

JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה

**THE BOOK OF JUBILEES AND THE MIDRASH
ON THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF GENESIS**

**THE PROPHET MICAIAH IN
KINGS AND CHRONICLES**

ECCLESIASTES: PART II: THEMES

**SUBTLETIES IN THE STORY OF
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**REFLECTIONS OF READERS:
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(TB BAVA BATRA 14B)

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AND THE TOWER OF BABEL**

THE JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY

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AIMS AND SCOPE

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THE BOOK OF JUBILEES AND THE MIDRASH ON THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF GENESIS

ZVI RON

The Book of Jubilees is a retelling of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus in the form of an angel speaking to Moses. It was written by a Jew in Hebrew some time around the early second century BCE, perhaps even earlier. The original Hebrew is lost to us today; our translations are based primarily on Ethiopic texts. The main focus of the work is to demonstrate that the narratives in the early part of the Bible contain legal instruction, although the legal elements are hidden in the biblical narrative.¹ Jubilees often supplements the biblical narratives with additional information, in much the same way as the Midrash; at other times Jubilees provides a resolution to a difficulty in the biblical text, another concern of the Midrash. As such, the Book of Jubilees may be categorized as an early form of midrashic literature.² Some of the interpretations in Jubilees are, in fact, preserved in later midrashic literature. The title "Book of Jubilees" reflects the author's particular way of viewing the chronology of the world as a series of forty-nine year cycles, but it was also sometimes referred to as "The Little Genesis" (*Bereshit Zuta* in Aramaic),³ since it is an abbreviated retelling of Genesis.⁴ Jubilees was not incorporated into rabbinic literature, as it differs in some very fundamental legal points, most famously its insistence on a purely solar calendar, as opposed to the rabbinic lunar/solar model,⁵ and stringencies regarding Shabbat observance.⁶ In this article we will show how Jubilees dealt with various difficulties in the text of Genesis in ways sometimes similar to and sometimes very different from the later rabbinic midrashic literature. We will focus on the first portion of Genesis, from chapter 1 to 6:8, and on aggadic rather than halakhic matters.

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DAY AND NIGHT BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE SUN AND MOON

The Bible begins counting days even before the creation of the sun and moon on the fourth day, leading to the well-known question as to how the terms first, second and third day and night can apply before the sun and moon came into existence. Jubilees, in recording what God created on the first day, states: *He created the abysses and darkness – both evening and night – and light – both dawn and daylight* (Jub. 2:2). Thus, daylight existed before the sun, as did the darkness of night, so that actual 24-hour days could be counted even without the sun.⁷

TB *Hagigah* 12a offers a few approaches to this question. R. Eliezer explains that "with the light that God created on the first day one could see from one end of the world to the other," meaning that the Bible in the first three days refers to a special light having nothing to do with the sun. This light is set aside for the righteous to enjoy in the future. The Sages, however, explain that in fact the sun and moon were created on the first day and gave light, but they were fixed in their places only on the fourth day. This is the view followed by Ibn Ezra in his commentary to Genesis 1:5, and by Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (2:30).⁸ Alternatively, *Genesis Rabbah* (3:7) suggests that this indicates that the concept of time (*seder zemannim*) had already come into existence before – a view rejected by Maimonides, since he associates it with the theory that the universe always existed.

In Jubilees, solar chronology is a central concern, so it makes sense that daylight should be created on the first day. The rabbis were less concerned with the particulars of timekeeping, and could offer an approach that the light in this passage is not sunlight, or that timekeeping began even before creation, ideas that are anathema to Jubilees.

ADAM BEFORE ENTERING EDEN

Genesis 2:8 and 2:15 both state that God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden. *The Lord God planted a Garden in Eden, to the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed* (Gen. 2:8) implies that Adam was brought to Eden from somewhere else. After a short geographical account of its location, the narrative recaps, *The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it* (Gen. 2:15). This further indicates

that Adam was taken from somewhere and brought to Eden. Why wasn't Adam simply created in Eden in the first place? In Jubilees the angel explains: *And after forty days were completed for Adam in the land where he was created, we brought him into the Garden of Eden so that he might work it and guard it* (Jub. 3:9). The forty-day period is explained in Jubilees as prefiguring the biblical laws of impurity after a woman gives birth to a boy, when *she may not touch anything sacred and she may not enter the Sanctuary* (Lev. 12:4). Jubilees reports that Eve was only brought into the Garden after eighty days, *because it is more holy than any land* (Jub. 3:12). This period of purification mirrors that of a woman after giving birth to a girl (Lev. 12:5). Both Adam and Eve had to undergo a period of purification before entering the Garden of Eden.

Rabbinic tradition also understands that Adam was not created in Eden, as the verse clearly states that he was brought there from somewhere else. *Genesis Rabbah* (14:8) teaches that Adam was created from the earth at Mount Moriah. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* states that the entrance to the Garden of Eden was right next to Mount Moriah. There is no mention of the need for a forty-day purification period. In fact, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* explicitly points out that Adam was created using earth from a holy and pure place.⁹ *Hizkuni* explains that the reason for Adam being created outside the Garden – so that he could appreciate how wonderful Eden was after seeing the thorns and thistles of the outside world. This seems to contradict Genesis 3:18, *Thorns and thistles shall it sprout [tatzmi'ah] for you*, implying that before Adam sinned, thorns did not grow from the ground. However, *Hizkuni* understands the word *tatzmi'ah* in that verse to mean *you will plant*, indicating that man will now have to plant thorns and thistles around his gardens to protect the produce from animals which, after Adam's sin, no longer fear man.

Another approach found in *Genesis Rabbah* (15:4) is that the term *vayasem* ("He put," Gen. 3:8) does not refer to physical placement, but rather to an appointment, as in *You shall surely set over (tasim) yourself a king* (Deut. 17:15). According to this view, the verse is telling us that God appointed Adam as ruler of the Garden of Eden, but that he was there all along.

Rabbinic tradition generally disregards the approach of Jubilees, based on the idea in TB *Shabbat* 135a that the concept of forty days of impurity following childbirth only came into existence after the Torah was given. How-

ever, *Midrash Tadshe*, also known as the *Baraita of Pinhas ben Ya'ir*, does state that the forty days of impurity after childbirth correspond to the forty days Adam waited before entering the Garden of Eden.¹⁰ *Midrash Tadshe*, written in the early eleventh century and based on earlier material, is one of the few rabbinic works that incorporate material from Jubilees, although it is by no means viewed as a canonical midrash.¹¹

TIME IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN BEFORE THE SIN

The Bible does not indicate how long Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden before they sinned and were expelled. According to Jubilees 3:15, *Adam and his wife had been in the Garden of Eden for seven years tilling and guarding it, then At the end of seven years which he completed there, seven years exactly, in the second month on the seventeenth day, the serpent came and drew near to the woman* (Jub. 3:17). The idea that Adam and Eve lived blissfully for seven years fits into the general view of Jubilees that history works in units of forty-nine year jubilee periods which are subdivided into "weeks," i.e., seven- year periods.¹²

Rabbinic tradition considerably shortens the length of time that Adam lived in the Garden of Eden. TB *Sanhedrin* 38b states that Adam and Eve sinned in the tenth hour of the first day, were judged in the eleventh, and exiled in the twelfth hour. *Genesis Rabbah* (18:6) shortens the time still further and explains that the blissful time did not even last for six hours. These approaches view Adam's stay as an extremely brief period of time, expressed as either one day (the rabbinic period of daylight being 12 hours) or half a day.

R. David Tzvi Hoffmann (1843-1921) explains that the rabbis felt that a shorter amount of time makes sense, because it is unreasonable to assume that man would be left for as long as seven years with only one commandment to perform, and a negative one at that.¹³

ANIMALS SPEAKING

The Bible records that the serpent spoke to Eve, yet we are not explicitly told when it was deprived of this power of speech. Jubilees (3:28) explains that on the day Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, *the mouth of all the beasts and cattle and birds and whatever walked or moved was stopped from speaking because all of them used to speak with one another*.

er with one speech and one language. Prior to Adam's sin, the serpent and all other creatures were able to speak, but afterwards they lost this ability.

There are many different approaches to the question of the serpent's speech in rabbinic literature. It is not even clear if, at the time, all snakes could speak or only this one.¹⁴ Saadiah Gaon explains that an angel spoke through the serpent, which is similar to his understanding of the episode of Balaam's ass, where the animal was not given intelligence but an angel spoke and the ass only appeared to be talking. Ibn Ezra records the approaches according to which Eve understood the language of snakes, or the snake communicated using signs which Eve interpreted, or else the serpent was actually Satan in the form of a snake. Ibn Ezra himself declares that it seems reasonable to him that the serpent actually spoke and was an intelligent creature that used to walk upright.¹⁵ This approach is also found in the early commentary *Midrash Lekah Tov*, which further states that the serpent was speaking Hebrew.¹⁶ Radak strongly disagrees, opining that if the serpent was intelligent and could actually speak, the removal of these attributes would surely have been mentioned in the curse God placed on him, a deprivation far more significant than losing the ability to walk upright. Furthermore, if the snake was intelligent, he should have been singled out in the biblical account of the creation of beasts. Radak concludes, like Saadiah, that the serpent's speech was a miraculous occurrence.¹⁷ However, there are rabbinic sources, such as *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (chapter 42), where the inability to speak is in fact listed as one of the curses imposed on the serpent. Rabbenu Bahya (Gen. 3:14) explains that an inability to speak is a curse so severe and obvious that it did not have to be stated explicitly in the Bible.

Whichever way the speech of the serpent is understood, there are no rabbinic sources which claim that before Adam's sin all animals could speak.¹⁸ However, this idea is found in other early non-rabbinic Jewish sources such as Josephus¹⁹ and Philo,²⁰ indicating that it was a common belief at one time, rejected by the rabbis. From the rabbinic perspective, the fact that the serpent spoke was unique and remarkable; it was also hard to explain, because the power of speech could not be seen as shared by the rest of the animal kingdom. The basic reason for the rabbinic rejection of animal speech seems to be that it would blur the distinction between man and animals, speech being regarded as a uniquely human ability.²¹

WIVES OF CAIN AND ABEL

The Bible does not record who Cain and Abel married, nor does it indicate whether any women were available as marriage partners. However, the Book of Jubilees (4:1, 4:9) explains that Eve had a daughter, Awan whom Cain took as a wife. Similarly, Seth took a sister, Azura, as his wife (Jub. 4:11) and his son, Enos, married his sister Noam (Jub. 4:13). This trend continued with his son Kenan, who married his sister Mu'aleleth (Jub. 4:14). The first recorded union of an offspring of Adam with someone other than a sister is that of Kenan's son, Mahalalel, who married Dinah, his cousin's daughter (Jub. 4:15). From this point onward there were no further marriages with sisters.

Rabbinic tradition states that sisters were born with Cain and Abel. According to TB *Yevamot* 62a, each boy was born with a twin sister, whereas *Genesis Rabbah* (22:3) relates that Cain had a twin sister and that Abel was a triplet, two sisters having been born with him. According to TB *Sanhedrin* 58b and many other rabbinic sources, Cain and Abel married their sisters.²² *Genesis Rabbah* (22:7) explains that a fight between Cain and Abel over the third ("extra") sister led to Abel's murder.

In this case Jubilees and rabbinic tradition agree that Cain married his sister, as no other option was available. However, Jubilees continues this trend for further generations, something not found in rabbinic tradition. Such unions were understood to be limited to the children of Adam, when there was no alternative. In Jubilees this form of marriage lasts until the time of the Nephilim.²³ It is not unusual for the birth of daughters to go unmentioned in the Bible, and for wives not to be named. For the most part, biblical genealogical lists include only males. It is also not unusual for Jubilees to name the wives of these biblical personalities; one characteristic of Jubilees being the large number of proper names it supplies, particularly of women.²⁴

DEATH AFTER EATING FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

God warns Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, *for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die* (Gen. 2:17). The fact that Adam and Eve do not die instantaneously upon eating the forbidden fruit led to various interpretations of the death penalty mentioned by God. Jubilees explains that Adam died at the age of 930, *and he lacked seventy years from one thousand years, for a thousand years are like one day in the testimony of heaven and there-*

fore it was written concerning the Tree of Knowledge, 'In the day you eat from it you will die.' Therefore he did not complete the years of this day because he died in it (Jub. 4:30).

The idea that a day is a thousand years from the perspective of God is rooted in Psalm 90:4: *A thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday*. That the punishment of death meant that Adam would not live a full thousand-year "day" is also found in *Genesis Rabbah* (19:8).

However, another opinion in *Genesis Rabbah* (16:6) offers the approach that now, for the first time, man became mortal. Rabbenu Bahya adds the view of "scientists" that until Adam sinned man would only die a natural death; thereafter, as a result, the concept of an untimely death came into being.²⁵ Other rabbinic approaches include the view expressed in *Toledot Yitzhak*, that the punishment was indeed supposed to be instantaneous death, which was, however, averted when Adam repented.²⁶

In this instance, the view of Jubilees did not contain anything unreasonable as far as the Sages were concerned. It dovetailed with the biblical statements that Adam lived to 930 and that a day can be considered as lasting a thousand years. The same explanation may thus be found in Jubilees and in rabbinic literature.

DEATH OF CAIN

The Bible does not tell us how Cain died, but Jubilees records: *His house fell upon him, and he died in the midst of his house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and with a stone he was killed by righteous judgment. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets,*²⁷ *'With the weapons with which a man kills his fellow he shall be killed, just as he wounded him, thus shall they do to him'* (Jub. 4:31-32).

This is at variance with rabbinic teachings. TJ *Sanhedrin* 7:3 specifically asks, "Can it be that if the murder was committed by sword, he is punished by sword and if with a rod, he is punished by a rod?", and then proceeds to reject this view. TB *Sanhedrin* 52b also states that all murderers are punished by the sword. There is no concept that the murderer should be put to death in the same way he committed his crime.²⁸ However, the idea that Cain killed Abel with a stone is found in the Midrash. *Genesis Rabbah* (22:8) records a dispute between R. Shim'on ben Gamliel and the Sages as to the type of

weapon Cain used against his brother; the former says it was a reed, the latter say it was a stone.²⁹ Still, the rabbis do not have the tradition that Cain was killed with a stone, i.e., measure for measure, or that murderers in general should be punished in this way. According to rabbinic tradition, Cain was accidentally killed by his descendant Lemech while hunting with a bow and arrow.³⁰

While the Bible does speak of measure-for-measure punishment, *a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...* (Ex. 21:23-25), this was never understood to extend to the manner of dispensing justice, to punish in the same exact way that the offense was committed. For this reason, the approach of Jubilees – that we learn this principle from Cain's death – is untenable in rabbinic thinking. However, the idea that Cain used a stone to kill Abel does not pose any halakhic problems and may seem reasonable, since they were fighting *in the field* (Gen. 4:8),³¹ and so it could be adopted by the rabbis as well.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ENOCH

The Bible tells us very little about Enoch, and what we are told is mysterious. *Enoch walked with God, then he was no more, for God had taken him* (Gen. 5:24). Why did God take him, and where? Jubilees has a long section on Enoch (Jub. 4:16-26). There it is explained that he was the first man *who learned writing and knowledge and wisdom...and who wrote in a book the signs of the heaven according to the order of their months* (Jub. 4:17), so that people could observe holidays in their proper time. He recorded history (Jub. 4:18) and had visions of the future (Jub. 4:19). The angels took him for *six jubilees of years, and they showed him everything which is on earth and in the heavens, the dominion of the sun* (Jub. 4:21), which he recorded in writing (Jub. 4:22). He was taken by angels to live in the Garden of Eden *for greatness and honor, and behold he is there writing condemnation and judgment of the world, all of the evils of the children of men* (Jub. 4:23). According to Jubilees, Enoch is a very significant figure, particularly since Jubilees is very concerned with the solar calendar and chronology. Enoch is the one who received this knowledge from the angels and taught it to man. He continues to record history as an eternal watcher, privileged to live in Eden.

