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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

by

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This is a work dependent primarily upon primary sources.

The research method was as follows: After determining which Biblical miracles were important enough to explore, references to the verses containing these miracles were gathered from the various Midrashim. These references were then classified according to the manner in which they discussed the Biblical verses.

There is a discussion of Natural Law and it is proved that the Midrash was cognizant of the existence of certain usually immutable laws in natural events. The acceptance of the miracles as such by the Midrash is explored and is found to exist. It is shown, however, that the Midrash felt that all miracles related in Scripture were pre-ordained from Creation. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that it was recognized in Midrashic times that the Biblical miracles came about not only for their immediate purpose, but also for the meaning that they would have to future generations.

Many examples are given showing that in dealing with miracles, the Midrash has a tendency to embellish and exaggerate them and also to bring in other miracles while discussing a verse dealing with only one.

Finally, an analysis is made of the discussion, by the Midrash, of the source of Biblical miracles. This reveals that only God is considered to be the source of all miraculous events.

Biblical Miracles in Midrashic Interpretation

by

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of the requirements for
the Master of Hebrew Letters
Degree and Ordination.

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PREFACE

Before beginning any work which pretends to be technical rather than literary, it is well to acquaint the reader not only with the techniques employed, but also with the reasons that these methods were used and not others. This is particularly true when the writer is a novice both in the field in which he works and in the art of conveying the fruits of his discoveries to others who might be interested in them. Therefore we have a reason for beginning this essay before Chapter One.

It was the purpose of the writer to do a work dependent exclusively on primary source material. It was discovered that although such a work could be done it would be far richer for an occasional borrowing of a thought from a scholar more skilled and better trained than himself. Unfortunately all such references have been limited to works that have appeared in either the English or Hebrew Languages. This serious limitation has been imposed by the author's inability to handle the German language, at present. It is hoped that the work has not suffered to an inordinate extent by this lack. It will also be noted that in the body of the essay the original intention of working almost entirely with primary sources has been adhered to.

After having once decided upon a topic for discussion, the next step is to determine a system for uncovering

the material necessary for this discussion. When dealing with such a vast and diverse work as the Midrash, this is not the simple problem that it might appear to be. A beginning was made by leafing through Ginzberg's "Legends of the Jews." This brought about a very rapid acquaintance with the type of material that would be encountered when the Midrash itself was to be tackled. It also clarified in the mind of the researcher exactly what he was seeking. The next step was the assembling of a list of approximately twelve of the most famous and most important Biblical miracles. The verses in which these miracles appear were noted and were used as the basis for consulting the "Beth Aaron", an index to Midrashic passages, compiled according to Biblical verses. It was later found, however, that this method was not to be as fruitful as it originally promised to be. In the first place it was an impossibility always to find the same edition of a work used to compile the "Beth Aaron". Again many of the passages cited turned out to have nothing at all to do with the topic under discussion and were merely instances when these particular verses appeared in some Midrashic work. However, many passages were found in such works as "Seder Eliahu Rabbah" and "Pirke de R. Eliezer", which are not arranged according to the Biblical order, by means of the "Beth Aaron". Nevertheless, it was the Midrashic works which have been compiled according to the Biblical order that supplied the vast majority of references for this work. The most important works used in

this category were the Rabboth and especially the Yalkut Shimoni. This latter work is the actual backbone of the essay. It was consulted for each one of the miracles and in practically every case provided usable material.

The ambitious reader, who will seek to verify the sources cited herein will find that there was considerable material connected with each one of the miracles to which no reference is made. Upon closer examination, however, he will find that if a passage is not mentioned it is because it has no bearing or relevancy to the topic under discussion. It has been the writer's purpose to exclude all matter which does not directly concern him, otherwise, in a work as vast and diverse as the Midrash he would have become lost in obscure details.

After having gathered as much material as was possible on each individual miracle, the task of classifying each reference was attempted. Finally six different categories were decided upon. To justify in his own mind this choice he then counted the number of miracles which supplied material for each division. It was found that in only one case were there fewer than half of the miracles represented, but even in this case those references available clearly made its position as a topic by itself necessary.

With these words we are ready to embark upon our voyage of discovery into the ancient lore of Rabbis and preachers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The birth of the modern state of Israel is called by many a "miracle". Whether future generations of history students with the records of the intricate diplomatic negotiations and the actual battles at their disposal will concur in this appraisal remains for time to tell. Perhaps future generations will look upon all the occurrences connected with the establishment of this new nation, with an ancient history, as events not to be explained in the normal, rational way. It is possible that such events as the "magic carpet" from Yemen and the sudden stopping of the locusts on the very border of Israel, during the fifth summer of its existence, will take their place alongside such stories as the crossing of the Red Sea and the provision of the manna. It cannot be denied by even the most skeptical of our modern sophisticates that it was a belief in the miraculous origin of these ancient happenings which kept alive in the hundreds of generations the Faith that was eventually responsible for the coming into being of these modern events. Without the Faith that was in our times turned into deed, there would be no Israel today, there would be no Jewish people today. To claim that this Faith is dependent on the stories of miracles recorded in Scripture would be to detract seriously from its beauty and meaning to many of us today, but to deny the role that

these miracles played in the establishment and growth of our Judaism would be a contradiction of history. Whether we believe in their actual occurrence, at all, or whether we should wish to explain the events away in a rational manner is immaterial. We must admit that for our ancestors, whose Faith was perhaps stronger than our own, and, yes, for many of our contemporaries, these singular events recorded in Scripture and called by us miracles, were and are real and actual in every detail. One of our great, modern, enlightened theologians had this to say on the subject: "There is...the interesting subject of miracles, which plays such an important part in the history of every religion. Despite the various attempts made by semi-rationalists to minimize their significance, the frequent Occurrence of miracles will always remain, both for believers and skeptics one of the most important tests of the religion in question; to the former as a sign of its superhuman nature, to the latter as a proof of its doubtful origin."¹

When examining the literature of the ancients, when discovering in the pages of our ancestral lore the truly mighty stature of the minds of many of these bygone sages, we are prone to question whether their attitude towards these extraordinary Biblical events was that of simple

1. Schechter, Solomon Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology
Pp. 5 - 6.

unquestioning belief, or whether they, too, looked upon these passages as something outside the usual realm of things, something requiring a special explanation. In their thorough exegesis of each word in Holy Writ what was their attitude towards those events, which as recorded, clearly transcend the normal, everyday run of things? Did any ancient scholar attempt to deny or even explain in a rational manner these supernatural events? Was any special importance attached to belief in miracles? Were these miracles made the basis of any type of exegesis? More basic than all these questions, did these ancient scholars recognize that the Biblical events they were discussing were supernatural, were separate and distinct occurrences that could not be expected to happen all the time? These are questions that might intrigue any person with a high respect and reverence for those minds that created ancient Jewish literature, yet who has an equal respect and reverence for modern, rational, skeptical, if you will, thought.

