

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

A recent issue of the *JBQ* contained an article by Shaul Bar entitled "The Curse of Death in War" (*Jewish Bible Quarterly* 2012; 40:231-237). This article contains much fine scholarship, but unfortunately the author's conclusion with respect to the Bible does not derive from scholarship. Indeed, with reference to the Bible, one can easily prove that the scholarship contradicts the conclusion.

In the last sentence of his introduction, the author declares: "This paper will show that death in war was among the curses and threats against the Israelites..." His paper does not show anything of the sort. The problem, in fact, can be summed up in the author's own two sentences at the beginning of the paragraph on page 233, as follows: "In the prophetic literature, defeat in war is divine retribution for Israel's transgressions, the consequence of insufficient fear of the Lord." This bit of scholarship is then followed by the author's own contribution in the next sentence, which reads: "That is, death in war is the price of sin." However, the first sentence does not mention "death in war." It clearly says "defeat in war." This defeat is inflicted on the nation as a whole due to the collective sin of the nation as a whole.

There is no such thing as war without death. The victors and the vanquished both endure losses in combat. The Bible, as described by the author, presents *defeat* in war as a result of sins (committed by the nation as a whole), not the inevitable death of individuals. The consequences of this defeat are then portrayed in descriptions of the horrible fate suffered by individuals, but those individuals are not necessarily sinners, nor are they necessarily combatants. They can be women and children who perish in sieges that accompany a losing war. The nation as a whole, including the righteous, suffers from its transgressions and the punishment is *defeat* in war. Furthermore, the Bible's respect for the inevitable individual casualties of war may well be implied in its use of the word "fallen," as described by the author, when referring to those who die in combat.

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Sir,

In a recent issue of the JBQ, Nathan Stein suggests an emendation of the hapax legomenon *keseh* (Ps. 81:4) to *kesef*, alluding to trumpets made of silver (Num. 10:10). This text-critical suggestion should be rejected for the following reasons:

1. The *heh/peh* is not attested in the *Ketiv-Kerei* apparatus.
2. The letters *heh* and *peh* are orthographically very different in both the paleoscript and the square script.
3. The *Versions* (Septuagint, Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate) do not mention a musical instrument in Psalm 81:4, although they were obviously challenged by the meaning of *keseh*. Thus, Septuagint renders *keseh* by "the glorious," Targum by "when the moon is covered," Peshitta by "the time appointed," and Vulgate by "the noted."
4. Nowhere in the Tanakh does *kesef* refer to a trumpet or musical instrument. Only once is the term "trumpets of silver" mentioned in the Tanakh (Num. 10:2), although "trumpets" are mentioned many times. It is likely that trumpets were also made from gold (II Kgs. 12:14).
5. Most of the commentators adopt one of the two opposing views: (a) *keseh* is the day on which the month begins and the moon is obscured; and, (b) *keseh* is the day on which the moon is fully seen, as in cognate languages. Accordingly, (a) refers to Rosh Ha-Shanah and (b) refers to Sukkot. Either of these explanations gives an adequate meaning for the verse. It should be noted, that the verb *k-s-h* does not necessarily mean complete coverage (Gen. 24:65, 38:14-15, Judg. 4:18, Ps. 147:8, I Chron. 21:16, II Chron. 5:8). Thus, *ba-hodesh* and *ba-keseh* refer to the same position of the moon, albeit from different perspectives; one sees the part that is illuminated and the other the part that is dark.

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