

GENESIS RABBAH AS POLEMIC: AN INTRODUCTORY ACCOUNT

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Genesis Rabbah presents the first complete and systematic Judaic commentary to the book of Genesis. In normative and classical Judaism, that is, the Judaism that reached its original expression in the Mishnah, ca. A.D. 200, and came to final and full statement in the Talmud of Babylonia, ca. A.D. 600, Genesis Rabbah therefore takes an important position. Specifically, this great rabbinic commentary to Genesis, generally thought to have been closed (“redacted”) at ca. A.D. 400, provides a complete and authoritative account of how Judaism proposes to read and make sense of the first book of Hebrew Scriptures.

The interest and importance of their reading of Genesis transcend the age in which the sages did their work. For how the great Judaic sages of that time taught the interpretation of the stories of Genesis would guide later Judaic exegetes of the same biblical book. So when we follow the work before us, we gain entry into the way in which Judaism in its normative and classical form, from that day to this, would understand the stories of the creation of the world. These concern Adam’s sin, Noah, and, especially, the founding family of Israel, in its first three generations, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Joseph. In an age in which the book of Genesis attracts remarkable interest and in which a literal mode of reading enjoys the authority of true religion, the supple and creative approach of the ancient rabbis, founders of Judaism, provides a valuable choice. The sages show the profound depths of the story of the creation of the world and Israel’s founding family. How so? They systematically link the history of the people of Israel to the lives and deeds of the founders, the fathers and the mothers of this book of the Torah.

What is striking in the document at hand? If one studies Genesis Rabbah as a whole, not simply as a scrapbook of bits and pieces of comments on discrete verses, we discover that compositor-exegetes—those who selected and arranged matters as we now have them—so chose and

arranged their inherited materials as to make important points. So Genesis Rabbah, a thorough survey will show, constitutes a highly polemical document.

To present that fact on a small scale, I wish now to show how the document, seen from a distance, conducts a systematic polemic against positions identified in late antiquity with the views of Gnostics. The compositors of Genesis Rabbah repeatedly make two points about creation. First, it was perfect, and the creator-God knew just what he was doing. Second, man, in particular, was the triumph and crown of creation, because man is in God's image. These two points constitute a telling answer to those who maintained that creation had failed, man was imperfect, and the whole would have to give way to the rule of a more perfect, but as yet unknown God, capable of doing rightly what the creator-God had botched completely.

II

My survey covers a few contiguous passages in my own translation. This translation of Bereshit Rabbah takes as its text and systematic commentary Theodor and Albeck (1893–1936). That text is critical, so far as contemporary Judaic scholarship can produce a critical text, and I have treated it as authoritative in every detail.

This is not the first translation into English of Genesis Rabbah. I had the advantage of an excellent one, already available, and made ample use of it. Specifically, I systematically consulted the admirable translation of Genesis by H. Freedman in Freedman and Simon (1939). Where I have adopted Freedman's translation verbatim or nearly so, I have indicated by adding his name in square brackets. But I have taken full account of his rendering of nearly every line and I learned from him on each occasion on which I consulted him. It is a splendid piece of work. As to the translation of verses of Scripture, I took an eclectic approach, sometimes copying Freedman's, sometimes relying on the fine English of the RSV, and sometimes making up my own translation.

In breaking up long columns of undifferentiated type into the smallest whole units of thought, I believe I have made it possible to read the components of the canon of Judaism in that precise way in which, in our day, all of the classical literature is read. All prior analysis rests on an imperfect system of differentiation and hence has to be redone. My system is quite simple. I have labeled each sentence, paragraph, and larger composite, so as to facilitate ready reference to the entire document. The first Roman numeral refers to the *pārāšāh*, or chapter; the second, to the paragraph of the *pārāšāh*. These two matters are already

signified in the printed text and in Freedman's translation. Many of the so-called paragraphs in fact are made up of two or more complete and autonomous thoughts. In my use of an Arabic numeral after the Roman, I indicate the divisions within paragraphs as I propose to differentiate them. I then indicate, by a letter, each individual stich, that is, the smallest whole unit of thought. Thus I:I.1.A stands for the first *pārāšāh*, the first paragraph of the first *pārāšāh*, the first complete composition of the first paragraph of the first *pārāšāh*, and the first sentence of the first complete composition of the first paragraph of the first *pārāšāh*—and so on.

We proceed to a sequence of compositions which, as a set, in my view conduct a sustained and powerful polemic against positions commonly espoused by Gnostic writers in the period from the second century onward.