In turning to a body of literature to seek the answers to our questions we find that there is one type, which because of its nature, arrangement and historical importance, demands of us its attention. This is that group of works known as the Midrash. A hurried glance might convince one that these works are nothing more than an attempt to provide some sort of explanation to the often cryptic words of the Bible and are the catch-all for the fruits of the creative imaginations of some old Rabbis. However, thanks to modern

scholarship, largely the work of Leopold Zunz and his successors, we know that the Midrashic works consist in large part of the sermons of these Rabbis and in their present forms are merely anthologies. There are few better gauges of the thought of a people than the sermons that are preached to them. It is really unnecessary to point out that the period during which most of these sermons were preached is one of unparalleled importance in the history of Judaism, since it was during this, the Talmudic period that the basis for the entire future growth of Jewish thought and practice was laid. That miracles played an important role in the thought of these architects of our modern religion, may be garnered from these sentences taken from an essay on the subject:

"The initial foundation which sustained the faith of early Israel consisted in the extraordinary experiences of individuals.' This foundation was in Talmudic times not merely maintained but also strengthened and expanded."²

To further recognize the important role that the Midrash played in the history of Judaism, let us examine a few of the words of Zunz: He holds that during this period, in the first thousand years of our era, that the Midrash, "ruled without bound." When speaking of the effect of the Roman collapse on world civilization he said: "For more than half a millenium, the eye of any observer of the Jews, Syrians, Greeks and Christians could see hardly anything besides

2. Guttman, Alexander, The Significance of Miracles for Talmudic Judaism, Hebrew Union College Annual vol #20 1947 P. 401.

Midrash, sectarian writings, disputations and theological tracts. The allegorical exegesis of Holy Writ and the use of it in the spirit of the contemporary thought dominated completely the times."³ It is this allegorical exegesis, which comprises most of the Midrash dealing with those Biblical verses containing stories of "miracles."

It has probably been noted that thus far all references as to what is it that is meant when the word "miracle" is used, have been rather vague. This vagueness must be eliminated, for upon definition of the word "miracle" is this whole thesis dependent. There are those who claim that every act or occurrence that takes place in the universe is indeed a miracle. These people claim that Divine Providence is responsible for each little thing that comes to be and that it cannot be subjected to any restrictions whatsoever. For them there can be no natural law. In their view it would be just as reasonable for an apple to leave the tree and ascend heavenwards, as to fall down upon Isaac Newton's head. Therefore, they do not question any happening recorded in the Bible and simply consider some unusual.

To most people, today, these unusual occurrences transcend the realm of what they consider to be natural. They believe that there are certain immutable laws by which the universe is governed and it would require a special act by a Divinity to bring about any change in them. To any such occurrences

3. Zunz, Leopold, Ha-drashoth beYisrael P. 24

they give the name miracle. A philosopher would define it in a very concise manner thusly: "A miracle is a discontinuity in the laws of nature brought to pass on a special occasion by a personal being in response to a prayer or in order to realize a given purpose."⁴ Yet a very famous chronicler of the growth of the Jewish religion takes exception to this definition: "To understand the Jewish conception of miracle, we must enter into their way of thinking about God and nature. A miracle from this point of view is an extraordinary phenomenon or occurrence wrought by God, presumably for some special purpose. It cannot be described as something at variance with the laws of nature, transcending or suspending them, for as has been said, there was no idea of laws of nature in the modern sense. Nor is it the mere wonder of it that makes such an event a miracle; it is the religious interpretation of the occurrence, the belief that in this phenomenon or event God in a peculiar way manifests His presence, reveals His will, or intervenes for the deliverance of His worshippers and the discomfiture of their enemies...and to save from a thousand evils where human help is vain. The greatness, the power of God, is abundantly manifest in the ordinary course of nature; it is His goodness that is peculiarly revealed in the miracle as faith interprets and appropriates it."⁵ The point at issue then, is

4. Musik, Isaac, "A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy P. 274.

5. Moore, George F., Judaism vol I P. 376.

whether the ancient sages recognized natural law. It will be one of the objects of this work to demonstrate whether there was any acknowledgment of natural law by ancient Judaism.

It would be well, before plunging into the body of the work to set a frame of reference in which the reader may follow us. Therefore, let us list those Biblical miracles whose exegesis in the Midrash has been scrutinized. Here the question may be raised as to why just these and no others were used. A number of considerations were taken into account. First and foremost was the issue of the importance and knowledge of the miracle in our time. Next the importance of the miracle in the Midrash itself. Finally, the discovery that not all Biblical miracles were deemed worthy of special exegesis as such. These, then, are those miracles whose exegesis have been scrutinized, though they have not all contributed to this work:

1. The splitting of the Red Sea and the plagues.
2. The manna.
3. The water out of the rock.
4. The history of Moses' rod.
5. The destruction of Nadab and Abihu.
6. The Destruction of Korach and his band.
7. Balaam's ass speaking.
8. The splitting of the Jordan.
9. The sun standing still at Gibeon.
10. The Elijah and Elisha stories.
11. Jonah and the whale.
12. The three men in the fire.

CHAPTER II

ATTITUDE TOWARDS MIRACLES

"This negative, this cautious, skeptical attitude is the one most observable in the philosophy of our time." Thus did Josiah Royce characterize the thought of his day. Few would wish to contest the validity of this observation as it pertains to most contemporary thinkers on the subject of Biblical miracles, excepting, of course, those sectarians whom we dub Fundamentalists. The question to be raised then is whether this questioning attitude is something entirely modern or whether traces of it may be found even as early as the first few centuries of our era.

Our modern skeptic doubts the occurrence, the very happening of such things as a splitting of the Red Sea only and precisely at the time when the Children of Israel were attempting to flee from the Egyptian hordes. Or else an attempt is made to explain the splitting of the waters by purely natural phenomena, such as shallow water and a strong wind, or a volcanic eruption.¹ It is pointed out in this same work that all of the plagues which struck Egypt at the waving of Moses' staff, with the exception of the final one, were happenings that could have arisen in the natural order of things. Thus do we today offer rational explanations for those Biblical miracles whose actual occurrence we choose not to disbelieve.

