Introduction

This is a book about the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, that momentous manifestation of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, under the impact of the rise of Christianity in the first centuries C.E. It is about identities and boundaries, boundaries between religions and boundaries within religions; about the fluidity of boundaries and the demarcation of boundaries—identities that are less stable and boundaries that are more permeable than has been previously thought and yet increasingly demarcated in order to occupy territories. It is about the fluidity of categories such as "inside" and "outside," "orthodoxy" and "heresy," not least "Judaism" and "Christianity," shifting paradigms that depend on literary and historical contexts and do not allow of an easy "either/or." It is a book by a historian who is deeply convinced that differences matter and must not be dissolved in overarching ideas void of any attempt to anchor them in time and place. Its main thesis is that not only the emerging Christianity drew on contemporary Judaism but that rabbinic Judaism, too, tapped into ideas and concepts of Christianity to shape its own identity; that, far from being forever frozen in ingrained hostility, the two sister religions engaged in a profound interaction during late antiquity. Even more, it posits that

in certain cases the rabbis appropriated Christian ideas that the Christians had inherited from the Jews, hence that rabbinic Judaism *re*appropriated originally Jewish ideas that were usurped by Christianity.

Common wisdom has it that belief in the unity and uniqueness of God has been one of the firmly established principles of Jewish faith since time immemorial. This belief is considered to be forever recorded in the solemn beginning of the biblical *Shema'*, one of the daily prayers in Jewish worship: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone (*YHWH ehad*)" (Deut. 6:4). Since the latter part of this declaration can also be translated as "the Lord is one," it contains *in nuce* an acknowledgment of Israel's God as the one and only God, with no other gods beside him, and is simultaneously a recognition of him as the one and undivided God, that is, not consisting of multiple personalities. This peculiar character of the Jewish God is generally captured under the rubric "monotheism"—although the view is becoming ever more accepted that such a category is highly problematic for the biblical period, let alone for those periods coming after the closure of the Hebrew Bible. The authors of the Hebrew Bible no doubt tried very hard to implement and enforce the belief in the one God in its double sense, but they also faced considerable resistance and were constantly fighting off attempts to thwart their efforts and—inspired by the customs of Israel's neighbors—to sneak in ideas that ran counter to any strict interpretation of monotheism. Thus it appears that the very notion of monotheism as a monolithic and stable entity is misleading and that we need to distinguish between the rigid and programmatic *rhetoric* of monotheism as opposed to its much less rigorous *practice*.

The rabbis of the talmudic period after 70 C.E. encountered an even more complex environment. Regardless of how much they assumed and insisted on their God's unity and uniqueness,

they were surrounded by people—their affiliation with different religious and social groups notwithstanding—for whom such an idea was highly contested territory. The Greeks and Romans were amazed by the notion of a God reserved solely for the Jews, this exclusivity underscored by the Jewish God's strict aniconic character and a complete lack of images depicting him. The well-meaning among them nevertheless tried to integrate this elusive God into their pantheon as some form of *summum deum* or "highest heaven," whereas the mean-spirited parodied the Jewish beliefs or plainly concluded that the Jews must have been the worst of atheists.[1] The emerging Christian sect set out to elaborate the notion of the one and only God in terms of first a binitarian and then a trinitarian theology—that is, they took the decisive step to include God's Son in the godhead, this followed by the inclusion of a third divine figure, the Holy Spirit. And the various groups that are commonly subsumed under the label "Gnosis" embraced the Neo-Platonic distinction between the absolutely and uniquely transcendent God (the first and highest principle) and the demiurge (the second principle) responsible for the mundane creation, which could easily (and derogatorily) be identified with the Jewish creator God.

