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GENESIS AND JUDAISM: THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENESIS RABBAH

The sages of third and fourth century Judaism who created Genesis Rabbah teach us an important lesson. It is to bring to the book of Genesis our deepest concerns as individuals and as a society—but to listen to the Scripture's abiding judgment. The book of Genesis, today a battlefield among contending forces of science and philosophy, religion and historical study, for the ancient sages of Judaism as for us formed the arena for sorting out and settling critical issues of human destiny and national history. That fact testifies to the enduring power of Genesis to speak to the human condition, but also to lay down a judgment of that condition. Genesis tells the story of humanity's beginnings and (to the sages of Judaism) of Israel's redemption. We do well to encounter the response, to Genesis, of sages who through the truth they found there taught an entire people the meaning of their lives.

What precisely do the ancient Judaic sages who produced Genesis Rabbah, flourishing in the Land of Israel from about 200 to about 400 of the Common Era, have to teach us? They demonstrate the power of Scripture to speak to our immediate circumstance; they illustrate the right of Scripture's people to listen to Scripture as the word reaches the here and the now. Once more they offer a model, a method, and a message. The model takes precedence, then the method, and, for all Israel, finally the message. That does not mean they invented for the moment, any more than that we make things up as we go along and call it God's word. But it also does not require us to wait for scholars of comparative Semitic philology to mediate the word of God to the world we know. What we confront is a generation

of sages who, because they revered Scripture as God's word, also insisted that God spoke to them about their deepest concerns. The lesson we here may learn concerns a Scripture employed today to intimidate science, on the one side, and embarrass belief, on the other. We learn, specifically, from the model of sages who found in Scripture profound and diverse layers of meaning, messages from God to their own hearts. To them God spoke a single word, but humanity heard many messages. There was therefore no single and "fundamental" message, which all must believe on pain of losing salvation.

To speak directly, the sages at hand knew nothing of rigid fundamentalism. They found many and diverse meanings in a text they read in many dimensions. But they also would have found incomprehensible the uncomprehending insistence of another kind of fundamentalism, that which assigns to the text only the "original" meaning, the one determined by a long-dead context of obscure and unimaginative philology. The lesson of the sages is simple. They exercised the freedom to ask many pressing questions, but also exhibited the patience to attend to answers. Above all they manifested the initiative to explore the Scripture's deepest layers of meaning.

The sages at hand have the power to teach us how to read Scripture their way, which, in Judaism, is the only right way. What is that way? It is the route that leads us to return to Scripture carrying the burden of all our anguish and our hope, to reflect through Scripture, that is, through the perspective of the Torah, upon our condition as human beings, and—to speak bluntly and as a religious Jew—to listen to and learn what God has to say about us: "in our image, after our likeness." We human beings are in God's image and after God's likeness. What can that possibly mean? Genesis, as the sages of Genesis Rabbah read the book, answers that question in very specific ways. Why this compilation of biblical exegeses (called, in Hebrew, *midrashim*) in particular? Because it is the first and the best. 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. 200 C.E., and came to final and full statement in the Talmud of Babylonia, ca. 600, Genesis Rabbah therefore takes an important position. Specifically, this great rabbinic commentary to Genesis, generally thought to have been closed ("redacted") at ca. 400, provides a complete and authoritative account of how Judaism proposes to read and make sense of the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures.

1. METHOD AND MESSAGE:
HOW THE SAGES READ THE BOOK OF GENESIS,
AND WHAT THEY FOUND THERE

Once we understand the method that tells the sages how to approach a verse or a story, we know how they derive meaning from the message of the Torah. So the proper route directs us first to the literary-critical question: exactly what does a sage see when he looks at a verse of Scripture? Only then shall we turn to questions of meaning, that is, sages' results in the explanation and amplification of a text. The fundamental method of sages is simple and familiar: they persistently see one thing in terms of another thing, one story in the light of another.

By method I mean a very simple thing: what tells a sage to ask one sort of question, rather than some other? How does a sage know what to look for? What will strike the sage as noteworthy? For example, a sage may want to know about the connection between one story and some other story, because the sage takes for granted that stories form a connected narrative and so relate to one another. So one point of method will be the sages' interest in tying tightly the threads of narrative and the strands of a story.