1. Robinson, A History of Israel vol I Pp. 69 ff, Pp. 86 & ff.

If there was anything in the attitude of the ancient Rabbis and preachers which might be called "skeptical" it was not this which is present in ours. It is true that there is one questioning theme which appears in connection with nearly all the miracles, but this theme doubts neither the actual transpiring of the event, nor the fact that it was contrary to the usual workings of nature. In only one instance was I able to find even the vaguest intimation of doubt concerning the actual occurrence of events recorded in Scripture. I tend to discount the importance of this single instance because here is apparently a case where a clever scholar was simply having a game of mental gymnastics with the exegesis of different Biblical verses. On page 5a of the Tractate Succah of the Babylonian Talmud we find the following Baraitha: "R. Jose says, the Shechinah never descended nor did Moses and Elijah ascend to heaven, as it is written: 'The heavens are heavens of the Lord and the earth was given to man' and the Shechinah did not descend...and Moses and Elijah did not ascend...but is it not written: 'And Elijah ascended in the whirlwind'?" It would seem that R. Jose is not questioning the authenticity of the Biblical account but rather that the Bible is apparently contradicting itself.

Let us return then to the case where there seemingly is a questioning of the miraculous nature of the events with which we are dealing. That, succinctly stated is the exact extent of any questioning that appears in the Midrash

concerning these events. There is no doubting of their actual happening. There is no attempt to explain them away according to the laws of nature as men know them. Here in full then, with only the elimination of the verses used as proof-texts is the classic statement concerning miracles as it appears in a number of places in Midrashic works: "R. Jonathan (in other places Johanan) said: the Holy One Blessed Be He arranged conditions with the Sea (at the time of Creation) that it should be split before the Israelites...R. Jeremiah said in the name of R. Elazar, not only with the Sea alone did the Holy One Blessed Be He arrange conditions, but with all that was created during the first six days...I have commanded the Sea that it be split before the Israelites. I have commanded the sun and the moon that they stand still before Joshua...I have commanded the heaven and the earth that they be silent before Moses ...I have commanded the ravens that they sustain Elijah... I have commanded the fire that it injure not Hananiah, Misha'el and Azariah. I have commanded the lions that they harm not Daniel. I have commanded the heavens that they open before Ezekiel....I have commanded the fish that it spew forth Jonah."² All these events are miracles by common concensus and by treatment in exegetical literature, yet here is an attempt to explain them not as sudden events brought about at the command of the Almighty to meet the

2. Yalkut Shimoni II 21 on Joshua 10:12 from Genesis R. 5.

emergency, but rather as pre-ordained happenings that were bound to occur. While it cannot be claimed that statements such as these appear in the exegesis of each and every miracle, they are not limited to this one statement.³ Indeed, the fact that this same statement, in essence, appears a number of times is significant. Its inclusion once would have been significant, showing that a sufficient number of scholars deemed it worthy of preservation. Because it appears in connection with so many miracles, we must consider that there was probably a school of thought connected with this idea concerning the origin of miraculous events in the Bible. As usual when propounding a theory, those who offered this new, and probably for their time somewhat startling, idea concerning miracles, used many ingenious proof-texts to support themselves. Here is one: "'And the sea returned to its bed as dawn broke': R. Johanan said, The Holy One Blessed Be He made conditions with the sea that it should be split before the Israelites, as the verse states: 'And the sea returned to its bed as dawn broke'. To its conditions that the Holy One Blessed Be He made with it. And it is written: 'Let the waters come together'. This actually means, let the waters wait for Me, for what I shall in the future do to them.'"

3. S. of S. R. II, Yalkut Shimoni II 550 on Jonah.

4. וישק פים אבנות קקד איתנו: אל יחנן כחג פקלפ, חגאיק דפ פים שיפן נקוד
אפי ישראל פלד וישק פים אבנות קקד איתנו איתנו שפגפ פקלד דמו
וכתב יקוו פמים יקוו וי פמים חפ גאז דתיז אגשות קפס.

Yalkut Shimoni I 236 on Ex. 14:27 from Gen. R.

The question might now be raised as to whether this attitude on the part of the Midrash towards the origin of miraculous events does not actually bear out one or the other, or possibly both opinions stated in the first chapter, to which exception has been taken. The first would be that of the group who today claim that there are no such things as miracles, because everything that God does is miraculous, which is a denial of the existence of natural law. The second is that which holds that the Jewish sages of this period did not recognize the existence of a law of nature. It can now be shown very clearly that such was not the case, that the authors of the works which comprise the Midrash did believe in a natural law and that they did believe that the miraculous events recounted in the Bible were violations of this natural law. Examples will be drawn from the exegesis upon seven of these miracles, in the order of their appearance in Scripture.

First let us take up the story of Aaron's rod and the rods of the Egyptian magicians. "R. Jose said in the name of R. Haninah, there was a great miracle that took place concerning the staff. Even though it consumed all of the staffs that were cast down, which were of a quantity to have made from them ten omers, it did not become any thicker."⁵ Here is an observation that would agree with the physical law of displacement as we know it. It cannot be said that in this case no cognizance was taken of natural law.

5. Ex. R. IX on Ex. 7:12; see also B.T. Shabbat 97a for a similar, though different acknowledgment of the supernatural in the same story.

Concerning some of the extraordinary events which took place in connection with the splitting of the Red Sea (into which the next chapter shall go further) there is the following interesting statement: "...it is natural for chariots to be drawn after mules, now were the mules drawn after the chariots."⁶ The original of the words "it is natural" is "Derech eretz".

In reference to the manna we have the following: "Rabban Simeon the son of Gamaliel says, Come and see how beloved are Israel before the Almighty. Because they are so beloved did He change before them the works of Creation. He made the lower things uppermost and the uppermost lowest. In the past bread rose from the earth and the dew descended from heaven... now the situations were reversed. Bread began to descend from heaven while the dew rose from the earth."⁷ Here is a plain acknowledgment that certain laws were made at the time of Creation which could only be broken under the most unusual of circumstances. When these circumstances arose, it was plainly a supernatural act on the part of the Deity which caused the laws to be broken.