The idea of Enoch as an Elijah-like figure, who never actually died and now functions as a heavenly scribe, is found in many Apocryphal works and in ancient non-rabbinic writings such as Philo and Josephus.³² Rabbinic literature tends to take a different view. In *Genesis Rabbah* (25:1) Enoch is described as a person who was sometimes righteous and sometimes not, so God decided to end his life while he was still in a state of righteousness. We find in the same midrash a few instances where sectarians (Judeo-Christians) and Gentiles claim that Enoch never died and became an immortal being, only to be refuted by rabbis who insist that Enoch did die. From this passage we can understand rabbinic opposition to the notion of Enoch becoming a supernatural entity and even being especially righteous. The idea of a person becoming an angel was considered dangerous, particularly in the context of debates with early Christians, and any verse that could be interpreted in a way that avoided this concept was given some different explanation.³³

Even so, the idea that Enoch lived in Eden and learned astronomy from the angels did find its way into the *Midrash Aggadah*, where Enoch is understood to have been transformed into the angel Metatron.³⁴ Both views of Enoch seem to be represented in rabbinic literature.³⁵ There are even two versions of the translation of this verse by Onkelos. One version translates it as *and he was not, for the Lord had killed him*, emphasizing that Enoch was not immortal and implying that he was not very righteous. The other version, *and he still is, for he did not die*, is the one accepted by Hizkuni and Rabbenu Bahya. Despite opposition in *Genesis Rabbah*, this idea managed to survive.

THE "SONS OF GOD"

One of the most cryptic passages in the Bible is the episode where *the sons of God* [benei ha-elohim] *saw that the daughters of men were good, and they took themselves wives from whoever they chose* (Gen. 6:2), thereby angering God. The meaning of the term *benei ha-elohim*, and therefore of this entire passage, is a matter of great debate. Jubilees views the *benei ha-elohim* as angels who copulated with human women to create the biblical Nephilim, giants (Jub. 5:1-2, 6-7; see Gen 6:4). This view is also found in the Septuagint, Philo, and Josephus, and can be seen as the older interpretation of this passage.³⁶

This interpretation was criticized in certain midrashim. While the Bible often refers to angels as *benei ha-elohim* (e.g., Job 1:6, 2:1; Dan. 3:25), in *Genesis Rabbah* (26:8) R. Shim'on bar Yohai states that the correct meaning of *benei ha-elohim* here is "sons of judges", and curses anyone who explains that they are angels. The concept of "fallen angels" and the idea that angels can and did interbreed with humans is very strange, especially since angels are God's messengers and are understood not to have an evil inclination, thus being incapable of sin. It is no wonder, then, that R. Shim'on vehemently opposed the idea found in Jubilees.³⁷ Similarly, Onkelos translates *benei ha-elohim* as human "sons of rulers" who took whichever woman they pleased.

Despite R. Shim'on's curse, the idea that *benei ha-elohim* means angels is found in the Talmud and other rabbinic sources, showing that an officially suppressed notion may still occasionally pop up again in rabbinic literature. These angels are even identified by name, Uzza and Azrael.³⁸ The idea is noted as a possible approach by Rashi (on Gen. 6:2), and it is accepted by Ramban (Gen. 6:4) and others.³⁹ Certain midrashim explain that these angels were sent to earth and instilled with an evil inclination as a test, which they failed.⁴⁰ Clearly, the early angelic interpretation in non-rabbinic literature, such as the Book of Jubilees, managed to survive and find its way into rabbinic thought, despite some serious opposition. Not surprisingly, the insertion of angels into the biblical stories is one of the characteristics of Jubilees: the creation of angels on the first day (Jub. 2:2), angels bringing Adam into the Garden of Eden and teaching him farming (Jub. 3:9, 12, 15), reporting man's sins to God (Jub. 4:6), and teaching Enoch (Jub. 4:21) – among many other examples.⁴¹ The Book of Jubilees itself is said to have been dictated by an angel (Jub. 1:27, 2:1). Little wonder that anything in the biblical narrative which could lend itself to an "angelic" interpretation is explained that way in Jubilees.

120 YEARS

According to the Bible, God said: '*My spirit shall not contend evermore concerning man for he is but flesh, his days shall be a hundred and twenty years*' (Gen. 6:3). This passage in Genesis could not be taken at face value, since after this verse many people live beyond 120 years. In Jubilees, this

statement is understood to apply specifically to the offspring of the fallen angels and human women as part of the plan to eradicate them:

*And against their children a word went forth from before His Presence so that He might smite them with the sword and remove them from under heaven. And He said 'My spirit will not dwell upon man forever, for they are flesh, and their days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' And He sent His sword among them so that each one might kill his fellow and they began to kill one another until they all fell on the sword and they were wiped out from the earth (Jub. 5:7-9).*⁴²

The standard rabbinic view is that the verse means that humanity has 120 years to repent before it is destroyed by God in the Flood.⁴³ Although this verse is found in the context of the *benei ha-elohim* narrative, it was not taken to refer specifically to the offspring of the *benei ha-elohim*. This is part of the aforementioned rabbinic approach, which sought to emphasize that the *benei ha-elohim* and their offspring were regular humans, and so the verse must refer to mankind, not the children of angels.

We have seen that the Book of Jubilees deals with many of the same questions and ambiguities in the biblical text that concerned later rabbinic literature. Some of the interpretations found in Jubilees were accepted, some were rejected and others suppressed. The Book of Jubilees affords us a glimpse of how the Bible was interpreted in ancient times, centuries before the midrashic literature with which we are familiar today came to be written.

NOTES

All translations of the Book of Jubilees are from O. S. Wintermute, *Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction*, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

1. James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997) pp. 38-39.

2. Wintermute, pp. 39-40.

3. S. Herr and S. Shrira, *Toledot ha-Sifrut ha-Talmudit* (Tel Aviv: Haskalah La-Am, 1937) p. 247.

4. Wintermute, p. 41.

5. See A. Z. Aescoly, *Sefer ha-Falashim* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1943) pp. 29, 60; and Michael Stone, "Astronomy in the Apocrypha," *Maḥanayim*, vol. 125 (Tishrei 1971) p. 108 (Hebrew).

6. See Jubilees 50:8, 12, and Avraham Goldberg, "Rabbinic and Biblical Shabbat Prohibitions," *Sinai*, vol. 46 (Tishrei 1959) p.183 (Hebrew).
7. See also Yehuda Rosental, "Heresy In the Time of Saadia," *Horeb*, vol. 9 (Nissan 1946) p. 34, note 107 (Hebrew). There is a view that the light and darkness in this biblical passage must refer to sunlight, based on the views of the surrounding cultures in the ancient Near East: see John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006) p. 180.
8. Ibn Ezra explains that the terms "day" and "night" are dependent on the existence of heavenly bodies. See also Ramban to Genesis 1:5 and Abrabanel's fifth question in Genesis chapter 1.
9. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapters 12 and 20. Radak similarly explains that Adam was created in close proximity to the Garden of Eden.
10. J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Midrashim* (New York: 1915), vol. 2, p. 481, *Pinḥas ben Yair* chapter 15. See Samuel Belkin, "Midrash Tadshe or Midrash de-Rav Pinḥas ben Yair, an Ancient Hellenistic Midrash," *Horeb*, vol. 11 (Nisan 1951) pp. 2-3.
11. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902) pp. lxxvi, 23, 24. See also Michael Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 47-58.
12. For more examples, see J. D. Eisenstein, ed., *Otzar Yisrael* (New York, 1911), vol. 5, p. 93. Note that the Book of Jubilees considers 49 years to be a jubilee period rather than 50 years; this is the subject of a debate between R. Yehudah and the Sages in TB *Nedarim* 61a.
13. David Tzvi Hoffmann, *Commentary to Genesis* (Bnei Berak: Netzah, 1969) p. 77 (Hebrew).
14. Hai Gaon, quoted in Adin Steinsaltz, *Bible Commentary in Responsa Literature* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1978) p. 4 (Hebrew).
15. Ibn Ezra to Genesis 3:1.
16. Midrash Lekah Tov, Gen. 3:1.
17. Radak to Gen. 3:1.
18. Menahem Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* (Jerusalem: The Torah Shelemah Institute, 1992), vol. 1, p. 252, note 9.
19. *Antiquities*, 1:4:46.
20. Charles, p. 28.
21. For example Targum Onkelos to Genesis 2:7 describes Adam as having a special "speaking soul" [*ru'ah memalela*]. See also Rashi, loc. cit., where the ability to speak makes Adam's soul different to that of animals.
22. Kasher, pp. 305-306, note 17.
23. See Charles, p. 33.
24. Charles, p. xiv. See also Meir Bar-Ilan, "Personal Names in *Divrei Gad ha-Hozeh*", *Sinai*, vol. 114 (1994) p. 119, note 40.
25. Rabbenu Bahya to Genesis 2:17. See also Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:10.
26. *Toledot Yitzhak* by R. Yitzhak Caro, uncle of R. Yosef Caro, Genesis 2:17.
27. On "heavenly tablets," see Florentina Garcia Martinez, "The Heavenly Tablets in the Book of Jubilees", in Matthias Albani, ed., *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), especially pp. 255-256.
28. Maimonides (*Hilkhot Rotze'ah* 1:1) explicitly rules that a murderer is punished by the sword "whether he killed another with iron, or whether he burned him by fire." See also the *Kesef*

Mishneh commentary (loc. cit); Dov Revel, "Targum Jonathan on the Torah," in *Ner Ma'aravi*, vol. 2 (New York: Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva, 1925) p. 95; and J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1-11 in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) p. 178.

29. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 21, also states that Cain used a stone to kill Abel.

30. *Midrash Tanhuma*, Bereshit, 11. See also Kasher, pp. 337-338.

31. Kugel, p. 92.

32. Kugel, pp. 100-106.

33. See Oded Yisraeli, "The Ascent of Enoch and Elijah in the Kabbalah of the 13th Century," *Pe'amim*, vol. 110 (Winter 2007), especially pp. 31-34 (Hebrew).

34. See Kasher, pp. 357, 359.

35. See Kasher, p. 358, note 60.

36. Charles, pp. 33, 43, and Van Ruiten, pp. 188-190.

37. See Bernard J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1952) pp. 91, 274.

38. See Rashi's explanation of "*ma'aseh Uzza*" on TB *Yoma* 67b.

39. See Hoffmann, p. 130, Kasher, p. 370.

40. *Pesikta Rabbati*, chapter 34, Eisenstein, p. 368 (*Midrash Petirat Moshe*), *Pitron Torah*, Aharei Mot, p. 66. See also Hoffmann, p. 132.

41. Charles, pp. Ivi-Iviii.

42. See Michael Segal, "The Composition of Jubilees," in Gabrielle Boccaccini, ed., *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdmanns Publishing Company, 2009) pp. 28-29.

43. See, for example, *Seder Olam*, chapter 28, and Onkelos and Rashi. See also Kugel, pp. 112-114.



CORRIGENDUM

We'd like to thank Dr. Steven Luger for calling attention to an error in a recent paper: "A new interpretation of *Akarah . . . Ein Lah Valad* (*Gen. 11:30*) *based on the Talmud: 'Unattached follicle'*" (*JBQ* 40(4):265-267). While the Graafian follicle is indeed the dominant follicle that releases the egg, after releasing the egg, the Graafian follicle does not migrate and attach to the uterine wall, as stated in the article, rather it turns into the corpus luteum, and is part of the ovary. If the egg is fertilized, the fertilized ovum implants in the lining of the uterus at the beginning of pregnancy.



THE PROPHET MICAIAH IN KINGS AND CHRONICLES

DAVID J. ZUCKER

INTRODUCTION

Chronicles is a product of the post-Exilic community living in Judea. Its purpose is to give shape and meaning to the returned community of Babylonian exiles in the fifth/fourth century BCE. Chronicles was probably written at that same time, although others argue for a mid-third century compilation, and its author(s) remain(s) unknown. The book serves as a kind of history of the people of Israel; but more than a simple historical document, the purpose of Chronicles is to interpret Israel's past and to understand its religious significance.

Chronicles features a very different approach than the earlier work of the Deuteronomist Historian¹ in Samuel-Kings. Chronicles focuses great attention on King David. Far more than his status as the political leader and head of the Davidic dynasty, David's major role was in establishing the Temple cult. As someone quipped, in Chronicles David prays a lot. The institutions of the Temple in Jerusalem, the cult, and their attendant personnel, primarily the Levites, are a major concern for the Chronicler. A key element of the Chronicler's thought is to promote the presence and glory of the deity, most often referred to by the Tetragrammaton, Y-H-V-H.²

In the words of Sara Japhet, the goal of the Chronicler "is a comprehensive expression of the perpetual need to renew and revitalize the religion of Israel"³ for those former Babylonian exiles now living in Judah.

Following a long genealogical introduction, drawn from the Torah and the history recorded in Joshua through Kings (though excluding Ruth), Chronicles focuses on the history of the southern kingdom of Judah. The Chronicler turns away from the northern kingdom of Israel, for in the author's mind, "the Northern Kingdom was conceived in sin, born in iniquity, and nurtured in adultery."⁴ One side effect of turning his back on the history and personalities

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of the kingdom of Israel was that the Chronicler could not (or chose not to) refer to the cycle of stories surrounding Elijah and Elisha so prominent in Kings (I Kgs. 18-19, 21; II Kgs. 1-2 – Elijah; I Kgs. 19; II Kgs. 2-13 – Elisha).⁵ The Chronicler, however, did choose to refer to one prominent northern prophet, Micaiah ben Imlah, a contemporary of Elijah and Elisha. Chronicles essentially repeats the narrative of the Ahab-Micaiah confrontation, which appears in I Kings 22. The Chronicler includes this episode, despite the fact that it refers to the northern kingdom's ruler, Ahab, and that its locale is Samaria. The most probable reason for the inclusion is that this narrative also features Judah's King Jehoshaphat.⁶

AHAB-MICAIAH

In the single chapter in Chronicles where Ahab appears as a personality in his own right (II Chron. 18),⁷ his presence is minimized when compared to the earlier history of First Kings, where Ahab is found in several chapters (18-22).

Since Ahab does not appear elsewhere in Chronicles, it is difficult to make sense of his statement to his southern counterpart, King Jehoshaphat, concerning the prophet Micaiah: *'I hate him [Micaiah ben Imlah] because he never prophesies anything good for me, but always misfortune'* (II Chron. 18:7, cf. I Kgs. 22:8).

The context for this statement is an event late in the life of King Ahab, a proposed joint Israel-Judah battle against their mutual enemy, the king of Aram. They plan to recapture the territory of Ramoth-gilead. Four hundred of the prophets based in Samaria claim that the kings of Judah and Israel will prevail. Then the Judean king, Jehoshaphat, turns to King Ahab. He calls for an independent endorsement for this possible encounter. *'Is there not another prophet of Y-H-V-H here through whom we can inquire?'* he asks (18:6, cf. I Kgs. 22:7). Ahab then replies, pointing out that there is someone, the aforementioned Micaiah ben Imlah,⁸ although *he never prophesies anything good for me*.

What is the basis for Ahab's hatred of Micaiah? Where and when has Micaiah spoken ill of Ahab? Since Ahab only appears in this one chapter of Chronicles, the answer cannot be found in that book. Logically, we would expect it to be revealed in the earlier books of Kings, yet even a close perusal

of the relevant chapters provides no solution. Just as Micaiah ben Imlah only appears in this one chapter of Chronicles, so does he appear in only one chapter of Kings (I Kings 22).

To add to the mystery, when the prophet Micaiah is summoned to appear before Ahab and Jehoshaphat, he first seems to endorse the coming battle; he foretells success (II Chron. 18:14) in a tone that may be sarcastic. Ahab then upbraids Micaiah, saying: '*How many times must I adjure you to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of Y-H-V-H?*' (vs. 15). This rebuke makes it clear that these two have met on several occasions in the past.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the historian Josephus (and, later, some rabbinic sources)⁹ affirmed that the previous encounter between Ahab and Micaiah refers to the unnamed prophet who confronted the king of Israel, as depicted in I Kings 20:13-43. Since this involved the northern kingdom, Chronicles does not repeat the episode, thus making Ahab's statement even more enigmatic. In I Kings 20, the text notes that a *certain man, a disciple of the prophets* (vs. 35), told the king of Israel that he had forfeited his life because he (Ahab) did not kill the Aramean ruler Ben-Hadad, a statement reminiscent of Samuel's rebuke of King Saul (I Sam. 15). This unnamed man is several times described as a *prophet* (I Kgs. 20:13, 22, 38, 41). The end of chapter 20 relates that *Sullen and dispirited, [Ahab] left for home and came to Samaria* (I Kgs. 20:43). This might well be the reason why Ahab said that he despised Micaiah.

Although there is some merit to Josephus's and the Rabbis' explanation, when Ahab says to Jehoshaphat that Micaiah '*never prophesies anything good,*' it is apparent that there have been multiple occasions where Micaiah has opposed Ahab. To what, then, does Ahab refer?

One needs to turn to Kings to offer a possible answer to this matter. I Kings 18 relates the Ahab-Elijah-prophets of Baal contest on Mount Carmel. On that occasion, an attendant accompanies Elijah. Elijah sends this figure out to seek whether there is any hint of the coming rain, which will end the three-year drought. Six times the servant goes and looks westward toward the Mediterranean, but sees nothing. Finally, on the seventh occasion the servant reported '*A cloud as small as a person's hand is rising in the west*' (I Kgs. 18:44).

Nothing more is said about this unnamed attendant in that chapter. In the next chapter an attendant, presumably the same person, accompanies Elijah when the prophet flees from the wrath of Jezebel. They travel south from Samaria as far as Beersheba in Judah. There Elijah leaves his servant behind (I Kgs. 19:3) and travels alone into the desert, eventually reaching Mount Horeb where he will experience a theophany with God.

At the Baal prophets' episode, when King Ahab meets Elijah, he dismisses him in scathing language. *Ahab caught sight of Elijah, [and] Ahab said to him, 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?'* (I Kgs. 18:17). On a later occasion, Ahab describes Elijah as an enemy (I Kgs. 21:20). Ahab detests Elijah, and Elijah's opposition. In like manner, Ahab associates that opposition with people connected with Elijah, and in particular (I suggest) Elijah's unnamed attendant, Micaiah.¹⁰ There is some support for this idea in rabbinic literature: the Midrash names Micaiah as one of the four students of Elijah.¹¹

THE USE OF THE TERM Y-H-V-H

There may be an additional reason why this particular Ahab episode was included in Chronicles. As stated before, an important element in the Chronicler's approach is promoting the glory of God. The Chronicler prefers Y-H-V-H above other names for the deity. While the author sometimes uses the term God by itself or Y-H-V-H God, simply Y-H-V-H is used more often. As shall be explained below, the confrontation of Micaiah and Zedekiah lent itself to clarify how Y-H-V-H communicates, either through word or through spirit.

In II Chronicles 18, as in the earlier parallel narrative in I Kings 22, there is a distinction between the "Word of Y-H-V-H" and the "Spirit of Y-H-V-H." Although Ahab rebukes Micaiah to his face, the Micaiah-Ahab confrontation actually plays out between two prophets, Micaiah and Zedekiah ben Kenaanah, leader of the four hundred court prophets who predict a successful battle for Ahab and Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 18:5, 10-11). Ahab is present, but he is essentially a passive observer of events.

When Micaiah speaks his true prophecy to the kings of Israel and Judah, he uses very deliberate language. He says, '*Indeed, hear now the word of Y-H-V-H*' (vs. 18). Micaiah prophesies destruction and disaster for the proposed battle at Ramoth-gilead. This is when Zedekiah ben Kenaanah strikes Micaiah

and claims that he (Zedekiah) really speaks for God. Zedekiah says to Micaiah, *'However did the spirit of Y-H-V-H pass from me to speak with you?'* (vs. 23). Micaiah retorts, *'If you ever come home safe, Y-H-V-H has not spoken through me'* (vs. 27).¹² There is a clear contrast between *the word of Y-H-V-H*, the term for prophecy used by Micaiah, and the term used by Zedekiah, *the spirit of Y-H-V-H*. " [At] the heart of the matter [are]: two views of prophecy, divination by 'YHWH's spirit' and divination by 'YHWH's word'. . . true prophecy is rational and unaffected by the deceptive spell of the 'spirit.'" ¹³ Micaiah makes no claims about the four hundred court prophets; he does not suggest that they are self-deluded, or that they are motivated by some sense of personal gain. Rather, Micaiah regards those four hundred, including their leader Zedekiah ben Kenaanah, "as pawns, serving YHWH's ends . . . they are unlike the false prophets denounced by the literary prophets"¹⁴ such as Micah (2:11).

This contrast between word and spirit is used by other prophets as well. Jeremiah (5:13) states that the false prophets *will become like the wind* [using the same word as Micaiah used for spirit, *ru'ah*], *for the word is not with them*. It may also be hinted in God's words to Elijah, *'Y-H-V-H is not in the wind [ru'ah]'* (I Kgs. 19:11). The term *spirit of Y-H-V-H* is used in the Bible to denote emotional inspiration, sometimes leading to irrational behavior, such as Saul being overcome by *the spirit of Y-H-V-H* in I Samuel 10:6, and an urge to kill David with his spear in I Sam. 19:9. In the Pentateuch, Abraham and Moses always receive *the word of Y-H-V-H* (Gen. 15:1, 15:4, Deut. 5:5), never *the spirit of Y-H-V-H*. By way of contrast, ambiguous heroes are described as being inspired by *the spirit of Y-H-V-H*, Jephthah in Judges 11:29, and Samson multiple times (Judg. 13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14).¹⁵

CONCLUSION

The Book of Chronicles is a sympathetic portrayal of the Kingdom of Judah, despite some of the faults of its monarchs. In II Chronicles 10-36, references to the rebellious northern kingdom are all but excised from the text. A prominent exception is II Chronicles 18, which repeats, with small emendations, an episode late in the life of King Ahab of Israel, also found in I Kings 22. On that occasion, Ahab rebukes an otherwise unknown prophet of Y-H-V-H, Micaiah ben Imlah. In his censure of Micaiah, Ahab makes clear that

they have a long history of confrontation, although the Bible is apparently silent about that history. This article suggests the basis behind Ahab's accusation. It also distinguishes between the (false) "spirit of Y-H-V-H" and what Micaiah calls the true "word of Y-H-V-H."

NOTES

1. The Deuteronomist Historian refers to the person(s) responsible for the history that covers Deuteronomy through the Book of Second Kings. The dating for this work is a matter of debate, though there is some consensus that it is an Exilic document.
2. There are more than "five hundred occurrences of the Tetragrammaton in Chronicles, and it is the divine name used more often than all the other names combined": Ralph W. Klein, *I Chronicles: A Commentary [Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible]* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) p. 82, n. 3.
3. Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993, [The Old Testament Library]) p. 49.
4. Jacob M. Myers, *I Chronicles* (AB 12; Garden City: Doubleday 1965) p. xxxiii.
5. The reference in II Chronicles 21:12-15 to a condemnatory letter from the prophet Elijah to King Jehoram is probably apocryphal, or the attribution of Elijah's name to that of a lesser-known prophet.
6. The Chronicler was impressed that it was "the king of the Davidic line [that] insisted upon calling in this prophet of Y-H-V-H . . . It is quite possible that [the Chronicler] wanted to emphasize the interest in and insistence upon the orthodox religion of Yahweh by the king of Judah as opposed to the unrecognized religion of the north": Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*, AB 13 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) p. 105. The Chronicler's "veneration for Jehoshaphat led [the author] to incorporate all the available material dealing with that king": R. J. Coggins, *The First and Second Book of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 214. See also Japhet, 756.
7. Ahab as a figure appears only in II Chronicles 18. References to the House of Ahab appear in II Chronicles 21 and 22.
8. In this passage, as in the parallel passage in Kings, Micaiah is never directly referred to as a prophet, unlike other instances in Chronicles: *David said to the prophet Nathan* (I Chron. 17:1); *the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz* (II Chron. 26:22); *the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum* (II Chron. 34:22).
9. Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, book 8, ch. 14. See also Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1928, 1982) p. 311 n. 36, listing *Seder Olam* 20 which identifies the nameless prophet as Micaiah. In addition, see *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 14:15, and *TB Sanhedrin* 89b.
10. The unnamed servant in chapters 18 and 19 could be Elisha ben Shaphat, Elijah's successor, but this is unlikely. Elisha is not mentioned until the theophany of Mount Horeb when God specifically informs Elijah to commission Elisha, which then takes place at the close of I Kings 19. On that occasion, Elisha informs Elijah that he (Elisha) needs to take leave of his parents (vs. 20). The common sense understanding of this passage is that the two men have not met previously.

11. J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Midrashim*, vol.1 (New York: Noble, 1915) p. 173, *Hupat Eliyahu*, part four, number 47.

12. Micaiah's words, '*If you ever come home safe, Y-H-V-H has not spoken through me,*' are followed by the statement, *He said further, 'Listen, all you peoples.'* These last words suggest a Micaiah connection to Elijah, for they are similar to those used by Elijah when he speaks to the Israelites gathered on Mount. Carmel (I Kgs. 18:21-24). In addition, there is an echo here of the Elijah-prophets of Baal episode, "the theme of 'one' versus the 'many', the individual against the multitude" (Japhet, 759).

13. Mordecai Cogan, *I Kings* (Anchor Bible 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001) p. 497.

14. Cogan, 498, n. 3.

15. See also Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:45.



עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

July	Psalms	146 – 150
	Proverbs	1 – 23
August	Proverbs	24 – 31
	Job	1 – 20
September	Job	21 – 42
	Song of Songs	1 – 6
October	Song of Songs	7 – 8
	Ruth	1 – 4
	Lamentations	1 – 12
	Ecclesiastes	1 – 10
November	Ecclesiastes	11 – 12
	Esther	1 – 10
	Daniel	1 – 12
	Ezra	1 – 4



ECCLESIASTES

PART II: THEMES

ARON PINKER

THEMATICS

The themes in the Book of Kohelet are essentially those of interest to mature individuals of means and achievement. Using sociological analysis, Brueggemann concluded that the Book of Kohelet articulates a conservative ideology that reflects social control and a concern for stability.¹ This would be the attitude of the establishment – the older people afraid of losing their attained comfort. Even when Kohelet seems to be addressing the young, he may actually be addressing the concerns of his peers with respect to their heirs. A review of the content in the Kohelet corpus clearly impresses one with its somberness and maturity. It is retrospective and restraining. Some key concepts in the book illustrate these observations.

Vanity (hevel) – Kohelet begins and ends his book by stating that all is *hevel* (1:2 and 12:8). The ephemerality that hovers over the book reflects the voice of experience, recognizing the elusiveness of aspirations, the insubstantiality of achievements, the inability to control, the passage of time, and the inevitable end. The theme suggests a reference to maturity typical of the old.

Toil – This concept imparts a continuous struggle, or a prolonged effort, to attain some significant understanding, the achievement of a permanent advantage, everlasting fame, or the perpetuation of an enterprise. Fox observes that in Kohelet's view "the toiler may – indeed must – lose the fruit of his toil, and someone may get it who did not work for it. It is worse if the recipient is a fool, and it is better if he is one's son, but nothing really soothes the sting of loss and frustration . . . This, for Kohelet, proves the meaninglessness of human effort."² Obviously, the search for meaning in toil makes sense only with respect to someone who experienced frustration with the randomness of the connection between effort and reward.

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Joy – Kohelet recommends the pursuit of enjoyment in 2:24a, 3:12, 3:22a, 5:17, 8:15a, 9:7-9a, and 11:7-12:1a. However, enjoyment of the good that life offers is presented from a perspective of the experienced. Kohelet stresses that the opportunity to enjoy life is God-given: joy is viewed as a gift from God. Man should enjoy the good that life offers because he has to accept his lot (2:26, 3:14, 3:22b, 5:18, 9:9), life is short (5:17b, 9:9b, 11:9, 12:1b), and the future is uncertain (3:11, 3:22b, 8:14). Kohelet suggests that joy is good during the moment it is experienced and this slight advantage makes life, with all its miseries, preferable to death (6:6). These depressing rationales for enjoyment reflect a somber approach. Joy, to Kohelet, is not an urge to be happy, enjoy, live fully the moment, to "have fun." Kohelet describes a mature, controlled merriment.

Wisdom – The Book of Kohelet certainly impresses one with the notion that wisdom is valuable. It seems to be suggesting that wisdom is superior to inexperience as light is to darkness (2:13); can help gain wealth (2:9, 19, 21); gives man a cheerful demeanor (8:1b); develops a feel for timeliness (8:5); and makes man's speech pleasant and careful (10:12). Though wisdom could give man some advantage, it fails to provide a rationale for life's events (7:23). Fox points to four aspects of wisdom that undermine its utility: it does not provide enough knowledge; it is vulnerable to folly and fortune; it causes pain, because it "reveals the bitterness and absurdities of life"; and, it is wiped away by death.³ Only from the perspective of the experienced is wisdom less than a panacea (2:12-17, 10:1). They are aware of the power and limitations of knowledge.

Death – Kohelet's discussion of death is dark and gloomy. Crenshaw notes that Kohelet speaks about death with both neutrality and bitterness, and to him "death possesses a full measure of existential angst."⁴ Fox thinks that Kohelet exhibits "an obsession with death."⁵ It has been noted that Kohelet can be understood as suggesting that thinking of death whets the appetite for life.⁶ Young adults do not need such prompts.

Kohelet does not fear death; it is part of the natural order (9:5, 12:1-7). However, Kohelet is concerned that death cancels everything (2:14-16). Burkes writes that for Kohelet death is "the event that neutralizes memory, offspring, and choice."⁷ Kohelet is baffled by the random occurrence of death. His sense of a right order would have required that one who follows

commandments will live longer. His fear that our lives may prove meaningless in the end haunts him.⁸ These, too, are mainly concerns of the old.

