speculations of Genesis Rabbah 1-8. As we shall see, some of these speculations seem to show Gnostic influence, while others do not. The concern of the Rabbis in these traditions seems to have been twofold: first, to maintain that the God of Israel created man; and second, to maintain that the first man, Adam, was neither an aid to God in creation nor the Creator himself.

The first man was androgynous, according to R. Jeremiah b. Leazar, or double-faced according to R. Samuel b. Nahman. A similar concept is to be found in the works of both Philo and Plato.<sup>33</sup> Hippolytus, in his Refutation of All Heresies 6:3-11:1, describes the beliefs of the Naasene Gnostics. In this passage, the first man is called the "bi-sexual Adamas." He is considered to be the helper of the High God. He is said to be the creator, but is said **not to be** identical with anything that he makes. As a creator, the bi-sexual Adamas resembles a demiurge concept except for the fact that the Naasene Gnostics did not consider him to be the source of evil in the world.<sup>34</sup>

Several Rabbis (cf. Genesis Rabbah 8:1) believed that the first man was created as a "Golem," a lifeless mass which extended from one end of the world to the other. In Genesis Rabbah 14:8, the golem, receives a soul in order that he might have both mortal and immortal life. The soul makes him mortal for it makes him into a living and breathing creature. It also makes him immortal because it enables him to enter into the world to come.

Additional speculations on man in Genesis Rabbah 8:1 maintain that man was the first and last creation on the last or sixth day of creation. Man's soul was considered to be the first thing created on the sixth day, whereas his body was considered to be the last thing created. Another interpretation suggest that man was the first creation on the first day and last creation on the last day of creation.

The purpose of this interpretation was probably to indicate that the entire creation, from first to last, was for man's usage and enjoyment.

A similar interpretation is found in Genesis Rabbah 8:6. In this tradition, man's creation is described as a deliberate, willful event. The cosmos is created for man. As such, God creates the things which will feed man before He creates man himself. In the remainder of 8:6 (not quoted in Passage 22), the world is viewed as God's palace. Man is considered to be God's visitor in this place, and man's creation pleases God. This concept is also found in the following passage from Philo:

It is obvious to enquire why man comes last in the world's creation: for, as the sacred writings show, he was the last whom the Father and the Maker fashioned. Those, then, who have studied more deeply than others the laws of Moses, and who examine their contents with all possible minuteness, maintain that God, when He made man partaker of kinship with Himself in mind and reason best of all gifts, did not begrudge him the other gifts either, but made ready for him beforehand all things in the world, as for a living being dearest and closest to Himself, since it was His will that when man come into existence, he should be at a loss for none of the means of living and living well.<sup>35</sup>

For our purposes, the most interesting tradition of Adam speculation is to be found in Genesis Rabbah 8:10. In this passage, the angels mistakenly consider Adam to be a divine being. This tradition is attributed to R. Hoshaya, an early third century authority who was the head of the academy in Caesarea. Many scholars feel that R. Hoshaya came in contact with Origin while the latter lived in Caesarea. In Caesarea, with its large Hellenistic population, there were probably many different religious sects, Christians, Gnostic Christians and various Jewish sects. As a result R. Hoshaya's concerns, given their context, are especially relevant to historians of religion.

In Genesis Rabbah 8:10, according to R. Hoshaya, Adam is taken to be a divine being because he was created in the image and likeness of God. We are told that as a result of the — of the angels, God caused Adam to sleep in order that the angels would know that he is mortal. Sleep is therefore the sign of man's mortality.

The subject of Adam, as a divine or sem-divine being as hinted in Genesis Rabbah 8:10, frequently appears in Gnostic literature. In the Poimandres of Hermes Trismegistus, God himself was considered to have been an androgynous principle of creation. He was a combination of "Light" and "Life." The first man was felt to have been an emanation of God Himself. As such, the Poimandres viewed the first man as a divine being.

Another example of a Gnostic interpretation of Adam is to be found in the Apocalypse of Adam from the Nag Hammadi Library.<sup>37</sup> In this document, Adam is considered to have been the demiurge's helper in creation. Although he himself is the creation of the demiurge, he is considered to be "higher" than his creator. As a result, the demiurge becomes jealous of Adam, and causes sleep to fall upon him. Sleep, therefore, is the agent of the demiurge by which man is subjugated. Sleep in this system also entails the forgetting of the divine origin of man, or the forgetting that man was originally "higher" than the demiurge. Sleep is clearly the opposite of Gnosis. The Apocalypse of Adam is a document in which there are no Christian references. It is possible that the document was written by Jewish Gnostics.

Whether or not Jews actually viewed Adam as a divine being, or whether such views were confined to non-Jews, it is clear that the refutation of such a view was a great concern of the Rabbis. For example in Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 we read:

Again (only a single man was created) for the sake of peace among mankind, that none should say to his fellow: 'My father was greater than your father;' also that the 'minim' (heretics) should not say, 'There are many ruling powers in heaven.'

The intention of this Mishnah is to indicate that only one God created only one man, and not that many Gods created many men, or that many Gods created man. Notice that the heresy in this passage is referred to as a "many powers" heresy. This passage could have referred to the elaborate pleroma (heavenly realm) speculations of Gnostic sects.

Another passage which attempts to refute the view that Adam was God's partner in creation is found in Tosephta Sanhedrin 8:7:

Our Rabbis taught: Adam was created on the eve of the Sabbath (i.e. at the last moment on the sixth day.) Why? So that the "minim" could not say 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, had a partner in creation.'

According to this passage, Adam was created on the last day as the last creation. As a result, Adam could not possibly have been a partner of God's in the creation of the world.

Numerous other Adam speculations are to be found in the gemara to Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, in BT Sanhedrin 38ab. These speculations are too numerous to mention here. Nevertheless, the bulk of traditions and speculations concerning Adam suggest that the Rabbis speculated freely on the nature of Adam, but avoided at all times making it appear that Adam was a divine being. With this in mind, let us now examine the Rabbinic and Gnostic views of the world in which Adam lived.

### E. Man and the Nature of the Cosmos

In Greek thought, the cosmos was considered to be order. The concept of 'order' is the most fundamental aspect of life. Physics (mathematics) and metaphysics (philosophy) help us to understand the order of the universe. The particular things within the cosmos participate in this ordered universe to the extent that they resemble their ideal forms. Perfection is found in the cosmos as a whole, though the particulars in the cosmos are not perfect and ordered in and of themselves. Man, for example, according to Cicero

was born to contemplate the cosmos and to imitate it; he is far from being perfect, but he is a little part of the perfect.  
(De Natura Deorum II:11-14)

In addition, Greek thought considered the cosmos to possess its own intelligence and wisdom (Sophia). This intelligence or wisdom could be understood as a "God concept." Therefore, in Greek thought the order of the cosmos is ordained by divinity.

The Gnostic view of the cosmos is quite paradoxical. On one hand, the cosmos is considered to be ordered, but its order is an anti-divine order. Its order is such that it is governed by demiurgical law which in its essence thwarts man's freedom. The cosmos is negative because it is the creation of the demiurge. Its order is the order of evil ignorance and death. On the other hand, the cosmos, being as negative as it is, is quite chaotic. Man lacks surety within the cosmos. The weather, for example, is totally unpredictable. Moreover, man's lack of surety is characterized by the fact that he does not know when he himself will die. The cosmos, being the creation of the demiurge therefore is chaotic. This paradox of Gnostic thought may be expressed in the following manner: the cosmos is ordered according to the designs of the demiurge.

This order however is chaotic.

The rabbinic perception of the cosmos was that creation was a well-planned event. With this in mind, Genesis Rabbah 1:13 discusses the definite article in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The definite article is said to indicate that before creation God had in mind the creation of a specific earth and a specific heaven. In other words, God contemplated the creation of the heaven and the earth before he created them. His contemplation and planning were exacting to the smallest degree. God is therefore not like the mortal king who builds a building wherein the top part is dependent upon the lower. If the heaven had been dependent upon the earth or vice versa, God would have not used the definite article in Genesis 1:1. By the usage of the definite article, God indicated to Moses that his creation was well planned and that there was no need to modify the original plans.

Genesis Rabbah 1:12 expresses the idea that the cosmos is reflective of the kingship of God. In other words, God is known through his acts. In Genesis 1:1, the Hebrew verb "bara" preceeds the subject "elohim." In a word for word literal translation, this would render, "In the beginning (he) created God" (subject). Because God is known through his acts, the Hebrew verse order indicates that God created the world first, and then made his presence known. Furthermore, the word for beginning, "reishit," is often interpreted to mean Torah. Therefore the intention of this tradition could be to state that God first provided the Torah, after which he created the world, and only then did he allow his name to be known. In conclusion, God places himself after the creation of the cosmos, and only then claims His divinity. In such a way, God becomes the telos, the final cause of creation.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that the creation of the cosmos reflected the kingship of God is also to be found in the following passage from Theophilus, in his Ad Autolyicum II:1 :

And Moses who lived many years before Solomon, or rather the Logos of God speaking through him as a instrument says: "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). First he mentioned "beginning" and "creating" and only then did he introduce God, for it is not right to mention God idly or in vain. For the divine Sophia knew in advance that some people were going to speak nonsense and make mention of a multiplicity of non-existent gods. Therefore, in order for the real God to be known through his work and to show that by his logos, God made heaven and earth and what is in them.<sup>40</sup>

Theophilus was a second century C.E. Church Father who lived in Antioch. During this period Antioch had large Jewish and Christian populations which interreacted with each other. In the above passage, we notice the similarity of the Christian argument to the one found in Genesis Rabbah 1:12. Theophilus also refers to people whose heresy included a multiplicity of non-existent gods." It is probable that he was referring here to Gnostics and their extensive pleroma speculations. For Christians and Jews alike, the issue in these traditions seems to have the assertion that God was the creator and orderer of the cosmos. With God in this role, Christians and Jews could only suppose that the cosmos was not evil, unordered, and chaotic.

In the passage above, it seems that Theophilus considered that the word "beginning" in Genesis 1:1 referred to the logos. This equation also exists in Philo and, if we see the Logos as being equivalent to Torah for the Rabbis, then it also exists in Rabbinic Judaism. In addition, the word "beginning" was often interpreted in both Alexandrian and Rabbinic Judaism to be symbolic of divine wisdom. This interpretation or equation is most frequently based upon Proverbs 8 and Job 28. Wisdom is seen as an intermediary

force in creation,<sup>41</sup> and God is said to have consulted wisdom or the Torah before creating man.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in the Slavonic book of Enoch, God is said to have commanded His wisdom to create man. In addition, this book considers wisdom to have been the first emanation or emanated attribute of God.<sup>43</sup>

In Valentinian Gnosticism, Sophia, the Greek word for "wisdom," is one of the emanations of the Supreme God. She is connected to the creative process because of the fact that it is she who gives birth to the demiurge. Thus the association of divine wisdom personified with creation is to be found in Gnostic thought.

It is also found in a variety of Greek and Hellenistic sources. In Plato's Timaeus 29a, we read

The artificer looked for a pattern to that which is eternal.

It is possible that R. Hoshaya was adapting Plato when he wrote in Genesis Rabbah 1:1

God consulted the Torah and created the world.

In the context of this midrashic passage, the Torah is equated with wisdom, and the word "beginning" is equated with the Torah.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, it is possible that R. Hoshaya was influenced by the Greek concept of a first cause or a first principle in the creation of the world.<sup>45</sup> In the Republic 592ab, Socrates states:

In heaven perhaps, there is laid up a pattern of it, which he who desires may behold and beholding may set his house in order.

This pattern for Plato would have been the idea of the Good. For R. Hoshaya, the idea of the Good would have been equivalent to the Torah or to divine wisdom. With this Christian, Gnostic, and Greek background in mind, let us now direct our attention to R. Hoshaya's proem in Genesis Rabbah 1:1.

## Passage 23

Genesis Rabbah 1:1

R. Hoshaya began his interpretation with the verse: "Then I was by Him, as a nursling (amon); and I was daily all delight" (Proverbs 8:30). "Amon" means tutor; "Amon" means covered; "amon" means hidden. Some say "amon" means great. Amon is a tutor, as you read, "As an omen (nursing-father) carries the suckling child" (Numbers 11:12). "Amon" means covered as in the verse, "Haemunim (they that were covered) in scarlet" (Lamentations 4:5). "Amon" means hidden, as in the verse and he hid (omen) Hadassah" (Esther 2:7). "Amon" means great, as in the verse, "Are you better than No-amon?" (Nahum 3:8), which is rendered, Are you better than Alexandria the Great which is located between the rivers? Another interpretation: "Amon" is an architect (uman). The Torah says, I was the architect of the Holy One, blessed be He. In human practice when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not from his own knowledge, but rather from the knowledge of an architect. The architect does not build it from his knowledge (out of his head), but rather from plans and diagrams which he has in order to know how he should make the rooms and the doors. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, consulted the Torah and created the world. The Torah states, "In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1:1), the word "beginning" here refers to the Torah, as it is said, "The Lord made me the beginning of His way" (Proverbs 8:22).

R. Hoshaya's interpretation may have been influenced by either Greek or Gnostic thought. On the other hand, it may have been indigenous to Judaism itself. In the opinion of this writer, what we are seeing here is a broad cross-cultural concept in which wisdom is seen as either the creator of the world or the plan used by the creator to create the world.

R. Hoshaya was a Palestinian authority in the first half of the third century in Caesarea. He was the head of the academy there, and probably had contact with Origen and other Alexandrian Christians from whom Greek influences could have come.<sup>46</sup> R. Hoshaya used Proverbs 8:30 as his proem verse. As noted previously, Proverbs 8 often served as the scriptural basis for this type of interpretation of "wisdom." His interpretation centers on the word "amon," which according to most translators is a "nursling." The subject "I" of Proverbs 8:30 is Torah-Wisdom. Torah-Wisdom is first considered to have been a tutor or a pedagogue to God during the creative process.<sup>47</sup>

Torah-Wisdom is then considered to have been covered. This interpretation refers to the time prior to Sinaitic revelation, for before this time, the words of Torah were considered to have been "covered up" by God.

In the third interpretation, Torah-Wisdom is referred to as "hidden." The prooftext, Esther 2:7, is understood by the midrash to mean that Mordecai concealed Esther's beauty and protected her from the gaze of the public. The intention of this interpretation is that the beauty of the Torah is hidden in that it is concealed and protected under God's providence. In order for one to discover the beauty of the Torah, one must first look into the Torah and study it diligently.

In the fourth interpretation, Torah-Wisdom is called "great" in that she is greater than Alexandria the Great. This passage is an implicit reference to Greek culture.

In Pesikta Rabbati 33:11 we read:

Are you better than Alexandria, better than  
she who with regard to fastidious behavior,  
became the educator of the entire world.

It is clear then that R. Hoshaya's intention here is to state that the wisdom of the Torah is greater than the wisdom of the Greek philosophers.<sup>48</sup>

The final and most important interpretation in R. Hoshaya's proem is that Torah-Wisdom was the architect, workman, or blueprint for God in the creative process. This interpretation, which constitutes more than half of the proem, is central to its understanding. The Torah is seen either as architectural blueprint or as the architect itself of the world. God consults with the Torah before creating the world. The word "bereishit," "beginning," is interpreted to mean the Torah. Therefore, the midrashic reading of Genesis 1:1 is, "With the Torah, God created the heaven and the earth."<sup>49</sup> The equation of Torah-Wisdom and the word "beginning" is proved by Proverbs 8:22;

The Lord made me the beginning of his way,  
the first of his works of old.

The subject "me" of this verse is considered to be the Torah. The interpretation also contains an analogy of a king who builds a palace. Just as a king needs artisans and the artisans need a plan, so it is for God that the Torah serves as both the artisan and the plan. The Torah is given an essential existence. Like the "Logos" of Philonic, Greek, and Christian thought, it is the will and mind of God. Therefore, creation is not an arbitrary act, but an act which is well planned and results in an ordered cosmos.

Proverbs 8:22 and 8:30 each have wisdom as their subject. The midrashic associates wisdom with the Torah as we have seen. The association of Torah and wisdom is well founded in other Jewish sources. Genesis Rabbah 1:4 also uses Proverbs 8:22 to maintain that God created the world for

the sake of Torah-Wisdom. In other words, God created the world in order that His mind and plan might become actualized. Similarly, the Targum Yerushalmi's translation of Genesis 1:1 is, "With wisdom, the Lord created." The very first sentence of Tanhuma (ha-Nidpas) states:

"In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1:1)  
 "The Lord founded the earth with wisdom"  
 (Proverbs 3:19) and as God went on to create  
 the world, he took counsel with the Torah.

The overriding purpose of R. Hoshaya's proem in Genesis Rabbah 1:1 was to show that the cosmos is purposive, ordered, and (perhaps) good. This purpose is also manifested in both Christian literature. However, the Rabbinic desire to prove that creation was not chaotic, met its severest challenge in its attempt to interpret the words "Tohu" and "Bohu," (translated usually as "unformed" and "void") in Genesis 1:2.

"Tohu" and "Bohu" in Genesis 1:2 provided Gnostics with textual support for their view that the nature of the world is corrupt. Gnostic anticosmicism has been discussed previously in terms of the "Lying Lips" polemic in Genesis Rabbah 1:5.<sup>50</sup> The tradition of the king who builds a palace on a dung heap, found in Genesis Rabbah 1:5 and the Palestinian Talmud, most probably reflects a part of the polemic used by the Gnostics against the Rabbis. The Rabbinic denial of the validity of this polemic took the form of saying that such a polemic dishonored God as king. But aside from this denial, the Rabbis had many other ways of dealing with the exegetical problem of Genesis 1:2, the problem of "Tohu" and "Bohu."

The problem of "Tohu" and "Bohu" serves for the most part as the underlying thematic concern of chapter 2 of Genesis Rabbah. In Genesis Rabbah 2:5, the deeds of the wicked are called "Tohu" and "Bohu." Contrasted to this are the deeds of the righteous which are called "Light"

(Genesis 1:3) and "Good" (Genesis 1:4). Thus "Tohu" and "Bohu" represent evil and darkness. In the same tradition, R. Hiyyah interprets Genesis 1:1, "God created," as symbolic of the creation of the Temple. In Genesis 1:2, "Tohu" and "Bohu" are said to be symbolic of the Temple's destruction. Once again we see the negative connotation of these Hebrew words. Yet, Genesis 1:3, "Light," is interpreted by R. Hiyyah to be the rebuilding of the Temple in the Messianic era.

In Genesis Rabbah 2:1, "Tohu" and "Bohu" are once again negative terms. God is said to have created the earth in a clean and sinless state. In her immaturity, the earth is said to have rebelled, produced thorns, and became "Tohu" and "Bohu!" In this tradition, "Tohu" and "Bohu" are seen as being the result of man's sin. The intention was also to maintain that even though the earth became "Tohu" and "Bohu" because of man's actions, she will be redeemed in the future and returned to her original, pure state. It is also interesting to note that a logical consequence of such an interpretation is that man's condition on earth is "Tohu" and "Bohu," even though it is due to man's own actions and not God's creation.

Genesis 1:2 states, "And the earth was Tohu and Bohu." In a later interpretation, Genesis Rabbah 2:2 interprets "Tohu" and "Bohu" as meaning "bewildered." The earth is said to be bewildered because of the fact that earthly beings, though created at the same time as the celestial beings, do not live in God's palace and must toil or face starvation. The theme of man's responsibility for "Tohu" and "Bohu" is also repeated in this interpretation here in the name of R. Tanhuma. According to R. Tanhuma, the world was created perfect, but sat bewildered because she foresaw that she would meet doom because of man. Earthly life becomes filled with suffering and death due to man's actions. The celestial beings are said to enjoy eternal

life. Man, by contrast, could have been immortal, but his own actions caused his downfall. The Rabbis seem willing to acknowledge that the present state of the world is ~~that~~ of "Tohu" and "Bohu," or corruption. Once again, however, the ultimate responsibility for this state of affair is not God's, but man's.

In Genesis Rabbah 2:3 Genesis 1:2-4 is interpreted exegetically, word by word. Adam and Cain, as sinners, are considered to be "Tohu" and "Bohu," while Abraham and Jacob are considered to be "Light" and "Day" respectively. Abraham and Jacob in this tradition are probably meant to be messianic prototypes of future redemption. As such this tradition is a paradigm which shows that just as God redeemed his people in the past from "Tohu" and "Bohu," so He will redeem them in the future from their present state of affairs.

The theme of redemption from the current "Tohu" and "Bohu" is also the theme of the first half of Genesis Rabbah 1:2 is again interpreted word by word. "Tohu" is seen as symbolic of Babylonia, "Bohu" of Medea, "darkness" of Greece, and the "deep" as Rome. All of these are negative symbols which are applied to foreign powers who had or who were, in the case of Rome, persecuting Israel. The positive and redemptive symbols are the "spirit of God," which symbolizes the spirit of the messianic redeemer, and the "water," which symbolizes repentance itself.<sup>51</sup>

It is clear that "Tohu" and "Bohu" along with "darkness," are interpreted in the above passages as negative elements. These negative elements reflect the condition of the world in general, and of the Jewish people in particular. In Genesis Rabbah 1:5, we saw that some Rabbis attempted to deny this condition. Unlike this passage, the "Tohu" and "Bohu" traditions in chapter 2 of Genesis Rabbah seem ready and willing to acknowledge the corrupt condition of the earth. This acknowledgement is most likely the result of

the severe political and economic hardships experienced by the Jewish people in the second and third centuries. These hardships could not be ignored. Furthermore, it is not by accident that these traditions seem tinged with messianism, for it is during times of persecution and poverty that messianism flourished. Therefore, with two qualifications, the Rabbis were willing to acknowledge the existence of "Tohu" and "Bohu" in the created world. The first qualification was tht man, not God, is to be viewed as the cause of "Tohu" and "Bohu." The second qualification was that as God had redeemed His people in the past, so He will redeem them in the future. In this regard "water" and "Light" in Genesis 1:2-3 are used as symbols of redemption.

It is clear to this writer that the Rabbinic concern over the exegesis of "Tohu" and "Bohu" in Genesis 1:2 was generated by the threat of the Gnostic interpretation of these words. In Gnostic myth, "Tohu" "Bohu," and Darkness are the tools used by the demiurge in his subjugation of man. Gnostic messianism may be said to have depended only upon knowledge or gnosis. Gnosis could enable one to transcend one's condition after death or, even in some sects, in the present life. The cause of the human condition was not man's sin, but rather the design of the demiurge. Escape or redemption involved the overcoming of this design, and, in contrast to the Rabbinic concept, was not dependent upon man's actions or God's (the demiurge's) will.

The demiurge subjugated the earth by surrounding it with "Tohu," "Bohu," and "Darkness." Echoes of this Gnostic idea are to be found in BT Hagigah 12a wherein we read:

It is taught: Tohu is a green line that encircles the entire world, out of which darkness proceeds, as it is said, "He (God) made darkness his hiding place round about Him.

In this tradition, the world is surrounded by "Tohu" and "Darkness," which hide the apprehension of God from the people of the world, and which seem to hold the world in their grip. In this tradition, darkness is not an absolutely negative symbol, for it serves as the cover for God's light by which He will redeem His people.

In contrast, for the Gnostics, "Darkness" was symbolic of the demonic power controlling the world. The Gnostic equivalent to "Tohu" in Hagigah 12a is the idea that a great serpent-like creature surrounds the earth. In the Hymn of the Pearl we read:

When you go down into Egypt, bring up the  
one pearl which lies in the middle of the  
sea which is encircled by the snorting serpent.<sup>52</sup>

In this passage, the serpent is similar to an earth-encircling dragon. Egypt here is symbolic of the material world. The Gnostics who wrote this passage viewed the Exodus as being a paradigm of redemption.<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere in the Gnostic Pistis Sophia, we find the following:

The outer darkness is a great dragon whose  
tail is in his mouth in that the darkness is  
outside the world and encompasses it.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, Origin in his Contra Celsum VI 25:35, describes the Ophite Gnostics. In their seven heavens tradition, each heaven is ruled by an archon who controls the level below him. These seven archontic spheres are placed within a larger circle which is called the Leviathan.

In conclusion, we may note that "Tohu," "Bohu," and "Darkness." presented the Rabbis with real problems of interpretation. Their task seems to have been to deny that an evil demiurge had control of the world. Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 shows evidence of two responses to this problem. First, some Rabbis chose to deny the corrupt nature of the world altogether. The world for them was not built out of nor was it in its essence "Tohu," "Bohu," and

"Darkness." This approach was the approach the author of the earthly king allegory in Genesis Rabbah 1:5.<sup>55</sup> The second response acknowledged the corrupt nature of the world, and emphasized that the source of this corruption is man, not God. As opposed to the Gnostics, man's actions in the world, i.e. doing the commandments (mitsvot), and God's mercy help to reverse the chaotic state of the world. The culmination of this reversal will occur when God redeems His people. Thus man, and not the demiurge, is in control of the fate of the world.

#### F. Ma'aseh Bereishit and Ma'aseh Merkabah

Gershom Scholem, in his book, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, discusses the Hekhalot literature. This literature is replete with discussions of the heavenly chariot (or throne), known as the "merkabah." These discussions, often referred to as "ma'aseh merkabah," are based upon interpretations of Ezekiel 1. Scholem feels that this literature was written by a group within Jewish circles which may be viewed as being analogous to the Gnostics described in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Scholem labels this early merkabah mysticism as "Jewish Gnosticism."<sup>56</sup>

The early merkabah mystic attempted to understand a perception of God's throne on its chariot, rather than the true nature of God himself.<sup>57</sup> According to Scholem, these early merkabah speculations are parallel within "Jewish tradition to the revelations on the realm of the divine in Gnosticism."<sup>58</sup> Gnostic writings, however, do not seem to be overly concerned with the exegesis of Ezekiel 1:1 or the perception of the throne of God on its chariot. Scholem has stated that the qualities (middot) of God, such as wisdom knowledge, truth etc., are parallel to the Gnostic theory of archons which fill the pleroma (the divine realm).<sup>59</sup> The emphasis in pleroma speculation in Gnosticism is the attempt to account for the creation of the world and man's place in it, more than to attempt to impart an understanding of the nature of the High God. Gnosis means understanding the "forgotten" divine origin of man. Man's soul is considered to have within it divine sparks from the Supreme Being. If we wish to understand the relationship of Gnosticism and Judaism, then we should examine the Rabbinic traditions on the creation of the world, which evidence such a relationship.

Why then, it may be asked, was Scholem so intent upon seeing the relationship between Judaism and Gnosticism as centered upon "ma'aseh merkabah?" Scholem's interest in merkabah mysticism was derived from his interest and expertise in the Kabbalistic speculations of the merkabah. His book attempted to establish an early date for the Hekhalot merkabah traditions as precursors of Kabbalistic traditions. In this area, it appears that Scholem has been successful. However, his account of the relationship between Hekhalot literature and Gnostic literature is far from convincing. As we have seen, the relationship between Gnostic literature and early Jewish speculations on the account of creation is potentially a much more fruitful field of study.

It is clear that "merkabah" mysticism is not the focus of concern of Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8. The only possible reference to the "merkabah" occurs in Genesis Rabbah 1:4. Therein, two things are said to have been created before the creation of the world: Torah (as in Genesis Rabbah 1:1) and the throne of Glory. It is not clear, however, whether the Torah or the throne was created first. In all of Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 this is the only possible reference to the merkabah. This, to be honest, is to be expected, for Genesis Rabbah 1-8 deals exegetically with the account of creation in Genesis 1.

The concern of these chapters in Genesis Rabbah seems to be directed at countering the threat of Gnosticism by either polemics or by encouraging the proper understanding. The Rabbinic polemics sought to deny the validity of Gnostic claims and to limit speculations which could lead to heretical or Gnostic beliefs. The 'proper understanding' which the Rabbis sought to encourage was an understanding which retained the honor of God, stressed kingship, and emphasized his inherent goodness in the creation of the world. In light of this concern, it makes far more sense

to speak of Jewish gnosis in terms of "Ma'aseh Bereishit," the account of creation, rather than "Ma'aseh merkabah." It is to this type of Jewish gnosis which we now turn examining first the speculations about the nature of God as found in Genesis Rabbah 1-8.

G. The Theological Speculations of Genesis Rabbah,  
chapters 1-8

Genesis Rabbah 1-8 contains two basic categories of theological speculations. The first category consists of moral statements which stress God's goodness. In Genesis Rabbah 6:5, God's gifts to the world are discussed. God is described as the giver of the Torah, the luminaries, and rain. Other gifts of God include peace, salvation, compassion, the ability of travelers to cross the sea safely, and vengeance upon those who persecute Israel. The discussion of these gifts is meant to illustrate God's concern and compassion for His people.

In Genesis Rabbah 3:9, God's goodness is illustrated by His desire to be man's partner. God is said to have desired from the time of man's creation to enter into partnership with man. This partnership, however, was not fulfilled until the day on which the Tabernacle was completed. The Tabernacle is the place wherein the divine presence, the shekhinah, dwells on earth. With the completion of the Tabernacle, God's original desire is fulfilled. The day on which the Tabernacle was completed is described as "the first day."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the creation of the world is not really completed until man does God's will which is symbolized here by the erection of the Tabernacle, at which time God's original desire was fulfilled.

The second category of theological speculations consists of statements about God Himself. God's power is such that he has the ability to draw figures upon the sea in the same way that man may draw figures on land. (Genesis Rabbah 7:1). In Genesis Rabbah 8:11, God is said to have created "man and his apertures" (Genesis 1:27) instead of "man and woman" or "male and female," as is the commonly accepted translation. Since man is said to be created in the image and likeness of God in Genesis 1:26, the issue in 8:11 is

the idea that God's image is not both male and female, but only male. God's speech is a source of considerable speculation. It is considered to be an instrument of power and creation. For example, God is said to be able to suspend the heavens by His words (Genesis Rabbah 4:4). Creation itself is done not by labor or toil, but by God's speech (Genesis Rabbah 3:2). The first time that God opens His mouth to speak, He gives light to the world (Genesis Rabbah 1:3). This is seen by the Rabbis as illustrative of God's concern for and benevolence toward His creatures, for Light is a positive symbol of goodness (Genesis Rabbah 3:1).

God is considered to be ubiquitous. In Genesis Rabbah 4:4, we find a discussion of how God, who fills all of heaven and earth, could have spoken to Moses from between the staves of the ark. The analogy of man's usage of a mirror is used to illustrate **that just** as man can change his image from large to small, depending on the size of the mirror he uses, so God can alter His image from large to small as He pleases.

This may have been an early form of Shiur Koma mysticism. Shiur Koma mysticism discussed the size and measurements of God. The date of these traditions is in doubt. However, they are pseudepigraphic in that they are ascribed to R. Akiba and R. Ishmael. Nevertheless, according to Scholem, the subject matter in these traditions may be dated as early as second century C.E.<sup>61</sup> Also similar to Shiur Komah mysticism would be the idea of a garment of light in which God enwrapped himself as found in Genesis Rabbah 3:4. According to Scholem, speculations such as this are of great significance in Hekhalot Rabbati's discussion of the account of creation.<sup>62</sup>

The two categories of speculations concerning the nature of God seem, for the most part, to have one common element. This common element is the idea that God is the creator of the universe. The association of "Light" as an attribute

of God may be found in Gnosticism, but there it is an attribute of the Supreme God. Of course, of all the attributes of the Supreme God in Gnosticism, the attribute of creator, ruler, or judge is never found. In conclusion, the theological speculations concerning the nature of God in Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8, are a sort of Jewish gnosis and reflect a positive approach to esoteric speculation on the account of creation.

## H. Jewish Gnosis - Speculations Concerning the Nature of the Firmament

In this section, we shall examine the speculations in Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 concerning the nature of the firmament. These speculations emphasize God as the creator of the universe, and seek to explain how the firmament or sky was created. They comprise the bulk of chapter 4 of Genesis Rabbah.

The firmament is said to be made of water. This observation obviously arose out of the sky's blue color. Nevertheless, the water in the firmament is dry water. God is said to have caused fire to burn the face of the firmament and dry it up. Thus R. Samuel b. Nahman called it a "middle layer of water which had solidified" (Genesis Rabbah 4:2). It separates the upper and lower waters (Genesis Rabbah 4:5), or the upper sphere, consisting of the celestials, from the lower sphere consisting of men (Genesis Rabbah 4:2).

There is much speculation concerning the thickness of the firmament (Genesis Rabbah 4:5). One anonymous view said that firmament was as thick as the earth. R. Aha maintained that it was only as thick as a metal plate. R. Joshua b. R. Nehemiah said that it is only two (or three) fingers in thickness. It is not clear what is the background of these speculations. They are probably related to Ben Zoma's statements concerning the distance between the upper and lower waters. If the reader accepts the hypothesis expressed in chapter IV, section H, of this thesis concerning the significance of the Ben Zoma statements, then the distance between the upper waters is related to redemption. The smaller the distance, the closer man would be to being redeemed. Similarly, the tradition in Genesis Rabbah 4:3 stresses the void between the firmament and the upper waters. This could indicate, in a similar way, that man is

not close to the time of redemption.

The name of the firmament, "shamayim," or sky is also discussed in considerable detail (Genesis Rabbah 4:7). The name is discussed by a series of Hebrew word plays or notarikons which indicate, for the most part, the composition of the firmament. Of particular interest to us, however, is the word play which states that the name 'shamayim' is derived from the verb "mishtomemim," "they wonder." In this interpretation, men are said to wonder at the composition of the firmament. Thus the midrash recognizes man's natural curiosity to know and understand the nature of the universe. This type of speculation was obviously designed as an attempt to provide answers to man's wonderment.

The significance and meaning of these speculations is often quite obscure. However, we can say that at their lowest level, they sought to speak to and answer the questions of man concerning the nature of the universe. At the same time, they also emphasize God's role as creator of the universe. Though obscure to us in meaning, these speculations most certainly constituted speculations on the account of creation and, as such, may be described as being Jewish gnosis. With this in mind, let us now proceed to another example of such speculations.

# I. Speculations Concerning the Gathering of the Waters

In this section we shall examine the speculations concerning the gathering of the waters. These speculations form the bulk of chapter 5 of Genesis Rabbah.

According to the midrash, if God had not gathered the waters, the world would not have been able to exist. The gathering of the waters is said to have been done by God's speech or rebuke (Genesis Rabbah 5:1). The voice of God is said to have been a "metatron," a guide to the waters, ostensibly telling them where to collect. This tradition is attributed to Ben Zoma and Ben Azzai (Genesis Rabbah 5:4).

Up to this point, the traditions which we have mentioned have discussed how the waters were gathered. Many of the traditions in chapter 5 of Genesis Rabbah deal with the question of why the water was gathered. For example, assuming that water was everywhere before God gathered the waters, Genesis Rabbah 5:7 asks the question of how the waters could have been gathered into one place. The answer to the question is not an answer as to how they were gathered, but as to why the waters were gathered. The tradition in 5:7 tells us that the waters were gathered in order to teach man the principle that a small area may hold many things. Thus, for example, in the Temple of Jerusalem all people would be packed tightly together, yet when the time came for them to prostrate themselves, each would have plenty of room.

Another example of this type of speculation is found in traditions which state that the waters were gathered for a future purpose; namely, the flood. The purpose of the gathering of the waters, therefore, was seen as enabling God to have the potential to bring the wicked of the earth to judgment (Genesis Rabbah 1:1 and 5:6).

Another tradition (Genesis Rabbah 5:5) maintains that the gathering of the waters was done for the sake of Israel's future crossing of the Red Sea. Thus, once again,

the midrash seems to stress that God as a creator was purposeful. R. Jeremiah in the same tradition takes this idea one step farther, maintaining that everything which God created during the first six days of creation, was created for a purpose. This purpose, according to R. Jeremiah, is always related to God's covenant with Israel and to His future redemption of Israel.

These speculations, though seemingly obscure and unimportant attempt to provide a certain gnosis concerning the account of creation. As we saw in relation to the speculations concerning the nature of the firmament, these speculations seem to emphasize God's role as creator. The gathering of the waters was done by God in order that the world and man might exist and for future purposes such as the punishment of the wicked and the redemption of Israel as God's people. Finally, and perhaps most important, these speculations and those discussed in the last chapter, seem to stress that God created the world with a definite purpose and plan. As a result, the world is to be seen as ordered and not chaotic.

# J. The Creation of Light and the Garment of God

## Passage 23

### Genesis Rabbah 3:4

R. Simeon b. R. Yehozedek asked R. Samuel b. Nahman: **Because** I have heard that you are a master of haggadah, tell me from where was the light created? He replied: The Holy One, blessed be He, wrapped Himself in it as if it were a robe and it shone from the lustre of His majesty from one end of the world to the other. He answered him in a whisper. He said to him, 'There is a verse which explicitly states, "Who covers Yourself with light as a garment" (Psalm 104:2), yet you say it in a whisper!' He said to him: Just as I heard it in a whisper, so I have told it to you in a whisper. R. Berekiah remarked: Had not R. Isaac taught it, could we have said it!

In previous sections, we have seen that the Rabbis viewed light as a symbol of goodness. In this section, we will deal in greater detail with the speculations concerning the nature and creation of light. These speculations, for the most part, are to be found in Genesis Rabbah chapter 3.

