CHAPTER FIVE

ADAM, EVE AND THE SERPENT – THE FIRST VERSION
OF THE FALL (PRE 13)

Who first seduc’d them to that fowl revolt?
Th’ infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stird up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv’d
The Mother of Mankinde, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav’n, with all his Host
Of Rebel Angels… (John Milton, Paradise Lost, I.34–39)

The retelling of the events in the Garden of Eden in PRE constitutes an etiological myth on the origin of evil in the world. According to certain trends in Second Temple literature, the tendency towards sin could not have been attributed to God, deemed all-good and all-powerful. Rather, it must have been the result of a tragic error committed by the first parents of the human race, and the primary figure held culpable for introducing sin was God’s Adversary – Satan or Samael. This tenet is most pronounced in pre-rabbinic and early Christian sources, as well as passages from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, while it seems to be systematically rejected by later Jewish sources, which favor, instead, the explanation that Adam was initially created with an evil inclination [yetzer hara’]. Like the non-canonical writings of ancient Judaism (the Sefarim Hitzonim), PRE constructs a model based on an externalized source, wherein evil is introduced, through ‘original sin’, in the Primeval events of history. But the flaw that now mars human nature is not associated either with lust or sexuality, but rather with ‘a bad seed’ introduced into the genetic descendants of Eve. Sexuality in PRE is deemed to be an integral part of the Garden of Eden experience before the sin and not a consequence of ‘the Fall’. Conceived through Adam prior to eating of the Tree, Abel is not predisposed to evil, whereas Cain, the product of Samael’s seduction of Eve, is. I will explore some of the sources – Gnostic, Islamic, and Christian – that may have provided the inspiration for this account, all drawing on the legend of the Fallen Angel. In my analysis of the role of Samael in the Garden, I will also compare our text with other midrashic accounts – Avot de-Rabbi Natan and Breshit Rabbah in
particular – and attempt to reconstruct a theological basis for the differences. PRE, uniquely, detaches the story of Satan’s fall from the creation of Man, and links it, instead, to the drama of the Garden of Eden and the seduction of Eve.

**Adam as the Envy of the Angels**

The author, in the opening statement of Chapter 13 of PRE, alludes to the triangle dynamic between Adam, Eve, and the Serpent/Samael, drawing on *Pirqe 'Avot* (2:10): “Envy, desire, and pride take man out of the world [i.e. cause his downfall].” Dina Stein points out that this aphorism functions as a title, defining the main theme of the chapter. Of the three characters in our drama, however, only Adam is exempt from these cardinal sins; it is Samael and Eve who collaborate in bringing about man’s downfall. Yet, even before being introduced to Samael, the scene is set by an entourage of angels envious of man:

**Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 13**

1a. “Envy, desire, and pride remove man from the world.”

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1 Dina Stein points out that this is one of seven aphorisms identical or similar to ones found in *M 'Pirqe 'Avot*, Stein 2005: 68, n. 157. She suggests that PRE, like *ARN*, may function as a series of narrative expansions on moral aphorism taken from *'Avot*, in which there are two levels of reading: a) the level of Scripture in the distant past, and b) the level of the aphorism (*meimra*), alluding to the relevant present. PRE attempts to reconstruct a reading of the biblical text through the use of these aphorisms. *ARN*, on the other hand, employs narrative expansions of the biblical text as well as stories about the Rabbis to illustrate the moral aphorisms in *'Avot*. Stein lays the emphasis on the aphorism, while I’d like to shift the emphasis back to PRE’s exegetical reading of the Bible.

2 This translation is based on the 1st ed., checked against Börner-Klein 2004: 133–141. See Appendix D for the semi-critical edition of the Hebrew text. Here, I have added punctuation and references to the exact citations from the Bible. I have also supplemented the printed edition with reference to four manuscripts, as well as Radal’s edition (Warsaw 1852) and the 2nd ed. (Venice 1514).

3 I translate the phrase as “Envy, desire, and pride remove man from the world,” whereas Friedlander translates the three sins as: “envy, cupidity, and ambition” (1981: 91), but the Hebrew terms are broader than the English – *ta avah* [תא אבה], for example, may be neutral (it was the first affect Eve felt when she looked at the tree, following the words of the Serpent, “And it was desirable to the eyes [ויי的眼睛]” (Gen. 3: 6), and *kavod* [כבוד] simply means ‘honor’ (perhaps implying the desire for honor/ambition). In the Latin translation by Vorstius (*Capitula R. Elieser*, 1644) the terms were translated as: *invidia* [revenge], *concupiscientia* [sexual lust], and *superbia* [pride]. Milton draws upon Vortius’ language in his account of the motivation behind Satan’s plot in causing the downfall of Man: