

THE JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY



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Abraham's Trials: Tests of Strength or
Learning Experiences?

The Education of Abraham: The Encounter Between
Abraham and God Over the Fate of Sodom
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AIMS AND SCOPE

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ABRAHAM'S TRIALS: TESTS OF STRENGTH OR LEARNING EXPERIENCES?

SHUBERT SPERO

There are two seminal events in the life of Abraham: The encounter with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Akedah. Professor Shubert Spero and Rabbi Robert Eisen start each with the separate event to come to a similar conclusion.

With ten trials [תּוּבוֹת] was our father Abraham tried and he withstood them all, to make known how great was the love of Abraham, our father (Mishna Avot 5:4).

Actually, the only event in Abraham's life that is explicitly described as a *trial* [נִסְיוֹן] is the *Akedah* [עֶקֶדָה] or "Binding of Isaac."¹ However, once the concept of a "trial" is thoroughly analyzed, it is reasonable to re-read Abraham's entire career as a series of trials leading up to that which is generally agreed to be the severest test of all -- the *Akedah*:² 'Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac . . . and offer him there for a burnt-offering . . . ' (Gen. 22:1,2).

What encourages this interpretation is the fact that in contrast to the way Noah is introduced to the reader *before* we are told his story, with a complete characterization -- *a righteous man and whole-hearted* [תָּמִים] (6:9) -- Abraham makes his appearance as one addressed by God, without our knowing anything about his character or his earlier life. In effect, the text is suggesting: If you wish to know the nature of this man Abraham, read carefully what follows and note his responses. Noah's essential character is already complete at the time God begins to work with him. Whatever he is, is sufficient for God's purposes. Abraham's personality at the age of 75 is still not fully actualized and we are invited to watch its development as Abraham responds to the various trials set before him.

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Noah starts out by already being *tamim* [תמים]. Abraham is told '*be thou tamim* [והיה תמים]' (17:1).

While the Mishna refers to "ten trials," it is not clear which events in Abraham's life constitute the ten, so that, as is usual in such situations, we find different views among the commentators.³ And after all is taken into consideration, it turns out that there may be more than ten!⁴ But let us first briefly review what is meant by the term "trial" [ניסיון].⁵ The two biblical events which can serve as a paradigm are the stories of *Akedat Yitzchak*, where a form of the term ניסיון is explicitly used, and the story of Job where, from the setting (Job 1:6-12), it is clear that God is permitting Satan to test Job. In the case of the *Akedah* it is the difficulty of God's command which constitutes the challenge and it is Abraham's love of and loyalty to God which is being tested. Abraham "passes" the test when he obeys God's command. This same analysis holds for the following events which are included among Abraham's ten trials:

1. '*Get thee out of your country . . .*' (Gen. 12:1).
2. '*And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin . . .*' (17:11).
3. '*In all that Sarah says to you, hearken to her voice . . .*' [to banish Hagar and Ishmael] (21:12).
4. '*Take thy son and bring him up for a burnt offering . . .*' (22:2).

The Job model, however, suggests that the individual may be tested not only by a direct command of God but also by a particular set of difficult circumstances (which the biblical reader of course may assume to be the work of God). Thus, the occurrence of a famine soon after Abraham's arrival in Canaan, which prompts him to leave the land, is also considered one of the ten trials, for such hardship is hardly compatible with Abraham's expectations after receiving God's promises of a glorious future in Canaan. Certainly, this too puts Abraham's faith to the test.

A similar analysis can be given to the following events where the challenge is carried by circumstances rather than by a command from God:

5. The taking of Sarah to the palace of Pharaoh (12:15).
6. The rescue of Lot from the foreign kings (14:14).
7. The taking of Hagar as a concubine (16:3).
8. The taking of Sarah by the King of Gerar (20:2).

Concerning the eight events listed above, there is general agreement that they are among the ten trials of Abraham.

There is, however, another pivotal event in his life, and commentators are divided on whether it is to be included among the ten, and whether it is to be considered a trial at all.⁶ Soon after Abraham arrives in Canaan, God appears him in a "vision" [חִזְיוֹן] and assures him of seed as numerous as the stars in the heavens, and then tells him: *'I brought you out of Ur . . . to give you this land to inherit it'* (15:7). While Abraham accepts the first promise without comment, in regard to the land he asks: *'How will I know [יָדָע] that I will inherit it?'* (15:8). God, in the vision, then has Abraham prepare an elaborate rite involving animal sacrifices, signifying that the Divine promise is now confirmed by a solemn covenantal act. Then God replies:

'Know for sure [יָדָע] that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall enslave them and afflict them 400 years. And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge and afterwards they shall go out with great substance . . . and the fourth generation they shall come back here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full . . .' (15:13-16).

Beginning with the talmudic sages, readers have been perplexed as to how to understand Abraham's question. Is he asking for some sign to strengthen his belief? If so, the question betrays an uncharacteristic weakness in Abraham. Moreover, why should he ask for a sign in connection with the land when he did not ask for one after the promise of children, where we are told: *And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord* (15:6).

What perhaps occasions Abraham's perplexity about the land is the different wording he hears in the course of the vision. Earlier at Shechem, when Abraham first arrived in Canaan, God said: *'Unto thy seed will I give this land'* (12:17). Now, Abraham hears: *'I brought you out of Ur . . . to give you this land to inherit it'* (15:7). From the moment Abraham entered Canaan and saw that the land was already populated by different ethnic groups (12:6), he realized that "inheriting" the land could not realistically be an immediate prospect. First, because it was already inhabited, and second because a land can only be properly possessed by a people or nation, whereas Abraham was but a single individual.

However, convinced now that Sarah was soon to give birth, which meant that God was working in ways that went beyond the natural, Abraham decided to seek clarification about the promise of the land. After all, Abraham thought, if a woman of 90 could give birth and a centenarian with a few hundred retainers could rout a confederacy of four kings, perhaps God plans to have me, somehow, possess the land *now*! Abraham's question to God, therefore, was in effect: "When, how and for whom is possession of the land to come about?" or "What conditions will indicate that I am about to inherit?"

God's reply informs Abraham that the question of the land is in a different time-frame altogether; something that will happen centuries from now and only after Abraham's offspring will have developed into a nation.

But why do some commentators include this experience (called the "Covenant Between the Pieces") among Abraham's ten trials? After all, no demands as such are made upon Abraham. He neither receives a command nor is he expected to respond. Where is the challenge? In what sense is this a test?

I would suggest that the answer is to be sought in the varied effects of knowledge on the human consciousness, for better or for worse. Certainly, the statement: *He who increases knowledge increases pain* (Eccl. 1:18) is true at least some of the time. Thus, when Abraham asks for knowledge about the future [בְּחַבְּרַת אֲדָמָה], he is opening himself to the possibility of pain, which is swift in coming [יָדַעַתְּ תַּדְעַתְּ]: Your children will suffer as slaves in a strange land for a long time, after which they will inherit the land.

Abraham's question was legitimate, so the pain generated by God's reply was certainly not intended as punishment. Nevertheless, learning that the offspring he had so desperately wanted and was miraculously granted would have to suffer, certainly caused Abraham considerable pain. However, the "test" consisted in the fact that the information was another challenge to Abraham's maturing understanding of the moral nature of God. We have every reason to believe that Abraham arrived at this first ever philosophical insight on his own, prior to any Divine revelation: Responsible for the universe was a single, omnipotent, transcendent Being of a *moral nature*; i.e., whose "way" was one of justice and righteousness. The disclosure by God that his descendants would be enslaved for centuries must have raised severe questions for Abraham regarding the justice of it all, particularly when he is told that *'the nation whom they shall serve, I*

will judge' which implies a recognition that Abraham's people were to suffer undeservedly.

Surely, Abraham must have been struck by the seemingly different standards implied in the prophetic vision he had just experienced; the Amorites cannot be driven from their land until they deserve it (. . . *the iniquity of the Amorite is not full*), while the descendants of Abraham, although apparently without "sin," are to suffer slavery! What are the moral criteria by which God governs history? Abraham absorbs this painful information and the questions it raises, without comment.

This "trial" should be contrasted with another, this time unsolicited, Divine disclosure to Abraham which I believe should be considered a trial of the same type as the above. I am referring to the passage where God declares why He is about to inform Abraham of His planned destruction of Sodom:

'Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

'For I have known him [יָדַעְתִּיו] so that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice (18:17-19).

According to the Netziv and in keeping with the context, verse 19 should be interpreted "for I make this known to him [הוֹדַעְתִּיו]"; i.e., I am telling him about my plans to punish Sodom in order to see how he will respond.⁷ And what follows is the well-known ten verses in which Abraham does indeed respond, repeatedly challenging *the Judge of all the earth* as to the morality of what He is about to do. Undoubtedly, Abraham learns much about the moral nature of God from this dialogue; about the rigor of His justice and the limits of His compassion.

This too can be seen as a trial for Abraham, similar to the earlier trial of the Covenant Between the Pieces. In both, the challenge consists of receiving certain information [אָדַע -- בְּחַהּ-אָדַע] and the test is to observe how Abraham will respond. In the case of the first, he passes the test by remaining silent though he knows not why his people deserve to suffer. In the case of Sodom, Abraham passes the test by arguing passionately to allay the seemingly unjust punishment that is in store for the city. But how could two contradictory

responses to unjust situations both be considered correct?

Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that God's action in Sodom is presented explicitly as *punishment* for ongoing sins. Therefore, as a moral judgment upon a particular group known to him, Abraham is able to respond out of his intuitive understanding of justice and righteousness and to challenge the Divine judgment, at least *prima facie*. However, in the case of the Covenant Between the Pieces, where he is told of a time to come in history when his people will be enslaved and afflicted, causing him great anguish and perplexity, Abraham is at a loss to respond.

This is because it is precisely on this question of God's ways in history, the ups and downs of nations, the fate of the individual in relation to the fate of the collective, that even the understanding of a Moses will later falter.⁸ Does God in history act on the basis of the principle of moral deserts only, or is this principle sometimes overridden by the need to arrive at some historical goal? Abraham does not know the ways of God in history. He is but at the beginning of the journey. He remains silent. However, what he does *not* do is to protest: "If this is what my people will have to endure at their very birth, then count me out!" And so Abraham passes this test as well.

If our analysis is correct, then this might give us an insight into the much discussed question of the over-all purpose of the biblical trial [ניסיון]. The obvious explanation that X tests Y in order to learn something about Y is not applicable to the biblical trial, since God is by definition omniscient and does not need to test for that purpose.⁹ This leaves two possible theories: (1) God tests His most faithful servants so that their steadfastness can become known and an inspiration to others, and (2) The purpose of the test is primarily for the benefit of the one being tested. By living through a particular experience, certain potential qualities of the individual's character are actualized and made real. Thus, in the case of the *Akedah*, Abraham's decision to obey God's command and actually go through all of the motions up to the actual drawing of the knife, transforms Abraham's innate "fear of God" into a resident aspect of his personality.

Similarly, in the case of the two trials we have been considering, where the challenge was embodied in certain information received and the test was to see how Abraham would respond, their primary purpose was to thrust Abraham into an existential situation in which he is compelled to question and explore the

moral nature of God.¹⁰ From both of these trials Abraham emerges a better and wiser person. From all of his trials there emerges a remarkable specimen of a human being that we proudly call Abraham our Father.

NOTES

1 *And it came to pass after these things that God did test [נסו] Abraham . . .* (Gen. 22:1). Perhaps this event alone is called a "trial" because here alone God's command involves an action which was never intended to be carried out, so that its only rationale was as a "trial"!

2 See Gen. Rabbah 55:8.

3 One of the main differences is whether one includes stories about Abraham told in the Midrash or one sticks to the biblical stories only.

4 A similar situation develops in connection with the tradition that there is a total of 613 commandments in the Torah. Exactly what they are is a matter of disagreement among the *rishonim*.

5 See Jacob Licht, *Testing* [נסו] (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973).

6 Maimonides and Rabbi Jonah do not include this in the ten.

7 See the commentary of Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, called *Haemek Davar*, on Gen. 18:19.

8 See Exodus 33:13.

9 See Licht, *op. cit.*, who also treats a type of biblical trial where the people "test" God! Pp. 30-40.

10 Another aspect of the trial of the Covenant Between the Pieces could be Abraham's realization after he receives this prophetic vision that all that had transpired in his life had been primarily of a preparatory and symbolic nature. The many converts to ethical monotheism that he and Sarah had made (12:5) were only of peripheral significance, for the entire future would be channeled through Isaac. Abraham's life will end peacefully enough (15:15). However, the real work towards the visionary promises made to him: Becoming a numerous people, inheriting the land, being a blessing to all men, would first start centuries from now! This was quite a change in perspective for an activist like Abraham. Part of the trial for him was adjusting to this change.

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THE EDUCATION OF ABRAHAM: THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND GOD OVER THE FATE OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

ROBERT EISEN

The verses which quote the dialogue between Abraham and God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:17-33) are sometimes read as an argument. This approach to the text as disputation reads the passage as follows:

1. God reveals to Abraham that He plans to destroy the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. Abraham confronts God, questioning His sense of justice.

3. Abraham bargains with God until He agrees to spare the cities if there are at least 10 righteous men in Sodom. When it appears that there are not even 10 righteous men in the city, the dialogue breaks off.

