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 Sourcesheet for Lecture #2

Source 1:

Preface to Genesis, from Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī’s *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ wa-l-Ḥadā’iq* (*The Book of Gardens and Parks*); RNL Evr.-Arab. I:1366, 1v.
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In the name of God, the Eternal

“I hate and abhor falsehood; I love Your teaching.”

When I finished composing this book on the interpretations of the Torah, those which relate to the non-legal parts of the Torah, I considered what I had done in my interpretation of the weekly portion of Genesis, and I found it to be extremely long. I had discussed rational and philosophical issues at (such) length that the scriptural issues were nearly drowning in them – to the point that the reader would arrive at an understanding of most of them only after being exhausted by prolonged reading. I feared that many of those who read it would be repelled by its length, and might even rebuke me for this, or perhaps even find fault with me.

I therefore saw fit to abbreviate it [= the original commentary on the weekly portion of Genesis] and to bring together in it the scriptural issues with a small measure of the rational and philosophical issues. In this way, it will be easy for the reader who wishes to memorize it, and especially for someone who preaches to the people in synagogues (*majālis*). I will mention in this shortened version some, but not all, of my answers to scriptural explanations and issues. Likewise, I will omit the thirty-seven principles that I established as a foundation for interpreting the meaning of the Book. (Therefore) anyone who wants to acquaint himself with them, as well as to know all of the rational matters and answers to scriptural questions that I have omitted, can see them there [in the original long version, in *Tafsir Parashat Bereshit*]. And now I will begin, with the help of God.

Source 2:

Sa‘adya Ga’on, “Long Introduction” to Pentateuch Translation
 (ed. Haggai Ben-Shammai; translation from Judeo-Arabic, Miriam Goldstein)

In God’s Name, the Long Introduction.

Blessed be God, the Lord of Israel, the One, the Eternal, Who speaks the truth in His promises, the loving, the compassionate.

The composer of the book said: Volition, in which no time period interposes between it and the action intended, is that of the Eternal. When he wants something to be, the thing occurs, without any time between the will and the created action. This is perceived by the rational intellect, that is, that the Creator does not need time to carry out His actions. But it is also stated explicitly in Scripture, in describing the acts of God: “For he spoke, and it was; He commanded, and it endured” (Psa. 33:9) and “He sends forth His word to the earth; His command runs swiftly” (Psa. 147:15).

Volition, in which there is a period of time in between it and the action intended, is the volition of human beings, because humans require time to plan the actions that they are hoping to accomplish, and all the more so, to carry the actions out well, because they do things step by step. This is all the more true if they are impeded by any sort of impediment.

While I was living in my hometown, I had long intended to compose for those of our religion a translated version of the Pentateuch, an appropriate one, [and] one which would accord with rational speculation as well as with rabbinic tradition. However, I hesitated to take this on, fearing to display my inner beliefs in public, for I imagined that in faraway places distant from my hometown, there existed clear and apt translations... [manuscript source is cut off at this point]