About the water coming out of the rock, the Midrash has this to say: "R. Symon said, 'And it will give its waters'...but it is not its way (natural) to give forth water...behold the miracles that the Holy One Blessed Be

6. Yalkut Shimoni I 235 on Ex 14: 25 from Mekilta V.

7. Mekilta on Ex 16:4; also Tanchumah on same verse.

He performed, He put in the rock oil and honey, water and fire."⁸

While it is not explicitly stated that the swallowing of Korach and his band would have violated a natural law, this is clearly implied in the following statement: "R. Jeremiah the son of R. Elazar said, There are three openings to Gehinnom, one in the wilderness, one in the sea, and one in Jerusalem."⁹

There are few more explicit statements that an event is supernatural than this one, made in commenting on the conversation between Balaam and his ass: "The Princes of Moab were amazed that they saw a miracle the likes of which had never been seen."¹⁰

The supernatural saving of the three men from the fire, also supplies us with an example: "It is taught that six miracles took place on that very day...."¹¹ These seven quotations, and the others cited in the notes should provide ample evidence that the concept of natural law was known and acknowledged to exist by the ancient scholars and sages with whom this work deals. In this case the theme has appeared too often and in too many diverse forms to deny that its

8. Yalkut Shimoni I 763 from Yelamdenu on Num. 20:8.

9. B.T. Erubin 19a on Num. 16:33.

10. Num. R. XX on Num. 22:29.

11. Yalkut Shimoni II 1061 from B.T. Sanhedrin 92b; also S. of S.R. VII.

belief was widespread among many different factions of the Rabbis.

It remains for us, in this examination of the attitude of the Midrash towards miracles, to see whether there were ever any reasons, either implied or explicit given for the occurrence of miracles. Did miracles ever serve a purpose beyond that which appears on the surface? Did the splitting of the Red Sea mean more than a way for the Israelites to escape from the Egyptians? Did the manna do more than feed the wanderers in the desert? Could the Lord have used other means, just as efficacious, besides miracles to accomplish the deeds that were done through miracles? The answer to the first series of questions is in the affirmative and that to the last one is negative. The authors of the Midrash very definitely recognized that while the actual events might have had significance to the generation during whose lifetimes they took place, it was the manner of their occurrence that would have meaning to all subsequent generations. The escape from Dunquerque by the British army may have seemed miraculous to the contemporary world, but how many youngsters are there even today, but a dozen years later, who recognize this event? Undoubtedly there are far fewer of these than of those of the same age who are acquainted with the Crossing of the Red Sea. This was recognized by the Rabbis and therefore they have in their commentary on the various miracles, ascribed reasons for these occurrences.

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There is, of course, one reason which transcends and permeates all others for the coming into being of supernatural events. This is the encouragement and strengthening of Faith in the Deity. However, this may be subdivided into various means of achieving this.

The first of these divisions is that in which Faith is encouraged by the simple demonstration of God's might. Pharaoh is warned to believe in the might of God by the miracles that transpired with the rods. The Midrash puts these words in God's mouth as He instructs Moses: "And say unto him, behold this staff is of dry wood, yet it became a serpent and there was in it a spirit and soul and it consumed all of the rods, but its end is to return to being dried wood. You also, did I create from a putrid drop and gave you sovereignty, but you became proud and said to me this is my river and I made it - behold I will cause you again to be nothingness."¹² In connection with the splitting of the Red Sea, the Midrash has this question to ask: "Why did He split the waters before them?" The answer: "In order to achieve for Himself world-wide fame."¹³ The miracle of the manna, also, was to spread the knowledge of Him: "Ossi ben Judah says, the manna that came down to Israel would become great and rise until all the kings of the east and west could see it."¹⁴ An even clearer demonstration that the

12. Yalkut Shimoni I 181 on Ex. 7:9

13. *ibid* I 233 on Ex. 14:13.

14. *ibid* I 260 on Ex. 16:13.

Rabbis believed that the miracles were necessary for the inculcating of Faith is the following: "R. Joshua says, The Israelites said, If He is the Master of the Universe just as He is our Master, then we shall serve Him. But if not we shall not serve Him. R. Eleazar says, They said if He fulfills our need we will worship Him and if not we shall not serve Him."¹⁵ This in commenting on the necessity for drawing water out of the rock.

That upon occasion miracles may be considered the only fitting reward of Faith may also be demonstrated: "Rabbi says, Sufficient was the Faith that they had in Me that I should divide the Sea for them.... Shemaiah says, Sufficient was the Faith that Abraham had in me that I should divide the Sea for them...Others say, Sufficient was the Faith that they had in me that I should divide the Sea for them. That they did not say to Moses, How will we go out to the Wilderness without provisions. Rather did they have Faith and follow Moses."¹⁶ Nor is this the only place where the Crossing of the Red Sea through a miracle from above is pointed to as a reward for Faith.¹⁷ Miracles are also vouchsafed to individuals for having served the Lord well: "And why did Elijah merit so much as to be able to revive the dead? Because he did the will of Him who spoke and the world was, the Holy One

15. *ibid* I 262 from *Mekilta* on Ex. 17:7.

16. *ibid* I 233 on Ex. 14:13.

17. Ex. R. XVII; also *loc cit* in note 16 for further commentary.

Blessed Be He. And he would weary himself because of the honor of the Lord and because of the honor of Israel every day."¹⁸ "R. Johanan said, Righteous men are greater than the Ministering Angels, as it is said: 'He answered and said: Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a child of the gods'."¹⁹

But if miracles serve as rewards for the righteous, is not the converse true? "Zabdi ben Levi said, The manna would come down two thousand cubits. Every day it would stand until the fourth hour and when the sun would strike, it would melt and become streams and overflow and descend... And since it would descend in streams, the nations of the world would come to drink from it, but it would become as bitter as hemlock in their mouths."²⁰ "They say, if the Almighty is prepared for those who anger Him, how much the more so shall he requite with a goodly wage the righteous in the future."²¹ "'If these men die the common death of all men...' What does this teach us? Rabba said if these men die the common death, that they sicken and are laid out on their beds, and men visit them, what would mankind say?

18. Seder Eliahu Rabbah Chapter 5.

19. B.T. Sanhedrin 93a.

20. Yalkut Shimoni I 258 on Ex. 16:4 from the Tanchumah.

21. Yalkut Shimoni I 259 on Ex. 16:22; also Midrash Tehillim 78; also Mekilta.

The Lord has not sent retribution to these...."22 "'And the earth split beneath them' That the Lord is able to bring retribution from any place which he so desires."23 It is therefore seen that just as a miracle may have been wrought to reward the righteous so may the reason for a miracle have been the punishment of the wicked.

Again, a miracle may serve to strengthen the resolve of some mortal who is undecided whether to act for the Lord or not. In connection with the Egyptian plagues we read: "And R. Judah the son of R. Shalom said, He (Pharaoh) spoke normally when he said, give a sign. And thus do you find in the case of Noah. After all the miracles that the Holy One Blessed Be He had done for him in the ark and had taken him out from it...he began to beg for a sign until the Holy One Blessed Be He said to him, 'I have placed my bow in the cloud.' And if Noah, the righteous begged a sign, how much the more so would Pharaoh, the wicked. And thus do you find concerning Hezekiah, when Isaiah came...and if Hezekiah the righteous sought a sign would not Pharaoh, the wicked?"24 Or, in addition, to strengthening the resolve of the person involved, the miracle might serve to symbolically represent what the future holds: "The Holy One Blessed Be He made known to Moses, while yet in the bush what Pharaoh would do.