Viewed as a literary unit removed from its context, interpreting this passage as an argument might be justified. However, it will be contended here that in the context of the chapter as a whole the dialogue is not an argument, nor is Abraham a champion of justice. It will be argued that we are, in fact, dealing with a kind of Socratic dialogue in which Abraham during this experience of God's righteousness, justice and compassion, is not demonstrating any exceptional qualities of his own character but is, rather, receiving from God a vital lesson in his moral education.

This is especially necessary at this point, lest God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah be misunderstood by Abraham and the people who are to emerge from him. The destruction must be understood in its full moral dimensions; namely, Sodom's total and irredeemable wickedness, as evidenced in its lack of even 10 righteous citizens. God engages Abraham in the Sodom-Gomorrah dialogue to help him comprehend the full situation and advance his moral sensibilities.

In order to reach this conclusion, one must first look at Chapter 18 as an independent literary unit. The division of the Torah into the familiar books, chapters

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and verses was formalized long after the segment with which we are dealing, but there is good reason to suggest that it is a separate unit and may be read as such. A brief outline of the unit will establish that point.

1. Verse 1: *And the Lord appeared unto him [Abraham] by the terebinths of Mamre*

2. Verses 2-16: Three visitors, one of whom disappears into the background, appear to Abraham. He offers them rest and refreshment, and two visitors announce that Abraham and Sarah will be blessed with a son.

3. Verses 17-19: God defines why He will reveal to Abraham His plan for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

'For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him'.

4. Verses 20-32: Abraham and God "discuss" the plan and the impact that the presence of 50, 45, 40, 30, 20 or even 10 righteous men will have on the future of the cities.

5. Verse 33: *And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left off speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned unto his place.*

This chapter tells us that God appeared to Abraham, revealed to him His plan concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, and after their dialogue *went His way*. Yet it seems evident that God was at least inactively present as the third mysterious visitor, while the other two "men" (angels or Divine messengers) reveal that Abraham and Sarah are to have a son. Although God's involvement in the story prior to the Sodom-and-Gomorrah dialogue appears to be passive, it is the revelation concerning the forthcoming birth of Isaac that sets up the interaction between Abraham and God in the latter part of the chapter.

The key elements in this reading are:

1. Verse 1: God appears to Abraham.

2. Verses 17-19: God decides that He must reveal His plan concerning Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham, along with an indication of the nature of His righteousness, justice, and compassion, and the hope that Abraham and his descendants will acquire those qualities.

3. Verse 33: When He is finished speaking, God leaves and Abraham returns to his place -- having already accompanied his visitors on their way (and God too, who had emerged from the background in verse 16).

Our suggestion that the Sodom-Gomorrah dialogue is not an argument but rather a step in Abraham's moral education is derived from a reading of the dialogue itself, here excerpted from the text. Emphasis is added for the words of God.

God: Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him. Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.

Here one must assume that God has told Abraham about His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Note that God has already informed the reader that He intends to observe the cities in order to ascertain whether or not what He has heard is correct, and that Sodom and Gomorrah need to be dealt with. Abraham then responds to God's announcement of His decision as God would want him to, with the expected question(s) that will lead him to a better understanding of God's ways, and a critical step in his own moral education.

Abraham: Will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are only fifty righteous inside the city; will you also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous who are in it? Be it far from You to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, be it far from you; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

God: If I find in Sodom fifty righteous inside the city, then I will spare the whole place for their sakes.

Abraham: Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes; perhaps there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?

God: *If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it.*

Abraham: *Perhaps there shall be forty found there.*

God: *I will not do it for forty's sake.*

And similarly for 30, 20, and finally 10 good men. God assures Abraham that He will not destroy the city as long as at least 10 righteous men reside in it. Again, if we read the chapter as an independent literary unit by itself, separate from what precedes and follows it, the encounter between Abraham and God concerning the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah reads much more like a Socratic dialogue rather than an argument. In fact, reading the chapter as a separate unit adds an additional element of understanding to the announcement of the impending conception and birth of Isaac. This too, like God's response to Abraham's pleas for Sodom and Gomorrah, is an expression of God's righteousness and compassion. Thus, Abraham is being taught of God's ways through everything that He does.

At this point, it would be appropriate to ask: If, as has been suggested, the Sodom and Gomorrah episode was intended to be a lesson in moral behavior, was it assimilated? Did Abraham understand what God was trying to communicate to him? If we consider the way Abraham lived his life both before and after this episode, the answer would have to be No, or at best a Yes that must be strongly qualified.

To take but one example, there is the matter of how Abraham twice presents Sarah as his sister rather than his wife, putting her well-being at risk in order to protect his own life and well-being. The first instance occurred shortly before the Sodom and Gomorrah episode (12:10-20) and the second soon after the destruction of the cities (Ch. 20).

One would think that after being scolded and expelled by Pharaoh for attempting to pass off his wife as his sister, Abraham would have learned the lesson and thereafter take Sarah's safety and well-being into account. However, he has not yet absorbed the Divine teaching concerning the obligation always to act with justice and compassion. Later on he does acquiesce to Sarah's concern (jealousy?) in the matter of Ishmael's bad influence upon Isaac, and banishes Hagar and Ishmael. Yet the Hagar-Ishmael incident itself raises serious questions about Abraham's capacity for compassion and humane concern.

Let us put all these events into sequence: In Chapter 17, Abraham circumcises

himself, enters into a covenant with God, and is rewarded with the promise that a son will be born to him and Sarah in their old age. Further, he is granted a glimpse of what God expects of him; to strive to be as just and compassionate with all people as God is with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah -- who do, after all, get their just deserts. And yet, soon after the Sodom-Gomorrah incident, when Abraham acted justly and compassionately in his dialogue with God, he nevertheless passes his wife off as his sister a second time. He does take some responsibility for the wrongdoing in his prayers for Abimelech's recovery, but soon afterwards agrees to expel Hagar and Ishmael because of Sarah's jealousy. One can easily argue that Hagar and Ishmael were entitled to at least the same degree of concern that Abraham displayed toward the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. To put it mildly, Abraham just does not "get it." He has not yet learned that the duty to act justly and with compassion applies to him at all times, and not only to God. Hence the need for one more lesson, the *Akedah*, the trial God will put Abraham through to see if he has finally learned his lesson.

From the evidence of his behavior, it is reasonable to ask whether or not Abraham saw his encounter with God as a lesson in the application of justice, compassion and humane concern. Did he understand what God wanted of him, that he was being taught a lesson in personal moral conduct? These questions are premised on our assumption that God was acting as Abraham's moral teacher, and that the Sodom-Gomorrah episode was a Socratic teaching dialogue and not an argument. However, if one were to follow the common understanding of the Sodom and Gomorrah episode as an argument, with Abraham representing the high moral position, it is hardly likely that the same man who would argue over the fate of a people he did not know would cast out his first-born son, and blindly accept God's command to sacrifice his second and favorite son. Surely, it is not an attribute of the just and the righteous to care more about one people than another, not to mention one's own children. Would one not expect the champion of justice and righteousness to be a little more consistent?

Harsh as it may sound, we suggest here that the *Akedah*, which follows all these events, was a continuation of the lesson begun at Sodom and Gomorrah. The Abraham who was ready to sacrifice his son is neither heartless nor cruel; he is just experiencing a very sharp turn on his learning curve of what God

really wants of him. He is being tested, but not only on his faith. Are the *Akedah* and its aftermath perhaps also a test of growth in Abraham's moral character?

Through the *Akedah*, God sees that Abraham is truly a man of faith and a worthy transmitter of the Divine blessing and covenant. But something else also shows forth, although there is no text to prove it clearly; namely, Abraham's attainment of moral maturity. And this too must please his Divine teacher.

Though it has been a long time coming, Abraham finally, through his own terrible pain and agony, reaches understanding of what God expects of him. It is not faith alone, but faith and compassion, faith and justice, faith and loving concern for others. This lesson is learned on the mountaintop where Abraham almost slaughters his beloved Isaac, later with the death of his beloved Sarah, and finally in "letting go" of his dearly-loved Isaac, who marries Rebekah and establishes his own home. It is in these moments of love, terror, loss, and separation, that Abraham finally becomes God's moral man, a worthy role model and hero.

We know little of Abraham's doings after the *Akedah* and Isaac's marriage. He took Keturah as a concubine and fathered six children, but for his moral character and fatherly model there are no clear data. We can only guess and surmise. When Abraham died *in a good old age, and full of years . . . Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah . . . there Abraham was buried and Sarah his wife (25:8,9)*. Were Isaac and Ishmael reconciled? Did Father Abraham have a hand in bringing his two sons together? That is what fathers are supposed to do!

As for Abraham's moral example, centuries later the prophet Isaiah proclaimed:

Hearken to me, you who seek righteousness, you who seek the Lord: look to the rock whence you are hewn, . . . Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah that bore you: for he was but one when I called him, and I blessed him and increased him (Isa. 51:1-2).

In the approach suggested here, the God whom Abraham encounters prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is not a God with whom one needs to argue, one who would be lacking in compassion and love for His Creation. Rather, He is a God who is so concerned with His Creation that even when a

lesson needs to be taught, He is ready to reveal the nature of the lesson before it is given. It is God who approaches Abraham in order to inform him of the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, and thus entice him to plead for the righteous inhabitants of the wicked city. It is God who appears to Abraham in order to reveal to him the nature of His being; which is *tzedakah* [righteousness, justice] (15:6). Abraham was the one whom God called. As the midrashic tradition puts it, "When the Holy One contemplated the generations of Enosh and the Flood, He said, How can I build a world with such wicked material? But when He envisioned Abraham, He said, I have found a rock on which to build the world" (Yalkut No. 766).

Human beings were created with two hands and two eyes so that they might be able to read and understand the Bible more deeply. One hand and one eye are necessary for the text, and the other hand and eye are necessary for the commentary. As this passage concerning the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah often has been read, the "other" hand and eye have been understood as being raised against God, as Abraham is seen to be in argumentative opposition to Him. With the alternative understanding of the text suggested here, even while the story is firmly clutched to one's heart, the other hand is responding to God's own Hand, that is bestowing a gift not only of a better understanding of what it is that God wants of men and women, but also the gift of His presence in our lives.

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DIVINE AND HUMAN CURSES

JACOB CHINITZ

Whether we accept a traditional version of revelation and the divinity of the Torah, or indulge in a process of humanization of the sacred text by the use of biblical criticism, the human element in the biblical material is present. If we approach the Bible as literature this discovery is natural. What is truly impressive is finding human aspects in the Torah, not outside of the pious tradition, but inside it.

For example, the principle applied by the Talmud, "*Dibra Torah bilshon b'nei adam* [The Torah speaks in the language of man]" was originally meant to justify not exercising the hermeneutic technique of attaching significance to every superfluous letter in the text. Gradually, this principle of the "normal human language" is broadened to include anthropomorphic metaphors, obvious hyperbole and symbolic figures of speech. Without explicitly saying so, the rabbinic tradition went further. It introduced human nature into all aspects of Torah text, into its dialogue, its narrative, and even into its legal content.

With respect to dialogue, it is apparently assumed even by the most pious stance, that what the characters in the Torah speak (except for the case of Balaam whose words are placed into his mouth by God), they speak by their own choice. Whether this choice is always a moral one, or perhaps sometimes merely esthetic, is an interesting question. For our purposes it is sufficient to posit that, although in the ultimate sense the dialogue in the Torah is authored by God, the doctrine of Free Will compels us to state that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses spoke out of choice, not by Divine dictation.

With regard to how events are determined by human moral choices, we are compelled to assume that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, the Israelites worshipped the Golden Calf, and listened to the evil report of the spies, not by the dictation of God. How different the Book of Genesis would be if Adam had chosen not to eat the forbidden fruit. How different the Book of Exodus would

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be if the Israelites had not chosen to worship the Calf; or the Book of Numbers had they rejected the report of the spies!

God may have dictated the text to Moses, but the nature of that text was determined and shaped by human choice, virtuous or sinful. It might even be suggested that while the traditional imagery is that of Moses as God's stenographer, God is the Divine Stenographer, writing His Torah at the dictation of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob among others?

Not only dialogue and narrative but also *mitzvot* are considered in traditional interpretation of Torah to be determined by human nature. Would some of the commandments be different than they are if it were not for the weaknesses and strengths of human character? For example, of the "law of the beautiful captive" it is said: "*Lo dibra Torah elah keneged yetzer harah* [The Torah speaks with reference to the evil inclination]."

One outcome of humanization of the Divine Torah is the willingness of the tradition to consider the possibility that the Book of Deuteronomy was delivered, if not authored, by Moses, rather than by God Himself as with the other four books of the indivisible Pentateuch. The Talmud is quite willing to ascribe the two *tokhachot* [chastisements], one in Leviticus and one in Deuteronomy, to God and to Moses respectively. A passage in Bava Batra 88b, in our opinion, represents one of the most blatant compromises with the pristine Divine revelatory nature of Torah, in favor of human authorship of part of the Torah text:

Rabbi Levi said: Come and see how different is God's conduct from the conduct of flesh and blood. The Holy One, Blessed be He, blessed Israel with twenty-two blessings and cursed them with eight. He blessed them with twenty-two, from (Lev. 26) "*im bechukotai* . . . [If you walk in My statutes]" to "*komemiyut* . . . [I will cause you to walk upright]." He cursed them with eight, from "*ve'im bechukotai timasu* . . . [if you condemn My statutes]" till "*ve'et chukotai goalah nafshom* . . . [and My statutes disgusted them]."