Genesis Rabbah 3:4 presents us with a discussion of God's garment of light. The discussion takes place between R. Simeon b. Yehazdek and R. Samuel b. Nahman, 'The master of the Haggadah.' The conversation, however, is artificial, for while both men lived in Palestine, R. Simeon b. R. Yehozedek who lived in the first half of the third century lived some fifty years prior to R. Samuel b. Nahman.

Nevertheless, the question which is attributed to R. Simeon b. R. Yehozedek is the question of where light was created. R. Samuel b. Nahman's answer was that it was created from God's garment. The implied sense of the passage is that light had existed prior to its creation for man, for it was seen as being co-existent with God. It is probable that R. Samuel b. Nahman felt that God was able to create using light. Accordingly, light preceeded everything else in creation.

The preexistence of light is also implied by the question itself, "From where was the light created?" The question seems rather strange. Why does it say "From where" instead of "how" as in, "How was the light created?" Similarly, in Leviticus Rabbah 31:7, the question reads, "From where did light come out into the world?" In this question, the intent is even clearer. Both questions imply that light was pre-existent to the creation of the world.

This means that the light in Genesis 1:3 was not really created, but rather "came out," probably from God's garment. As such, many authorities seem to have maintained that light preceeded the creation of heaven and earth. For example, Psalm 104:1-5, which is a poetic account of the creation of the world, reads:

- 233
- (1) Bless the Lord, O my soul  
O Lord my God, you are very great!  
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
  - (2) Who covers Yourself with light as a  
garment,  
Who has stretched out the heavens like  
a tent,
  - (3) Who has laid the beams of Your chambers  
on the waters,  
Who makes the clouds Your chariot,  
who rides on the wings of the wind,
  - (4) Who makes the winds Your messengers,  
Fire and flame your ministers.
  - (5) You set the earth on its foundations,  
so that it should never be shaken...

Genesis Rabbah 3:4 used verse 2 of this Psalm to prove that God coverse Himself with a garment of light. Exodus Rabbah 15:22 cites Psalm 104:2 as a proof that light was created before the heaven and the earth. This interpretation would have been based upon the appearance of heavens in the second half of verse 2 and earth in verse 5. Because Psalm 104 was seen by the Rabbis as being a poetic account of creation, the mention of light before heaven and earth in this Psalm proved for the Rabbis that the creation of light preceded the creation of heaven and earth. Similarly, in Genesis Rabbah 3:1, we read:

R. Judah says: The light was created first. This is similar to a king who wished to build a palace, but the site was shrouded in darkness. What did he do? He lit lamps and lanterns in order to know how to affix the foundations. Thus, the light was created first.

In this tradition, R. Judah maintained that light was created before the heaven and earth, citing as proof by analogy the fact that a builder needs light in order to know where and how to build.

Once again, it is clear that in order to reconcile the view that light was created before heaven and earth with the order of the biblical verses in Genesis 1:3 ("heaven and earth" in Genesis 1:1 and "light" in Genesis 1:3), we must see light as being preexistent with God and "coming

out," as it were, when it was created for the cosmos. Another way to reconcile the rabbinic view with the biblical order is to see the light in Genesis 1:3 as being a physical or created light, which comes from the uncreated spiritual light of God. This spiritual light would appear to be part of the essence of God. This view would account for R. Simeon b. Yehozedek's question, "From where was light created?" as opposed to "How was light created?"

A similar dichotomy between physical and spiritual light or created and uncreated (or preexistent) light is to be found in Philo. In On the Creation of the World, chapters 26-29, Philo maintained that there were seven things which were created on the first day and that light was the last thing created on this day. The assertion that light was the last creation on the first day would agree with the biblical account. However, in De Somniss I:75, Philo identifies the light with the "Logos." The Logos, as we have seen previously, was for Philo preexistent to the creation of heaven and earth. In addition, in our discussion of Genesis Rabbah 1:1, we saw how just as Philo viewed the "Logos" as God's plan of creation, so the Rabbis viewed the Torah as God's plan of creation. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the Rabbis themselves made the equation of light with Torah. This equation was made in Genesis Rabbah 3:5, wherein each book of Torah is called "light."

In Genesis Rabbah 3:4 Psalm 104:2 is used to prove that God's garment consists of light, and as such is the "home" of the preexistent light. In Song of Songs Rabbah 4:10, the same R. Samuel b. Nahman lists ten garments of God. Other garments include majesty, power, and justice. Obviously R. Samuel b. Nahman had a fondness for the motif of God's garment. The Song of Songs Rabbah tradition also shows us that R. Samuel b. Nahman considered light to be an

attribute of God similar to majesty, power, justice etc. Thus once again we see how the preexistent light was part of the essence of God.

The garment of God was an important part of the speculations found in Hekhalot literature. In Hekhalot Rabbati, it is called a "haluk," which in Rabbinic literature is simply a "long shirt-like robe." It is said to have been worn by Zohariel, Lord, God of Israel. In Hekhalot Rabbati 3:4 we read:

The attribute (middah) of the garment of Zohariel, the Lord, God of Israel, who comes crowned to the throne of Glory.

According to Scholem, the early merkabah mystics were taught to expect to see such a garment covering the throne of God.<sup>64</sup>

In both Rabbinic literature and Hekhalot literature, the light of God's garment was considered to have been an instrument of creation. For example, Pirkei de R. Eliezer chapter 3 states:

From where were the heavens created? From the light of the garment with which he was robed.

Similar to this is Hekhalot Rabbati 4:2:

The Pleides, Orion, the planet Venus, the constellations, stars and signs of the zodiac, all flow and issue forth from the garment of He who is crowned and shrouded in it, sits upon the throne of his Glory.

In the latter passage, it is understood that the stars were created from the light of God's garment. The Hekhalot passage is taken from a hymn whose composition Scholem saw as occurring in the third century C.E. in Palestine. Therefore, this hymn is significant to us because it was composed in or around the time in which R. Samuel b. Nahman lived.

According to R. Samuel b. Nahman (in Genesis Rabbah 3:4), information concerning the preexistent light was to be communicated in a whisper. R. Simeon b. Yehozedek asked why it was to be communicated in a whisper when Psalm 104:2,

"Who covers Yourself with light as a garment," is so explicit? Samuel b. Nahman answered that that was the way he had heard it. R. Berekiah, a fourth century Palestinian authority, taught that "if R. Isaac had not taught it, could we have said it?" This statement is rather obscure. R. Isaac was a contemporary of R. Samuel b. Nahman in Palestine. What did R. Berekiah mean by this statement? As this writer sees it, there are three possible interpretations. First, R. Isaac discussed the details of God's garment of light in public in front of more than one person. The Venice, Paris, and Oxford manuscripts of Genesis Rabbah all read, "Had not R. Isaac discussed it in public etc." This, by the way, is also the interpretation of pseudo-Rashi as found in the folio edition of Genesis Rabbah. The second interpretation is to see R. Isaac as discussing the nature of God's garment of light even though it was esoteric speculation of a sort which was forbidden. The third interpretation is to see R. Isaac as discussing the garment of light even though such discussion seemed to indicate that God was corporeal.

Regardless of which interpretation the reader chooses, it is clear that this sort of speculation was, according to R. Samuel b. Nahman, to have been communicated in a whisper. In Rabbinic Literature, things which are communicated in a whisper often are done so because they have a sort of magical power and, as such, are to be regarded as secret. For example, in BT Sanhedrin 101a we read that one may whisper a charm or incantation over a snake bit on the Sabbath. But in BT Hagigah 14a, the secrets of the Torah are said to be communicated from one person to another in a whisper. From this tradition and from Genesis Rabbah 3:4, it would seem that "speaking in a whisper" was a technical term for the communication of esoteric teaching.

We can now begin to draw some conclusions concerning the significance of R. Samuel b. Nahman's discourse on the creation of light. R. Samuel b. Nahman's account of the

creation of light resembles both a doctrine of emanation by the "Logos" as found in Greek thought and in Philo, and the idea of devolution in Gnostic thought. In Gnostic myth, light is one of the attributes of the Supreme God. The Gnostics also distinguished between the physical light of the world and the spiritual light of the Supreme God. We have noticed previously that such a distinction exists within Rabbinic Literature and in the writings of Philo. Gnosis, of course, for a Gnostic sect would be the apprehension of this spiritual light. Similarly, the Hekhalot mystics were taught to expect to see in their vision of God's throne a garment of light which covered the throne. For a Gnostic sect, apprehension of this light would lead to redemption from the corrupted physical world. For the Rabbis, apprehension of this light had to be earned. Man must perform certain actions, i.e. the mitsvot (commandments), and know certain things (the written and oral law), if he expects to partake of the preexistent light. Therefore, the preexistent light, in the view of the Rabbis, has a specific function, and it is to that function which we now turn.

## K. The Preexistent Light

Rabbinic Literature sees the preexistent light as being stored by God for the righteous in the world to come. From the biblical account of creation, it is not clear what happened to the preexistent light after God "let it out," so to speak, from His garment (Genesis 1:3). The light in Genesis 1:3 is not the same light as the light of the sun, moon, and stars. Because of the uncertainty of what constituted the light in Genesis 1:3, many Rabbis felt that God withdrew the preexistent light from the world, because God foresaw the wickedness of the future generations, and desired that these wicked people not partake of this light.<sup>65</sup> Thus it is said to have been stored away for the righteous in the world to come.

Another reason as to why the preexistent light was withdrawn was so that it would not eclipse the light of the sun (Genesis Rabbah 3:6). If God had not withdrawn this light, there would have been no need to create the sun. Moreover, because the preexistent light was seen as being absolutely good, it could not have shone at night. In such a way, the Rabbis accounted for the creation of the moon. However if God created or "let out" this light from His garment, and then chose to withdraw it, then why did God "let it out" in the first place? Was not this an unnecessary and superfluous act, given the fact that He was to create the sun, moon, and stars.

It was this question which led to the idea that this light was stored for the righteous in the messianic future. The author of this concept was either R. Judah b. Simeon b. Pazi or R. Eleazar b. Pedat.<sup>66</sup> Because both of these authorities lived at the same time, we may date the origin of the concept of the preexistent light which was as hidden or stored away for the messianic future, to the second half of the third century.

Some traditions associate this preexistent light with the first man Adam. Many sources, all in the name of R. Simon b. Menasya who lived in Palestine in the second half of the second century, state that the splendor of Adam originally eclipsed the splendor of the sun. The similarity of Adam's original splendor and the preexistent light of God was noted by Alexander Altman in his article entitled "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology." Altman feels that the two **concepts** seem to have merged. As such, it is the sin of Adam which causes God to withdraw and store away the preexistent light.<sup>67</sup> In Genesis Rabbah 11:2 and 12:6, we read that "Adam did not retain his Glory for a night." Therefore, Adam was felt to have immediately lost the pre-existent light after he had sinned.

Thus we see evidence of two traditions concerning pre-existent light. One tradition says that this light was withdrawn by God before the fourth day in anticipation of the future deeds of the wicked, and in order that the creation of the sun would not be superfluous. The second tradition says that the preexistent light was in Adam's possession, and was taken from him either in anticipation of or due to his sin.

The Gnostics believed that the preexistent light of the Supreme God descends, falls victim to the world below, and is mixed with darkness. The task of the Gnostic, according to Manichaen Gnosticism, is to redeem this light from its mixture with darkness. In contradistinction, the Rabbis felt that the preexistent light was taken away and hidden due to the wickedness of future generations. They believed it was stored away for the righteous who will be rewarded in the future.

In view of the traditions which saw Adam as having been in possession of this light, it is possible to view the Messiah as Adam's future twin. Like Adam, he is constantly

striving to return to the garden. It is he to whom the preexistent light is given as a result of Adam's sin. In Genesis Rabbah 1:6, R. Abba of Serungayya interprets the verse "Light dwells within him" (Daniel 2:22), as a reference to the Messiah.

In conclusion, the divine, spiritual, and preexistent light according to the Rabbis was not drawn into the world. The problem faced by the Jew was not how to separate out this light from the darkness of this world. Rather, the task of the Jew was how to obtain this light in this world and, as a result, bring about the messianic age. Bringing the Messiah or partaking of the light stored away by God is something which must be earned by the Jew through righteous living, i.e. observance of the commandments and study of Torah.

# L. Conclusion - The Overall Thematic Concerns of Genesis Rabbah Chapters 1-8

In this chapter we have examined the overall thematic concerns of Genesis Rabbah 1-8. These chapters exhibit a concern over the assertion that a plurality of deities created the world. This concern arose out of the heretical interpretation of Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:26. The people who made these heretical interpretations were labeled as "minim" by the Rabbis. The interpretation of Genesis 1:1 by the minim was based on seeing the word "Elohim" as implying more than one deity. They also claimed that the phrase in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man," indicates plurality.

In their response to the minim, the Rabbis chose to emphasize that there was only one God, the God of Israel, who was the creator of the world. The issue of plurality existed within the Jewish community as well as the non-Jewish community. The Rabbis in the academy were anxious for their students to have the proper understanding of these verses. Among non-Jews, the pluralistic minim to whom the Rabbis referred could have been either Christians, Gnostics or both.

The Rabbis also downplayed the role of angels in creation. In their interpretation of Genesis 1:26, the Rabbis maintained that God did not consult with the angels, or, if he did, he did so **out of** moralistic reasons. They sought to insulate the community from angel speculations, especially those which concerned a primary angel of creation. There is evidence that both Jesus and the demiurge were viewed individually by different non-Jewish groups as this primary angel. We have also seen evidence in this chapter that there seem to have been Jews who believed that angels had created the world.

The Rabbis engaged in a considerable amount of speculation concerning the first man, Adam. The idea that the

the cosmos was created for man's usage and enjoyment is found in Philo, as well as rabbinic sources. It is also clear that the Rabbis knew of some sects wherein Adam was interpreted as one of the creators of the world. Such an interpretation was shown to exist in the Apocalypse of Adam in the Nag Hammadi library. The rabbinic concerns are more reflective of a concern over Gnosticism than they are a concern over Christianity.

The Rabbis viewed the creation of the cosmos as purposive and ordered for the good. This assertion was contrasted with that of Gnostic myth in which cosmos may be viewed as ordered, but its order is for the evil purposes of the demiurge. The Rabbis stressed the role of the God of Israel as king of the world. As creator of that world, He is an agent of good. This latter idea was shared by the Church Fathers.

The idea of the Logos as an intermediary in creation was found in Philo. This idea resembled the concept of the Sophia who was wisdom personified in Valentinian Gnosticism. The Sophia was viewed as being the mother of the demiurge. Rabbinic sources include an idea similar to that of Philo, seeing the Torah as being wisdom personified and as the active architect in the creation of the world.

The words "Tohu" and "Bohu" in Genesis 1:2 caused serious exegetical problems for the Rabbis. Gnostic sects considered chaotic and evil "Tohu" and "Bohu" to be the natural state of affairs in the world. The Rabbis either attempted to deny this assertion, or they accepted it. If they accepted it, they sought to deny that the source of "Tohu" and "Bohu" was God, but rather was man. Man's responsibility for evil in the world is stressed. God is not the source of evil. In these traditions, we also found several traditions whose purpose could have been to deny that the world was created or controlled by the demiurge.

The basic theological assumption in chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah is that God is a good and benevolent creator. God is described as being man's partner in the world. Once again any concept similar to a demiurge concept is denied. In these chapters, we also find several traditions which speculate about the nature of God Himself. On the whole, these traditions represent a positive attitude towards speculation and Jewish gnosis.

These chapters also contain numerous speculations concerning the creation of the firmament and the gathering of the waters. One purpose of such speculations was simply to describe the nature of the universe. In these traditions, God's benevolence and reward of the righteous is once again stressed. God's role as Creator is emphasized. Another purpose of these traditions might have been to provide Jews with a Jewish alternative to Gnostic speculations on the account of creation. These traditions also represent a more positive attitude towards speculation and Jewish gnosis.

Considerable speculation concerning the nature and creation of light is found in this material. The idea of a preexistent or primordial light is to be found in both Rabbinic and Gnostic Literature. For the Gnostics, the preexistent light was corrupted by the created world. For the Rabbis, this light was removed and stored for the righteous and for the messianic era. On the whole, these traditions reflect a more positive attitude towards speculation and Jewish gnosis.

It is clear that Jewish gnosis on "Ma'aseh Bereishit" forms the basis of chapters 1-8. Gnostic themes and concerns seem to have had a significant influence of these chapters. This influence, according to the evidence presented here, seems to have been much greater than the Christian and Greek influences present in these chapters. The Rabbis

reacted to Gnosticism in two ways. First they sought to deny its assertions. This denial was often coupled with warnings against any type of speculations which could lead to "Gnostic-like" conclusions. Second, they sought to provide a Jewish alternative to the Gnostic understanding, an alternative Jewish gnosis if you will. Naturally, this latter way reflects a more positive attitude towards the potential benefits of esoteric speculation on the account of creation.

The overall approach of Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 is more reflective of the second mode of rabbinic reaction to Gnosticism than the first. These chapters seek to provide the Jew with an alternative Jewish gnosis on the account of creation. In comparison to Haqiqah II:1 of the Palestinian Talmud, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1-8 and the traditions therein express a much more positive attitude towards speculation on the account of creation. It appears that some of the traditions of Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 sought to combat speculation with speculation. On occasion, the traditions in these chapters seem to have incorporated Gnostic motifs into their interpretations. These motifs were incorporated only where they did not constitute a threat to the honor of the God of Israel and His commandments. When we add together all of these factors, it appears that Gnostic speculations on man, God, the cosmos, and creation, seem to have been the prime candidate for the target of these alternative speculations which we have labeled as "Jewish gnosis."

Chapters 1-18 of Genesis Rabbah consist of a collection of aggadic comments on Genesis 1:1-22. The redaction of these chapters is usually ascribed to the redactor of the entire work, but this is not necessarily so.

<u>Genesis Rabbah, Chapter</u>	<u>Sections</u>
1	1:1-2
2	2:1-3
3	3:1-2
4	4:1-2
5	5:1-2
6	6:1-2
7	7:1-2
8	8:1-2
9	9:1-2
10	10:1-2
11	11:1-2
12	12:1-2
13	13:1-2
14	14:1-2
15	15:1-2
16	16:1-2
17	17:1-2
18	18:1-2

The redaction of these chapters is usually ascribed to the redactor of the entire work, but this is not necessarily so. The redaction of these chapters is usually ascribed to the redactor of the entire work, but this is not necessarily so.

## CHAPTER VII

### A REDACTION CRITIQUE OF GENESIS RABBAH CHAPTERS 1-8

Chapters 1-18. The reader will recall that chapters 1-18 are a separate unit in the work. The redactor of chapters 1-18 was not the same as the redactor of the entire work.

Of chapters 1-8 none of the attempts to explain the divisions appear to be valid. Obviously, the redaction of these chapters is not based upon the triennial cycle of reading, for all eight chapters appear within the same cycle.