22. B.T. Nedarim 39b on Num 16:30.

23. Tanchumah on Korach also Num R XVIII.

24. Ex. R IX on Ex. 7:9.

He said, 'What is in your hand Moses?' and he answered, 'A staff'. And he said, 'Cast it upon the earth', and he cast it upon the earth and it became a serpent. And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Send forth thy hand and grab its tail.' And it again became a staff. The Lord said to Moses, 'Just as the serpent is cunning, so shall Pharaoh act cunningly towards you'....²⁵

One more reason for the occurrence of a miracle is to strengthen the fulfillment of a specific commandment. For instance the prohibition of profaning the Sabbath with work: "From the time of Creation, the moon and the stars and the planets arose to light the world and did not contest one with another until Joshua came and fought Israel's battles. And it was the eve of the Sabbath and Joshua recognized Israel's distress over having to profane the Sabbath.... What did Joshua do? He stretched forth his hand to the light of the sun and to the light of the moon and to the light of the stars and pronounced to them the (ineffable) Name and each one stood still for 36 hours until after the Sabbath."²⁶ As demonstrations of the power of prayer we have two beautiful stories, one concerned with the story of Joshua and the sun, and the other dealing with Jonah and the fish. "From the time that the sun rises until it sets, it praises the Holy One Blessed Be He. And thus do you find

25. Tanchumah on Va-era to Ex 7:8,9.

26. Pirke de R. Eliezer 52.

that at the hour when Joshua stood in Gibeon and sought to stop the sun, he did not say 'Stand still at Gibeon' rather 'Sun be silent at Gibeon'.²⁷ All the while that he went he praised the Holy One Blessed Be He, and as long as he praised Him he had the strength to continue. Therefore did Joshua say, be silent. The sun said to him, 'You say to me, be silent? I was created in the firmament and you were created on the sixth day, yet you say to me, be silent.' Joshua answered him, does not a minor freeman tell his elderly slave to be silent? Did not Abraham, our father, acquire the heavens and all that are therein?... And not only this, did you not bow down as a slave before Joseph?' The sun answered, 'You tell me to be silent, but who will praise the Holy One Blessed Be He?' He answered him, 'You be silent and I will recite the Lord's praises.'²⁸ "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights without praying. The Holy One Blessed Be He said, 'I have prepared for him a place in the belly of a male fish in order that he be not distressed, and he does not pray. I shall prepare a female fish, pregnant with 365,000 small fish in order that he may be distressed and will pray before me, because the Lord longs for the prayers of the righteous.' In that very hour He prepared a pregnant fish and this fish said to the other one, 'The Lord has appointed me to swallow the Prophet who is within you,

27. *p19*

28. Yalkut Shimoni II 22 on Josh 10:12 from Tanchumah.

and if you do not let him up I shall swallow you with him.' He asked, 'Who knows whether you speak the truth?' She answered, 'The Leviathan.' They went to the Leviathan, and she said to him: 'O Leviathan, king of all the sea's fishes, do you know whether the Lord has sent me to this fish to swallow the prophet who is within him?' He answered, 'Yes'. The first fish asked, 'When'? He answered, 'Within the last three hours when the Lord came down to play with me I heard thusly.' Immediately he let him go and the female fish swallowed him. And Jonah was very distressed from the squeezing and from the placenta. Immediately he turned his heart to prayer.... Immediately the Holy One Blessed Be He notified the fish and she spewed forth Jonah....²⁹ Thus we see an acknowledgment by the Rabbis that the miracles can serve not only to strengthen Faith, generally, but also to strengthen particular acts of Faith.

As our final sphere we refer to the cases where the Rabbis interpret miracles to have been caused in order to strengthen an idea within the people. This is in connection with the coming of the Messiah and God's ever-continuing protection of His people. First in connection with both the rod and the coming forth of water from the rock we find: "...And thus shall the very same staff be given to the king, the messiah. And thus are all the nations of the world destined to be ruled by it."³⁰ Next in connection with the

29. Yalkut Shimoni II 550 on Jonah from Pirke deR. Eliezer 10.

30. Yalkut Shimoni I 763 on Num 20:8 from Yelamdenu; also Num R 18 on Num 17:23.

plagues we find: "And all the plagues which the Holy One Blessed Be He brought upon the Egyptians he will in the future bring upon Edom."³¹ It is interesting to note that if this phraseology was used in a sermon, it probably meant that conditions at the time had reached the stage, under Roman oppression that it was thought that only a miracle could save Israel. Again we have a reference dealing with the plagues:"...Not only in connection with the Egyptians alone (does He perform miracles) but also upon all who oppress Israel in all generations."³²

Thus has been indicated, in the language of the Midrash itself, that it was recognized of old that the Biblical miracles came about not only for their immediate purpose, but also for the meaning that they would have to future generations. This chapter has also indicated to what extent there was a questioning by the Rabbis of the events known as miracles and has shown that there was a recognition of natural law in Jewish thought at this time.

31. Tanchumah on Bo

32. פא לא קמערק קלר אלא קל פאצירן אפס זי פניכ פצוח
Yalkut Shimoni I 235 on Ex 14:25 from Mekilta.

CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTIC HANDLING OF MIRACLES

Since we have observed that the Midrash definitely recognizes Biblical miracles as such, we would expect that perhaps it accords to them a special type of treatment. This is the case. Before attempting to state what this treatment is let us first look at a typical case: "When Moses and Aaron came and stood before Pharaoh and they (the Egyptians) saw that they resembled the ministering angels and their height was as the cedars of Lebanon, and their eyes were like suns, and their beards as clusters of palms, and the brightness of their faces as the brightness of the sun, and the staff of God in their hands, upon which was engraved the Ineffable Name, and the words in their mouths like flaming fire; immediately they were stricken with fear. There were four hundred entrances to the palace of Pharaoh and at each entrance were bears and lions and evil animals and no creature could enter until they had fed them meat, in order that they should not injure them. But when Moses and Aaron came, they all gathered around and licked their legs and conducted them until they came before Pharaoh. When all the kings of the east and west saw this they were stricken with fear and perspiration, trembling and shaking gripped Pharaoh and all who sat before him and they removed their crowns from off their heads and bowed before them (Moses and Aaron). At that

time Pharaoh was forced to heed the call of nature and he entered the proper chamber but a dozen scorpions were prepared for him and they stung him every place that he sat, and Pharaoh let out a long and bitter wailing until the dignitaries of the kingdom heard his wailing. Afterwards he returned and sat upon his throne and his heart was hardened. He asked Moses and Aaron, "Who are ye, from whence do ye come and who sent ye to me?" They answered him, 'The God of the Hebrews sent us to you. Send forth my people that they might serve Me.' Immediately he replied, 'I have never known the Lord. He has never sent me a message of peace nor a gift.'¹ The Biblical account of the entrance of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh reads as follows: "And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh and they did so as the Lord had commanded; and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did in like manner with their secret arts. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents; but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had spoken."² The Midrash, in recounting this event, after giving the Biblical details continues as follows: "...He

1. Yalkut Shimoni I 181 on Exodus 7:9

2. Exodus 7:10 - 13.

(Aaron) put his hand in his breast and withdrew it leprous as snow. They also, put their hands in their breasts and took them out leprous as snow. And they would duplicate each plague that the Lord brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt until He brought upon them the plague of boils and this they were unable to duplicate...."³

These two Midrashic passages based upon these Biblical verses, in which the only miracle is that of the rod and the serpent would seem to indicate that the Rabbis were not content with the simple Biblical account, once they were provided with an opening. It was their wont to weave much legendary lore about all Biblical incidents. Each scriptural conversation, no matter how brief, becomes in the Midrash a full-blown drama, replete with the phrases and thoughts that contemporary audiences would expect. In expanding the passages dealing with miracles, however, we find that the legend remains in the spirit of the original text and where there might have been but one simple miraculous event in Scripture, we now find that many other miracles have been joined to it. In other cases, the Rabbis have retained only the original miracle but have extended its scope far beyond what it originally encompassed. A Talmudical scholar has this to say: "The general tendency was to exalt the Biblical miracles, to expand them, to move them from the sphere of the individual concerned to that of the entire

people."⁴ To this might be added the words that not only were they moved from the individual to the national, but also from the national to the universal. There is evidence to support these statements in practically all of the miracles with which this work deals. Take for instance the commentary on the first of the plagues with which the Egyptians were afflicted: "What is meant by all their pools of water? Even what was in the cup became blood, and even what an Egyptian would spit from his mouth became blood...And the barrel was full of water (in the Israelites territory) and the Egyptian would go to fill the jug from it and it would turn to blood, while an Israelite would go and drink water from it...and he would say to him, 'Let us both go and drink water from the vessel' and the Israelite would drink water and the Egyptian blood."⁵ The staff, which was the means used to bring on most of the plagues, also comes in for much imaginative thinking. "He asked Him, 'How shall I bring upon them ten plagues?' He answered, 'Take this staff in your hand.' R. Judah said the staff weighed forty seah and was of sapphire. The ten plagues were engraved upon it in abbreviation. The Lord said unto him, 'In this manner bring upon him the plagues.'"⁶

4. Guttman, Alexander The Significance of Miracles for Talmudic Judaism, HUCA #20 P. 401.

5. Tanchumah on Exodus 7:19.

6. Exodus Rabbah 8 on Exodus 7:1, see also Ex R 9 on Ex 7:21.

What was probably the most important Biblical miracle to the Midrashic sages was that of the Splitting of the Red Sea, because of its significance in the birth of the Israelite nation. Certainly the researches necessary for this work uncovered more material relating to this miracle than to any other. Therefore, as might be expected, the Midrashic legends and embellishments which have been woven about the original Biblical narrative are many in number and rich in content.

In one instance we have the emphasis on Israel's great trepidation and the consequent necessity for the Almighty to completely reassure them as to their safety: "And the Holy One Blessed Be He worked ten miracles for them at the Sea. He made the water to stand as walls. There is no wall without a tower, there is no tower without a guard, and the ministering angels were guarding Israel that they might not be injured. Moses said to them (Israel) 'Come and cross over' They answered 'How can we pass through these walls?' ...He congealed the heart of the sea and the sea rose and filled all its boundaries as a man cups one hand above and one below, thus did the Holy One Blessed Be He congeal the heart of the sea and fill all its boundaries and make it like an archway... Moses said to them, 'Come and pass through.' They answered, 'When the water was two below and one above, we were unable to pass, now that there are two above and one below, how much the more so?' He made it like a plateau...

He brought them sweet water out of salt water and they and their animals drank...He made it like clay...He made it like straw...like a pile of straw between two stacks. And He made it into many fragments...and He made it into sections...and He made it like dry land...and He made it like a plain and brought forth grasses and Israel pastured thereon...."7

Another development concentrates on the punishment of Egypt and is adorned with angels: "During the night Gabriel wanted to murder Egypt. The Holy One Blessed Be He said, 'Let them wait until the same hour when Abraham, their father (Israel's) labored for me' as it is written 'And Abraham arose early in the morning.' When Gabriel heard this, he did not smite them all night... The Egyptians would have worked magic and arisen from the sea, but the sea considered that it had received a mandate from the Lord...and the water went after every single Egyptian and brought him down to the sea.... There were two magicians in Egypt, Jochani and Mamre and they made themselves wings through magic and flew in the air and were reaching the heights of the universe. Gabriel said, 'Your great pride will destroy your height.' Immediately the Holy One Blessed Be He said to Michael, 'Go and give them their

7. Midrash Tehillim 114. For same story with slightly different developments see the following: Aboth de R. Nathan (version #1 Schechter) 33; Yalkut Shimoni I 233 on Ex 14:16; Mekilta 5 on Ex 14:16; Pirke de R. Eliezer on Beshalach.

just desserts.' Michael grabbed them by their pigtaails and dashed them into the sea."⁸ Angels again play a role in this version, which lays stress on the delivery of Israel from a threatening enemy: "Moses said to the Almighty, 'The enemy is behind them and the sea is in front of them, how shall they go?' What did the Holy One Blessed Be He do? He sent forth the great prince, Michael, and he became a wall of fire between Israel and Egypt. And Egypt sought to chase Israel, but they could not because of the fire."⁹

Without creating any legendary stories and without joining any non-textual miracles, our original miracle of one sea splitting is carried up to a universal level by the Midrash: "'And the waters split' all the water in the universe split...even the water that was in cisterns, ditches, caves, cups, glasses and jars was split...the heavenly waters and the earthly waters were split...and when they returned, all the waters in the universe returned."¹⁰

The Midrash is far from content to leave us with so few details concerning the manna as we are able to garner from the story in Exodus. We have three separate descriptions of its descent, with varying details: "...A north wind