The rabbis were certainly aware of such developments and responded to them. The rabbinic literature has preserved a wealth of sources that portray the rabbis as engaged in a dialogue, or rather debate, with people who present views that run counter to the accepted or imagined rabbinic norm system. Generally, these dialogue partners—commonly subsumed under the category *minim*, literally "kinds (of belief),"[2] that is, all kinds of people with divergent beliefs—are presented as opponents whose ideas need to be refuted and warded off; hence the customary translation of *minim* as "heretics" (because their ideas deviate from the norm established by the rabbinic majority). It goes without saying that these "heretics" did not escape the attention of modern

scholarly research, which, from its inception, was focused on—if not outright obsessed with—identifying this elusive group of people that caused the rabbis so much trouble. The respective sources have been collected and exhaustively analyzed, more often than not with the explicit goal of identifying *the* particular and peculiar heretical "sect" behind each and every individual source. In other words, it was the implicit and unquestioned assumption of most of the relevant scholarship that within the wide spectrum of rabbinic sources we are indeed dealing with clearly defined boundaries between what was regarded as an accepted set of ideas and what was not regarded as such—hence, with boundaries between "orthodoxy" and "heresy"—and that almost all the varieties of heresies can in fact be identified as belonging to this or that heretical group.

The scholarly standard, still largely valid today, has been set by two major works: Travers Herford's *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*[3] and Alan Segal's *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*.[4] Quite distant in time and methodology, both nevertheless share—in retrospect—a rather naïve confidence in our ability to pin down the heretical "sects" addressed in the sources. Herford arrived at "Christianity" as the main target of rabbinical ire in a relatively effortless fashion, whereas Segal, with his more sophisticated methodological equipment and a much broader perspective, tried to mark out the full range of possibilities—from "paganism" in all its varieties through a more differentiated "Christianity" (Jewish Christians, gentile Christians, God-Fearers, Hellenized Jews) to "Gnosticism," this latter (in the vein of Hans Jonas) in still quite undifferentiated form. Despite its undoubtedly great progress in both methodology and results, *Two Powers in Heaven* remains trapped in that all too rigid straitjacket of definable "religions," "sects," and "heresies" that know and fight each other with an equally well-defined set of ideas and beliefs.

This impasse was readdressed only recently, thanks above all to the work of Daniel Boyarin. In his book *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*[5] as well as in a series of articles,[6] Boyarin repeatedly and forcefully maintains that not only is the effort to identify the various heretical "sects" a vain one; moreover, and more importantly, he holds that there were no such heretical groups as well-defined entities distinct from the rabbis. In fact, when exposed to Christian ideas in particular, the rabbis were arguing not against an enemy from the outside but rather from within, that is, against their own colleagues who seemed unduly impressed with certain Christian views. He even goes so far as to suggest that we regard Christianity not as a "sect" within ancient Judaism against which the rabbis fought but as an integral part of the rabbinic mind-set. Much as I agree with the proposition (no well-defined heretical "sects" as opposed to "rabbinic Judaism"), I will demonstrate that Boyarin grossly overshoots the mark with respect to the conclusions he draws. In his desire to integrate Christianity into rabbinic Judaism he in fact blurs the boundaries and cavalierly disregards chronological and geographical (Palestinian versus Babylonian) distinctions (this becoming particularly obvious in his dealing with the Enoch-Metatron traditions).

But still, Boyarin has opened a window and allowed a fresh breeze to reinvigorate the scholarly debate about the *minim*. Indeed, it remains an important question as to what extent the rabbis were active partners in these discussions with the *minim*, that is, whether our rabbinic sources only reflect the fending off and repulse of such "heretical" propositions or whether they reveal hints that the (or rather some) rabbis were actively engaged in expanding the borderlines and softening the all too rigid idea of the one and only God. Phrased this way, the question does not assume that the discussions preserved in our rabbinic sources reflect the controversy of firmly established "religions"—"Jewish,"

"pagan," "Christian," "gnostic," or other—but allow for still fluid boundaries within (and beyond) which a variety of groups were competing with each other in shaping their identities. From this follows of necessity that the rabbis, in arguing against "heretics," were not always and automatically quarreling with enemies from the outside—however hard they may have tried to give precisely this impression—but also with enemies from within, that is, with colleagues who entertained ideas that the rabbis were fighting against.