To take another, more telling example, the sage takes for granted that Scripture speaks to the life and condition of Israel, the Jewish people. God repeatedly says exactly that to Abraham and to Jacob. The entire narrative of Genesis is so formed as to point toward the sacred history of Israel, the Jewish people; its slavery and redemption; its coming Temple in Jerusalem; its exile and salvation at the end of time. The powerful message of Genesis proclaims that the world's creation commenced a single, straight line of events, leading in the end to the salvation of Israel and through Israel all humanity. Therefore a given story will bear a deeper message about what it means to be Israel, on the one side, and what in the end of days will happen to Israel, on the other. So another point of method will be the sages' persistent search in Scripture for meaning for their own circumstance and for the condition of their people.

Now these two points of persistent methodological concern, seeing one thing in terms of something else, exemplified, first, in the narrative, and second, in the substantive meaning of what is narrated for Israel's coming redemption, will help us understand how the sages of Genesis Rabbah received and read the book of Genesis. But these points prove important, not merely illuminating, when we realize that the sages who are our teachers in our effort to read the book of Genesis also set the pattern and defined the model for generations to come. For Judaism the sages at hand presented the definitive

response to the book of Genesis: this then is how Judaism reads the story of humanity.

So when we understand how the sages of *Genesis Rabbah* read the book of Genesis, we also learn what is right and proper for us to do when we take up that same fundamental document of the Torah. The negative result? We are not bound to read the book of Genesis as a tale of things that happened long ago—or that never happened. Nor is the book of Genesis to remain merely a source for the study of ancient Semitic philology or long-dead Israelite history. The scholars of Semitics and history have had their say on this book. Now let us listen to the believing Jews who revered the book and found in it God's message. The positive? We are free, as they were free, to bring to Scripture a free and open imagination, a tormented and troubled spirit, the concerns of an age of trial and tribulation. Once we realize that in Judaism as defined by the sages before us Scripture, that is, the Torah, addresses the living, we confront the living word of God to us, here and now, just as they did, and for the same reason. So how may we define the basic problem as to method? It is to see how many layers of meaning the sages penetrate, on the one side, and to describe the types of meanings they uncover, on the other.

2. ONE TALE, MANY MEANINGS

A quartet in an opera joins four voices, each telling its own singular story, into a harmony, so that, at one moment a diversity of messages forms a single song. If I had to specify the dominant method of scriptural understanding revealed by the sages of *Genesis Rabbah*, it is the power to hear Scripture's harmonic music, to perceive each of its distinct melodic lines, all at once, all together, and all in deep union of ultimate meaning. The one important, exemplary fact of Scriptural interpretation we learn from the sages at hand is to permit the Torah to tell us all that it wishes, saying many things by the act of speaking a single word.

It is one thing to say so in the abstract. It is quite another to provide a concrete example of how the sages hear much in little. For that purpose, I present a passage in which the sages face a simple task. It is how to find meaning in a story of merely domestic consequence. We recall that, square in the middle of the tale of Joseph and his brothers, in Genesis 38, is intruded a story of how Judah, one of Joseph's brothers, got himself involved with a woman whom he thought was a prostitute but who turned out to be his daughter-in-law. How shall we read what is to follow? We begin with the literary convention at hand. Sages love to juxtapose two

seemingly unrelated verses of Scripture and to show how one illuminates the other. The problem will be the explanation of what I call “the base verse,” that is, the verse that demands unpacking. Then the verse intended to open up the matter, which I call “the intersecting verse,” will be quoted, and the meaning of the two verses brought into collision will be spelled out, ordinarily only by implication.

The interpretation of our story begins with a statement quoted at the outset of the passage to follow. Then the exegete cites another verse, unrelated to the former. This other verse will open up the interpretation of the tale at hand. Why do I call the verse under examination “the base verse?” Because it is the foundation for all that follows. Then comes the second verse, the one drawn from some other passage of Scripture entirely, which I call, as I said, “the intersecting verse,” meaning, the verse that will serve to intersect with, and to open up, the base verse.