III

VIII:VIII.1.A. R. Samuel bar Nahman in the name of R. Jonathan: "When Moses was writing out the Torah, he wrote up the work of each day (in sequence). When he came to the verse, 'And God said, "Let us make man . . ."' (Gen 1:26), he said, 'Lord of the universe, in saying this you give an opening to heretics (to claim that there are two dominions in heaven, so the creator-God had to consult with others in making the world, because he was not alone and all-powerful).'

B. "He said to him, 'Write it anyhow, and if someone wants to err, let him err.'

C. "The Holy One, blessed be he, said to him, 'Moses, as to this man whom I am going to create, will I not bring forth both great and unimportant descendants from him?'

D. "It is so that, if a great man has to get permission from a lesser person and says, 'Why in the world should I have to get permission from an unimportant person,' people will say to him, 'Learn a lesson from your creator, who created the creatures of the upper world and the creatures of the lower world, but when he came to create man, went and took counsel with the ministering angels.'

2.A. Said R. Layyah (Hila), "There is no taking counsel here. Rather the matter may be compared to the case of a king who was walking about at the door of his palace and saw a clod tossed (on the ground). He said, 'What should we do with it?'

B. "Some say, 'Use it for public baths,' and others, 'For private baths.'

C. "The king said, 'I shall make a statue (of myself) with it, and who is going to stand in my way?'"

No. 1 answers the pressing question by supplying a context in which people notice the use of the plural, "we". The usage indicates how one

should conduct himself, and has no theological meaning whatsoever. (The next entry, VIII:IX, will make explicit what is here merely implicit.) This answer then matches that of No. 2: even though the king out of courtesy may consult lesser authorities, in the end he does just what he wishes, without regard to the advice others may give him. The point then underlines that the king makes no sort of bath whatsoever. Why then does the author of the parable select, in particular, a statue? It is hardly random, in light of the statement, later on, that man is made in God's image. So the answer is decisive and stunning. After consulting the angels, God did what he wished, and what was that? It was to make another God, that is, man in God's image. That represents a stunning rejection of the angels and affirmation of man.

VIII:X.1.A. Said R. Hoshiah, "When the Holy One, blessed be he, came to create the first man, the ministering angels mistook him (for God, since man was in God's image) and wanted to say before him, 'Holy, (holy, holy is the Lord of hosts).'

B. "To what may the matter be compared? To the case of a king and a governor who were set in a chariot, and the provincials wanted to greet the king, 'Sovereign!' But they did not know which one of them was which. What did the king do? He turned the governor out and put him away from the chariot, so that people would know who was king.

C. "So too when the Holy One, blessed be he, created the first man, the angels mistook him (for God). What did the Holy One, blessed be he, do? He put him to sleep, so everyone knew that he was a mere man.

D. "That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: 'Cease you from man, in whose nostrils is a breath, for how little is he to be accounted' (Isa 2:22)."

This is simply a stunning follow-up on the foregoing. Since man is in God's image, the angels did not know man from God. Only that man sleeps distinguishes man from God. I cannot imagine a more daring affirmation of humanity. The theme derives from the verse that states, ". . . in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26), but this passage is not cited in the present construction. Clearly VIII:X simply carries forward the concluding entry of VIII:IX, in which the relevant verse is cited. We have, then, no mere anthology on the cited verse. We have a profoundly polemical statement about the true character and condition of man. Moreover, even at VIII:IX.2.E the cited verse plays no substantial role. It is as if the framer did not wish to give emphasis to Gen 1:26 and chose rather to submerge that verse, while making such observations as proved needful. Accordingly, "in our image" yields the view that the complete image of man is attained in a divine union between man and woman, and, further, the syllogism that what makes man different from God is

that man sleeps, and God does not sleep. Given the premise of the base verse and the issues inherent in the allegation that man is in God's image, the treatment here proves extraordinary.

IV

VIII:XI.2.A. R. Joshua b. R. Nehemiah in the name of R. Hinena bar Isaac and rabbis in the name of R. Eleazar: "He created in him four traits applicable to beings of the upper world and four of the lower world.

B. "As to traits applicable to creatures of the upper world, he stands up straight like ministering angels, he speaks as do ministering angels, he has the power of understanding as do ministering angels, and he sees as do ministering angels."

C. "But does a beast not see?"

D. "(That indeed is the case,) but a man sees from the side.

E. "As to traits applicable to creatures of the lower world, he eats and drinks like a beast, he has sexual relations like a beast, he defecates like a beast, and he dies like a beast."

3.A. R. Tipdai in the name of R. Aha: "The creatures of the upper world were created in the image and likeness (of God) and do not engage in sexual relations, while the creatures of the lower world engage in sexual relations and were not created in the image and likeness (of God).

B. "Said the Holy One, blessed be he, 'Lo, I shall create him in the image and likeness (of God), like the creatures of the upper world, but he will engage in sexual relations, like creatures of the lower world.'"

C. R. Tipdai in the name of R. Aha: "The Holy One, blessed be he, said, 'If I create him solely with traits of creatures of the upper world, he will live and never die, and if I do so solely with traits of creatures of the lower world, he will die and not live. Instead, I shall create him with traits of creatures of the upper world and with traits of creatures of the lower world.

D. "'If he sins, he will die, and if not, he will live.'"

Sin now makes the difference. Man has traits of angels and traits of beasts. When he is righteous, his angelic and heavenly traits mark him as in God's image, and when he sins, he is not in the likeness and the image of God. No. 1 takes up the cited verse. Nos. 2 and 3 go over the same matter, which in no way intersects with the verse at hand but pursues an interest of its own, namely, the divine and human traits of man. What is interesting is that the appropriate "base-verse" is once more "In our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Why so? The question that is answered is what traits of human beings are divine, in line with the verse at hand, and what traits are not. Perhaps in a better edition VIII:XI.2, 3 would be located together with VIII:X. But the really interesting question remains the one we addressed just now, namely, why has the framer

not cited Gen 1:26's reference to man in God's image as a principal point of exegesis and subjected it to the sort of treatment he has lavished on Gen 1:26's reference to "*Let us make. . .*"

One available theory is that the allusion to man in God's image may have appeared to exegetes too close to the Christians' claim of Jesus as God incarnate, an issue the exegetes before us do not appear to have wished to confront in connection with the "base-verse" at hand. It is as if the principal threat came from "heretics" who sought proof for the belief in two dominions, e.g., Gnostic convictions about a creator God and another, unknown God as well. But a different sort of "heretic", maintaining that God had been incarnate as man in the form of Jesus, who, in the period in which the document came into its final form, triumphed as Christ, ruler of the world, does not appear to have received his appropriate reply in the present context. That view is treated as though no one held it.

V

IX:I.1.A. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31):

B. R. Levi in the name of R. Hama bar Hanina commenced (discourse by citing the following verse of Scripture): "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov 25:2).

C. R. Levi in the name of R. Hama bar Hanina: "From the beginning of the book (of Genesis) to this point: 'it is the glory of God to conceal a thing,' but from this point forward: 'the glory of kings is to search out a matter.'

D. "The reference to 'glory' applies to words of Torah, which are compared to kings, as it is said, 'By me kings rule' (Prov 8:15).

E. "'To search out a matter' (amplifies the verse,) 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen 1:31)."

The fact that the verse has God examine—hence, search out—the results of six days of creation evidently draws attention to the intersecting verse. Up to this point the works of creation have been kept a secret, but from this point onward the king, the ruler, takes over and investigates the character of what is going on. So from here on "one may search out the matter" [Freedman and Simon, 1939, p. 64, n. 1]. There is no hidden God, or God who has absconded. All things are public and open: in the Torah.

IX:II.1.A. R. Tanhuma opened (discourse by citing the following verse of Scripture): "He has made every thing beautiful in its time" (Qoh 3:11).

B. Said R. Tanhuma, "The world was created at the proper time. The world was not ready to be created prior to this time." (God admired the

works of creation because the world was brought into being when it was ripe. Hence what has attracted the exegete's attention, once again, is the question, what is it about the world that God found to be very good? The answer here is that the world was "beautiful in its time," the right one for God to create.)

2.A. Said R. Abbahu, "On the basis of the cited verse, we learn that the Holy One, blessed be he, had created worlds and destroyed them (as unsuccessful), until he created this world. He said, 'This one pleases me, the others did not please me.'"

B. Said R. Phineas, "The scriptural verse that supports R. Abbahu's view is this: 'And God saw all that he had made . . . '(Gen 1:31)."

Both exercises make a single point. Tanhuma's takes the form of the citation of an intersecting verse; the compositor obviously relies on IX:I.1.A. for the base verse, so whatever he used he has revised to accord with the requirements of the present context. Abbahu does not have an intersecting verse, but the base-verse supplies a proof-text for his syllogism.

We see two modes of making the same point, the one through the intersecting verse and the base verse, which we may call exegetical, the other syllogistic, joined with facts supplied by Scripture to prove the syllogism. The editor has joined the materials and set them here for good reason. We cannot say that he has created a mere anthology of materials relevant to Gen 1:31. Prior to the work of composition the compositor had clearly defined what point he wished to make. It is the perfection of creation, the best of all creations, completed at just the right moment.

IX:III.1.A. ["And God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31):] R. Yohanan and R. Simeon b. Laqish:

B. R. Yohanan said, "A mortal king builds a palace, then examining the upper floors in one inspection and the lower ones in another, but the Holy One, blessed be he, could take in both the upper floors and the lower floors in a single look." [Freedman and Simon, 1939, p. 65, n. 1: Interpreting "And God saw *everything* that he had made"—in a single glance.]

C. Said R. Simeon b. Laqish, "'Lo, it was very good' refers to this world. 'And lo, it was very good' (with the addition of *and*) encompasses the world to come. The Holy One, blessed be he, encompassed both of them with a single look."

2.A. R. Simeon b. Laqish in the name of R. Eleazar b. Azariah: "'Ah Lord God, behold, you have made the heaven and the earth' (Jer 32:17). From that moment: 'There is nothing too hard for you' (Jer 32:17)."

B. R. Haggai in the name of R. Isaac, "'And you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the

imaginations of the thoughts' (1 Chr 28:9). (Taking the root of the word for 'imaginations', YSR, which serves also as the root for the word, 'form' or 'create', we interpret as follows:) Before thought is formed in the heart of man, it already is revealed before you."

C. R. Yudan in the name of R. Isaac: "Before a creature is actually created, his thought is already revealed before you."

D. Said R. Yudan in his own name, "'For there is not a word in my tongue but lo, O Lord, you know it altogether' (Ps 139:4). Before my tongue forms speech, already 'lo, O Lord, you know it altogether.'"

No. 1 interprets the reference to God's seeing, making noteworthy what in the text is a dormant detail. No. 2 seems to me to answer the question, Did God not know, prior to creation, whether what he would make would be any good? Is that why he had to look at it and declare it very good? The answer of course is that just as God knows before human creation precisely what mortals will go and do, all the more so before his own act of creation does he know the outcome of all things.

VI

If we look back at the sequence of propositions from IX:I onward, what do we find? First, the mystery of creation is sealed and not to be revealed. Second, it is true that God made worlds before this one. But the reason is that only with the creation of this world did God know that the world he created was very good. God fully inspected this world and found it very good. God knew full well what he was doing from the beginning. If people maintained that the creator-god was an evil bungler, the present sequence would present a systematic reply. God not only did not bungle creation but knew precisely what he was doing from beginning to end. The reference to God's inspecting creation and finding it very good, then, contains no implication that God did not know what he was doing, since he knew full well from before creation precisely what he was doing. That accounts for IX:II's emphasis on God's power to see it all, all at once, providing a restatement of the same notion. IX:III spells it out. So we have to read the three paragraphs as a continuous statement of a sizable syllogism.

Obviously, were we to reconstruct the argument against which the authorship of the document directs its counter-argument, we should once more find ourselves in the midst of a gaggle of gnostics. But that observation seems altogether too general, for "gnostic" stands for many positions sharing few indicative traits. All we can identify are the most general, hence commonplace, propositions. Without a theory on the particular sort of gnostic position against which argument flows, we

cannot materially advance the large-scale interpretation of our document. Shortly we shall have reason to identify the holders of the position contrary to the one advanced by the present authorship.

IX:VI.1.A. Said R. Simeon b. Eleazar, "'And behold, it was very good' (Gen 1:31) means: 'And behold, sleep is good.'

B. "But is sleep *very* good (under all circumstances)? Have we not learned in the Mishnah: Wine and sleep are a pleasure for them (the wicked) and also a pleasure for the world (M. San. 8:5) (but sleep is not a pleasure for the world when the righteous go to sleep, since the world is then deprived of their righteous deeds; accordingly, sleep is not invariably *very* good).

C. "(Sleep is very good because) a person sleeps a bit and then gets up and works hard in Torah-study (accomplishing more than he would if he had not slept for a little while)."

