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Mattan Torah: An Example of Concept Theology in Rabbinic Literature

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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New York, New York

For my teachers

love for medieval thought and how, as he repeatedly told us, "immensely fun" and meaningful "moderate" Torah can be.

Abaye taught (Shabbat 106b): "Let the lesson you study be like a song!" Dr. Norman Cohen orchestrated midrash classes that resounded in four part harmonies. He taught me how to unlock the treasure trove of aggadic literature.

Among the other teachers I would like to thank are Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz and Dr. Martin A. Cohen. Dr. Borowitz's course, Rabbinic Theology, showed me that it is possible to look beyond the literary content of the aggadah. Outside of the classroom he encouraged me to question my methodology. Dr. Cohen taught me that a living organism must shape its ideology in relation to its historical context. When I think of these two men, I think of the saying from Midrash Mishle, 2:4, "Learning must be sought; it will not come by itself."

Now I would like to acknowledge those who helped me achieve success: my father-in-law, Horace Klafter, was gracious enough to read the entire thesis and helped improve its flow and organization; my mother-in-law, Corinne, offered very constructive suggestions; my wife Beth also helped with the editing. Much of what is good about this project stylistically came from their suggestions, any mistakes herein are my responsibility. Others helped me in less specific, but crucial ways: my mother, Lily Hecht, has always been a model of perseverance and commitment, our discussions and her interest in my projects encouraged me to

forge ahead; my father's memory is always before me, I draw inspiration from the knowledge that he would have been quite proud of his son's accomplishments; finally, I would thank my classmates, I have benefitted so much from my interaction with them these past five years.

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As I hand in this thesis, completing the requirements for ordination, I pray that this "ending" is truly just a beginning: now that I have acquired the paint, the brushes, and the canvas, I hope to paint numerous portraits.

Jonathan L. Hecht
Shabbat HaChodesh
Adar 26, 5747

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Chapter 1: The Study of Rabbinic Literature: Alternative Approaches

Rabbinic literature has been studied via a number of different competing methodologies. In this chapter, I shall examine the major methodologies as presented by a well known scholar. I will show why I take exception to his conclusion, and then present my own approach called "concept theology." In the rest of this thesis I shall illustrate how concept theology works by examining MATTAN TORAH, the "revelation of Torah," as a case study.

Schafer's Analysis of the Six Approaches

A superb discussion of the prevailing research approaches to the study of rabbinic literature may be found

in Peter Schafer's excellent article entitled "Research into Rabbinic Literature: An Attempt to Define the Status Quaestionis."[1] The author defines and examines the "traditional-halakhic," the "exploitative-apologetic," the "thematic," the "biographical," the "analytical-descriptive" and the "immanent in the work" approaches. After a thoroughgoing critique, Schafer proposes what he considers to be the best approach, a modified version of the analytical-descriptive method.

Each of these methodologies has a limitation stemming from the relation of text and time: The "traditional-halakhic" method has been used in both classical Jewish commentary and various modern introductions such as Lieberman's commentary to the Tosefta and J. N. Epstein's 'Introductions.' In these works the "Halakhah" is seen as a superior entity which is taken for granted and never questioned. This method is more "systematical-theological" than "historical-literary." Thus, the Halakhah is, in a sense, timeless, and cannot be examined critically.

Another method, the "exploitative-apologetic," has been used solely by Christians. It is characterized by its selective use of rabbinic sources to explain the New Testament. Rabbinic literature is not studied for its own

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[1] Peter Schafer, "Research into Rabbinic Literature: An Attempt to Define the Status Quaestionis," Journal of Jewish Studies (Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies), Vol. 37, No. 2, Autumn 1986, pp. 139-52.

sake, but only as a stepping stone to a better understanding of another text. The results are of dubious value, as Schafer sums up: "At best, the point is to 'elucidate' the New Testament from its Jewish environment; at worst, the rabbinic parallels serve to demonstrate the superiority of the New Testament."[2] The result is what Schafer calls, "parallelomania." Parallels of New Testament verses and verses from rabbinic literature may be interesting, but not very significant because it is not possible to evaluate the status of the verses being compared in their own literature. Verses are taken out of context and applied to another text from a different context and time period.

The third method is the "thematic" approach. Here, theological ideas are isolated and subjected to analysis. The researcher collects many passages and synthesizes them to gain insight into the significance of the theme at hand. The first problem we encounter is that the "theme" has not been isolated by the literature itself, rather it has been artificially applied by the modern scholar:

> The rabbis have given the themes no consideration, not because by reason of some mysterious deficiency they were unable to do so, but because they did not wish to, because they were not interested in these themes as isolated themes.[3]

The attempt to derive a "rabbinic theology" is a modification of the thematic approach. One example of this

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[2] ibid., p. 140.

[3] ibid., p. 141.

type of work is E. E. Urbach's The Sages. This approach just intensifies the problems of trying to isolate individual themes by attempting to find an all encompassing one which is no less debatable.

The "biographical" approach is an attempt to study individual rabbis, their doctrines, and how they influenced the literature. The problems are similar to the thematic approach in that the personality of a particular sage has simply been substituted for the theme. To these problems we add the uncertainties which arise from the attempt to isolate the historical figure of a particular rabbi from the sources. The rabbis contribute to the literature, but beyond this, there is very little which can be said of them historically.

The "analytical-descriptive" method is different because it attempts to examine the literature as literature. The best proponent of this method is Arnold Goldberg.[4] He calls this method, "form-analytical." It entails the study of the material as textual units with the goal being the identification of form and literary device. Some basic forms he identifies are the Midrash, the Dictum or Logion, the Mashal, the Ma'aseh, and the Haggadah. From these basic forms, higher structures have evolved, such as the homily and the Sugya. The problem with this method is the

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[4]His articles have been published in Frankfurter Judaistische Beitrage.

definition of "text." What are the boundaries of legitimate study? Is it the Babylonian Talmud, the Midrash, a particular Midrash, or all of rabbinic literature? Then, once a text is chosen, the researcher must answer the question of why that text was chosen over others.

The final method Schafer considers is the "immanent in the work" method. Here, complete works are analyzed in order to identify their inherent structures and rules. The problem is, when faced with numerous manuscript, eclectic, critical and traditional versions of a particular text, which text shall be the object of study? Furthermore, how are the boundaries of study to be identified? For example, the Yerushalmi and Bereshit Rabbah are very similar, but does this mean that they can be compared? Where can legitimate boundaries be drawn?

As stated, the problems with all the aforementioned models stem from the relation of text and time. The greatest problem seems to be that of dating. It is almost impossible to state with certainty when a particular text was finally redacted. To this problem, we must add the identification of the text boundaries. When faced with many variants contained in numerous manuscripts, it becomes difficult to determine which is the "correct" version, or even if a correct version exists. These two problems, text and time, make historical research of rabbinic texts nearly impossible:

> When even the individual work of rabbinic literature - Mishnah, Tosefta, Yerushalmi, Midrashim, Bavli - is no longer a stable quantity, provides no fixed frame of reference within which closed systems can be worked out and placed in chronological relation to one another, it becomes extraordinarily difficult, if not virtually impossible, to ask adequate historical questions of the texts, and to answer them.[5]

When this difficulty is realized, Schafer concludes that there are only two methods worth pursuing. These also have advantages as well as some drawbacks.

The first is Goldberg's method of examining the texts as "synchronic units." As previously mentioned, Goldberg studies the individual texts in order to determine their basic forms. This method need not take into account dating or historical context. Thus he has solved the problem of dating. Yet Schafer finds this solution at least partially inadequate:

> If the individual text cannot be fixed in time and space, then it hardly makes sense to behave in regard to certain questions as though this were possible. We would thereby be, although at a methodologically more considered level, exactly where we started, with the 'traditional' study of rabbinic literature as a synchronic unit. This seems to follow from Goldberg's logic. His method of language- and form-analysis allows for an almost 'scientifically' precise description of the mechanisms and rules by which the corpus 'rabbinic literature' is constructed and functions; as such, it is of admirable unity and consistency. This unity and logical consistency is admittedly paid for with the final, even programmatic, renunciation of every attempt at temporal placing and historical differentiation. Legitimate and doubtless necessary as this process is, its price

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[5]Schafer, p. 150.

is very high.[6]

So Schafer proposes a second, slightly modified model which takes this problem into consideration. Although we cannot speak with any surety about the historical context of these documents, we can study their history of redaction. When we know more about the redactional process, we may be able to say more about the historical context of the individual work.

Schafer advises us to concentrate on studying rabbinic literature to determine its form and dating. Historical and theological research is not going to be fruitful unless we can better reconcile the relation of text and time. Until then, we should concentrate on describing the linguistic forms of the individual texts.

The problem with this method is clear. We completely relinquish the study of content in favor of form. Why is it necessary to give up the message and concentrate solely on the medium? It is true, we need to continue the study of the way the language functions and the history of text redaction, but not to the exclusion of content oriented research. We have much to gain from the study of the message contained in the medium. Research in this area will produce benefits in the study of Jewish history, the study of Jewish theological development, and the study of religion in general. Although more may be learned about the dating and

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[6] ibid., p. 151.

form of the material, we should not ignore the content altogether. The study of theological development will help us in many ways, it may even help in the study of form and dating.

Concept Theology: A Modified Thematic Approach

I propose a method for studying rabbinic literature called "concept theology." Rabbinic theology is made up of interconnected theological concepts. The content of these concepts develop and change. They are given new or renewed emphasis throughout the literature depending on the needs of the moment. But the overarching concept, the rubric, is always present in the literature. These concepts can be studied to see how they have developed against the backdrop of their historic context. Let us now see how this modified thematic approach responds to some of the problems to which Schafer points.[7]

False identity can be partially avoided by choosing a concept which is inherent in the literature. For example, we can study the notion of MATTAN TORAH (revelation of Torah) throughout rabbinic literature. The goal would be to examine how the literature deals with the concept of MATTAN TORAH.

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[7]It should be noted that Schafer did not completely rule out the thematic approach, as long as the scholar is cautious about examining the source of his own questions, p. 141.

The problem of artificial identity is thus partially avoided since the literature does maintain the concept of MATTAN TORAH as a theological idea. In Schafer's critique of the thematic method he stated:

> Almost all the more recent studies in this field are aware that in each case the superordinate question (the theme) is not inherent to the sources but is applied to the texts from the outside. The idea of God, the idea of the Holy Spirit, of the angels, or of the Messiah, have not been made into themes in rabbinic literature; it has expressed no systematic consideration of them."

While it is true that the literature presents no "systematic" consideration of these themes, it would be an overstatement to say that there is no consideration of them at all. Theologic themes are dealt with in rabbinic literature because it is a theological literature. Therefore it is possible to ~~examine~~ it for its content and we need not limit ourselves to structure alone.

The problem of artificial identity can be further avoided by studying the concepts on a text-by-text basis. As stated, the fundamental objection to the thematic method is that the researcher, in the process of fleshing out the 'theme,' runs the risk of imposing a foreign identity on the text. The process usually entails collecting as many 'passages' as possible and then synthesizing them into an understanding of what the literature "says" about the theme at ~~hand.~~ For example, say a researcher wanted to study the

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"ibid., p. 141.

rabbinic conceptualization of God. He would begin by collecting as many passages about God as possible: God and the world, God and Israel, the notion of God's love, God's mercy, and so forth. He would then synthesize the material. The danger is that this study might tell us more about the author's notion of God than the literature's. Has he redacted his own text: a new compilation reflecting his world view and expressed through his selection of passages from rabbinic literature?

In an attempt to overcome this pitfall, we shall analyze the literature on a text-by-text basis.* In this way, we hope to be reading the themes out of the material, and not into it. To examine the conceptualization of revelation of Torah, we will search for individual texts which develop this theme and examine how they develop it.

The problem of dating can be partially avoided by placing the texts under consideration into epochs, rather than specific centuries. It is slightly easier to place the text in historical time period, such as Tannaitic, or Amoraic, than to specify an exact date of redaction. After placing a text into an epic, we ask ourselves how the historic context of this time period might have influenced the theological development of the concept.

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*Schafer mentions that "fictitious identity of the material from which the theme is extracted can be avoided to some extent if the analyses are made separately work by work," p. 142.

Max Kadushin has developed a conceptual approach to the study of aggadic and halakhic literature. In his book, The Rabbinic Mind, Kadushin proposes that rabbinic theology develops around "organismic" or "value-concepts." These concepts develop and change throughout rabbinic literature:

> Rabbinic concepts common to both Halakah and Haggadah are represented by single words or terms such as ZEDAKAH (charity), MIDDAT RACHAMIM (God's love), TESHUBAH (repentance), KEDUSHAH (holiness), MALKUT SHAMAYIM (the Kingship of God), GIMILUT HASADIM (deeds of lovingkindness), 'ADAM (man), to mention but a few. These terms are connotative and suggestive. This is to say that they are not definable and, furthermore, that they cannot be made parts of a nicely articulated logical system or arranged in a hierarchical order. Nevertheless, despite being simply connotative, these rabbinic terms are genuine concepts, general ideas, although neither scientific or philosophic concepts, nor yet concepts referring to objects or relations in sensory experience. They deal exclusively with the sphere of value, performing there the functions of classifying and abstracting. They are, in fine, value-concepts.[10]

These concepts are interwoven into the fabric of rabbinic literature. They develop a system of value, not logic. They do not prescribe a hierarchical order, but they are implicitly connected: without a concept of Torah, you cannot have Israel; without a concept of God, you cannot have Torah. It is this interconnectedness, this organismic development, which keeps the system together.

The question we must now consider is that of boundary. What is "rabbinic literature?" Is it just material from the

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[10]Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind (Bloch: New York), 1972, pp. xi-xii.

Tannaitic or Amoraic time period? Does it also include medieval material? How do we determine the boundaries of study? When examining the theological development of concepts we include all material in which these concepts have remained central. Since rabbinic literature develops conceptually, concepts such as Torah, revelation, redemption, creation, and the like are everpresent rubrics. They form the foundation of the literature. The crucial question for our study is how the text relates to the original concept. Although the content of the sub-concepts may change, sometimes even radically, the overarching rubric is always maintained.

This feature of rabbinic literature is the basis of a reader edited by Jacob Neusner, Understanding Rabbinic Judaism: From Talmudic to Modern Times. Neusner collects articles examining Talmudic Judaism till modern times on the assumption that this literature, despite covering nearly 1500 years, can be compared because it is based on one overarching heritage: "Torah."[11] It is Torah as a conceptual symbol which ties together rabbinic literature. This symbol allows us to broaden the boundaries beyond talmudic literature to include the study of medieval scholars such as Rashi, Nachmanides and Maimonides, as well as pre-modern scholars such as Moses Sofer and Israel Salanter.

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[11] Understanding Rabbinic Judaism: From Talmudic to Modern Times, Jacob Neusner, ed. (Ktav: New York), 1974, p. 1.

Rabbinic theology, from Talmudic until modern times, can be studied by identifying and analyzing the concepts which serve as its foundations. Concepts such as creation, revelation, redemption, suffering, martyrdom, charity, God's kingship, and so on, become overarching symbols. They are both everpresent and everchanging.

The next chapter will examine the concept of MATTAN TORAH, how it developed from its biblical foundations into rabbinic idiom, and the centrality of this notion to the literature. In subsequent chapters we shall examine the concept of MATTAN TORAH in specific texts and attempt to explain why the notion developed as it did.

Chapter 2: MATTAN TORAH in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature

As stated, one of the greatest problems with the thematic approach is artificial identity. The prudent researcher will question the nature of the very questions he asks: Why was this theme chosen over others? Is it inherent to the material and, if so, what is the best way to isolate it? With these questions in mind let us examine the concept of Mattan Torah to see how it relates to the literature.

MATTAN TORAH is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Nevertheless, the Sinai experience (Exodus 19 and 20) is central to the flow of Biblical history. The Bible presents a religious history of the world. It describes how the world came to be; how God created it, and is the "Hand" behind all

events, and how Israel came to occupy the central role in world history.

The first group of Biblical stories describe the roots of Israel. We begin with the creation of the world, the experiences of the first humans, the adventures of the patriarchs, and end with the children of Israel (i.e. Jacob) moving to Egypt. The second group of stories describe the enslavement and redemption of Israel culminating with the covenant at Sinai. Leviticus and Numbers describe the laws of the covenant and the sacrificial cult in detail. Deuteronomy presents a recapitulation of the history of Israel told to them by Moses as the people prepared to enter the promised land.

The second section of Bible, the Prophets, describe the conquest of the land and the establishment and history of the monarchy. It also includes Prophetic texts which reinforce the importance of Israel's adherence to the covenant, and warn her not to stray from faithful observance of God's law. The final section, the Writings, contain a variety of sacred literature: liturgy, such as Psalms; wisdom, such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job; love poetry such as The Song of Songs; and other stories and works of history, such as Ruth and Chronicles.

From this very brief overview we can see the important role played by the Sinaitic revelation in the Bible. The revelation at Sinai is the foundation upon which the cult

described in Leviticus and Numbers was based. The reason given by the Bible for this revelation is that it was to insure the people's loyalty. As we read in Exodus 20:12,

> The Lord said to Moses: Thus shall you say to the Israelites: You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens: With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold. Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.

The purpose of the revelation was to establish the special covenant between God and Israel as manifested in the sacrificial cult. It is because of this event that the sacrificial cult described in the rest of the Torah make sense.

The Bible is a religious history of the world. It begins with the creation of humankind, narrows its focus to the Patriarchs, describes the redemption from Egypt and the decisive covenant at Sinai, and then tells the history of the people in the land. The revelation at Sinai is integral because it establishes the special covenant between God and Israel. The historical and theological significance of revelation are tied together in the Bible because the Bible is a theological history: the historical account of revelation makes the entire theology presented in the Bible work. It explains Israel's election as God's covenanted people.