Fear of God – Kohelet's discussion of the fear of God (3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12-13) is traditional. It suggests viewing God in awe and wonder, not in belittling slavishness. God *made everything beautiful in its time* (3:11), and He also imbued it with mystery, *has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end* (3:11). Kohelet always uses the name *Elohim* for the deity, which traditionally conveys His attribute of judgment. It is not a warm and supporting image of God that is concerned with the human condition. Old as young, in Kohelet's time, accepted God's role in life (3:10), were incapable of understanding the acts of God (7:14, 11:5), and were puzzled by the unpredictable.

Justice – Kohelet's discussion of justice and the justice system reflects the personal experience of someone who has been involved in litigation. In his view, there is no justice where justice should have been practiced (3:16), and the poor are oppressed without mercy (4:1-3).

Kohelet harbors dissatisfaction with the working of God's justice. God sometimes allows the righteous to suffer and the wicked to prosper (8:14). Fox says, "It is not only the anomalies that contradict divine justice. There is a systemic and invariable violation: death. It's not that death is so bad in itself that distresses Kohelet, but that it is unfair; it fails to recognize distinctions" (9:3, 11-12).⁹ Such views could have been aired only among Kohelet's close friends.

Timeliness – The concepts of timeliness (3:1-8), proper manners, and routines represent the norm, the societal expectations chiseled out by years of human interaction. These concepts of the accepted and expected are entirely in the domain of the mature and established. Kohelet is unwilling to experiment with alternatives and to defy the established order. He rather reiterates the transmitted wisdom.

Youth – Barton sums up Kohelet's advice to the young: "Enter into life heartily, be kindly, venture to sow and reap and fill the whole round of life's duties while you can. Let the young man, therefore, make the most of his youth, for the inevitable decay of bodily powers will come with advancing age, and the cheerlessness of Sheol will terminate all."¹⁰

It is clear from this review that Kohelet deals with issues weighing on the mind of the established and experienced members of society. The aristocracy in Jerusalem was content with what it had. Its fundamental tendency was to promote conservatism and oppose change.

THE BOOK

How was the book formed? At first glance, it would appear to be the creation of a single author because of its personal tenor, expressed, for instance in such phrases as *I turned to see* (2:12), *I said in my heart* (2:15), *I saw* (4:4), and *I tested this in wisdom* (7:23).¹¹ However, it is possible that Kohelet's observations were only a trigger to a more complicated process in which the observation led to discussion by a small group of Kohelet's intellectual peers, the *kohélet*, or in later parlance the *havurah*.¹² It would be natural to expect that these debaters were not unanimous in their opinions. Kohelet recorded their views, although he did not always accept them. This might explain the contradictions and repetitions in the Book of Kohelet, as well as the absence of any discernible thematic organization or connected orderly argument in the book. Indeed, a number of commentators felt that several hands were involved in its shaping.¹³

These commentators reflect a strong sentiment that the book cannot reflect the mindset of a single person. My suggestion, that Kohelet recorded the positions expressed and discussed in his *kohélet*, would aptly accommodate the views of this approach. Such an approach would allow for a range of views to exist in the discussions of the *kohélet*.

With its pessimistic tone and unorthodox views, how did this book come to be included in the Tanakh? It would seem that the themes of the book were so unusual and pertinent, and the stature of the members in Kohelet's circle was so high, that it made the book a worthy candidate for inclusion in the canon.¹⁴ The members of the *kohélet* were apparently individuals with a solid belief in a God that rules the world who found it difficult to understand divine wisdom on earth. The striving to understand God's ways could not be denied or suppressed.

It is also possible that the superscription (1:1) and the statement in 1:12 were later interpreted as alluding to Solomon, and thereby facilitated the acceptance of the book into the canon. It may be that the later rabbinic percep-

tion of *all is hevel* as referring only to this world as opposed to the afterlife (cf. Targum on 1:2), also helped to smooth the way into the canon. A similar intent can perhaps be found in the later addition of verse 12:11, suggesting that the words of sages are divinely inspired. However, it is doubtful whether these factors played a critical role, although they may have contributed to the book's inclusion.¹⁵ Concern about its suitability for the general public was of greater importance.¹⁶ However, the canon was, as Ehrlich observed, "a national literature upon a religious foundation." The uniqueness of the Book of Kohelet aptly qualified it for inclusion into the canon.¹⁷

Hengstenberg rightly noted that "The Author has studiously maintained a certain tone of reserve in respect of the circumstances of his time; and of design rather glanced at them, than entered into details."¹⁸ Indeed, in a number of instances, the careful reader can sense fear of the Ptolemaic reporting system and Kohelet's use of ambiguity for self-protection (4:17-5:2, 8:5-7, 10:20-11:1, 12:12-13).¹⁹ The *kohelet*, which consisted of the elderly rich, feared change and naturally resented the opportunities offered by the Ptolemaic regime (1:12-16, 4:1-3, 5:7, 12-16, 7:10, 8:9, 10:6-7). It is possible that Kohelet confined himself to using only the name *Elohim* because its secular and sacred meanings were so convenient for his intended ambiguities.²⁰ Circumspection apparently dictated the style of the notes taken. These notes are suggestive but never fully developed. They highlight an issue, but do not illuminate it from all aspects.

Finally, the book is intensely human. It soberly addresses the vagaries of life at a difficult time for Jews in Judea. Its contributors valiantly search for the solid and durable in circumstances containing much that is ephemeral and transient. The findings of the elders in the *kohelet* are typically prudent and hesitant. The men of gray saw much grayness. Their focus on the fundamental problems of human existence makes the book ever pertinent. Jastrow writes: "Koheleth is modern because with great literary skill he deals with those aspects of human life which are always the same. He is almost brutal in holding the mirror up to life. For all that, he is neither a scoffer nor a pessimist."²¹

CONCLUSION

The author of the Book of Kohelet was a rich and wise Jewish patrician in Jerusalem. He was not a teacher or a preacher. More likely, he was a leader of a circle of social and intellectual peers, the *kohelet*. At the meetings of the *kohelet* practical and philosophical questions were discussed, and the author recorded the various positions that were taken. This would explain the structure of the book and its apparent contradictions. At some point, the author adopted the noun *Kohelet* as his pseudonym. This would explain the confusion between the noun and pseudonym in 7:27 and 12:3.²²

The *kohelet* relied on experience and keen observation when formulating topics for consideration. Reason and experience are the key elements of its epistemology (1:13, 2:3, 7:23). It would be too speculative, however, to assume that it had a set of postulates and rules of logic according to which the discussions were conducted, although they must have had some intuitive logic. Thus, it cannot be said that the book is a philosophical treatise.

The many issues that the *kohelet* discussed and textual indeterminacy make it difficult to define the book's message. Graetz thought that the book is a cynical satire on the career of Herod the Great.²³ Delitzsch named it "the Song of the Fear of God."²⁴ Some commentators thought that the gist of Kohelet's thesis is that "life under God must be taken and enjoyed in all its mystery."²⁵ Other commentators felt that the message has been expressed in "Utter futility! All is futile!" occurring at the beginning of the book (1:2) and its end (12:8). There is no doubt that gloom pervades the book and its tenor is pregnant with pessimism. For instance, Crenshaw writes: "Qoheleth taught by means of various literary types that earlier optimistic claims about wisdom's power to secure one's existence have no validity. No discernible principle of order governs the universe, rewarding virtue and punishing evil. The creator, distant and uninvolved, acts as judge only (if at all) in extreme cases of flagrant affront . . . Death cancels all imagined gains, rendering life under the sun absurd."²⁶

The crucial question for the reader is to understand how the *kohelet* related the *hevel* passages to the joy passages within a divinely guided world.²⁷ Elul's encapsulation of Kohelet's message may perhaps give the proper answer: "In reality, all is vanity. In truth, everything is a gift of God."²⁸

NOTES

1. W. Brueggemann, "The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. J.G. Gammie and L.G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) p. 129.
2. Michael V. Fox, "The Inner Structure of Qohelet's Thought," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Anton Schoors (Leuven: University Press, 1998) p. 228.
3. Fox, "Inner Structure," pp. 229-230.
4. James L. Crenshaw, "The Shadow of Death in Qoheleth," in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions. Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995) pp. 573-585; (first published in 1978), p. 574. Kohelet refers to death in 3:2-4, 4:2-3, 6:3-6, 7:1-2, 4, 9:4-6, 10, 12:1-7.
5. Michael V. Fox, "Aging and Death in Qoheleth 12," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament*, 42 (1988) p. 61.
6. Kathryn Ymray, *Qohelet's Philosophies of Death* (Ph.D. dissertation; Murdoch University, 2009) p. 1; Choon-Leong Seow, "Qohelet's Eschatological Poem," *JBL* 118:2 (1999) p. 209.
7. Shannon L. Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (SBLDS 170; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999) p. 76.
8. Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 34-35. In Longman's view it is the inescapability of death which for Kohelet renders wisdom meaningless. Indeed, death renders "every status and achievement of this present life 'meaningless'."
9. Fox, "Inner Structure," p. 232.
10. George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908) p. 47.
11. First person language is used in 1:12-14, 16-17; 2:1, 13-15, 18, 24; 3:10, 12, 14, 16-17; 4:1, 4, 7, 15; 5:12, 17; 6:1, 4; 7:15, 23, 25-26; 8:2, 9-10, 12, 14-17; 9:1, 11, 13; 10:5, 7.
12. It is notable that in TB *Gittin* 62a and *Berakhot* 64a the head of a school is called "king." Kohelet might have used this term to describe his leadership role in his *kohelet*.
13. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 21, 23. T. A. Perry, *Dialogues With Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes. Translation and Commentary* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University, 1993) p. 36. In Perry's view, such a dialogue framework enables us to understand the apparent "contradictions" in the book. Thus, the Book of Kohelet is a debate and the reader's task is to discern the alternating voices. Marvin V. Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Kohelet," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 48 (1977) pp. 48, 90, 91.
14. When the Book of Kohelet was accepted into the canon is disputed. Wright (C. H. H. Wright, *The Book of Koheleth* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888] p. 79) argued that "the men of the Great Synagogue," who flourished between 444 and 196 BCE, admitted the book into the canon. In the opinion of Gordis (Robert Gordis, *Koheleth, the man and his world: A Study of Ecclesiastes* [third ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968] p. 71), it was accepted at the Council of Jamnia in 90 CE. However, Kohelet's admission to the canon continued to be disputed (Mishnah *Yadayim* 3:5, Mishnah *Eduyyot* 5:3).
15. James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (Westminster, John Knox Press, 1987) p. 52. Crenshaw writes: "A better answer to the question of acceptance points to the second epilogue, which re-

moved the sting from Kohelet's skepticism and advocated traditional views concerning observation of Torah."

16. Menahem. Haran, *Ha-Asuppah ha-mikra'it: tahalikhei ha-gibbush ad sof yemei Bayit Sheni ve-shinnuyei ha-tzurah ad motza'ei yemei ha-beinayim* (Jerusalem: Bialik and Magnes Press, 1996) p. 301 and ch. 5.

17. Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Die Psalmen, neu übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1905), VI. In the view of Gordis (*Koheleth*, p. 131), "Undoubtedly, the tradition of Solomonic authorship and Koheleth's unique style, particularly his unquestionable use of a religious vocabulary and his citation of proverbs for his own special purposes, proved decisive factors." This position is questionable.

18. Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co., 1869) p. 1.

19. Aron Pinker, "Intrusion of Ptolemaic Reality on Cultic Practices in Kohelet 4:17 and the Unit to which it belongs," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 9 (2009), art. 21; "On the meaning of Kohelet 11:1," *Old Testament Essays*, 22/3 (2009) pp. 618-645; "On Cattle and Cowboys in Kohelet 5:9b," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 123 (2011), pp. 263-273; "The Structure and Meaning of Qohelet 8:5-7," *BN* 153 (2012).

20. Marcus A. Jastrow, Jr., *A Gentle Cynic, Being a Translation of the Book of Koheleth* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1919) p. 134. In Jastrow's opinion, Kohelet uses *Elohim* rather than Y-H-V-H, because "he has passed beyond the stage of any narrow nationalistic conception in his religious attitude."

21. Jastrow (*A Gentle Cynic*, pp. 8-9) writes: "The human interest of the book is all the more intense because of its main conclusion, that life itself is a paradox. Life is made to be enjoyed, and yet enjoyment is 'vanity'."

22. The voice of the *kohelet* comes through in 1:2, 7:27 and 12:8. This third person voice is not that of Kohelet, particularly in 7:27. It is unlikely that Kohelet would speak of himself in the third person in the midst of a first person sentence.

23. Heinrich Graetz, *Kohelet* (Leipzig: C.F. Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1871) p. 13.

24. Franz Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth* (BKAT4; Leipzig: Dorffling & Franke, 1875) p. 190. Delitzsch says: "The Book of Kohelet can therefore be better named the *Song of the Fear of God* rather than, as H. Heine suggested, the *Song of Skepticism*."

25. Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) p. 14; Addison G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 30 (1968) p. 318.

26. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 7.

27. Craig Bartholomew, "Qoheleth in the Canon? Current Trends in the Interpretation of Ecclesiastes," *Themelios*, 24.3 (1999) p. 15. Bartholomew suggests that "what we have in Ecclesiastes are the *hebel* conclusions – arrived at via Qoheleth's empiricism applied to the area he examines – juxtaposed next to the joy passages which express the shalomic perspective on life that Qoheleth would have derived from his Jewish upbringing and being part of Israel. These perspectives are set in contradictory juxtaposition and the effect of this is to open up gaps in the reading which have to be filled as the reader moves forward."

28. Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) p. 31.

SUBTLETIES IN THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

SHIMON BAKON

Joseph's dramatic encounter with Potiphar's wife is related in Genesis 39:7-23. Just a few verses portray the daily attempts by Potiphar's wife to seduce the handsome and charismatic Joseph, as well as Joseph's struggle with his conscience, his imprisonment, and his rise to greatness.

The brilliant insights of our Sages allow us to obtain a more complete picture of the narrative by emphasizing the subtle cues in the text that indicate hidden struggles and intentions.

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and she said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused [va-yema'en] and said unto his master's wife: ' . . . How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her or to be with her. And it came to pass on a certain day, when he went into the house to do his work, and there was none of the men of the house there within, that she caught him by his garment, saying: 'Lie with me.' And he left his garment in her hand and fled outside (Gen. 39:7-12).

In the Jewish tradition, Joseph is a *tzaddik*, a righteous man. According to some of the Sages, that title was gained precisely as a result of resisting temptation. However, the text hints that this was no easy challenge for Joseph, and came only after a valiant struggle. Signs of an internal struggle are evident in the language Joseph uses when he refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife. Rather than a simple refusal, Joseph says over the course of two verses, 'Look, with me here, my master concerns himself about nothing in the house, and whatever he has placed in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' (Gen. 39:8-9). This seems like a case of Joseph protesting too much, saying out loud the reasons he must not succumb to the advances of Potiphar's wife in order to convince himself. The Sages noted that Joseph was slowly being

worn down by Potiphar's wife, connecting the phrase *she spoke to Joseph day after day* (Gen. 39:10) with Esther 3:4, where the servants of the king inform Haman that Mordecai refuses to bow down to him, even though the latter was ordered to do so *day after day*.¹ Both are examples of a person no longer able to control his emotions, having his self-control eroded by daily provocation.