The anthology continues, now taking up new themes deemed relevant to the words, "very good". We move from death to sleep, which is compared to death. We recall, moreover, that it is what distinguishes man from God, who never sleeps.

IX:VII.1.A. Nahman in the name of R. Samuel: "'Behold, it was very good' refers to the impulse to do good. 'And behold, it was very good' encompasses also the impulse to do evil.

B. "And is the impulse to do evil *very* good?"

C. "(Indeed so, for) if it were not for the impulse to do evil, a man would not build a house, marry a wife, and produce children. So does Solomon say, 'Again I considered all labor and all excelling in work, that is rivalry with his neighbor' (Qoh 4:4)."

The anthology now moves along to a new topic. Rivalry is deemed an aspect of the impulse to do evil which produces good results.

IX:VIII.1.A. Said R. Huna, "'Behold, it was very good' refers to the measure that metes out good (things to people), while, 'And behold, it was very good' refers to the measure that metes out suffering as well.

B. "And can anyone say that the measure of suffering is *very* good?"

C. "Rather, on account of that measure people reach the life of the world to come, and so does Solomon say, 'And reproofs of chastisement are the way to (eternal) life' (Prov 6:23).

D. "You may say: Go forth and see what is the path that brings a man to the life of the world to come. You have to conclude, it is the measure of suffering."

The impulse to do evil draws in its wake the suffering that people undergo. Is this too very good? Indeed so, for the reason that is given: it is what brings people to the world to come.

IX:IX.1.A. Said R. Zeirah, "'Behold, it was very good' refers to the Garden of Eden. 'And behold, it was very good' encompasses Gehenna.

B. "And can anyone say that Gehenna is 'very good'?"

C. "Rather, the matter may be compared to a king who had an orchard and brought workers into it, building a paymaster's hut at the gate. He said, 'Whoever shows himself worthy through hard work in the orchard may go into the paymaster's hut (and collect his wages), and whoever does not show himself worthy in the labor of the orchard may not go into the paymaster's hut.'

D. "So for whoever stores up a treasury of merit through performing religious duties and supererogatory good deeds, lo, there is the Garden of Eden, and for whoever does not store up for himself a treasury merit through the performance of religious duties and good deeds, lo, there is Gehenna."

That is why Gehenna is very good, in line with the foregoing. Just as the suffering of people prepares them for the life of the age to come, so the promise of Gehenna makes them wish to avoid failures in performing religious deeds.

IX:X.1.A. Said R. Samuel bar R. Isaac, "'Lo, it was very good' refers to the angel of life. 'And lo, it was very good' refers to the angel of death.

B. "And can anyone say that the angel of death is 'very good'?"

C. "Rather, the matter may be compared to the case of a king who made a banquet and invited guests and set before them a spread of every good thing. He said, 'Whoever eats and says a blessing for the king may eat and enjoy himself, but whoever eats and does not say a blessing for the king will have his head cut off with a sword.'

D. "So here, for whoever stores up a treasury of merit attained through performance of religious duties and good deeds, lo, there is the angel of life. And for whoever does not store up a treasury of merit attained through performance of religious duties and good deeds, lo, there is the angel of death."

From suffering and Gehenna we move on to the angel of death, also encompassed in the perfection of creation.

IX:XI.1.A. Said R. Simeon bar Abbah, "'Behold, it was very good' refers to the measure that metes out good things to people. 'And behold, it was very good' refers to the measure that metes out punishment to people.

B. "And can anyone say that the measure that metes out punishment is 'very good'?"

C. "What it means is that God reflected long on how to impose (the measure of punishment)."

2.A. R. Simon in the name of R. Simeon bar Abba, "All of the measures (of reward and punishment) have ceased, but the principle of measure for measure has not ceased."

B. R. Huna in the name of R. Yose, "From the very beginning of the creation of the world, the Holy One, blessed be he, foresaw: By the measure that a person metes out to others, so by that measure is (his fate) meted out (M. Sot. 1:7).

C. "Therefore Scripture has said, 'And behold, it was very good,' meaning, 'and behold, the measure is good' (a play on the word for 'very', M³D and 'measure', MDD)."

Obviously, IX:VI–IX:XI.1 follow a single formal pattern. The repetition of a single form serves to make a single point through unifying numerous examples. The rhetorical formalization serves to construct a cogent list of proofs for one syllogism. That syllogism, presented through illustration and then made explicit at the very end, is that the world is "very good" because there is an exact justice in what happens in the world. "Measure for measure" marks creation and its rules. While some maintain that the world presents marks of imperfection and of the creator's incompetence of malicious spirit, the contrary is the case.

