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GOD AND THE CREATION OF ADAM IN THE VISION OF GENESIS RABBAH 8 AND SUBSEQUENT RABBINIC TEXTS

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ABTRACT: The following paper analyzes the Midrashic text *Genesis Rabbah* chapter 8. The texts represents a Rabbinic reading of the biblical text of Genesis 1:26-28. We will show that, even though the rabbis analyzed the text verse by verse, their method of interpretation diverges from the classical, expositive Protestant way of reading the Bible. In their concern to defend the Scripture against pagan religions, Gnostic Jewish mysticism, and even Christian Church Fathers, the rabbis developed a creative way of probing the misteries that surrounded the creation of Adam.

KEY WORDS: God, creation, Adam, image, likeness

Introduction

The theme of *creation* has mystified people from the earliest times until the present. In particular, the Biblical account of creation has been subject to a rich and diverse interpretive activity, both in the Jewish and the Christian traditions. This activity covers now, as it did in the past, a large spectrum, beginning with religion and extending to science, culture, arts, and the like. It is true that modernity has tended to elevate science above the claims for authority made by the other disciplines. So in a sense, the question does not seem to begin any more with the "who," but with "what happened?" And yet, recent trends have shown that spirituality still concerns most of us. And since "creation" addresses the issues of beginnings, its spiritual, emotional, and intellectual appeal is still strong. In rabbinic literature, the theme of creation generated a lively discourse as well. Their questions, though less scientific in the modern sense, covered a vast domain. One of the documents that best captures the rabbinic understanding of creation is Genesis Rabbah (abbreviated Gen. R.)

In particular, we will attempt to understand how the rabbis interpreted the creation of human beings, as described in the Bible in Genesis 1:26-28. What were the

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concerns, be they religious, political, cultural, that guided their exegesis of this text? We will pay attention to the structure of the midrashic passages, but ultimately we will want to bring all the interpretive threads under a more unified system. This will allow us to compare the Genesis Rabbah material with other rabbinic documents which addressed the theme of creation. As such this paper is takes a comparative approach. The focus will fall on Genesis Rabbah's midrash on Genesis 1:26, 27, 28. In the second part we will compare Gen. R. with other rabbinic documents such as Mishnah, Talmud Bavli and Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesikta Rabbati, Pesikta de-Rab Kahana, Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer, and Mekilta. Hopefully this comparative approach will allow us to view the rabbinic interpretation of the creation of human from several different perspectives, and thus offer a more complete picture of the whole.

Genesis Rabbah VIII: Introduction

Gen. R. 8 has 13 chapters that unfold as a commentary to each of the three verses of Genesis 1:26-28. Usually the commentary is "opened" with a Rabbinic citation that links the text in Genesis with a biblical verse from another book. As we showed elsewhere (Botica, 2023, 167), this opening, or the "petihta", is a literary device by which the commentators interpret the main verse (here, Genesis 12:1) with the help of "a second, remote verse" that shares in common a phrase with the main verse" (Lerner, 2006, 117, Shafrai, 2006, 2:117, Strack, 1991, 51-53). As its basis, the term originates from the "verb פתח (to open) and the noun פתחא (opening)," and when it appears it announces the "introduction to a lecture" (Jastrow, 1991, 1253). In our case, it is significant that Genesis Rabbah is a pioneering work in "that it introduced… the 'petihta'" as a new form of interpretation," one that later defined the "midrash aggadah genre broadly" (S.K. Gribetz and D.M. Grossberg, 2016, 4-5).

As us the case in Gen. R. 8, the Petihta contains a verse:

> from the Prophets or the Writings, which is usually not obviously related to the subject of the parashah and which stands at the beginning of the petihta. What follows are various interpretations of this distant petihta verse, concluding with some connection made to the parashah verse, cited at the very end. Hermeneutically, the function of the petihta is to make use of the verse from the Prophets or the Writings to shed light on the (usually Torah) parashah verse (Anison, 2009, 45-46).

