CHAPTER 7

Soul, Fall and Restoration

7.1 Subject and Structure of the Chapter

MM3a Defense of physical resurrection in this world (MM 48:1–51:15)
MM3b On man, human soul, Fall and restoration (MM 51:16–68:26)
MM3b1 Creation of man and the nature of the human soul (MM 51:16–60:20)
MM3b2 Fall and restoration according to the Garden of Eden account (MM 60:21–68:26)
MM3c Genesis and the Jewish people (MM 68:27–83:2)
MM3c1 Generations of Genesis and the periods of history (MM 68:27–72:21)
MM3c2 The Jewish soul (MM 72:22–74:3)
MM3c3 Anticipated objections (MM 74:4–75:27)
MM3c4 Nature of the people of Israel (MM 75:28–76:27)
MM3c5 Messianic calculations (MM 76:28–81:18)
MM3c6 Jacob’s blessings to Judah (MM 81:19–83:2)
MM3d Conclusion (MM 83:3–21)

On the surface, the third chapter appears to contain various issues which have little in common. It begins (MM3a) with a defense of the belief in physical resurrection for a life in this world. The defense begins with an explanation as to why it is needed, gives a summary of the views that need to be refuted, and continues to present arguments and proofs in favor of the belief in resurrection.

After this follows a long passage on the creation of man and the nature of the human soul based on Gen. 1–2 (MM3b1), followed by an interpretation of the Garden of Eden account from Gen. 3 (MM3b2). Both passages follow and comment on the respective biblical texts. Although this commentary covers most verses of these biblical passages, it is not a general verse-by-verse commentary. Rather, the text is interpreted in the light of the themes and issues at hand, using several interpretive approaches. The function of the commentary on the Garden of Eden passage is obvious: Bar Hiyya explains how immortality was lost in the Fall, and then he reads a blueprint of the future redemption into the biblical text. The function of the passage on the human soul is less obvious. Partly, it may be a didactic excursion not uncommon in medieval works, including Petrus Alfonsi’s Dialogue. But most probably it also anticipates and prepares the reader for the ideas on the Jewish soul that Bar Hiyya presents later in the chapter.
The rest of the chapter appears to cover various issues that are only loosely connected to each other. Bar Hiyya examines the genealogies according to Gen. 5 and uses them to revisit his scheme of world ages (MM3c1). He then moves on to affirm the special nature of the Jewish soul (MM3c2). Both passages can be regarded as building on the materials introduced in the previous chapter. It is also possible, that the third chapter is intended as a conclusion of what was started in the first chapter and what developed into a theology of time and history in the second chapter. Now, in the third chapter, the final conclusions are drawn. That Bar Hiyya next considers and responds to possible objections to his ideas (MM3c3) further supports this hypothesis: the objections apply particularly to the ideas presented in the second chapter. This response to likely objections is concluded by Bar Hiyya's statement on the nature of the people of Israel (MM3c4). The passage is short in extent and traditional in content, but it is also an essential point in Megillat ha-Megalleh as Bar Hiyya in the rest of the book formulates his views on the future fates of Israel and the nations. After some rather intricate messianic calculations, Bar Hiyya turns to giving his own interpretation of Gen. 49:8–12 (MM3c5), a biblical passage which had been used by Christians in their anti-Jewish polemic, and subsequently concludes the chapter with a short bridge (MM3c6) introducing the move to the Book of Daniel in the following chapter.

Thus, whereas the other chapters have a specific focal point (nature of time in the first, determinism of history and the six world ages in the second, the text of Daniel 8–12 in the fourth and astrology in the fifth), the third chapter appears to lack a similar obvious focus. The issue of resurrection, while prominent in the beginning, is not present throughout the chapter. The issues concerning the human soul, the Jewish soul and the special nature of the Jewish people take up more pages than the question concerning the resurrection. One feature that is common for a large part of the chapter is that it is based on the text of Genesis (end of ch. 1, chapters 2, 3 and 5, and at the end, Gen. 49:8–12).

Despite the change of focus throughout the chapter, the discourse appears to move from one issue or topic to another quite smoothly, and the reader has no major difficulties in following it. But within this discourse, which moves from the topic of the resurrection to the creation of man, the nature of the human soul, the Fall of man and so on, there are some themes that appear and reappear, but are neither highlighted nor summarized by the author.¹ The

¹ Such themes include the idea of scientific plausibility of human immortality, the concept of the rational-moral soul in man and its historical development, as well as the nature and fate of non-Jewish nations.