Joseph's struggle is hinted at in the very phrase the Bible uses to indicate that Joseph overcame his desires, *but he refused*. This Hebrew word (*va-yema'en*) is adorned with the elongated musical trope of *shalsholet* which appears only four times in the Torah, always carrying with it a sense of hesitation.² It appears three times in Genesis: Firstly, when Lot, warned by the Lord's messenger to flee Sodom, *lingered* [*va-yitmahmah*] (Gen. 19:16). The Midrash interprets this to mean that Lot found it difficult to leave behind the wealth he amassed in Sodom (*Genesis Rabbah* 50:11). Secondly, when the servant charged by Abraham with the grave responsibility of choosing a bride for his son, Isaac, appeals to the Lord to approve his choice on the basis of her kindness, first using the word *and he said* [*va-yomar*] (Gen. 24:12). Here, too, the Sages remark that the servant Eliezer wanted his own daughter to marry Isaac (*Gen. Rabbah* 59:9) and had difficulty overcoming his wish and seeking another bride for Isaac. Finally, in the Joseph story, *but he refused* is now qualified by an urge (temptation), accompanied by a struggle to overcome desire.

What was so special about that *certain day* when Joseph came *to do his work*? It is almost inconceivable that no servants of the wealthy and powerful Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard, were in the house. Indeed, the Talmud (TB *Sotah* 36b) interprets *to do his work* as an indication that Joseph was finally succumbing to the blandishments of Potiphar's wife, who had arranged to be alone in a house empty of servants. This interpretation emphasizes the challenge that Joseph faced, and hints at his own internal struggle. According to TB *Sotah* 36b, Joseph saw an image of his father Jacob and then *fled outside*; he needed a powerful reminder of his moral upbringing to strengthen his resolve not succumb to temptation.

It is not clear whether the garment she caught hold of had already been shed by Joseph. Shadal (S. D. Luzzatto), relying on the Bible's specific note that Joseph *went into the house*, explains that the garment she removed was a loose-fitting cloak worn outdoors. However, the true significance of "gar-

ment" is the fact that *begged*, the Hebrew term used here and repeated six times in this brief episode, recalls the root *b-g-d*, denoting treachery and marital infidelity, thus subtly reinforcing the theme of this story. Use of the term *begged* is particularly significant in light of Shadal's interpretation,³ since one would expect the word *me'il* to be used, denoting an outer garment.

With all the fury of a woman scorned, Potiphar's wife goes about defaming Joseph and accusing him of molesting her. As shown by Neḥama Leibowitz, she does so with exquisite subtlety. Potiphar's wife tells the members of the household: *See, he has brought in a Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came to me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice* (Gen. 39:14). The phrase *he has brought* indicates the subconscious contempt she has for her husband. By stressing *us* (and not referring to Joseph as a slave), she appeals to the solidarity of her Egyptian servants and infuriates them against the Hebrew outsider who molested her.⁴ To her husband she says, *The Hebrew servant whom you brought into our house came in to me to mock me* (Gen. 39:17). To Potiphar and his wife, Joseph is a lowly Hebrew slave, emphasizing the outrage of this brazen act.

Now Potiphar, whose *wrath was kindled* (Gen. 39:19), could easily have ordered Joseph's execution. Yet he doesn't fully trust his wife (see Ibn Ezra and Ramban), a point that may be hinted at in the narrative, which does not explicitly identify the object of Potiphar's anger.⁵

It is interesting to note that in *The Tale of Two Brothers*, an ancient Egyptian story which scholars often compare to this part of the Joseph narrative, none of these subtleties are found in the words of the accusing wife. There, Bata works for his older brother Anubis. One day, Bata is propositioned by his brother's wife, but he refuses her advances. To avoid getting into trouble, she tells Anubis that Bata propositioned her and so Anubis should kill him. The story ends with the brothers reconciling and the husband killing his unfaithful wife.⁶ The Egyptian story is plain and straightforward, with none of the nuances found in the narration or dialogue of Genesis 39.

As a mark of his esteem for Joseph (see Abrabanel), Potiphar merely places him in a *sohar*, a prison for high-ranking offenders. There he finds favor with the prison's commander and winds up as the person in charge. With poetic justice, it is precisely this sorry incident with Potiphar's wife that leads to Joseph's greatness.

NOTES

1. *Genesis Rabbah* 87:6.
2. Leonora Samuel, "Accentuation: A tool for interpretation of the Hebrew Bible," *JBQ* 33:3 (2005) pp.174-183.
3. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary – Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989) p. 274.
4. Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit (Genesis) in the Context of Ancient and Modern Jewish Bible Commentary* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, Department for Torah Education and Culture, 1972; fourth revised edition, 1981) pp. 417-419.
5. Sarna, p. 275.
6. Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) pp. 61-64.



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ISAIAH 7:14B IN NEW MAJOR CHRISTIAN BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

CLIFFORD HUBERT DUROUSSEAU

Recent major Christian Bible translations have finally admitted after nearly 2,000 years that Isaiah did not prophesy a virgin birth or, more precisely, a supernatural virginal conception of the Messiah. Beginning with *The Revised Standard Version* in 1952, followed by *The Jerusalem Bible* in 1966, *The New English Bible* in 1970, *The New Jerusalem Bible* in 1985, *The Revised English Bible*, *The Good News Bible* and *The New Revised Standard Version* in 1989, and, just recently, *The New American Bible Revised Edition* (2011), translators have decided that the time is right to reveal that Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus – Jewish and Judaeo-Christian translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the second century – were right in translating *almah* in Isaiah 7:14b as *neanis* ("young woman") rather than *parthenos* ("virgin"), and that Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, who opposed the use of "young woman", were wrong.

An examination of the complete text and context of Isaiah 7:14b in the original Hebrew rather than the Greek of the Septuagint that not only confirms that *ha-almah* has been mistranslated as "the virgin" or "a virgin" but that *harah* has been mistranslated as well. Furthermore, it is clear that it is part of a near-time prophecy delivered *ca.* 734 BCE about the imminent birth of a son to a then-pregnant mother, who would call him (*karat*) Immanuel ("With-us-is-El"), who would be a sign to Ahaz and the house of Judah that Rezin and Pekah would be soon defeated, rather than a far-term prophecy of the birth of the Messiah non-metaphorically-God-fathered and *betulah*-born.

As these new translations read it, Isaiah 7:14b is partly in implied present time. The first part of the first clause consists of a demonstrative particle, a definite article, a noun, and an adjective: 'Look, the young woman pregnant.' This is a common construction in Hebrew. In English, we supply a context-dependent form of the linking verb "to be," in this case "Look, the young woman is pregnant." If the *almah* pointed out was already pregnant (*harah*),

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this automatically rules out the claim that Isaiah was prophesying a distant, future virginal conception. Jewish tradition unanimously agrees that Immanuel was a contemporary of Isaiah, and this is clearly indicated by Isaiah 7:16.

"Young woman" and "virgin" were not synonyms in ancient Judaism, when it was common for twelve-year-old girls to be married and become pregnant. There is no indication in the oracle that this young woman is not pregnant through normal intercourse with a man.

Harah, too, has been translated imprecisely. There is in fact no verb in the first clause. It does not say the *almah* "shall conceive." The RSV, which translated *almah* correctly in 1952, mistranslated the adjective *harah* ("pregnant") as "shall conceive" and, moreover, failed to translate the definite article and used the indefinite article instead: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, . . ." This translation of the adjective *harah*, the fourth word in the first clause, as the verb "conceive" began in the Vulgate. Jerome, despite the fact that he learned Hebrew from a Jewish teacher and made his translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin from the Hebrew text (not the Greek Septuagint), translated thus: *Ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium, et vocabitur nomen ejus Emmanuel* ("Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel"). The NRSV corrected these items in 1989: "Look, the young woman is with child . . ." "With child", an archaic prepositional phrase, renders *harah*, the present tense copula is supplied, and the definite article is restored after being overlooked for centuries.

The NRSV has the sixth word of this compound clause in the Hebrew in the future tense: "Look, the young woman is with child and *shall bear* a son, . . ." The word *yoledet* is an active participle and can be translated "is bearing/giving birth to." It signifies in this case a very near-term event and thus can also be rendered "about to give birth to." The NABRE reads: "the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel." But why Emmanuel, the Greek form, rather than Immanuel, the Hebrew form? In a footnote, we are informed that "Emmanuel" means "with us is God." That is correct. "Immanuel" (properly *immanu El*) is a verbless clause functioning as a name and consisting of a preposition, a pronoun and a noun. As in the first clause of the prophecy, "the young woman is pregnant", a form

of the verb "to be" must be supplied. Yet the NABRE failed to supply the verb "is" in the first clause. *Harah* and *yoledet* are not attributives here, but predicates. Furthermore, the second conjunction *ve-* before *karat* ("she shall call") is omitted. The correct translation is: "Look, the young woman is pregnant and about to bear a son, and she shall call his name Immanuel."

These multiple mistranslations of the Hebrew text, beginning in the LXX, caused it to be misinterpreted for centuries in Christianity. An inordinate focus upon only two words in the prophecy in the Greek version, *parthenos* ("virgin") and *Immanuel* – the one as a proof of the virgin birth (traditionally, that Mary was a virgin *ante partum*, *in partu*, that is, before the birth, during the birth), and the other as a proof that the child to which the prophet refers would be God incarnate, a paradoxical "God-man" – led to a neglect of the rest of the words in the text, starting with the definite article! But this has changed in recent scholarship. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, a first-class work of modern Catholic Biblical scholarship which Raymond Brown, the Vatican II peritus, edited along with Roland Murphy and Joseph Fitzmyer, declares: "A critical examination of Is 7:14 . . . gives no evidence that Isaiah was thinking of Jesus' conception. Isaiah does not speak about a virgin; it is not clear that he is referring to a future conception; and the whole import of the scene in ch. 7 of Is *implies that the birth will take place ca. 734 BC*. Clearly Mt's [Matthew's] interpretation of Is is more-than-literal" (italics mine).¹

The later use of Isaiah 7:14b by Matthew 1:22-23 was non-contextual and midrashic and based on the Greek Bible. It is not a *sensus plenior* ("fuller sense") of the Hebrew Bible text. As Samuel Sandmel says in *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament*, "In all traditions, proof-texting ignores the total context and plucks out a gratifying verse."² The use of Isaiah 7:14b by the translator of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew is a *peshet*, not *peshat*, that is, it is an oracular application of the verse to a contemporaneous event over seven hundred years after its fulfillment; it is not the plain meaning of the text in its context. While a *peshet* is legitimate as long as it is recognized as a *peshet*, it is illegitimate once the *peshet* is considered the *peshat*. This is what happened in Christian literature with Isaiah 7:14b.

Christianity's Isaiah 7:14b-LXX-supported virgin birth narratives contended with antecedent analogues and Jewish and Roman objections (see

Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 67.2; 70.5; I Apology 22.5; 54.8). The account of the conception of Plato by his virgin mother Perictione through Apollo, as related by Diogenes Laertius in *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 3.2, is a Greek parallel to the Matthean conception story. It opens with a genealogy to indicate his distinguished family line and then merely by implication points to Apollo as the father of Plato. The legend of the virginal conception of Perictione is also found in Apuleius, *De Platone* 1.1; *Anonymous Prolegomena* 1.41-46, 2.12-16; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 717 b-e.

Justin Martyr indicates in *Dialogue with Trypho* 48 that there were Christians even in his day who did not accept the *peshet* found in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, produced, as Jerome tells us (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 3), by an unknown translator: "For there are some of our race, my friends, who admit that he is the Anointed One, while holding him to be man of men . . ." This view, held by Theodotion and Symmachus, was later anathematized.

The Roman Catholic translators of *The New American Bible* (1970) knew over forty years ago the truth about Isaiah 7:14b. As Raymond E. Brown openly admitted, but in a small footnote (!) in 1977 in his magisterial and monumental work on Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2, "The reading 'virgin' was imposed by a decision of the American bishops on the reluctant Catholic translators of the NAB."³ They finally gave a green light and a *nihil obstat* and imprimatur to "young woman" in 2011.

Almah as "young woman" is not a non-Christian or Jewish translation: it is the correct translation. Lexicography confirms it. This is the plain meaning of the word *almah* as found in Proverbs 30:19, *the way of a man with a young woman [almah, MT; neanis, LXX]*, referring to sexual intimacy and proving it need not connote "virgin." There is only one word for "virgin" in Hebrew, *betulah*, and Isaiah did not use it. Christianity has now honestly admitted what even Jerome knew but dared not to admit into the Vulgate.⁴ As the NABRE puts it succinctly in a note: "Hebrew *almah* designates a young woman of marriageable age without specific reference to virginity. The Septuagint translated the Hebrew term as *parthenos*, which normally does mean virgin, and this translation underlies Mt 1:23." In other words, the LXX translation uses a word that signifies something which the Hebrew word does

not, and the Greek Gospel of Matthew based its proof-from-prophecy upon a term which Isaiah did not use.

The Jewish Christians who accepted the Greek Gospel of Matthew and its use of the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 7:14b were evidently Greek-speaking or Hellenistic Jews who did not carefully check the LXX against the Hebrew of Isaiah. Isaiah 7:14b-LXX at Matthew 1:23 is a mistranslation and misquotation of Hebrew Isaiah 7:14b. *The Great Isaiah Scroll* discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 confirms that the Hebrew *almah* of Isaiah 7:14b is correct and has not been changed in the course of Judaism's controversy with Christianity.

Isaac ben Abraham of Troki (16th century), in his *Hizzuk Emunah* [*Faith Strengthened*] (Part 2, chapter 2), stated: "We have had frequent occasion to speak of the method employed in the New Testament and other Christian works, of citing from our Scriptures certain passages which, on careful examination, have no reference whatever to the immediate subject. Thus they quote also the passage from Isaiah 7:14, 'Behold, *ha-almah* (meaning young woman and not virgin) is with child and about to bring forth a son.' The prophecy was given to Ahaz, King of Judah, in order to allay his apprehensions regarding the two kings who had come to wage war against Jerusalem. How could Ahaz receive consolation from prophecy, the fulfillment of which he would not live to see?" In chapter 3, Troki completed his discussion of the quotation in Matthew 1:23 with these words: "The English version of Matthew 1:23 has, 'And they shall call his name Emmanuel,' but in the Hebrew original we have *ve-karat*, 'and she shall call.' It is also a striking fact that the name Emmanuel was not given to Jesus by the virgin. Nor do we find that the Emmanuel mentioned in Isaiah was ever considered to be the Messiah." There, in plain and simple language, was the correct translation of all of Isaiah 7:14b.

Ulrich Luz, in his commentary on Matthew, writes: "Luther declared his willingness to pay the 'stubborn, condemned Jews' a hundred guilders if [*almah* at] Isaiah 7:14 really means 'young woman' and not 'virgin.' He owes them."⁵

Isaiah 7:14b in recent major Christian Bible translations spells the dénouement of the ad infinitum *almah-betulah/parthenos-neanis* debates between Jews and Christians. This is good news.

WAS EZRA A HIGH PRIEST?

REUVEN CHAIM (RUDOLPH) KLEIN

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah detail the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. These books feature Ezra the Scribe as a religious leader of the fledgling Jewish community in Jerusalem. He is introduced in the Tanakh with the following genealogical lineage:

*Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest*¹ . . . (Ezra 7:1-5).