A peculiar case is Moshe Idel's book *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*.[7] Although Idel does not deal with *minim* in the full sense of this term, his book is nevertheless important for our subject since, in surveying the concept of sonship (the Son of God in particular) in Judaism from antiquity to the modern period, Idel refers to a number of sources also discussed in this present book. In terms of methodology, he typically follows his "phenomenological" approach—an approach that scorns both unilinear histories of Jewish mysticism as well as homogeneous interpretations focusing on the theosophical strand of Kabbalah (as opposed to the ecstatic strand), the latter demonized as Gershom-Scholem-and-His-School.[8] Such an approach leads to a highly idiosyncratic mixture of sources that deliberately ignores the constraints of time and place, advocating instead a synchronic reading of the respective literatures that moves effortlessly back and forth between antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern period. The reader who doesn't want to follow Idel's presupposition is confronted with a hodgepodge of sources and impressions that—although often interesting and illuminating—defy any serious source-critical analysis and chronological classification and are therefore, from a historical point of view, worthless.[9] Even at the risk of being suspected of historicism, I prefer a sober historical evaluation to one of impressionistic ideas, brilliant as they might be.

Yet even Idel cannot completely ignore chronology and source criticism. A case in point is his treatment of the antediluvian patriarch Enoch who, according to the Third Book of Enoch (which is part of the Hekhalot literature), was transformed into the highest angel Metatron and called the "Lesser God" (*YHWH ha-qatan*) and who will play a prominent role in the pages of this book. For Idel it is a matter of course that this "Lesser God" of 3 Enoch stands in unbroken continuity with and in fact forms the climax of a much earlier development that started with the First (Ethiopic) and the Second (Slavonic) Book of Enoch.[10] Without taking the trouble of descending into the lowly sphere of source criticism, and with no attempt to date 1 and 2 Enoch,[11] let alone 3 Enoch, which most likely represents the latest of all the Hekhalot writings and belongs to the late or even postrabbinic period,[12] Idel simply declares that the Enoch-Metatron passages in 3 Enoch are among the "early themes in this book."[13] And it is through the use of this artifice that Metatron, the "Lesser God" of 3 Enoch, is read back into much earlier sources and an unbroken chain of tradition is established.[14] As opposed to this mashing together of sources I posit that distinctions are indeed relevant, for they lead us in this case, as I will demonstrate, not into the realm of Palestinian but rather Babylonian Judaism and, chronologically speaking, into a relatively late period.

The most recent attempt to come to terms with the rabbinic heretics is Adiel Schremer's monograph *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity*.[15] Schremer's main thesis is that the attempt by Herford and his new supporters (Boyarin in particular) to see in the rabbinic debates first and foremost a reflection of theological, that is, Christological, themes narrows the complexity of the sources to a single and in fact secondary aspect. The real issue, he maintains, is not theology but social history, namely, the identity crisis Pales-

tinian Jewish society faced after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 C.E., which cemented the oppressive power of the Roman Empire. Even the Christianization of the Roman Empire after Constantine's conversion, he suggests, was of little significance: "Palestinian rabbis of late antiquity continued to view Rome as a powerful oppressor, without paying much attention to its new religious character."[16] He even goes so far as to claim that the scholarly bias in favor of Christian themes as being at the center of the debate about heretics ultimately results in suppressing rabbinic Judaism and painting it with Christian colors—hence in "Christianizing" and "colonizing" it.[17]

These are strong words. Much as I agree with Schremer's emphasis on the political and social-historical implications of the rabbis' encounter with the heretics, it seems to me that with his stark contrast of "theological" versus "political" he has set up a straw man that may be useful for developing a new theory but woefully fails to correspond to the historical reality. After all, it is a futile and naïve undertaking to attempt to separate neatly "theology" from "politics," and this is certainly true for late antiquity, the period in question. Schremer is clearly aware of this basic principle,[18] but it appears that he keeps forgetting it and repeatedly lapses into the black-and-white picture of politics and history as something that can and should be separated from and contrasted with theology. This, I am afraid, reveals a rather inadequate conception of theology, not to mention politics.

In what follows I will survey the rabbinic literature for the rabbis' discussions with all kinds of "heretics." I do not claim, however, to do full justice to this subject in all its complexity, that is, to write a new Herford; rather, I will focus on debates about the rabbinic concept of God, his unity and uniqueness, and his relationship with other (prospective) divine powers. In so doing I will start with the assumption that the boundaries be-

tween "orthodoxy" and "heresy" have been fluid for a long time or, to put it differently, that the impact of the various "heresies" was crucial to the rabbis in shaping their own identity. With regard to the "heresies," a picture will emerge that is much more diffuse than has been previously thought—with fluid boundaries even between the heretical groups and sects—and that renders fruitless any attempt to delineate these boundaries more sharply. Yet it seems safe to say that the main "opponents" of the rabbis were "pagans" on the one hand (that is, Greco-Roman polytheism in all its diversity) and "Christians" on the other (again, in all its heretical variety and with its own struggle to define its identity).[19] This means that, whereas the emerging Christianity defined itself by making recourse to contemporary Judaism as well as to all kinds of groups and movements within itself, the emerging rabbinic Judaism defined itself by making recourse to *Christianity* (as well as to all kinds of groups and movements within itself). To be more precise: even the phrase "within itself" is ultimately misleading, since this "itself," far from being a stable entity, is the unknown quantity that we aim to describe. In other words, the paradigm of our unknown quantity is in constant flux and not always the same (i.e., not always either a straight "Judaism" or a straight "Christianity"). Depending on the context, it sometimes *is* "Christianity," and sometimes it is *inside* "Judaism"—with the "inside" and "outside" categories becoming ever more blurred.

If we take paganism and in particular Christianity as the most common determiner of those heresies confronting and shaping rabbinic Judaism, we find that the rabbis reacted in two ways: repulsion and attraction. Many of the debates between the rabbis and the heretics betray a sharp and furious rejection of ideas about God that smack of polytheism in its pagan or Christian guise, the latter making do with just two or three gods—that is, developing a binitarian or trinitarian theology. But since such

ideas were by no means alien to ancient Judaism—the frequent attacks against polytheistic tendencies in the Hebrew Bible forcefully demonstrate that the authors of the biblical books had good reason to attack polytheism; and the biblical and postbiblical speculations about "Wisdom" (*hokhmah*) and the "Word" (*logos*) prove beyond any doubt that Judaism was open to ideas that accepted divine or semidivine powers next to God—one could regard their elimination with mixed feelings. Hence, some rabbis were resistant to the Christian usurpation of their ideas and insisted that not only did they *originally* belong to them but that they *still* belonged to them. I will demonstrate that this reappropriation of originally Jewish ideas about God and (semi-) divine powers apart from him took two forms. First, certain Jewish groups elevated figures such as Adam, the angels, David, and above all Metatron to divine status, responding, I posit, to the Christian elevation of Jesus; and second, other groups revived the idea of the suffering servant/Messiah and his vicarious suffering despite (or because of) its Christian appropriation.

Concerning the relevant sources, I will pay due heed to the traditional distinction between earlier tannaitic sources (that is, sources ascribed to the rabbis of the first and second centuries) and later amoraic ones (that is, sources ascribed to rabbis of the third through the sixth centuries). Moreover and most importantly, as I did in my book *Jesus in the Talmud*,[20] I will again be placing great emphasis on the geographical distinction between Palestine and Babylonia; as in *Jesus in the Talmud* it turns out that this distinction is crucial for some of the major texts dealing with the elevation of divine or semidivine figures.

I begin with a chapter ("Different Names of God") addressing a problem that must have plagued the rabbis a great deal: the undeniable fact that the Hebrew Bible uses various names for God, most prominent among them *Elohim* and the tetragrammaton *YHWH*. Both names attracted the attention and curios-

ity of Gentiles, the latter because of the mystery surrounding it—it was originally used only by the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies of the Temple, and its proper pronunciation was deemed lost—and the former because it is grammatically a plural and hence could easily give rise to the idea that the Jews worshiped not just one God but several gods. The "heretics" apparently knew enough Hebrew to seize the opportunity and insinuate that the Jews were no different in this regard than the pagans and indeed accepted the notion of a pantheon of various gods. Many rabbinic sources prove that the rabbis were frequently exposed to such arguments on the part of the "heretics," who bombarded them with Bible verses in which the name *Elohim* could be interpreted as referring to a variety of gods. The rabbinic literature preserves several collections of such dangerous verses that clearly demonstrate how well-known and widespread this problem must have been.

One such debate, attributed to R. Simlai, a Palestinian amora of the late third/early fourth century, is of particular importance to our subject. I will argue that to a certain degree it presupposes and reflects Diocletian's reform of the Roman Empire toward the end of the third century—a reform that also affected Palestine as belonging to the eastern part of the empire. I posit that the notion of a diarchy of emperors (one Augustus and one Caesar, subordinate to the Augustus) followed by a tetrarchy (two Augusti with equal rights and two subordinate Caesares) gave rise to rabbinic reflections about the nature of their God: attacked by "heretics" insinuating that their *Elohim* mirrored a hierarchy of divine powers similar to the hierarchical structure of the Roman Empire, these rabbis insisted that their God still remained one and the same. Since this more complex power structure of the Roman Empire apparently influenced the evolving theological debate in Christianity about the nature of God (two or even three divine powers), and since both are mutually illumi-

nating developments, I will argue that the rabbis were engaged in discourse not just with the Romans but also with the Christians. I will discuss the impact of this discourse on rabbinic Judaism and demonstrate that the rabbis—familiar with the Christological debate about the Son of God in particular and perceiving it as simultaneously tempting and threatening—ultimately rejected its implications out of hand.

The rabbis not only were aware (and were made aware) that the God of the Hebrew Bible is addressed by different names—sometimes, to complicate matters, even in the plural—they also were confronted with the fact that this God assumes various guises. Here, too, they had to answer impertinent questions from the heretics. The second chapter ("The Young and the Old God") will turn to this problem, using the example of a relatively early (third century) Palestinian midrash. There, the heretics take advantage of the fact that God is sometimes portrayed as a young war hero (most prominently when he redeems his people of Israel from Egypt and drowns the Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea) and sometimes as a merciful old man (when he gives the Torah to his people at Mount Sinai). Countering the heretics' argument that these various manifestations point to two divine powers of equal right in heaven, one old and one young, the rabbis insist that their God, despite his varying appearances, nevertheless is always one and the same—never changing and never growing old.

The danger evoked by such an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible is obvious: one immediately thinks of the Christian notion of the old and young God—God-Father and God-Son. Although such associations cannot be completely ruled out, I urge caution and argue against a trend in modern scholarship (Boyarin) of reading back into this midrash later Babylonian ideas. The distinction between Palestine and Babylonia is crucial: whereas the later Babylonian rabbis, as I will argue in the next

chapter, were indeed exposed to the growing attraction of two divine figures, the situation in third-century Palestine remains different. The early Palestinian amoraim did indeed witness the nascent Christianity, but they were still quite "innocent," with regard both to recognizing the developing theological intricacies of Christianity and to being drawn into them.