Rabbinic views on the creation of Adam

The biblical text exegeted in Gen. R. 8 is Genesis 1:26-28. In the exegetical process on Genesis 1:26-28, out of the 13 paragraphs only 5 are introduced by a biblical verse (paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 11, and 12). The rest begin with different Tannaitic and Amoraic comments on the issue at hand. The Genesis text reads:

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
>
> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
>
> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:26-28, ESV).

The Rabbis begin the commentary with Genesis 1:26a: "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" It is R. Yohanan who "opens" (פתח) the interpretation by linking Psalm 139:5 to the text in Genesis: "R. Yohanan opened [by means of the verse], 'You have enclosed me [צרנתי] behind and before and have laid your hand upon me' (Psalm 139:5). "

R. Yohanan reads the verb צור from Ps 139 as "to design" apparently in order to connect the psalm with the theme of creation introduced by Gen. 1:26, i.e., "let us make..." In the Old Testament, the primary sense of the verb צור is "to bind" , "tie" or "enclose," which is how we read it in Psalm 139 (Koehler/Baumgartner, 2015). R. Yohanan apparently links the root צור ("to bind") with the verb יצר, which in Genesis 2 appears three times with the sense of "to shape" or "to give form" (Otzen, 1990, 261, Jastrow, 1996, 1270) – all three occurences describing the "shaping" of Adam from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2: 7, 8, 19). In this way R. Yohanan will use the rest of the verse in Psalm 139:5 as a mirror of meaning for Genesis 1:26.

Once this relation was established, the rabbis seemed more concerned with the words אחור (ahor, behind) and קדם (qedem, before), which in Psalm 139 describe God surrounding the psalmist from all sides: "You enclosed me behind and before…" For the rabbis, however, this apparent dualism is not without significance. In classic rabbinic fashion they will now attempt to explain its various nuances in relation to the account of the creation of Adam in Genesis 1:26. Smelik notices a number of interpretations that range from physical to geographical and to the temporal factors (Smelik, 2018, 24).

In the view of R. Yohanan, the pair "behind and before" may refer to the two worlds for which humans were created, the enjoyment or punishment of which will depend on human obedience or disobedience. In this context, R. Yohanan interprets the second part of Ps. 139:5, "you lay your hand upon me," as an indication of punishment for disobedience.

In the view of R. Yehoshua bar Nehemya, the pair *ahor/qedem* may point to the

physical space occupied by Adam - from *West* (*ahor*) to *East* (*qedem*). Hence the "enormous dimensions" of Adam fill "the whole world to all the points of the compass" (Moore, 1960, 1.452-453).

Insisting on the *qedem*, the rabbis also point to the order of creation, where Adam, though created last (*ahor*) received his soul "before (*qedem*) anything else which was made on the sixth day" (Freedman, 1983, 1:55). In the order of creation, then, we have first "And God said, 'let the waters swarm' " (Gen. 1:20), and only later, "and God said, 'let us make man...' " (Gen. 1:26).

The nature of Adam and the peril of unpermitted knowledge

An interesting take on the concept of the "image" here is R. Yirmiyah ben Elazar's "notion that man was created androgynous." This interpretation was derived from the verse "Male and female he created them," even though Moore raises the possibility that the rabbis may have been influenced by foreign sources, possibly Plato's *Symposium* 189D-190A (Moore, 1960, 1.453). While Urbach acknowledges that some remnants of myths and legends may have been absorbed by the rabbis "and Judaized and deprived of their hurtful mythological characteristics," he underlies the difference between the purpose of Plato in The Symposium – to explain the myth and the nature of Eros – and the Rabbinic intent to explain the phrase "male and female he created them" (Urbach, 1987, 228). In Smelik's view too, the "androgynous" motif was derived from the idea that humanity was created "as male and female all at once," which was followed by God dividing Adman's androgynous nature in two (Smelik, 2018, 24).