This passage traces Ezra's descent all the way back to Aaron, the first high priest (kohen gadol). Nonetheless, rabbinic tradition teaches that Ezra himself was not a high priest. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 list all those exiles who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. Ezra's name is conspicuously absent from this list because he only returned to Jerusalem later, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7-8),² one year after the Holy Temple had been rebuilt. TB *Megillah* 16b notes Ezra's absence during the early days of the restored Temple and asks why he did not leave Babylon earlier. The Talmud then explains that Ezra did not want to leave Babylon while his teacher, Baruch ben Neriah, was still alive; he therefore had to wait until Baruch's death before leaving for Jerusalem. The Midrash adds the following to this talmudic discussion:

The Temple was actually consecrated because Ezra did not arrive at the time, for had Ezra arrived then, Satan would have filed accusations against the Jews, arguing that Ezra would better serve as high priest than Jeshua ben Jehozadak. This is because even though Jeshua ben Jehozadak would have been a high priest son of a high priest, Ezra was more righteous than he (*Song of Songs Rabbah* 5:2).³

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This discussion clearly establishes the classic rabbinic position that it was not Ezra but his brother's son Jeshua who served as high priest (see I Chron. 5:40, which states that Jehozadak was a son of Seraiah, Ezra's father). This is also implied in the list of high priests in Nehemiah 12:10-11, all of whom were lineal male descendants of Jeshua ben Jehozadak.

However, when tracing the transmission of the Masorah (chain of tradition), Maimonides (Rambam) mentions the rabbinical court of Ezra, known as the "Men of the Great Assembly",⁴ and notes that the last of these sages was Simeon the Just, whom he describes as the high priest some time after Ezra.⁵ This seems to imply that Maimonides understood Ezra to have been a high priest.⁶ Rabbi Menahem Meiri (1249-c. 1316) echoes the words of Maimonides and adds that Ezra was the first high priest of the Second Temple.⁷ Thus, Maimonides and Meiri assume that Ezra had indeed served as high priest. In fact, Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (Hida; 1724-1806) relates that he found a manuscript of Maimonides to that effect. In this manuscript, Maimonides observes that he compared his Torah text with an ancient Torah scroll in France written by Ezra the high priest.⁸ Azulai infers that Maimonides believed that Ezra was indeed a high priest, in consonance with his opinion above. Elsewhere, Azulai questions the position of Maimonides in light of the aforementioned midrash which states that Jeshua, not Ezra, was the high priest.⁹

Rabbi Ya'akov Emden (Yavetz; 1697-1776) writes that Maimonides' source is Tractate *Parah* (3:5) of the Mishnah,¹⁰ which records all historical instances of preparing a red heifer (*parah adumah*) for use in purification:

Who prepared them? Moses did so first; Ezra, the second; and after Ezra five more were prepared according to Rabbi Meir. The Sages say that seven more were done from Ezra's time onward. Who prepared them? Simeon the Just and Johanan the high priest each prepared two. Elyhoenai ben Hakkuf, Hanamel the Egyptian, and Yishmael ben Piavi each did one.

By mentioning Ezra in conjunction with the other high priests who prepared red heifers (Emden reasons), the Mishnah seems to imply that Ezra, too, was a high priest. This idea gains support from the view that the red heifer might only be prepared by the high priest (see *Parah* 4:1). Emden then notes that even according to the opinion that any *kohen* may prepare a red

heifer, each *parah adumah* would still have been known historically by the name of the serving *kohen gadol*, not by the name of the *kohen* who actually prepared it.¹¹ Thus, since the Mishnah mentions a red heifer prepared by Ezra, the implication is that Ezra was indeed the high priest.

R. Emden concedes, however, that from a simple reading of the Tanakh it is evident that Jeshua ben Jehozadak was the *kohen gadol*, not Ezra, and that the succession was in a direct line through his male descendants for generations. In order to defend Maimonides' position, Emden goes on to suggest that Ezra functioned as high priest only while Jeshua's son or grandson was still too young or while Jeshua or one of his descendants was temporarily disqualified from performing the high priest's duties owing to ritual impurity. One must therefore assume that Ezra served for a very short time in this capacity because the Talmud (TB *Yoma* 9a) does not list Ezra among the righteous high priests of the Second Temple whose merit entitled them to long service.¹²

Rabbi Avraham Zacuto (1452-1515) explicitly disagrees with Maimonides and contends that Ezra was never high priest, despite being the most prominent *kohen* of his generation.¹³ Rabbi Shim'on ben Tzemah Duran (1361-1444) likewise affirms that Ezra was not a high priest. Yet by citing the aforementioned Mishnah to prove that Simeon the Just lived after Ezra,¹⁴ Duran evidently fails to understand that it contradicts his earlier assertion that Ezra was not a *kohen gadol*. This can be explained by an idea that Hida (Azulai) proposed. He writes¹⁵ that Ezra defined his generation, because he was the leading Torah scholar and prophet¹⁶ of his time. The Mishnah is therefore justified in stating that Ezra prepared the red heifer, simply because this was done during his lifetime, even though he himself was not the high priest, but it does not provide support for the notion that Ezra functioned as the *kohen gadol*.

Rabbi Hayyim Palache (1788-1869) rejects the whole idea that Maimonides considered Ezra to have been a high priest and explains that Rambam had something entirely different in mind.¹⁷ He simply meant that Simeon the Just was high priest some time after the era of Ezra's leadership and then became the nation's leader as well. According to Palache, Maimonides never meant to imply that Ezra served as *kohen gadol* and that Simeon the Just later succeeded him in that office. However, this explanation does not account for the

words of Meiri, who stated explicitly that Ezra was the first high priest of the Second Temple. According to Palache, the term “*kohen gadol*” in this context should not be taken to mean literally “high priest” but “great *kohen*”. In fact, notes Palache, *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:8 maintains that had Aaron lived in Ezra’s time, Ezra would have been greater than Aaron. Furthermore, the Talmud declares (TB *Sanhedrin* 21a) that Ezra was so great that he could have received the Torah instead of Moses, had he preceded him chronologically. Palache asserts that because Meiri was only writing a historical account of the Masorah, he did not strive to make it clear that Ezra was not in fact a high priest. (This point is hard to accept, because great care and precision are needed in the recording of history; Palache, however, seems to think otherwise.) In his opinion, no one claimed that Simeon the Just actually succeeded Ezra as high priest, since many generations elapsed between them. All that the writers meant was that Simeon the Just eventually became heir to the legacy of Ezra.

Although some authorities believed that Ezra once served as high priest, this seems to contradict the plain meaning of the biblical text. Most authorities do not see Ezra in that role, and even Maimonides is ambiguous at best on this issue. From the standpoint of Jewish history and tradition, Ezra’s achievements in strengthening Jewish life and rejuvenating Torah study far overshadow anything to do with his priestly status.¹⁸

NOTES

1. The holder of the title “chief priest” in this context is ambiguous; it could refer to Aaron, Ezra’s ancestor, or to Ezra himself. In the KJV and the JPS Bible, *kohen gadol* is always translated as “high priest” and *kohen ha-rosh* as “chief priest.” However, Ibn Ezra (to Psalms 99:6) refers to Aaron as *ha-kohen ha-rosh*. In the Apocrypha, Ezra (Esdras) is explicitly referred to as the “chief priest” (Esdras 9:40, 49). See A. Kahane, *Ha-Sefarim ha-Hitzonim* (Jerusalem, 1970) pp. 425-6 (Hebrew), who refers to Ezra in those instances as *kohen ha-rosh*. Furthermore, it is unclear what the meaning of *kohen ha-rosh* is and whether it means the same as *kohen gadol*. The term *kohen gadol* appears many times in the Tanakh: Lev. 21:10; Num. 35:25, 35:28; Josh. 20:6; II Kgs. 12:11, 22:4, 22:8, 23:4; Haggai 1:1, 1:12, 1:14, 2:1, 2:2, 2:4; Zech. 3:1, 3:8, 6:11; Neh. 3:1, 13:28; and II Chron. 34:9 (which essentially paraphrases II Kgs. 23:4). The term (*ha-kohen ha-rosh*, however, only appears in the books of Ezra and Chronicles, i.e., Ezra 7:5; II Chron. 19:11, 24:11, 26:20, 31:10. In I Chron. 27:5, Benaiah ben Jehoiada is referred to as *ha-kohen rosh*. Rashi comments that although some maintain that he was the high priest, this opinion must be rejected since Zadok and Abiathar held that office during the reigns of David and

Solomon. R. David Kimḥi (1160-1235), in his commentary, explains that the title *kohen ha-rosh* was not applied to Benaiah but rather to his father, Jehoiada. Jehoiada is mentioned in I Chron. 12:28 as “prince of [the house of] Aaron” and Kimḥi explains that this means that he was the high priest. Rashi, commenting on II Chron. 24:11, explains that “*kohen ha-rosh*” means associate high priest. The only other occurrence of the term, besides Ezra and Chronicles, is in II Kings 25:18, where Seraiah is titled *kohen ha-rosh* and Zephaniah is styled *kohen mishneh* (lit., “secondary priest”). Here Kimḥi explains that *kohen ha-rosh* refers to the high priest and *kohen mishneh* to his assistant. No explanation is given by Rashi. Thus, even if “chief priest” in this context alludes to Ezra, not Aaron, this does not necessarily imply that Ezra was the high priest.

2. Rashi (in his commentary to Ezra 7:7 and to TB *Megillah* 16b) identifies Artaxerxes with Darius II. Here, Rashi follows the classic rabbinic interpretation (see TB *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 3b) that this Persian king is known by three different names: Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.

3. Rashi (I Chron. 5:41) also observes that Ezra did not become high priest because Jeshua arrived in Jerusalem long before him. Elsewhere, Rashi writes (I Chron. 24:1) that Ezra did not become high priest because his father, Seraiah, was not the firstborn son of Azariah, the *kohen gadol*. Seraiah’s older brother Jehozadak was the firstborn, and it was therefore Jehozadak’s son, Jeshua, who inherited the position of high priest. See the responsa of R. Yosef Hazzan, *Hikrei Lev on Orat Hayyim*, vol. 1 (Salonika, 1787) p. 42, dealing with priority in the succession of high priests on the basis of this discussion.

4. Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*.

5. See S. Buber, *Sha’arei Tziyyon* (Jaroslaw, 1845) p. 15, where R. Isaac Immanuel de Lattes (16th cent., Italy) is said to have declared that Ezra was the first high priest of the Second Temple and that Simeon the Just succeeded him. However, De Lattes contradicted himself, because on p. 20 he writes that Ezra, the first high priest, was succeeded by Jeshua ben Jehozadak. See also *Nahalat Avot* (New York City: Zilberman, 1953) p. 51, in which R. Isaac Abrabanel (1437-1508) wrote that Simeon the Just was the son of Jeshua ben Jehozadak, the implying that the latter succeeded the former. He also claimed that Ezra was a son of Jehozadak, making him Jeshua’s brother. Both statements are obviously erroneous and run counter to explicit passages in the Tanakh.

6. In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides also declares that Simeon the Just, a high priest, was the last of the “Men of the Great Assembly.” However, Maimonides does not say that Ezra preceded him as the high priest. This apparently gives rise to a contradiction in Maimonides’ position. One can nevertheless argue that since his *Commentary on the Mishnah* was written many years before his *Mishneh Torah*, he must have adopted the view that Ezra was a *kohen gadol* some time later, after initially rejecting it. Indeed, Meiri, who traditionally follows the opinions of Maimonides, did express the same opinion (see below). Similarly, R. Ovadyah of Bertinoro (15th cent., Italy) wrote in his commentary to the Mishnah (*Avot* 1:2) that Simeon the Just was the high priest after Ezra. His commentary usually consists of abridgments of Rashi and Maimonides. Thus, Bertinoro also seems to believe that Maimonides held Ezra to have been a high priest.

7. B. Z. Prague, ed., *Beit ha-Behirah – Avot* (Jerusalem: Yad Ha-Rav Herzog, 1963) p. 19.

8. M. M. Kregel, *Shem Ha-Gedolim* (Krakow, 1905) p. 164.

9. H. Y. D. Azulai, *Kikar la-Aden* (Livorno, 1801) p. 146.

10. Y. Emden, *Lehem Shamayim*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1958) p. 137.

11. See Numbers 19:3-4, where Eleazar was commanded to prepare the red heifer, even though Aaron, his father, was the high priest. The Talmud (TB *Yoma* 42b) explains that although some held that a red heifer might only be prepared by the high priest, there was a special scriptural imperative that transferred the right of preparing the first red heifer from Aaron to Eleazar; all future red heifers were to be prepared by the *kohen gadol*. The opinion that any *kohen* can prepare a red heifer derives this notion from that fact that the first red heifer was prepared by Eleazar, not his father, Aaron the high priest. According to this opinion, one must explain that even though Eleazar prepared the first red heifer, Moses is said to have done so because (according to TB *Zevahim* 102a) he, like his brother Aaron, had the halakhic status of a high priest. The fact that the Mishnah speaks of a red heifer being prepared by Ezra shows that Ezra was indeed a *kohen gadol*. This is the reasoning behind Emden's analysis.

12. See Hayyim Kanievsky, *Be-Sha'ar ha-Melekh* (Bnei Berak, 1960) p. 17, and *Kiryat Melakh* (Bnei Brak, 1978) p. 8, where Kanievsky deduces from the same mishnah in *Parah* that Ezra was indeed a high priest. He then asks how this can be reconciled with the aforementioned midrash, which states that Jeshua ben Jehozadak was the *kohen gadol*, not Ezra. His answer is that perhaps, after Jeshua or one of his descendants died, Ezra replaced him. Here R. Kanievsky differs slightly from Emden, but they both conclude for the same reason that Ezra could have only been high priest for a short period of time.

13. H. Filipowski, *Sefer Yuhasin ha-Shalem* (London, 1857) p. 11.

14. Y. Fischl, *Magen Avot* (Leipzig, 1855) p. 4.

15. Azulai, *Petaḥ Einayim*, vol. 2 (Livorno, 1790) p. 92.

16. Azulai apparently assumes that Ezra was a prophet because TB *Megillah* 15a identifies Ezra with Malachi. However, TB *Megillah* 14a notes that there were only 48 prophets. Now whatever method one adopts to count these 48 *nevi'im* (see Rashi, Rabbenu Hananel, *Haggahot Ha-Bah*, *Haggahot Ha-Gra*, *Seder ha-Dorot* Year 2442), Malachi is included and Ezra is not. This approach is not accepted by Maimonides, who lists Ezra and Malachi as separate people when tracing the transmission of the Masorah. See Kanievsky, *Be-Sha'ar ha-Melekh*, p. 18, where he writes that Maimonides rejected the opinion mentioned in the Talmud that Ezra and Malachi were one and the same.

17. H. Palache, *Beit Avot* (Salonika, 1821) p. 8.

18. See, for example, Ezra's *takkanot* as described in TB *Bava Kamma* 82a-b and *Megillah* 31b.

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BE-DOROTAV: NOAH'S "GENERATIONS" **IN LIGHT OF** **ANTEDILUVIAN LONGEVITY**

JEFFREY M. COHEN

The talmudic dispute between Rabbi Johanan and Resh Lakish as to the relative merit of Noah is very well known. It hinges on the statement that Noah was *a righteous man, perfect in his generation* [be-dorotav] (Gen. 6:9). R. Johanan states that the phrase *in his generation* is intended to convey the sense that only by the standard of "his (wicked) generation" was Noah perceived as a righteous man; but had he lived in an age of other righteous people, he would not have been regarded as extraordinary. Resh Lakish inferred the very opposite emphasis from that phrase. The fact that Noah succeeded in maintaining his righteousness even "in his (wicked) generation" is an indicator that had he enjoyed the benefit of living in a righteous generation, he would have been all the more righteous (TB *Sanhedrin* 108a).¹ Both views share the identical exegetical assumption: that the phrase "in his generation" is essentially superfluous, since he could hardly have been living in any other generation! It could only have been included, they believed, in order to add an extra perspective on the relative piety of Noah.