However, Moses blessed them with 8 and cursed them with 22. He blessed them with 8 (Deut. 28) from "*vehaya im shomoa tishma* . . . [and it shall be if you hearken]" to "*le'avdam* . . . [to serve them]." He cursed

them with 22, from "*ve'haya im lo tishmeu . . .* [and it shall be if you do not hearken]" to "*ve'ain koneh . . .* [there will be no buyers]."

While the emphasis upon the position of individual letters in the text attests to an exaggerated notion of the significance of sacred script, the idea that Moses blessed and cursed Israel, as God blessed and cursed it, is striking in terms of the humanization of the content of the Divine text. We have here a contrast between Divine nature and human nature, with respect to generosity towards and consideration for Israel. God blesses more and curses less; Moses blesses less and curses more.

In the structure of blessings and curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that are attributed to God and to Moses, we find the exemplification of the generosity and consideration towards Israel posed in two ways. One is in the numbers of verses, blessings and curses, and the other in qualitative content. The primary element in the qualitative aspect is whether the chastisement ends with an ultimate reconciliation and hope, or whether there is no happy ending to the *tokhacha*.

In quantity of verses, Leviticus' God-like chastisement contains 10 verses of blessing and 32 of curses; Deuteronomy's Mosaic chastisement contains 14 verses of blessing and 54 of curses. (This length of Deuteronomy is almost twice that of Leviticus.)

Another aspect of comparisons is the first and last letters of relevant words. Rabbi Levi studied this with a method similar to but not identical with *gematria*. In Leviticus, the blessing *im . . . komemiyut* begins with *aleph* and ends with *tav* -- the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, across a range of 22 letters. The curse *ve'im . . . nafshon* begins with *vav* and ends with *mem*, across a range of eight letters.

In Deuteronomy, the blessing *ve'haya . . . le'ovdom* begins with *vav* and ends with *mem*, across a range of eight letters. The curse *ve'haya . . . koneh* begins with *vav* and ends with *he*. Here Rabbi Levi uses an ingenious way of counting the distance between the letters; he counts 17 from *vav* to *tav*, and then another 5 for *aleph* to *he*, making a total of 22.

One can cavil against this mechanical approach to biblical language, that takes advantage of coincidental appearances of certain letters at the beginning and

end of certain words. However, it is notable that talmudic scholars were willing to go to these lengths to make the point that God is more generous with His blessings than is Moses, and more careful with His curses than is Moses. It is also notable that Moses is referred to as *basar v'dam* [flesh and blood], as if to identify him with all of humanity, or with human nature.

This tribute to God's generosity as compared with the harsher attitude of Moses is contradicted dramatically by what happened after the Israelites worshipped the Golden Calf. There it is God who wants to destroy Israel, while it is Moses who pleads for it, and even rejects the offer to be himself the founder of a new people. The Bible is not quite consistent with regard to Divine nature any more than it is consistent with regard to human nature. Perhaps that is because truth itself is not consistent, because reality is not consistent.

A salient contrast between the two *tokhachot* is that the one in Leviticus ends with a consolation of ultimate reconciliation, while the one in Deuteronomy concludes with a negative prediction and no "happy ending." Contrast the conclusions in both passages:

'With all this, when they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not condemn them and will not hold them in disgust, in order to destroy them, and annul My Covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. And I shall, for their sakes, recall the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God, I am the Lord' (Lev. 26:44-45).

'And the Lord will return you to Egypt in ships, in the way whereof I said to you: You shall not see it [them] again, and there you shall be offered in sale to your enemies as bondmen and bondwomen, and one shall buy you' (Deut. 28:68).

This contrast between the compassion of God and the lack of compassion of Moses is more impressive and depressing than Rabbi Levi's tally of the distance between letters of the alphabet. Is there not a shocking contradiction between the defense of Israel in the Book of Exodus and the hopeless condemnation in the Book of Deuteronomy, both by the same Moses? Is there not great comfort in God's transformation from the Divine wrath in Exodus to the consoling comfort in Deuteronomy?

Some commentators see in Deuteronomy 30 the good destiny for Israel that is lacking in Chapter 28:

'And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you shall bethink yourself among all the nations . . . and shall return unto the Lord your God, and hearken to His voice . . . that then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples'

If Deuteronomy is one long speech, or several speeches, by Moses, it is reasonable to attach this final consolation to the somber conclusion of the earlier dire malediction.

There may be here some connection with the two distinctively different types of covenants that are found in Scripture, one that is unconditional and one that is conditional. The first is granted by God as a gift, with no reciprocal obligations on the part of the beneficiary of the covenant. For example:

'This is the token of the covenant which I give'

'I have set My bow in the cloud . . . I will remember My covenant . . . and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh' (Gen. 9:12-15);

'I will give My covenant . . . and will multiply you exceedingly' (Gen. 17:2)

'Behold, I give unto him . . . My covenant of peace' (Num. 25:12).

In all these instances, the promises given (to mankind, to Abraham, to Phinehas) did not impose obligations upon them. Indeed, the essence of the Covenant of the Rainbow is that even if mankind sins there will be not be a second Flood. Offspring are promised to Abraham unconditionally. Phinehas was rewarded for what he had already done, not on condition that he would do something in the future.

The other kind of covenant is more like a contract, with mutual undertakings and obligations. The first is forever; the second may be canceled if one side to the covenant does not fulfill the obligations undertaken. Unlike the unconditional covenants, they are not "given" -- they are "cut":

'Behold, I cut a covenant . . . ' (Ex. 34:10).

'Write you these words, for after the tenor of these words I cut a covenant with you and with Israel' (Ex. 34:27).

These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to cut with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the Covenant which He cut with them in Horeb (Deut. 28:69).

Is it possible to explain the difference between the conclusion of the *tokhachot* in Leviticus and Deuteronomy on the basis of this distinction between the unconditional and conditional covenants? Leviticus speaks of an eternal, unbreakable covenant which God gives Israel as a gift, so that it will not be destroyed in the exile. Deuteronomy speaks of the conditional covenant which lapses when Israel does not fulfill its obligations.

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**FINAL JUDGMENT:
THE AMBIGUOUS MORAL QUESTION
THAT CULMINATES GENESIS 34**

RONALD T. HYMAN

Chapter 34 of Genesis is devoted solely to one complete short story, the Rape of Dinah. On the surface, it appears to be a simple, straightforward story about rape and retribution. Upon a deeper, more careful reading, however, the story about Dinah emerges as a tightly constructed, complex work concerning the many issues which faced the Israelites upon the re-entry of Jacob into the land of Canaan. A substantive exploration reveals that the author interrelates the primary issues of rape and retribution with other issues, such as sibling loyalty, intergenerational conflict, violent revenge, tribal honor, deceitful talk, rescue, intertribal relations, the customs of marriage proposal, the covenantal tradition of circumcision, and the consequences of leadership failure in Canaan.

A literary perspective on this story shows that the Rape of Dinah employs sophisticated devices that heighten its drama and meaning. These devices include the theme word *take* [תקח -- *l'kh*], an open-ended conclusion, ambiguity, a vague simile, silence on the part of the rape victim, multiple views of the same event, allusion to the future as well as the past, a challenging and ambiguous rhetorical question, surprise created by delaying the revelation of a fundamental fact, and the thwarting of reader expectation. The careful reader comes to realize that it is through these literary devices that the author is able in 31 compact verses to interweave so many substantive issues within a complete and compelling story.

The capstone of the Rape of Dinah is the final four-word verse that is emblematic of the story as a whole. The characteristics and functions of Genesis 34: 31 are the focus in this article. The culminating verse of the Rape of Dinah

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contains a three-word thought-provoking question. It intends to justify the violent revenge taken by Dinah's brothers, but it does not resolve the issues raised in the story. In addition, this final ambiguous verse poses a serious moral question for our consideration. In exploring the complexity of the verse we come to delve into a moral issue still present in our modern lives.¹

Dinah, though she is the character around whom the action revolves, is not, like Esther, Ruth, and Deborah, the heroine of her story. She performs only one act -- *she went out* -- and performs it in the very first word of the story. There is not one adverb modifying her only mentioned act and not one adjective describing her. Thus, we never learn from Dinah what happened to her.

Moreover, neither the Narrator or any character describes Dinah's feelings. We can only wonder what Dinah feels and to what degree it may be any of the following: Shame, hate, fear, loneliness, defilement, powerlessness, reciprocal love for Shechem who loved her and spoke to her heart, or gratitude to Simeon and Levi for rescuing her and taking her home. The silence grips us as we ponder the questions: What did Dinah feel? What did she say to Shechem after being raped, after he talked to her heart, and after he agreed to be circumcised? Did she want to be taken from Shechem's house?² What did she think of her father's behavior? What happened to Dinah the rest of her life? Did she ever marry?³ What did she say to her family upon her return with Simeon and Levi? What was her opinion of her brothers' concluding remark in verse 31?

The text of 34:31 is: 'וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכּוֹזֵנִים יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת-אֲחֹתוֹנוֹ' [*vayomru hakzonah yaaseh et-ahotenu*]. In order to remain close to the structure and sequence of the Hebrew, the verse may be translated as: *And they said, 'As a whore shall he treat our sister?'* The two primary characteristics of this verse are that it contains a moral question and that it is unclear. The lack of clarity exists because the verse is both ambiguous and vague. The reader must cope with these characteristics whether they were deliberate or not. Let us deal with them before examining the functions served by verse 31. Then we shall explore some substantive issues.

AMBIGUITY AND VAGUENESS IN VERSE 31

In quoting a question by some characters in the story, the culminating verse is ambiguous in several ways. This final verse of the story uses no names or other

specific words to identify people. It uses only Hebrew's indefinite verb construction with built-in pronouns to refer to the people involved. In verse 31 we know from the construction of the sentence only that there is more than one speaker [*vayomru* -- and they said), that Dinah is the sister of the speakers [*ahotenu* -- our sister), and that the person referred to who is treating Dinah like a whore is a man [*yaaseh* -- he shall treat).

Furthermore, in contrast to other pieces of quoted dialogue in the story, there is no identification by name or by descriptive word of the addressee of the question. Nor is there an identification of the audience for the question. While addressee refers to the person *to whom* the speakers explicitly direct their remarks, audience refers to the people *on whom* the remarks are intended to have an effect. Audience refers to the people who hear or should hear the remarks and who may be of greater concern to the speaker than is the addressee. Finally, as with all written dialogue without authorial commentary, we do not have any indication by way of the words themselves of how the question was asked by the speakers. Whereas a listener to a story has oral clues from the speaker's tone and volume (and gestures, too, sometimes when the listener is also a viewer) to indicate emphasis, there is no written clue in Genesis 34 as to which word is to be emphasized.

Not only is the last verse unclear due to linguistic ambiguity, but also unclear due to vagueness. Vagueness is the condition in which the meaning of the words is indefinite or imprecise. The vagueness in verse 31 exists because the connection between Dinah and a whore is not clear to the reader, even though there must be some connection existing in the minds of the speakers.

Because of the ambiguity and vagueness of verse 31, we need to consider possible interpretations by seeking answers to some analytic textual questions: (1) Who asks the rhetorical question? (2) How shall we read the question (that is, which word shall we emphasize)? (3) Who is the man referred to in the question? (4) Who is being addressed by the speakers? (5) Who is the audience on whom the question is to have an impact and for whom the question is asked? and (6) In what ways may it be said that "he" treated Dinah as a whore? The answers to the above questions are not perfectly obvious or settled despite the availability of ancient translations, traditional commentaries, and modern

commentaries. One way to start a consideration of the six questions raised above is to explore the possible answers since a good case can be made for each possibility.

1. Regarding the speakers of the rhetorical question, the two possibilities are:
 - (a) Simeon and Levi, who were just rebuked by their father in verse 30;
 - (b) The sons of Jacob collectively, since it is they who spoke with and deceived Hamor and Shechem (vv. 8, 13) and who later plundered the Hivites (vv. 27-29). (The other brothers may be defending Simeon and Levi as well as their own behavior by offering a retort to Jacob.)
2. Regarding the word to be emphasized by voice inflection in the question, there are also two possibilities:
 - (a) "as a whore," the first word of the question;
 - (b) "our sister," the last word.
3. Regarding the man referred to in the question, the three possibilities are:
 - (a) Shechem, who "took, laid,⁴ and raped" Dinah;
 - (b) Hamor, who came to negotiate with the Israelites and later spoke about the agreement differently to the men of his city from the way it was stated by Jacob's sons;
 - (c) Jacob, who remained silent and passive until after revenge occurred but in any case never said anything negative at all about the rape of his daughter.
4. Regarding the addressee of the question, the possibilities are:
 - (a) Jacob, who just rebuked Simeon and Levi;
 - (b) the sons of Jacob, who may have heard Jacob's rebuke and who sided with Simeon and Levi by their looting of the Hivites;
 - (c) Simeon and Levi, who were rebuked;
 - (d) Dinah, the sister referred to in the question.
5. Regarding the audience for the question, the possibilities are:
 - (a) the entire tribe of Israel, including Dinah, who are put on notice that tribal loyalty and solidarity will be important to their survival in the new land;
 - (b) the other peoples inhabiting the land of Canaan, who are put on notice that the Israelites have a high moral standard, will seek to maintain that standard in Canaan, and will not tolerate any violation of it (note that in Genesis 35:5 we learn that the people of Canaan did not pursue the sons of Jacob on their journey

to Bethel, as Jacob feared in 34:30);

(c) both the Israelites and the peoples of Canaan.