The process in these chapters does not follow the same pattern as the other chapters. Each chapter has at least one section, but the number, size, and quality of the sections vary greatly. The redaction of these chapters is not based upon the triennial cycle of reading, for all eight chapters appear within the same cycle.

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Chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah consists of a collection of exegetic comments on Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 1:28. The actual breakdown of the chapters in Genesis Rabbah and the verses discussed in each chapter is as follows:

<u>Genesis Rabbah</u> , Chapter	Genesis
1	1:1
2	1:2-3
3	1:3-5
4	1:6-8
5	1:9-13
6	1:14-18
7	1:20-25
8	1:26-31

All of these chapters comment on the first "parashah" and the first "seder" of the Torah.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 3 of this thesis, we discussed the various attempts to explain the chapter divisions of Genesis Rabbah. As we saw, most of these attempts have proven to be unsatisfactory, especially in terms of chapters 1-18. The reader will recall that it is my contention that chapters 1-18 are a separate and earlier literary unit. The redactor of chapters 1-8 was not the same as the final redactor of the entire work.

In terms of chapters 1-8 none of the attempts to explain the chapter divisions appear to be valid. Obviously, the division of the chapters is not based upon the triennial cycle of Torah reading, for all eight chapters appear within the same "Seder." The proems in these chapters do not account for the chapter divisions. Each chapter has at least one proem, but the number, size, and quality of the proems in the individual chapters vary greatly.<sup>2</sup> The length of the chapters is certainly not a criteria for the divisions. Though it is possible that the redactor could have possessed a large amount of homiletic material concerning the first chapter of Genesis, it is clear that this material was not divided equally in order to determine the chapters, for the length of the chapters varies greatly.

For example, chapter 6 contains 31 lines, whereas chapter 1 contains 140 lines.

The "open and closed" verses do not account for the chapter divisions. This criteria is applicable to only 5 out of the 8 chapters, chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The "natural break" theory, which sees a natural break according to the Genesis narrative as being determinative of the chapter divisions, is applicable only to the same five chapters mentioned immediately above. In conclusion, no theory which has been proposed previously may account for the chapter divisions.

Nevertheless, the exact identity of the chapters which may be explained by the "open and closed" verse theory and the "natural break" theory seemed to be more than a curious coincidence. As a result, I began to search for a way to account for the coincidence, and found what I believe to be the key to understanding the chapter divisions. This key was to see the divisions in terms of the particular days of creation. When we use this as a criterion and compare it with the "open-closed" verse and "natural break" theories, we find the following results:

Chapter	Verse	Day	Open-closed	Natural Break
1	1	1	x	x
2	2-3	1		
3	3-5	1		
4	6-8	2	x	x
5	9-13	3	x	x
6	14-18	4	x	x
7	20-25	5-6	x	x
8	26-31	6		

This chart shows us how the day of creation may account for the beginning of chapters 1,4,5,6, and 7. These chapters are the same chapters to which the "open-closed" verses and "natural break" theories apply.

The reader is correct in asking what is the difference between the "day" criterion and the other two criteria. All three theories or criteria account only for the same five

chapter divisions. Nevertheless, the day criterion is significant in that it marks the beginning of a thematic approach. The "natural break" theory, although it was thematic, could only account for large blocks of material. For example, the "natural break" theory, given its criteria as discussed in chapter III of this thesis, could only account for chapters which would begin with the exegesis of 1:20, 1:24, and 1:29. It was unable to look at the intermediary verses and to search therein for certain homiletic themes which would be of concern to the redactor.

A thematic approach looks for overall themes rather than the way in which the Genesis text reads. The thematic approach becomes extremely useful when, coupled with the "day" criterion, it is applied to the first eight chapters of Genesis Rabbah. Using this approach, we may begin to understand the division of chapter 8. Chapter 7 includes exegetetic material from both the fifth and sixth days of creation. Therefore the division of chapter 8 is not according to the sixth day, but rather according to the creation of man on the sixth day. Chapter 7 includes exegetetic material concerning the fifth and sixth day until the creation of man. Chapter 8 constitutes a thematic unit on man and his creation. Thus, the division between chapters 7 and 8 is explained by applying a thematic appraisal to the material covered in these chapters.

Such an appraisal may also account for the divisions of chapter 1-3. Chapters 1-3 deal with the exegesis of the events of the first day of creation. Chapter 1 deals solely with Genesis 1:1. The structure of this chapter is rather complex and will be discussed shortly as to its overall theme. Chapter 2 deals with the nature of the cosmos, basing its discussion upon the appearance of "Tohu" and "Bohu" in Genesis 1:2. Genesis 1:3 appears only in this chapter only as a contrast to Genesis 1:2. In chapter 2 "Light" as in Genesis 1:3 is a symbol of the

reward and the redemption of the righteous from "Tohu" and "Bohu." Chapter 3 deals with Genesis 1:3-5. The thematic basis of this chapter is its discussion of the nature of "Light." Chapters 4-7 are all based upon the events of creation of the second through the fifth day. Thus we see how the thematic approach when coupled with the "day" criterion may account for the divisions of chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah.

As a midrashic text, Genesis Rabbah is a bridge between exegetic and homiletic forms of midrashim. As such, it is a watershed midrash. The tannaitic or exegetic midrashim are marked by a verse by verse exegesis of the biblical text. The Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, the Sifra, and the Sifre, are all examples of this type of midrash. Examples of literary-homiletic midrashim are Leviticus Rabbah and Pesikta de R. Kahane. Leviticus Rabbah is based upon the triennial cycle of Torah reading, and has a clear and formal structure. This structure consists of an introductory proem or proems, followed by a body of material, and concluded with a messianic peroration. This structure created a new literary form which is called the "literary homily." In his "literary homilies," the redactor of Leviticus Rabbah seems to have collected proems from different live sermons. He then focused the body of the homily upon the first verse or verses of the "seder," skipping the remaining verses in the triennial Torah reading. He concluded his homily with a messianic peroration.<sup>3</sup>

Chapters 1-8 in Genesis Rabbah resemble the literary homiletic form in that they possess proems. However, they do not possess messianic perorations, nor are they based upon a clear and formal structure. These chapters resemble the tannaitic or exegetic midrashim in that they embody verse by verse exegesis. While chapters 1-8 in Genesis Rabbah, for the most part, do not "skip" verses, they do

seem to be based in large measure upon the first verse which is discussed or interpreted in the particular chapter. The following chart illustrates this phenomenon.

chapter	1st verse	# of lines total	# of lines 1st verse	%
1	1	140	140	100
2	2*	43	43	100
3	3	68	44	71
4	6	67	40	60
5	9	70	54	77
6	14**	96	12	12.5
7	20	31	17	55
8	26	107	84	78.5

\* includes verse three only in the context of verse 2  
cf. above this chapter

\*\* breakdown of the exegesis in chapter 6 is  
verse 14-15 - 12 lines  
" 16 - 30 "  
" 17 - 40 "  
" 18 - 14 "

From the chart, it is evident that, with the exception of chapter 6, all of the chapters are built more than 50% upon the first biblical verse which the chapter discusses. Only chapter six evidences a different distribution. In conclusion, the evidence supports my contention that Genesis Rabbah constitutes watershed midrash, a transition between two literary forms. With this in mind, let us now examine the internal structure of Genesis Rabbah 1-8, beginning with the structure of chapter 1.

The great respect with which scribes held these traditions is evidenced by a note at the beginning of the London manuscript which reads:

Let us not be afraid of the secrets of great holiness. Strengthen my hand to begin and finish R. Hoshaya's Genesis Rabbah.

More importantly, however, is a scribal note at the beginning of the Oxford A manuscript of Genesis Rabbah. This scribal note says that the first six proems served as an introduction to the entire midrash. As a result, the

scribe of this manuscript began the seventh section of chapter 1 of Genesis Rabbah by quoting Genesis Rabbah 1:1.<sup>4</sup>

According to the traditional ordering of Genesis Rabbah, the proems constitute sections 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 of chapter 1. Section 4, which is not a proem, seems out of place according to the traditional enumeration, especially if we view the proems as introductions to the rest of the material in chapter 1. This confused order was apparent to the scribe of the London manuscript. His order was sections 1, 5, 6, 7, 2, and 3, which are the six proems, followed by 4, 8, 9, and 10-15. J. Theodor, in his critical edition of Genesis Rabbah, retained this ordering. Furthermore in his commentary entitled Or haSechel,<sup>5</sup> R. Abraham b. Asher wrote:

Rashi had a different order for the beginning of the Midrash in that some of the divisions are reversed and not organized according to the order of our book. . . I have also found an edition of Midrash Rabbah with ancient script which agrees with Rashi's order.

It is not clear which edition either Rashi or R. Abraham b. Asher possessed. Theodor believes Rashi's order to have been that of the London manuscript.<sup>6</sup> R. Abraham b. Asher seems to have accepted Rashi's order, for he writes:

Accordingly after investigation, it would seem that the genuine order is that of Rashi.

With this altered ordering in mind, let us now direct our attention to the proem in chapter 1.

Accordingly to their order in the London manuscripts, the proems in chapter 1 of Genesis Rabbah constitute sections 1, 5, 6, 7, 2, and 3. The proems in sections 1, 5, 7, and 2 return at the end of the pericope verse, Genesis 1:1. The proems in sections 6 and 3 do not return to Genesis 1:1. Genesis Rabbah 1:6 which was extensively discussed in chapter 4 section C of this thesis, represents a compilation

of two traditions. The proem itself is based upon Psalm 86:10 and is attributed to R. Tanhuma who makes the crucial exegesis at the end of the proem. The angel tradition, which may also be found in Genesis Rabbah 3:8, seems to be a later addition. It was probably added due to the fact that it, too, interprets Psalm 86:10 in terms of God's aloneness in creation.

In terms of the body of chapter 1, sections 4,8,9, and 10 all interpret the word "bereishit," "in the beginning." Sections 4,8, and 9 "bereishit" as "bara shet" which means "he created six." These interpretations discuss the six things which were created prior to the creation of the world, or the six things or materials that God used in the creation of the world. Genesis Rabbah 1:10 interprets the first letter of the word "bereishit," the "bet." The "bet" is interpreted in terms of its shape and symbolic significance and in terms of a limitation on esoteric speculation. Genesis Rabbah 1:4 also interprets the "bet" in the word "bereishit," but interprets it as meaning "for the sake of." Thus, God is said to have created the world for the sake of Torah, Moses, Hallah, tithes, and first fruits.

Section 11 discusses children who engaged in speculation on the "final letters" of the Hebrew alphabet. The intention of this tradition is to show that proper speculation can really only affirm God's kingship. Through a proper understanding of the "final letters," the children are said to have understood that each letter illustrated that God as king had transmitted the Torah to Moses. It is clear that in this tradition, Moses is a pseudonym for the Rabbis themselves.

From section 12 on, the redactor interprets the words in Genesis 1:1. Section 12 discusses the Hebrew ordering of the first three words of the Torah, "bereishit bara Elohim," "In the beginning God created." Section 13 and 15 discuss the words "heaven" and "earth," and section 14

discusses the particle "et."<sup>7</sup>

Chapter 1 is completed by a tradition which is found in numerous other sources.<sup>8</sup> The tradition emphasizes that precedence in scripture may often be reversed in two verses. For example, one finds both "heaven and earth" and "earth and heaven." This lack of consistency indicates that the two are to be considered as equals. Other equals in scripture include the patriarchs, Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, and father and mother. In the parallel to Genesis Rabbah 1:15 in PT Hagigah II:1 77c-d, only the "heaven and earth" are discussed as being equals. The redactor of Genesis Rabbah chose to add the examples of "equals" from other sources to this tradition for two reasons. First, these examples illustrated the principle of equality in scripture as expressed in the Hillel-Shammai tradition. Second, because this list of equals ends with the teaching that one is to treat one's mother and father with equal respect, the redactor was able to end chapter 1 on a moral note. It is possible that this conclusion was placed here by the final redactor of Genesis Rabbah and not by the earlier redactor of the first chapters.

If we examine Genesis Rabbah chapter 1 in terms of the major themes, we find that each theme may in some way be related to a Gnostic concern. In the following chart, these two concerns are placed side by side for the sake of comparison:

<u>Genesis Rabbah Theme</u>	<u>Gnostic Concern</u>
a. Torah as the source of gnosis (1:1)	Torah as the tool of the demiurge
b. Torah as a blueprint for a well-planned creation by God as creator (1:1, 1:8, 1:13)	Creation, the work of the demiurge was not well planned, due to the existence of evil in the world
c. The Rabbis possess gnosis which is based upon the proper understanding of the Hebrew Bible (1:4, 1:6)	Gnostic claims that they, not the Rabbis, possessed gnosis

Genesis Rabbah Themes

- d. Rabbinic attempts to limit speculation as an anti-gnostic polemic (1:5, 1:10, 1:11)
- e. God as king and sole creator. Angels and other powers do not create (1:3, 1:7, 1:12, 1:14)
- f. Israel as the possessor of gnosis-Election in this sense (1:2)

Gnostic Concerns

Anti-Jewish polemics

The demiurge as king of the physical world and its creator. Pleroma speculations leading to the demiurge, not the high God, as creator

Gnostic claims that he who possesses gnosis is in a sense the elect; Anti-Jewish polemics

As seen above, it is possible to relate every concern of chapter 1 to a parallel Gnostic argument or position. The subthemes in this chapter may appear in several traditions within the chapter itself. It is important to note that chapter 1 begins by stressing the importance of the Torah. The Torah serves as the basis for all Jewish knowledge or gnosis concerning the nature of the world and its creation and Israel's place within that world.

After this point, however, the subthemes of chapter 1 are not ordered according to theme, but according to form-exegesis. Therefore, the chapter begins with six proems, and is followed by a word by word exegesis of Genesis 1:1, as discussed above. It is this form-exegetical criterion which accounts for the fact that the subthemes of chapter 1 are not ordered intelligently. Nevertheless, the chapter as a whole seems to be unified thematically in terms of its refutation of Gnostic concerns. The fact that the chapter as a whole is unified, but is organized according to form exegesis illustrates that Genesis Rabbah is a watershed midrash. From the tannaitic midrashim it borrows an exegetic, word by word, approach. From the homiletic midrashim, it borrows the proemial form and the overall unity of theme. However, unlike the concerns of

a literary homily, the subthemes of Genesis Rabbah chapter 1 are not well ordered.

Chapter 1 of Genesis Rabbah borrows heavily from PT Hagigah II:1 77. Parallels exist in Genesis Rabbah 1:5, 1:6, 1:10 and 1:13. Approximately 30% of chapter 1 is dependent upon PT Hagigah II:1 77c. 9% of chapter 1 is dependent upon parallel traditions found elsewhere in the Palestinian Talmud.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, 39% of the traditions in chapter 1 are to be found in the Palestinian Talmud.

Zechariah Frankel felt that it was clear that the Palestinian Talmud was a source of Midrash Rabbah. Frankel states:

The editors of the Rabbot took from the Palestinian Talmud, but they did not copy the traditions of the Palestinian Talmud strictly according to their form and content, but rather changed corrected and added explanation.<sup>10</sup>

We should notice that Frankel mistakenly treated the "Rabbot" as a unit, when in reality the individual midrashic collections in Midrash Rabbah were compiled at different times by different schools, and show marked differences in form, content, and style. Therefore, it is impossible to say that Frankel was speaking strictly in terms of the relationship of the Palestinian Talmud to Genesis Rabbah.

Albeck felt that Genesis Rabbah draws upon a different version of the Palestinian Talmud than our present version. He postulated the existence of a "Talmud Eretz Yisrael," a sort of "proto-Palestinian Talmud" from which both Genesis Rabbah and the final Palestinian Talmud took.

Regardless of whether or not we accept Albeck's postulation of a proto-Palestinian Talmud, "it is clear that some sort of Palestinian Talmud" was known to the redactor of the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah. Certain changes may be ascribed to this redactor who either summarized and abridged or expanded and commented upon the content of a particular tradition.<sup>13</sup> The process of transference of material was a creative process, and the redactor of chapter

1 should be viewed as a creative literary figure. Often as we have seen, his style was more polished than that of the Palestinian Talmud. Finally, within the form and framework of chapter 1, we have found larger themes. These themes seem to be unified in that each theme is related to a Gnostic concern. With this in mind, let us now proceed to examine chapter 2 of Genesis Rabbah.

Chapter 2 is not as complex a chapter as chapter 1. Perhaps as a result of this fact, one finds a greater unity of theme in this chapter. The proem serves as an introduction to the chapter in three ways. First, the proem ends with a reference to "Tohu" and "Bohu" in Jeremiah 4:23. The citation of "Tohu" and "Bohu" at the end of the proem in 2:1 introduces the topic of discussion in the remainder of the chapter. Second, the proem introduces the idea that man (who is equivalent to the earth) and not God is the source of "Tohu" and "Bohu." This idea is also dealt with in this chapter. Third, by citing Proverbs 20:11 "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure and whether it be right" the proem intimates that through righteous living, man will cause God to redeem the world from "Tohu" and "Bohu." Once again, this idea is dealt with in chapter 2.

The remainder of chapter 2 is also organized according to theme. 2:2 and 2:3 stress that man is the source of "Tohu" and "Bohu" or corruption and evil in the world, while 2:3 and 2:4 emphasize God's plan of redemption from "Tohu" and "Bohu." This plan, according to 2:4, is dependent upon the actions of man. 2:5 includes both of the above themes and ends the chapter with the association of "Light" with the messianic future.<sup>15</sup>

The themes in chapter 2 also have their Gnostic counterparts. The Gnostics maintained that evil, corruption, and suffering were the result of demiurgical creation. The Rabbis felt that man was the source of evil. The Gnostics maintained that redemption comes about only through gnosis.

For the Rabbis, redemption results from man's actions and God's mercy.

Chapter 3 discusses Genesis 1:3-5, the creation of light. Genesis Rabbah 3:1 - 3:3 serve as introductory proems that introduce the verse to be interpreted, Genesis 1:3. They also introduce the discussion of light by dealing with its creation. According to these proems God created light by His speech. 3:4 continues the discussion of the creation of light, but does so in much greater detail than the three proems. 3:4 seems to be a highly mystical speculation on the nature of and manner in which light was created. After dealing explicitly with the creation of light, the chapter equates light with the Torah (3:5), and discusses the primeval or preexistent light which is stored for the righteous in the world to come (3:6). At this point, the chapter discusses Genesis 1:4-5 which describes the end of the first day of creation. The creation of this world is said to please God (3:7). "Evening" and "morning" are interpreted as acts of the wicked and acts of the righteous respectively (3:8). The chapter concludes in a moral tone by stressing that God views man as a partner in creation (3:9). In conclusion, it is clear that chapter 3 possesses a thematic flow and the ordering of the traditions is not at all haphazard.