Rabbinic literature recognizes the centrality of Sinai and gives it new emphasis. It is a large body of material contained in numerous texts which were compiled over a period of more than a thousand years. Thus it follows logically that there exists no definitive Rabbinic view concerning MATTAN TORAH, but we can make some generalizations about the way the literature presents the events on Sinai. The Rabbinic presentation maintains the central role played by the Sinaitic revelation in the Bible but it also gives it new significance: nowhere in the Bible do we find the notion that the entire Torah was "given" on Mount Sinai. In the Rabbinic view, however, not only is the Decalogue given on Sinai, but the Oral and Written traditions as well:

> 1. Tractate Berachot, p. 5a, Rabbi Levi ben Hama says further in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish: What is the meaning of the verse (Exodus 24:12): "And I will give thee the tables of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written that thou mayest teach them?" 'Tables of stone': these are the ten commandments; 'the law': this is the Pentateuch; 'the commandment': this is the Mishnah; 'which I have written': these are the Prophets and the Hagiographa; 'that thou mayest teach them': this is the Gemara. It teaches [us] that all these things were given to Moses on Sinai.[12]
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> 2. Mishnah Aboth, 1:1, Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets; and the

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[12]Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud. Berakoth, Maurice Simon, tr. (Soncino: London), 1984, p. 5a.

> Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things...[13]

> 3. Pesikta de-Rab Kahana, 12:1, [Many women have done well, but you surpass them all (Proverbs 31:29)]. But at Sinai "thou hast exceeded them all," for there, O Israel, you were given six hundred and thirteen commandments, of which two hundred and forty- eight are positive commands and three hundred and sixty-five are negative ones.[14]

Through Rabbinic hermeneutic the boundaries of the Sinaitic revelation were extended far beyond the Decalogue.

The Rabbis explicate the implicit centrality of the Sinaitic revelation in the Bible. In the Bible, Sinai was central because it represented the election of Israel. All of her prior history, especially the redemption from Egypt, lead to this moment which would serve as the foundation for the entire Israelite religious cult. In Rabbinic literature, Sinai becomes the explicit foundation of the entire tradition. Not only the Written, but the Oral Law as well is now considered to originate on Sinai. In the Bible, Sinai justified the Israelite cult; in Rabbinic literature, it explains Rabbinic authority. Clearly, MATTAN TORAH is not a foreign theme to Rabbinic literature.

In the next chapter we shall see how the Rabbis, through aggadic literature, gave different emphases to the Sinai experience. MATTAN TORAH will be conceptualized

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[13]The Mishnah, Herbert Danby, tr. (Oxford: London), 1983, p. 446.

[14]Pesikta de-Rab Kahana, Braude and Kapstein, tr. (JPS: Philadelphia), 1975, pp. 227-28.

differently depending on the historical context in which the textual traditions developed.[18]

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[18]An excellent analysis of aggadic literature and the emphases which have developed from the revelation at Sinai is Abraham J. Heschel's Torah min Ha'Shamayim b'Aspaklariah Shel Ha'Dorot (Soncino: London), 1962.

Chapter 3: MATTAN TORAH in Aggadic Literature

We define aggadic literature as the non-halakhic material which developed from the time of the Second Temple and to the Middle Ages. This negative description does not express the essence of the aggadah. This literature is much more than just "not-halakhah:" it pulses with its own life, it has its own purpose. Through the aggadah, the reader immerses himself in the richness of life and emerges with a new outlook. The halakhah produced the legal principles which shaped the behavior of the Jew. But the aggadah taught moral and ethical truths about the world in which he lived.

The aggadah did not determine law, it discovered life's meaning.

During the period of more than a thousand years in which the aggadah evolved, a literature which contained vastly different styles and genres developed. During the Tannaitic time period, aggadah was placed right next to halakhic material. This material was "exegetic:" its purpose was to explain the Biblical text. During the Amoraic period, we find compilations which are "homiletic:" it contains short homilies intended to supplement the reading of Scripture in the synagogue. As we approach the threshold of the Middle Ages, aggadic literature was compiled in anthologies.

Aggadic literature is based on the Bible. Rabbinic notions of God, of ritual, social and ethical law, of providence, reward and punishment, and of the election of Israel, are ideas inherent to the Bible. In the Bible, however, these themes are not made explicit. The Rabbis explicate these concepts through the aggadah.

Despite what has just been said, we must recognize that the aggadah does not develop a systematic theology. Problems are taken up on a case-by-case basis and consequently we find no coherent framework. Aggadic literature contains theological expressions, not systematic theology.[18] For

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[18]Julius Guttmann, Philosophies of Judaism: A History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig (Schocken: New York), 1973, p. 44.

example, in some places the literature seeks to reinterpret anthropomorphic descriptions of God while elsewhere it is content to leave well enough alone, or even use these descriptions to make its point. In the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael we find two passages which illustrate this. Exodus 20:11 states, "and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it," the midrash comments:

> And is He subject of a thing as weariness? Has it not been said: "The Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. 40.28)? And it says: "He giveth power to the faint" (ibid. v. 29). And it also says: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made," etc. (Ps. 33.6). How then can Scripture say: "And He rested on the seventh day?" It is simply this: God allowed it to be written about Him that He created His world in six days and rested, as it were, on the seventh. Now by the method of kal vahomer you must reason: If He, for whom there is no weariness, allowed it to be written that He created his world in six days and rested on the seventh, how much more should man, of whom it is written: "But man is born unto trouble" (Job 5.7), rest on the seventh day.[17]

God does not "tire." God is simply described as if He rested to teach humans how important it is to rest on the Sabbath.

But in its comment to Exodus 19:20, "The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai" the Mekilta itself uses anthropomorphic descriptions:

> I might understand this to mean upon the entire mountain, but it says: "To the top of the mount." One might think that the Glory actually descended from heaven and was transferred to Mount Sinai,

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[17]Tractate Bahodesh, Ch. 7, Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Jacob Z. Lauterbach, tr. (JPS: Philadelphia), Vol. 2, pp. 256.

> but Scripture says: "That I have talked with you from heaven" (Ex. 20.19). Scripture thus teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, bent down the lower heavens and the upper heavens of heaven, lowering them to the top of the mountain, and thus the Glory descended. He spread them upon Mount Sinai as a man who spreads the mattress upon the bed and speaks from the mattress...

God "bends" the heavens to talk to Israel as if from His bedroom.

In the first case, the Mekilta feels compelled to go beyond the description of a God who rests. In the second case, the text teaches us about the intimacy of revelation by describing God in human terms. Sometimes the midrash goes beyond the anthropomorphic description, sometimes it utilizes it, sometimes it ignores it, but never do we find a systematic presentation of how anthropomorphism should be understood.

Let us not pass over the lack of systematic theology in aggadic literature too quickly. Scholars trying to explain the nature of Rabbinic theology have gone to great lengths to describe the lack of systematic theology as a positive phenomenon and not a deficiency. Solomon Schechter, one of the first to inquire into the theology of the Rabbis, describes the "peculiar nature of old Rabbinic thought:"

> A great English writer has remarked "that the true health of a man is to have a soul without being aware of it; to be disposed of by impulses which he does not criticize." In a similar way the old Rabbis seem to have thought that the true health of a religion is to have a theology without being aware of it; and thus they hardly ever made - nor could they make - any attempt towards working their theology into a formal system, or giving us

> a full exposition of it. With God as a reality, Revelation as a fact, the Torah as a rule of life and the hope of Redemption as a most vivid expectation, they felt no need for formulating their dogmas into a creed, which, as was once remarked by a great theologian, is repeated not because we believe, but that we may believe.[18]

Schechter tells us that Rabbinic theology develops "spasmodically" or "impulsively." It responds to the needs of the moment. It need not develop systematically because it responds to the heartbeats of life. Lack of systematic organization is not a deficiency.

If it does not develop systematically, then how is it organized? Rabbinic theology is organized conceptually. Rabbinic concepts are central to the literature. They are like chapter "titles" which remain the same but whose essences change from text to text. MATTAN TORAH, for example, is viewed quite differently throughout the literature, but the concept itself is always an important category. Flexibility in the definition of concepts, which later Judaism inherited from the aggadah, is perhaps the most important aspect for understanding the unity of Rabbinic Judaism. This unity was preserved despite the fact that it spans nearly two thousand years. Rabbinic theology, therefore, can and should be studied conceptually.

We must now ask, why should we study these texts in relation to their historical contexts? Why not simply

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[18]Solomon Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud (Schocken: New York), 1961, pp. 11-12.

examine them to see what they say about the question of God? Theology is the study of how God relates to the world.[1*] Rabbinic theology is the way this relationship is conceptualized in the Rabbinic tradition. When we study these texts removed from their historical contexts, we are in danger of bringing our own, modern contexts, to bear. In order to understand the true significance of the theological development in these texts we have to attempt to place ourselves into their historical contexts.

What are we looking for in our analysis of aggadic literature? First, we want to identify and define the concepts of this fluid material. We begin by choosing our theme and examining its appropriateness. Second, we need to draw suitable boundaries. We choose suitable texts and examine the scholarly view on their dating. Then we examine the historical context in which they developed. This helps us to understand the concept's development. Finally, we pinpoint the sub-themes and tie them back into the overarching concept.

Identification and analysis of sub-themes is a tricky business. Theme development is often greatly influenced by the flow and development of the Bible. For example, chapter 8 of Tractate Bahodesh in the Mekilta, discusses the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." Naturally,

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[1*]Dagobert D. Runes, ed., Dictionary of Philosophy (Helix: New Jersey), 1983, p. 333.

this chapter emphasizes the importance of honoring parents. The question is, how much of the emphasis stems from the Biblical text and how much is added by the Rabbis? In this case, the Rabbis add their emphasis by paralleling honor of parents to honor of God. The importance of honoring parents is found in the plain reading of the Bible, but the amount of emphasis given through the aggadah teaches us of the Rabbinic attitude.

Problems in Studying Aggadic Literature

As stated in Chapter 1, the critical issue in Rabbinic research is the relation of text and time. Historical allusions, names of tradents, and first citations are not conclusive instruments with which we can date these texts. We attempt to fix the text's relative date of compilation by analyzing how one midrashic compilation relates to another structurally. Does text A draw from text B, does B draw from A, or do both draw from text C?[20]

There are controversies over the dating of the two texts we shall be considering. The traditions contained in the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael have been dated back to the 1st - 2nd century CE, but its date of compilation has been placed between the 3rd and 5th centuries: Albeck and Herr

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[20] "Midrash," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, Vol. 11, pp. 1508-09.

say that it is a late compilation, 3rd - 4th century; other scholars say that it is early, 1st - 2nd century. The traditions in the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana have been dated to the 3rd - 5th centuries, but its actual redaction has been placed in the 6th century. As can be seen from these two texts, discrepancies over date of compilation and traditions are not simply a matter of years, but of centuries.

We can partially avoid this problem if we examine these texts in relation to their epoch. Almost all scholars agree that the Mekilta is a production of Tannaitic Judaism, and the Pesikta, Amoraic. Therefore, we can examine the historical contexts of these epoch periods and speculate on how they might have shaped the concepts presented in the texts.

The Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael

The Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael is a Tannaitic compilation from Palestine. The Mekilta is one of the compilations we call Midreshei Halakhah. These are exegetic Tannaitic expositions on the Pentateuch (excluding Genesis) which deal with Jewish law, although there is much aggadah found in them as well. Hoffmann identified 4 differences among the Midreshei Halakhah which led him to develop the following typology:

Biblical Text	Type A (school of Ishmael)	Type B (school of Akiba)
Exodus	Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael	Mekilta of Rabbi S. b. Yochai
Leviticus	(fragments)	Sifra
Numbers	Sifrei	Sifrei Zuta
Deuteronomy	Mekilta / Midrash Tannaim	Sifrei Deuteronomy

Type A Midrash originated from the school of Rabbi Ishmael, Type B, from the school of Akiba. The differences in these texts include the following: 1. In the Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael and in Sifrei we find many statements of tannaim who were students of R. Ishmael. In Sifra and Sifrei Deuteronomy the pupils of Akiba are found more frequently. 2. Type A contain anonymous midrash quoted in the talmuds as tanna de-vei Ishmael. 3. Type A use the hermeneutical rules of Ishmael, Type B use those of Akiba. 4. Type A and Type B use different terminology.[21]

Albeck disputed aspects of Hoffmann's theory. Since 1-3 are not provable, all that can possibly said is that Type A contains more of Ishmael's school, and Type B, more of Akiba's. Consequently Albeck finds that there were not two schools, but two different redactions.[22] Ultimately, the only difference between these texts is language.

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[21] "Midreshei Halakhah," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, pp. 1521-23.

[22] ibid.

In the Mekilta material we shall examine, there are sayings attributed to Akiba. This supports Albeck's challenge of Hoffmann's typology, but the presence of this material does not preclude the two school theory: this material may have been placed here by Ishmaelite redactors who wanted to show how their thought differed. On the other hand, it may have been placed here by later redactors and thus, Albeck's challenge to Hoffmann stands: it is not possible to say definitely that one is completely Type A and the other, B.

Tannaitic Judaism

Now let us turn to a discussion of the historical context of Tannaitic Judaism. This period dates from Hillel in year 20 CE, to the redaction of the Mishnah, approximately 210. But to achieve a full understanding of Tannaitic Judaism we must begin even earlier, with the rise of the HAKHAMIM, 'the sages.'

The sages were scholars of Torah who were influential in the development of Jewish religious tradition, especially the HALAKHAH, Jewish law. HALAKHAH covered the gamut of life: everyday, religious, ceremonial, criminal and governmental law. The study of Torah attracted the best minds and leadership among the sages was given to the greatest scholars. Unlike the other influential groups of

society, the priesthood and the aristocracy, the hierarchy among the sages was non-hereditary.

The sages taught in the Temple and in BATTEI MIDRASH ('houses of study'). They gathered many students and disciples. Among the greatest sages were: Antigonus of Sochoh, Jose ben Johanan, Jose ben Joezer, Joshua ben Perahiah, Simeon ben Shetah, Judah ben Tabbai, Shemiah, Abtalion, and Hillel the Elder.

The sages were the chief group among the Pharisees. Pharisaic Judaism built the foundation upon which normative Judaism developed and so, the sages were very influential in the development of Rabbinic theology. In a sense, they formulated the "concepts" which we are isolating and analyzing. Their basic tenets included: absolute loyalty to Torah; the notion that the Torah included not only the Scriptures, or 'Written Torah,' but the HALAKHAH, the 'Oral Torah,' as well; the belief that Torah contains truth beyond its literal, or 'plain' reading; the belief in the immortality of the soul, the idea of reward and punishment for the individual, and the notion of eschatology. In the areas of ritual law, the Pharisees created a system which was based on the idea of ritual avoidance of impurity. This may be the origin of their Hebrew name: PERUSHIM, which comes from the Hebrew root "to separate."

Most of the nation came to view the HALAKHAH of the Pharisees as the self evident expression of the Jewish

religion. The Pharisee's main opponents were the Sadducees who drew their support, it seems, from the conservative element. They favored the 'Written' Torah and did not accept the interpretations of the sages. The Sadducees may have believed in the free will of the individual, and rejected Pharisaic beliefs in resurrection and angelology. Structurally, they were members of the upper class.[28]

By the time we get to the Tannaitic period, the leadership model established by the sages became the accepted model of Jewish leadership. During this period the traditions of the sages were codified into the Mishnah, which was the first major code of Jewish law and the foundation of the Talmud. Two major contextual events occurred during this period: the destruction of the Temple by Titus in the year 70 CE; and the failure of the Bar Kokhbah revolt with the fall of Betar in 135.

The war against Rome culminated with the fall of the Temple. The Temple with its two great institutions: the priesthood and the Sanhedrin were the foundation Jewish life. All other institutions (the synagogues, the houses of study, and the academies) in Israel and the diaspora, looked toward the Temple in Jerusalem for leadership. When the

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[28]Menahem Stern, A History of the Jewish People, H. H. Ben-Sasson, ed. (Harvard: Massachusetts), 1976, pp. 233-38.

Temple ceased to function, the Jewish nation entered a period of major spiritual disorientation.

It was the Rabbis, the heirs of the sages, who were successful in reorienting the people. The only major institution of Jewish life left after the destruction of the Temple were the houses of study which they operated. Thus, the Rabbis were in a perfect position to refocus the people. Never did they cease to hope for a reestablishment of Jewish hegemony in Palestine and the rebuilding of the Temple, but the focus now shifted to the people and nationhood. Torah, charity and repentance were offered as theological replacements for sacrifices and the Temple.

Very soon after the destruction, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai established a school at Jabneh. Here, ben Zakkai, and his successor, Rabban Gamaliel, created a new spiritual and political capital. In the new Sanhedrin, which they established, Rabbinic leadership was consolidated. No longer represented in the Sanhedrin were the priestly caste or the aristocracy. After the destruction of the Temple, the priesthood was no longer functional. Therefore, even though some of the Rabbis were of the priestly caste, they no longer derived any significant power from this social status. Among the leaders of the new Sanhedrin were: Rabbi

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Akiba.[24]

The rebuilding of the nation came to an abrupt halt with the failure of the Bar Kokhbah revolt in 135 CE. After the Emperor Hadrian reneged on his promise to allow the Jews to rebuild the Temple, sentiment against Rome began to rise. It culminated with the revolt of Bar Kokhbah. After some initial successes Rome got the upper hand and the revolt came to an end with the fall of Betar in 135. Many of the sages, most notably, Rabbi Akiba, supported the revolt. After 135, the schools were dismantled and those sages who were not captured and executed went into hiding.[25] Under these conditions the need to codify the tradition was felt.

This trend toward codification culminated with the final redaction of the Mishnah by Rabbi Judah, the Prince. R. Judah was the son of Simon ben Gamaliel, the head of the Sanhedrin just before the revolt. Judah was born after the revolt and received his education while his father was in hiding with sages from all the great schools. Thus, Judah became familiar with all the traditions and was in an excellent position to compile a very inclusive code. He was not the first to attempt such a collection, but his was the most comprehensive. He arranged his Mishnah by chapter and

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[24]Shmuel Safrai, A History of the Jewish People, H. H. Ben-Sasson, ed. (Harvard: Massachusetts), 1976, pp. 319-29.