A much different picture emerges when we turn our attention to Babylonia. The third chapter ("God and David") deals with an exegesis of Daniel 7:9, found only in the Babylonian Talmud, which boldly assigns the Messiah–King David a throne in heaven, next to that of God. Here we have for the first time clear evidence that certain rabbis felt attracted to the idea of a second divine figure, enjoying equal rights with God. The angry rejection of this idea by other rabbis—and the editor of the Bavli—demonstrates that such "heretical" ideas gained a foothold within the rabbinic fold of Babylonian Jewry. The Bavli's Daniel exegesis finds its counterpart in the David Apocalypse, which gives an elaborate description of the elevated David and his worship in heaven. I posit that this unique piece is structurally similar to the elevation of the Lamb (that is, Jesus Christ) in the New Testament Book of Revelation and can be interpreted as a response to the New Testament. We don't know the time and place of origin of the David Apocalypse, but the fact that it is transmitted as part of the Hekhalot literature and develops ideas known only from the Bavli makes it probable that it indeed belongs to the realm of Babylonian Judaism. The Babylonian context is corroborated by the depiction of the Messiah–King David on the frescoes of the Dura Europos synagogue.

With the fourth chapter ("God and Metatron") we remain largely in Babylonia. The hero now is finally Metatron, that enigmatic figure assuming the title "Lesser God." I begin with an analysis of a midrash transmitted again only in the Bavli, in which Rav Idith (a Babylonian amora of the fourth or fifth cen-

tury) deflects the fierce attacks of certain heretics who insist on assigning Metatron divine status. The structure of the midrash reveals not only that the heretics have the better arguments; it also becomes clear that the neat distinction between "rabbis" and "heretics" simply doesn't work here, and that we must reckon with the possibility that the clever biblical exegesis of the "heretics" in fact reflects ideas entertained by certain rabbis. No doubt, the notion of a second divine power alongside that of God has gained followers among the Babylonian Jews.

In order to substantiate this claim I survey all the relevant Metatron passages preserved in rabbinic literature. It turns out that almost all of them are found either in the Babylonian Talmud or in the Hekhalot literature, most notably in 3 Enoch; the few Palestinian examples are very late or originally refer to the angel Michael who was later identified with Metatron. Because 3 Enoch and presumably much of the Hekhalot literature if not originated in Babylonia at least received its definite literary form there, I conclude that Enoch-Metatron's elevation to a (semi)divine figure is part and parcel of Babylonian, not Palestinian, Judaism. This Babylonian context is again corroborated by extraliterary evidence, this time the Babylonian incantation bowls where Metatron plays a prominent role. I conclude this chapter with a comparison between Metatron's elevation in our rabbinic sources and Jesus' elevation in the New Testament. Again I posit that the Metatron of the Bavli and the Hekhalot literature is a deliberate response on the part of the Babylonian Jews to the challenges posed by Christianity.[21]

The fifth chapter ("Has God a Father, a Son, or a Brother?") returns to the realm of Palestinian Judaism and analyzes midrashim referring to God's family background. They again reflect the power structure of the Roman Empire with the emperor's dynasty (father, brother, son, probably also adoptive son). Since, as we have repeatedly seen, this hierarchy forms the backdrop of

the nascent Christological speculations, it appears that it is the relationship between God and his Son in particular that is at stake in these sources. Additionally, some of these midrashim hint at the increasingly heated debate between Jews and Christians over the question of who is true heir to the Land of Israel.