6. Regarding the vagueness of the rhetorical question in which the treatment of Dinah is likened to the treatment of a whore, several possibilities are:

(a) the disdain that people have for a whore (*whore* has always been an epithet used against women) is similar to the way "he" behaves toward Dinah now that she is a raped woman;

(b) the negotiating over Dinah -- the taking and giving of her -- is similar to the way men take a whore and give her money and other goods;

(c) the treatment of Dinah merely as a commodity to be bargained for as if she were an item in the marketplace is similar to the way men treat a whore;

(d) the way "he" treats Dinah is similar to the neglect shown to a whore who is believed to have no worth to her family;

(e) the way "he" treats Dinah as an object of sexual desire is similar to the way men treat a whore.

Of course, some answers are contingent upon others or are implied once other questions are answered. However, in general and despite any logical relationships, the six questions must be answered independently. Moreover, even though tradition holds that Simeon and Levi are the speakers and that Shechem is the antecedent of *he* in the question in verse 31, the other possibilities not only make sense textually but they have enormous effects on the meaning of the verse as well as the entire story.

Consider this possibility: Simeon and Levi, upon being rebuked by Jacob who still does not defend Dinah's honor, address their brothers, point to *Jacob*, and say, '*As a whore shall he treat our sister?*'

FUNCTIONS OF VERSE 31

Verse 31 serves several functions simultaneously for the storyteller. Its rhetorical question serves as a rebuke. The speakers of verse 31 decide not to be silent, not to accept Jacob's rebuke of Simeon and Levi in the previous verse. "They" counter-rebuke powerfully.⁵

Verse 31 also poses a rhetorical moral question. In doing so, it is the only place where characters in the story comment on the moral issue regarding

Dinah. Jacob in verse 30 speaks for the first time, chastising Simeon and Levi for killing all the men of the city of Shechem. However, he never says a word about the abomination Shechem committed. Nor has the Narrator told us what Jacob said to his sons or to anyone else about the defilement of Dinah. Nor have we had any comment at all -- no apology or acknowledgment of wrong behavior -- about that act from Hamor and Shechem. In short, until verse 31 we have no direct verbal comment from any character in the story about the wrong that Shechem has done. We have only the Narrator's words that Dinah was raped and defiled, that the rape was an abominable act in Israel, and that it ought not to have been done (vv. 2, 5, 7).

FINAL JUDGMENT IN VERSE 31

In addition to offering a counter-rebuke and verbally raising the moral question, verse 31 offers a final judgment on the rape of Dinah. With the four words of this verse, the Narrator counters the substantive slide present in the previous verses. That is, while at the beginning of the story we are appalled by Shechem's original act of rape, subsequent verses lead us to moderate our feelings when Shechem indicates his love for Dinah and his desire to marry her, when the brothers speak deceitfully, and when Hamor and Shechem agree to undergo circumcision in order to permit Shechem to take Dinah as his wife. We moderate our feelings further when we read the speech of Hamor and Shechem to the men of their city (vv. 21-23) even though it states matters differently from those of Jacob's sons (vv. 14-17). Our feelings change once again when Simeon and Levi kill *all* the Hivite men, when the sons of Jacob plunder the city, and when Jacob rebukes Simeon and Levi. Indeed, we recognize, upon reflection, that the Narrator leads us to change our feelings about Shechem and Dinah's brothers several times. Verse 31 comes as an unexpected conclusion to The Rape of Dinah. First, it audaciously rebukes Jacob, the patriarchal leader of the Israelites. Second, it challenges us to agree with the speakers' counter-rebuke and to endorse the actions taken against Shechem. It requires us to face three central and related issues of the story: What is the just punishment, if any, for a man who rapes a virgin? What is the just punishment, if any, for a man who treats a young girl as a whore? How should a father, brother, or any other family

member help a raped young girl to cope with the "abomination" done to her physically and emotionally?

Jacob seeks no punishment at all for Shechem. Jacob is interested only in peaceful co-existence with the Canaanites in the promised land. However, Dinah's brothers violently punish Shechem and his entire city because Shechem committed an abominable sexual act⁶ with religious and tribal overtones?⁷ Shechem has tried to shortcut the customary, age-old way of uniting families. The usual pattern is proposal, marriage, and then sexual union. Shechem's breaking of custom by putting sexual union first is no minor transgression, striking as he does at the heart of the central societal unit -- the family -- and through it the larger tribe. (Recall how strongly Laban in Genesis 29:23-27 holds to social custom regarding the age order in which his two daughters will be married.)

Other questions flow from the central one raised by verse 31. Is the offense committed against Dinah only against her and not also against her relatives who are following in the footsteps of Abraham and Isaac? To what extent is Jacob correct to be concerned only, or at least primarily, that the other peoples will now gather to destroy him and his tribe? To what extent are Jacob's sons correct in avenging the rape of Dinah? (Note that Shechem was killed just as was Amnon in The Rape of Tamar story in II Samuel 13.) What would be the appropriate punishment, if any, of Jacob's sons for taking revenge so violently before any peaceful or Divine resolution with the Shechemites could be reached? Was Dinah wrong in some way for going out to see the *daughters of the land*, apparently by herself and without the knowledge or permission of her family?

The brothers' counter-rebuke constitutes their judgment. That verse 31 offers a judgment is appropriate. The judgment of the brothers in their question is strong and severe even with its ambiguity and vagueness. It concerns Dinah, whose name comes from the Hebrew word meaning judgment or law, thus underscoring the centrality of judgment within the story. In this way the story opens with "judgment" and closes with a judgment that justifies, in the eyes of the speakers, the actions taken by the brothers to defend their sister's and their own honor. This fact indicates to the reader that the story comes full circle and

invites further judgment about a basic moral issue, the punishment appropriate for an abominable act that is also seen as an attack on a family and tribe.

Verse 31 comes as a surprise. The reader expects a clear resolution to the issues raised by the tensions among the characters in the story. Such a resolution, an accepted story-telling device, would be satisfying and would end the story on a positive note. However, the final verse thwarts that expectation, unsettling the reader. The counter-rebuke by Dinah's brothers gets the reader's attention just as does the revelation in verse 26 that Dinah remained in Shechem's house after the rape. With the counter-rebuke comes an allusion to Jacob's prior interaction with Laban in Genesis 31:26-42. There is also a foreshadowing of the subsequent behavior of the brothers toward Joseph and Jacob in Genesis 37-50.

The counter-rebuke in 34:31 is a clear indication that Jacob's sons have begun to challenge their father openly. Two other indications appear earlier in the story of The Rape of Dinah. First, the brothers and not Jacob speak with Shechem and Hamor about Dinah, even though Hamor came to speak with Jacob (v. 6). Second, the brothers apparently took revenge on the Shechemites without their father's knowledge and approval. This inference stems from the stern rebuke given by Jacob to Simeon and Levi in verse 30. The counter-rebuke is a hint of the dissension to come to the Israelites and probably contributed to it also.

The sons' behavior is an indication that the new generation is emerging and that it holds a different perspective on matters concerning tribal identity and relations with neighboring peoples. The new generation believes that it understands the desert culture^s better than does their father. Furthermore, the sons do not fear the indigenous population of Canaan. Whereas Jacob is concerned that the *inhabitants of the land* will gather against him, smite him, and destroy him and his house (v. 30), the sons indicate that they will not tolerate the offense inflicted on their sister and their tribe. The sons, with their rhetorical question, indicate that tribal loyalty and solidarity should be at the core of their future in the land of Canaan.

The Narrator gives his over-all support to the brothers by giving them the last word for their judgment via their dramatic rhetorical question. The reader may

not agree with the point of view of the Narrator, but the reader can see that the ambiguous and vague question directs our attention to serious issues. The culminating question leads us to continued reflection upon the scriptural messages embedded in the story.

NOTES

1. As I write, *The New York Times* has published two separate first-page articles on rape and the sexual defilement of women in Jordan and Kosovo on June 20 and June 22, 1999, respectively.

2. S.P. Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) p. 95. Jeansonne, writing from a feminist perspective, states that Dinah was "treated as an object" by her brothers just as she was by Shechem. The brothers did not "ask her about her wishes," according to Jeansonne, and "the brothers' actions are unfair to Dinah."

D.N. Fewell & Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1991) p. 210-211, believe that "to stay in Shechem's house is the best thing for Dinah," and that "we may fairly suppose, she is taken against her will."

3. Fewell and Gunn argue that "except to Shechem, marriage would appear to be effectively denied her, since she is now a 'defiled' woman."

4. The Hebrew text indicates that Shechem "laid" (direct object) Dinah rather than "lay with" Dinah, as appears in most translations. This point applies to the verb *lay* as found in verses 2 and 7. The Hebrew is consistent with the elements of force, abomination, anger, and vengeance which appear in the story.

See S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989) p. 265, who derives the forbidden and forced aspect of Amnon's intercourse with Tamar in II Samuel 13:14 from the words "laid her" and notes that these are the same words used in regard to Dinah.

5. For another famous counter-rebuke, see Genesis 44:7-9. For other ways to deal with a rebuke see R.T. Hymn, "Fielding 'Why' Questions in Genesis," *Hebrew Annual Review* 11:173-183.(1987) pp.178-182.

6. The same word for "abomination" is used in Judges 19:23-24 for an attempted homosexual act. See comment by Bar-Efrat, p. 262 on the use of this term in the Bible. The culprit always pays with his life.

7. Compare the punishment exacted by Dinah's brothers for the rape of their sister with the punishment meted out by all the tribes of Israel for the rape and killing of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19-20. See also II Samuel 13:28-29 for the punishment of Amnon for raping Tamar.

8. For more on desert culture regarding honor to women see C. Bailey, "How Desert Culture Helps Us Understand the Bible: Bedouin Law Explains Reaction to Rape of Dinah," *Bible Review* 7:14-21 (1991). See also J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays on the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp.161-170.

A FIRST CENTURY C.E. DATE FOR THE CLOSING OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS?

GERALD H. WILSON

Traditionally, it has been generally accepted that the Book of Psalms reached its final, fixed form and arrangement by late in the fourth century BCE. In the last 15 years, however, investigation of the more than 35 scrolls of psalms discovered at Qumran near the Dead Sea has raised the possibility that final closure of the Book of Psalms was not completed until the middle of the first century C.E.! The Qumran psalms manuscripts -- which date from the second or third century BCE through the late first century C.E. -- demonstrate almost complete stability for the arrangement of Psalms 2-89,¹ suggesting *this portion* of the canonical collection may have been fixed by the traditional fourth century BCE date.²

For Psalms 90-150, however, the situation is much different. A number of important Qumran scrolls indicate a significant degree of variation from the canonical collection, in both the actual compositions included and the order of the compositions. Relatively few of these Psalms 90-150 are found in their canonical order. Also, at least 11 other compositions, that are not included in the canon, are interspersed with the traditional psalms.³ These variant manuscripts from Qumran are dated up to the middle of the first century C.E. Later manuscripts of the Psalms, discovered at Wadi Murabba'at and dating from the second century C.E., show virtually no variation at all from the canonical arrangement.

All this evidence from Qumran suggests that the Book of Psalms came to its final form in two stages, with the first three groupings (Ps. 2-89) having been fixed in content and arrangement at an early date, perhaps the traditional fourth century. By contrast, the last two groupings (Ps. 90-150) continued to receive

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alternative arrangements and contents until the canonical form was fixed some time after the mid-first century C.E.⁴

The evidence of the Qumran psalms scrolls receives support from the recent study of the history of the collection of the psalms and the editorial techniques employed to arrange them (a process also known as *redaction history*). Among the results of this kind of study are:

- (1) clear confirmation that the five groupings of the psalms (set off by concluding doxologies) are intentional editorial divisions;⁵
- (2) the growing awareness that the first three groupings have been arranged and shaped with editorial techniques and concerns different from those of the last two groupings.⁶

In the first three groupings, arrangement is predominantly by author, with significant collections attributed to David, Asaph, and the Sons of Korah.⁷ In contrast, authorship plays almost no role in the organization of the psalms in the last two groupings, since only a very few of these psalms bear any indication of author. Here, instead, the editor(s) employ(s) a distinct technique of arrangement unknown to the first three groupings. Some sections are concluded by "hallelujah" psalms, while new segments are introduced by psalms with the opening phrase *Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever*.⁸ The two segments thus highlighted by these different techniques of arrangement are consistent with the Qumran evidence of two stages of development in the history of the Book of Psalms.

PSALMS 2-89

The shape and content of these two groupings also suggest arrangement with a purpose. Just a few comments will sketch the broad outlines. In Psalms 2-89, three "royal" hymns⁹ are placed at important "seams" of the collection (2, 72, 89). The placement of these psalms turn the first three sections, with their predominant preoccupation with lamentation psalms, into a grieving reflection on the collapse of the Davidic monarchy and the Exile and express a desire for restoration. As introduction to this section, Psalm 2 describes the institution of the Davidic covenant with "stark assertion of the 'world rule' of the Davidic monarchy."¹⁰ At the conclusion of the segment (89:38-52), the collapse of the Davidic covenant dominates the scene, along with an eloquent plea for its restoration. In

between these two extremes (72; 89:1-37), we encounter the transmission of the covenant obligations and blessings to succeeding generations of Davidic kings.

As a literary unit between these boundaries, this first segment focuses the attention of the reader on the Davidic covenant, raises questions on why it failed, and calls on God to remain loyal to His covenantal promises and restore the kingdom. With this over-all purpose in mind, the personal lamentation psalms that dominate the first three sections express all Israel's grief and confusion over the loss of the monarchy.¹¹

While the final psalm in this first section (89) *does* mention the possibility of Divine punishment for royal transgressions (89:30-32; cf. II Sam. 7:14-15), there is no attempt to explain the demise of the monarchy on this basis. Neither is there any acknowledgment of or contrition for sin or wrongdoing (as is characteristic of "Deuteronomic" passages such as the prayer of Daniel 9:4-19). The sole basis for the desired restoration is God's loyalty to His covenantal promises and the scorn heaped on His chosen people.

PSALMS 90-150

The last two groupings of the Book of Psalms now stand as a response to the earlier plea for restoration articulated in Psalm 89. The answer offered, however, is surprising. It is not the anticipated affirmation of the Davidic covenant and the Divine promises it enshrines. Instead, this later section counsels a change of focus; a "return" so to speak to a pre-Davidic lifestyle characterized by direct reliance on God alone. Beginning with Psalm 90 (the only psalm attributed to *Moses the man of God*), a pre-monarchical Mosaic motif is introduced that emphasizes:

- (1) the frailty of human accomplishment in contrast with that of God (90-92; 102-103; 144);
- (2) the eternal kingship of God (93-99; 145);
- (3) the need for obedience to the commandments as the source of Divine blessing (94:12-15; 99:6-8; 103:17-18; 119);
- (4) acknowledgment of human sin as the cause of the collapse of the monarchy (90:7-8; 99:8-9; 102:9-10).¹²

Toward the end of the fifth section, the reliability of human princes is negatively evaluated and the reader is pointed once again to the eternal kingship of the Lord as the true source of security and future hope (146).¹³

THE EFFECT OF THE SHAPE OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS

It is also clear that the final arrangement of the whole Book creates a new interpretive context for reading the individual psalms.¹⁴

(1) The final form of the Book of Psalms de-emphasizes the role of the psalms as *performance pieces* within the Temple worship. While the psalm headings make it clear that they were used in that fashion, the placement of Psalm 1 -- with its exhortation to meditate on God's *torah* (in the broader sense of "instruction") -- as introduction to the whole Book, encourages *reading* and *studying* the psalms as the source of Divine guidance for life.

(2) At the same time, there is a shift of emphasis to the study of Torah and obedience to the commandments as the source of life (cf. 1; 94:12-15; 99:6-9; 103:17-18; 119).¹⁵ This emphasis is also associated with the role of Psalm 1 as introduction as well as the strategic placement of other *torah* psalms (19, 119) within the Book.

SUMMARY THUS FAR

The final form of the Book of Psalms, which may not have been fixed until the mid first century C.E., reflects conflicting views of the Davidic covenantal promises. The final arrangement rejects reliance on human strength (or princes), and points Israel instead to complete reliance on the kingship of God Himself. There is, further, a shift away from the cultic performance value of the psalms, which are now to become the object of individual reflection and appropriation. Even stronger emphasis is placed on Torah as the source of life (rather than Temple rites) and on the necessity of meditation on it and obedience to its commandments.

Having reviewed briefly the results of recent scholarship on the final arrangement of the Book of Psalms, it is my intention in the remainder of this paper to make some tentative suggestions about what historical setting best accounts for these findings. First, if the manuscript evidence for the continued fluidity of the Psalms is taken seriously, then we must look for the circum-

stances precipitating its closure in the first century C.E. I would like to suggest that events surrounding the first Jewish war with Rome in 66-70 C.E., as well as the activities of Johanan ben Zakkai and the great Academy of Yavneh following the war, may well have influenced the distinctive characteristics of the final form of the Psalms.

It is well known that Zealot resistance to Rome led to open rebellion in 66 C.E. The Sadducee party and some of the Pharisees supported the resistance movement. Apparently, Johanan ben Zakkai took a pacifist stance in the years leading up to the revolt and openly counseled against the war effort. He fled from Jerusalem in 68 C.E., met with Vespasian and received permission to establish an academy of sages in the coastal city of Yavneh.¹⁶

Yavneh, also known as Jamnia, was the location of first-century debates concerning the contents of the third segment of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings. But the accomplishment of Johanan ben Zakkai and the Academy of Yavneh (and others like it at Lydda and Jaffa) exceeds the discussion of which books do or do not "defile the hands." To Johanan and the Academy is attributed the redefinition of Jewish life which insured its survival following the disastrous defeat of 70 C.E. and the destruction of the Temple.¹⁷ Too much has been written for me to do more than sketch an outline of the major developments traced to Johanan and the Academy which have bearing on our particular discussion. There are four I would like to mention.

1. It was at this time, and in response to these events, that the authority of Judaism shifted from the priests to the sages. Several factors were involved. The destruction of the Temple and Roman refusal to allow its reconstruction signaled the end of the sacrificial rites and considerable reduction of priestly status. In addition, Sadducean and priestly involvement in the Jewish war effort left them at odds with the Roman authorities. Gamaliel II was prevented by them from assuming control of Palestinian Judaism, and the authority of the Sanhedrin (dominated by the priests) passed to the great Bet Din of Yavneh (controlled by the Academy of sages).

2. Johanan avoided conflict with the Romans by re-interpreting Jewish messianic hopes in terms of passive (pacifist) expectation of Divine action in response to human piety rather than militant human action. As Jacob Neusner tells us, "Johanan ben Zakkai devised a program for the reconstruction of the people

and the faith in the aftermath of disaster. That program did not include the teaching that by fighting a Messianic war, the Jews would recover their holy city."¹⁸ It is apparent that Johanan and the Academy enjoyed the approval of the Roman authorities, and his method was to point Judaism in ways of faith and practice which did not incite the suspicion and opposition of Rome. This resistance to militant messianism may partially explain the exclusion at that time of most of the available apocalyptic literature from the Writings.

3. It is through the work of Johanan and his successors, in response to the devastations of 66-70 C.E., that the core of Jewish faith and its source of hope were shifted from the performance of the Temple rites and sacrifice to a three-fold basis of piety: prayer, study of Torah, and acts of loving-kindness. Johanan taught that if Israel followed this form of practice faithfully, "then no nation or race could rule over them."¹⁹

4. Finally, as previously mentioned, there are strong traditions connecting the Academy of Yavneh with the final delimitation of the Hebrew scriptures. While disagreement continues over the exact significance of the debates, it seems clear that the sages and the Academy exercised some influence over the contents of the Writings of which the Book of Psalms is an important part.

CORRELATION OF SETTING AND PSALMS

Now, how does this setting correlate with the results of research previously outlined? First, one is faced with the two opposing segments of the Book of Psalms. It is at least plausible that Psalms 2-89 reflect the militant program of the pro-war group. Emphasis on the world domination promised in the Davidic covenant, the inviolability of the Divine promises, the transmission of legitimacy to the later Davidic successors, and the plea for the restoration solely on the faithfulness of the Divine promises, fit well against the background of the pre-70 coalition of priests, aristocracy and Zealots in militant opposition to Rome.

The War Scroll of Qumran confirms the militant apocalypticism of those sectarians. Their apparent association with the Zealots in the final days of the war (demonstrated by the destruction of Qumran and the presence of sectarian documents at Masada) indicates their views were not too far removed from their more mainline contemporaries. At Qumran we also find the expectation of both

priestly and Davidic messiahs, once again confirming the association of Temple rites and messianic hopes. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Qumran Psalm Scroll (11QPs^d) exhibits an even more strongly Davidic collection of psalms than the Masoretic text. The recognition (by Gottwald and others) that in this section (Psalms 2-89) lament psalms predominated over those of thanks and confidence by a ratio of 3:1, also aligns well with a community chafing under foreign rule and committed to its military overthrow.²⁰

The addition of Psalms 90-150 and the placement of Psalm 1 as an interpretive introduction accords well with the post-war shift of power from priest and Temple to sage and Torah. Does this arrangement represent re-evaluation by the pacifist segment of the Pharisee party in the aftermath of destruction? Let's look at a number of correspondences.²¹

The shift from public, communal performance in the cult to individual meditation and appropriation of the Psalms through study and prayer is entirely compatible with the post-war program of Johanan ben Zakkai and the Yavneh Academy. The Temple and its rites are ended and the authority of the priest is passing into the hands of the sages, for whom study of Torah represents the proper response of faith. It seems unlikely that the Book of Psalms would assume a literary form designed primarily for individual meditation and prayer at a time when the Psalms were still actively employed in cultic celebration.

The emphasis on Torah as the source of Life (Ps. 1, 119, et al.) created in the final form of Psalms is clearly related to the work of Johanan and the Academy to redefine Judaism around the interpretation of written and oral Torah. As Brevard Childs has suggested, the final form of the Psalms signifies that they no longer function solely as Israel's response to God, but now serve as the source of the Divine word to Israel, if properly studied and interpreted.²²

We have seen that in Psalms 90-150 concern is deflected away from the restoration of the Davidic monarchy to Israel's need for total reliance on God as King. By the use of the Mosaic motif previously described, this reliance on God alone is connected to Israel's need for obedience to the Mosaic Law. In addition, reliance on God's kingship leads to the devaluation of human strength and leadership as the source of Israel's hope. The post-war program of Johanan and the Academy follows a similar pattern of distancing hope from military opposition to Rome. Messianism assumes a more peripheral place in the rabbinic literature

and human messianic claimants are received with suspicion.²³ As Neusner has said, "Instead of offering an activist, military program for subversion of Roman rule, the rabbi's Messianic program now constituted an irenic, spiritualized, passive expectation."²⁴

CONCLUSION

We have seen that numerous correspondences exist between the final editorial shaping of the Book of Psalms and the activities of Johanan ben Zakkai and the Academy of Yavneh to reshape Judaism in the wake of the destruction of 70 C.E. Coupled with manuscript evidence for the cessation of variation in psalm manuscripts in the first century C.E., these correspondences lead me to suggest that this period provides a plausible setting for the fixation of the text.

NOTES

1. Psalm 1 is considered an introduction to the whole Book and may have come to its position at a later date.
2. Or, if not as early as the fourth century, then certainly by the second century BCE.
3. For a description of the texts and evidence for variant arrangement of psalms at Qumran, see Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) pp. 91-138 and the recent publication by Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls & the Book of Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). A review of Flint's work by the present author will appear in an upcoming issue of *Jewish Quarterly Review*.
4. Gerald H. Wilson, "The Qumran Psalms Manuscripts and the Consecutive Arrangement of Psalms in the Masoretic Psalter," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 45 (1983), pp. 377-88.
5. The five groupings thus distinguished are: Group One - Psalms 1-41; Group Two - Psalms 42-72; Group Three - Psalms 73-89; Group Four - Psalms 90-106; Group Five - Psalms 107-150.
6. See Gerald H. Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46 (1992) pp. 129-42.
7. David - Psalms 3-41, 51-70/71 ; Asaph - Psalms 50, 73-83 ; Sons of Qorah - Psalms 42/43-49, 84-85, 87-88.
8. הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב, כִּי לַעֲוֹלָם חֶסֶד.
9. Psalm scholars have long recognized that a number of psalms reflect concerns with the ancient monarchical leadership of Israel and Judah. Psalm 45, for example, is a hymn in honor of the marriage of one of the kings, while Psalm 72 pleads for the long and wise rulership of the monarch. For a discussion of the use of such royal psalms in the shaping of the Book of Psalms, see Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (1986), pp. 85-94. The lack of a royal psalm at the seam between the first and second groupings (Psalm 41) is explained by the fact that already at an early date the first two groupings had been combined into a single collection of *prayers of David, son of Jesse* as the post-script in 72:20 indicates.

10. N.K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible-A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) p. 536.
11. For clear examples of individual laments that have been read this way, see Psalms 28, 31, and 53, where individual laments become vehicles of communal expression in the final verses.
12. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, pp. 214-228. See also David M. Howard, *The Structure of Psalms 93-100* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), a study that analyses this same section of the Psalms using very different principles and yet confirms the conclusions set out here.
13. While it is true that the hope for the Davidic king is not entirely dismissed from the last two groupings of the psalms, but appears in two particularly striking psalms (132 and 144), it seems that these psalms must now be understood messianically and eschatologically, so that the king has become that hoped for future figure who will usher in the "Kingdom of God" in which the Lord Himself rules humankind directly.
14. See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) pp. 513-514; Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, pp. 199-228 and "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46 (1992):129-42.
15. Note particularly the significant placement of psalms celebrating the Torah (1, 19; 119). Cf. James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 128-135; J. Clinton McCann, "The Psalms as Instruction," *Interpretation* 46 (1992), pp. 117-128; Walter Breuggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50(1991), pp. 63-92.
16. Jacob Neusner, *First Century Judaism in Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1975) p. 136; *There We Sat Down* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1972) pp. 36-40; Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 243.
17. Sandmel, pp. 138-40, 161-62, 243; Neusner, *There We Sat Down*, pp. 38-40; Neusner, *First Century Judaism in Crisis*, pp. 176-98.
18. Neusner, *There We Sat Down*, p. 38.
19. Neusner, *There We Sat Down*, p. 39.
20. Gottwald, pp. 535-36.
21. Additional evidence from Acts 13:33, where some texts cite a passage from Psalm 2 as from the "first psalm," confirms the possibility that Psalm 1 only assumed its present position after the composition of Acts, certainly some time in the late first century C.E.
22. Childs, p. 513
23. Sandmel, pp. 206-207
24. Neusner, *There We Sat Down*, p. 38.