[25]Ibid., pp. 332-335.

tractate according to subject. This work became the dividing line of Jewish literature: the end of the Tannaitic period and the beginning of the Amoraic. But the line is not as distinct in aggadah.[26] Thus, the Mekilta, although it was compiled in the Amoraic period, is considered a Tannaitic document because its traditions are Tannaitic.

The reorientation of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple necessitated more than just a codification of Jewish law. A rethinking of Jewish theology was also required: without a Temple and a nation, the people needed a new ideology which explained to them how God related to their world. In the aggadah, we find the theological concepts which the Rabbis employed in the reorientation of the people. Notions such as atonement, martyrdom, suffering and pacifism became emphasized as replacements for the Temple. These concepts gave meaning to the historical circumstances in which the people were living. Judaism was reorganized on the basis of these themes and the performance of the MITZVOT as a substitute for the Temple while awaiting the ultimate redemption.

It is out of this historical context that the Mekilta grew. The themes mentioned above are those developed in the Mekilta material on MATTAN TORAH. The section of the Mekilta which covers revelation is the commentary on Exodus 19 and 20, Tractate Bahodesh. It contains 11 chapters with short

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[26] Ibid., pp. 338-42.

variegated homilies and exegeses on different subjects. What follows is an analysis of this tractate, by chapter, identifying its development of theme.

Chapter 1 of Tractate Bahodesh[27] discusses Exodus 19:1-2,

> "On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day they entered the wilderness of Sinai. Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain."[28]

The themes developed by the midrash are TESHUBAH, 'repentance,' and the election of Israel.

The text begins with a discussion of the counting of time from significant events. "On the third new moon" indicates that the counting of time took place from the Exodus. Time was next counted from the construction of the Temple. After the Temple fell, they counted time from its destruction. Finally, time was not even counted from a Jewish event, but according to the reign of foreigners, like Darius and Nebuchadnezzar.[29] The midrash takes us on a journey through Jewish history from the Exodus to the exile.

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[27] Mekilta, pp. 192-201.

[28] All Bible translations, other than those contained within the translations of the midrashic compilations, are taken from Tanakh: A New Translation of THE HOLY SCRIPTURES according to the Traditional Hebrew Text (JPS: Philadelphia), 1985.

[29] Mekilta, p. 192.

The Exodus was the most important event in Jewish history until the building of the Temple. Apparently the Jewish people did not want to serve God in joy and abundance (Deut. 28:47), and so, because of their great sins, they were forced to serve Him in oppression.

The text continues with a story about Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai who sees a Jewish woman picking seeds out of the horse manure of an Arab.[80] Israel has no one to blame for her miserable condition but herself: 'You did not want to serve heaven, so now you serve the most inferior of nations.'[81]

After placing us into the context of destruction and exile, the chapter continues with a discussion of repentance. The question is, why did the Bible repeat that the children of Israel traveled from Rephidim to Sinai. It mentions this here: "Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai" and in Numbers 33:15, "They set out from Rephidim and encamped in the wilderness of Sinai." According to the midrash, this teaches that their leaving Rephidim doing TESHUBAH is connected to their coming to Sinai doing TESHUBAH. A number of midrashim follow, all of which reinforce the notion of TESHUBAH and God's

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[80]Based on the historical context, "Arab" makes little sense. The text would read better as "Roman."

[81]Mekilta, pp. 193-94.

forgiveness.[32] The theme is clear: destruction of the Temple was due to Israel's sins, but she can clear herself of these sins through repentance.

The chapter continues with the theme of the election of Israel through Torah. This is what makes Israel special. She was the only nation which took the Torah despite the fact that it was given in a wide-open, public place. When the other nations heard the sounds coming from Sinai, they came before Balaam[33] who reassured them saying: "May the Lord grant strength to His people; may the Lord bestow on His people wellbeing" (Psalms 29:11).

The midrash concludes with the notion that God gives rewards even before commands. God gives a double portion on the sixth day so that the Sabbath can be observed without hardship. Thus, the reward is given before the command.[34]

Chapter 2[35] discusses Exodus 19:3-9,

> and Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples.

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[32] Mekilta, pp. 195-97.

[33] Balaam may metaphorically represent Jesus, which would make this midrash polemical.

[34] Mekilta, pp. 198-200.

[35] Mekilta, pp. 201-09.

> Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to me kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel." Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to the Lord...

From these verses, the text develops the themes of the special nature of revelation and response to persecution.

Revelation was given in a specific way, this is why the Bible says: "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel..." The events leading up to revelation were also of a special nature. The words 'You have seen...' tell us that the Israelites did not learn about the Exodus from tradition, documents, or witnesses, but experienced it themselves. The protective aspects of revelation are brought out through the discussion of the words 'how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me.' What is the special quality that an eagle has, the midrash asks? The eagle places her children on her back because she does not fear from other birds, only from man who might shoot them from the ground. So the text tells us that God placed Israel on His wings to protect them from the Egyptians.[26]

The chapter also presents a few responses to persecution. In his discussion of the words, "a kingdom of priests," Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Rabbi Jose the Galilean,

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[26] Mekilta, pp. 201-02.

asks the question: How do you know that each Israelite will have offspring as numerous as the Egyptians? Because it says in Psalm 45:17, "Your sons will succeed your ancestors." The midrash gives comfort to a persecuted people. Rabbi Eliezer tells his contemporaries that Israel shall be even more numerous than her ancestors despite the fact that she is being persecuted now. But the question is asked, perhaps this means that they will still live the life of a despised people? The midrash tells us that this will not be the case, for Psalm 45 continues: "you will appoint them princes throughout the land." Perhaps this does not mean "princes," but traveling merchants? No, for it says 'a kingdom.' You might think that this means a military kingdom? No, for the text says 'a kingdom of priests.' Perhaps this means non-practicing priests? No, for it says 'a holy nation.'[37] It is interesting to note the direction taken by the text: it assures Israel that there will be return to a kingdom in which priests will practice, i.e. the Temple will be rebuilt. At the same time, it states that this will not be a military state! This could be a pacifistic response to the disastrous results of the revolts which occurred during the Tannaitic time periods, or simply an accommodation to the reality of Roman rule.

The chapter then returns and concludes with the discussion of the meaning of revelation. All the people

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[37] Mekilta, pp. 204-06.

heard this revelation exactly as it was given, first-word-first, last-word-last. Israel responded in one voice and without any hypocrisy. The roles of Moses and the elders are also emphasized. Moses brought the answer of the people back to God, even though God already knew. This gives honor to Moses. Furthermore, in the words of Rabbi Jehudah, God told Moses that they should converse, and God would agree with him, so that the people would know how great Moses was that even God agreed with him.[88]

Chapter 3[89] discusses Exodus 19:10-17,

> and the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai. You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying 'Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death: no hand shall touch him, but he shall be either stoned or shot; beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Be ready on the third day: do not go near a woman." On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn; and all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.

This chapter continues the description of the qualities of

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[88] Mekilta, p. 207.

[89] Mekilta, pp. 210-19.

Torah. The text offers Torah as a response to Israel's persecution. In this chapter we also find some halakhic material concerning ritual purity[40] and the death penalty.[41]

The actual revelation was specific and special. It occurred on the sixth day of the week. On the fourth and the fifth days Moses prepared the people. He built an altar and made the people immerse. Commenting on the words, "in the sight of all the people" the midrash teaches that there were no blind people among the Israelites on Sinai, and that this vision was greater than the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah. Every Israelite was present, for if even one person was missing, the Torah could not have been given.[42]

Chapter 4[43] comments on Exodus 19:18-20:1,

> Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. The Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to the Lord to gaze, lest many of them perish. The priests also, who come near the Lord, must stay pure, lest the Lord break out against them." But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, for you warned us saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain

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[40] Mekilta, p. 214.

[41] Mekilta, p. 214

[42] Mekilta, pp. 210-12.

[43] Mekilta, pp. 220-29.

> and sanctify it.'" So the Lord said to him, "Go down, and come back together with Aaron; but let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them." And Moses went down to the people and spoke to them. God spoke all these words, saying:

This chapter places limits on revelation. Based on the verse, "now Mount Sinai was all in smoke," the midrash teaches that Torah is described as fire. Fire has both protective and dangerous qualities: it warms, but if one gets too close, it burns. The midrash then takes up the issue of literalism. When the Bible says "the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln," does it mean that the mountain was really burning like a stove? The midrash teaches that the Bible speaks in metaphoric terms so humans can [illegible]. These midrashim limit the revelation described in the Bible.[44]

The chapter continues with a midrash which emphasizes the election of Israel. The other mountains ask why Sinai was chosen over them. The response is Psalm 68:16-17, "O majestic mountain, Mount Bashan, O jagged mountain, Mount Bashan; why so hostile, O jagged mountains, toward the mountain God desired as His dwelling? The Lord shall abide there forever." This text may very well represent a response to the oppression felt by Israel. Why is she the object of hostility? Because she is God's chosen. She is perfect while

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[44] Mekilta, p. 220-21.

the others are jagged.[45]

One of the most interesting aspects of this chapter is the importance of the status given to the ZEKENIM, the elders. The Bible text reads, "The priests also, who come near the Lord, must stay pure, lest the Lord break out against them." The midrash teaches that the priests were not in the same class as the people, since it already mentions in verse 19, "Go to the people and sanctify them." Then, the midrash reads into this verse the elders: the word 'also' in the verse, "The priests also," teach us that the elders were there too.[46] The midrash goes to great lengths to read the elders back into the text. Who are the 'elders' to which the midrash is referring? Most likely they were the sages and rabbis. During the Tannaitic period the rabbis inherited the mantle of leadership. It is only natural that they would want to find themselves present at this most special moment in Jewish history. Their authority in a society where priests were still found might be questioned if they could not.

The chapter concludes with the theme of the miraculous nature of revelation. The words, "God spoke all these words, saying:" are understood to mean that God spoke all these words in one utterance. This, of course, is impossible for man to do. The actual listing of the decalogue, is just

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[45] Mekilta, p. 221.

[46] Mekilta, p. 225.

Moses' filling in of the details.[47]

Chapter 5[48] discusses the first commandment, Exodus 20:2, "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage." This chapter develops the correlative notions that MATTAN TORAH is equivalent to God's coronation, and the importance of monotheism. Once again we find the text discussing the election of Israel,[49] the important position of the elders, the fire-like quality of Torah,[50] and the negative view of the nations.[51] The chapter ends with a message of consolation for Israel, whose ultimate end will be redemption.

God's declaration, "I the Lord am your God," is viewed as His enthronement. All the salvific acts leading up to this revelation were just preparatory. The parable is given that when a king comes into a land he cannot just declare his kingship. First, he must perform acts for the people. Therefore, God split the sea, brought the Israelites out of Egypt, gave them manna, the well, the quail, and battled against the Amalekites. Then the people accepted Him as

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[47] Mekilta, p. 229.

[48] Mekilta, pp. 229-37.

[49] Mekilta, pp. 232-35.

[50] Mekilta, p. 233.

[51] Mekilta, p. 236.

King.[52]

The different manifestations of God are discussed. The midrash teaches that God appeared in many ways: at the sea, like a warrior; and at Mount Sinai, like an elder, full of mercy. But despite the different manifestations of God, there is only one God.[53] This is the introduction to the theme of monotheism. The rabbis give themselves authority by teaching that God appears on Sinai as an elder. God appears on Sinai disguised as the authors of our midrash, the elders.

The theme of monotheism is the subject of the next few midrashim. This text, "I the Lord am your God," is an answer to the sects who say there are two powers in the world.[54] The gnostics believed that the world was run by two powers: God, who represents the good; and the Demiurge, who represents evil. The Mekilta provides a number of proof texts in which God speaks about Himself in the first person and describes Himself with different adjectives. For example, Deuteronomy 32:39, "See, then, that I, I am He; there is no god beside Me. I deal death and give life; I wounded and I will heal..." Despite the multiple description, there is only one God. As Rabbi Nathan teaches,

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[52]Mekilta, p. 229.

[53]Mekilta, p. 231.

[54]Mekilta, p. 231.

when God said "I" no one stood up and disputed."[55]

The chapter concludes on a note of consolation. Were the Israelites the slaves of slaves, or the slaves of kings? They were the slaves of kings, because we read in Deut. 7:8, "rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt."[56] This verse begins, "but it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that the Lord freed you with a mighty hand..." In other words, Israel might be held captive, but God will keep His promise because of His love for Israel.

Chapter 6 discusses Exodus 20:3-6,

> You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

As might be expected, the main theme emphasized by this chapter is disdain for idolatry. The acceptance of the first commandment, "I the Lord am your God," is the reason for the second command, "You shall have no other gods besides me." Once the children of Israel accept His rule, they must

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[55] Mekilta, p. 231.

[56] Mekilta, p. 237.

accept His decrees."[87]

A number of midrashim follow which develop the evil nature of idolatry. The words, ELOHIM ACHERIM, "other gods," do not imply that other deities actually exist, rather these words teach us that ACHERIM "others," call them gods. Also, belief in them delays (M'ACHER) goodness from coming into the world. Furthermore, they make their worshipers into "strangers," ACHERIM; and, the idols themselves are "strangers" to those who worship them since they cannot help them."[88]

At one point in the discussion, we find an interesting section in which Rabban Gamaliel debates with a philosopher. The philosopher poses the question to Rabban Gamaliel: If God is jealous of these 'other gods' does this not prove that they really have power, since a warrior is only jealous of other warriors? Gamaliel responds: if a man called his dog by his father's name, who would the father be angry with, the son or the dog? The philosopher then proposes that some idols have power, since in a particular town where there was a fire, the temple in which the idols were kept did not burn down. Gamaliel responds: when a king goes out to battle with whom does he fight, the living or the dead? Finally the philosopher asks why God does not destroy them if they have no power? Gamaliel responds that idol

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[87] Mekilta, p. 237.

[88] Mekilta, p. 239.

worshipers pray to so many things: the sun, the moon, the stars, constellations, mountains, springs, glens, even man; what should God do, destroy the whole earth? As it says in Zephaniah 1:2-3, "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord? I will sweep away man and beast? I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea?"[39]

The chapter concludes with a powerful midrash on the theme of suffering which may also be a response to Christianity. The midrash asks what the words, "those who love Me (L'OHAVAI) and keep My commandments" imply. Rabbi Nathan teaches that these words are talking about the Israelites who give their lives for the commandments. Why are they killed? Because they circumcise their sons. Why are they burned to death? Because they read the Torah. Why are they crucified? Because they eat the Matzah. Why are they whipped? Because they shake the lulav. As it says in Zechariah 13:7, "from being beaten in the homes of my friends (BEIT M'AHAVAI)," these wounds were received for loving God.[40] The parallels here are clear: circumcision, which is done with a knife, and death; study of Torah, which has been described as fire, and being burned; eating of Matzah, and crucifixion; shaking the lulav, which is long and thin like a strap, and being whipped. This text is a

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[39] Mekilta, pp. 244-45.

[40] Mekilta, p. 247.

clear response to suffering at the hands of foreigners and may also be an attack on Christian symbolism.

Chapter 7[61] comments on Exodus 20:7-11,

> You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name. Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work- you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

The midrash once again takes up the theme of TESHUBAH, repentance. The discussion of cases in which God clears those who swear falsely introduces the theme. The four levels of atonement are discussed: TESHUBAH, the Day of Atonement, suffering, and death.[62]

The chapter continues with a discussion of contradictions found in the Bible. This is spurred by the contradiction between the way the command to keep the Sabbath is presented in the two enumerations of the decalogue. Here, in Exodus, we read ZACHOR, "remember" the Sabbath day; while in Deuteronomy 5:11, we read SHAMOR, "guard" it. The midrash then lists a number of other contradictions: Ex. 31:14 (do not profane sabbath) and Nu.

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[61] Mekilta, pp. 248-56.

[62] Mekilta, pp. 248-51.

28:19 (sacrifice two lambs) Lev. 18:6 (do not uncover your brother's wife) and Deut. 25:5 (marry the Yebammah); Deut. 28:11 (Shatnez) and Deut. 22:12 (put tassels on you garments). The midrashic response is that God said all of these verses in one utterance, something impossible for men to do. As proof, the text offers Jeremiah 23:29 "Behold My word is like fire-declares the Lord-and like a hammer that shatters rock." God's word can be two things: a fire and a hammer.[43] Metaphorically it is quite beautiful, both fire and a hammer have positive and negative qualities. A fire is warming, but it can burn. A hammer can shatter rock, but it is needed for construction.

Another midrash on "remember the Sabbath" teaches that Israel does not count time like the other nations, but counts for the Sabbath: day 1, day 2, ..., day 6, Sabbath.[44] Although cryptic, this could reflect the attitude toward Roman influence on the Jewish nation. Rabbi Yitzchak, in whose name this verse is cited, may be speaking to a Jewish people who are being culturally pressed to conform to imperial standards, such as the use of the Roman calendar.

Chapter 8 comments on Exodus 20:12-14,

> Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is

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[43] Mekilta. p. 252; see also chapter 8, "Thou shalt not covet," p. 264.

[44] Mekilta, p. 252.

> assigning to you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

In its discussion of the commandment to honor parents the midrash resorts to parallelism. Honor and fear of parents are placed on the same level as honor and fear of God.[45] The commandments against murder, adultery, theft, and false witnessing are contrasted to other places in the Bible where these prohibitions are mentioned together with their punishment. The midrash teaches that the prohibitions of the Decalogue are the warnings, while these other verses describe the punishments. Thus, there is no extraneous repetition.[46]

Chapter 9[47] comments on Exodus 20:15-19,

> All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. "You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray." So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. The Lord said to Moses: Thus shall you say to

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[45] Mekilta, pp. 257-59.