Once again, each of the major themes of this chapter seems to have a Gnostic counterpart. The discourse on light as Jewish gnosis in 3:1-6 is paralleled by similar discourses on light in Gnostic myth. In Gnostic myth, light is most often an attribute of the Supreme God, and a symbol of gnosis itself. The idea that the creation of the world pleases God is countered by the Supreme God's anticosmicism in Gnostic myth. Furthermore, Gnostics believed that there was no justice in the world of the demiurge. This stands in contrast to the rabbinic claims that the righteous will be rewarded (3:8). Finally God's

partnership with man, according to the Rabbis, stands in contradistinction to the Gnostic idea that man is totally alien to the Supreme God. It is clear that the refutation of Gnostic claims was the major concern of the redactor of chapter 3.

Chapter 4 discusses Genesis 1:6-8, the events of the second day of creation. 4:1 seems to serve as an introductory proem in that it introduces Genesis 1:6, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters." This chapter discusses the nature and creation of the firmament. It may be seen as an attempt to provide Jewish gnosis on the creation of the world. The significance of these traditions is rather obscure. Given this fact and the fact that all sections in this chapter deal with the creation of the firmament, it is impossible to list any specific sub-themes. The chapter seems to lack a sense of flow from one tradition to another. Sections 1-5 discuss Genesis 1:6, section 6 discusses Genesis 1:7; and section 7 discusses Genesis 1:9. Therefore, exegetic considerations effected the ordering of the traditions in this chapter.

Chapter 4 does discuss the upper and lower waters which the firmament is said to have divided. It is possible that these firmament speculations were rooted in a type of mysticism in which the upper waters became symbolic of redemption.

For the same reasons that it was impossible to identify clear sub-themes in chapter 4, it is impossible to identify sub-themes in chapter 5. Chapter 5 discusses the gathering of the waters which took place on the third day of creation. (Genesis 1:9-13). This chapter seems to lack flow from one tradition to another. Sections 1-7 discuss Genesis 1:9, section 8 discusses Genesis 1:10; and section 9 discusses Genesis 1:11-13. Again, it is clear that exegetic considerations seem to have played the most important part in the organization of the traditions of chapter 5.

Yet, the chapter does seem to display an overall thematic concern. This concern was to provide the Jewish community with an alternative Jewish gnosis concerning the creation of the world. In the context of this gnosis, the gathering of the waters is said to have been done out of God's benevolent attitude towards the created world. This idea is to be found in sections 1-7 in the exegesis of Genesis 1:9, and in section 8 in the interpretation of Genesis 1:10. This idea may be contrasted to the Gnostic claim that the demiurge is non-benevolent.

The only other thematic concern of chapter 5 is to be found in section 9. The tradition in 5:9 presents us with an allegory on man's disobedience to God. The earth is said to have disobeyed God's command by having created trees which could not be eaten. In such a way, the origin of imperfection in the world is described. While it is not stated within the tradition, it seems to this writer that the thrust of this tradition was that man, through his disobedience to God's commandments, was the source of imperfection in the world. This idea stands in contrast to the Gnostic myth which sees imperfection as having been originated by the demiurge.

Chapter 5 begins with an extremely short introductory proem which constitutes the first few lines of section 1. This proem introduces Genesis 1:9, the focus of interpretation of the chapter. The chapter ends with a moralistic plea for communal unity in the face of a stronger force. It is possible that this short conclusion, whose thematic concern does not seem to be shared by the earlier traditions in the chapter, was added by the later redactor of the entire work.

Chapter 6 discusses Genesis 1:14-18, the events of the fourth day of creation. Sections 1 and 2 serve as introductory proems only in so far as they introduce the exegesis of Genesis 1:14. They do not introduce themes

which are discussed in the later sections. This provides us with an important observation concerning chapter 6. This chapter does not possess thematic flow or unity. By contrast, the previous chapters, while some did not possess thematic flow, all possessed thematic unity. This lack of thematic unity is seen by the fact that some of the themes may be related to Gnosticism and Jewish gnosis, while others clearly are not related to these concerns. The themes which are related to Gnosticism and their gnostic counterparts are as follows:

<u>Genesis Rabbah Thematic Concern</u>	<u>Gnostic Myths Assertions and Concerns</u>
a. The mistaken belief that the sun and the moon are divinities (6:1).	Pleroma speculations
b. God controls both the day and night. Nighttime is not necessarily evil. Miracles occur in both day and night. (6:2).	Evil exists in the world due to the existence of the demiurge. Night is symbolic of evil.
c. God's gifts to the world indicate His benevolence (6:5).	The non-benevolence of the demiurge
d. Seven heavens speculations (6:6)	Pleroma speculations and ascent traditions
e. Gnosis on the setting of the sun and the moon (6:8)	Pleroma speculations
f. Rabbinic authority in speculation. The Rabbis possess gnosis. They light the world and control that which lights the world. (6:9).	Gnostic claims that they, not the Rabbis, possess gnosis.

There are four themes in this chapter which are not related to Gnosticism. The first is a moralistic exhortation that one should not trespass on the territory of another without advance permission (6:3). The second is an anti-Roman polemic which states that Rome's glory will fade as the setting of the sun, and that she will have no share in

the world to come (6:3). The third is another moralistic exhortation, which urges humility among those who possess authority (6:4). The final tradition of these four discusses the nature of the soul.

It is impossible to ascribe the ordering of the traditions in chapter 6 to thematic concerns. The redactor organized chapter six on the basis of traditions which discussed the fourth day of creation. The individual traditions in this chapter were then organized according to the order of the biblical verses being discussed. Section 1 discusses Genesis 1:14-15; sections 2, 3, and 4 discuss Genesis 1:16. Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8 discuss Genesis 1:17; and section 9 discusses Genesis 1:18. Therefore, chapter 6 which lacks thematic unity seems to be a collection of traditions concerning the fourth day of creation which are organized solely according to the order of the biblical verses which describe that day.

Chapter 7, like chapter 6, also displays a lack of thematic unity. It discusses Genesis 1:20-25, the events of creation on the fifth day and sixth day until the creation of man. The chapter begins with a short proem which introduces Genesis 1:20 (Genesis Rabbah 7:1). In 7:1 God's power is stressed. In sections 2 and 4 legal questions concerning fish are discussed. Birds are said to have been created in order to fill the void between heaven and earth (7:3). The nature of the soul is also discussed (7:5). The chapter ends with an exhortation to Sabbath observance (7:5). These varied and unconnected themes do not seem to relate to Gnosticism. The chapter lacks both flow and thematic unity. The traditions are organized solely according to the order of the biblical verses being interpreted. Sections 1 and 2 discuss Genesis 1:20a; section 3 discusses Genesis 1:20b; section 4 discusses Genesis 1:21-22; and section 5 discusses Genesis 1:24-25.

In contrast to chapters 6 and 7, chapter 8 is unified thematically and exhibits a good sense of flow from one tradition to the next. The chapter discusses Genesis 1: 26-31, the events concerning the creation of man.

Chapter 8 contains 2 proems. The first proem introduces Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man" etc. The second proem is defective in that it does not return to the pericope verse. Each of the two proems introduce themes which are discussed in later traditions within the chapter. The proem in 8:1 was most probably a composite tradition, since the proem verse Psalm 139:5 is repeated in the middle of the section. For this reason, the proem does not coincide with the usual proemial form. The themes in the first proem are:

1. Gnosis concerning the creation of man and Adam speculation and;
2. Man, according to his actions, may be the agent of his own redemption.

The first of these themes is also found in sections 10, 11, and 12. The second proem discusses the limitation of **esoteric** speculation. Speculation is limited to the things based upon verses from the Hebrew Bible, which knows the events which preceeded and were part of the creation process. This introduces the method which is used in the rest of the chapter.

Once this method has been established, the proem proceeds to use it to discuss the role of angels and other powers in the creation of man (sections 8:3-8:9). Included in this discussion are anti-Gnostic polemical statements which stress that man's creation was deliberate and good, and that man and the world were created by one diety. The chapter ends with speculations describing the physical and spiritual condition of man when he was created (8:12 and 8:13). Included in this section are statements dealing with the goodness of marriage and procreation.

The traditions in this chapter also follow the verse order of the biblical narrative. However, the thematic unity is illustrated by the fact that all the traditions deal with the creation of man. In terms of the **eight chapters** studied in this thesis, chapter 8 shows the greatest degree of thoughtful editing and redaction.

In addition, each of the traditions in this chapter have a Gnostic counterpart. This is illustrated by the following chart:

<u>Genesis Rabbah</u> <u>Thematic Concern</u>	<u>Gnostic Myth</u> <u>Thematic Concern</u>
a. Gnosis concerning the creation of man and Adam speculations (8:1,8:10,8:11,8:12)	Adam speculations
b. Man, according to his actions, may be the agent of his own redemption (8:1)	Gnosis, which brings redemption, is related to knowledge not to action
c. Limitation of esoteric speculation (8:2)	anti-Jewish polemics
d. Jewish gnosis in the Hebrew Bible. Creation is well planned (8:2)	The Torah and the rest of the Bible are tools of the demiurge.
e. Discussion of angels and other powers in creation (8:3,8:4,8:5, 8:7,8:8)	Pleroma speculations which assert that the demiurge is the creator
f. Polemics against the many powers heretics (8:8,8:9)	The demiurge and his archons are the creators
g. Man's creation is deliberate and good (8:4, 8:5, 8:6)	Man as an inferior imitation of the divine
h. The goodness of marriage and procreation (8:12, 8:13)	Certain Gnostic sects viewed marriage and procreation as tools of the demiurge and, as a result, practiced asceticism

It is clear from the evidence presented above, that the main concern of the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 8 was to

refute the Gnostics claims by polemics and alternative speculations.

We should also note briefly the appearance of common issues and themes in chapter 1 and 8. For example, both Genesis Rabbah 1:1 and 8:2 interpret Proverbs 8:30. In each tradition, we find the idea that the architect or blueprint of the world is the Torah. There are three major areas of shared concerns in these two chapters. These concerns and the places wherein they appear are:

- a. Limitation of esoteric speculation (1:5, 1:10, 1:11, and 8:2).
- b. Jewish gnosis exists in the Torah. This proves that creation was well planned ordered (1:1, 1:4, 1:8, 1:9, 1:13, and 8:2).
- c. Discussion of angels and other powers (1:3, 1:7, 1:14, 8:3, 8:4, 8:5, 8:7, 8:8 and 8:9).

It is not surprising that chapters 1 and 8 show similar concerns. This is because of the fact that, as we have seen, the Gnostics seemed to have made heretical interpretations of Genesis 1:1 and 1:26. Genesis 1:1 is discussed in chapter 8. The Gnostic interpretations of these verses attempted to demonstrate a plurality of creators in the creation of the world and man.

At this point, we may draw several conclusions concerning the redaction of chapters 1-8 in Genesis Rabbah. These chapters exhibit varying degrees of thematic unity and ordered flow of the individual traditions. Chapters 2, 3 and 8 seem to be both unified thematically and well ordered. As a result, these chapters seem to be the most highly edited chapters. Chapters 1, 4, and 5 lack a sense of ordered flow, but do exhibit thematic unity. Chapters 6 and 7 lack both thematic unity and ordered flow, and as a result, seem to be the least edited of all the chapters.

We have proved that the traditions which constitute these chapters were divided according to thematic considerations, and according to the day of creation as des-

cribed in the biblical narrative. Chapters 1,2,3 and 8 represent chapters divided according to thematic considerations. Therefore, it is no accident that these chapters seem to be the most highly edited chapters. Chapters 4,5, 6 and 7 were divided according to day considerations, and seem to be the least ordered and unified chapters. The following chart illustrates this correspondence:

Chapter	Thematic Division	Day Division	Thematic Unity	Ordered Flow	Degree of internal editing (high medium or low)
1	x		x		medium
2	x		x	x	high
3	x		x	x	high
4		x	x		medium
5		x	x		medium
6		x			low
7		x			low
8	x		x	x	high

In conclusion, the most highly edited chapters are those which are divided according to theme, and which possess thematic unity and ordered flow.

All of the chapters seem to have been divided according to the order of the biblical narrative. In terms of editing this seems to be the lowest common denominator. The higher the degree of editing in a chapter, the less important is the biblical order in terms of holding the chapter together. In other words, a chapter which shows a low degree of editing, will be organized only according to the order of the biblical narrative.

Finally, the majority of overall themes of these chapters seem to involve concerns about Gnosticism. As we have seen numerous times in this thesis, this concern expressed itself in two ways; negative polemics and alternative gnosis. With this in mind let us now proceed to state our final conclusions concerning the relationship of Genesis Rabbah and Gnosticism.

CONCLUSION :

In this thesis, we have examined the creation traditions of chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah. These chapters have been shown to contain both anti-gnostic polemics and a sort of esoteric speculation concerning creation. We have labeled this type of speculation as "Jewish gnosis," but not Jewish Gnosticism. It consists of the secrets of creation which are derived from biblical texts. Genesis 1 was shown to be the general outline of creation, and the remainder of the Hebrew Bible provided the specifics to this general outline. The Rabbis felt that they were the sole authorities for this method of speculation. This type of Jewish gnosis retains the honor of God. No evidence of dualism on the part of the Rabbis within Genesis Rabbah has been found. In addition, the Rabbis in Genesis Rabbah 1-8 maintain that the world was created out of divine blessing, rather than a divine tragedy. Dualism and a divine tragedy which lead to the creation of the world as we have seen, are the chief characteristics of Gnosticism. Because Genesis Rabbah lacks these elements, it is improper to label the knowledge of the creation of the world or gnosis which exists within this midrashic text as "Jewish Gnosticism."

The method used in this study of Genesis Rabbah has been a combination of source, form, and redaction criticism. We attempted to understand the origin, meaning, and form of the individual traditions. With such an understanding, we have learned that certain traditions in Genesis Rabbah represent a response to the presence of Gnostics in Palestine in the second, third, and fourth centuries. In addition, it has been shown that other traditions may be labeled as "Jewish gnosis." In these latter traditions, the Rabbis attempted to provide their followers with an understanding of the nature and creation of the world.

Having reached this level of understanding of the traditions as individual units, we then proceeded to apply

a redaction critique to these traditions. This critique involved a careful analysis of the placement, arrangement, and relationship of the traditions within Genesis Rabbah. This critique has shown that the redactor of these chapters of Genesis Rabbah was deeply engaged in speculation on the account of creation and used his speculations to counter the threat of heretical Gnostic speculations on the same subject.

Within this thesis, it has been hypothesized that chapters 1-8 originally constituted a separate and earlier literary unit than the rest of the corpus of Genesis Rabbah. The redactor of these chapters was not the same as the redactor of the final work. In chapter 3, we listed several reasons for this hypothesis. As we have examined in depth only Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8, a source for further study would have to be chapters 9-18 of this midrashic text. It is my contention that by using the method employed within this thesis, similar conclusions will be reached regarding chapters 9-18.

This theory of two levels of redaction of Genesis Rabbah may be historically significant. The traditions in these chapters express a concern over the threat of Gnosticism. If these chapters were redacted only in the fifth and sixth centuries, then it is probably that the issues discussed were no longer live issues. Furthermore, if these chapters were redacted only at this late date, then we would expect to find more of a concern for the threat of Christianity, rather than Gnosticism. Seeing an earlier time period of redaction for these chapters enables us to say that the threat of Gnosticism was a live issue for the redactor of these chapters. Based upon the evidence, it is this writer's contention that the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah were redacted somewhere around the mid-fourth century or slightly earlier.

We have also noticed how many of the traditions in chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah are to be found in Hagigah II:1 a-d of the Palæstinian Talmud. The redactor of Hagigah II:1 a-d asserted that only the most knowledgeable Rabbis were qualified to enter the field of speculation concerning the account of creation. He stresses that the dangers of unbridled speculation are both spiritual and physical. His attitude and tone towards speculation is harshly negative.

In contrast, the redactor of Genesis Rabbah had a more positive attitude towards the benefits of speculation on the account of creation. Although he attempted to stress the potential heretical danger of unbridled speculation, he also attempted to provide an alternative understanding or gnosis concerning the creation of the world. This type of gnosis included speculations and discussion of the role of angels in creation, the first man, the nature of the cosmos, the primordial light of creation, the creation of the firmament, the gathering of the waters, and the nature and role of God in creation. For the redactor of Genesis Rabbah 1-8, it is not speculation itself which is undesirable and heretical, but speculation which leads to dualism and to other heretical beliefs. Therefore, he uses speculation to provide his followers with a "proper" understanding of the account of creation. This "proper" understanding stresses the unity of God as creator and man's responsibility for chaos and evil within the cosmos. Inherent in these speculations is the notion that man's performance of the commandments and his study of Torah may lead to the eradication of evil from the world. Therefore, it is Jewish gnosis on the account of creation which constitutes the basis of chapters 1-8 of Genesis Rabbah.

The purpose of this gnosis was to insulate the Jew against Gnostic claims. The Gnostics used myth to describe the creation of the world in terms of a divine tragedy.

Creation was a sinister act by an evil creator. They used the first chapters of the book of Genesis to support their assertions. They especially used Genesis 1:1 and 1:26 to prove that more than one diety created that more than one diety created the cosmos. The redactor of Genesis Rabbah not only sought to disprove these assertions, but to provide, as we have stated, a rabbinic understanding of these verses and of their meaning in terms of the creation of the world. Thus, the rabbinic relationship to Gnosticism as found in Genesis Rabbah 1-8 may be described as a combination of negative polemics and alternative gnosis.

Judaism and Gnosticism were fairly ubiquitous phenomena in the second, third, and early fourth centuries in the Hellenistic world. We have seen evidence of contact between Jews and Gnostics in Egypt, Caesarea, Tiberias and Antioch. The rabbinic assertions of the unity of God and the goodness of the created world led Judaism into direct conflict with Gnostic sects. It is highly likely that the appeal of Gnostic myth extended even into the Jewish community itself. For example, Aher and Shimon b. Zoma could have been influenced by Gnosticism. Therefore, the conflict between Judaism and Gnosticism was not only a conflict between a Jewish and non-Jewish community, but also a conflict which existed within the Jewish community itself. The chief contribution of Gnosticism to the Rabbinic Judaism of Genesis Rabbah was that of a thought provoker and catalyst. On several occasions, the Rabbis seem to have adopted Gnostic motifs to fit their own theology. More often, however, the Gnostic assertions caused the Rabbis to develop and to clarify their own views concerning the creation of the world.

Finally, let us stress that this study is only a partial study. The traditions in Genesis Rabbah 9-18 which discuss chapter 2 of the biblical book of Genesis await examination, and may be seen as a field for further study.

When this study has been undertaken, it is this writer's contention that the relationship between the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah and Gnosticism will be fully appreciated. In conclusion, it should be stressed that the Jewish gnosis on the account of creation in the first chapters of Genesis Rabbah tells us how Rabbinic Judaism developed its view of the creation of the world, and man's task and destiny within that world.