*LXXXV:I.*¹

1.
 - A. “It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers [and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her]” (Gen. 38:1):
 - B. “Judah has done treacherously [and an abomination is committed in Israel . . . for Judah has profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loves and has married the daughter of a strange god]” (Mal. 2:11).
 - C. [God] said to [Judah], “You have denied, Judah, you have lied, Judah.”
 - D. “. . . and an abomination is committed in Israel . . . for Judah has profaned,” which is to say, Judah has become unconsecrated.
 - E. “. . . the holiness of the Lord which he loves and has married the daughter of a strange god.”
 - F. “It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers [and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her].”
2.
 - A. “I will yet bring to you, O inhabitant of Mareshah, him who shall possess you, the glory of Israel shall come even to Adullam” (Mic. 1:15).
 - B. The reference is to the Holy One of Israel.
 - C. “. . . to Adullam shall come the King of Israel.”

- D. "To Adullam he shall come": "It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her."
3. A. R. Samuel bar Nahman commenced discourse by citing this verse: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord" (Jer. 29:11).
B. While the fathers of the tribes were taken up with the sale of Joseph, Jacob was taken up with his sackcloth and fasting, and Judah was taken up with finding himself a wife, and the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating the light of the king messiah.
C. "It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers [and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her]."
4. A. "Before she travailed she brought forth" (Is. 66:7):
B. Before the final persecutor was born, the first redeemer was born:
C. "It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers [and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her]."

The interest of the exegete, No. 1, in the statement that Judah went down from his brothers, becoming less than they, is that he did so by marrying a Canaanite woman. So his first point is that people who marry Canaanite women lower themselves. No. 2 then follows up with attention on the place mentioned in the base verse. No. 3 draws the ironic contrasts among the activities of the heroes of the narrative. Here is where the analogy to the operatic quartet becomes apt. The Messianic theme derives from the fact that the offspring of Judah and Tamar would be the messiah. No. 4 goes over the same ground. Obviously, the linkage of the lives of the patriarchs to the history of Israel accounts for the point of special interest to the exegete. In some ways, as I said, we have the equivalent of an operatic quartet, in which each character sings about a single strand of the drama, and in which all the strands form a whole greater than the sum of the parts. The messianic theme will now infuse all to follow, with contrasts and comparisons outlining the tragedy and the triumph of Israel.

To return to the point at which we began, the one striking fact before us is how many layers of meaning the sage's eye discerns. Any claim that the text at hand bears only a single sense and significance must give way to the sage's insistence to the contrary. So the first principle of the sages' way of reading Genesis dictates that none can impose limits. That is not to say whatever we wish to find there will be there. It is only to force open—for all time, I think—the boundaries of meaning, to insist we read a many-splendored story.

3. EXPLAINING CONNECTIONS

If sages find diverse layers and levels of meaning, we wonder where they start. The question carries with it a second: do we make things up as we go along, or are there correct, therefore also incorrect, ways of proceeding? The answer begins to emerge when we consider systematic and recurrent ways of addressing a given tale or verse. Once we discern patterns of explanation and amplification, we also may define the rules that guide sages in explaining and amplifying a story or saying. For, working back, the pattern reveals the rule. And the presence of rules assures us that there is a right way, therefore also a wrong way, of doing things. But the right way, I insist, turns out to be a way meant to open possibilities, to stimulate our imagination, above all to encourage us to find ourselves in the Torah, and the Torah in ourselves.

The following extended passage illustrates a systematic and, in my mind, quite reasonable approach to explaining the book of Genesis. It requires us to ask, at each point, where we stand in the unfolding of the whole. Specifically, we place a given story into its larger narrative context. This we do by taking note of what comes first and what follows, how a given story relates to what has gone before.

LXXXV:II.

1. A. What is written prior to this passage?
 B. “Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard” (Gen. 37:36), followed by: “It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers [and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her (Gen. 38:1)].”
 C. The Scripture needed only to state, “And Joseph was brought down to Egypt” (Gen. 39:1).