PROPHETIC VIEWS OF THE DAVIDIC MONARCHY

JOSIAH DERBY

Of the various differences between prophets of the pre-Exilic period (Hosea, Amos, Isaiah 1-39, Jeremiah, Micah, Nahum) and the post-Exilic period¹ (Ezekiel, Isaiah 40-55, Isaiah 56-66, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)² the most apparent and the most significant is their eschatology. That is, their vision of the future of Israel. It is the purpose of this article to discuss this difference and to suggest the reasons for it.

The pre-Exilic prophets associated Israel's redemptive future with the House of David. Inasmuch as they lived with the reality of the monarchy, it was both logically and psychologically apt for them to envision a monarchy in Israel's future and, in keeping with the ancient promise, a Davidic king occupying the throne in Jerusalem. Even though they were highly critical³ of some Davidic kings, they saw in Hezekiah and Josiah the possibility that a perfect king could yet emerge from the line of David, who would rule over a benign and peaceful world.

There is, first and foremost, I Isaiah's universally acclaimed prophecy:

And many peoples shall go and shall say, 'Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob' Thus He will judge among the nations and arbitrate for the many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation, they shall never again know war (2:3,4).

While this passage does not mention a king in Jerusalem, it can be understood only in connection with the prophecy in which a Davidic king with Divinely-endowed powers is the ruler and judge:

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse The spirit of the Lord shall alight upon him. . . . He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the Lord; . . . Justice shall be the girdle of his loins' . . . (11:1-9).

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Then there is Isaiah 16:5: *And a throne shall be established in goodness in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler devoted to justice and zealous for equity.*

Micah, Isaiah's younger contemporary, also looks to a future Davidic king, without mentioning the dynasty by name: *And you, O Bethlehem of Ephrath, least among the clans of Judah; from you one shall come forth to rule Israel for Me, one whose origin is from of old' (5:1).*

Jeremiah, even as he castigates the people for violating the Sabbath (17:22-24) and denounces King Zedekiah (Ch. 22), for which he is incarcerated and is barely saved from execution, can still believe that some day there will sit upon the throne in Jerusalem a righteous scion of David (23:5;30:9;33:22, esp. 33:15,17).

Thus, the pre-Exilic prophets, in spite of the unsavory record of the Davidic kings and in spite of David's own faults and the murder for which he was responsible, nevertheless placed their hope in the tradition that God had made an eternal covenant with David. This had been enunciated by the Deuteronomic historian: *'Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before Me; Your throne shall be established forever' (II Sam. 7:16).* Their confidence was undoubtedly bolstered by the personalities and deeds of Hezekiah and Josiah.

This expectation is completely absent from the utterances of the post-Exilic prophets. In their vision of Israel's future,⁵ there is no room for a Davidic king. In fact, one is astonished to read that Isaiah 45:1 confers the honorific "anointed one" not upon a scion of David, as was later indelibly established by tradition, but upon the Persian conqueror Cyrus the Great. This prophet also gives Cyrus the title "My shepherd" (44:28), a designation that hitherto had applied only to kings of Israel.

What are the reasons for this silence about the Davidic line? I would suggest four.

First, there is the adage, "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." It was Cyrus⁶ (546-529 BCE) who had made it possible for the exiles in Babylonia to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-3; II Chr 36:22,23). It was Darius I (521-485 BCE) who ordered the return of the gold and silver treasures of the Temple that Nebuchadnezzar had looted. Cyrus had been the most benevolent,

liberal ruler in the ancient world. The Judean exiles flourished under his rule and some attained important places in his court and in that of his successors. For the Post-Exilic prophets to suppress the hope for a Davidic ruler as had been envisioned by their predecessors was an act of gratitude to these two great Persian emperors, their contemporaries.

Second, it would have been politically incorrect and probably dangerous for these prophets to have hoped publicly for political independence under a monarch other than a Persian. Cyrus had done away with the system of vassalage that conquerors in the Middle East had employed from time immemorial. That system had permitted the king of a conquered city or country to remain on his throne as a vassal so long as he paid the imposed annual tribute. The Bible reflects this practice by the Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors. Cyrus understood what his predecessors did not: that a native king is a symbol of independence and can become the spearhead of revolt as, indeed, frequently happened.

Nebuchadnezzar seems finally to have learned this lesson. When Zedekiah, whom he had put upon the throne in Jerusalem, rebelled against him, Nebuchadnezzar killed him and his family, and destroyed the Temple. He did not replace Zedekiah with another member of the Davidic royal family. Instead, he appointed Gedaliah ben-Ahikam to govern the remaining population of Judea (II Kg. 25:22). Cyrus, in turn, appointed satraps to govern his conquered lands, and this practice was continued by his successors.

He designated Zerubbabel ben-Shaltiel as satrap over Judea but not as king, even though Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin and next in line for David's throne. Had Cyrus violated his own principles? No. He was fully aware of Zerubbabel's lineage, but he also knew that Zerubbabel had grown up in the Babylonian court, and believed that in view of what he himself had done for the Jewish exiles, Zerubbabel would remain loyal to him. Besides, he was subordinate to the satrap over Syria.

Cyrus' calculations proved to be correct. Zerubbabel and the returnees remained loyal to him until his death. But during the interregnum that followed, Judea and other conquered provinces saw it as a window of opportunity to regain their independence. The Judeans, particularly, believed that this was a propitious moment, for the Temple was already under construction and a "shoot from the stump of Jesse" was there to reclaim the throne.

Their hopes were fanned by Haggai and Zechariah, emboldened as they were by the absence of a powerful Persian authority. Zechariah spoke directly to Zerubbabel, encouraging him in veiled language not to fear but to assume his rightful place (4:6,7). He also refers to him as "Zemah," which may have been a code name (literally "flower," though the NJPS renders it as "branch") (3:8; 6:12).⁸ Haggai addressed Zerubbabel in even stronger apocalyptic language. In cryptic words he is practically calling upon Zerubbabel to declare himself king in Jerusalem (2:20-23).

When Darius I took over the Persian throne, all these hopes came to naught. Darius spent the early years of his reign suppressing all of the rebellions that had broken out around the empire. Zerubbabel disappears from the biblical record and from the pages of history.⁹ Is it any wonder that, except for this incitement by Haggai and Zechariah, David does not figure in either their eschatology or that of the other post-Exilic prophets during the Persian period?

Third, it is quite conceivable that these prophets, looking back upon the previous centuries of their people's history, had become disillusioned with the House of David. They accepted the historical verdict that, except for Hezekiah and Josiah, the Davidic kings had failed in their loyalty to the God of Israel. Even these two kings, so highly praised by the historian, produced offspring that *did evil in the eyes of the Lord*. Instead of a scion of David, the Lord Himself would rule in Jerusalem. And so did Zechariah proclaim: *It shall be that the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one Name* (14:9), words repeated often in our liturgy. The author of Isaiah 66:23 could envision a time when all flesh will come to Jerusalem to prostrate themselves not before a human king but before the Lord. They could not see a scion of David as king over a redeemed Israel.¹⁰

There may be yet a fourth reason. The geopolitical history of the ancient Near East had demonstrated that no small state could withstand the voracious appetites of the superpowers in the region. After the rise of the Assyrian empire in the ninth century BCE, the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah had struggled desperately to maintain their independence, but ultimately had succumbed to the superpowers and suffered destruction.

The post-Exilic prophets were in a position to see the events of the preceding centuries in their historic perspective. While Haggai and Zechariah may have

been blinded to these realities by the presence of Zerubbabel and the new Temple,¹¹ the other prophets refused to ignore the sad lessons of their history. They could see in a restoration of the monarchy in Jerusalem only an invitation to disaster. The restored Israel would become *a light unto the nations*, a true Kingdom of Priests, but a kingdom without a mortal king.

Among the founders of modern Zionism it was Ahad Ha'am who advocated the idea of Palestine as a spiritual and cultural center for the Jewish people rather than a political entity. Had he been inspired by the post-Exilic prophets?

NOTES

1. The post-Exilic period is usually reckoned from the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 587 BCE until the time of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century BCE.
2. With respect to the remainder of the prophets -- Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Habakuk and Zephaniah -- there is no unanimity among scholars as to their dates. Most scholars date them late, some as late as the Maccabean period.
3. Rashi and other scholars maintain that in the "Emanuel" prophecy (Isa. 7:14) and the "prince of peace" prophecy (9:5:6) Isaiah had Hezekiah in mind.
4. There is also the well-known statement in Amos 9:11: '*In that day I will set up again the fallen booth of David.*' Most critics do not regard this as genuine. In my opinion, it may have been glossed by a Pharisaic author in opposition to the Hasmonian kings whom the Pharisees regarded as illegitimate. Amos, a contemporary of Hezekiah but prophesying in the Northern Kingdom, would hardly have made a statement like that. Similarly, Hosea 3:5 is also considered by many as a very late gloss.
5. David is mentioned (usually obliquely) eight times in I Isaiah. In the post-Exilic II Isaiah, his name occurs only once (55:3), if this citation is genuine. According to the Anchor Bible (*Second Isaiah*, p. 143) "this allusion to David does not suggest that Isaiah B sees a restored monarchy in a restored Israel." Moreover, I accept the view of those critics who maintain that the eschatological prophecies relating to David in Ezekiel (34:23, 24; 37:24, 25.) were written by him while still in Jerusalem before he went into exile with Jehoiachin in 597 BCE and hence are pre-Exilic. See O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, an Introduction* (NY: Harper & Row, 1965) p. 371.
6. In biblical times, the king and the high priest were anointed with holy oil so that מָשֹׁחַ was a gerund denoting a certain status.
7. See my article "Isaiah and Cyrus," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* XXIV (1996) pp. 173-177.
8. Jim Hicks, *The Persians* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books).
9. The designation of the future Davidic king as פְּרוֹצָא was introduced by Jeremiah (23:5) '*I will raise up a true branch of David's line and he shall reign as king.*' This prophecy is repeated in 33:15. He probably derived it from Isaiah 11:1.
10. For conjectures as to what might have happened to Zerubbabel see *Encyclopedia Mikra'it* (Hebrew) Vol. II, Col. 946.

11. There are references to the House of David in Zechariah 12:7, 10, 12; 13:1, but most scholars agree that Chapters 9-14 are from the "Greek period," that is, late fourth century BCE. See Eissfeldt, p. 434.

12. The phrase "Messiah son of David" is not found in the Bible, and is a product of the Mishnaic period: The word משיח here is the proper name of a person.

13. To refer to the mood of that period as "messianic fervor" as some historians and commentators do is anachronistic. See note 12.

עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

2000

April	Ecclesiastes Esther
May	Daniel Ezra
June	Nehemiah First Chronicles 1-10
July	First Chronicles 11-29

PSALM 91 AS RESPONSORY

ASHER EDER

This psalm, that is recited every Shabbat at morning services, is a choral reading, with a Levite choir welcoming pilgrims making their way to the Temple. I suggest that this psalm was read as a responsory: Levite, Israelite, and God.

LEVITES DECLARE:

*He that dwelleth in the secret places of the most high
shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

ISRAELITES ANSWER:

*I will say of the Lord: He is my refuge and my fortress:
my God, in Him will I trust.*

LEVITES TO ISRAELITES:

*Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,
and from the noisome pestilence.*

He shall cover thee with His feathers,

and under His wings shalt thou trust:

His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night;

nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness;

nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

A thousand shall fall at thy side,

and ten thousand at thy right hand;

but it shall not come nigh thee.

Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold

and see the reward of the wicked.

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ISRAELITES TO THE LORD:

*For thou art, O Lord, my refuge;
high didst Thou set Thine habitation.*

LEVITES TO ISRAELITES:

*There shall no evil befall thee,
neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling;
For he shall give His angels charge over thee,
to keep thee in all thy ways.
They shall bear thee up in their hands,
lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.
Thou shalt tread upon the jackal and the asp;
the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet.*

THE LORD -- AS VOICE FROM ON HIGH:

*Because he clings to Me with yearning,
therefore will I deliver him:
I will elevate him because he knew My name.
He will call upon me, and I will answer him.
I will be with him in trouble;
I will deliver him, and honor him.
With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.*

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAGER IN THE BOOK OF JOB

SIDNEY BREITBART

The Book of Job is an ancient morality play with an enigmatic text. The author presents several intertwined issues: God's justice, human righteousness, responsibility, and undeserved suffering. The premise that the action is a test of Job is overshadowed by the wager, related in the Prologues of Chapters 1 and 2, between God and Satan the Adversary. On the face of it, as far as the plot is concerned, the wager is gratuitous. To address the issues, the action may just as well have begun with the death of Job's children and loss of possessions (1:13) and skipped to his wife's despairing suggestion that Job '*blaspheme God and die*' (2:9).

Unknown to Job, of course, the wager in heaven between God and the Adversary is consummated. Satan argues that a rich man will blaspheme God if his possessions were to disappear. When this proves to be wrong, the Adversary asks God to permit an increase of the severity of Job's travail: '*Lay a hand on his bones and his flesh, and he will surely blaspheme You to Your face*' (2:5). God acquiesces, provided Job's life is spared. Satan's claims represent his acknowledgment that God is the dispenser of material well-being or poverty. The scene is thus set for the forthcoming drama involving God, man, justice, and evil (in the form of suffering).

The first thing to strike a reader as strange is: Why does the author need to have his character "God" agree to a test which involves such terrible suffering? If God makes a wager with the Adversary, it is a foregone conclusion that the test will result in God's favor. Furthermore, in classical Jewish thinking, God does not test a person beyond his capacity to pass the test. This alone distinguishes Job from the other characters in the drama -- his wife and his four friends. Such tests are really for the edification of man.

One of the main questions of the book is whether a man -- especially a man endowed with many possessions -- will maintain his strong faith in God once he

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loses not only all his possessions but also all his children, and is stricken with a terrible skin disease besides. Will his view of himself as man of integrity and righteousness remain consistent with his fate? In the midst of his suffering, Job replies to his wife, *'Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?'* (2.9). This statement reflects two ideas: (a) Every action speaks of God's will, and (b) covenantal thinking presumes the consistency of the principle of reward and punishment. In other words, Job's question comes down to: Is suffering necessarily a punishment?

The question attains a level of theodicy once his friends come to console Job. After seven days of silence, their consolation takes the form of charging Job with some terrible sin which is the cause of his great suffering. The view of these friends is simple and in concert with traditional thinking: all is well when one follows the Covenant; but if one does not obey the Covenant, suffering as a punishment is the consequence. This claim is not consistent with the reality of earthly existence in general. Clearly, experience tells that there are moral and good people who are poor and there are evil people who prosper. Moreover, Job cries out that it is not applicable in his particular case either. He denies that he is guilty of any sin that would merit such painful suffering. (He does not know, of course, that God had gone even further that this in His testimony to Satan of Job's righteousness -- *'a blameless and upright man'* [1.8]). Job cites his ethical life and his adherence to the Covenant as proof of his righteousness, and contends that if he had committed a sin, he did so unknowingly and unconsciously:

*If I have sinned, what have I done to You,
 Watcher of men?
 Why make of me your target,
 And a burden to myself?
 Why do you not pardon my transgression
 And forgive my iniquity?*

In this frame of mind, tortured by terrible suffering and convincing himself that he is beyond reproach, he challenges God to explain his suffering, not to justify the extent of it.

It may be profitable to compare and contrast Job with the Patriarch Abraham. Both of these biblical figures challenged God on the question of Divine justice, but there is a significant difference between them. Abraham challenged God about the people of Sodom and Gemorrah: *'Will you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?'* (Gen. 18:23) In contrast, Job questioned God only about his own situation, limiting his questions to his personal needs in spite of his experience which should have made him consider others. He never asked the universal question: Why may righteous people suffer? Though it is true that if he himself is righteous then he himself should not suffer, yet his narrow self-interest undermines his moral challenge to God.

Two of Job's early statements are highly personal and simplistic, though one is from God's point-of-view. The first is: *'The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'* (1.21). The second is: *'Should we accept only good from God, and not accept evil?'* (2.10). Presently, Job will climb up to issues more complex and theological. His extreme suffering, which he takes as inconsistent with the claim of righteousness, pushes Job to question Divine justice:

He destroys the blameless and the guilty (9:22).

The earth is handed over to the wicked one; He covers the eyes of its judges. If it is not He, then who? (9:24)

Why do You hide Your face, And treat me like an enemy? (13:24)

I cry 'Violence!' but am not answered; I shout but get no justice (19:7).

Men groan in the city; The souls of the dying cry out; Yet God does not regard it as a reproach (24:12).

While Job discourses on Divine justice and insists on his integrity, his friends counter with the argument that his transgressions are the true cause of his suffering. (They do not address Job's claim that even if had sinned, his sin is minor and his suffering imbalanced.) Job rejects their basic argument and asserts:

*'I have followed in His tracks,
Kept His way without swerving.
I have not deviated from what His lips commanded;
I have treasured His words more than my daily bread (22:11-12).*

The debate is between strong believers in the idea of covenantal reward and punishment, and a believer that this principle is *not a consistent necessity* in life. Indeed, the Book of Job may be an imaginative presentation of the problem, but there is no shortage of examples in Jewish history where Job's questions are asked, explicitly or implicitly: the Crusades, the Inquisition, repeated pogroms, persistent, undying anti-Semitism, the Nazi Holocaust. The friends' argument would demand presuming that the victims of these onslaughts in history were sinners, but there is no evidence of sin in these Jews. Of course, these Jews were imperfect, but that truth only recalls Job's argument that if he had sinned, it is a small thing in no way proportionate to the suffering exacted. Thus, Jews need not feel disloyal to the Jewish tradition if they reject the covenantal idea that all suffering is Divine punishment for sin. To do otherwise in spite of experience and history is to condemn the victims to a false consciousness of themselves as the source of the evil that had befallen them. In the case of Job, he refused to assume this false consciousness, while his friends were ready to do so, and this may be the reason for God's displeasure with them at the end of the book.

Indeed, the reader is permitted to know that the source of Job's fate does lie outside of Job. It lies ostensibly in the wager between God and the Adversary, which is possibly why the author of the book felt the need to include the Prologues in the text. In his ignorance of the immediate cause of his suffering, Job does not utter blasphemous words, but persists in proclaiming his ignorance and demanding of God an explanation through a direct meeting with Him. God finally succumbs. He speaks to him out of the whirlwind. However, God cannot provide an explanation, because Job's dreadful fate was a direct result of a wager. On the other hand, the Adversary is absent from the chapters at the end when God answers, perhaps to show the reader that God had given permission to the Adversary to visit these sufferings upon Job, but in the last analysis it was God's will that oversaw the test and "called the shots" as it were. On this point, Satan can have no lines to speak.

God confronts Job with a series of seemingly rhetorical questions that are irrelevant to Job's desire for an explanation. God's answer implies, indeed, that it is presumptuous of man to question God and to expect an explanation of universal justice. God's answer stands in sharp contrast to His patient answers to Abraham in the case of Sodom and Gemorrah. Nevertheless, there is in God's oration no implication of guilt in Job, which may offer Divine vindication of both Job's innocence and his argument, even though God did not actually affirm that there is suffering without sin. Job evidently still is as blameless and upright and he was when God said so in the first chapter of the book.

God's constant reference to His awesome celestial power -- the Creation of the universe -- is really an evasion of explanation either of God's plan of justice or of entering into a wager in the first place. The whole point is that God does not, or, indeed, cannot, explain to a mere mortal. Job gets the point. Finally encountering God in the whirlwind, he makes the decision to trust God, not because of His omnipotent power (which he never questioned), but because of His "living presence."

Job admits:

*'See, I am of small worth; what can I answer You?
I clap my hand to my mouth.
I have spoken once, and will not reply,
Twice, and will do so no more' (40. 4-5).*

And elaborates:

*'Indeed, I spoke without understanding
Of things beyond me, which I did not know.
Here now, and I will speak: [. . .]
I had heard You with my ears,
But now I see you with my eyes;
Therefore, I recant and relent,
Being but dust and ashes' (42.3-6).*

In uttering these words, Job lowers the value of man and his dignity to the lowest denominator; he makes no reference to the biblical statement that man was made in the image of God and that God assigned the dominion of earth to man (Gen. 1.27, 28).

On the other hand, the author of the Book of Job does stress the value of man in two ways. First, he does have God come down to speak with this mortal. Second, as Eliphaz, the fourth of the friends, declares:

*'Evil does not grow out of the soil,
Nor does mischief spring from the ground'* (4.5-6).

He is right: Along with being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth, comes the challenge and responsibility of free will, whether the deed be righteous or evil. Thus, the Book of Job comes to imply a relationship between its hero and Adam.

The wager can be seen as indicative of God's arbitrary fiat placing Job under a test, as God's admonition to Adam placed him under a test. Adam was not given a choice in the matter. God created the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. Adam was placed therein and burdened with the admonition not to eat of the fruit of that tree. "Knowledge of Good and Evil" presupposes the prior existence of good and evil on a spiritual plane and the tree symbolizes the creation of good and evil on earth as well. In choosing good, man demonstrates his morality and enters into an ethical relationship with God as His partner. In choosing evil or by rejecting God's challenge, man denies God and his own humanity.

But the implacable paradox remains: Job's situation falls outside the premise of reward for choosing good and punishment for choosing evil. He was subjected to terrible pain because of the wager and not because of his own choices. He did make a choice, though. He chose to stand by his righteousness, being the only one of the cast of characters with the capacity to do so. Apparently this made him God's hero, for he was ultimately rewarded, and his friends were scolded. Moreover, God spoke to him out of the whirlwind -- without explanations, but also without blaming Job for his choice of persistence. Neither Job nor mankind got any answers from God, but who ever promised man that he would ever get all the answers?

LEADERSHIP IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

JEFFREY M. COHEN

The Book of Numbers [Hebrew: *BeMidbar* -- In the Wilderness] has since ancient times been referred to as *Chomesh HaPekudim*. This is clearly intended as a reference to the "numbers" of the Israelites -- though that topic is confined to Chapters 1-4 and 26. Yet the root "*p-k-d*" has another, related usage: namely, "appoint" or "lead." Hence the noun "*pakid*" is found with the various meanings of "commissioner," "deputy," or "overseer."

From this perspective, the term *Chomesh HaPekudim* has a far more comprehensive relevance to the contents of the entire book. It may be taken in the sense of "The Book of Leadership," for that is the recurring theme throughout the book. Indeed, there is not one portion which does not provide us with some insight into the nature of Moses' leadership and the manifold challenges with which a leader has to contend.

It has been said that a truly great leader turns weakness into strength, obstacles into stepping stones, and disasters into triumphs. Moses, in large measure, did just that. He never forgot that, from the time God first appeared to him with a call to leadership, He had made a point of referring to Israel as *עַם* [My people] (Ex 3:7, 10:7:4), and had insisted that Moses employ that term when demanding their release from Pharaoh (1:7, 16, 26; 8:16; 9:1; 13; et al). This imposed on Moses a rather anomalous form of leadership, in an era when the pharaohs viewed themselves as god-kings and other monarchs owned the lives of their subjects. By contrast, Moses was a leader whose very mission it was to direct the nation's loyalty and fealty elsewhere. It is impossible, as the rabbis point out, for two kings to share the same crown. It was no easier for Moses to share it with God. It took a rare kind of man, a unique type of leader. The Book of Numbers provides a continuous chronicle of the specific quality and nature of Moses' leadership, as well as providing insights into other forms of leadership, whether complementary or competitive.

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The opening portion gives the names of the 12 tribal leaders *asher ya'amdu itkhem* [who shall stand by you] (1:5), and those of subsidiary leaders from influential families (3:14ff). It is clear from the outset that, even in day-to-day affairs, Moses was not granted any independent, let alone autocratic, power.

The second portion provides guidelines for the spiritual and cultic leadership of Aaron and his sons. Though, on the whole, there was a happy working relationship, yet since Moses was also a spiritual leader, it could not have been without its problems. Indeed, Leviticus 10:16-20, wherein Moses chides Aaron for being remiss in the discharge of his ritual duty, exemplifies the inevitable strain occasioned by these overlapping leadership roles.

This portion goes on to define the relationship of the priestly religious leader to his flock. This is exemplified in the Priestly Blessing (6:23-27) which the priests must bestow on the people each day, in a relationship not of privilege but of *ahavah* [love]. Moses had been cautioned to remember that Israel is God's people, not his, and a similar caution is implicit in the final words of instruction on the blessing: *'And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel, but I will bless them.'* (This emphasis is inferred from the use of the subject pronoun *va'ani avorakheim* [And I shall be the One to bless them], instead of simply *va'avorakheim*.)

The portion goes on to define the relationship of the tribal leaders to the Tabernacle, and details the installation of those leaders in office through a symbolic offering of their gifts. Their sacrificial offerings symbolize the element of sacrifice that is essential in the calling of the Israelite leader.

The third portion refers to the flawed leadership, that of the firstborn, who were replaced by Levites because of the wholesale sin of worshipping the Golden Calf (8:15-26). In that incident, all the tribes and their firstborn participated, with only the Levites and priests remaining aloof from that widespread act of apostasy.

It also chronicles the agony and loneliness of the leader, as echoed in Moses' *crie de coeur*, *'Why have You done such harm to Your servant, and why have I not found favor before You, that you have put upon me the burden of this entire people?'* (11:11).

The fourth portion presents the episodes of the spies, and also discloses the *sine qua non* for leadership: namely, the ability to love one's people and to give one's all for them, regardless of their obduracy and rebelliousness. For all that Moses suffers from his faithless flock and their flawed tribal leadership, he puts up the most eloquent, passionate and persuasive defense for them when God suggests that He might destroy them and build a new nation through Moses (14:13ff).

The following portion describes the rival bid for leadership by a man with an alternative political and religious philosophy that was calculated to appeal to the masses: *'The entire assembly is equally holy, why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?'* (16:3).

The succeeding portion highlights the enormous pressures of leadership, as Moses falters for an instant, and strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. Not a terrible crime, we might think; but for the leader who is in communication with the Lord and Creator of the universe, every syllable ought to be sacrosanct. Imagine if, in the course of Creation, the channel of Divine communication had become obstructed, and one word or letter of God's fiat had not been translated into practice. The entire, delicate and interactive plan for Creation could have been thrown into confusion, with the cosmos returning to primeval chaos. So Moses, as a flawed conduit for the Divine fiat, has to be replaced as leader.

The next portion demonstrates how Moses, for all his tender feelings for his people, knows where to draw the line. When the Divine order is given to cut down the ringleaders of the widespread fornication with the daughters of Moab, Moses displays nerves of steel, and issues the inevitably unpopular command.

Then comes a portion that describes the relationship of the mainstream leader to the charismatic zealot. Moses knew when to stand back and allow Phinehas to act at a critical moment when the entire moral framework of the Israelite camp was in danger of disintegration. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad (27:1-11) clearly defines the integrity of the leader unafraid to admit his own lack of information and his quest for heavenly guidance.