9. Pirke de R. Eliezer on Beshalach.

10. Yalkut Shimoni I 234 on Exodus 14:21; see also Exodus Rabbah 21 and Mekilta on Ex 14:16; for more legends and greater expansion of this miracle see Yalkut Shimoni I 235 on Ex 14:25 from Mekilta 5 and again Pirke de R. Eliezer on Beshalach.

would come and sweep the wilderness, rain would come and wash the ground, then the dew would rise and the wind would catch it and make it like tables of gold. The manna would descend upon them and from them Israel would take it..."¹¹ "And you might think that since it came from heaven, it came down cold, but this teaches us that it was warm, and how do we know that it landed only in the vessels?"¹² The manna that descended to Israel would grow and rise up until all the kings of east and west saw it..."¹³ The Rabbis, however, were not only interested in supplying the details of how it came, but they also were intent on explaining what a truly marvelous food it was. Given only the cryptic words "Tsappichis bid'vash" in the text they let us know that: "Not as the elderly tasted it did the infants taste it. The infants tasted it as milk...the youths tasted it as honey...and the elderly tasted it as bread...and the sick tasted it as fine flour mixed with oil and honey like the pearl-barley that they prepare for the sick...."¹⁴ "Even as a matter that one did not voice, only thought in his mind what he would like, the Holy One Blessed Be He did his will and he would taste what he

11. Yalkut Shimoni I 259 on Ex 16:12 also Mid. Teh. 78 and Mekilta.

12. Yalkut Shimoni I 260 on Exodus 16:13

13. ibid.

14. Yalkut Shimoni I 258 on Ex 16:4 also Yoma 75b and Tanchumah.

wanted to taste."¹⁵ We are also assured that the manna had a marvelous effect on those who ate it: "They would eat and not bring forth anything."¹⁶ To the authors of the Midrash the descent and unusual taste of the manna were not its only great qualities, for it did not descend unaccompanied: "That there came down to Israel precious stones and pearls along with the manna."¹⁷ But this wealth did not only serve the generation in the wilderness: "Three divisions were made of the wealth of the manna. One third went to the scholars, a third to Mordecai and Esther, and a third to the construction of the Temple."¹⁸

The story of the destruction of Nadab and Abihu is graphically presented in this fashion: "Two streams of flame came out of the Holy of Holies and divided into four and two entered this one's nose and two entered the other's nose....it burned them and not their clothes."¹⁹ In the somewhat similar story of the destruction of Korach and his band, we find that the Midrash is interested in impressing upon us the completeness of the catastrophe, so the following legendary tale is told: "Even if some of their clothes were at the laundry they rolled and came and were

15. Exodus Rabbah 25 on Exodus 16:4.

16. Midrash Tehillim 78.

17. Yalkut Shimoni I 260 on Exodus 16:21.

18. Midrash Tehillim 78.

19. B.T. Sanhedrin 52a; Sifra.

swallowed with them...even a needle that had been borrowed from them by an Israelite was also swallowed...."²⁰

The Bible tells us of one opening in the ground, but the Midrash is not satisfied with this: "At the same time, there were opened in the earth many holes...the earth became like a funnel and in each place where there was one of them or his wealth it rolled and came and went down with him...."²¹

One of the most delightful of Biblical stories is that of Jonah's sojourn within the fish. Part of the treatment of this story in the Midrash has already come within our purview in another connection.²² The beginning of this legend is an even more extraordinary example of how the Rabbis were prone to expand and embellish Biblical miracles with their own imagination. One might almost think that they foresaw our own day with its television screens and their almost unlimited possibilities for use in navigation.²³

The Hagiographa affords little opportunity for the Midrash to exploit happenings in this characteristic fashion. However, when such an opportunity is given as with the story of the three men who went through fire in the Book of Daniel, it is certainly not overlooked: "And

20. Numbers Rabbah 18 on Numbers 16:32

21. Yalkut Shimoni I 752 from Yelamdenu on Num 16:32; Num R 18

22. Chapter two.

23. Yalkut Shimoni II 550 on Jonah from Pirke de R. Eliezer 10.

what do we learn from the words 'there was no hurt to them'? This tells us that they had been eunuchs and were now healed."²⁴

The great medieval commentator Rashi often alludes to the fact that he can find no logical or rational reason for the juxtaposition side by side of many of the passages that we find in the Pentateuch. There is an entirely different picture presented when we turn to the Midrash. Here, a definite attempt is made to bring topical material together. It is striking how often we find that as the Midrash comments on one Biblical miracle, they will refer to other Biblical miracles. We remember how it was shown that for many miracles, conditions had been made with the various parts of nature which were involved.²⁵ In this case, of course, it is necessary to bring in other miracles for the commentator to make his point, but upon examination many other instances can be found where the only apparent connection is the fact that both stories involve miraculous events. Take, for instance this passage, which was located while looking for references to Joshua's stopping the sun: "...The Holy One Blessed Be He created seas and Moses made the sea dry land.... Elisha came and made the dry land a sea.... The Holy One Blessed Be He created winter and summer and Elijah came and made the winter summer...Samuel came and made the summer winter.... The Holy One Blessed Be

24. P.T. Shabbath Chapter 6 Halacha 9

25. Chapter II; see also note 2 for this chapter.

He created the heavens for the heavenly hosts and the earth for earthly creatures.... Moses came and made the earthly creatures heavenly and the heavenly hosts earthly...."²⁶

Or let us take the case of the interpretation of a verse having nothing to do with miracles, which also came up as Joshua's feat was investigated: "'To Thee O Lord is the greatness', this is Creation... 'and the strength' this is the Exodus... 'and the glory' this is the sun and the moon which stood still for Joshua...."²⁷ It might be assumed that in connection with the verses describing the miracle of the water coming from the rock only this story is dealt with. This is not the case: "When Israel passed through the Sea, infants were thirsty and a woman would stretch forth her hand fill her water-skin from the salty water and they would become sweet. And another miracle occurred, she would stretch her hand between the waves of the sea and gather for her son figs and pomegranates and peaches and give them to her son."²⁸ Nor is this the only case we have come across demonstrating this point.²⁹

A miraculous object may also become the center of a cluster of stories connecting one miraculous event with

26. Yalkut Shimoni II 21 on Joshua 10:12 from Deut. R 10; see also Koheleth R. 3.

27. B.T. Berachoth 58a.

28. Yalkut Shimoni I 764 from Yelamdenu on Num 20:12.

29. *ibid* I 235 on Ex 14:25 from Mekilta; *ibid* I 237 on Ex 14:27 from Gen R.

another. This may be illustrated by the staff which was used by Moses and Aaron: "'Take the staff'...this was the staff which was in the hand of our father Jacob...and it was in the hand of Judah...and in Moses' hand...and Aaron's and David's...and it was in the hand of each king until the Temple was destroyed. And thus it will be in the hand of the Messianic king to rule over the nations of the world."³⁰ The consuming fire also demonstrates an object which the Midrash singles out to join other miraculous events to: "He sent fire against them and this same fire remained on the earth and did no longer return to its place. Rather did it enter the Tent of Meeting and all the sacrifices that were offered in the wilderness were consumed by this same fire, which came out and burned them...and this same fire went out and consumed the band of Korach...and the same fire went out and consumed Aaron's sons...no human being leaves this world until some of this same fire has passed over him."³¹

It would seem then, that in dealing with miracles, the Midrash has a tendency to embellish and exaggerate them and also to bring in other miracles while discussing a verse dealing with one.