[46] Mekilta, pp. 260-61.

[47] Mekilta, pp. 266-76.

> the Israelites: You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens:

The chapter discusses the uniqueness of the revelation at Sinai: The people witnessed the decalogue, each according to his own ability. The people were made perfect, there were no blind, no deaf, no lame, and no fools among them.[69]

Once again we find the harshness of Roman rule being discussed. Abraham had been shown the Exodus and the four kingdoms of affliction which would rule over Israel: Babylonia, Media, Greece, and Rome.[69]

In this chapter, the theme of Moses' meekness is developed. The text tells us that Moses was worthy of entering the thick cloud to encounter God on account of his meekness.[70] The proof is Isaiah 57:15, "...I dwell on high, in holiness; Yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit..." and 61:1, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble..." 66:2, "All this was made by My hand ... Yet to such a one I look: to the poor and brokenhearted." The opposite of meekness is haughtiness. We are told that haughtiness is equivalent to idolatry and causes the Shekinah to withdraw from the world.[71] The issue

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[69] Mekilta, pp. 266-68.

[69] Mekilta, pp. 268-9.

[70] Mekilta, pp. 273-74.

[71] Mekilta, pp. 273-74.

of Moses' meekness may be a polemic against Christianity which taught that Jesus was the 'good news' to the poor and contrite.[73]

Chapter 10[74] comments on Exodus 20:20, "With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold." As expected this chapter discusses idolatry, but in addition, there is a particularly poignant exchange on the positive nature of chastisement. It begins with our verse, "with Me, therefore, you shall not make for yourselves any gods of gold." Israel treats her God differently. Other people curse their gods when something bad happens, but Israel does not. She gives thanks when receiving the good and the bad. Chastisement is good because this is how Israel knows she belongs to God (Deut. 8:5). Through them Israel receives Torah, the land, and the world to come (Prov. 1:2, Ps. 94:12, Deut. 8:5). This is followed by a homily where Rabbis Tarphon, Joshua, Eleazer b. Azariah and Akiba go to visit the ailing Rabbi Eliezer. Akiba's words are the most valued by Rabbi Eliezer. His message was "precious is chastisement."[75]

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[73]See Matthew 11:5 and Luke 7:22.

[74]Mekilta, pp. 276-84.

[75]Mekilta, pp. 277-82.

The final chapter of Tractate Bahodesh[75] covers Exodus 20:21-23,

> Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you. And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them. Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.

This chapter is a fitting conclusion to the text, for it develops the theme of response to the Temple's destruction. The discussion begins by examining what God meant when He told Moses, "make for Me an altar of earth," and very quickly shifts to a discussion of the altar in the Temple and the sacrifices offered there.[76]

Within the framework of its historical context, the Mekilta is responding to the destruction of the Temple. Sacrifices, atonement, and the pronouncement of God's name can only take place there. Tannaitic Judaism was forced to respond theologically to this crisis. It responded by declaring the surviving institutions established by the sages in the days of the Temple to be as valued as the Temple itself:

> "In Every Place," etc. Where I reveal Myself to you, that is, in the Temple. Hence they said: The Tetragrammaton is not to be pronounced outside of the Temple. - R. Eliezer b. Jacob says: If you come to my house I will come to your house, but if

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[75] Mekilta, Chapter 11, pp. 284-92.

[76] Mekilta, pp. 284-87.

> you do not come to my house I will not come to your house. The place my heart loveth, thither my feet lead me. - In connection with this passage the sages said: Wherever ten persons assemble in a synagogue the Shekinah is with them, as it is said: "God standeth in the congregation of God" (Ps. 82:1). And how do we know that He is also with three people holding court? It says: "In the midst of the judges He judgeth" (ibid.). And how do we know that He is also with two? It is said: "Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with another," (Mal. 3:16). And how do we know that He is even with one? It is said: "In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come unto thee and bless thee."[77]

This text begins by identifying our verse with the Temple, and proceeds to identify it with other places that God makes Himself known: the synagogue, the court, and ultimately, the individual. The Temple, while very important, can be replaced, at least temporarily, by the institutions of Tannaitic Judaism.

The emphasis which is given to the discussion of the types of sacrifices and how the altar should be built leads us to conclude that the redactors of the Mekilta believed that the Temple would be rebuilt. It is interesting to note their concern with the issue of pacifism. The Temple will be rebuilt, but not through the waging of war. The verse, "for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them," is read, "for by wielding your sword upon it you have profaned them." Commenting on this verse, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai taught: just as it says in Deuteronomy 27:6, "you must build the altar of the Lord your God of unhewn (SHLEMOT) stones,"

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[77]Mekilta, p. 287.

we know that these stones exist to establish peace (SHALOM).[78] This pacifistic response may be a result of necessity: the Rabbis had no choice but to seek accommodation with Rome.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the fact that the Sanhedrin was established alongside the altar. This is derived from the juxtaposition of the verse: "that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it," with the very next verse which begins Exodus Chapter 21: "These are the rules that you shall set before them..."[79] The chapter concludes with a parallel of the Sanhedrin and the altar of the Temple. While the Temple no longer exists, the Sanhedrin would serve as the focus of the nation.

By way of summary, let us recognize that much of the Mekilta material is a response to, and emphasis of, what appears in the Biblical text. But we must also recognize that some significant emphases have been added. Notions such as the idea that the Sinaitic revelation represents the enthronement of God, the importance of honoring parents, the negative view toward idolatry, and the importance of monotheism, are clearly Biblically based, but ideas of TESHUBAH, the positive view toward chastisement, the

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[78] Mekilta, p. 290.

[79] Mekilta, p. 292.

importance of pacifism, and the important role played by the elders, are emphases read into the text by the Rabbis.

The Mekilta developed its theologic statements in response to the historic context of Tannaitic Judaism. Monotheism was emphasized in defense of Judaism where competing religious systems, especially Gnosticism, threatened to introduce their ideas into Judaism. The role of the elders, and the importance Tannaitic institutions were a response to the dismantling of the priesthood and the Temple.

Theology, it will be recalled, is the question of God and the examination of how God relates to the world. How can the election of Israel be explained to a generation that has experienced the loss of autonomy in their promised homeland, and the destruction of their Temple? How does one communicate with God when the conduit of the Temple has been destroyed? The midrash responds to these historic circumstances: Repentance can bring the people back to God; Chastisement is good, for it assures Israel of God's love and allows her to express her devotion. Chastisement and atonement become replacements for the sacrifices and the Temple. Through these the people continue to live with God. Chastisement and TESHUBAH are themes which were developed to explain to Tannaitic Jews how God related to their world and how they had to relate to God.

We shall next turn to a discussion of a text representative of Amoraic Judaism, the Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. As we did with the Mekilta, we shall examine the structure and dating of the text, some of the modern scholarship on the text, an overview of the historical context in which its traditions grew and then examine the "piska" which deals with MATTAN TORAH.

The Pesikta de-Rab Kahana

The Pesikta de-Rab Kahana is an Amoraic compilation of Palestinian origin. Most scholars place its date of compilation somewhere in the 5th-6th century. The Pesikta is a homiletic midrash which was arranged to accompany Torah portions and Haftarah readings on holidays and special sabbaths.[oo] Zunz proved the existence of the Pesikta of Rab Kahana in 1832. With no manuscripts to go by, he showed that the references in the Yalkut and the Arukh of Rabbi Natan did not refer to the known Pesikta texts: the Pesikta Rabbati, or the Pesikta Zutrata. By examining the differences between these two texts with the Yalkut and the Arukh, Zunz proved that there was a separate text which he called the Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. His ordering of the chapters began with Rosh HaShanah and followed the calendar.

[oo]"Pesikta De-Rav Kehana," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, Vol. 13, pp. 333-34.

He proposed that its date of compilation occurred in the 8th century.[81] In 1868 Solomon Buber published an edition of the Pesikta of Rav Kahana based on 4 manuscripts. The publication of Buber's edition confirmed Zunz's theory. However, Buber's edition began with Hanukkah and he placed the date of compilation in the 3rd century.[82] Modern scholarship places traditions contained in the Pesikta as dating back to the 4th-5th century, although its redaction may have occurred as late as the 6th century.

The chapter in the Pesikta which deals with revelation is chapter 12. This chapter was read on Shavuot, the holiday which commemorates the revelation on Sinai. It contains comments on verses from Exodus 19 and the first commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20.

Amoraic Judaism

We shall now turn to a discussion of the historical context of Amoraic Judaism. This epic period begins with the conclusion of the Mishnah and ends with the rise of the Savoraim, roughly from 210 to 640. During this period, the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmuds were arranged and edited. Jewish life during these four centuries was affected

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[81] Zunz, Ha'Drashot B'Yisrael (Bialik: Jerusalem), 1974, pp. 81-107.

[82] "Pesikta," pp. 333-34.

by the decline of Hellenic Roman rule and the beginning of Christian Rome. The period ends with the Arab conquests. In the Jewish life, we see a decline in the hegemony of Palestine over the diaspora and a worsening political and economic situation in Palestine.

The period from 235 to 284 is marked by a decline in Roman rule. This period, which spans from the end of the Severan dynasty, to the beginning of the Diocletian reign, was a era of crisis and confusion throughout the empire. The Roman administrative system caused hardship throughout the realm.[88]

The two important institutions of Jewish life were the Sanhedrin and the Patriarchate. The Patriarch was the official head of Palestinian Jewry but with the beginning of the Amoraic time period the Sanhedrin established itself as a separate power. Already in days of Rabban Gamaliel (220-230) and Rabbi Judah (230-270), the Patriarch no longer presided over the Sanhedrin. During the first and second generations of Amoraim, power was shared by the Patriarchate and the Sanhedrin. After the fall of the Temple, ordination of rabbis was placed in the hands of the Sanhedrin but during the patriarchate of Rabbi Judah the Prince, this authority was placed in the hands of the Patriarch. After Judah, joint approval was required. During the first generation of Amoraim, the Sanhedrin, the academy, and the

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[88]Safrai, pp. 343-44.

Patriarchate were located Sepphoris but by the second generation, the Sanhedrin and academy moved to Tiberias.[84]

In 284, Diocletian became emperor and stabilized Roman rule. In 313, Constantine recognized Christianity as the official religion of the empire. Palestinian Jewry was now forced to wage a two front battle. When the empire was pagan, the Jews had to defend themselves only in the political arena because paganism, by its very nature, was tolerant of other religions. Christianity, on the other hand, was monotheistic and therefore not tolerant of other belief systems. Judaism was in an especially awkward position vis-a-vis Christianity since Christianity viewed itself as the true heir to the Jewish heritage. Throughout this period we find a movement toward systematic persecution and degradation of Judaism as a result of the Church's influence. Still, the Church never proscribed Judaism allowing it to exist in a degraded condition to serve as a "witness" to the truth of Christianity. For these reasons, it sponsored anti-Jewish legislation and attempts to convert Jews to Christianity.[85]

It was this persecution and degradation which led to an abolition of the Patriarchate and other significant changes in Jewish life. During the reigns of Theodosius I, Honorius, Arcadius, and Theodosius II till the end of the

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[84] Ibid., pp. 345-47.

[85] Ibid., pp. 349-53.

Patriarchate, 379-425, imperial attitude toward the Jews worsened. After the brief rule of Julian the Hellene (360-63), who took steps against Christianity, the Church consolidated its position and became less tolerant toward Hellenes and 'heretics.'[66]

In this climate of increasing intolerance the Patriarchate was abolished. The Patriarchate had been strong throughout the 4th century, but early in the 5th century steps were taken by the empire to insure its deterioration. The last Nasi, Rabbi Gamaliel, was accused of breaking imperial law by building new synagogues and allowing the circumcision of slaves. He was subsequently demoted in legal status. When he died the authorities refused to acknowledge his successor. Partially, the Church wanted to abolish this institution because it claimed a tie to the royal Davidic line.[67]

The period from the abolition of the Patriarchate to the Arab conquest was difficult for the Jewish populace of Palestine. The population dwindled, and their legal status deteriorated. The Sanhedrin continued to operate, but it was very restricted. The beginning of the 5th century was marked by anti-Jewish legislation and riots of Christian fanatics.

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[66] Ibid., pp. 354-55.

[67] Ibid., p. 355.

After a respite in the second half of the century, Christian militancy renewed under Justinian (527-65).[••]

Out of this historical context aggadic literature, separate from halakhic material, emerged. As stated, prior to the Amoraic period aggadah was placed right alongside the halakhah, as is the case with the Mishnah and the Talmuds. Now, in the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries we find collections of aggadah independent from halakhah. This homiletic material was used in the synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals. Some scholars view the development of aggadic literature as an example of the intellectual decline of Palestinian Jewry. But this notion has been strongly contended by others who view the aggadah as a rich and creative literature. Clearly, the material shows generations of development and widespread knowledge among the populace of Hebrew and Bible.[••]

The development of aggadah also fits the historical situation. With the deterioration of central authority, people could no longer be compelled to follow the halakhah. The leadership resorted to aggadah to convince them why they should continue to feel bound by the tradition. The aggadah does not seek to compel, it strives to convince.

Now let us focus our discussion on the Pesikta de-Rab Kehana. Two overarching themes are present in its treatment

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[••] Ibid., pp. 357-63.

[••] Ibid., pp. 360-61.

of MATTAN TORAH: the notion of covenant, and a response to life under foreign domination. Both of these are a reaction to the historic context in which Palestinian Jewry found itself. In response to the dominance and challenge of Christianity, the Amoraim felt the need to defend their position as God's covenanted partner. A partnership which, in their opinion, had not been superseded by Christianity. Hence it is not surprising to find the theme of covenant playing a central role in its treatment of MATTAN TORAH.

In addition to the importance of covenant, which is an indirect response to foreign domination, we also find direct responses: a negative view of the nations, a belief that God will ultimately visit His retribution upon Rome, and polemical material against Christianity.

The Pesikta develops themes in a different way than the Mekilta. The Pesikta, as a homiletic midrash, can deal with any theme as long as it can connect back to the text at hand, while the Mekilta, an exegetic midrash, was more or less bound by the Biblical text. The Pesikta is free to develop themes at will: it begins with a [illegible] and develops in whatever direction it desires not bound by a text to which it must thoroughly explicate. Exegetic material contains short homilies on variegated topics because it is bound to a complete text but homiletic material can develop and shape its themes freely.

The chapter of the Pesikta which deals with MATTAN TORAH is Piska 12.[90] It begins with a discussion of the history of revelation from Adam to the present. Adam received 7 commandments, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Judah, each received one more. Israel, however, rose above all the rest; she received 613. The text discusses the qualities of Moses over Adam and Noah. It further explains that the prophets were parabolized in the feminine because, like a woman in a husband - wife relationship, they were not afraid to ask for what Israel needed. The section ends with the notion that when Israel reads this portion every year (on Shavuot) it is as if she stands at Sinai.[91]

Some interesting questions come to mind immediately: Why does the text relate revelation back to Adam? and why does it skip over Isaac in the chain of revelation? One possible answer is that this text is responding to other people's claims that they were the true heirs of the Biblical tradition. The Jewish people were not in a position to deny other religions' claims, she could only respond that her's was the best. Therefore, the paragraph begins with Adam, who is the progenitor of all people and concludes with a discussion of why Moses' revelation was greater. Isaac may

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[90] Pesikta de-Rab Kehana, ed. Buber, p. 100b-110b; english edition, Braude and Kapstein, tr. (JPS: Philadelphia), 1975, pp. 223-52. Paragraphs numbers coincide with the order of the paragraphs as they appear in the Buber edition.

[91] Ibid., pp. 100b-101a.

have been skipped over simply because there was no revelation of law to Isaac, or because he was considered to be a pre-Jesus paradigm in Christian circles. Isaac was similar to Jesus because he was bound and almost sacrificed by his father Abraham. In some midrashic traditions, it is proposed that he was sacrificed and then resurrected.[92] By playing down the role of Isaac, with his parallel to Jesus, the text is also playing down the importance of Jesus and Christianity's claim to revelation.

The Pesikta goes into great detail describing various aspects of the covenant established through the revelation of Torah. In paragraph 2, we see that it is protective, for God gave it because of his anxiety about the safety of the Israelites.[93]

Paragraph 3[94] continues the development of the theme of covenant. The text begins with the pericope, Song of Songs 2:5, "Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love." This verse is an excellent choice, for the very next verse continues: "His left hand was under my head, His right arm embraced me." The 'right hand' is understood by the midrash to mean Torah, and the use of fruit reminds us of the first paragraph's discussion

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[92]Shalom Spiegel, The Last Trial (Pantheon: NY), 1967, pp. 3-8.

[93]ibid., paragraph 2, p. 101a-b.

[94]ibid., p. 101b-102a.

of why Moses is better than Adam. Unlike Moses, Adam did not know how to use God's fruit.

The paragraph discusses the positive aspects of martyrdom. What are the raisin cakes (ASSISIYOT)? They are the fires (ESHOT) of Abraham (who, according to Genesis Rabbah, 42:4, was thrown into the fire after rejecting idolatry), and Hananiah, Michael, and Azariah (a reference to their survival of martyrdom in Daniel 3:19). The midrash then gives another interpretation: they are the 'well thought out' (M'OSASOT) halakhot.

The text continues its discussion of the text: "refresh me with apples," the Torah's scent is as pleasing as apple blossoms; "for I am faint with love," Rabbi Isaac teaches: when money is plentiful people want to hear legal discussions, but when money is scarce and people are feeling oppressed, they would rather listen to aggadah.

The paragraph concludes with a parable in which God is described as a king whose son is sick and the teacher wants him to go back to school. The king will not let him go until the boy is healed. That is why God waited three months, fed the people manna and quail, made them drink from the well, and ultimately gave them Torah. All these things, the manna, the quail, the well, and the Torah are viewed by the midrash as miraculous sources of sustenance. They all lead up to the revelation of Torah.