In another portion, Moses displays fury with his commanders for not observing to the letter the commands he gave them (31:13ff). He teaches them that the

heat of battle is no excuse for overlooking a single instruction. Leadership involves the demand for total obedience.

In the final portion, the leader is given and transmits the most detailed instructions regarding the precise borders of the Holy Land. Harmonious relations with one's neighbor is predicated upon a clear understanding of where the boundaries of my country stops and his begins.

So, if I were to produce an annotated edition of the Torah, I would describe the Book of Numbers as The Book of Leadership. It provides fascinating and edifying insights into that subject, though the indubitable message it conveys is that leadership of such an individualistic people is at best hazardous, and at worst impossible.

II

We referred above to the flawed leadership of the Israelite firstborn. The verses continue the theme of flawed leadership in its description of the 12 "princes" chosen by Moses to spy out and assess the Promised Land (Chs. 13-14), leaders whose false but persuasive report implants despair in the hearts of the Israelites.

This episode surely calls into question Moses' ability to assess the character and leadership potential of those in his inner circle. How could he have been so blind as not to detect the faint-hearted nature of those leaders?

Most pertinent is the observation in the Talmud on the opening words '*Send for yourself*': I am not commanding you to do so. If you want, then send . . . but I have already promised them that it is a goodly land. Sending spies will only provide an opportunity for leading the nation astray.

And yet, notwithstanding God's patent lack of enthusiasm for such an exercise, Moses proceeds with it, thereby providing the leaders with enough rope to hang themselves. Is it an inescapable conclusion that Moses displayed an astonishing degree of political naivete? If so, then the key to understanding the episode of the spies lies rather in a deeper examination of the nature of leadership than in the matter of the fear or lack of faith of the spies and the Israelite nation.

Leadership is a balancing act, between satisfying the basic and unquenchable desires of the masses and at the same time controlling those desires in their own

long-term interests. Leaders are only as good as their followers allow them to be, and they can never really be sure whether their people are following or chasing them. Perhaps it is against this background that we must view the role of Moses in this episode. Moses was presented with an agonizing dilemma: If he refused to allow the nation to glean some first-hand information about the land, he would have opened himself up to the charge of having had something to hide, of suppressing some unpalatable truths about the Promised Land, which once revealed would have led the nation to revolt and despair.

His only alternative was to grant the request, even though this involved conceding appointment of people for that mission whom he knew from the outset were flawed. Moses had no choice but to send out men whose horizons were narrow. They saw giants in the Promised Land, and were sorely afraid. They did not marvel at a land whose rich vegetation and natural properties were could breed men of superhuman strength. They did not conclude that this was precisely why God had chosen that land, above all others, to give to His Chosen people, in order to endow their progeny with similar strength.

One may wonder whether Moses was remiss for not having nurtured a young generation of worthy tribal leaders. His problem may well have been that this could so easily have been construed as interference in the autonomy of the tribes, as stifling popular leadership, as imposing central authority and not allowing any measure of devolution. In short, as creating a dictatorship. This he neither would nor could do. After all, they were God's people -- not his.

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DARSHANUT

Darshanut, derived from the Hebrew root darash [explicate, expound], presents the expository, homiletic interpretation of the Bible. Its origins are as old as the most ancient aggadic and midrashic teachings and as new as the sermon or D'var Torah delivered on the most recent Shabbat. The intent is a challenge to relate the Bible to the problems, issues and goals of daily living.

We encourage our readers to contribute to Darshanut. The submission should be based on the Bible, no more than 750 words in length, and as relevant and current as you would like to make it. For more information on submissions, see the inside back cover.

IT'S ALL IN THE TRANSLATION

DAN VOGEL

The April-June 1999 issue of The Jewish Bible Quarterly carried an essay, "On the Inadequacy of Translation." The following article discusses an instance where translation may actually help in explicating a biblical verse. It is a revised version of an article that appeared in Tehuda, a journal published by Congregation. Beit Yosef, Jerusalem, Erev Pesach, 5758

Translation has an honored place in the tradition of biblical exegesis. Translations have been helpful in understanding not only the plain meaning of the Hebrew text, but also the embedded meanings inherent in it. Even Rashi, exegete *par excellence* to the present day, quite frequently referred for clarification of a word or of a concept to the ancient Aramaic translation by Onkelos -- a work that because of its excellence is called simply "the Targum" [the Translation]. Similarly, it can happen that a translation in a modern language, such as English, can contribute to deeper understanding of a verse.

Take, for example, Deuteronomy 10:12, one of the most popular verses in the whole Bible:

Dan Vogel was Professor of English at Yeshiva University and Dean of Stern College before aliyah in 1973. He then served as Chairman of the Department of English at Michlalah-Jerusalem College until retirement in 1995. He is the author of Three Masks of American Tragedy, Emma Lazarus, and numerous articles on literature.

ועתה ישראל מה ה' א-להיך שאל מעמך
 כי אם ליראה את ה' א-להיך ללכת בכל דרכיו
 ולאהבה אתו ולעבד את ה' א-להיך.
 בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך.

The Jewish Publication Society translation of 1916 renders this verse:

And now, Israel, what doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

In this translation, the Hebrew ליראה [*yirah*] = "to fear." On the face of it, and owing to our familiarity with this English rendering of the verse, "to fear" has long been accepted as the proper translation. There are, however, conceptual difficulties with it. In Nechama Leibowitz's explication of this verse, Aryeh Newman, her excellent translator, translates *yirah* as "fear" both in this biblical passage and in the passage from the *Sefer Ha'Ikkarim* of Joseph Albo, that she quotes as part of her explication:

When [the soul] acquires this attribute of *fearing* God [my italics], then the soul is elevated and is prepared to attain eternal life But it is extremely difficult to attain this quality, and yet it can be attained by observing the commandments of the Torah.¹

Is it really true that the attribute of *fear* is so difficult to attain?

"Fear," the dictionaries insist, is connected with expectation or awareness of danger (or, I may add, punishment or pain). Many of us have already experienced fear (as well as love) toward our earthly fathers. Regarding our Divine Father, fear seems to be quite easy to feel. We cringe twice annually at the recitation of the two long passages of curses (in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) that have come to realization over the eons of Jewish history. And we are reminded twice daily in the second paragraph of the *Shema* (Deut. 11:13-21) of what will happen to the Land and to us if we deviate from the Lord's commandments. No, it is not difficult to "fear" the Lord.

"Fear," in the sense of impending uncomfortability, however, does not seem to be what Deuteronomy 10:12 is talking about, nor what Albo is trying to teach us to reach for. There is another word in English that coalesces the recognition of Divine Power and our outpouring of love, and that is "reverence." *The*

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1969) defines *reverence* as "a feeling of profound awe and respect and often of love; veneration." Not a word about danger, pain, or punishment. In fact, *The American Heritage Dictionary*, and indeed *Roget's Thesaurus*, do not even list "reverence" as a synonym of "fear." The terms seem to be, by definition, emotions apart.

Though "awe" is part of the dictionary definition of "reverence," there is a difference between them that Hebrew always understood. For example, אָרַךְ, the root of אָרַךְ, also yields אָרַח [norah], widely translated as "awe," as in *Yomim Noraim* [Days of Awe -- i.e., Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur]. "Awe," however, implies a wonder so great that the awestruck is enervated into a kind of passionate passivity. "Reverence," on the other hand, implies responses that display a sublime active feeling toward God, a desire to perform some kind of reverential act. Applying "reverence" in the translation of Deuteronomy 10:12 clarifies what both this verse and Joseph Albo intended to convey. The Jewish Publication Society translators nearly 50 years later came to realize that their original translation was inadequate. In their new rendering (1969) they have:

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the LORD your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and soul . . .

With this translation, we can begin to understand Albo's notion that the attainment of *yirah* -- that is, "reverence" -- is easier said than done. For him, *to walk in the ways of the Lord* means to "observ[e] the commandments of Torah,"¹ which is, admittedly, vague. To concretize the generalization, Joseph Albo refers to two verses in Leviticus 19:14 and 19:32.

Now, both of these verses appear in the chapter where the children of Israel are commanded to be holy [קִדְשׁוּם יְהוָה]. Thirty-seven verses in this chapter tell the children of Israel how to do so. Most of them end with the most important motivation: 'I am the Lord.' The two that Albo refers to are the only ones to include the command וַיִּרְאֵהָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם [v'yareta'h Elohekha]. Unfortunately, in these two verses, unlike Deuteronomy 10.12, the JPS still mistakenly translates *yirah* as "fear": *You shall fear your God*. But we now know better; if Albo sent us to these verses, then the phrase should be translated as, *You shall revere your God*, and that is how I shall presume to translate it in the following:

You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind.

You shall revere your God: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:14).

You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall revere your God: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:32).

Many of the other verses in this chapter on the attainment of holiness are in the second person plural; these are in the second person singular. (English-language pronoun forms make no distinction, but the Hebrew does.) Most of the other verses deal with communal conduct; these deal with individual conduct. When other verses are in the singular, they refer to natural tendencies, like honoring one's father and mother; these verses select specific acts that one must learn and practice.

Now we can understand more fully why, from all other mentionings of *yirah* in the Torah, Joseph Albo selected precisely these two verse in Leviticus. No threats of punishment, no theodicy, no philosophy of ethics, no animal sacrifices, no grandiose actions are necessary. Simple individual acts of *menschlichkeit*, of sensitivity to one's fellow beings. That, implies Joseph Albo, is how one reaches the pinnacle of reverence for the Lord.

A proper translation is not a matter of accurate linguistics only. It can also be a matter of understanding and appreciating a nuance in Hebrew that can become a homiletic concept. Indeed, in the case of Deuteronomy 10:12, it's all in the translation.

NOTES

1. *Studies in Devarim (Deuteronomy)*, trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: WZO, 1980) pp. 100-101.
2. *Ibid.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Berel Dov Lerner, in his article "Saving the Akedah from the Philosophers" (XXVII:3, July-September 1999) is missing one important fact in his discussion. Abraham lived all his life in a pagan culture where the sacrifice of children was prevalent. The charge to Abraham to sacrifice his son presented him with a dilemma: Did the charge originate from the pagan culture or from the true God? The true God would not require the sacrifice because it would contradict God's promise to Abraham. He decided that the voice came from his culture. He decided to go through with the process knowing that the true God would stop him from performing the sacrifice. If the order not to hurt Isaac failed to materialize, Abraham would abort the action because it originated from the culture in which he was living. I suggest to the reader my article "The Akedah -- A Test of God," published in *JBQ* (XV:19-28, 1986).

Sidney Breitbart
Aberdeen, MD

Sir,

In Genesis 25:29-34, we have the account of Jacob's acquisition of Esau's birthright. Following this, Isaac is deceived into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. Our enemies routinely use these incidents to excoriate the "perfidious Jew," the contents of Genesis 25:23 notwithstanding.

Is the story as straightforward as it appears?

Esau willingly gives up his birthright for a "mess of pottage" which he could easily have taken by force, so the matter was obviously of no great concern to him at the time. Given what we are led to believe about the character of Esau, how could Jacob be sure Esau would not, on later reflection, renege on the agreement? If there was such a doubt, was the transaction effected in the presence of witnesses? If so, is it not a possibility that, during the course of his life, Isaac would have come to hear of it? The incident may well have suited Isaac who, although he loved Esau for other reasons, realized that he was not the person to carry on his own (Isaac's) traditions and those of Abraham. Under these circumstances it would be prudent to remain silent.

When the time comes for Isaac to bless his sons, Jacob's arms are covered with kids' skins in order to deceive Isaac into thinking he is dealing with Esau. Isaac had lived all his life with flocks of sheep and goats. Is it likely he would

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have mistaken a kid's skin for the arm of a man, however hirsute? The question of Jacob's voice is a little by-play to show Isaac is still aware of what is going on and only lends greater force to his eventual blessing of Jacob.

Do we, in fact, see here a parallel and unspoken conspiracy between Isaac and Rebekah to ensure that Jacob is the true inheritor of the Abrahamic line?

Oscar Davies
Jerusalem

Sir,

More on the gematria of Genesis 14:14. The number is odd inasmuch as the Bible usually speaks in round figures. Since Eliezer is prominently featured in the Abraham cycle, one must be impressed that 318 is precisely the gematria of his name: *aleph* = 1; *lamed* = 30; *yod* = 10; *ayin* = 70; *zayin* = 7; *resh* = 200. Sum total: 318

Rabbi Israel C. Stein
Bridgeport USA

Sir,

I enjoyed reading the article "The Treatment of Women in Deuteronomy" by Jonathan R. Ziskind (XXVII:3-4, July-September and October-December 1999). Yet, with all due respect to the views of the author, it is my impression that the laws of Deuteronomy are deliberately intended to give women more freedom from male control. For example, in the Judah-Tamar affair, Tamar could not budge to remarry as long as other younger brothers lived who might have to marry her. Deuteronomic law frees the widow from this heavy bond through allowing the brother and the widow freedom of action.

Moreover, in Deuteronomy, as was pointed out, the role of the father was greatly diminished. Again, the goal was not, to me, a transfer of power to the court but rather the intent to allow the woman more freedom to act. Thus another passage might be appended to this article: "At the same time, Deuteronomy also freed the widow from being bound to one person to marry. She was now free through the ceremony of *halitzah* -- having adequately demonstrated her loyalty to her deceased husband -- to marry the man of her choice."

Benjamin Goodnick
Philadelphia PA

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