APPENDIX # 1

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS RABBAH

CHAPTERS 1-8

Chap- ter & Gen. verse	All Lists	Some Lists	No Sedar	Petu- chot or Setumot	Natu- ral Break	# of Proems Acc. to Heinemann	Quality Def- Genu- ec- ine tive	Size of Chap- ters	Proem lines
1 (1:1)	x			NA	WA	3 & (6)	6	140 lines	57 lines
2 (1:2)			x		No	0(1)	1	43	3
3 1:3			x		No	3 & (3)	1 2	68	11
4 1:6			x	Pet	Yes	1	1	67	3
5 1:9			x	Pet	Yes	0(1)	1	70	2
6 1:14			x	Pet	Yes	1(2)	2	96	20
7 1:20			x	Pet	Yes	1	1	31	3
8 1:26			x		No	1(2)	1 1	107	32
9 1:31			x		No	2	2	71	9

Chapter & Verse	All Lists	Some Lists	No Sedar	Pet-uchot or Setumot	Natural Break	# of Proems Acc. to Heinemann	Quality Def-ec-tive	Genuine	Size of Chapters	Proem Lines
10 2:1			X	Pet.	Yes	2		2	77	8
11 2:3			x		No	0(1)	1		77	
12 2:4	x			Pet.	Yes	2		2	139	26
13 2:5			x		No	0			99	
14 2:7			x		No	1		1	72	6
15 2:8			x		Yes	0			59	
16 2:10			x		Yes	1		1	71	5
17 2:18			x		Yes	0			94	0
18 2:22			x		No				71	



Yerushalmi: Hagiqah II:1

Mishnah - The forbidden decrees of marriage may not be expounded before three persons, nor the account of creation before two, nor the account of the chariot before one alone, unless he is a sage who understands of his own knowledge. Whoever thinks about four things, it were better for him if he had not been born: What is above? What is below? What is before? And what is after? And whoever is not sensitive to the glory of his Creator it were better for him if he had not been born.

Halacha - A. p. 77a

THE FORBIDDEN DECREES OF MARRIAGE MAY NOT BE EXPOUNDED BEFORE THREE. (1) R. Ba in the name of R. Judan. (2) It (the halacha of the Mishnah) is according to R. Akiba. Perhaps it is according to R. Ishmael who taught prohibitions (3) against an illicit sexual act. From this injunction, R. Ami sat teaching that a prohibition not to have an illicit sexual act (with another, active) is also a prohibition to be the subject of such an act (by another, passive). (4) Thus the halacha is according to R. Ishmael.

NOR THE STORY OF CREATION BEFORE TWO. (5) R. Ba in the name of R. Judah. It (the halacha of the Mishnah) is according to R. Akiba. Perhaps it is as R. Ishmael (6) interprets the prohibition (or deed). From this, R. Judah b. Pazi sat and explained that in the beginning (7) the world was water in water. This shows the halacha is according to R. Ishmael. (8) R. Judah b. Pazi interpreted, "In the beginning the world was water in water? What is the support for this? (9) "And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters " (Gen. 1:2). After which he made the snow from it. (10) "He casts forth His ice like crumbs " (Ps 147:17). After which He made the earth, "For He says to the snow, Become earth. (Job 37:6). (11) And the earth stands on the water, "To Him that spread forth the earth above the waters" (Ps 136:6).

And the water stands (12) on the mountains, "The water stood above the mountains " (Ps.104:6). And the mountains stand on the wind (ruah). (13) "For lo, He that forms the mountains and creates the wind " (Amos 4:13). The spirit hangs in the winds. "Stormy (14) fulfilling (carrying) his word " (Ps. 148:8). God made the storm as an amulet and hung it (15) on his arm as it is said, ("The eternal God is a dwelling place and ) underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut. 33:27).

"For lo, He that forms the mountains etc. " (Amos 4:13). This is one (16) of six verses that Rabbi used to read and weep. "Seek the Lord all (17) you humble of the earth " (Zeph. 2:3). "Hate evil and love the good " (Amos 5:15). "Let him put his mouth in the dust etc." (Lam 3:29). (18) "For God shall bring every work into the judgment concerning every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil " (Ecc. 12:14). "And Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disquieted me to bring me up?' (I Sam 28:15). (19) He said to him, 'Had you no other means of enraging your Creator except through me, that you have made (20) your idol? Do you not know that just as punishment is inflicted upon the worshipper (of idols), so it is inflicted (21) upon the worshipped (The idols themselves ). And not only this, for I thought that it was the judgment day and I was afraid. (22) Behold these things are 'kal-v'homer, for if Samuel, the greatest of the prophets, of whom it is written "And all Israel from Dan even to BeerSheba knew (23) that Samuel was trustworthy as a prophet of the Lord " (I Sam. 3:20), was afraid of the day of judgment, how (24) much the more so should we be. Because, "For lo, He that forms the mountains and creates the wind. " (Amos 4:13). (25) Even deeds which are not sinful are written about man in My (God's) ledger. And who tells (26) to man the vanity which comes from his mouth? R. Haqqai in the name of R. Yaabetz; "He who forms the mountains and creates (27) the wind " (Amos 4:13). R. Haqqai in the name of R. Yaabetz, 'The people of

Sepphoris are void and darkness. (28)

R. Judah b. Pazi in the name of R. Josi, the son of R. Judah. Hadrian asked Aquilas the proselyte (29) whether those who say that the world stands upon the wind speak the truth. He (Aquilas) said to him, 'Yes.' He (Hadrian) said to him, 'From what do (30) you teach me?' He said to him, 'Bring me small camels.' He (Hadrian) brought him the camels. He placed (31) heavy burdens upon them. He raised them and watered them (until) they lost their wind and strangled. He (Aquilas) said to him, 'Here they are, raise them!' (32) He (Hadrian) said to him, 'How can I?' He (Aquilas) said, 'I took only their wind from them.'

(33) NOR THE ACCOUNT OF THE CHARIOT BEFORE ONE. This also represents the position of R. Akiba. The purpose of this being that (34) man should know that he should be sensitive to the glory of his maker. Is it not as Rav said, (35) 'A man is only permitted to utter an interpretation before his teacher only if he sees or serves.' (36) How would he do this? His teacher would at first present the chapter headings to him, and (if) he agrees (with the students participation the student may continue), R. Hiyyah (37) in the name of R. Yochanan: Rabbi had a distinguished student who interpreted one chapter in the account (38) of the chariot when Rabbi did not agree with his involvement. As a result, he (the student) was smitten by boils. This teaching (39) resembles two paths, one of fire and one of snow. The traveler in one (40) dies of fire. The traveler in the other dies of snow. What should be done? Walk between the two (Take the middle way).

It once happened (41) that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was traveling on a road riding a donkey. (42) R. Eliezer ben Arak was traveling behind him. He (Eliezer) said to him, 'Teach me a chapter (43) about the account of the chariot.' He (Yohanan) said to him 'Did our sages not teach,

"nor about the account of the chariot (before one) (44) unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge." He (Eliezer) said to him, 'Rabbi grant me permission to say a word (45) you.' He said to him, 'Speak!' When R. Eliezer ben Arak began to expound the account (46) of the chariot, R. Yohanan ben Zakkai dismounted the donkey saying 'It is not proper that I should hear the glory of my master while riding on a donkey.' They went and sat (48) under one tree. Fire descended from heaven, encompassed them, (49) and the ministering angels began to leap before them as joyous groomsmen before a groom. (50) One angel answered from the midst of the fire saying, (51) 'This is the very account of the chariot. It is according to your words, Eliezer ben Arak.' Immediately all the trees opened their mouths and sang (52) "Then shall all of the trees of the wood sing for joy." (Ps 96:12) When R. Eliezer ben Arak finished (his exposition) of the account of the (53) chariot, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai rose and kissed him on his head and said, 'Blessed is the Lord, (54) God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who gave to Abraham, our father, a wise son who knows how (55) to speculate on the glory of God in heaven. There are those who know how to speculate, yet whose actions are not in accordance with their words. There are those whose (56) actions are good, but who do not know how to speculate. Eliezer ben Arak knows how to speculate (57) and his actions are in accordance with his words. Happy are you, Abraham our father, from whose loins came Eliezer ben (58) Arak.'

When R. Joseph the priest and R. Simeon ben Nathaniel heard (this), they also began to speculate on the (59) account of the chariot. They said, 'One day during the solstice of Tamuz, there was (60) an earthquake and a rainbow appeared in a cloud. A Bat Kol came out and announced to them, "Behold (61) God has turned to you (or, the place is open for you) and the dining chamber is spread for you. You and your students are invited to be part of the (62)

third group. Therefore it is written, "In your presence is the fullness of joy " (Ps 16:11). The Seven classes of the (63) righteous in the time to come.'

Further, it happened with R. Joshua that he was walking (64) on the road and Ben Zoma was coming towards him. He (R. Joshua) greeted him, but he (Ben Zoma) did not respond. Said (R. Joshua) to him, (65) "From whence and where to, Ben Zoma?" He (Ben Zoma) said to him, "I have been looking into the account of creation (End of 77a, beginning of 77b) (1) and there is nought between the upper waters and the lower waters except about the extent of a handbreadth. (2) It is said here "hovering over its young " (Deut 32:11). Just as "hovering" in the latter case means "touching" yet not touching, so "hovering" in this case means touching, (4) yet not touching. R. Joshua said to his disciples, 'Behold, Ben Zoma is on the outside.' And it was not but a (5) few days until Ben Zoma died.

R. Judah ben Pazi in the name of R. Josi, the son of R. Judah. Three (6) presented their teachings before their rabbis. R. Joshua before R. Yohanan ben Zakkai. R. Akiba before (7) R. Joshua. (and) R. Hanania ben Hanina before R. Akiba. From this time on their attitudes were tinged.

(8) Four entered pardes. One looked and died. Another looked and was smitten. Another (9) looked and mutilated the shoots. Another entered in peace and came out in peace. Ben Azzai looked (10) and was smitten. Concerning him it is written, "Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you " (Prov. 25:16). Ben Zoma looked and died. (11) Of him it is written, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints " (Psalm 116:15). Aher looked and (12) mutilated the shoots.

Who is Aher? Elisha ben Abuyah, who destroyed the rabbis' Torah. They say (13) that each student that saw him (and thought he had) found Torah was killed. Not only this

(14) but also, he would enter the house of assembly and would see the youths before the teacher and would say (15), 'Who are these who sit here? His trade will be that of a builder. His trade will be that of a carpenter. (16) His trade will be that of a hunter. His trade will be that of a tailor.' When the students heard this, they would (17) forsake and leave him. Concerning him, scripture states "Suffer not your mouth to bring (18) your flesh into guilt etc." (Ecc. 5:5), for God confounded the plan of this man.

Also at the time of persecution, (19) they would place burdens on themselves (on the Sabbath), and they intended that there should be two carrying one burden because (20) 'two that do the work of one (do not transgress).' He (Elisha ben Abuyah) said, 'Carry them one by one.' He went to them and told them to carry (21) (the burdens) one by one. They (however) intended to unload (the burdens) in the vineyard in order not to carry from the private domain to (22) the public domain. He said, Carry the vials. (burdens) They went and they carried the vials. (burdens)

R. Akiba (23) entered in peace and went out in peace. Of him it is written, "Draw me, we will run after thee. The king has brought me into his chambers " (Song of Songs 1:4).

(24) R. Meir was sitting and preaching in the house of study in Tiberias when Elisha his teacher passed (25) riding on a horse on the Sabbath. They (the students) came to him and said, 'Behold, your teacher is outside.' (26) He ended the sermon and went out to him. He (Elisha) said to him, 'What was your sermon on this day?' (27) He answered, "The Lord blessed the latter end " (Job 42:12). He said to him, "How did you begin?" (with what proem?) He answered (28) "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had had before " (Job 42:10). He doubled his wealth. He said, (29) 'Woe to those who lose and do not find (who suffer an irretrievable loss). Akiba, your teacher, did not explain thus, but

(he explained) "And the Lord (30) blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning " (Job 32:12); (meaning) By the merit of the commandments and the good deeds that (31) were to his credit at the beginning. He said to him, "What else did you expound?" He answered, "The end of a thing is better(32) than its beginning " (Ecc. 7:8). He said How did you begin? (with which proem verse?) He answered, It is like a man who sires sons in his youth and they died. (33) In his old age, we say about him, "The end of a thing is better than its beginning " (Ecc. 7:8). It is like a man who does (34) business in his youth, and loses, and in his old age he makes a profit. Thus "The end of a thing is better than its (35) beginning " (Ecc. 7:8). It is like a man who learns Torah in his youth and forgets it, but in his old age it returns to him. (36) Thus, "The end of a thing is better than its beginning " (Ecc. 7:8). He said, "Woe to those who lose and do not find. (37) Akiba your teacher did not teach this, rather "The end of a thing is better than its beginning" (Ecc. 7:8), when (38) it is good from the beginning.

I will give you an example of such an incident.

Abuyah my father was one of the notable men of Jerusalem. (39) On the day of my (Elisha's) circumcision, he invited all the notables of Jerusalem and assembled them in one room. (40) R. Eliezer and R Joshua were in another room. When they had eaten and drank, they began to make noise (41) and dance. R. Eliezer said to R. Joshua, Because they are busy with theirs, let us be busy (42) with ours. Thus they sat and busied themselves with Torah, and from the Torah, (they went on) to the prophets and (43) from the prophets, (they went on) to the writings. A fire from heaven came down and encircled them. (44) Abuyah said to them, 'Friends, why did you come? To burn down my house on me?' They said to him (45), 'Far be it! Rather we are sitting and learning Torah, (going on) from Torah to the prophets and from the prophets to the writings! The words (of Torah) were as joyful as if

they had been given from Sinai and the fire (47) played about them, for they (the words) were not originally given on Sinai. Further, was not the essence of their being imparted from Sinai that they were imparted (48) in fire? (as it is written) "And the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven " (Deut 4:11). Abuyah my father said to them, (49) "My friends, if such is the power of Torah, if my son is granted life, (50) I will dedicate him to the Torah." And because his (my father's) intention was not for the glory of God, my Torah did not remain with me.

He said to him, 'What else did you preach?' He answered, (52) "Gold and glass cannot equal it (Job 28:17). He said to him, "And what did you say concerning it?" He answered him, 'The words of Torah (53) are as difficult to obtain as gold vessels, yet are as easily broken as vessels of glass. Just as vessels of gold (54) and vessels of glass may be repaired if they are broken, and made into tools as they were previously, (55) so too a wise student who loses his learning is able to return and learn it anew.'

He said to him (56), 'It is enough for you Meir. (Turn back!) Up to this point is the Sabbath boundary!' He asked, "How do you know?" He answered, (57) 'From the hoofs of my horse which I used to measure two thousand cubits.' He (Meir) said to him, 'You (58) possess all this wisdom and you will not repent?' He (Elisha) answered, 'It is not within my power.' He said to him (59) 'Why?' He answered, 'One time I was traveling before the Holy of Holies, (60) riding on my horse on a Yom Kippur which happened to fall on a Sabbath. I heard a Bat Kol (voice) come out (61) of the Holy of Holies and say, "Return O Children!" (paraphrase of Jer. 3:14), all except for Elisha ben Abuyah who knew of my power (62) and yet rebelled against me!'

And given all this, how did it happen to him? (that he became an apostate?) One time, he was sitting and studying (63) in the valley of Ginosar when he saw one man go up to

the top of a palm tree and take the female bird with the young and (64) descend safely. The next day he saw another man who ascended to the top of the palm tree and take (65) the young, but shied away the mother. When he descended from there, a snake bit him and he died. It is written (66), "You shall surely shoo away the mother, but the young you may take with you, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong (67) your days " (Deut 22:7). Where is the goodness of this? How does this lengthen one's days?(68) He was unaware that R. Jacob had interpreted it previously: "That it may be well with you"-in the world (69) to come where all is good. "That your days may be prolonged-in the future world where everything is prolonged.

Some say that it was (70) when he saw the tongue of R. Judah the baker which was bleeding in the mouth of a dog. He said, (71)'Is this Torah and is this its reward? This is the tongue that had brought forth words of Torah as they were meant to be. This (72) is the tongue which labored in Torah all of its life. It seems that (73) the giving of reward is nonexistent and there is no revival of the dead.'

There are those who say that when his mother was pregnant with him,(74) she passed a heathen temple and smelled the apostasy. (As a result), the smell of the sacrifice (75) spread though her body as the poison of a large snake.

After several days, Elisha fell sick and (76) they came and told R. Meir, 'Behold your master is ill.' He went to visit him and found him (End of 77b-beginning of 77c) (1) ill. He said to him, 'Won't you repent?' He answered, 'They will not accept the one who repents.' He said to him, 'Is it not written (2) "You turn man to contrition and say 'Return ye children to me'"(Ps. 90:3) until his life is crushed, they will accept (repentance).' At that (3) time, Elisha burst into tears and died. R. Meir rejoiced and said, 'It appears that my teacher died (4) in the midst of

repentance.' When they buried him, a fire from heaven came down and consumed (5) his grave. They came and told R. Meir, 'Behold, the grave of your teacher has been burned.' He went out, looked and found that it had been burned. What did he do? He took his cloak and spread it over it and said "Tarry this (7) night" (Ruth 3:13). Tarry in this world which resembles the night. "And it shall be morning," (Ibid) this is the world to come (8) which is all morning. "If the Good one will redeem you, he will redeem you." (Ibid) This is God who is good, as it is written, (9) "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps 145:9). But if he will not redeem you (10) then I will redeem you; "as the Lord lives" (Ibid). Then the flame was extinguished.

They said to R. Meir, 'If they say to in this world, to whom (11) do you prefer to visit, your father or your teacher?' (What would you answer?). He (Meir) answered, 'I would go first to my teacher (12) and then to my father.' They said to him, 'And will they honor your request?' (lit. will they hear you'). He answered, 'Have we not been taught that one saves (13) the case of the scroll with the scroll, the case of tefillin with the tefillin. Elisha Aher (14) will he be saved by the merits of his Torah.'

After some time, his daughters went to beg charity from Rabbi. (Judah Ha-nasi) Rabbi decreed, (15) "Let there be none to extend kindness to him, neither let there be mercy shown to his orphans" (Ps. 109:12). They said to him, 'Rabbi regard not (16) his deeds, regard his learning.' At this, Rabbi wept and declared that they should be supported. (17) He said, 'If he who labored in Torah but not for the sake of heaven was able to raise (daughters) such as these, then (18) how much the more so he who labors in Torah for its sake.'

R. Eliezer in the name of (19) Bar Sira, 'What should you know concerning that which is too wonderful for you?

What should you investigate concerning the depths of the netherworld? (20) Inquire (only) into that which has been transmitted. You have no business (inquiring into) hidden knowledge.'