Paragraph 4 discusses the numerical value of the things described in Hosea 3:2, "Then I hired her for fifteen [shekels of] silver, a homer of barley, and a lethech of barley." A homer of barley equals 30; a lethech equals 15; altogether that makes 45. The text asks, what happened to the other five which would make 50 to equal the fifty days of the Omer between Passover and Shavuot (the time between redemption and revelation)? They are found in the continuation of the Hosea verse: "and I stipulated with her, "In return, you are to go a long time (lit. "many days") without either fornicating or marrying; even I [shall not cohabit] with you." In this verse, "many" is taken to mean three; and "days" is taken to mean two; five altogether. The Hosea text makes the "waiting period" of the Omer into a chance for the people to 'cleanse' themselves. When they proved they would not adulterate, God gives the Torah.[95]

In paragraph 5, we find that Torah is described as something new. It was given "just yesterday." Exodus 19:1 does not read 'on that day,' but "on this day."[96] Note the tension: in the first midrash, revelation was described as beginning with Adam, thus it is very old; but this midrash teaches that it is always new. This may be polemical against Christian claims that the Church represents the "new" covenant.

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[95] Ibid., p. 102a.

[96] ibid. p. 102a; p. 105a; p. 107a.

In paragraph 6, Torah is compared to a weapon which 'establishes' its master. It is a double edged sword which gives life in this world and the world to come. It is also compared to spiced wine, apparently a popular drink during this period.[97] These motifs betray the influence of a Roman cultural environment.

Paragraph 8 comments on Ecclesiastes 3:1 "To everything there is a season..." The revelation on Sinai was the culmination of a chain of smaller revelations to Adam, Noah and his sons, and Abraham. We see there is a set time for revelation even though the process is ongoing.[98] What is very interesting about this midrash is that it takes us from a very protective environment, the Garden of Eden, to a less protective environment, the Ark, and finally to the least protective environment, circumcision. The covenant becomes less protective but equally, if not more, salvific as time goes on.

Paragraphs 10, 11 and 13 all develop a negative view toward Roman rule. In paragraph 10 we read about man's ultimate punishment. Why does a man's soul recoil when he smells brimstone? Because he knows that this is how he is going to be punished, Ps. 11:6 "He will rain down upon the wicked blazing coals and sulfur; a scorching wind shall be their lot." The paragraph then discusses the 'double cup'

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[97] Ibid., p. 102a-b.

[98] Ibid., 102b.

that the Romans drink at the bath. Today, they drink this poterion, a medicinal drink, but tomorrow they will receive a double portion of scalding wind.[99]

Torah is metaphorically described as a tree in paragraph 11. Song 2:3 "Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the youths. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my mouth." In Rabbi Huna's exposition of this text, Torah is the apple tree and Israel sits in its shade. Didn't the rest of the nations have the opportunity to sit under its protective shade? They ran away because its shade was not good enough.[100] This midrash may very well be polemical since Song of Songs 2:3 is a key verse in Christian Patristic literature.

This negative view of Christian Rome is contrasted once again to Israel's covenant with God. This relation is expressed through descriptions of God, Torah and Israel in familial relation. In the Pesikta, the relation between God and Israel is not only described as a marriage, but also as a parent-child relationship. Paragraph 12, after utilizing the marriage motif, compares God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt to a king who rescues his son from kidnappers.[101]

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[99] ibid., p. 103a-b.

[100] ibid., p. 103b.

[101] ibid., pp. 103b-104a.

In paragraph 13, God is compared to a king who wants to marry a woman. Before he betroths her he must do some things for her. When he sees her naked, he clothes her (the cloud and the tabernacle); at the sea, he crosses her over; captured, he saves her (the Amalekites). Another version of the deeds is offered: he sees her at the baker, and gives her bread (manna); he sees her at the inn, and gives her spiced wine (the well); he sees her at the bird crammer who fattens birds for sale, and gives her birds (quail); he sees her at the dried fruit dealer, and gives her fruit (the land of Israel). These images describe the Sinai experience as the courtship and betrothal of God and Israel.

We also find the marriage motif describing the betrothal of Israel and Torah. God is described as a king who wants to marry off his daughter (Torah) but had proclaimed that people from one country couldn't marry people from another, when he desired to find a groom for his daughter, he relaxed the decree. Ps. 115:16 teaches, "The heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He gave over to man." Yet in Exodus 19:3,20 we read, "and Moses went up to God ... The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai." God, who at first had separated heaven and earth, gave something of heaven to the earth through Torah.[102]

In paragraph 15 we find a discussion of the number "three." This has its textual basis in the first verse of

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[102]Ibid., pp. 104a-105a; see also paragraphs 12 and 19.

Exodus 19, "In the third month..." The midrash teaches the importance of the number three: the Torah is made up of three parts, there are three patriarchs, the third tribe is Levi (Moses' tribe), and Torah was revealed in the third month.[103] The midrash continues with numerous examples. This may be a response to the Christian belief in the Trinity.

Paragraph 16 tells us that God gave the Torah to Israel because the Israelites did not fight among themselves. The Torah is a document of peace, and so it could not be given to Israelites until they were unified.[104]

In paragraph 18 we find a well constructed midrash which teaches that Torah was revealed to strengthen Israel against sin. The pericope text is Ecclesiastes 10:18, "Through slothfulness the ceiling sags, through lazy hands (RAPPU YADAYIM) the house caves in." This is compared to Rephidim, the place from which the children of Israel departed on their way to Sinai. God was forced to give the Torah because of the people's carelessness: Because of their slothfulness, the ceiling (i.e. the heavens) sagged (God came down on Sinai); because of their lazy hands, the house caved in (i.e. Torah was given). The proof text reinforces this: Judges 5:4, "O Lord, when You came forth from Seir, advanced from the country of Edom, the earth trembled; the

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[103] Ibid., p. 105a.

[104] Ibid., p. 105b.

heavens dripped, Yea, the clouds dripped water."[105] The scene is Sinai, the earth trembling, and the rafter's of heaven opening with the cloud dropping its water: Torah. Note the different view of rain here than that which will fall on Rome described in paragraph 10.

Paragraph 19 betrays a negative view of other nations. The midrash teaches that Jethro, Moses' father in law and a Midianite priest, was not allowed to be present during revelation. The textual basis for this is the end of Exodus 18, where Moses sends him away. The proof text offered by the midrash is Proverbs 14:10, "The heart alone knows its bitterness, and no outsider can share in its joy." Jethro was sent away, we are told, because he was dwelling in comfort while the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. Since he did not share in their bitterness, he could not participate in their reward.[106] Look at the importance given to suffering. Without suffering, Israel would not have merited Torah. Since Jethro did not experience suffering in Egypt, he could not experience Torah on Sinai.

Paragraph 20 presents the notion that through Torah, the people are renewed. Thus, revelation is a foretaste of the world to come. God "renewed" the Israelites because they had to be perfect before betrothing them to Torah. The midrash teaches: If a king wanted to marry off his son, but

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[105] Ibid., p. 106a.

[106] Ibid., p. 106a.

did not have new silver service and chests to give him, he would polish old ones. That is what God did. Before he married Torah and Israel, He corrected any defects in the Israelites: those who were blind, were given sight; those who were deaf, could hear once again; those who were lame, were given the ability to walk. The proof text points to the Messianic time (Is. 35:5-6); Torah is therefore, a taste of what the world to come will be like.[107]

The Pesikta continues with some negative passages toward Rome and Christianity. Paragraph 21 asks why God waited till the third month before revealing the Torah. Because the third month is the month of the constellation, TE'UMIM, "twins." The text is referring to Esau, Jacob's twin. God waited till the third month to see if he would do TESHUBAH. This way, we are told, the nations could never complain that they would have followed the Torah too, if they had the chance. For they had the chance. 'Esau' refers to Christian Rome, Israel's 'twin,' who claims to supersede her.

The paragraph continues with a discussion of why Torah was given in the wilderness. This metaphorically refers to the nations. Israel continues to receive Torah in the "wilderness," but now the wilderness is life among the

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[107] Ibid., p. 106b.

nations. By living Torah in this desert Israel has the potential for receiving reward.[108]

Paragraph 22 contains a polemic against Christianity. In Jeremiah 31:31 we read, "See, a time is coming - declares the Lord - when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah." The Church claimed to be the institution of that new covenant. This paragraph, after comparing the newness of Torah to the world to come, offers a comment on Jeremiah 31:33,

> But such shall be the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days - declares the Lord: I will put My Teaching (TORATI) into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

In this world people study Torah, but forget; in the world to come, God will teach Israel Torah and no one will forget.[109] Torah is the vehicle of the "new" covenant. The Pesikta emphasizes that Torah is "new" and "renewing." This is contrary to Christian claims that Jesus, and thus, the church, was the embodiment of the promise of Jeremiah.

Paragraph 24 discusses Psalm 50:7, "Pay heed, My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will arraign you. I am God, your God." The theme developed is how Israel differs from the other nations. She is the only one who received the commandments (HA'DIBROT), as it says, "Pay

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[108] Ibid., p. 107a.

[109] Ibid., p. 107a.

heed, My people, and I will speak (V'ADABER)." She is the only nation who is called "My people." She is the only one who witnesses to God, for their is no witnessing (EIDAH) without hearing (SHMUAH), as it says, "Pay heed (SHIM'AH) ...and I will arraign you (V'AIDAH)." God is her master and judge, her patron, as it says, "I am God, your God." Which brings us back to Exodus 20:2, "I" (ANOCHI).[110]

Paragraph 25 is a midrash on the first word of the decalogue, "I" (ANOCHI). It is explained as a notarikon, an abbreviation, for: "I Myself wrote it and gave it;" "The writing has been given, pleasant are its words;" or "I will be thy light, thy crown, thy grace."[111] This midrash discusses some qualities of Torah.

Paragraph 26 begins with a discussion of the word, "I," and then moves into a discussion of monotheism. God appears at the sea as a warrior, at Sinai as a scribe teaching Torah, and in the days of Daniel as an elder. Just because God appeared in many different guises, Israel should not think that there are many different Gods. The paragraph ends, "for it is pleasant for Torah to come out of the mouths of elders."[112] Once again, we see the importance of the "elders," the teachers of Torah. It is not surprising to

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[110]Ibid., p. 108b.

[111]Ibid., p. 109a; Braude, p. 247.

[112]Ibid., p. 109a.

find those who taught Torah describing God as doing what they do, since that is how they derived their authority.

The last paragraph, 27, continues this theme of monotheism. God appeared in a stern face, like a man teaching his son Bible; an indifferent face, like a man teaching Mishnah; an inviting face, like a man teaching Talmud; and a joyous face, like a man teaching aggadah; but there is still, only one God. God is also described as an iconic statue (note the Roman cultural influence), a thousand people will look at it differently, but there is only one statue. The "command" (DIBBUR), was heard according to each persons ability, like the manna which tasted different to the babies, the young, and the elders.

The midrash concludes on a note of hope for the final redemption: Israel is told not to think because she hears many voices there are many Gods. Rather,

> '"I the Lord am your God;" In this world, Israel was redeemed from Egypt, and put into servitude to Babylonia; and from Babylonia, to Persia; and from Persia, to Greece; and from Greece, to Rome; and from Rome, the Holy One will redeem them, and they will never be put into servitude again. As it says in Isaiah 45:17, "But Israel has won through the Lord triumph everlasting. You shall not be shamed or disgraced in all the ages to come."

In summary, it is clear that the Pesikta de-Rab Kahana is representative of Amoraic Judaism. It develops two main themes: the centrality of the covenant, and responses to foreign domination. The covenant is established through the

Torah and is everlasting, despite claims to the contrary. The revelation at Sinai, for which only Israel was present, represents her election above the nations. The text is apologetic and polemical against Christian claims. Furthermore, it expresses a negative view of the nations. It's hope is for ultimate redemption from, and retribution against, Rome.

Conclusion:
Some Aspects of Aggadic Literature on MATTAN TORAH

We have thoroughly examined two texts which have sections dealing with MATTAN TORAH. In the Mekilta, Sinai represents the enthronement of God and the election of Israel. This episode allows the text to develop a number of sub-themes, most notably: those of TESHUBAH, chastisement, pacifism, honoring parents, and the rejection of idolatry. The text betrays some of the important contributions of the Tannaim in transforming Judaism from religion based on a Temple cult and priesthood to a religion based on Rabbinic notions.

The Pesikta emphasizes the covenantal relationship between Israel and God. This takes two forms: direct emphasis of the covenant through positive descriptions of that relationship; and, indirect emphasis through negative descriptions of the other nations and polemics against

Christianity and Rome. The text exemplifies the historical situation of Amoraic Judaism.

We can now attempt to make some general conclusions regarding the aggadic view on MATTAN TORAH. The aggadah views the revelatory experience at Sinai as integral to the covenant between Israel and God. The Sinai experience is simultaneously viewed as the enthronement of God, and the election of Israel. Related to these notions, it represents the marriage of God to Israel, and Israel to Torah. It makes God into Israel's king, judge, father, husband, and patron.

The aggadah preserves the Biblical concept of MATTAN TORAH, but it imbues it with new form and meaning. Clearly, the Biblical story portrayed Sinai as the culmination of redemption and the enthronement of God. The Bible emphasized disdain for idolatry, and stressed the extraordinary nature of revelation. These emphases are maintained and accentuated in the aggadah. The aggadah also uses the Biblical text as an opportunity to express its own ideas: In the Mekilta, Israel continues to stand at Sinai through TESHUBAH, chastisement and martyrdom; in the Pesikta, the observance of Shavuot is the mechanism through which Israel can once again stand at Sinai and renew the covenant.

In the next chapter, we shall examine some of the medieval responses to MATTAN TORAH. We will look at the lives of Rabbi Solomon b. Isaac, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, and Rabbi Moses b. Nachman. After examining the contexts in

which they lived, we will study their commentaries' to Exodus 19 and 20. We shall conclude by comparing and contrasting the theological development in the aggadic and medieval literatures.

Chapter 4: MATTAN TORAH in Medieval Literature

We have determined that aggadic literature develops conceptually. In the aggadic texts we analyzed, MATTAN TORAH came to symbolize the correlative notions of the enthronement of God and the election of Israel. Numerous sub-concepts generated from it: TESHUBAH, suffering, and chastisements. These sub-concepts were created from the synthesis of the literature's historical context and the Biblical tradition.

The Rabbis built upon Biblical notions to explain their experience of the world. The merger of Biblical text and Rabbinic thought produced the great literary works of

Judaism: the Mishnah, the Talmuds, and the Aggadah. The theology in these texts developed "impulsively." It responded to the stimulae of life. Thus, it dealt with problems as they presented themselves and not systematically. The underlying assumption in these texts is that all truth can be found in the Biblical text. The Rabbis felt no need to look elsewhere to describe the way the world worked.

Medieval Jews built upon this structure, but for some, the Bible and the Rabbinic literature were no longer viewed as the only sources of truth. In medieval thought we find three basic approaches: the literal, the philosophical, and the mystical. These lead to the establishment of three different "schools," each attempting to bring the Bible into harmony with their approach. Yet, in spite of their differences, medieval Judaism did not break apart. The conceptual nature of the theology it inherited allowed different approaches to be maintained within Judaism. Despite an ideological tension great enough to cause schisms like the Maimonidean controversies,[113] the unity of Judaism was preserved. The conceptual nature of Rabbinic theology was in part responsible for this unity.

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[113]Controversies which erupted over Maimonides' use of allegory. The Maimonists were in favor of this approach, while the anti-Maimonists claimed it denied the truth of the Torah.

Medieval Jewish history begins with the Moslem conquests of the Roman empire in 633 and lasts until the Sabbatean crisis in the 17th century. For our study, we are only concerned with the period up to the 13th century.

The Moslem conquest brought most of the Jewish population of the world under the rule of the Caliphate. Political circumstance presented the opportunity for Jewish self government through the office of the Exilarch. On the whole, life under Islamic rule was better than the Christian rule that preceded it. Economcally, Jews were permitted to engage in all types of business. Christians and Jews lived in a degraded, yet relatively secure, condition. "The Covenant of Omar" stated that they were "Peoples of the Book," which gave them a special status.

Yet despite this "degraded" status we find great intellectual growth among the Jews as a result of their interaction with other cultures. The intellectual climate of the Moslem empire was that of a renewed Hellenism. In this environment, Jewish scholars came into contact once again with Greek philosophic notions. Not since the days of Philo, had Jewish thinkers attempted to harmonize Torah's truth with Greek philosophy. The goal of both Jewish and Moslem thinkers was to bring reason and revelation into agreement.[114]

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[114]Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, A History of the Jewish People, pp. 385-88.

In the areas which remained under Christian control: Spain, Italy, and Franco-Germany, increasing pressure was placed on the Jews. In Visigoth Spain, from the 6th century until the Moslem conquest in 711, there were persecutions and attempts to convert the Jews by force. Elsewhere, conditions also worsened. In the first half on the 9th century the situation improved under the rule of Emperor Louis the Pious, but by the latter half of the 9th century and throughout the 10th and 11th centuries, pressure on the Jews increased once again. Christianity became the faith of the masses and the Jews were viewed as the only remaining antagonists to the 'true faith.'[11a]

Papal attempts to consolidate Church influence eventually succeeded in producing the First Crusade in 1096. One of the targets of the crusaders was the Jews. In the months April through June, 1096, riots broke out against the Jewish communities in the Rhine basin.[11e]

In this context of pressure and persecution, Ashkenazic Judaism was formed. It had its roots in Southern Italy, but fully blossomed in the 10th and 11th century in Western Europe, north of the Pyrenees. Its leadership structure was based on the Rabbinic model, but reflected Christian influence. Unlike the Jews under the Caliphate, whose leadership was based on a rigid hierarchy combined with

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[11a] Ibid., pp. 409-13

[11e] Ibid., pp. 4133-18.

academic knowledge and central authority in the Yeshiva, Ashkenazic Jewry was based mostly on Torah knowledge and local authority. Unlike the Babylonian model, Rabbinic leadership served without material reward or great public fanfare. The importance of Torah study was of central concern from the very beginnings of Ashkenazic Jewry.[117] Unlike their coreligionists under Islamic rule, study of secular subjects was not at all emphasized.