D. R. Eleazar said, "It introduced this long digression about Judah so as to juxtapose a passage that deals with a fall from glory to another passage that deals with a fall from glory."

E. R. Yohanan, "The passage was introduced so as to juxtapose one statement concerning, 'discernment' to another such statement." [Cf. LXXXIV:XIX.3.B: Said R. Yohanan, "Said the Holy One, blessed be he, to Judah, 'You have said to your father, ". . . see now." By your life, you will hear the words, ". . . see now, whose are these . . ." (Gen. 38:25).']"

F. R. Samuel bar Nahman said, "So as to juxtapose the tale of Tamar to the tale of the wife of Potiphar. Just as the one was truly for the sake of Heaven, so the other was truly for the sake of Heaven."

G. For R. Joshua b. Levi said, "She foresaw through her horoscope that she was destined to produce a son with him, but she did not know whether it was from her or from her daughter. That is in line with this verse: 'Let now the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from some of the things that will come upon you' (Is. 47:13)."

H. On this matter said R. Abin, "'From some . . . ,' but not from all."

2. A. Along these same lines: "And they were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). "But the snake was more subtle [than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made]" (Gen. 3:1).

B. It would have been quite sufficient for Scripture to say: "And the Lord God made for the man and his wife garments of skin" (Gen. 3:21), [since this was done prior to the sin, and not afterward, so that statement should have appeared right after Gen. 2:25, rather than the verse that comes as Gen. 3:1, cited above].

C. Said R. Joshua b. Qorha, "It serves to let you know the sin that that wicked [creature] had got them to do. When he saw that they were having sexual relations, and he lusted after [the woman], [he tried to kill Adam by getting him to sin]."

D. Said R. Jacob of Kefar Hanan, "[The presentation of that detail] was postponed to that latter passage so as not to conclude the story of the creation of man with the matter of the snake. [So that detail was introduced only at the end of the narrative.]"

3. A. Along these same lines: "And those who walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. 4:34), followed by, "Belshazzar, the king, made a great feast" (Dan. 5:1).

B. What happened to Evil-Merodach?

C. R. Eleazar said, "It was so as to juxtapose the story of one wicked person to the story of another wicked person, one destroyer with another, one man puffed up with pride with another."

D. R. Samuel bar Nahman said, "It is so as to juxtapose the conclusion of one dominion with the conclusion of another dominion."

4. A. Along these same lines: "In that night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was slain" (Dan. 5:30). "And Darius the Mede received the kingdom" (Dan. 6:1).
B. What about, "In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar" (Dan. 8:1)?
C. R. Huna in the name of R. Aha: "It was so that people should not say that the story was mere poetry, so that people should know that everything had been stated by the Holy Spirit."
D. Rabbis say, "It was so that the whole of the Book of Daniel would be treated as stated by the Holy Spirit."
5. A. "It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers" (Gen. 38:1):
B. They said, "Come, let's scatter, for so long as we are gathered together, the bond of debt [for what we have done] is waiting to be collected."
C. Said the Holy One, blessed be he, to them, "If ten men are implicated in an act of theft, cannot one of them be seized in behalf of all of them?"
D. When they were found in the matter of the silver cup, they said, "God has found out the iniquity of your servants" (Gen. 44:16).
E. Said R. Isaac, "The creditor has found the occasion to collect the bond of debt that is owing to him."
F. Said R. Levi, "It is comparable to one who overturns a barrel of wine, leaving only the lees." [Freedman²: "God is punishing us to the last drop."]
6. A. ["It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers" (Gen. 38:1)]: They said, "Come, let's take charge of our own affairs [and find wives for ourselves]."
B. "In the past, Jacob was obligated to marry us off to wives, but now that he is taken up with his sackcloth and fasting, it is not likely that he is going to find women for wives for us."
C. They said to Judah, "And is he not the head of us? Go and take care of yourself." Forthwith: "It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers" (Gen. 38:1).