VII

For at issue throughout is the simple question, How can creation be "very good" if there is evil in the world? So we systematically review the challenges to the view that creation is "very good". These encompass death, IX:V, sleep, IX:VI, the impulse to do evil, IX:VII, suffering, IX:VIII, Gehenna, IX:IX, the angel of death, IX:X, and the measure of punishment, IX:XI. All of these negative aspects of creation mar the goodness of the work of the creator-God and point to the conclusion that the creator was evil, not good. By repeating the matter in a protracted catalogue and in a single form, the compositor makes his point. Everything people think mars creation in fact marks its perfection.

Death is good because it prevents the wicked from getting what they have not earned, hence, death insures justice in creation. Sleep is good because it permits the sage to study Torah all the more effectively when he awakes. The evil impulse produces good results. Suffering is the route to eternal life. Gehenna likewise insures justice for those who have earned a reward, by preventing those who have not earned a reward from getting one. The angel of death takes up the same task. And as to punishment? It is inflicted only with justice. So in the end, there is a meted punishment for those who deserve it and a proper reward for those who earn it, so IX:XI.2.

If I had to guess against whom the compositors of this striking composition argue, I should find my clue at IX:VI. That pericope clearly addresses sages. Who else cares about why sleep is a disadvantage and

finds compensation in improved alertness in learning? The troubling questions at hand prove urgent in particular to sages and their disciples. So the polemic looks to be addressed to within.

VIII

IX:XII.1.A. All rabbis say the following in the name of R. Haninah, R. Phineas, R. Hilqiah in the name of R. Simon: “The word ‘very’ and the word for ‘man’ are written with the same consonants (M^ᵛD, ^ᵛDM, respectively). The letters for both are the same.

B. “The meaning then is as follows: ‘And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’ (Gen 1:31)—and behold, man is good.”

Now comes the climax. The crown of creation is man, and when God praises creation, the intent focuses in the end upon humanity. We cannot treat as distinct from the foregoing the present, stunning conclusion. Rather, the passage that breaks the established form also presents the point of the antecedent catalogue. The purpose of the whole then leads us to conclude that the human being is “very good”. Commonly, when the Mishnah presents a sustained, formal list, making a point through a shift in the established rhetorical pattern, the framers will take on a further item, not entirely consonant in subject-matter or purpose, with what has come before. That is what follows in context. But we need not go on, since the point I proposed to present seems to me admirably made by the texts at hand.

What conclusions may we now draw? One seems firm, the other probable. The firm conclusion is that in this document of the late fourth or early fifth century sages systematically argue in favor of positions we should have thought long ago commonplace. Creation was the act of a good and knowing God. That God loves Israel. The first man was not a mistake but an act of considered judgment. There is only one God, one domain ruled by a single all-powerful Creator. Man is in God’s image and therefore good. No hidden God rules beyond all human knowing. God revealed his will in the Torah, and humanity has access to that Torah. The survey given just now demands a contrary position, and, as is well known, that contrary position, point by point, derives from thinkers we call Gnostic. The upshot? The redactor-compositors of Genesis Rabbah have brought to the creation-story a systematic polemic in behalf of the position we now identify as Judaic and against the position generally associated with Gnosticism.

That brings us from the certain to the probable. Since the document at hand speaks out of the period beyond the conversion of Constantine

to Christianity, and since, it is more likely still, the work of redaction took place a century after the triumph of Christianity, we must wonder who took the views that, in the second century, we know were held by Gnostics. The document before us addresses Israel, the Jewish people, so the polemic to begin with ought to take up views held within Israel. Why should Jews have called into question the basic goodness of creation, not to mention the knowledge of God through the Torah? The one event that comes to mind, the triumph of Christianity, requires consideration. That fact not only validated the Christian claim in behalf of Jesus as Christ, but it also invalidated, for some, the claim of the Torah that Israel would yet see the salvation of God through the Messiah. If, as is commonly thought, many Jews converted to Christianity, particularly after the catastrophe of Julian's plan in 360 to build the Temple and its failure, then we should not find surprising the positions against which the compilers of our document conduct their polemic. So we may take up the possibility that Jews, reaching conclusions familiar to us from Gnostic writings of an earlier period, expressed by appeal to an evil creator-God, who bungled whatever he did, the total despair of the age—the triumph of Christianity, the fiasco of rebuilding the Temple.

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