Rav said, "'Let the lying (21) lips be dumb.'" (Ps. 31:19) Let them be made dumb, bound, and silenced. "Let them be made dumb" as it is written, "And the Lord said (22) to him, "Who has made a man's mouth?" (verse continues. "Or who makes a man dumb or deaf, sighted or blind; Is it not the Lord.") (Exodus 4:11) "Let them be bound" as it is written, "For behold we were binding (23) sheaves." (Gen 37:7) "Let them be silenced" should be interpreted literally. "Which speak (Atak) arrogantly concerning (24) the righteous One of the world, things which He has withheld from His creatures. "With pride and contempt" (Ibid). This he (25) who boasts 'I discourse on the account of creation!' thinking that he is as one who (26) labors (in Torah), when (in truth) he is as one who is contemptuous (of it).'

R. Josi ben Hanina said, 'Whoever elevates himself at the cost of his fellow man's degradation has no share in (27) the world to come. Is this not even more true concerning he who elevates himself (at the expense) of the glory of the Lord of Worlds?' Is it not written (28) after it, "Oh how abundant is your goodness, which you have laid up for them that fear you." (Ps. 31:20) Let him not partake of your abundant goodness.

(29) R. Levi said, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of Kings to search out a matter. (Prov. 25:2) "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." (30) prior to the creation of the world. "But the glory of kings to search out a matter" from the time of creation.

(31) R. Levi said, "It is written, "Know you this from old time" (Job 20:4). But you, (only) "since man was placed upon the earth." (Ibid)

(32) R. Jonah in the name of R. Bo. It is written, "For ask now of days past which (33) were before you "

(Deut 4:32). Are you able to speculate from before the act of creation? It is written, "Since the day that God created (34) man upon the earth " (Ibid). Is one able (to speculate) from the sixth day onward? It is written "The first days." We have here an instance of Scripture~~s~~ making a general statement (35) and then limiting it. Thus we learn from the sixth day. Just as the sixth day possesses a special character from among the six days of creation, (36) so too you should bring me only that which is similar to the sixth day. Is it possible to know (37) that which is above the heavens and that which is below the deep? It is written, "from one end of the heavens (38) unto the other end of the heavens" (Deut. 4:32). In short, you may speculate in your heart until the time of creation, (39) from the time of creation on, you and your voice (publically) may speculate from one end of the world to the other.

(40) Bar Kappara taught: "Since the day "(that God created man upon the earth") (Deut. 4:32) R. Judah b. Puzi lectured (on the account of creation) in accordance with Bar Kappara. (41) R. Hiyyah lectured in accordance with the opinion of R. Bo.

R. Jonah said in the name of R. Levi. (42) The world was created with a "bet." Just as a "bet" is closed on all its sides and open on one side, thus you are not permitted (43) to investigate what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind. Rather (only) from the day (44) that the world was created. And to those that say to the "bet," 'Who created you?' It shows them with a point (above) and says, 'He who is above.' And what is His name? It shows them with a point behind it and says, (46) "Ha-shem His name. The Lord (adon) is His name.'"

Another interpretation: Why (was the world created) with a "bet?" Because it connotes blessing (47). And not with an "aleph?" Because it connotes cursing. God said, 'I will create my world (48) only with a "bet" so that all

all of the people of the world will not say "How can the world endure seeing that it was created (49) with the language of cursing!" In short, behold I will create it with a "bet" the language of blessing (50) in order that it might stand.'

R. Abbahu in the name of R. Yohanan: With two letters, two worlds were created: (51) This world and the world to come. One (was created) with a "heh" and one (was created) with a "yod." What is reasoning? "For the Lord (Bet-yod-heh) is God (52) an everlasting rock " (Isaiah 26:4). (read here as "For with a "yod" and a "heh" the Lord created Worlds") Do we not know which was created with a "heh" and which was created (53) with a "yod?" Yes, from that which is written, "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created " (Gen. 2:4). (Be-hibbaram read as Be-heh-baram) (54) With a "heh," he created them. Thus this world was created with a "heh" and the world to come with a "yod." (55) Now the "heh" is open underneath. This is an indication to all the people of the world that they will go down to Shol. Now (56) the "heh" has a point above it (which means that) from the time they descend they (are destined) to ascend. Even as the "heh" (57) is open on all sides, as a hint to all would be penitents (that they may still repent), so the "yod" is bent (58) as all the inhabitants of the world are bent (as it is written). "All faces are bent low with shame " (Jeremiah 30:6). When David saw (59) this, he began to praise the two letters, "Halleluyah. Praise O ye servants of the Lord. Praise the (60) name of the Lord." (Ps. 150:1).

R. Judah (II) Nesiah asked R. Samuel b. Nahman: 'What is the law concerning that which is written, "Extol him (61) that rides upon the skies, Be-yah is His name, and exult ye before him" (Ps. 68:5).' He answered, 'You will not find a single place (62) which lacks someone appointed to rule over it. And who is appointed to rule over it all? The Holy one blessed be He. Be-Yah (63) (the ruler) is his name, for

Yod-heh is his name.' (In Greek, Bia is "ruler" or "governor").

R. Eliezer said to him. 'Your teacher did not interpret it this way. Rather he likened it to a king (64) who built a palace in a place of sewers, garbage, and dung heaps. He (65) who comes and says, 'This palace is built on a place of sewers, garbage, (66) and dung heaps, does he not insult (the palace and the king.)? Likewise, he who says that in the beginning, the world was water (67) in water, does he not also insult (the world and God)?' This may be likened to the vineyard of a king upon which was built a platform. If you stand on it, (68) you may peek, but not touch (or get too close).

Bet Shammai says that the heaven were created first and afterwards the Earth. (69) Bet Hillel says that the Earth was created first and afterwards the heaven. Each side (70) brought support for its views. What was the reasoning of Bet Shammai's position. "In the beginning God created the Heaven (and then) the Earth (Gen. 1:1). It is similar to a king who makes a throne. After he had done this (72) he made his footstool. (As it is written) "The Heavens are my throne and the Earth is my footstool " (Isaiah 66:1). What (73) was the reasoning of Bet Hillel's position? "In the day that the Lord God made (first) Earth and (then) Heaven. (Gen. 2:4). It is similar to a king who makes (74) a palace After he had built the bottom part, he made the upper part (as it is written) "My own hand founded the Earth (first) and (then) my right hand spread out the Heaven." (Isaiah 48:13) (End of 77c, beginning of 77d) (1) R. Judah bar Pazi said, 'Surely this supports Bet Hillel (2) "Of old you did lay the foundations of the Earth (first) and the Heavens (second) are the work of your hands " (Ps. 102:26). R. Hanina, From the text that Bet (3) Shammai brings as support for its position, from it Bet Hillel refutes them. What is the support of Bet Shammai? (4) "In the beginning

God created the Heaven and the Earth " (Gen. 1:1). From here Bet Hillel refutes them. (5) "And the Earth was" (Gen. 1:2) meaning that it had already existed (before heaven).<sup>1</sup> R. Yohanan said in the name of the sages, 'Regarding the creation, Heaven (6) was first. Regarding the completion, Earth was first.' Regarding creation, Heaven was first (as it is written), "In the beginning (7) God created the Heaven (first) and (then) the Earth. Regarding the completion, the Earth was first (as it is written) "In the day that God made earth (8) and heaven " (Gen. 2:4).

Heaven was created on first day according to Bet Shammai. Then he made three days and made offspring (from the Heaven). (He made) the first, second (9) and third days, and on the fourth day (he said) "Let there be lights in the firmament " (Gen. 1:14). The sea was created on the second day, then he made three days and made offspring (from the sea). (10) (He made) the second, third, and fourth days, and on the fifth day (He said) "Let the waters swarm "(Gen. 1:20). Earth was made on the third day according to Bet Shammai. Then he made (11) three days and then made offspring (from the Earth). On the sixth day (He said), "Let the Earth bring forth the living creature etc." (Gen. 1:24).

(12) The Earth was created first according to Bet Hillel. Then he made two days and made offspring (from the Earth). (He made) the first and the second days (13) and on the third, (He said) "Let the Earth put forth grass " (Gen. 1:11). The Heaven was created on the second day according to Bet Hillel. Then He made two days and made (14) offspring (from the Heaven). (He made) the second and third days and on the fourth day (He said) "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven"(Gen. 1:14). The sea was created on the third day according to Bet Hillel (15). Then He made two days and made offspring (from the sea). He made the third and fourth days, and on the fifth day (16) (He said), "Let the

waters swarm with swarms of living creatures." (Gen. 1:20)

R. Simeon b. Yohai said, 'I am amazed at how the fathers of the world engaged in such a controversy regarding (17) the creation of the world, for I say that the Heaven and the Earth were created as a pot and its cover. (18) What is the proof? "My own hand founded the earth and my right hand spread out the heaven" (verse continues: "When I call to them, they stand up together") (Isaiah 48:13). R. Eliezer b. R Simeon, 'If father's view is correct, then why sometimes does it happen that the Heaven is given precedence (20) over the Earth, and sometimes it happens that the Earth is given precedence over the Heaven? Only to teach that the two of them (21) are equal to each other.' (End of Hagigah II:1)

## NOTES

### Introduction

- <sup>1</sup>The term pagan, as used here, is a catch-all phrase to designate a sect with Gnostic tendencies, philosophy or theology, at the same time it refers to a sect which lacks Jewish or Christian influence.
- <sup>2</sup>The Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., The Anti-Nicene Fathers, 1:159-161; Haim Hillel Ben Sasson, "Disputations and Polemics," Encyclopaedia Judaica 6:83-87.
- <sup>3</sup>For a full discussion of the usage of the writings of the Church Fathers in the study of Gnosticism, see Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion pp. 37-38.
- <sup>4</sup>Alan Franklin Segal, Two Powers in Heaven, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>5</sup>The problem of identifying to whom the Rabbis refer when using the term minim has been discussed in the following works: A. Buchler, "The Minim of Sepphoris and Tiberias in the Second and Third Centuries," Studies in Jewish History, pp. 245-274; Harris Hirschberg, "Once Again the Minim," Journal of Biblical Literature 67 (1948): 305-318; George Foot Moore, Judaism, 3:68f.; and Daniel Sperber, "Min," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 12:1-3.
- <sup>6</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 37-39.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-41.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>Theodor Gaster, The Dead Sea Scriptures, p. 179.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 313.
- <sup>11</sup>Menahem Mansoor, "Knowledge in Qumran and the New Testament is Du'ath, but not Gnosis," (Paper delivered at the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, March 28-31, 1978).
- <sup>12</sup>David Flusser, "Gnosticism" Encyclopaedia Judaica 7:637-8.
- <sup>13</sup>James M. Robinson, "Introduction," in The Nag Hammadi Library in English, ed. James M. Robinson, p.2; Birger A. Pearson, "Nag Hammadi Codices," Encyclopaedia Judaica Yearbook (1974), p. 245-247.

- <sup>14</sup>Both of these areas will be discussed later in this thesis, chapter 4, pp. 122-146.
- <sup>15</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 9-11.
- <sup>16</sup>Birger A. Pearson, "Friedlander Revisited. Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins," Studia Philonica 2 (1973): 23-25.
- <sup>17</sup>Scholars debated and still debate whether the Qumian documents are Gnostic or not. Most feel that they are not Gnostic. By contrast, scholars agree that the overwhelming majority of the tractates in the Nag Hammadi library are Gnostic in context.
- <sup>18</sup>Gilles Quispell, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge," Gnostic Studies 1 (1974):213-218.
- <sup>19</sup>G. W. MacCrae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," Novum Testamentum 12 (1970): 78-79.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>22</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:498.
- <sup>23</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 33-34.
- <sup>24</sup>Jonas, "Response to G. Quispell's 'Gnosticism and the New Testament,'" The Bible in Modern Scholarship, ed. J. Phillip Hyatt, p. 288.
- <sup>25</sup>E. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences, p. 144.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.
- <sup>27</sup>See A. Altman's essay, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology," Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J.H. Hertz, pp. 19-32.
- <sup>28</sup>Pearson, "Friedlander Revisited," p. 35.
- <sup>29</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 264-267.

# Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup>Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, p. XVI.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. XV-XVI.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 18.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>6</sup>This, after all, is what Philo attempted to do with Judaism; namely, to express Judaism in rational and cogent terms, terms understandable to an educated person within the world of Hellenistic culture.
- <sup>7</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>U. Bianchi, "Final Document," The Origins of Gnosticism, ed. U. Bianchi.
- <sup>10</sup>T.P. Van Baaren, "Towards a Definition of Gnosticism," The Origins of Gnosticism, ed. U. Bianchi, p. 175.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup>Bianchi, "Final Document," p. XXVIII.
- <sup>13</sup>Hans Jonas, "Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon-Typological and Historical," The Origins of Gnosticism, ed. U. Bianchi, p. 93.
- <sup>14</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, p. 236.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup>Jonas, "Delimitation," pp. 93-95.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 94.
- <sup>18</sup>Eugene Mihaly, A Song to Creation, A Dialogue with a Text, p. 42.
- <sup>19</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, p. 43.

- 20 Jonas, "Delimitation," p. 96.
- 21 Mihaly, Song to Creation, pp. 41-43.
- 22 The Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5:69-73; equals Hippolytus, "Refutation of All Heresies," 5:19-23.
- 23 Segal, Two Powers in Heaven, pp. 428-430.
- 24 James M. Robinson, The Nag Hammadi Library, pp. 153& 158.
- 25 Ibid., p. 165.
- 26 Ibid., p. 161.
- 27 Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia, Vain Claim Patterns and Genesis Exegesis," (Paper delivered at the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, March 28-31, 1978).
- 28 Segal, Two Powers, pp. 428-430.
- 29 Jonas, "Delimitation," p. 95.
- 30 Ibid., p. 96.
- 31 Ibid., p. 94.
- 32 Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 130-131.
- 33 Jonas, "Delimitation," p. 97.
- 34 Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 62-66.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 57-60.
- 36 Ibid., p. 55.
- 37 Jonas, "Delimitation," p. 100.
- 38 Robinson, Nag Hammadi, pp. 411-412.

<sup>39</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 44-45.

<sup>40</sup>Jonas, "Delimitation," p. 91.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup>Hans Jonas, "Response to G. Quispell's Gnosticism and the New Testament," The Bible in Modern Scholarship, ed. J. Phillip Hyatt, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. pp. 290-292. Among the writings of the Church Fathers, on the name "Simon Magus" may be considered to be a Jewish name. Simon Magus, of course, was not a Jew, but a Samaritan. The Samaritans, then as now, are a fairly localized sect. It is difficult to ascribe the origin of Gnosticism to them.

<sup>4</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, "Kabbalah" Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:498.

<sup>7</sup>David Flusser, "Scholem's Recent Book on Merkabah Literature," Journal of Jewish Studies II (1960): 58-68.

<sup>8</sup>James M. Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library in English, pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup>Leon Nemoy, "Al-Qirgisani's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," Hebrew Union College Annual 7 (1930): 317-399.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 363-364.

<sup>12</sup>H.A. Wolfson, "The Pre-existent Angel of the Magharians and Al-Nahawandi," Jewish Quarterly Review 51 (1960): 89-106.

<sup>13</sup>Gilles Quispell, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge," Gnostic Studies 1 (1974): 213-216.

- <sup>14</sup>The Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds.,  
The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:351-352.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., 3:651.
- <sup>16</sup>Quispell, "Origins," pp. 217-218.
- <sup>17</sup>Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5:100.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., 5:114.
- <sup>19</sup>Quispell, "Origins," p. 213.
- <sup>20</sup>Hans Jonas, "Response," p. 289.
- <sup>21</sup>T.P. Van Baaren, "Towards a Definition of Gnosticism,"  
The Origins of Gnosticism, ed. U. Bianchi, pp. 178-180.
- <sup>22</sup>U. Bianchi, "Final Document," The Origins of Gnosticism, ed.  
U. Bianchi, p. XXVIII.
- <sup>23</sup>Hans Jonas, "Response," p. 293; idem, "Delimitation of the  
Gnostic Phenomenon: Typological and Historical,"  
The Origins of Gnosticism, ed. U. Bianchi, p. 102.

### Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup>Edwin M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of  
the Proposed Evidences, pp. 143-144.
- <sup>2</sup>The chapters do not in and of themselves constitute a unit.  
All studies must have a certain limitation. These chapters  
were chosen merely because they reflect the rabbinic inter-  
pretation of the creation of the world from its beginning  
through the creation of man. Therefore, this study  
suggests a direction for future studies. For example, the  
Nag Hammadi Library makes extensive exegesis of Genesis 2-3.  
Perhaps a future study will contrast and compare the  
Gnostic exegesis of these chapters with the material in  
Genesis Rabbah.
- <sup>3</sup>Moshe Herr, "Genesis Rabbah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 7:399.
- <sup>4</sup>Chanoch Albeck, "Mavo u-maftehot le-Midrash Bereshit Rabbah,"  
Midrash Bereishit Rabbah, eds. J. Theodor and C. Albeck, 3:94.

<sup>5</sup> Chapters 1-18 interpret Genesis 1-2. Chapters 1-29 interpret the first weekly portion (parasha) of the Torah.

<sup>6</sup> Albeck, "Mavo," 3:44.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3:46.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Grossfeld, "Bible: Translations, Ancient Versions," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 4:843.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Albeck, "Mavo," 3:45-48.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Later Targumim such as Pseudo-Jonathan or the Jerusalem Targum appear to borrow entire traditions from Genesis Rabbah.

<sup>13</sup> Albeck, "Mavo," 3:85-6. Certain parallels are to be found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Albeck warns against seeing Philo as a source of the traditions in Genesis Rabbah. Noting the Greek tone of many of Philo's interpretations, Albeck feels that these interpretations came to Palestine through traveling rhetoricians. Nevertheless, these parallels are always thematic, and never resemble each other in form or language.

<sup>14</sup> Mishnaic material appears in many instances in Genesis Rabbah via the Palestinian Talmud, and not as a direct source.

<sup>15</sup> These are: Mishnah Avot 5:5 in Genesis Rabbah 5:7; Mishnah Kilaim 8:2 in Genesis Rabbah 7:4; Mishnah Yebamot 6:6 in Genesis Rabbah 8:12; and Mishnah Ketubot in Genesis Rabbah 8:12.

<sup>16</sup> Both of these are taken from Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael Beshallah, chapter 8, in which there is a collection of "earthly king" sayings. One of these sayings is to be found in Genesis Rabbah 4:1 and another in Genesis Rabbah 7:1. The only parallel from the Sifra is that of a baraita in the name of R. Simeon b. Yochai which deals with meal and burnt offerings. This baraita is found in Sifra Nedavah, chapter 8, and Genesis Rabbah 1:13.