The second petihta comes in Midrash Rabbah 8:2, namely: "R. Hama b. R. Hanina interpreted [by means of the verse], 'do you know this from of old, from the establishment of man on earth?' (Job 20:4)." As was the case with Psalm 139:5, here too Job 20:4 provides a reference that illumines Genesis 1:26-28. Here, the word "establishment" comes in the form of the verb sym (שׂים), "to establish." The rabbis used it to read a new meaning into the larger theme of creation for the purpose of containing Jewish Gnostic authors who speculated about the divine mysteries that may have occurred prior to the creation and then used that knowledge inappropriately (Neusner, 1985, 76). Moore points to esoteric cosmological works like Ma'seh Bereshit, The Works of Creation, which dealt with speculative theories of events that may have occurred before Day One of creation (Moore, 1960, 1.383). The contents of Ma'she Bereshit remain elusive to this day, but the clearest depiction of what it may have dealt with comes from Mishnah Hagigah 2.1, specifically: "Whoever looks into four matters it would be better for him had he not come into the world: What is above and what below, what is before and what after." These four dimensions – above, below,

before, and after – may describe both geographical and temporal realities that remain inaccesible to human beings (Gottstein, 1995, 186).

To provide a second biblical base for their position, the rabbis appeal to Proverbs 8:30: "then I was by Him, as a nursling, and I was his delight day after day." They interpret "I" as a reference to Torah, which was present with God at creation and hence preceded all creation. Linking Proverbs 8:30 with the Petihta verse, Job 20:4 ("Do you know this from of old?"), the authors enforce the belief that Torah alone knows these mysteries and that the creature should not speculate in vain "what was before the creation of the world." Behind this interpretation there may be an allusion to the Genesis account of the fall, where Adam and Eve were advised to seek divine knowledge, "and become like God." Hence the position of R. Eleazar, in the name of Bar Sirah: "…concerning what has been permitted to you, look deeply, for you have no business dealing with hidden things" (M. Rabbah 8.2). And that, because the Torah alone "knows what came before the creation of the world, but you have no business in investigating such questions, attending rather to 'what has happened since man was placed upon the earth'" (Job 20:4).

Concerning the theme of the *nature of humanity*, the rabbis also point to the fact both righteousness and wickedness will arise from Adam and his offspring. But when the ministering angels advise God that the character of Adam should be "righteousness," God hides from angels the "wicked character" of man, and reveals only the attribute of righteousness (Gen. R. 8.4). The rabbis use Psalm 1:6 for this theme: "For the Lord regards the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked shall perish." This reveals the love of God for his creation, as he limits his own justice in order to allow Adam and Eve to exist. God's creation (here Adam) is so perfect that the ministering angels "mistook him [for a divine being] and wished to exclaim 'Holy' before him" (Gen. R. 8:10).

In response, God caused "sleep to fall over him, and so all knew that he was man." It was only in Adam falling asleep that man was distinguished from God, who never sleeps. For Neusner, one can hardly imagine "a more daring afirmation of humanity" (Neusner, 1985, 83). Among the other attributes of Adam the rabbis mention *posture*, *language*, *understanding*, and *sight* (the 4 attributes shared with the higher beings and God himself), and *eating*, *procreating*, *excretion*, and *death* (the opposing 4 attributes shared with the animal world - Gen. R. 8:11). This is a wonderful example of the realism of Scriptural and rabbinic theology. Neither the world of the Scripture, nor that of the rabbis were perfect. Even a pious man like Moses faced the struggles shared by the common people. But in the end the divine nature implanted at creation will win over the physical and moral limitations imposed now by a fallen world.

One of the purposes of God in creating Adam and Eve was to give them domin-

ion over the animal world. The rabbis exegete the verb "to have dominion" (*redu*) in a creative way (Gen. R. 8.12). According to R. Hanina, Adam's character will determine the outcome in his relation to the Creator and the created order. If Adam is worthy of merit, he will have dominion – thus the verb hdr, to rule. But if not, then he will descend to the level of the animal world, and thus suffer the consequences of his voluntary choice - thus ירד, to descend.

