

MIDRASHIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE TERM *HOLID*

DAN VOGEL

In the various genealogies listed in the Torah, the favorite word for "begot," that is, "fathered," is "ויולד." The Torah also uses two grammatical derivations from that term, "הוליד" and "הולידו," to express past tense. In the New Jewish Publication Society English translation all three are rendered "begot." The morphological correctness of הוליד and הולידו as a past tense is not under question. However, it will be noticed that typically it is used in connection with the choice of one out of many children of the generation. Of all the offspring [בנים ובנות] in the generation, this individuated one is singled out for two purposes: As a marker for the aging of the father, and as an implication that the father made an attempt to rear this son with his values -- whether they are acceptable to God or not.

FROM ADAM TO TERAH

The first major list in the Torah of the early generations of mankind appears in Genesis 5. This chapter lists the 10 generations from Adam that eventually resulted in the birth of Noah. A typical text reads:

ויחי שת חמש שנים ומאת שנה ויולד את אנוש.
ויחי שת אחרי הולידו את אנוש שבע שנים ושמונה מאות שנה ויולד בנים
ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי שת שתים עשרה שנה ותשע מאות שנה ושלושים
שנה, וימת. (ה' ו-ח)

When Seth had lived 105 years, he begot Enosh. After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and begot sons and daughters. All the days of Seth came to 912 years; then he died (Gen. 5.6-8).¹

The recording of each succeeding generation follows this model.

This, as Genesis 5:1 says, is the record of Adam's line: Adam > Seth > Enosh > Kenan > Mahalal > Jared > Enoch > Methusaleh > Lamech > Noah. The Midrash caught the implication of "הולידו" and commented on these 10 genera-

Dan Vogel was a professor of English at Michlalah - Jerusalem College for Women. He wrote this essay in memory of Rabbi David Mirsky of Yeshiva University, New York. It is reprinted by permission of Jewish Thought from its issue of Spring 5753. He is currently an Associate Editor of The Jewish Bible Quarterly.

tions and each progenitor favorably.² "There were seven pious men of pre-Abrahamic times: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mehelel, Enoch, Noah, and Shem." The eighth in the Midrash's listing is already a son of Noah (Ginzberg V:150, n.53).³ The first five of these, together with Jared (though he is not of these holy seven) and Enoch (who is), wrote eschatological books. In a revelation to Enoch, God mentions the writings of "thy fathers" which are guarded by two angels until an apocalyptic time when "I will show . . . the books . . . to the men who are true and please me" (Ginzberg I:136; V:150, n.53).

Thus, of the 10 progenitors, seven plus Noah are accounted for as pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. The Midrash, however, does not neglect the two not mentioned in these listings: Methusaleh and Lamech. Methusaleh is called "a pious man" who, at his death, was mourned by all the people on earth as well as by celestial beings (Ginzberg I:141-42). For Lamech is reserved high compliments indeed: When a son was born to him, he went to his father Methusaleh to petition *his* father Enoch on the child's behalf. Enoch was able to vouchsafe to Lamech that his son Noah will be instrumental in cleansing the earth and restarting mankind (Ginzberg I:145-46). The Midrash sums up that Lamech "followed the path of his father and son whole-heartedly" (Ginzberg VI:175, n.20).

In its treatment of these generations, the Midrash establishes one of the major themes about the individuals singled out by הַיְהוֹדֵת or הַיְהוֹדֵת ; they contributed to a generational chain of interaction that will one day form the sociological basis of the future Jewish nation and its monotheistic faith. Thus, Ginzberg can remark that "Seth [was] of excellent character, so he left children behind him who imitated his virtues" (Ginzberg I:121). The word "so" says it all as far as the rabbis of the Midrash are concerned; because Seth was of excellent character, his children inevitably turned out to be likewise. Indeed, Ginzberg concludes: ". . . Seth became, in a genuine sense, the father of the human race, especially the father of the pious, while the depraved and godless are descended from Cain" (Ginzberg I:121). Unfortunately, the descendants of Cain won out. Regardless of the qualities of these 10 pious progenitors, the Flood became inevitable.

After this cleansing, humankind had to begin all over again.

Genesis 10 catalogs the descendants of Noah's sons. It is noteworthy that in this passage the Torah uses forms of the term יָלַד but not הוֹלִיד or הוֹלִי , thus

implying the relative spiritual passivity of these individuals -- except for one line of the family of Shem, upon which it is about to expound.