The three approaches found in medieval Jewish theology developed in response to the political and ideological climate of the Middle Ages. In Ashkenaz, we see the emergence of the talmudists. In the orient, we find the emergence of the philosophical school. In Spain, we find the emergence of the mystical school.

Representative of the talmudists is Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, known as Rashi, who wrote in the 11th century, and the Tosafists, whose work appeared in the 12th and 13th. Rashi wrote the premier commentary to both the Bible and the Talmud. The Tosaphists wrote additional notes to talmudic commentaries which came before them, particularly that of Rashi. The talmudists were concerned with thoroughly elucidating the traditions contained in the halakhah and the aggadah. They attempted to solve contradictions in the Bible and the Talmud, and show how the events in the Bible were "literally" true. They used exegesis, grammatical

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[117] Ibid., pp. 458-60.

explanations, and sometimes even resorted to aggadah in order to show that the Bible was true. This approach resulted partly from their context. Ashkenazic Jewry was thoroughly grounded in Biblical and Talmudic education but disdained from study of 'foreign sciences,' like philosophy. Religious life was all encompassing and its study was the only subject given serious consideration by scholars. The pervasive role of religion in society was shaped by the cultural environment: not only in the Jewish community were religion and religious study all encompassing but in the Christian world as well.

The literal approach of Ashkenaz in Bible commentary may also have been a direct response to Christian pressure. The Church used interpretation of scripture to claim that Christianity was the true religion. The talmudists, by concentrating on the literal meaning of the Biblical text and using midrash sparingly, were able to disprove Christian claims.

In the orient, we find the emergence of the philosophic approach. Representative of this method is the Biblical commentary of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra in the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th century, and the philosophic writings of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides, in the 12th century. These men were influenced by Hellenic thought which they encountered through Moslem culture. In the lands of the Caliphate, Jews engaged in secular as well as religious

studies. The synthesis of religion and revelation was the imperative. Maimonides, in his introduction to the Moreh Nebukhim, "The Guide of the Perplexed," stated that he was writing for those who had studied philosophy and were perplexed because of the contradictions between reason and religion.[118] The philosophers used allegory to prove that the Bible's "real" truth lies in its rationality. Biblical stories, the philosophers said, allegorically teach truths which any rational person could determine.

In Spain we find the emergence of a third approach, that of the mystics. Spain was ruled by the Christians until the Arab conquest in 711. During the years prior to the conquest, Spanish Jewry was influenced by its Christian environment. After 711, Moslem culture was influential until the Christian reconquest in the 11th century.[119] Under these conditions we understand the development of the mystical approach. Mysticism is a synthesis of philosophy and religion: couched in philosophic language, it attempts to prove that the truths of religion are primary. While the philosophic approach attempted to prove that the stories of religion were nothing but allegory, the mystics attempted to

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[118]Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, Shlomo Pines, tr. (University of Chicago: Chicago), 1963, p. 5; Rabbinic edition: p. 4a.

[119]"Spain," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, Vol. 15, pp. 222-27.

prove that these stories really happened, but had symbolic significance.

Representative of the mystical school of Spain is Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, known as Nachmanides or the Ramban and Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon both of whom lived in the 13th century. Ramban filled his Torah commentary with symbolic comments which connect the Bible to the Mystic Tree. Moses de Leon is most likely the author of the Zohar, the most influential Kabbalistic text.[120]

The difference between the talmudists, philosophers and mystics is found in their approach, not in their conclusion. All three concluded that Judaism was a religion of truth, but all three disagreed on what that truth was and how it should be interpreted. The Talmudists said that Judaism should be interpreted strictly from Biblical and Rabbinic sources. The philosophers said that philosophy was the basis of truth, and that "revelation" teaches truth that anyone with the proper intellectual training could intuit. The mystics said that Judaism contained "symbolic" truth which can only be understood by those trained in the secrets of mysticism.

The halakhic system did not divide the three: all agreed that Judaism was to be based on MITZVOT. Yet it is not surprising to find that they all disagreed over the

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[120]"Zohar," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, Vol. 16, pp. 1209-11.

reasons for the commandments. The talmudists bridged the gap caused by the contradiction between Divine will and human freedom by emphasizing the complete obedience of man. Thus, commandments were given so man could know the Divine will and follow God's ways. The philosophers were not satisfied with a view of the world in which authority was placed in the hands of heaven alone. Man, they said, participates in the Universal Soul through rationalism. The commandments were "given" in order make man fully rational. The philosopher truly understands the "reasons" (i.e. the rationality) for the halakhah. The path to eternal life for the philosopher is not obedience to God through performance of MITZVOT, but activation of the intellect through philosophic training. The mystics add to the Rabbinic tradition a different dimension: SOD, the mystical "secret." According to the mystic, each and every MITZVAH has an internal force which kindles the hidden Divine lights of the S'PHEROT, the mystical tree. The halakhah becomes a way to prepare both mind and body for the ascent up the tree to encounter God. The mystic endeavors to penetrate the mystical light hidden in each command, each verse, each word, and even each letter of the tradition.[121]

Now let us turn our attention to representatives of the three schools of thought and see how they understood MATTAN

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[121]Chaim Hanoch, HARAMBAN K'HOKER U'MKUBAL (Torah L'Am: Jerusalem), 1978, pp. 13-16.

TORAH. We shall examine the Biblical commentaries of Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra on Exodus 19 and 20 to determine what significance the concept of revelation of Torah held for them. These men developed their systems of thought upon both the Biblical and aggadic tradition which we have examined, but they add something new to the text: a systematic approach.

Unlike the study of aggadic literature, we have little problem dating the medieval material: we know who these men were, when they lived, their biographies, and the historical circumstances which affected their lives. Therefore, it shall be much easier to make generalizations about how they may have been influenced by their historical contexts. Now we shall look at their biographies and commentaries to see how they fit into the puzzle of medieval Jewish thought.

Rashi: His Life and Commentary on Exodus 19 and 20

The flowering of Ashkenaz took place in northern France during the 10th and 11th centuries. Here the mystical trends of southern Italy were toned down but not completely discarded. Franco-German Jewish society was a merchant society deeply involved in Torah study and ruled by halakhah. Out of Ashkenaz came the first, almost complete, commentary on the Talmud and the Bible, the commentary of Rashi. These have remained the basis of traditional Jewish

Biblical and Talmud study to this very day.[122]

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, known as Rashi, was born in 1040 in Troyes, France. Troyes was the capital of Champagne and thus attracted many merchants. It is not surprising then that Rashi was well educated and acquainted with numerous aspects of medieval life. After his marriage, he went to Mainz where he studied with Jacob ben Yakar and Isaac ben Judah. From there, he moved to Worms where he studied with Isaac ben Eleazar Halevy. At the age of 25, he returned to Troyes, but maintained close contact with his teachers. All three of his daughters married prominent scholars. He founded a school which soon came to rival those at Mainz and Worms.[123] During Rashi's life the pressure upon Jews living under Christian rule intensified. Rashi survived the First Crusade in 1096, but many of his friends and relatives were killed.[124] Rashi died in the year 1105.

In his Biblical commentary, Rashi employed a method of exegesis which could be characterized as a compromise between pshat and drash. His goal was to give a literal explanation of the Biblical text. He therefore favored the

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[122]"History," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, Vol. 8, p. 667.

[123]"Rashi," Encyclopedia Judaica (Keter: Jerusalem), 1972, Vol. 13, p. 1558.

[124]"Rashi," Encyclopedia Judaica; and, Ben Sasson, A History of the Jewish People (Harvard: Cambridge), 1976, pp. 414-18.

pshat, the "plain" reading, but in cases where he could not explain the text using this method, he resorted to the drash.[125] The midrashic explanations he employed were always the closest to the plain reading as possible, that is, they did not go far afield in their explanation of the Biblical text. Most of his comments, whether pshat or drash, are taken from Rabbinic sources. The rest are mostly grammatical explanations and philological comments.[126] Rashi's goal was to "explain" the Biblical text through the use of Rabbinic sources. This is the essence of the literal approach. Now we shall turn our attention to his commentary on Exodus 19 and 20 to ascertain his definition of MATTAN TORAH.

Rashi closely adheres to Rabbinic notions of what MATTAN TORAH means. Unlike the philosophers and the mystics, he did not want to uncover the Bible's hidden meaning by applying a foreign system to it. Rather, Rashi goes through the text, verse by verse, word for word, and presents the comments of the sages which most clearly bring out the literal meaning. At times he presents some midrash: either when he cannot explain the text literally or when the drash does not stray too far from the plain meaning.

In chapters 19 and 20 of Exodus, most of Rashi's commentary is taken from the Mekilta, but he also takes from

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[125]Ezra Zion Melamed, Bible Commentators (Magnes: Jerusalem), 1975, pp. 359-66.

[126]"Rashi."

various tractates of Talmud and other midrashic compilations. Rashi's method is closest to the aggadic style: it develops impulsively. This is because Rashi collects what he feels is the best Rabbinic explanation of the problem in the text. Thus, he synthesizes the Rabbinic literature and the Biblical text.

The following excerpts from Rashi's commentary will show how Rashi drew from Rabbinic sources what he felt were the simplest explanations of the Biblical text. The first six examples present notions which we encountered in our examination of the Mekilta and the Pesikta.

> 1. Exodus 19:1 "On that very day:" The text should have begun "on this day," why does it say "on that very day?" So that the words of Torah should be new to you, as if it was just given to you today.[127]
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> 2. 19:2 "Having journeyed from Rephidim:" Why does it repeat the explanation of where they were coming from since it already says that they were encamped in Rephidim and therefore that is where they were coming from? This connects their leaving Rephidim to their arrival at the Sinai desert, just like their arrival at Sinai was with TESHUBAH, so their leaving Rephidim was with TESHUBAH.[128]
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> 3. 19:4 "On eagle's wings," like an eagle who carries its young on its wings. Other birds carry their young between their feet because they fear birds that fly above them. But the eagle fears only man who could shoot an arrow at it [and does not fear other birds], since no bird can fly higher than it. Therefore, it puts its young on its wings, saying, 'better the arrow should strike me than my children.' God did likewise: Ex. 14:19-20, "The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army now moved and followed

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[127]See above, p. 67; Pesikta, p. 102a, 105a, 107a; All translations of Rashi's commentary are my own.

[128]See above, p. 35; Mekilta, pp. 193-94.

behind them; and the pillar of cloud shifted from in front of them and took up a place behind them, and it came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel..." and even though the Egyptians were shooting arrows and sharp stones at them, the cloud was deflecting them.[129]

4. 19:17 "Moses led the people out of the camp toward God," This teaches that God's presence went out to meet them like a bridegroom goes to receive his bride, as it says Deut. 33:2, "The Lord came from Sinai," but it does not say, "to Sinai."[130]

5. 20:1 "all these things saying," This teaches that the Holy One said the decalogue in one utterance, something which is impossible for a man to do. If this is true, then why does it continue: "I the Lord am your God ... You shall have no other gods besides Me?" This teaches that God went back and explained each and every command.[131]

6. 20:8 "Remember the sabbath day," "Remember" and "keep" (Deut. 5:12) were said in one utterance. Just like Ex. 31:14, "You shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy for you. He who profanes it shall be put to death," and Num. 28:9-10, "On the sabbath day: two yearling lambs without blemish ... a burnt offering for every sabbath ..." Also, Deut 22:11, "You shall not wear cloth combining wool and linen" and v. 12 "You shall make tassels ..." Also, Lev. 18:16, "Do not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife" and Deut. 25:5, "Her husband's brother shall unite with her." [All these were said in one utterance,] as it says, Ps. 62:12 "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard."[132]

All these comments, gleaned from Aggadic literature, are presented to explain the Biblical text according to the best (i.e. the most literal) Rabbinic comment.

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[129]See above, p. 37; Mekilta, pp. 201-02.

[130]See above, pp. 69-70; Pesikta, pp. 104a-105a.

[131]See above, pp. 48-49; Mekilta, p. 252.

[132]Ibid.

In addition to connecting the Biblical text to the aggadic literature, we see that Rashi also makes connections to the Talmud:

> 1. Ex. 19:13 "He shall be cast down," From here we learn that they should be thrown down into a stoning pit which is two lengths high. Sanhedrin 45a.
>
> 2. 20:13 "You shall not steal," This means stealing people, (i.e. kidnapping) because stealing money is prohibited in Lev. 19:11, "You shall not steal." How do we know this is correct and that it is not the other way around, that Ex. 20:13 prohibits stealing money and Lev. 19:11 prohibits kidnapping? You know from the context, since (the other prohibitions in Ex. 20:13) "You shall not murder," and "You shall not commit adultery" both require the death penalty to be given by the court, so here, "You shall not steal" requires the death penalty by the court. Sanhedrin 86a.

Rashi offers numerous grammatical explanations (#1, below) and often explains Biblical words by offering quotes from other sections of the Bible (#2) or from the Aramaic translation (#3). Sometimes, Rashi translates difficult words into French for the reader (#4). Unlike the other two commentators we shall examine, rarely does he digress to give his opinion. Rather, he allows his selection of source material, whether Rabbinic, Biblical, or translation, to speak for him:

> 1. Ex. 19:18 ASHAN KULO, "was all smoke," ASHAN is not a noun since the SHIN is appointed with a PATACH, but it is a PA'AL verb, like SHAMAR, SHAM'AH, that is why Onkelos translated "it was all smoking" and not "it was full of smoke" ...
>
> 2. 19:5 SEGULAH means "a treasured possession" like Eccles. 2:8, "treasures of kings," i.e. expensive utensils and precious stones that kings store. So you are My treasured possession among all the nations. But do not say that you alone are Mine and I have no one else other than you: I have others so that you should

be known as My favorite. As it says, Ex. 19:5, "Indeed, all the earth is mine," but in my eyes, they are worthless.

3. 19:4 "how I bore you," Onkelos translates it "and I made you travel," revising the text in order to show proper respect to God.

4. 20:23 "Do not ascend My altar by steps," When you build the ascent to the altar, do not make it step by step, "echelons" in French, but make it one part and sloping.

As stated, Rashi prefers the pshat to the drash in his explanations. He provides aggadic material that closely adheres to the simple meaning. When he does give the drash, he often mentions the pshat first:

1. Ex. 19:17 B'TACHTIT HA'HAR, according to its pshat this means "at the foot of the mountain." And according to the drash, it means that the mountain was ripped out of the ground and placed over them like a roof. Shabbat 88a.

2. 20:2 "who brought you out of the land of Egypt," the Exodus alone was sufficient for you to serve Me. Another interpretation: Because He appeared to them at the sea as a warrior doing battle now revealed Himself to them as an elder full of mercy ... just because I change My appearance, do not say that there are two powers: I am He who took you out of Egypt and crossed you over the sea.

It is clear that Rashi's goal is to explain the problems in the Biblical text through Rabbinic sources. Most of his comments attempt to give the simplest explanation possible, the pshat. He does at times use aggadic explanations which are not pshat, but bring us further away from the plain, or literal, explanation. These midrashic explanations are usually introduced as such, or are given with other explanations.

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac was writing his commentary for the learned masses of Ashkenaz who were well acquainted with the sources. He synthesized the Bible and Rabbinic literature in a concise and easy to use commentary. Rashi's objective was to bring the text to life through Talmudic and aggadic sources alone, not because these were the only ones at his disposal, but because in his Ashkenazic context there was no reason to do otherwise.

Rashi creates no concept of MATTAN TORAH independent from the aggadic notions he presents. His methodology is to create a synthesis of the best (i.e. simplest) Rabbinic explanations. He does not provide a systematic theology of Judaism, rather, his theology is closest to that of the aggadic material which presents theological "statements" but not systematic thought. As we found in the aggadic literature these statements are offered impulsively and not taken to their ultimate conclusions. For example, he treats the problem of anthropomorphism in a few comments in Exodus 19 and 20. Rashi presents material which shows that he is clearly aware of the problem posed by anthropomorphic descriptions of God:

> 1. see above, Rashi's comment on Ex. 19:4, where he offers Onkelos' translation and states that he translates this so in order to "order to show proper respect to God."
>
> 2. 19:8 "And Moses brought back the people's words to the Lord,"... Is it true that Moses had to bring it back to God? No, it is just that the text teaches you proper manners through Moses. Moses did not say: 'since

> He who sent me already knows the answer I do not have to bring it back to Him. Shabbat 87a.
>
> 3. 19:18 "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln," ... What does "kiln" teach? To make it understandable to the human ear - it gives humankind a known symbol, just like: Hos. 11:10, "The Lord will roar like a lion." After all, who gave strength to the lion to roar in the first place if not God? Yet, the text compares Him to a lion? This is because we have to compare Him to his creation in order to understand Him. Another example of this is Ezek. 43:2, "with a roar like the roar of mighty waters, was the Presence of the God of Israel." Who gave a roar to the waters if not Him? Yet we compare Him to His creation? To make Him understandable.
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> 4. 20:11 "and He rested on the seventh day," Is it possible for Him to write about Himself that He rested? This is to teach man a fortiori that even though he may still be toiling in his work when the sabbath comes that he must rest.

Clearly Rashi and the aggadah from which he drew his comments knew of the problems posed by anthropomorphic statements describing God. Yet, instead of developing a systematic approach to this problem, these Biblical texts are used as opportunities to make theologic statements concerning how the world operates.

This is not the case with the philosophers. They recognized the problems inherent in the descriptions of the God of the Bible. Thus, they sought to explain these statements (and the entire Bible by extension) as allegorical. Descriptions of God, if possible at all, are only possible in the negative. Any description of God implies limits. Any Divine action implies change of will. The synthesis of philosophy and Judaism introduced something

new, an approach in which a foreign system, namely Hellenic philosophy, was synthesized with the Biblical text. Now we shall turn to the commentary of a man who represents the philosophic school: Abraham ibn Ezra.