The nature of God

In the process of exegeting Genesis 1:26-28, the rabbis addressed the issue of the *nature of God*, as well. This made sense in the context of the debate between Monotheism and Polytheism in the 5th Century, as Jews in the Roman Empire were still surrounded by neighbours who still shared remnants of pagan polytheistic beliefs. But even within the framework of polytheism some pagan authors spoke about the "macrocosmic" nature of divinity (Smelik, 2018, 25). This too may have been a concern that the rabbis felt that they had to address.

In fact, the aspect of anticipating and answering objections from pagan authors is an well-established phenomenon in Rabbinic literature and, specifically, in the Midrash Rabbah. Scholars noted that "more than tannaitic midrashim and the Mishna and the Tosefta, Genesis Rabbah is characterized by its Greek loan words and of concepts and metaphors from Greco-Roman culture" that would still resonate with Hellenistic thinkers, even though by the the 5th Century the Roman Empire would have been influenced by Christianity (Gribetz and Grossberg, 2016, 7). As such the plural of "let us make" may have puzzled the audience by implying that there is more than one God.

In interpreting Genesis 1, the rabbis may have been influenced by how the Church Fathers viewed the plural verb of Genesis 1:26, namely, as a text that proved the existence of the Holy Trinity. Augustine, among others, understood the phrase "let us make man in our image" as the voice of the Trinity planning the creation of Adam in the likeness of the Trinity (*On The Trinity* 7.6.12), even though the image itself was "not equal to the Trinity" (Oden, 2001, 30). Late in the Fourth Century, when Midrash Rabah would have taken its final shape, Christianity would have already been dominant even in Jewish lands (Neusner, 1985, ix). The plural in "Let us make…" would have been proof for the Fathers of the truth of the Holy Trinity, an interpretation strong enough to challenge the Jewish insistence on Monotheism to the exclusion of the the divinity of Jesus Christ. That is why for the rabbis the verb in the plural form portrays God as a king taking counsel with his two trusted advisors: the "works of heaven and earth" (Gen. R. 8.3). Even so, according to R. Hilla God is like a king who has the authority to act unopposed and would not need to take counsel from anyone (Gen. R. 8.8).

Another view on the plural may allude to God counseling "his own heart," since we are told that later "it grieved him in his heart (Gen. R. 8.3 for Gen. 6:6). Furthermore, the angels (Gen. R. 8.4,5) and the souls of the righteous (Gen. R. 8.7) could have also taken part in God's counsel (Neusner, 1985, 81). In paragraph 5 the angels debate whether God should act out of *love* and create humanity, or act listening to *truth* and not create man, "because he is compounded of falsehood."

The scriptural verse that inspired the rabbis here is Psalm 85:11. The rabbis read the verse as "Love and truth fought together; righteousness and peace combated each other," since the verbal form nashaku (נשק, to "kiss", Koehler/Baumgartner, 2015) can be revocalized as *neshek*, i.e., [taking] arms [against each other] (Freedman, 1961, I.58). The rabbis relied on the scriptural precedents for the meaning of "weapons" (2 Kings 10:2, Isaiah 22:8) and "battle" (Ps 140:8). This apparent conflict would have brought to mind the rabbinic view of God's mercy versus God's justice, where finally mercy prevails in order to ensure the continuity of world. The tension between God and the angels is heightened when God cast the truth to the ground. This gesture again betrays the love of God for a humanity which should not have endured, had not the mercy and love of God prevailed (Ps. 85:11). It is possible too that the rabbis may have argued here against "anyone how holds that the creator-God was evil" (Neusner, 1985, 78).

At this point one may also take into account *Pesikta Rabbati 21*, which contains a unique interpretation on Genesis 1:26. Here, the Holy One Blessed Be He says, "Behold, for you I have created your neighbor in My likeness...Do not bear false witness against your neighbor." This is one of the most profound applications of the creation account to the realm of ethics and interpersonal relations. One is called to respect his or her neighbor because all humanity bears the resemblance of their Creator.