No. 1 asks and answers a question we should now call “redaction-criticism.” Why the stories are juxtaposed produces a number of interesting lessons, beginning with the moral comment on the descent of the brothers and of Judah, then the comparison of Tamar and Potiphar’s wife, since Joseph married her daughter. Then at Nos. 2, 3, and 4 we have further examples of the same mode of thought. The entire construction then appeals to the passage before us as part of its larger rhetorical inquiry. Nos. 5 and 6 introduce an interesting question. Why did Judah depart from his brothers? No. 5 gives one answer, No. 6 another. The former answer is that the brothers thought they could avoid punishment by scattering. The latter is more in consonance with the story to come. Both of them add a deep dimension to the text, by drawing together its fragments.

XCV:I.

1. A. “He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to appear before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen” (Gen. 46:28):
 - B. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (Is. 65:25).
 - C. Come and see how every wound that the Holy One, blessed be he, inflicts in this world he heals in the age to come. [At issue is the following intersecting verse: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing” (Is. 35:5).]
 - D. The blind are healed: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.”
 - E. The lame are healed: “. . . then shall the lame man leap as a hart.”
 - F. The dumb are healed: “. . . and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.”
 - G. All are healed, but just as a person goes out, so he comes back to life.
 - H. If he goes out blind, he comes back blind, if he goes out deaf, he comes back deaf, if he goes out dumb, he comes back dumb, if he goes out lame, he comes back lame.
 - I. Just as he is garbed when he goes out, so he is garbed when he comes back: “It is changed as clay under the seal, and they stand as in a garment” (Job 38:14).
 - J. From whom do you learn that lesson? It is from Samuel the Ramathite. When Saul brought him up, what did he say to the woman? “What form is he of?” And she said, “An old man comes up, and he is covered with a robe” (1Sam. 28:14).

K. For that is what he had been wearing: “Moreover his mother made him a little robe” (1 Sam. 2:19).

L. And why is it the case that just as a person goes out, so he comes back to life?

M. It is so that the wicked of the world will not claim that, after they have died the Holy One, blessed be he, will heal them and afterward bring them back to life. It then would appear that these are not the ones who died, but others.

N. Accordingly, the Holy One, blessed be he, says, “If so, let them rise up out of the dust just as they went, and afterward I shall heal them.”

O. Why so? “That you may know that . . . before me there was no God formed, neither shall any be after me” (Is. 43:10).

P. And afterward even the wild beasts are healed, as it is said, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.” All are healed.

Q. But the one who brought [the ultimate] injury [of death] on all will not be healed: “And dust shall be the serpent’s food” (Is. 65:25).

R. Why? Because he brought all of life down to the dust.

2. A. Another interpretation of the verse: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion like the ox shall eat straw” (Is. 65:25):

B. “The wolf”: this refers to Benjamin: “Benjamin is a wolf that tears at prey” (Gen. 49:27).

C. “. . . and the lamb”: this speaks of the tribal fathers: Israel is a scattered sheep” (Jer. 50:17).

D. “. . . shall feed together”: When is this the case? When Benjamin went down with them.

E. Jacob said to them, “My son shall not go down with you” (Gen. 2:38).

F. But when the time came and they went down, and Benjamin went down with them, they watched over him and kept good care of him.

G. So it says with regard to Joseph, “And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin . . . and said, ‘God be gracious to you . . .’” (Gen. 43:29).

H. “. . . the lion”: this refers to Judah: “Judah is a lion’s whelp” (Gen. 49:9).

I. “. . . like the ox”: “this speaks of Joseph: “And of Joseph he said . . . , ‘His beauty is that of his firstling bullock’” (Deut. 33:13, 17).

J. They turned out to eat together: “And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest

according to his youth. . . . portions were taken to them . . .” (Gen. 43:33–34).

K. “. . . and the lion like the ox shall eat straw”: therefore: “He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to appear before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen” (Gen. 46:28).

We note the persistence of a single question: how does this story relate to its larger context? But the question of context proves somewhat more complex than mere narrative considerations suggest. For the deeper foundations of all stories carry us into the profound question of salvation. The quest for context demands that we ask how a given story relates to the larger tale of how Israel is saved. So the rule at hand—pay attention to what comes before and what follows afterward—reflects a deep theology of Israel’s history.