In Genesis 11, after the Tower of Babel, humankind is dispersed. In 11:10, the Torah now turns its attention to Shem's family line to record the revival of the spiritual relationship with God. Here, the Torah reverts to the policy of selecting one of several sons and reiterating the same verse pattern as in the earlier genealogy in Genesis 5: the progenitor יָרָא [begot] a son; after הוֹלִידוֹ ["having begot"] this son, he lives a certain number of years, siring sons and daughters. But there is one great difference, on which Sforno, the medieval exegete comments:

It is not said of any of the following generations in this chapter [11] that they died, as it does of the first ten generations from Adam to Noah [Ch. 5]. The reason is that all those generations had died by the time of the Flood, which is the culmination of that section of the Scriptural narrative. All these generations, on the other hand, were still alive when Abraham sought to lead men to worship the God of love, the account of which is the central feature of this section.⁴

This is the line of Shem, the Torah particularizes: Shem > Arpachshad > Shelah > Eber > Peleg > Reu > Serug > Nahor > Terah > Abraham and his brothers Nahor and Haran. Of these 10 generations, every one of them identified by הוֹלִידוֹ, well-known or obscure, is afforded a favorable midrashic comment. Shem, Arpachshad, and Shelah were "pious men" (Ginzberg VI:195, n.72). Peleg ("division") received an historical name, for in his time the peoples were dispersed. Reu prophesied that from Serug "shall be born in the fourth generation [one who] shall be called perfect and spotless, and his covenant shall not be dissolved and his seed shall be multiplied forever" (i.e., he predicted the coming of Abraham) (Ginzberg I:185). Finally, Nahor (not be confused with Terah's second son of the same name) was God-fearing (Ginzberg V:208, n. 5).

With the mention of Terah, Abraham's future father, the Torah breaks the pattern of reporting. It begins this series with וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת שֵׁם [*This is the line of Shem*], and concludes it innocuously with וַיְחִי תֵרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּלְדֵת אֶת אַבְרָם וְאֶת נְחוֹר וְאֶת חָרָן [And Terah lived seventy years and begot Abram and Nahor and Haran] (Gen. 11:26). Now the Torah is ready to say something special about Terah's line. So, in Genesis 11:27, it uses the rubric וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת

תרח [*and this is the line of Terah*], and reprises what it had just told us, emphasizing: תרח הוליד את אברם את נחור ואת הרן [*And Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran*].

THE UNIQUE CASE OF TERAH

To understand the uniqueness of the case of Terah, Abraham's father, we must leap for the moment to the famous genealogical verse Genesis 25.19: ואלה נולדה תולדות יצחק בן אברהם, אברהם הוליד את יצחק. [*This the story of Isaac, son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac*].

The redundancy did not, of course, escape the commentators. Among the comments they offer, one is relevant to our subject, that of Radak:

[Isaac] was straightforward and trustworthy and walked in the way of the good and loved mankind, like his father, so that all said about him: אברהם הוליד את יצחק -- Abraham begot Isaac. [My translation – D.V.]

Rashi reacts to the gossip of "the scorners of the generation" that Abimelech was the true father of Isaac by emphasizing the physical likeness of Isaac to Abraham. However, Radak here seems to recapitulate and stress what we have noticed the Midrash had done with prior progenitors for whom the term הוליד was used: the spiritual inheritance from the father is evident in the spiritual likeness of the son.

Heretofore, the term indicated a positive heritage from father to son. To apply Radak's interpretation of הוליד to Terah > Abraham might, on the face of it, be considered an anomaly. Terah, according to the Midrash, was an idol-worshipper himself, and also a maker of idols for sale. The Torah's term that he had הוליד his sons must indicate that Terah tried to lead them in his idolatrous ways. He succeeded with Nahor and Haran, but failed with Abraham, the first monotheist. There are several well-known midrashim of Abraham mocking buyers of the idols his father left for him to sell, and of Abraham teasing his father about the impotency of the figures of wood he had fashioned with his own hands (Ginzberg I:195ff.). And yet, nonetheless, the Midrash finds some favorable things to say about Terah.

Terah was a high official in the court of Nimrod, yet suddenly:

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there (Gen. 11:31).