The rabbis also try to answer the problem of the plural "let us create" by showing that the verb "to create" is in the singular. In the background stands the objection of the heretics who challenged R. Simlai by asking, "How many gods created the world?" (Gen. R. 8:9). R. Simlai explains that, although the subject is in the plural (i.e., *elohim*), the verb used to describe the creation of both heaven and earth, and of humanity is in the singular - "And Elohim created - wa-yibra" (Gen. 1:27). Furthermore, the text does not read "let us make man in *our* image, in *our* likness." Rather the pronominal suffix here takes a singular form: "God created man in his image."

Finally, the rabbis discuss the nature of the "blessing" of God (Gen. R. 8:13). From Genesis 1:28 they understand that God blesses the marriage between a man and a woman; thus, one of the righteous deeds of "blessing the bridegrooms." As Neusner shows, this lesson does not "prove relevant to the dialogue with the heretics," which

took place in the preceding section, but presents Israel with a model for marriage" (Neusner, 1985, 82).

Concerning the other righteous acts, the rabbis appeal to Gen. 2:22 ("God built the rib...into a woman" - hence adorning a bride), Gen. 18:1 ("And the Lord appeared to [Abraham]" - after he was circumcised - thus visiting the sick), Dt. 34:6 ("And he buried [Moses] in the valley" - thus, attending the burial service), and Gen. 35:9 (following the death of Deborah - "And God appeared unto Jacob again...and blessed him" - comforting those who mourn). The rabbis, then, creatively establish a valid proof for their own contemporary practice - these are incumbent upon the pious because God himself established them. We can then outline Genesis Rabbah 8 in the following way:

8.1 - **Biblical verse** (Gen. 1:26) - **Petihta verse** (Ps. 139:5) - **Biblical verse** (Gen.1:26). **Rabbinic interpretations**: dual nature of Adam, physical attributes, his place in the order of creation.

8.2 - **Petihta verse** (Job 20:4) - **Rabbinic interpretations:** The precedence of Torah; probing into the mysteries of creation is prohibited.

8:3 - **Biblical verse** (Gen. 1:26) - **Rabbinic interpretations:** God taking counsel with the works of heaven and heart, and his own heart.

8:4 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** human goodness and wickedness, counsel with the angels, hiding the wickedness from angels in order to bypass the quality of Justice and thus create Adam.

8:5 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** conflict between Love and Truth; going against the angelic objection against man.

8:6 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** angelic objections for the abundance of food for Adam; going against Objections.

8:7 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** divine counsel with the souls of the righteous regarding the creation of Adam.

8:8 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** Moses counseled in the writing of creation account; divine Sovereignty.

8:9 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** heretical challenges over the plural "Elohim;" objection is met: verb is singular.

8:10 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** angels confuse Adam with a divine being; God points to Adam's Finitude.

8:11 - **Biblical verse** (Gen. 1:27 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** the 4 celestial and the 4 creaturely attributes of humanity; tension and resolution.

8:12 - **Biblical verse** (Gen. 1:28) - **Rabbinic interpretations:** human obedience brings dominion; disobedience brings descent.

8:13 - **Rabbinic interpretations:** pious acts (attending wedding, blessing, funeral, visiting sick) initiated by God.

The Theme of creation in other Midrashic texts

"Creation" is understood as one of the ten commandments by which "the world was created." In particular, the commandment was "let us create man" (Gen. 1:26). Interestingly, this interpretation is found not in chapter 8, but in chapter 17 of Genesis Rabbah. In the same work, the author revisits the theme of the counsel between the angels and God regarding the creation of Adam (Gen. R. 17.4). The same argument is also used in *Peskita de-Rav Kahana*, piska 4.

In the rabbinic view, in spite of the problems inherent in the human nature, God made Adam more superior in wisdom than even the angelic beings, as he excelled the angels in naming the animal order. In Gen. R. 22.2 we have a rabbinic interpretation of Gen. 1:26 that is not found in Gen. R. 8. Quoting Gen. 1:26 ("in our image, after our likeness") the rabbis show that in God's creation, a man and a woman need each other, and both need the presence (Shechinah) of God. Furthermore, in Gen. R. 34.12 the rabbis compare the effects of the fall with those following the Deluge. In particular, Noah is told by God that his fear and dread (i.e., Noah's) will be upon "every beast of the earth" (Gen. 9:2). The rabbis understand that only the fear and the dread of humans over animals returned, but not their dominion. Rather, the dominion was returned at the rule of Solomon, as quoted: "For he had *dominion* over all the region" (1 Ki. 5:4).

Furthermore, in Deut. R. 11:3 the rabbis portray Moses as superior even to the first man ever created, that is, Adam. In a midrashic dialogue between the two, Adam bases his superiority on Gen. 1:27, "And God created man in his own image." In turn, Moses refutes his argument by quoting Ps. 49:13, "But man (i.e., Adam) does not abides in honor." Midrash Rabbah too records a theme similar to the one already found in the Genesis Rabbah account, namely the superior wisdom of Adam. In Num. R. 19.3, the rabbis describes the wisdom of Solomon as being greater than Adam's. The rabbis use the verse ascribed to Solomon, that he was "wiser than all *adam*," in order to define the magnitude of that wisdom. As such, they recall the Gen. R. 8 account of the naming of the animals, where Adam proved his superior wisdom over God's ministering angels. In this sense, Solomon becomes the prototype of the wise sage in Israel. Finally, in Num. 16.24, the rabbis allude the notion of voluntary disobedience, already described in Gen. R. 8. Thus, in spite of the initial intention of God that Adam and Eve "should live and endure like Himself," with the fall they corrupted his deeds and nullified his decrees. As noticed, there are several themes that reappear throughout the entire Midrash Rabbah. But we have also observed that the rabbis had access to materials not included in Gen. R. 8, the chapter which only

dealt with the creation of Adam and Eve. Among these later themes, one should note the command of the creation (as one of the ten commandments on which the world depends), the superiority of Moses and Solomon over Adam, and the intricate bond between Adam and Eve and their mutual need for the Shechinah of God.

The Theme of creation in Mishnah and the Talmuds

Another recurrence of a Genesis theme is to be found in the Palestinian Talmud. In *Berakhot* 9.1 R. Simlai is approached by the heretics concerning the nature of the gods as defined by Genesis, namely: "In the beginning Elohim created...," and "let us create..." - both plurals referring to God. R. Simlai meets the objection by showing that verbs are all in the singular, a fact which proves that God is one, and not many. The same controversy is recorded in the Babilonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 38b. Other similar encounters between pagan thinkers and rabbis appear in the Sanhendrin 39a, as well, where the Emperor distinguishes between "creating" and "forming," and thus postulating either one activity foreign to God, or two gods - one creating and the other forming. Rabbi Gamliel, however, showed him that both verbs are used with respect to one God only in Genesis 1:27 (*bara*) and 2:7 *(yazar*).

Genesis is used in a second place in the Palestinian Talmud in *Taanit* 4:6. An objection was raised that only the man was commanded "regarding procreation," but not the woman. The objection was met by R. Yohanan b. Beroqah, who answered, "concerning both of them [the husband and the wife] Scripture says, 'God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply' " (Gen. 1:28). Of the two occurrences of the Genesis account, the second seems to be unique to the Palestinian Talmud. This, however, is to be expected. The logic and the style of the Talmud invites these types of debates much more often than the Midrash.