What makes this construction striking, therefore, is its focus on the eschatological meaning of the story at hand, which now gains yet a deeper dimension. If we start with No. 2, as the form requires us to do, we find that the intersecting verse, Is. 65:25, is made to refer to the tribal progenitors. Then the story at hand, involving the reunion and reconciliation of the tribes, finds its reference-point in the end of days. The message of No. 2 draws us back to No.1, and here the vision of the eschatological moment comes to full expression. All will be healed, the blind, deaf, dumb, but all return as they had been. That point of emphasis in No. 1 imparts its sense on No. 2. In the coming age Israel will be restored to life as it had been before, but then God will heal Israel.

The art of the composition demands that the whole be read as a single statement, a single judgment upon Israel in the world to come: pretty much like Israel now, only to be healed. Then the theme, the reconciliation and unification of Israel, finds its moment of realization in the age to come, a rather wry comment on the present state of affairs. It would be difficult to find a better example of the rereading of the scriptural narrative through the prism of a deeper perspective.

4. A THEOLOGY OF HOPE

What, then, tells sages how to identify the important and avoid the trivial? The answer derives from the fundamental theological conviction that gives life to their search of Scripture. It is that the task of Israel is to hope, and the message of Genesis—there for the sages to uncover and make explicit—is always to hope. For a Jew it is a sin to despair. This I think defines the iron law of meaning, telling sages what matters and what does not, guiding their hands to take up those

verses that permit expression of hope—that above all. Given the definitive event of their day—the conversion in the age of Constantine of the great empire of Rome to Christianity—the task of hope proved not an easy assignment.

XCVIII:XIV.

4.
 - A. “I hope for your salvation, O Lord” (Gen. 49:18):
 - B. Said R. Isaac, “All things depend on hope. Suffering depends on hope, the sanctification of God’s name depends on hope, the merit attained by the fathers depends on hope, the lust for the age to come depends on hope.
 - C. “That is in line with this verse: ‘Yes, in the way of your judgments, O Lord, we have hoped for you, to your name, and to your memorial, is the desire of our soul’ (Is. 26:8). The way of your judgments refers to suffering.
 - D. “. . . to your name:’ this refers to the sanctification of the divine name.
 - E. “. . . and to your memorial:’ this refers to the merit of the fathers.
 - F. “. . . is the desire of our soul:’ this refers to the lust for the age to come.
 - G. “Grace depends on hope: ‘O Lord, be gracious to us, we have hoped for you’ (Is. 33:2).
 - H. “Forgiveness depends on hope: ‘For with you is forgiveness’ (Ps. 130:4), then: ‘I hope for the Lord’ (Ps. 130:5).”

No. 4 is explicit on the critical importance of hope in the salvific process, and which further links the exclamation to the setting in which it occurs. This seems to me to typify the strength of the exegesis at hand, with its twin powers to link all details to a tight narrative and to link the narrative to the history of Israel.

5. CONCLUSION

We have travelled a long way from our original observation. We began by noting that sages heard much in little, took account of juxtapositions, introduced one verse to illuminate another. So at the outset we dealt with mainly literary matters. But as we proceeded, we realized that these traits of literary-critical character express both attitudes and convictions of a theological nature. So we could not remain entirely within the issue of method, narrowly defined as literary in character. Why not? Because method contains substance, contents dictate context, as much as method yields substance and

context imparts meaning and significance to what is said. Still, we realize at the outset that, as we follow the exposition of the book of Genesis by the ancient sages of Judaism, the issue in no way rests on such simple matters as the technicalities of word-choice or of stylistic peculiarities. In other words, we deal with religious minds seeking religious truth. It is our sages of blessed memory who lay down their judgment upon Genesis, and Genesis Rabbah declares in rich detail precisely the nature of that judgment.

NOTES

1. All numbering in this article refers to the author's *Genesis and Judaism: The Perspective of Genesis Rabbah. An Analytical Anthology* (Atlanta, 1985: Scholars Press for Brown Judaic Studies).
2. M. Freedman, transl., *Genesis Rabbah* (London, 1948), p. 730.