Abraham ibn Ezra: His Life and Commentary on Exodus 19 and 20

The reintroduction and penetration of Greek philosophy into Judaism occurred in geographic areas which were influenced by Islamic society and culture. Its influences can be seen in the rationalist tendencies of medieval Jewish philosophic writings and commentaries. The geonim of the 10th and 11th century appealed to rationalism in their works. They attempted to bridge the gap between the two truths of their society: rationalism and revelation. Saadiah Gaon, in his Book of Beliefs and Opinions explained Jewish theory and practice on systematic rational grounds. He argued that man must use his rational intellect as well as accumulated tradition (i.e. Talmudic argument).[133]

Out of this cultural context came Abraham ibn Ezra. From the little we know of his life scholars have been able to piece together somewhat of a biography. Ibn Ezra was born in Tudela, Spain, in 1089. In the first part of his life, he lived in Spain, and may have travelled to North Africa seeking the company of scholars like Judah Halevi. It is

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[133]"History," p. 667.

possible that he married Halevi's daughter and had five children.[134]

The first fifty years of the 12th century were promising years for scholars and poets in Spain and North Africa. During this time the area was ruled by the Almorabin who highly valued scholarship and were tolerant of other religions. But in 122, a new sect appeared in Islam led by Abdallah Almohadi. This new group was zealous for Islam and intolerant of other religions. As time went on the sect's power increased until it became the dominant Islamic force. Many Jews were given the choice of death or conversion: many fled to Rome or Castile, and Ibn Ezra too, was forced to flee.[135]

From 1140 till his death in 1164, Ibn Ezra lived the life of a wanderer. First, he travelled to Rome, where he made contact with important families. He may have taught the son of Rabbi Natan, the author of the Arukh. It seems he made both friends and enemies in Rome because in 1147 he was forced to move. It is possible that the extreme nature of his views may have contributed to his wandering. He lived in Beziers and then moved to Narbonna. At first he went to Northern Italy, then in 1148, he moved to Provence in France

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[134]"Abraham ibn Ezra," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 8, p. 1163.

[135]Melamed, p. 519.

where he befriended Jacob Tam. In 1158, he moved to London and in 1161 back to Narbonna.[136]

Ibn Ezra's writings were influenced by his life experience. He wrote numerous works, only some of which have come down to us. As a result of his incessant wandering, most of these works were short treatises and not methodically arranged. He began writing his Biblical commentary in Rome and continued working on it throughout his wandering.[137] His philosophy is expressed in scattered hints throughout his commentary. He used an elusive style and at times tantalized the reader with the phrase: "and the intelligent will understand." It is likely that he wanted to reveal his extreme views only to the select few who had training in philosophy. Because of the scattered nature of his presentation it is not possible to piece together a consistent system but it seems clear that he was essentially a neoplatonist and heavily influenced by Solomon ibn Gabirol.[138]

Neoplatonism is the system developed by Plotinus (205-270) and his pupils. It is based on the notion that reality consists of a series of emanations from the One, eternal source of being. The first emanation is Nous, which is mind or intelligence, and the further down you go in emanation,

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[136] Ibid.

[137] "Abraham ibn Ezra."

[138] Ibid., p. 1168.

the more multiplication, imperfection, and matter you find. Man bridges the gap between spirit and matter. Therefore he has the potential to unite with the Universal Soul and achieve salvation.[139]

Let us now turn to Ibn Ezra's commentary to Exodus 19 and 20.[140] It shall become quite clear that he is representative of the philosophic school of thought. Not only do we find the Neoplatonic theory of emanations contained in his presentation of MATTAN TORAH, but also we find a systematic denial of anthropomorphism through allegorical method. In addition, he provides thoroughly rational explanations for the commandments and their rewards.

Ibn Ezra begins his commentary to Exodus 20 with a rather long introduction[141] in which he describes the problems that anyone who looks at this chapter rationally would encounter. Many people say that the first two commands were the only ones given by God because they are in the first person. Others question if the first commandment, "I the Lord am your God..." is a command at all. They ask: can

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[139]"Neoplatonism," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 12, pp. 958-60; Dagobert D. Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy (Helix: New Jersey), 1984, p. 256.

[140]References to Ibn Ezra's commentary are from: Asher Vaizer, Perushei Ha'Torah l'Rabenu Avraham ibn Ezra (Rav Kook: Jerusalem), Vol. 2, Exodus, 1977; verses and the first few words of the comment will also be mentioned.

[141]op. cit., pp. 125-130; "YESH SHE'ELOT KASHOT..."

a system based on a commanding God also command belief in that God? Furthermore, we are not able to categorize it as positive or negative.[142]

On top of these problems, the rational person must ask why there are differences in the two enumerations of the decalogue. For example, in Exodus 20:8 we are told, "Remember (ZAKHOR) the sabbath day," and in Deuteronomy 5:12, "Observe (SHAMOR) the sabbath day."[143] The Rabbinic response to this problem is that both were said in one utterance.[144] This is problematic for Ibn Ezra:

> What did our sages say about this problem? They said: "observe" and "remember" were said in one utterance. And this statement is the greatest of all the problems which I shall explain. God forbid that they were incorrect, for our knowledge is less than theirs, it is just that some people of our generation thought that they were speaking literally, and they were not.[145]

There are more problems with this notion: if both were really said at the same time, why didn't the Bible simply say "Remember and observe the sabbath day?" Finally, it is not "rational" to think that many verses could be said at once. As Ibn Ezra concludes: "Reason does not support all these things. And the most difficult of the things that I

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[142] Ibid., "AMRU RABIM... V'SHE'ELOT KASHOT ME'ELEH."

[143] Ibid., p. 126, "V'HINEI ANACHNU KARANU ZO HA'PARASHA..."

[144] See above, Chapter 3, p.

[145] Ibn Ezra, p. 126, "V'KA'ASHER HIPASNU B'DIVREI HAZAL..." All translations of Ibn Ezra's commentary are mine.

mentioned, is that every wonder done by Moses has an element of imagination, and the intelligent will understand."[146] "Imagination" is a code word for the philosophers. Miracles occur in the imagination, or in dreams or visions, because they are not real. The dreamer just thinks that they are. Finally, if these things were really said in one utterance, this would have been the greatest of all miracles, for even if you should say that God does not speak like man, how would man understand God's words?[147] So Ibn Ezra concludes that it is simply not rational to conclude that these contradictions were said "in one utterance."

In order to properly explain these contradictions Ibn Ezra examines that nature of Biblical Hebrew. It is clear to <u>those who know</u>, that the words change but meanings remain the same.[148] Therefore, the fact that the second enumeration uses different language need not bother us, because the meaning is the same. For example, the reason for "remember" is that all week long you are to remember the sabbath so that when it comes you "observe" it:

> Know that the back of the brain is remembrance, in this place <u>forms</u> are kept. Therefore, remembrance includes keeping. The reason for "remember" is that every day he should remember what day of the week it is, and all this is done so that he "keeps" seventh day and does no work on it... So when God said "remember" <u>all those who</u>

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[146]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 127, "V'AIN HADA'AT SOVELET KAL ELEH..."

[147]<u>Ibid</u>., "V'HINEI ZEH HA'DAVAR HA'PELEH V'PELEH... SHE'HU KAVED MIN HA'DIVUR B'VAT ACHAT."

[148]<u>Ibid</u>., "AMAR AVRAHAM HA'MICHABER..."

> comprehend understand that its meaning is identical to "keep," as if they were said in one utterance.[149]

The notion of "forms" is crucial to an understanding of Ibn Ezra's commentary. From the above comment it becomes clear that "in one utterance" (B'VAT ACHAT) is associated with the Neoplatonic notion of forms in Ibn Ezra's reinterpretation. God "reveals" forms which the philosopher can comprehend. Ibn Ezra empties the Rabbinic idea, "in one utterance," of its Rabbinic meaning and fills it with a Neoplatonic philosophic notion.

Ibn Ezra's philosophic orientation can also be demonstrated through an examination of the reasons he gives for the commandments and their rewards. In Exodus 20:12 we read, "Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning you." 'Long life' is the reward for honoring parents. Ibn Ezra, in his introduction, comments:

> From the rational facility, which God has implanted in man's mind, he knows that he must treat with respect those who treat him well. For example, the child is brought into the world by his parents: they wean him, nurse him, raise him, and give him drink, food and clothes. Therefore, he must honor them all his life. They are the reason for his being alive on the face of the earth, and that is why [Scripture] says that its reward is "that you may long endure..."[150]

In his discussion of the reasons for the sabbath, Ibn Ezra tells us that Jews are to observe this day because it

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[149] Ibid., p. 129, "V'DA KI B'ACHARIT MOACH."

[150] Ibid., "U'MI'SHIKUL HA'DA'AT."

is a day set aside for wisdom (HOCHMAH). On the sabbath, one should be alone (L'HITBODED) in order to rest and turn aside from one's work. "To be alone" is another important code word for the philosophers, it means to separate from the world and reflect upon philosophical matters.[151]

According to Ibn Ezra, there are three categories of MITZVOT: commandments of the mind, commandments of the tongue, and commandments of action. All three categories have both positive and negative commandments. For example: commandments of the mind include "love the Lord your God" (Deut. 11:1) and "do not hate your neighbor in your heart" (Lev. 19:18); commandments of the tongue include the recitation of the Shema and "you shall not revile God" (Ex. 22:27); and, commandments of action are so self evident that he provides us with no examples. According to Ibn Ezra, commandments of the mind are the most important:

> The commandments of the mind are the most important and essential of all the commandments. Many people think that there are no punishments associated with the thoughts of the mind, except concerning idolatry. It is true that idolatry is the worst of all evil thoughts, but the rest put together are equal to it, after all, doesn't it say: "Six things the Lord hates" (Prov. 6:16), and among them: "A mind that hatches evil plots" (vs. 18).[152]

Thus, the first commandment, "I the Lord am your God," is the most important of all:

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[151] Ibid., pp. 136-37; Ex. 20:8.

[152] Ibid., p. 135; "V'KOL HA'MITZVOT AL SHALOSH DERACHIM."

> Therefore, the first commandment is the most important compared to the nine commands that follow it. It is the closest to commandments of the mind. The reason for this commandment is that you should believe, and that your mind should be without doubt...[153]

It is interesting to note that Ibn Ezra does not declare that it is a commandment of the mind. Rather he only says that it is closest to this category. In an elusive way, he communicates to us his opinion that a commanding God cannot "command" belief in Himself.

Like all the philosophers, Ibn Ezra has a tremendous amount of difficulty with anthropomorphic descriptions of God. He systematically discounts every anthropomorphic description in Exodus 19 and 20.[154] Here are two examples:

> 1. Ex. 19:20, ... When man wants to talk about things that are greater than he, from the uppermost world, he brings then down until they are imaginable to him, as if they were in the image of man, so that those who are listening to him can understand.[155]

> 2. Ex. 20:19, VA'YOMER ADONAI, Many people have erred because they thought that "from the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you" (Deut. 4:36) was referring to Mount Sinai since it is written: "The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain" (Ex. 19:20) and now it says "that I spoke to you from the heavens" (Ex. 20:19). Those who understand my commentary to KEE TISAH (see Ex. 33:21) will understand the reason for this [seeming contradiction]. But now, let me give a parable so perhaps those who have no brain will understand also: Ponder this, it is as if there was the image of a man with his head in the heavens and his feet on Mount Sinai. This is the reason

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[153] Ibid., p. 131; "V'HINEI ZEH HA'DIBUR HA'RISHON."

[154] Ibid., p. 120 Ex. 19:3; p. 134, Ex. 20:3, "AL PANAI"; p. 135, Ex. 20:5 "LO TISHTACHAVEH LACHEM, V'LO TA'ABDEM, EL KANA"; p. 142, Ex. 20:21, "AVO."

[155] Ibid., p. 124.

> for the word: "and He came down," and "that I spoke to you from the heavens," just like "on that day, He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives" (Zech. 14:4). Because we know, that the heavens and the earth is full of His glory.[156]

One more way Ibn Ezra exemplifies the philosophic school of thought is the way he rationalizes away miracles. For example, according to Ibn Ezra, the greatest miracle on Mount Sinai was the sound of the Shofar. No one had ever heard a ram's antler used as a horn before:

> One is amazed at those who say that the reason for "when the ram's horn sounds a long blast" (BIMSHOCH HA'YOVEL) was that it was getting louder and louder (Ex.19:19). Rather, Moses speaking BIMSHOCH HA'YOVEL teaches that the sound of the shofar was a great miracle. There was no miracle at the Sinai gathering greater than it: lightening, thunder, and the cloud of glory had all been seen before in the world, but the sound of the shofar was not heard until the day of the giving of the Ten Commandments.[157]

From all that we have examined we see that Ibn Ezra represents the medieval philosophic school of thought. He uses allegory to remove any problem posed to the rational mind by Biblical or Rabbinic concepts. In his commentary, anthropomorphic descriptions of God come to be nothing more than allegorical descriptions created by man to help describe the way the world works. Rabbinic notions are reinterpreted and given philosophic content: "in one utterance" comes to represent the Neoplatonic notion of "forms." In a similar manner, Ibn Ezra systematically gives

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[156] Ibid., p. 141.

[157] Ibid., p. 122, Ex. 19:13, "V'HATIMAH AL HA'OMRIM..."

the commandments and their rewards a thoroughly rational basis.

MATTAN TORAH, for Ibn Ezra, is an allegory which teaches philosophic notions. He compares the decalogue to the Neoplatonic system of emanations. In his commentary to Exodus 20:14, he compares the Ten Commandments to the nine spheres of emanation. God is not an emanation, but is presupposed. The nine which follow are: the diurnal sphere, the constellations, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, NOGA, ONES, the sun, and the moon.[158] In another place, he compares the Ten Commandments to Aristotle's ten principle's of reality.[159]

Ibn Ezra, in typical medieval philosophic style, uses the literal interpretation of scripture to show its rationality. In places where the plain sense of scripture goes against reason, he allegorizes the text using philosophic notions. Unlike the Talmudic school, which used literal interpretation to prove that events described in the Bible occurred exactly the way they were described, the philosophers were uncomfortable with the Bible representing truth in and of itself. Rather, they had to bring Biblical "truth" into harmony with philosophic truth. They resorted to allegorical interpretation to reveal to those trained in philosophy the real truth contained in the Biblical verses.

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[158] Ibid., p. 139-40; "AMAR ECHAD MECHOCHMEI HADOR..."

[159] Ibid., p. 133; Ex. 20:1; "V'ANSHEI HA'MECHKAR MAZU KOL DIVREI HA'GUF SHEHEM ASARAH..."

The third medieval approach we shall consider is the mystical school. Mysticism is a synthesis of the literal-talmudic approach the allegorical-philosophic approach. The mystics were not satisfied with the "pshat" reading of Scripture and, although they insisted that the Biblical text was literally true, they claimed that it also contained a "symbolic" meaning which becomes apparent to those trained in mysticism. Representative of this school is Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, known as the RAMBAN, or Nachmanides.

RAMBAN: His Life and Commentary to Exodus 19 and 20

Throughout the 13th century the Church maintained an aggressive attitude toward the Jews. Within the empire, the Church was constantly at odds with the emperors and rulers. Since Jews were increasingly involved in money lending, they were quite important to the rulers and for the same reason, hated by the general population.[160] At the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Pope Innocent III decreed that Jews should wear a special "badge of infamy." At the same time, the Pope appealed to the general populace by criticizing Jewish usury. Thus, the Pope struck a blow against both the Jews and the rulers. Beginning in 1241, a series of disputations took place in France in which the Jews were put on trial and forced to defend the Talmud. Many copies of the Talmud were

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[160]Ben Sasson, p. 477.

seized and burned.[161] During the period between 1298 and 1348, false charges against the Jews increased. This period culminated with massacres of Jews in response to the "Black Death" plague of 1348-49.[162]

In Christian Spain, where Nachmanides lived, the status of the Jews was considerably better than the rest of Ashkenaz. This was a result of the Reconquista of Spain from Moslem rule in which the Jews supported the Christians. In 1247, the King of Aragon proclaimed that Jews were welcome in Spain. These favorable conditions began to deteriorate by the end of the 13th century.[163]

Nachmanides was born in Gerona in 1194 and died in Palestine in 1270. The two great events during his life were the Second Maimonidean Controversy in 1230-32 and the Disputation of Barcelona in 1262. Maimonides, in his Moreh Nebukim, proposed that Scripture should be interpreted allegorically. The Maimonists took this position to the extreme, while the anti-Maimonists criticized it adamantly. Bans (HEREM) and counter bans were proclaimed by both sides. The anti-Maimonists appealed to the Jews of Franco-Germany for support.

Nachmanides, although by no means a Maimonist, attempted to mediate the controversy. He wrote to the Jews

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[161] Ibid., pp. 484-86.

[162] Ibid., pp. 486-87.

[163] Ibid., pp. 487-88.

of France asking them not to take an extreme position against Maimonides' works. Nachmanides said that Maimonides' intended audience was not the Jews of France, but those who had come into contact with Greek philosophy. Unfortunately, his attempts at mediation ultimately failed because extremists on both sides gained the upper hand.[164]

The second major event of Nachmanides' life was the Disputation of Barcelona. Pablo Christiani, a convert, claimed that he could prove the truth of Jesus through the aggadah in the Talmud. When faced with the defeat of their Rabbis in this disputation, the Jews would naturally convert. Interesting to note that this was the same Talmud which was put on trial and burned in Paris in 1241 in France. Unlike the Rabbis of France who were forced into the disputation as defendants only, Nachmanides was able to participate as an equal under protection of the king.[165]

In the disputation, which lasted five days, Nachmanides argued that the aggadah in the Talmud were just sermons expressing the Rabbi's individual opinions and not binding. This was not true of the halakhah which would always remain binding. He also argued that the issue of the Messiah was not of dogmatic importance to Jews. The most important thing for Jews was to live in purity through the Torah, and, since

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[164]Ibid., p. 542-45; Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism: Essays on Persons, Concepts, Movements of Thought in Jewish Tradition (Athenum: New York), 1970, pp. 196-97.