30. *ibid* I 763 from Yelamdenu on Num 20:8; see also Num R 18 on Num 17:23.

31. Yalkut Shimoni I 524 from Pirke de R. Eliezer on Lev 9:24; see also Pirke de R. Eliezer 53.

CHAPTER IV

SOURCE OF MIRACLES

The folk literature of many nations glorify heroes because they were miracle workers and had superhuman power. This is especially true of religious heroes. Ofttimes these personages are known for their goodness or their kindness but if they have ever had any miracles attributed to them, it is this particular facet of their personality which is remembered above all others. Was this true of the Midrashic interpretation of Biblical miracles and those who worked them? Who were the personalities who worked these miracles? Moses is remembered primarily as a lawgiver and not for the many miracles that transpired while he led Israel. Joshua is identified, perhaps, with the crumbling of the walls at Jericho in the popular mind, but the greater miracle, that of causing the sun to stand still, is not often attributed to him in popular thought and saying. It probably is true that Elijah is very closely identified with the working of miracles. However, as may have been noted already, this work has dealt very sparingly with any of the Elijah stories. This has been not because of lack of research into this material, but through a feeling that these formed a separate portion of the Bible and are not strictly conformant with the other miracles.¹ A quick perusal of some of the more

1. See Kohler, K. in CCAR Yearbook #24 P. 297 where in discussing a paper by Enelow, H. the following is said: "...in the Elijah stories there are many Agadic elements...."

of the ~~more~~ important Midrashic passages based on these Elijah stories would easily convince the reader that a different attitude is held here.² There does not seem to be any acknowledgment of anything extraordinary occurring, as was shown to be the case with most Biblical miracles.³

If one would wish to prove that the Midrash holds that the miracles were performed through the power inherent in some individual, this passage would be cited: "And all these miracles were done by Moses' hand."⁴ Immediately, however, he would be confronted with this most graphic refutation of his thesis: "He (Moses) showed him the staff, but he would not obey until the Holy One Blessed Be He appeared in His glory. Once the Almighty appeared in His glory, the sea began to flee...He (Moses) said to him, 'All day did I speak to you in the name of the Lord and you did not obey'...he answered, 'not from you, O son of Amram, but from the Master of the universe.'"⁵ Perhaps he would attempt to cite those passages which in this work have been grouped together to indicate the rewarding of the righteous through miracles⁶ to prove his point. However, it was also

2. A very fruitful source of these stories is the Seder Eliahu Rabbah. Chapter 17 of this work deals with the famous miracle of the overflowing food and oil containers. This was a very popular type miracle, appearing also in the New Testament. Also see Yalkut Shimoni II 207.

3. Chapter II.

4. Exodus Rabbah 21.

5. Yalkut Shimoni I 234 on Ex 14:21; also Mekilta 5 on Ex 14:16.

6. Chapter II; see the commentary on Joshua 10:12 in Yalkut Shimoni II 21 and 22; also Pirke de R. Eliezer 52.

also shown in this connection that the punishment of the wicked could also come in this fashion. The great preponderance of references indicate to us that for the masters of the Midrash the true source of all miracles is God and none else. "And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, to let you know that voice and tongue are in His province, that if he (Balaam) had sought to curse, his mouth was in His power."⁷ The crowning statement, which can leave no doubt that miracles are the work of God is this: "All that the Holy One Blessed Be He desires to do, He does, because all is His in the heavens and the earth."⁸

One more sidelight, which is not really within the scope of this work may be brought to show that the Rabbis felt that they could not overemphasize God's role in the working of miracles. This was an attitude on their part that many of the ordinary doings of the Almighty were even greater and more wonderful than the miraculous events recorded in the Bible. The story in the Midrash telling about the Roman lady who questioned His providence and who sought to show, by forcibly mating her slaves that she was as powerful as He,⁹ is a vehicle used to demonstrate this point. It was shown to the lady that the proper mating of men and women is actually more

7. Numbers Rabbah 20 and Tanchumah on Num 22:29.

8. ^{Exodus} Rabbah 25; for God's omnipotence in working miracles see also Ex R 22, Yalkut Shimoni I 235, Tanchumah on Korach, Num R 18 and Mid Teh 114.

9. Genesis Rabbah 68; Leviticus Rabbah 8.

difficult than the splitting of the Red Sea. Certainly, it would follow that if the Midrash believes explicitly in the Creation by the word of God, it would also believe that He has power over all and can use this power as He sees fit.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Let us now briefly summarize what has gone before and examine what conclusions may be drawn, if any. In the first place it was seen that the contributors to and the compilers of the Midrash had both an implicit and an explicit belief that all the events described in the Bible which might be questioned because they do not occur in the normal course of events did occur. Occasionally there might be some questioning as to whether these events were in defiance of natural law, or whether they were pre-ordained from Creation. It was also seen that there was a definite recognition by the Midrashic writers that there exists something which we call Natural Law.

Furthermore, the Midrash recognizes that miracles play a very important role in the religion of the people aside from any effect they might have had in aiding Israel to save themselves from dire straits at the time that they took place. The Midrash interprets miracles in such a manner so as to strengthen the faith, the ethics and the moral and devotional life of the people. It takes for granted that this was one of the main reasons for the inclusion of miracles in Scripture.

Finally, it has been seen that Pentateuchal miracles play a much larger role in the Midrash than miracles appearing in other sections. Not only is there much more material

available on those verses containing miracles which appear in the Pentateuch, but also the commentary is fuller. In the list of categories which was drawn up, Pentateuchal miracles are far more likely to appear in all of the categories, while non-Pentateuchal miracles are more likely to appear in only one or two categories. Along this same line of thought it is well to add that those miracles which are most vitally connected with important aspects of Judaism, such as the whole complex of miracles which we find in the story of the Exodus, are given a fuller treatment than any other miracle, whether they be Pentateuchal or non-Pentateuchal.

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