The present writer is but one among countless others down the ages who have been drawn to analyze those two opposing assessments of Noah, as well as to attempt to explain the anomaly of a sage of such acknowledged piety as R. Johanan presuming to disparage a biblical figure praised by the Torah as both "righteous" and "perfect".²

The difference of opinion between these two sages, inspired by the word *be-dorotav*, is obviously justifiable from a midrashic perspective. However, even then, a difficulty arises since it is based on an assumed singular formulation of the word, "in his generation [he was righteous, but . . .]," which presupposes a *be-doro* reading, whereas the text actually states *be-dorotav*, in the plural, which means "in his generations"! The plain sense of this word is

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that Noah lived, unusually, through several generations – beyond the lifetimes of his predecessors.

Significantly, the plural form, *dorotav*, "his generations," is used only here, whereas the synonymous term *toledot* is consistently used in relation to all the other names in the genealogical lists of Genesis.³ This allows us to assume that the employment of *be-dorotav* was intended to point to some unique aspect of Noah's "generations," which, we suggest, was the number of generations that he was privileged to see. At first glance this may seem strange, given that most of his predecessors, referred to in the genealogical lists of Genesis,⁴ lived for almost as long as Noah's 950 years, with Jared and Methuselah even exceeding it (Gen. 5:20, 27). Would they not also have lived, therefore, through as many "generations" as Noah? In fact, however, Noah lived through more generations than any of his predecessors.

If we examine the Torah's data regarding the onset of the male generative capacity in the antediluvian period, we will discover the mystifying, albeit consistent fact that not a single man fathered children before he was at least 65 years of age. Genesis chapter 5 provides a genealogical list of the notable antediluvian families from Adam until Noah which indicates that most of those listed did not have their first child until they were much older than that, with half of them not starting their families until they were at least 130 years of age! Seth did not beget a child until he was 105 years old; Enosh, 90 years; Kenan, 70 years; Mahalalel, 65 years; Jared, 162 years; Enoch, 65 years; Methuselah, 187 years; Lemech, 182 years; Noah, 500 years. Compare this list with that of the postdiluvian generations in Genesis chapter 11:10ff, where the age at which each of Shem's offspring first had a child is provided: Shem at 100 years; Arpachshad at 35; Shelah at 30; Eber at 34; Peleg at 30; Reu at 32; Serug at 30; Nahor at 29; and Terah at 70. This postdiluvian situation, where most of those listed had children around the age of 30, is thus totally consistent with a new biological time clock having been activated to accommodate the contracted human life span.

Noah's three sons procreated and gave rise to the founding nations of humankind during the period of 350 years that he lived through after the Flood (Gen. 10:1-5). Those children would have been the offspring of the period that witnessed a gradual reduction in the human life span until it reached the decreed maximum of 120 years. This gradually reduced life span is clearly

recorded in the genealogical list of the postdiluvian generations of Noah's offspring referred to above (Gen. 11:10) – generations which, in addition to the effects of the Flood, also witnessed the vagaries of the Tower of Babel and mankind's subsequent dispersal (*ha-pelagah*). The life spans achieved by successive generations are as follows: Shem's son, Arpachshad, 438 years; Shelah, 433 years; Eber, 464 years; Peleg, 239 years; Reu, 239 years; Serug, 230 years; and Naḥor, 148 years. As expected, the graph would also have some peaks and troughs before a consistent 120 years became the norm. Thus, Naḥor's son, Terah, reached an age of 205 years (Gen. 11:32); his son Abraham, 175 years (Gen. 25:7); Abraham's sons, Isaac, 180 years (Gen. 35:28) and Ishmael, 137 years (Gen. 25:17); Jacob, 147 years (Gen. 47: 25) and Joseph, 110 years (Gen. 50:22).

We referred above to the Torah's genealogical list of the postdiluvian generations, in which most of those listed began to have families at around the age of 30, as opposed to the antediluvian generation in which none produced children before they were in their sixties. The average age for procreation, spread over the ten generations from Adam to Noah, was 155 years 6 months.⁵ On the basis of these data, we realize the appropriateness of using the plural term *dorotav*, "his generations," in relation to the offspring that Noah was destined to see. For by using 155.5 years as the mean for each of those antediluvian "generations," we arrive at a situation where the oldest man, Methuselah, who reached the age of 969 years, would have lived through just six generations while Lemech, the last of the antediluvians, who lived 777 years, would have witnessed just five generations. By contrast, although Noah lived for 950 years and his children only had offspring during the 350 years after the Flood (Gen. 10:1), he would have witnessed some ten generations due to the shorter life spans and earlier birth time of subsequent generations. This, we suggest, is the force of the term *be-dorotav*. Noah was the only man blessed to see so many generations of his progeny.

On that basis we may assume that some of those later "generations" – specifically in the postdiluvian period – might not have been so iniquitous and could well have boasted some good people. This is certainly the position taken by the

the midrashic Sages with their concept of a *beit midrash* led by Noah's son, Shem, together with the latter's great-grandson, Eber (*Genesis Rabbah* 63:6, *Cant. Rabbah* 6:6). *Beit midrash* presupposes students learning how to lead righteous lives, and the generation gap between the two heads of this academy, *midrasho shel Shem ve-Ever*, reinforces the notion of several generations doing so at that period.

Such an understanding of *be-dorotav* would support the view of Resh Lakish, for it could now be argued that, on the evidence of the text, Noah did indeed live through some righteous generations, yet still merited the Torah's designation of "righteous" and "perfect." This, in turn, would give added emphasis to the divine injunction for Noah to enter the ark: *Come, you and all your household, into the ark; for I have seen you as righteous in this generation* [ba-dor ha-zeh] (Gen. 7:1). In other words, it was only in that specific antediluvian period that Noah was the only righteous man; but during the many generations through which he later lived, Noah was joined by a number of kindred spirits – and yet he remained *primus inter pares*.

NOTES

1. See also Rashi on Genesis 6:9.
2. See Jeffrey M Cohen, "Had Noah lived in Abraham's generation," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 22 (2):1994, pp.120-122; idem, "Had Noah lived in Adam's generation," *L'Eyla* no. 46 (September 1998) pp. 11-14.
3. See Genesis 5:1; 10:1; 11:10.
4. See previous note.
5. This is based on the total of 1556 years for the ten generations listed in Genesis chapter 5.

REFLECTIONS OF READERS

NOTE ON A LATIN TERM IN TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN

EUGENE WERNICK

It is well known that the various targumim to the Bible not only translate the original but also insert midrashic and other rabbinic interpretations. So often is this the case that eisegesis tells us about the times and attitudes of the interpreter more than it reveals new insights into the actual meaning of the text. One example can be found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the story of Joseph being sold in Egypt. This Aramaic translation, also known as the *Targum Yerushalmi*, was often mistakenly attributed to Jonathan ben Uzziel, author of the Aramaic translation of the Prophets. It is not clear who the real author was or exactly when this work was composed.

The Bible recounts the sale of Joseph to Potiphar in a straightforward and simple way: *And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and chief steward, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who brought him down there* (Gen. 39:1).

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan adds some midrashic embellishments:

Joseph was brought down to Egypt and Potiphar bought him because he saw how handsome he was and wished to have homosexual intercourse with him. But immediately it was decreed on him [Potiphar] that his testicles dried up and were hidden. And he [Potiphar] was the chief officer of Pharaoh, chief of the *sapokleturia*, an Egyptian man; he bought Joseph from the Arabs who brought him down there [to Egypt].

The key to understanding this passage is knowing the meaning of the unusual term *sapokleturia*. This term is used occasionally in rabbinic literature to denote an executioner (see TB *Shabbat* 108a, *Lam. Rabbah* 2:3), sometimes in a garbled form (as in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 48: *sinkletorei*). The word is actually based on the Latin term *speculator*, which originally meant a scout, spy or investigator, but over time it came to denote an armed bodyguard of the emperor, who is sometimes employed as an executioner or torturer. In the

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New Testament (Mark 6:27) the word is already used to denote a soldier employed as an executioner, and it always appears with this meaning in rabbinic literature (see Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Talmud*).

The Talmud records the idea that Potiphar purchased Joseph for the purpose of homosexual intercourse (TB *Sotah* 13b), while Onkelos explained that Potiphar served as *rav katolaya*, chief executioner, but Targum Pseudo-Jonathan adds a nuance by using the Latin term *sapokleturia*, recalling a specifically Roman soldier employed as a torturer.

The Targum's use of this Latin term in the context of sexual abuse reflects a particular event in Jewish history, the period after the wars with Rome, when large numbers of Jewish young men and boys were taken into captivity. Many of them were sold to brothels throughout the Roman Empire, from Pompeii to Rome. The Targum portrays Joseph in the same predicament as those young Jews, and gives voice to the prayer of the captives' families that they, like Joseph, might somehow avoid the fate awaiting them. Here we have one of the few instances where this aspect of the national disaster resulting from the conflict with Rome is alluded to in midrashic literature.

"MOSES WROTE HIS BOOK AND THE PORTION OF BALAAM"

(TB BAVA BATRA 14B)

SHUBERT SPERO

The story of Balaam in the Book of Numbers (Chapters 22-24) has over time elicited a number of serious questions both structural, pertaining to the story as a whole, its authorship and place in the canon, and internal, pertaining to the plot and its characters. Its location in the Book of Numbers seems appropriate as one of the events which occurred on the east side of the Jordan. However, it is told completely from the vantage point of Balak, King of Moab: what he thought, how he invited a sorcerer from Mesopotamia to curse Israel, what God told Balaam, and how Balaam responded. The question is: how did this information get to Moses, since he was not at all involved in the event? There is no indication in the text that this was revealed to him by means of prophecy. I believe that these questions prompted the Rabbis in the above title to insist that it was, nevertheless, Moses who composed the Portion of Balaam. I will return to this later.

In terms of the story itself, the main questions have been:

- 1) Why does God initially forbid Balaam to accept Balak's invitation and, when the delegation returns with a better offer, why does God tell him to go with them?
- 2) Why is Balak so insistent on urging Balaam to try again and again, when the sorcerer has repeated over and over that God, not he, is in control?
- 3) How are we to understand the inclusion of a story about a pagan sorcerer and a talking donkey in the Torah?

But perhaps the most interesting question of all centers around the character and personality of Balaam who, the Rabbis decided, was a *rasha* – "wicked" and dissolute. How can an individual who is a practitioner of magic and sorcery suddenly turn into a *navi* upon whom the *spirit of God* rests? (Num. 24:22).¹

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In order to understand these specific internal problems we must first grasp the overall purpose of the story and the spirit which animates the portion as a whole. Clearly, the aim of the story is to ridicule and poke fun at the superstitious beliefs and idolatry of the time. The reader, therefore, is to look for the irony and comic aspects of the situation, all of which are offered in a quasi-serious spirit. With this in mind, let us review the above questions. When Balak's messengers deliver his invitation, Balaam asks them to stay overnight so that he may consider his reply, *as the Lord may speak unto me* (Num. 22:8). This was probably known to be Balaam's standard response to those who requested his services. It said, in effect, "Give me time overnight to consider your offer." He no more meant to "consult" God than Balak's men believed that this was what he was going to do. So when, for the first time in his life, the living God actually appears to Balaam, no one is more overwhelmed than he! Yet when, the next morning, a pale and shaken Balaam tells the messengers that God has forbidden him to go, there are plenty of smiles and winks among them. Their report to Balak, of course, mentions nothing about God but simply implies, "Balaam wants a higher fee." This impression is confirmed when the delegation, returning with a better offer, is told by Balaam that God may now allow him to go!

A close reading of God's conversation with Balaam will explain why, when the delegation returns, God tells Balaam to go with them. From the beginning, He feigns ignorance of everything going on beyond His conversation with Balaam. God thus asks Balaam, *'Who are these men with you?'* (22:9). Balaam explains and God then replies: *'Do not go with them; you shall not curse this people for they are blessed'* (22:12). The assumption is that Balaam repeats this to the messengers, who inform Balak that God has said that the Israelites are a blessed people who cannot be cursed, so it is a mission impossible! The reality, however, is that while Balaam, after the first visitation, reports "God will not permit me to go with you," he does not tell them what God said about Israel. When members of the delegation report to Balak, all they say is that Balaam refuses to come with them, not even mentioning God. When the delegation returns, God says to Balaam: *'If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do'* (22:20). This means, "If, after I (God) told you that Israel is a blessed people and cannot be cursed, Balak persists in asking you to come

and curse Israel, he evidently seeks to match his will against Mine. So be it! Go with them, Balaam, and may the contest begin.'

This seemingly inconsistent reaction on God's part has the following result:

1. Balak, now thoroughly convinced that Balaam's God-talk is no more than a front for his own decisions, cannot take seriously Balaam's repeated mumbling, *only the word that God puts in my mouth, that shall I speak* (Num. 22:38). Yet the fact that Balaam has insisted on a large fee suggests that this sorcerer is very confident that he can perform the services for which he is being paid.
2. Balaam is now absolutely terrified by his encounter with the living God, and his usual self-confidence is badly eroded.

The incident with the donkey is a further step in the humiliation of Balaam and the ridicule of his magical powers. At this point in the story we must see events as they appear to the distinguished princes of Moab who have come to honor the famous sorcerer, one claiming to *know the knowledge of the Most High* (24:16). Picture them riding ahead of Balaam when suddenly they hear an animated conversation. Turning back, they witness the following series of events. Balaam seems to have trouble with the donkey he has been riding. It had evidently turned off the path, then swerved sharply to the wall, injuring Balaam's leg, and Balaam is now furiously striking the beast with his staff. The animal suddenly lies down and, much to their astonishment, Balaam appears to be talking to it! The famous sorcerer, whose mere curse is supposedly fatal, is heard to say: *'Were there a sword in my hand, I would have killed you'* (22:29). Then, for no apparent reason, Balaam looks up, bows his head, falls on his face, and seems to be talking quietly to himself. He and the donkey rise up at last, resuming their journey.² The Moabite princes are baffled by what they have seen and heard, but assume that it had to do with some magical rituals that the sorcerer performed. Balaam, however, is utterly crushed by this experience. After all, his donkey was able to see the angel with a drawn sword, whereas he who prides himself on being *the man whose eye is opened . . . who sees the vision of the Almighty* (24:3-4) could not do so earlier!