Enoch-Metatron, being transformed into the highest of all angels and becoming a divine figure next to God, stands at the extreme (Babylonian) end of a much larger spectrum of rabbinic attitudes toward the angels. If we survey the full evidence (chapter 6), it turns out that the earlier Palestinian sources were vehemently opposed to any such possibility of the angels being granted a role transcending their traditional task of praising God and acting as his messengers. This is particularly true for the creation story and the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. With regard to the former, the rabbis set great store in pointing out that the angels were *not* created on the first day of creation—to make sure that nobody should arrive at the dangerous idea that these angels *participated* in the act of creation (as their opponents obviously held). The rabbis had enough trouble with the plural of "Let us make man" in Genesis 1:26—although they opted for the interpretation that God consulted with his angels (the lesser evil in view of the Christian claim that he consulted with his Son), they immediately played down the inherent danger by maintaining that God did not follow the advice of his angels (who were against the creation of man) or by arguing that God did not in fact take this consultation very seriously; and it is left to the Bavli to come up with the most radical solution to this problem—having God burn the stubborn angels with his little finger, clear evidence again that the editors of the Bavli had to deal with groups advocating a more active role being played by the angels. In order to evaluate the dangers inherent in such ideas, I briefly analyze the place assigned to the angels in Philo's sophisticated system of carefully graded divine powers.

Similarly, the rabbis took great care in not granting the angels too active a role during the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Again, they had every reason for this restraint—cast in the formula that God revealed his Torah "not through the medium of an angel or a messenger"—since the alleged Jewish belief in the angels as mediators of revelation was used by no less a person than Paul to conclude that the Jewish "Law" was inferior to the new Christian interpretation of the Torah. Clearly, the rabbis were vulnerable here because some among them advocated just such ideas. Further indication of this problem is the fact that the rabbis felt compelled to parry attempts to venerate the angels (prominent among them Michael). Hence I posit that ancient Judaism was indeed on its way to introducing an intermediate level of angelic powers and that the rabbis tried very hard to counter such efforts—with more success in Palestine than in Babylonia.

It is not only the angels who are perceived as dangerous competitors with God—the same holds true for Adam, the first man, who, according to some midrashim, was originally created with enormous bodily dimensions (a *makro-anthropos*); one midrash even goes so far as to suggest that God decided to make him mortal only when he realized that the angels made an attempt to worship him (chapter 7). Refuting those scholars who try to locate this midrash within the realm of some vaguely defined "Gnosticism," I suggest that it much better reflects the period after Diocletian's reform—and with all that it implies for the Christological debate. This interpretation is corroborated again by Philo and the New Testament: while Philo identifies the (ideal) heavenly Adam with the Logos, Paul takes the next step and identifies this Logos-Adam with Jesus Christ. So my conclusion is very similar to the one regarding the angels: the rabbis polemicized against attempts to elevate Adam to a supernatural and (semi)divine being because they were aware of the possible

Christological interpretations and, not least, because such ideas had gained followers among the rabbis themselves. The Adam myth is but another example of the theological possibilities inherent in ancient Judaism—possibilities that were developed further by circles that would be labeled "Christian" yet could still remain, to a certain degree, within what would be called "rabbinic Judaism." In distancing themselves from such tendencies the rabbis ultimately aimed to shape their own (rabbinic) identity.

The last two chapters return to the Messiah, a subject already addressed in the chapters on David and Metatron. But the focus here is quite different. In examining a famous midrash in the Jerusalem Talmud about the disappearance of the newborn Messiah, the eighth chapter leads us into that very moment when "Christianity" sprang from the loins of "Judaism." Instead of tracking the more elaborate efforts of differentiation and demarcation (with its aspects of both repulsion and attraction), we now witness an early and archaic attempt to excrete "Christianity" from "Judaism"—yet this is a Christianity that is still regarded as part and parcel of Judaism and at the same time recognized as something that will become Judaism's worst enemy. Hence, this Baby Messiah is simultaneously the Jewish *and* Christian Messiah, caught at that tragic moment when Judaism was desperately trying to retain the Messiah within its fold but was also vaguely sensing that it would ultimately fail and that a new religion had already been born.