[165]Ben Sasson, p. 488.

rewards are greater when faced with obstacles, Jews would prefer to live in exile than under the Messiah. Needless to say, the Jews did not convert to Christianity and, for his part, Nachmanides was forced to flee for his life. In 1267, he moved to Palestine where he lived the last three years of his life and wrote the bulk of his Biblical commentary.[166]

Mysticism flourished in response to the philosophic approach which itself was a response to Moslem culture, but it did not develop solely in response to rationalism. Mystical trends had been present in Judaism since Talmudic times, as can be seen from the famous story of the four Rabbis who "enter Paradise."[167] However, in the Middle Ages, mysticism found new theoretical and literary expression as an alternative to philosophy. This was especially true in 13th century Spain. Here, until the beginning of the 12th century, Jewish philosophic thought developed against the backdrop of Moslem culture. But from the 12th century on, Christianity made its presence felt. The Jewish response to this presence was primarily mysticism.[168]

The philosopher accommodated faith to the truths of rationalism: revelation, anthropomorphism, and miracles became theoretical issues which were explained allegorically. To the mystic these notions were not just

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[166]Schechter, pp. 197-200.

[167]Talmud Bavli Masechet Hagigah, p. 14b.

[168]Ben Sasson, pp. 517-20.

theoretical issues but spiritual foci: they explained how the world operates.[169] The talmudists explained Biblical stories literally. Thus, Exodus 19 and 20 tell exactly what happened on Sinai and how Israel was historically chosen over the nations. The mystic did not view Sinai as just a historical event: but a paradigm of revelation full of secret meaning: MATTAN TORAH is symbolic of ongoing mystical revelation. It has "hidden" meaning which is yet to unfold to the mystic. This hidden meaning is the decisive one for the mystic.[170]

The mystic views reality through the spherot of the mystic tree. By understanding how the tree operates, the mystic understands how God, and thus, the world operates. The tree describes the emanations of God's attrubutes:[171]

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[169]Ibid.

[170]Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (Schocken: New York), 1941, pp. 7-10.

[171]Ibid., pp. 211-17.

Keter (supreme crown)

Bina (intelligence) Chochma (wisdom)

Gevurah (power/punishment) Chesed (love)

Rachamim (compassion)

Hod (majesty) Netzach (lasting endurance)

Yesod (basis)

Malchut (kingdom)

The mystic attempts to "reunite" with God by reversing the process of emanation and "climbing up" the tree. Along the way, the mystic encounters different attributes of God. The Torah becomes a mystical manual describing how the cosmos operates. The mystic's primary concern in interpreting the Torah is to discover its secrets (SODOT). The drash is all important to the mystic for through it he extends the meaning of the Biblical text to uncover its hidden meanings.[172] Nachmanides' commentary to the Torah is full of mystical symbolism referring the reader to the mystic tree.

Nachmanides, like Ibn Ezra, wrote in an elusive style which only hints at his true meaning. There are some

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[172]Ibid., pp. 10-14.

indications that, at first, he wanted to reveal more mysticism in his commentaries but he fell ill and was told in a dream not to reveal too much and so he chose this style for his commentary.[173] These hints often take the form of cryptic references to the mystic tree. In his commentary to Exodus 19:5, he compares revelation to the "Yesod" of the mystic tree:

> "Indeed all the earth is Mine" ... (this verse means) that I am the land called all, like my commentary to the verse "and the Lord blessed Abraham with all things" (Gen. 24:1), and those with intelligence will understand.[174]

In Nachmanides' commentary to Genesis 24:1, he states:

> ... others uncovered in their commentary to this verse a very deep matter and expounded one of the secrets of the Torah. They said that the word all hints at a great matter: The Holy One has an attribute called all which is the "basis" (Yesod) of all.[175]

In a very elusive way, Nachmanides tells those trained in mystic lore that Exodus 19:5, "indeed all the earth is mine," refers to the second step up the mystic tree. This is the step just above "Malchut" which is also the people Israel. Thus, Israel is about to begin its ascent by uniting with the next sphere.

In his comment to Exodus 20:6, Nachmanides first presents the Mekilta's comment on "those who love Me and

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[173]"Nachmanides," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 12, p. 782.

[174]References to Nachmanides' commentary are from: Chaim Chavel, Perushei Ha'Torah L'Rabbenu Moshe ben Nachman (Rav Kook: Jerusalem), 1976, p. 383; translations are mine.

[175]Ibid., p. 132.

keep My commandments." The Mekilta taught that this verse refers to the martyrdom suffered by Israel because of the commandments.[176] Nachmanides extends this midrash with the following: "But in this matter there is a great secret, it is said that Abraham gave his life with love, as it says, "love (CHESED) to Abraham" (Micah 7:20) and the rest of the prophets with power (GEVURAH)."[177] "Chesed" and "Gevurah" are on the same level of the mystic tree. This teaches that prophecy comes at a certain level and with different attributes. For this reason the people suffered the martyrdom as described in the Mekilta text. They were experiencing that attribute of God which is equivalent to the love given to Abraham.

One final example in which Nachmanides refers to the tree is his commentary to Exodus 19:13, "When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." Nachmanides quotes Rashi who said that the shofar was from the ram that Abraham slaughtered in place of Isaac. At first Nachmanides says he cannot understand this since that ram was completely burned up. The only way to make sense of Rashi's comment is to say that God reformed the ashes into a shofar. But, in Nachmanides' opinion, this is not the case:

> In my opinion there is a secret in this aggadah, the sages say that this (sound) was the voice (KOL) of Isaac's fear. That is why it says "and all the people

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[176] See above, p. 47.

[177] Ibid., p. 395-96.

> who were in the camp trembled" (Ex. 19:16, cf. Gen. 27:33 which uses the same word: "and Isaac trembled"). They did not apprehend the commandment at this revelation of "Gevurah" only the "voice" (KOL).[178]

Gevurah, which is not only power, but stern justice, frightened the people because they experienced the attribute, but did not comprehend its true meaning.

"Voice," KOL, is commented on again in verse 20. The Rabbis said that the Torah was given with seven KOLOT, "voices." KOLOT, is used in Exodus 19:16, "On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightening (KOLOT, written defective), ... and all the people who were in the camp trembled," and 19:19, "As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder (KOLOT, written full)." In his comment, Nachmanides tells us that when God came down on Mount Sinai the people heard the KOLOT (lightning), but only apprehended one of the spherot, while Moses heard them and apprehended all seven. This is hinted at because KOLOT is written defective (without the Hebrew letter VAV which has a numerical equivalent of six) when it talks about the people hearing the lightning. When it discusses Moses it is written full (with the VAV). Thus, the people only apprehended one sphere, while Moses apprehended one with the people, plus six more.[179] Moses becomes the paradigm of the mystic

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[178] Ibid., p. 386.

[179] Ibid., pp. 387-88; Ex. 19:20.

leader. He teaches the people Torah because he has a greater understanding of how the tree operates.

Note how different Nachmanides' commentary is from Ibn Ezra's. Ibn Ezra disdained from reading meaning into each and every letter of the Torah. He specifically says that it is wrong to comment on words just because they are written full (with the VAV) or defective (without the VAV):

> As I said, at times the word is written in a type of 'shorthand' and at times it is written out 'longhand' This is also the case with the helping letters which are sometimes added or missing but the meaning is the same... this happens often, but both are correct because when it is written without the VAV it is simply written in shorthand and does no damage (to the meaning) as when it is written with the VAV, longhand...[180]

It is not "rational" to look for difference in letters, only meaning, and so the philosopher does not bother with this type of commentary. But the mystic, on the other hand, finds worlds of hidden knowledge when these letters are either present or missing.

Nachmanides uses the Bible as a guidebook to explain the mystic tree. We saw that he found hints in the text which refer to different attributes of God. Now let us examine his view of the decalogue:

> It would appear that the commandments were written on the tablets in the following manner: five on one tablet which relate to God, as I have already mentioned, and the other five on one tablet; five opposite five. Just as they taught in the Sefer Yetzirah: "with ten spherot

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[180]Ibn Ezra, Exodus 20:1; pp. 127-28; "V'KAASHER AMARTI LECHA, SHEPA'AM YEACHZU DERECH KITZARAH, UPHA'AM DERECH ARUKHA..."

> which have no essence, like the ten fingers, five opposite five, and the covenant of unity in between them." From this it should become clear to you why they taught that there were two tablets: because up to "honor your father..." it is discussing the written Torah and the others are the oral Torah. And so our Rabbis hinted: like bride and groom, like their two friends, like the two worlds, and all this is one hint, only the intelligent will understand the secret.[18]

Nachmanides hints to us that the Ten Commandments are arranged like the spherot of the mystic tree. The top half describes God's place and the bottom half, the place to which the mystic can ascend. All ten make up the entire tree and are unified through the middle sphere: Rachamim, "mercy." Thus, the Ten Commandments are unified through "honor of parents:" just as mother and father sexually unite, so Israel and God unite through the sphere of Rachamim.

We have seen how Nachmanides uses symbolism to interpret the Torah. He finds in its letters, words, phrases, and flow a new world: that of the mystical spherot.

Conclusion

Three schools of thought emerged during the Middle Ages, all of whom maintained vastly different interpretations of MATTAN TORAH: For the talmudists, MATTAN TORAH was a real event; for the philosophers, it has

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[18]Nachmanides, p. 404; Ex. 20:13.

assigned (allegorical) meaning; and for the mystics, it has both real and hidden (symbolic) meaning.

The **talmudists** viewed revelation on Sinai as a **"literal"** story which explained why Israel was chosen over the nations. In his Biblical commentary, Rashi "proved" the literalness of the story by seeking out plain meaning of Scripture and only using aggadah which did as little damage to the plain reading as possible.

The **philosophers** viewed the Sinaitic experience as an **"allegory"** which teaches rational truth; in the case of Ibn Ezra, it teaches about the Neoplatonic system of emanations. Through the allegoric method, the philosophers reinterpreted everything in the Bible which contradicts reason.

The **mystics** looked for the hidden **"symbolism"** in MATTAN TORAH. For Nachmanides, revelation at Sinai was an example of the entire people's ascent up the tree. Moses was the great mystic who apprehended seven of the spherot, while the rest of the people only understood one. Through the symbolic method, the mystics found the "true" significance of the Biblical verse.

Despite the immense difference between these three approaches all were maintained in Jewish tradition. No group broke off to form their own religion, all remained within Judaism. All three of the commentaries we examined are found in any typical Rabbinic Bible which Jews continue to study from today. How was this unity maintained? We know that

there were boundaries within Judaism and at times various sects were pushed out of the fold.[182]

Clearly, unity was maintained by the centrifugal force exerted by the pressure from the surrounding society in which the Jews found themselves. Christian, and to a lesser extent, Moslem society viewed the Jews with animosity and put varying degrees of pressure upon their Jewish minorities. This, however, was not the only reason that Jewish unity was maintained.

There were at least two other major factors which kept Medieval Jewry unified: the halakhah and the conceptual nature of Jewish theology. Although the three schools disagreed over the reasons for the commandments, the importance of the halakhic system was never questioned. As long as a basic agreement regarding behavior pattern was maintained, Jewish unity was assured. At the same time, theological unity was maintained because Medieval Judaism inherited a theological system which developed conceptually. In the next chapter, I will discuss the nature of this theological system.

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[182]Specifically, the Karaites. See Ben Sasson, pp. 441-50.

Chapter 5: Concept Theology

We have examined two aqqadic compilations and three medieval commentaries on MATTAN TORAH. There were similarities and differences in the ways in which these texts responded to the issue of revelation. The aqqadic texts developed "impulsively" or "spasmodically." They responded to theological issues much the same way they dealt with the problems they encountered in the Biblical text. The "impulses" of life were dealt with on a case by case basis creating wonderful theological statements concerning Israel's relation to the world, to God, to the nations, and so forth. Revelation, with all its concomitant sub-themes, came to symbolize Israel's election by the one God. Through

the Rabbinic hermeneutic Sinai became the origin of the halakhic system.

The medieval texts developed "systematically." They responded in measured phrases which synthesized the Biblical and Rabbinic material with a "foreign" system of truth. This system was viewed as the principle message of the Bible, the aqqadah, and the halakhah. The two primary external systems were philosophy and mysticism. The talmudists, as we have stated, responded "systematically" in so far as they applied a literal interpretation to the Biblical and Rabbinic tradition. They only used aqqadic sources which were close to the literal meaning.

Despite the differences between the medieval and the aggadic literature, all are maintained under one overarching literary classification: Rabbinic literature. This is because they all develop within a "conceptual" framework: developing and expressing their thought via concepts which all the texts "agree" to maintain, but "disagree" over their essences. All of the texts we examined maintain and develop the concept of MATTAN TORAH, yet all disagree over its content. The conceptual nature of Rabbinic theology permits this. When theology develops conceptually and not by formation of dogma, a tremendous amount of flexibility is built into the structure.

The question before us now is whether or not these five texts developed conceptually. Clearly the aggadic texts did:

they "dug" deep into the Biblical text, enlarging and contracting the themes they found there based on the context in which the aggadah developed. They taught their theology in scattered phrases which reacted to the "heartbeats" of life.

The question is more difficult with regard to the medieval material. Rashi presented a more or less abridged version of the aggadah in his commentary and so his theologic system developed much like the Rabbis. But what of Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides? They systematized MATTAN TORAH, making it into an "allegoric" or "symbolic" teaching. Unlike the Rabbis and the talmudists, no longer did they view the "tradition" as being the only source of truth. They did not develop their theology "spasmodically," relating the Bible to all aspects of life. Rather, they developed their theology "systematically." The Bible's stories, verses, words, and even letters were "assigned" new meaning. This assigned meaning was derived from a synthesis of the "system" with Jewish sources. This new interpretation came to be viewed as the true meaning of the text.

However, both the philosophers and the mystics were meticulous in maintaining the structure. All three medieval schools disagreed over the principles behind the halakhah, but all were in agreement over its efficacy. That is, although they all gave different reasons for the halakhah

they all believed that it was the self evident expression of Judaism.

The same is true with the way they developed the conceptual rubrics they inherited from the Rabbis. All three groups disagreed over the essence of the rubrics, but agreed to use the overarching concepts more or less as "chapter titles" for the expression of their theologic system. Thus, for Nachmanides, MATTAN TORAH was the mystical experience of Israel. For Ibn Ezra, MATTAN TORAH allegorically taught the Neoplatonic system of emanations. For Rashi, MATTAN TORAH represented the historical election of Israel by God, and the organizing principle of the literature. Because all three maintained the centrality of the overarching concept, theologic unity was maintained. Thus, despite the differences between the medieval systems in approach, all were maintained within the Jewish tradition because they maintained the structure.

The systematic thought of the medieval period might have led to a dissolution of Judaism because by its very nature it can be dogmatic: Dogmatic theology develops to the exclusion of other systems. Nevertheless, this did not happen: the unity of the structure was maintained because the "systems" were expressed through "concepts" inherited from Rabbinic Judaism.

Form and Content

The study of Rabbinic literature by analyzing only its form and device does not give us any sense of the material's theological unity. Thus, Schafer's proposal of a modified "analytical-descriptive" methodology, while essential for the advancement of the field, should not be the only way for scholars to proceed. Clearly, Schafer's methodology will help us to achieve both a better understanding of how the literature works and to sharpen our knowledge of the relation between text and time; but we should not limit ourselves to form analysis and shy away from the study of content.

In my opinion, study of content is as important as study of form, for there can be no true understanding of a literature through its form alone. Research in English literature, for example, would not be limited to study of form alone. Rather, analysis would take place on both levels: content and form. The same should be true for Rabbinic literature.

Concept Theology: The Unifying Factor

Yet even study of both content and form do not demonstrate the unity of Rabbinic literature: as we have seen both change dramatically throughout the centuries.

There are vast differences between Tannaitic and Amoraic midrash, and this material is quite different from medieval exegesis. Yet this problem is not insurmountable. To solve it, we must look beyond content and form to theology. It is the maintenance of an overall theological structure which unifies Rabbinic Judaism. The conceptual nature of this theology preserves the unity of Rabbinic literature. Although this literature has continued to be been shaped by the historical context of its "redactors" throughout the centuries, every editor, whether he was a Tanna, an Amora, or a medieval exegete, has maintained the overarching rubrics which are the basis of the literature. These rubrics were inherited from "the Rabbis" and thus we give the entire literature the name: Rabbinic literature.

In the beginning of his commentary to Exodus 20, Ibn Ezra stated:

> Know this: the words are the bodies, and the meanings are the souls, and the body is to the soul like a container. Therefore, it is a general principle of the sages to maintain the meanings but not to worry about change in words since they have the same meaning.[108]

Ibn Ezra was telling us not to worry about the apparent contradiction between Biblical verses. In his systematic application of neoplatonism to the literature, he reads the

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[108] Vaizer, Ibn Ezra al Ha'Torah, p. 127; "AMAR AVRAHAM HA'MECHABER ... V'DA, KEE HA'MILOT..."

notion of eternal "forms" into the phrase "in one utterance."[184]

Yet we might rephrase his comment to teach something about Rabbinic theology: "Know that the conceptual rubrics are the bodies, while the meanings given to them are the souls, and the body is to the soul a container. Therefore, it is a general principle of Rabbinic literature to maintain unity by reinterpreting concepts while maintaining the conceptual framework." Flexibility in conceptual definition has permitted a theological unity in Rabbinic thought for two thousand years.

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[184]See above, p. 101-03.

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