Why did Terah decide to leave even *before* Abraham got the Divine call to go on *his* journey? And, ironically, why was it to Canaan that Terah headed, when God did not even tell Abraham that land was to be his terminus?

Abraham, the Midrash tells us, preached monotheism to his father and brothers. Nahor and Haran resisted; Terah, on the other hand, became convinced (Ginzberg V:217,n.49), and God accounted Terah's decision to leave the land of his birth and start to go to Canaan as "a great merit." The father enjoyed basking in Abraham's glory for many years of remaining life in the city of Haran (Ginzberg I:206). It may not be too much, then, to conjecture that a touch of intellectual openness was passed on from Terah to Abraham, who, born and reared in an idolatrous household, nevertheless became the first monotheist. At the very least, Terah was ready to be on the receiving end of the prophet's dictum: *The parents [will be reconciled] with their children* (Mal. 3:25). This is a reverse twist to the Midrash's insistence on the principle of the flow of generational influence that was to characterize the Jewish people.

There is another possible indication of Terah's ancestral value. To his son Nahor was born Bethuel, *the father of Rebekah* (Gen. 22:23) as well as of Laban. In a family known for deceit and guile, from where did Rebekah receive the trait of hospitality that she showed to Eliezer the servant of Abraham and the willingness to leave her own family to join that of her saintly uncle (Gen. 24)? Perhaps the trait that made Terah willing to convert to the worship of the One God and follow His teachings somehow showed up in the genetic make-up of his great-granddaughter.⁵ Perhaps a bare touch had even been absorbed by her father and brother, for they blessed her at the moment of her decision (Gen. 24:60).

Not even her grandfather Nahor was entirely incorrigible. The Midrash tells us that Abraham "suffered terribly" when his brother Nahor died in Haran (Ginzberg V:216,n.48). That Abraham would mourn a spiritually wayward brother is understandable, but "terribly"? Perhaps Nahor too, like his father, felt a yearning toward Abraham's God, and Abraham intuited it. By using תֵּרַח for Terah as progenitor, the Torah may be implying that somehow he was not all bad.

Not so with Haran, father of Lot. He accepted without demur Terah's idolatrous teachings. Haran, the Midrash indicates indignantly, was an opportunist in faith. When Nimrod cast those who would not worship idols into the fire one by one, Haran watched Abraham go first, thinking: "If he comes forth out of the fiery trial triumphant, I will declare my allegiance to him; otherwise I will take sides against him." Of course, the steadfast Abraham emerged unscathed, and the vacillating Haran was burnt as a punishment for his vacillation (Ginzberg I:202; V:214, n.39).

These traits of indecision Haran seems to have passed on to his son Lot. Lot accompanied his uncle Abraham to Canaan, and prospered with him, but it eventuated into an uncomfortable relationship. Because of arguments between their shepherds, Abraham suggested to his nephew: *'Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; if you go south, I will go north'* (Gen. 13:9). So Lot looked around him, saw how fertile the Jordan Valley was, and went down to settle in wicked Sodom. For this decision, the Midrash excoriates him: "Lot thereupon separated himself not from Abraham alone, but from the God of Abraham, and betook himself to a district in which immorality reigned supreme, wherefore punishment overtook him" (Ginzberg I:228). For the rabbis of the Midrash, this decision symbolized the fact that Lot, like his father Haran, was irresolute regarding Abraham's God.

And yet, a positive tendency may have been inherited from his grandfather Terah. Lot did learn something from his years with Abraham -- hospitality, one of Abraham's most famous traits. When the divine beings left Abraham's tent to descend to Sodom to fulfill the fiat to destroy it, Lot did take them into his house against the law and will of the Sodomites. For this, he was rewarded. One of the angels saved him from the fire-and-brimstone destruction.⁶

To climax this series of using *הוֹלִיט* to affirm the influence of father upon a son in the progeny of Terah, the Torah says that *אֵת יִצְחָק אֲבִי הוֹלִיטָם*, a rubric that we mentioned above. It all flows into the veins and mind of the patriarch Isaac. Like his grandfather and father, Isaac shall have to deal with a son that resists for a time the ways of the One God and a son that embraces them wholeheartedly. It is, of course, Jacob who will go on to father the 12 sons who will become the Jewish nation. Among that genealogy, only two instances of *הוֹלִיט* appear, and to those we now turn our attention.

IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

The Book of Numbers presents several genealogical lists, now registered by tribe as well as by father. In Numbers 26:29, while recording the descendants of Joseph, appears the following terse statement: בני מנשה למכיר משפחת [Descendants of Manasseh: Of Machir, the clan of the Machirites -- Machir begot Gilead]. Why was Machir > Gilead singled out for the distinctive הוליד connection?

We will not know until we peruse the midrashim on Gilead's great-granddaughters, the daughters of his grandson Zelophehad, who challenged Moses on the point of a daughter's inheritance (Num. 26:23, 27:1-11). These women lived "piously and wisely, like their father and their ancestors," writes Ginzberg (III:391), and their petition to Moses was a "distinction to [themselves] as well as to their father; it was a distinction to Machir as well as to Joseph [their progenitor], that such women issued from them."⁷

The laudatory references to their father, Zelophehad, may surprise some readers, because he is midrashically identified as the Sabbath-violator in the Torah who was condemned to death (Num. 15:32-6; Ginzberg III:240-41). Conversely, however, to certain rabbis of the Midrash, Zelophehad is a hero: "Zelophehad was willing to sacrifice his life that the people might learn by his death that the desecration of the Sabbath is a very grievous sin" (Ginzberg VI:84, n.452). Such a one was worthy to produce such daughters!

The final use of הוליד comes in Numbers 26:58, where we are told: אלה עמרם ומשפחות לוי... וקהת הוליד את עמרם [These are the clans of Levi . . . Kohath begot Amram]. The Midrash declares that "the most distinguished among the Levites were the sons of Kohath" (Ginzberg III:228). No doubt, because Amram, we are told immediately, married Jochebed, and he sired Aaron, Miriam, and Moses. A greater claim of filial receptivity and emulation of the father's adherence to the ways of the Lord cannot be made.

It would appear, then, that the Midrash saw in the terms הוליד and הולידו hints at destiny, but it is a destiny made by men themselves. It is a perception that places responsibility for the future upon the parents. The echoes of this insight throughout the millennia are still heard today: a Jew is called up to the Torah by his name and that of his father; the father acknowledges his responsibility

for forming his son spiritually by transferring further responsibility to the young man when he reaches the status of Bar-Mitzvah. Even after death this responsibility cannot be divested: for ever more the individual is identified on his gravestone as having been the son of his father. Nor is this generational guidance a family matter only, for it is abundantly clear that the whole Jewish nation is dependent upon this chain of influence. It is, indeed, the fulfillment of God's Divine destiny of the Jewish people.⁸

NOTES

1. It may be significant that up to Genesis 5, the Torah occasionally uses the matrilineal term "וַתַּהַר": *and* [the named woman] *conceived*. Why the mother is named as progenitress must be left to another discussion
2. In genealogies in later books all the sons are mentioned. I shall presently comment on this phenomenon in Numbers.
3. All quotations and paraphrases from midrashim in this article are from Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1947-67). Citations of this source are given in parentheses in my text. Among the dozens of sources cited by Ginzberg, there are occasional contradictions. Only the favorable comments are cited here, inasmuch as some midrashic rabbis did find good things to say about the individuals listed in the Torah's genealogies.
4. Paraphrased in the Soncino *Chumash* (London, 1962), pp. 53-4, on Gen. 11:11.
5. My thanks to Rabbi Pinchas Kahn of Jerusalem for pointing out this possibility to me.
6. For this suggestion, too, I am indebted to Rabbi Kahn.
7. *The Medrash Rabba: Genesis*, trans. and ed. H. Freedman (London: Soncino, 1972) III:836-7 9.
8. This article arose out of a suggestion made in the course in Midrash at Project Oded in Jerusalem under Rabbi M. Silverstein, מ"תש"ט. I am indebted to Rabbi Haim Halpern of Jerusalem for his general reactions to the idea of this article. They became challenges.

ERRATUM

The correct Hebrew text on page 81 of Dr. Pinchas Kahn's paper appearing in Volume 29, Issue 2 is as follows:

וְהָאֱמֶת הַמְכֻסָּה אֲנִי מְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי עֹשֶׂה:
 וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה לְגֹי גָדוֹל וְנִצְוָה וְנִבְרָכוּ בּוֹ כָּל גְּוֵי הָאָרֶץ:
 כִּי יִדְעֻתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְנֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשִׁמְרוּ דְרָכֵי ה'
 לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה' עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר עָלָיו.