With the ninth and last chapter ("The Suffering Messiah Ephraim") we turn to the seemingly traditional task of the Messiah as the redeemer of Israel at the end of time. But what pretends to be traditional emerges as something radically new within the context of rabbinic Judaism or, more precisely, as something originally and inherently Jewish that (1) was usurped by Christianity; as a result of this (2) was suppressed by Judaism;

and then, as the return of the suppressed, (3) was later making its way back ever more forcefully to rabbinic Judaism. I am referring to the idea of the suffering Messiah that evolved from the suffering servant in Isaiah, which was in turn adopted by the New Testament and expanded to include the notion of the Messiah's vicarious expiatory suffering—and was therefore completely ignored by the rabbis. It returns in a series of midrashim (dated presumably to the first half of the seventh century) in the collection Pesiqta Rabbati—just as if nothing had happened, as if the New Testament usurpation of this idea had never occurred. Appearing there is a Messiah named Ephraim of whom God demands that he take upon himself the sins of the people of Israel; only after the Messiah accepts this strange request does God agree to create humankind. Hence, it is ultimately the Messiah's expiatory suffering that guarantees creation and redemption.

With this we come full circle. We have followed the heretics' claim that the different names used for God in the Hebrew Bible point to a variety of deities and similarly that God's different manifestations as a young war hero and an old man lead to the inevitable conclusion that there are at least two gods in Judaism. We have seen that the rabbis virulently rejected such claims, apparently aware of their Christological implications, because they found followers within their own ranks. The latter appeared to be particularly true of the Jews of Babylonia with their bold ideas about David and Metatron as (semi)divine figures elevated to the heavenly Messiah-King and the highest angel respectively. More than anything else it seems to have been the notion of God's Son that bothered the rabbis, a problem coming to the fore also in texts dealing with the imperial-divine family and Adam as a supernatural being in competition with God. Other competitors deemed dangerous were the angels—because they diminished God's creative and revelatory power and could be

used as ammunition for the Christian claim that the new covenant had superseded the old covenant.

Most of the sources analyzed in this book touch on Christianity as the major subject of the debates between rabbis and heretics, simultaneously perceived as a threat against which the rabbis' own identity needed to be defined and as a temptation triggering ideas that came dangerously close to the message of the New Testament. In contrast, the midrashim about the birth of the Messiah and the suffering Messiah Ephraim are not instigated by probing questions on the part of the heretics; rather, they lead us into the very heart of Judaism's multifarious and conflict-ridden relationship with Christianity—the birth of Christianity from the loins of Judaism and the bold reappropriation of originally Jewish ideas that had become the main markers of the new Christian religion.

The publisher and I have thought extensively about an appropriate title for this book. The German version was provocatively called *The Birth of Judaism from the Spirit of Christianity*, meant as a deliberate inversion of the much more common *The Birth of Christianity from the Spirit of Judaism*. Whereas the latter phrase expresses the truism that Christianity wouldn't have become possible without Judaism, that is, presupposes and continues Judaism, the former takes a different perspective: what we call Judaism—more precisely rabbinic Judaism—emerged in constant exchange with and differentiation from Christianity (or rather, from what, during this mutual process, became Christianity). It goes without saying that this title is an allusion to Friedrich Nietzsche's famous *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*: just as "music" was the midwife that brought "tragedy" to life, so "Christianity" was necessary to give life to "Judaism."

The present title, *The Jewish Jesus*, looks at the same phenomenon from a different angle. It is inspired by Geza Vermes' classic

Jesus the Jew:[22] whereas Vermes aimed at reclaiming Jesus for the Jews, arguing that the historical Jesus was essentially Jewish and belongs to the Jewish fold, this book is not concerned with the historical Jesus but claims that certain figures within rabbinic Judaism (such as David, Metatron, the Messiah, the angels, Adam) have been assigned a place within Judaism similar to the role Jesus played in Christianity. In other words, such figures—whether adopted or rejected—are attempts to incorporate into or repel from Judaism (semi)divine powers that enhance or threaten the divinity of the Jewish God. I am aware that this title is no less provocative than the earlier one, but I am confident that it will be assessed as an attempt to cast a fresh look at the origins of rabbinic Judaism in conjunction with the emergence of Christianity.