The character of Balaam, as it emerges solely from the text of these three chapters in Numbers, is that of an amoral professional sorcerer who will curse or bless anyone for the right fee. There is no mention here of any pagan

gods or worship. Indeed, sorcery in those days was considered a sort of quasi-science which operated in a realm independent of the gods. Balaam himself claimed that he knew how to bypass or manipulate the gods.³ From the very first time that God appears to him, Balaam is perfectly obedient and gives no hint of wanting to curse Israel. A dramatic change seems to affect him when makes his third attempt to do the bidding of Balak. We are told that Balaam *went not, as the other times, to use his enchantments . . . and he saw Israel dwelling tribe by tribe. The spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his parable. . .* (Num. 24:1-3). Does this mean that Balaam, at this point, actually becomes a *navi*, a prophet in the full sense of the word?⁴ According to Maimonides, Balaam was accorded the lowest level of prophecy known as *ru'ah ha-kodesh*, the Holy Spirit.⁵ This means that the initiative and choice of words originated in the individual, whereas divine inspiration helped him to find the best expression for his thoughts. In light of 24:1 and the fact that Balaam was told to say only what God would *show* him (23:3), we may conclude that all four of Balaam's parables were divinely inspired, the only difference being that the first two came via Balaam's magical apparatus while the last two came directly from the mouth of Balaam.

When we examine the content of Balaam's oracular poems, we find that they are all friendly and complimentary to Israel, though hardly "blessings" in the usual sense of the word. Perhaps, however, they may be called "blessings" in the sense of those Jacob bestowed on his sons before his death, which were really prophetic insights about each of them (Gen. 49:28). At any rate, there are certainly no curses to be found in Balaam's utterances, nor any indication that he wanted to curse Israel.

This brings us to what, I believe, is the key to the problem behind the Rabbis' strange statement which I have used as the title of this article. What difficulty did they find in the Portion of Balaam that compelled them to emphasize its Mosaic authorship? There is a reference by Moses to the Balaam episode in the course of his farewell addresses in the Book of Deuteronomy. Explaining the ban on intermarriage with the Moabites, Moses says: *Because they met you not with bread and water... and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Aram-Naharayim, to curse you. Nevertheless, the Lord your God would not hearken unto Balaam, and the Lord your God turned [va-yahafoh] the curse into blessing for us* (Deut. 23:5-6).

Two items in the above statement seem strange. What "curse" is Moses referring to? There never was an actual curse! Should not Moses have said, "The Lord your God would not hearken unto *Balak*" instead of Balaam? The answer is that Moses could not have known all of the details of the Balaam story at the time of his orations, which was in the eleventh month of the fortieth year after he had conquered the lands of Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan (Deut. 1:1-5), but before the Israelite invasion of Midian. He knew only that Balak had sent for Balaam to curse Israel and that somehow what had issued from Balaam's mouth was pleasant and positive. Hence he wrote in broad terms that Balaam failed in his mission to curse the Israelites. So where did the detailed three-chapter-long Portion of Balaam in Numbers come from?

I would offer the following theory. Immediately after the portion of Balaam, we are told how the people committed harlotry with the daughters of Midian and were severely punished (Num. 25:1-9). Moses is commanded to perform what is to be his last action: *Avenge the children of Israel on the Midianites; afterwards you shall be gathered unto your people* (Num. 31:2). Moses raises his troops and sends them into battle against Midian, under the leadership of Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest. Their victory is total and the loot is staggering. A notable figure is among those killed: *Also Balaam, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword* (31:8). We do not know what brought Balaam to Midian; when last heard of, *Balaam rose up and returned to his place* (24:25).⁶ Nor do we know the circumstances of his death. There in Midian, however, Phinehas had an opportunity to learn all the details of the Balak-Balaam encounter, at least from Balaam's viewpoint.

Archaeological discoveries suggest that Balaam ben Beor was a well-known figure, one popularized in the region's folklore on account of his exploits, as well as his curses and blessings.⁷ It would be consistent with what we know of him that Balaam, while visiting Midian, boasted of his experience in Moab and recited the beautiful poems he had composed. Phinehas conveyed this information to Moses, who realized its significance – showing God's love for His people, the prophetic beauty of Balaam's *meshalim*, and the ineffectualness of pagan sorcery. Moses then utilized this information when he wrote what we call the Portion of Balaam.

My theory finds support in the Jerusalem Talmud's somewhat different version of the Mosaic authorship of *parashat Bil'am*: "Moses wrote the five books of the Torah, *ve-hazar* [and returned?] and wrote *parashat Balak u-Vil'am*" (TJ *Sotah* 5). The word *ve-hazar* has puzzled the classical commentators.⁸ According to the theory outlined above, *ve-hazar* should be connected to the following word as *ve-hazar ve-khatav*, meaning "*and he rewrote the Portion of Balaam*." That is to say, with this new information in hand and for the sake of history, Moses wished to expand the story of Balaam and God's "wondrous works," and perhaps give a rather different slant to the one he had touched upon in Deuteronomy 23:5-6. He therefore composed "the Portion of Balak and Balaam"⁹ and inserted it, where it belongs chronologically, in the Book of Numbers.

God could easily have persisted in his first command to Balaam, ordering him not to go with Balak's emissaries. Instead, we have a dramatic narrative and inspired poetry containing some penetrating insights into the character of Israel. The whole episode also offers the reader what are probably the only comic scenes in the Bible, as it exposes the empty pretensions of pagan sorcery.

NOTES

1. See Ethics of the Fathers (*Avot*) 5:22, where he is described as having "an evil eye, an arrogant spirit and an expansive appetite."
2. It is perfectly reasonable, in the circumstances, to interpret the speech of the donkey as the fruit of Balaam's overheated imagination and sense of guilt for pretending to have powers which he does not really possess.
3. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, translated and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (University of Chicago Press, 1960) p. 84.
4. On the words *and there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses* (Deut. 34:10), the *Sifre* comments: "However, among the Babylonians [variant text: nations of the world] there did such arise and who was that? Balaam ben Beor."
5. *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:45.
6. According to the Rabbis and a hint in the text (Num. 31:16; see Rashi ad loc.), Balaam had been called back to the area as a consultant and it was his idea to have the daughters of Midian entice the Israelites at Baal Peor.
7. In the course of excavations conducted in 1967 at Tell Deir Alla in the Jordan Valley, archaeologists discovered the remains of plaster that had fallen from a wall or monument, on which there was writing in black and red ink dating from the middle of the eighth century BCE. The script is thought to be close to what is known about the Amon writing while the language seems to be an Aramaic-Canaanite-Moabite dialect. When put together and deciphered, the inscription

OUTSMARTING GOD: EGYPTIAN SLAVERY AND THE TOWER OF BABEL

SHEILA TULLER KEITER

The Book of Exodus begins the story of Israel's enslavement in Egypt. A new pharaoh rises to power, one who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8). This new pharaoh ushers in a new regime and new policies. He embarks on a national program of enslavement and subjugation. Yet these policies are not as original as one might think, for they are reminiscent of the social-political experiment of another great building society, the people who built the Tower of Babel. The Torah deliberately links these two societies and passes judgment on both.

The new pharaoh begins by bringing his cause to the Egyptian people, making the following pitch: *'Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise, in the event of war, they may join our enemies in fighting against us and go up from the land'* (Ex. 1:9-10).

As presented in the text, the pharaoh's logic is hard to discern. His solution to the problem of Israel's burgeoning population is persecution and enslavement, rather than expulsion or genocide (Ex. 1:11). If they are too many, why not just kill them? Pharaoh does eventually order the killing of all the male babies born to the Hebrews, but only after his first policy prescription results in an Israelite population boom (Ex. 1:12, 16). Furthermore, if the Israelites represent a potential fifth column, why is Pharaoh afraid that they will leave the land? He should welcome their departure.

Slavery, in and of itself, is not a reliable form of birth control. Nor does it engender the loyalties of the subjected population. Perhaps population control and national security were not Pharaoh's true aims. He was able to justify his subjugation of the Israelites with this pretext, but the lack of logic in his reasoning suggests that his true goals lay elsewhere.

The language used by Pharaoh harks back to another, earlier narrative, that of the Tower of Babel. Pharaoh invites his people, *'Come, let us deal shrewdly ...'* (Ex. 1:10). This formulation, "Come, let us" (*havah n . . .* in Hebrew),¹

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appears nowhere else in the Torah except in the Tower of Babel story, where it occurs three times.

There, the people who have settled in Shinar say to one another, '*Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard*' (Gen. 11:3). They go on to say, '*Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world*' (Gen. 11:4). Finally, God responds to their efforts by stating, '*Come, let us then go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech*' (Gen. 11:7). In all three instances, the Torah uses the same formula, "Come, let us..." (*havah n ...*), that Pharaoh uses in proposing the enslavement of the Israelites.

The literary connection between Pharaoh's policy of enslavement and the Tower of Babel is strengthened by the prominent role of bricks and mortar. The people who build the tower are able to do so only because they develop the technology to burn bricks as hard as stones and to mass-produce mortar (Gen. 11:3). The text in Exodus specifies the production of bricks and mortar as a method Pharaoh uses to embitter the lives of the Israelites (Ex. 1:14). In another parallel, the people of Shinar use their newfound technology to build a city (Gen. 11:4), while Pharaoh uses his slave labor to build great store cities (Ex. 1:11).²

The linguistic and thematic similarities between the two narratives suggest that Pharaoh's aims and those of the tower builders were one and the same, and they are viewed this way in the midrashic literature. What were the people who built the Tower of Babel trying to achieve? In their own words, the people who settled Shinar sought to make a name for themselves and to avoid dispersion (Gen. 11:4).

Focusing on the proposed height of the tower, "with its top in the sky," a midrash identifies one of the purposes of the Tower of Babel as being to challenge God's sovereignty. TB *Sanhedrin* 109a states that the builders of the tower fell into three groups: one wishing to ascend and settle there, one wishing to ascend and commit idolatry there, and one wishing to ascend and make war. Those who sought to settle were dispersed by God, those who sought to make war were transformed into apes, spirits, demons, and winged demons, and those who sought to worship idols had their language confounded.

The commentators presume that each of these punishments is specifically tailored to the nature of the offense. Rashi notes that spirits have neither body nor form, and while demons have some human characteristics (TB *Sanhedrin* 109a), both are clearly not human. Maharal explains that this brazen attack on God showed that the people who were building the Tower of Babel were no longer worthy of the divine image (the *tzelem Elokim*) in which they were created and which is meant to demonstrate the attachment and connection of human beings to their Creator. Therefore, they were transformed into apes, spirits and demons, all bereft of that divine image unique to humans.³

A direct assault on God may seem theologically so primitive that it is easily dismissed. However, the tower builders deemed themselves unworthy of their divine spirit, their *tzelem Elokim*, in another way. The tower builders undermined individual human dignity in the interests of the collective. They sought a collective name and feared dispersion of the collective, even at the expense of the individual. Another midrash captures their skewed values: the project of building the Tower of Babel became of such paramount importance that bricks became more valuable than human beings. If a man fell to his death during the construction, no one paid notice. But if a brick dropped, the people wept (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 24). By negating the value of the individual, the builders of the tower denied man's divine source and its attendant holiness. In so doing, they challenged God's authority as Creator.

Pharaoh's goals were not wholly different. He, too, sought to challenge God's authority. The Egyptian pharaoh was treated as divine, a representative of the gods on earth, if not a god himself. The Hebrews, however, worshipped a greater God. Their strength and success would have represented the superior power of their God. This challenged Pharaoh's divine credibility. Therefore, Pharaoh's interest would have been to diminish their power through subjugation, thus proving his divine superiority to the Hebrew God. This was the real motivation behind Pharaoh's policy of enslaving the Israelites.

The language Pharaoh uses when he proposes his plan is consistent with this goal. Pharaoh invites his nation, '*Come, let us deal shrewdly . . .*' (Ex. 1:10). The object of this shrewdness is unclear. In Hebrew, Pharaoh proposes that they deal shrewdly with "*lo*." In this context, the Hebrew word *lo* must mean "with him" or "with it." The standard translation presumes that the "it"

to which Pharaoh is referring must be the nation of Israel. Therefore, the verse is usually translated in the plural, '*Come, let us deal shrewdly with them . . .*' He refers to them in the singular, as a collective. They are deprived of their liberty and are subjected to oppression and humiliation. Their enslavement and objectification pave the way for mass murder. As in the case of those building the Tower of Babel, Pharaoh's challenge to God's sovereignty relies on the dehumanization of individuals, in this case the people of Israel. However, the verse could just as easily be translated, '*Come, let us deal shrewdly with Him.*' This rendering suggests that Pharaoh's primary target is not Israel, but their God. Indeed, Rashi suggests that it is God, the Defender of Israel, Whom Pharaoh seeks to outsmart (Ex. 1:10).

The stories of the Tower of Babel and the enslavement of the Israelites share another feature. While both stories depict challenges to God perpetrated through mass dehumanization, both rely on the willingness of the people to further those goals. The people who build the Tower of Babel collectively agree to subsume their individual dignity for the greater goals of the collective, thus denying their own humanity. Pharaoh, despite his tremendous power, cannot embark on his campaign of dehumanization without the consent and cooperation of the Egyptian populace. Even today, the excesses and abuses of tyrants and madmen are made possible only by the willingness of a sufficient number of the population to carry out those policies.

In the end, both plans backfire. Despite Pharaoh's efforts, the Israelites become numerous, they do leave the land, and God, through signs and wonders, triumphs over Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt. Ultimately, the people who built the tower have no name. They are identified merely as a group of people who settled in a valley in the land of Shinar (Gen. 11:2). The location of the tower is named Babel after the people's languages are confounded and they are dispersed (Gen. 11:9), but the people themselves remain anonymous, scattered among the nations.

In fact, namelessness pervades both narratives. The anonymity of the tower builders stands in stark contrast to the genealogies that immediately precede and follow the Tower of Babel story. The progenitors of each generation are listed by name, as individuals. The builders of the tower are the exception, relegated to namelessness.

Similarly, the Book of Exodus begins with a genealogy, naming each of the twelve brothers who came down to Egypt with their father Jacob. In Hebrew, the Book of Exodus is called *Shemot*, meaning "names." Yet with the ascendance of this new pharaoh, the names disappear. The Israelites are dehumanized and lose their identities as individual human beings. (The Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah, are an exception and they are specifically named by virtue of their human decency in the face of unspeakable cruelty.) Thus, an unnamed man from the tribe of Levi marries an unnamed woman of the same tribe, and they have an unnamed baby boy (Ex. 2:1-2). Only when Pharaoh's daughter saves the baby and names him Moses, transforming him from an anonymous, dehumanized victim into a human being, is the mechanism for redemption set in motion.

Significantly, the Egyptians are equally nameless. The Midrash has to supply Pharaoh's daughter with a name because the Torah omits one. Even the pharaoh himself is nameless. "Pharaoh" is the designation of his office, a political position, not a name. Historically, the Egyptian pharaohs all had names, yet the Torah pointedly omits them. They become anonymous persecutors of God's nation. And this is the ultimate lesson of namelessness. One cannot deny the divine spirit in others without denying the divine spirit in all men. One cannot dehumanize others without dehumanizing one's self.

NOTES

1. *Havah* is an invitational word, usually translated as "come." In all four of the cited instances, the *n...* prefix refers to a Hebrew verb beginning with a *nun* indicative of the first person plural in the future tense: "we will . . ." When paired together, the *havah* and the *nun*-prefixed verb are translated as "Come, let us . . ."
2. Incidentally, there is one extant source that conflates the story of the Exodus from Egypt with the Tower of Babel. In the Koran, when Moses comes before Pharaoh to demand that he free the slaves, Pharaoh's response is to command Haman – yes, that Haman – to make bricks of clay and build a tower so that Pharaoh can climb up to Moses' God to see if He exists (Koran, Sura 28:38).
3. Maharal of Prague, *Hiddushei Aggadot*, Part 3, second ed. (London: Honig, 1960) p. 261a.

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