- 17 Albeck, "Mavo," pp. 55-56.
- 18 The remaining common traditions of the Palestinian Talmud and Genesis Rabbah chapters 1-8 are to be found in BeraChot 2c and 5b; Peah 15b, Kelaim 27a and 27b; Shabbat 5b; Succah 58b; Megillah 71d; Yebamot 4a and 7d, and Ketubot 24d.
- 19 Z. Frankel, Mavo ha-Yerushalmi p. 51.
- 20 J. Heinemann, "Leviticus Rabbah," Encyclopaedia Judaica 11:149.
- 21 Herr, "Genesis Rabbah," Encyclopaedia Judaica 7:399-401.
- 22 Albeck, "Mavo," 3:94-97.
- 23 Herr, "Genesis Rabbah," Encyclopaedia Judaica 3:399-401.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Herr and others see chapters 95-101 as being a later addition based upon the language, style and content of these chapters. This becomes important, as we shall see, for J. Heinemann analyzes only chapters 1-94 in his study. Of 94 chapters there are only 44 possible sederim.
- 26 Even here, Theodor realized that the "open" and "closed" verse theory could not account for every verse division. In his commentary, Minhat Yehuda in Midrash Bereshit Rabbah eds. J. Theodor and C. Albeck 3:54, note 3, Theodor notes that chapter 8 begins with Genesis 1:26 which is neither an "open" nor a "closed" verse. As we shall see, it is of great significance in attempting to understand the concerns of the redactor that Genesis Rabbah chapter 8 begins with Genesis 1:26.
- 27 Albeck, "Mavo," p. 97.
- 28 Out of a possible 44; see note # 25.
- 29 The first scholar to make this suggestion was Shlomo Rapoport in Erekh Milim. Rapoport, a nineteenth century Rabbi and scholar, compiled a rabbinic dictionary of Talmud, Targum, and Midrash. Under the entry, "Petihta," Rapoport argues that the proems are the key to understanding the divisions of Genesis Rabbah.

<sup>30</sup>Of the proem verses within Genesis Rabbah, 199 are taken from the Hagiographa, 37 from the Prophets and 10 from the Torah. Albeck feels that the reason that so many of the proems were taken from the Hagiographa was because the proem was originally an oral sermon preached on the Sabbath. By beginning with the Hagiographa, a congregant would hear all three parts of the Hebrew Bible. If a suitable verse from the Hagiographa could not be found, a verse from the Prophets or Torah was used. See Albeck, "Mavo," 3:14.

<sup>31</sup>Albeck, "Mavo," 3:17-19. Albeck lists six different types of charuzot. these are:  
 1) The proem verse is interpreted in such a way that brings it back to the pericope verse onto some subject within the Torah reading for that week;  
 2) The proem verse comprises some general law or statement which is to be used in the weekly Torah portion;  
 3) The two verses interpret the same concept or idea.  
 4) The relationships between the two verses is one of "kal v'chomer," influence a minor ad maius;  
 5) An incident within the weekly Torah portion teaches us about the proem verse;  
 6) The proem verse opposes or is contrasted to the pericope verse.

<sup>32</sup>Albeck, "Mavo," 3:12.

<sup>33</sup>Albeck, "Mavo," 3:14-17. Among the ways to establish this would be the existence within the charazah of a later authority (later than the attributed author), or the existence within the charuzah of a statement which contradicts the attributed author.

<sup>34</sup>Albeck, "Mavo," 3:17.

<sup>35</sup>I. Bettan, Studies in Jewish Preaching, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup>B.Z. Wacholder. "Prolegomenon," J. Mann, The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue, p. XXXV.

<sup>37</sup>J. Heinemann, "The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim," Scripta Hierosolymitana 22 (1971): 107.

<sup>38</sup>J. Heinemann, "Mivnehu ve-halukato shel Midrash Bereishit Rabbah," Sefer ha-Shanah Shel Bar Ilan 9 (1972): 280.

- <sup>39</sup>One cannot be certain as to what extent the individual readings of the Torah and Haftorah were fixed during this period.
- <sup>40</sup>J. Heinemann, "Preaching (in the Talmudic Period)," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 13:993.
- <sup>41</sup>Heinemann, "The Proem," p. 107.
- <sup>42</sup>Heinemann, "Mivnehu," pp. 279-289.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 283.
- <sup>44</sup>J. Mann, The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue, 1:LI-LV.
- <sup>45</sup>Heinemann, "Mivnehu," p. 279.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 280.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 289.
- <sup>48</sup>Horace D. Hummel, "Bible Research and Criticism," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 4:907-8.
- <sup>49</sup>Herbert F. Hahn. The Old Testament in Modern Research p. 150.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup>D.N. Freedman, "The Deuteronomistic History," The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume I, pp. 226-228; Michael Fox, "Noth, Martin," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 12:1232-33.
- <sup>52</sup>For a fuller exposition of the positions of these scholars and others, see the Introduction of this thesis, pp. XI-XVI.
- <sup>53</sup>This type of redaction is often found at the end of tractates in the Mishnah and Talmud.
- <sup>54</sup>It is due to the enormity of the task at hand that only these chapters will be tested against the stated propositions.

# Chapter 4

- <sup>1</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:497-98.
- <sup>2</sup>For a full translation of this gemara, see Appendix #2, pp. 275-291.
- <sup>3</sup>Marcus Jastow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature, p. 1571.
- <sup>4</sup>Note that the position of R. Ami is not that only two people are involved. The warning is not a reciprocal warning, A to B and B to A. The interpretation mentioned is the only possible interpretation given the context of the passage. I owe this interpretation to Dr. Michael Chernick, professor of Talmud at the Hebrew Union College.
- <sup>5</sup>The meaning of "sat and explained" is that he said and explained in the academy in front of his students.
- <sup>6</sup>The translations of Genesis Rabbah in this thesis are based upon those found in Midrash Rabbah, ed. and tr. under the direction of H. Friedman.
- <sup>7</sup>As we shall see, the form in PT Hagigah II:1 77c is not a proem form. This part of the proem in Genesis Rabbah 1:5 constitutes a separate tradition from this which follows. see pp. 61-65.
- <sup>8</sup>BT Baba Batra 154b and Ecclesiastes Rabbah 6:2. see also, Yitzhak Dov Gilat, "Bar Kappara," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 4:227-228.
- <sup>9</sup>Y. Gilat "Bar Kappara," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 4:227-228; and PT Niddah 50c.
- <sup>10</sup>Shmuel Safrai, "Huna," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 8:1073-74.
- <sup>11</sup>Moshe Beer, "Rav," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 13:1576-79.
- <sup>12</sup>Z. Frankel, Mavo ha-Yerushalmi p. 123.
- <sup>13</sup>Albeck, "Mavo," 3:23.
- <sup>14</sup>The way in which Genesis Rabbah deals with anti-cosmicism will be discussed in chapter 6, pp. 208-220.
- <sup>15</sup>Zvi Kaplan, "Judah bar Simeon," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:339-340.

- <sup>16</sup> Judah M. Rosenthal, "Seder Olam," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 14:1091-93.
- <sup>17</sup> R.F. Harper, Assyrian and Babylonian Letters, #1240, lines 11-13; and Samuel A. Lowenstamm, "Mah le-malah u-mah le-metah, mah le-fanim u ma le-ahor," (English title: "On an Alleged Gnostic Element in Mishnah II:1"), Yehezkel Kaufman Jubilee Volume, ed. Menahem Haran, pp. 117-118.
- <sup>18</sup> Wm. Braude, Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbath 1:448.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-26.
- <sup>20</sup> F. Sagnard, Clement d'Alexandrie, Extraits de Theodotus, paragraph 78, pp. 201-202.
- <sup>21</sup> Eugene Mihaly, A Song to Creation: A Dialogue with a Text, pp. 67-68.
- <sup>22</sup> See Genesis Rabbah 28:4, Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Lech Lecha 11, Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit 2, Song of Songs Rabbah 5:8, Yalkut Hamalkhiri Psalm 105:7, and Midrash on Psalms 90:11 and 105:3.
- <sup>23</sup> Shmuel Safrai, "Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 4:737.
- <sup>24</sup> Edward A. Goldman, Parallel Texts in the Palestinian Talmud to Genesis Rabbah (Chapters I-V), P. 70; and Aaron Rothkoff, "Prosbul," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 13:1181-1182.
- <sup>25</sup> See Yalkut Hamakhiri Isaiah 48:13 and Psalms 102:20, and Tanhuma Buber Bereishit 19.
- <sup>26</sup> James M. Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 123.
- <sup>27</sup> See the above discussion of the pleroma, chapter 1, pp. 6-13.
- <sup>28</sup> Samson Levey, "The Best Kept Secret of Rabbinic Tradition," Judaism 21 (1972): 454-469.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Solomon Zeitlin, "The Plague of Pseudo Rabbinic Scholarship," Jewish Quarterly Review 63 (1973): 195.

- 31 Levey, "Best Kept Secret," p. 457.
- 32 W. Bacher, "Shimon ben Zoma," Aggadot ha-Tannaim 3:1409.
- 33 Meyer Waxman, "Shimon ben Zoma," Ohel Moed 1 (1927): 70-74.
- 34 Ibid. The author feels that this was because of the fact that Ben Zoma did not use the hermeneutical middot. This argument is not convincing due to the fact that in Mishnah Hullin 5:5, Ben Zoma uses a "gezerah shava."
- 35 The Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers; 1:334-35.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Waxman, "Shimon ben Zoma," pp. 70-74.
- 38 Slavonic Enoch chapter 9 and The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch
- 39 Gershom G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, p. 14.
- 40 Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5:67.
- 41 Ibid., p. 68.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 BT Sukkah 53a, Genesis Rabbah 31:12 and 33:1, and Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Bereishit 1.
- 44 Scholem "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:504.
- 45 Jonas C. Greenfield, "Prolegomenon," 3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch, tr. Hugo Odeberg. p. XI.
- 46 Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:504.
- 47 Segal, Two Powers in Heaven, pp. 9-11.
- 48 Greenfield, "Prolegomenon," p. XI.

- <sup>49</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, "Metatron," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2: 1443-1446.
- <sup>50</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 9-11.
- <sup>51</sup>Henry A. Fischel, "Epicureanism," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 6:817.
- <sup>52</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 361, note #45.
- <sup>53</sup>David Flusser, "Scholem's Recent Book on Merkabah Literature," Journal of Jewish Studies ii (1960): 62.
- <sup>54</sup>Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, pp. 14-16.
- <sup>55</sup>Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:499.
- <sup>56</sup>Waxman, "Shimon ben Zoma," pp. 70-74.
- <sup>57</sup>See Above, chapter 1, pp. 1-13.

#### Chapter 5

- <sup>1</sup>See Appendix #2 for a full translation of PT Hagigah II:1. pp. 275-291.
- <sup>2</sup>See above, chapter 4, pp. 49-53.
- <sup>3</sup>See above, chapter 4, pp. 49-53.
- <sup>4</sup>The same idea may also be found in the tradition in passage 7. This tradition which deals with the idea that God created the world by means of a blessing in order that it might stand, is discussed in chapter 4, section E of this thesis, pp. 98-108.
- <sup>5</sup>See Jacob Neusner, A Life of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai; idem, Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yochanan ben Zakkai.
- <sup>6</sup>See chapter 4, section 14, pp. 122-146.
- <sup>7</sup>See chapter 4, section 14, pp. 122-146.

<sup>8</sup>Avot de Rabbi Natan II, chapter 24 is the only major source wherein positive statements regarding Aher are recorded.

<sup>9</sup>See above, chapter 4, section B, pp. 66-74.

### Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:498.

<sup>2</sup>See BT Berachot 28b and Megillah 17b, wherein the formulation of birkat ha-minim is described.

<sup>3</sup>Note the similarity of these beliefs with those of Aher as outlined in chapter 5, pp. 157-171.

<sup>4</sup>Adolf Buchler, "The Minim of Sepphoris and Tiberias in the Second and Third Centuries," Studies in Jewish History, pp. 254-274.

<sup>5</sup>Travers Herford, Christianity in the Talmud and Midrash.

<sup>6</sup>Harris Hirschberg, "Once Again-the Minim," Journal of Biblical Literature 67 (1948): 305-318.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel Sperber, "Min," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 12:1-3.

<sup>8</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, p. 9; and Alan Segal, Two Powers in Heaven, pp. 6-8.

<sup>9</sup>J. Theodor, "Minhat Yehuda," Midrash Bereishit Rabbah eds. J. Theodor and C. Albeck, 1:61, note 12.

<sup>10</sup>See above, chapter 4, section D, pp. 75-97.

<sup>11</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 6-8.

<sup>12</sup>A. Lukyn Williams, Justin Martyr: The Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 56, #23, p. 117.

- <sup>13</sup>Segal, Two Powers, 118-120.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 256-258.
- <sup>15</sup>His original contests with Simon Magus are recorded in Acts 8:9-24.
- <sup>16</sup>Johannes Irmischer, "The Pseudo-Clementines," New Testament Apocrypha, eds., Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 2:532-570.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 552.
- <sup>18</sup>Eugene Milhaly, A Song to Creation: A Dialogue with a Text, p. 58.
- <sup>19</sup>H. Graetz, The History of the Jews, 2:377ff.
- <sup>20</sup>Note the play on his name, for "Gam-zo" means "this too" in Hebrew.
- <sup>21</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 82-83.
- <sup>22</sup>The Rev. Alexander and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers 1:343.
- <sup>23</sup>Cf. passage 19 above, p. 186.
- <sup>24</sup>Judah Goldin, "Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger," Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, ed. Jacob Neusner, pp. 412-424.
- <sup>25</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 172-174.
- <sup>26</sup>Cf. Genesis Rabbah 1:1.
- <sup>27</sup>Yehoshua Amir, "Philo Judaeus," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 13: 409-415.
- <sup>28</sup>Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:227.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>30</sup>See above, chapter 2, pp. 18-20.
- <sup>31</sup>Leon Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisani's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," Hebrew Union College Annual 7 (1930): 364.
- <sup>32</sup>James M. Robinson, ed. The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 86.
- <sup>33</sup>J. Theodor, "Minhat Yehuda," 1:55, note 2.
- <sup>34</sup>Segal, Two Powers, pp. 245-248.
- <sup>35</sup>F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, trs. Philo in Ten Volumes and Two Supplementary Volumes, 1:61.
- <sup>36</sup>Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 155 ff.
- <sup>37</sup>Robinson, Nag Hammadi, pp. 256-264.
- <sup>38</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 241-246.
- <sup>39</sup>Mihaly, A Song to Creation, pp. 53-55.
- <sup>40</sup>R.M. Grant, Theophilus of Antioch: Ad Autolycum II:10.
- <sup>41</sup>Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:496.
- <sup>42</sup>Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit 13, and Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 11.
- <sup>43</sup>Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:496.
- <sup>44</sup>Henry Slonimsky, "The Philosophy Implicit in the Midrash," Hebrew Union College Annual 27 (1956): 244-246.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup>W. Bacher, "The Church Father Origin and Rabbi Hoshaya," Jewish Quarterly Review o.s. 3 (1891): 357-360; and E. Urbach, Rabbinic Exegesis and Origin's Commentaries on the Song of Songs and Jewish Christian Polemics, Tarbiz 30 (1960-1961): pp. 148-170.

- <sup>47</sup>As such, the Torah existed prior to the creation of the world. The Greek word "pedagogue," which means "tutor," is derived from a commonly accepted translation of the word "amon." The prooftext here is Numbers 11:12, "As ha-omen carries the suckling child." Ha-omen is a nursing father. In the Targum Yerushalmi to this verse, the word "ha-omen" is translated as "pedagogue."
- <sup>48</sup>Cf. Genesis Rabbah 1:9.
- <sup>49</sup>The London, Paris, and Oxford manuscripts suggest the reading, "be reishit," which would render, "By me, Torah, God created etc."
- <sup>50</sup>See above, chapter 4, section B, pp. 54-65.
- <sup>51</sup>See above, chapter 4, section H, pp. 122-146.
- <sup>52</sup>Jonas, Gnostic Religion, p. 113.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 118.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-117; and A. Altman, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology," Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J.H. Hertz, pp. 19-21.
- <sup>55</sup>See above, chapter 4, section B, pp. 54-65.
- <sup>56</sup>See above, chapter 2, pp. 14-24.
- <sup>57</sup>Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:497-8.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid. p. 506.
- <sup>60</sup>This is based upon the exegesis of Numbers 7:12.
- <sup>61</sup>Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:502; idem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp. 63-66; and idem, Jewish Gnosticism, pp. 36-40.
- <sup>62</sup>Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:502.

<sup>63</sup> See above, chapter 4, section H, pp. 122-146.

<sup>64</sup> Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, pp. 58-60.

<sup>65</sup> See Genesis Rabbah 41:3, Numbers Rabbah 13:5, and BT Hagigah 12b.

<sup>66</sup> R. Judah b. Pazi is the author of this concept as found in Genesis Rabbah 41:3 and Numbers Rabbah 13:5. R. Eliezer b. Pedat is the author of the concept in BT Hagigah 12a. In Genesis Rabbah 3:6, the concept is ascribed to the Rabbis in general.

<sup>67</sup> Altman, "Gnostic Themes," pp. 30-31.

### Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup> A "parashah" is a division of the Torah based upon the yearly cycle of Torah reading. A "seder" is a division of the Torah based upon a triennial cycle of Torah readings. See above, chapter 3, pp. 35-42.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix #1, pp. 272-274.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller description of the nature of the literary homily, see J. Heinemann's article, "Profile of a Midrash: The Art of Composition in Leviticus Rabbah," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39 (1971): 141-150.

<sup>4</sup> The seventh section corresponds to section four in the traditional ordering of chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> J. Theodor, "Minhat Yehuda," Midrash Bereishit Rabbah, eds. J. Theodor and C. Albeck, p. 1. Rabbi Abraham b. Asher was a 16th century commentator on the midrash.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis Rabbah 1:15 is discussed in chapter 4, pp. 113-121. Genesis Rabbah 1:14 is discussed in chapter 6, p. 189-190.

<sup>8</sup> Mishnah Keritot 6:9, Tosephta Keritot at the end, Tanhuma ha-nidpas Bo 5, Tanhuma Baber Bereishit 14.

<sup>9</sup> PT Megillah 77d (=1:11), PT Berachot 14b (=1:14), and Peah 15b (=1:14).

<sup>10</sup> Z. Frankel, Mavo Ha-yerushalmi, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> Albeck, "Mavo," 3:66-84.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Goldman, "Parallel Texts in the Palestinian Talmud to to Genesis Rabbah (Chapters I-V)," pp. 138-139.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-140.

<sup>15</sup> Ending the chapter with such a messianic expectation could possibly be a precursor of the messianic perorations of the literary homily.

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