The same theme appears in the Talmud Bavli, this time in the context of an incident regarding castration (*Shabbath* 110b). The argument revolves around the Scriptural support for or against the act of castration. The rabbis quote Genesis 1:28 – "And God blessed them and said to them, 'be fruitful and multiply' " – in order to show that the only castration Scripture may not prohibit is that of an old or barren woman (i.e., those who cannot fulfill the Genesis commandment). A second reference to Gen. 1:28 in the Talmud aims at answering the question whether one should abstain from making children (*Yebamoth* 61b, and *Bezah* 36b, *Pesahim* 72b). The Talmud quotes the Mishnah which states: "a man shall not abstain from the performance of the duty of the propagation of the race, unless he already has children." The Talmud then tries to establish the number of children that will allow one to abstain from fulfilling the Genesis commandment.

Furthermore, the debate recorded in the Yerushalmi Talmud (*Taanit* 4:6) - whether only a male is commanded to be fruitful and multiply - is included in the Bavli

as well (*Yebamot*, 65b). The Talmudic authorities do not seem to object against R. Johanan b. Beroka's ruling recorded in the Mishnah (i.e., that both the man and the woman are responsible to fulfill the commandment). However, the rabbis will debate whether the second part of the commandment, i.e., "and replenish the earth and subdue it," refers only to the man. Finally, the consensus seem to incline toward the view that the verb "subdue it," since it is in the singular, refers only to Adam.

Similar arguments are recorded concerning the obligation of both sexes to fulfill the Genesis command. R. Lakish believes that a converted heathen has not fulfilled his obligation toward procreation if he had his children before becoming a proselyte. This view was contradicted by R. Johanan, who believes that the former heathen has indeed fulfilled his obligation (*Bekoroth* 47a). Likewise, the concern for declining in marriage and parenthood is raised in *Moed Katan*, where the rabbis believe that taking a wife during the festivals is perilous. Some people may never actually carry on with the commitment, while others could be delayed or prevented by the congestion and by other causes familiar to such events (*Mo'ed Katan* 8b, 18b). Another occassion not suitable for taking a wife was seen as the mourning period, where one "may fail in the duty of procreation" (*Mo'ed Katan* 23a).

Finally, in a manner similar to the questions raised earlier by Genesis Rabbah 8, the Talmud would ask why in one place Genesis reads "And God created man in his image" (Gen. 1:27), and in another place it has "Male and female created them" (Gen. 5:2). Did the Scripture refer to two creations? The rabbis answered that in the beginning God had one intention only - namely to create two human beings. Yet, "in the end only one human being was created," and the woman was "built" by God out of man (*Ketuboth* 8a, Erubim 18a). The Talmud also records rabbinic discussions about different blessings inspired from Genesis. Gen. 1:27 is used for the blessing to God as the "Creator of man" (*Ketuboth* 7b).

Conclusion

It should be evident by now that the theme of creation never ceased to provide the rabbis with rich resources for their study and sermons. They applied the theme of "creation" to science when they investigate the physical nature of the human being. They viewed Adam and Eve as both animal and partly divine, and so they described their blessed nature (the celestial attributes) as well as their lower senses which proved to be troublesome. They read religion, psychology, history, culture, and philosophy into the account of creation.

In general, the non-halachic literature (Midrash, Mekilta, Pesikta, Pirke de-Rab Eliezer) afforded a more creative interpretation of the "theme" of creation. We have witnessed the ministering angels debating with God over the creation human beings, or God taking counsel with the souls of the righteous and the works of heaven

and earth, or the heretics trying to disprove the logical and theological coherency of the Scripture. We have read about the sublime nature of humanity. We were also informed that Adam and Eve's God given freedom was misused and resulted in the abrogation of God's initial purposes.

On the other hand, while the Talmudic literature contains some of these themes, it seemed that for the Palestinian and Babylonian academies the Genesis account offered valuable proof for the daily observance the law. Issues such as marriage, children, blessings, and others like these could be partially solved by appealing to the authority of Genesis. Naturally this should be expected from the Talmud. This latitude in interpretation, however, testifies not only to the creative power of the rabbis, but also to their devotion and reverence toward the biblical text. In essence, it tells us that for the rabbis, Scripture could answer all questions surrounding human life, be it science, culture, or religion.

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