

# THE JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY



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Israel's Spiritual and National Roots  
Not to Inflict Hurt on Animals  
Was Abraham Born in Ur of the Chaldees?  
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A Visit to Armageddon

# THE JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY

formerly **Dor LeDor**

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## **THE BIBLE**

### **ISRAEL'S SPIRITUAL AND NATIONAL ROOTS**

#### **DAVID BEN-GURION**

*David Ben-Gurion, a founder of the State of Israel and its first prime minister, was a secular man and yet a devout student of the Bible. A Bible study group met regularly in his home for many years. Ben-Gurion regarded the Sacred Scriptures not only as a sourcebook of Jewish history, but also as the foundation document of the Jewish people's striving for restored nationhood, and as the prime source of its values and aspirations. The following article, the first of two parts, was written by Ben-Gurion over thirty years ago and expresses some of his views about the centrality and importance of the Bible in Jewish life and experience. It was published originally in 1964 by the World Jewish Bible Society and the Israel Society for Biblical Research. Part 2 will appear in the next issue of The Jewish Bible Quarterly.*

The constant expansion of Bible study groups in Israel is one of the most outstanding and encouraging aspects of our return to ourselves, which stems from our return to Zion and the independence we have regained in the Homeland. It is natural, indeed admirable, that events in the Negev in the days of the patriarchs, Joshua's conquest of Canaan, David's adventures in the South when he fled from Saul, or Bar-Kokhba's epistles written over 1800 years ago, have more meaning for young people than descriptions of the rootless lives of the Jews in Poland or Galicia.

There is no justification for complaint at the fact that the Bible is closer to our hearts than any other work produced by our people over the past 3,000 years. There is nothing more natural, healthy or inspiring than the growing devotion it has won from the mass of Israelis — particularly the young people. The return to Zion and to the Bible is a supreme expression of the rebirth and resurgence of the Jewish people, and the more complete the return the nearer we will come to full political and spiritual salvation.

Nor is there any reason to fear that attachment to the Bible may detach us from the Diaspora. Dispersion is not something that started only after the completion of the Bible. Genesis itself contains the first description of a journey into exile; Exodus tells of the sufferings of the Jewish people in exile; Deuteronomy says:

*And the Lord shall scatter you among the peoples,  
and ye shall be left few in number among the nations* (Deut. 4:27).

But the same book also contains the promise:

*The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee,  
and will return and gather thee from all the peoples whither the Lord thy  
God hath scattered thee* (Deut. 30:3).

The same thing can be found in the Former Prophets and in the books of the literary prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others. The Diaspora did not begin after the destruction of the Second Temple but, according to tradition, preceded the birth of the nation and its settlement in the Land of Canaan. Even the story of Abraham — the progenitor of the Jewish people — does not begin in the Holy Land but on foreign soil — in Ur of the Chaldees and Haran, or, in contemporary geographical terms, Iraq and Turkey.

For the last 150 years biblical research has been mainly the province of non-Jews — Germans, Frenchmen, Britons and Scandinavians. We shall not be ungrateful to these investigators or deny them the credit of many important and instructive discoveries, although in my humble opinion biblical research cannot be regarded as a science which can reveal irrefutable historical truths. Nor do I wish to minimize the importance of archaeology in shedding light on the past. For a long time we could not escape the distressing and depressing thought that even in this sphere strangers had taken over our heritage.

This state of affairs continued until the return to Zion renewed our deep-rooted attachment to the Bible and produced original and profound students of the Scriptures, who no longer have to follow in the wake of their Christian colleagues. Christians who studied the Bible, with such individual exceptions as Travers-Herford and Albright, could not get away from the Christian conception that regarded the teachings of Jesus as Israel's greatest spiritual achievement — and also as the end of our people. Hence they regarded everything that preceded Jesus' appearance as only a kind of introduction to and preparation for the final revelation of the supreme religious and moral truth.

Some of these investigators were not free from anti-Semitism, which consciously or unconsciously distorted the direction and the results of their studies. It was hostility to the Jews that prompted them to seek the source of all the sublime moral and religious truths in the Bible — including the belief in one God who created heaven and earth — in the ancient literature of Egypt and Babylonia.

Even those who were not infected by anti-Semitism were impelled, consciously or unconsciously, to find all sorts of dubious evidence and theories to prove that the greatest chapters of the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings were products of a later period, after the destruction of the First Temple, and were only a preparation for the appearance of the doctrines of Jesus and Paul. Even Jewish investigators such as Gruenfeld, Hayut and even Klausner were more or less carried along into accepting these baseless notions.

It is to the everlasting credit of the greatest biblical scholar not only of the present but of all generations, Yehezkel Kaufmann, who was responsible for a Copernican revolution in the study of the Bible. He approached his studies without prejudgment, neither blindly accepting the ideas of Gentile scholars nor being bound by tradition. On the basis of an extraordinary knowledge of the entire Bible and its commentators, Jewish and non-Jewish, and on the basis of exhaustive and original research on the internal structure and historic significance, contents and style of the Bible, he challenged the “biblical criticism” system of the Wellhausen school, which tore the Bible into fragments and arbitrarily and unnecessarily erased, altered and transferred entire passages and chapters, attributed entire ancient and historical books to later periods, and distorted the whole character of the Bible and of Jewish history during the First Temple period.

In his monumental book *The History of the Jewish Faith*, Professor Kaufmann established an original, brilliant, enlightening and complete picture of the Bible and Jewish faith and prophecy, and proved its antiquity and originality. He did not intend to restore tradition to its former status, as he himself stated in the introduction to his great book, or to criticize “biblical criticism” on the basis of preconceived ideas which he wished to defend. What he did was to make a daring, revolutionary and successful attempt — and in my humble opinion a generally convincing one, although perhaps not in every single detail — to prove that the Bible represents a much greater degree of historical truth than was believed by the

Wellhausen school. The most important thing emphasized by Kaufmann, with skill and unimpeachable evidence, was that the faith in one God, the God of the universe and the God of history, was a primeval and original creation of the Jewish people, not borrowed from the peoples that preceded Israel or among whom it lived, but the fruit of an independent Jewish national culture, which grew out of the essence of the Jewish spirit, from the very beginnings of the Jewish people. He also proved that all attempts to ascribe the majority of the books of the Bible to the period of the Second Temple had no solid basis.

Today, there can no longer be any effective or productive study of the Bible without Kaufmann's great work being taken into consideration.

It is well known that biblical criticism did not begin with the Christian scholars, with Spinoza or with Ibn Ezra. Our sages had already studied the Bible; they stated that it was produced book by book, and in interpreting several passages they considered it necessary to depart from the literal meaning. The investigations of the sages were preceded by those of the Septuagint scholars, who translated the Bible into Greek in the third century BCE. For example, all the traditional interpreters were puzzled by the passage in Exodus 12, which reads:

*Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years (v. 40).*

This contradicts what was said to Abraham in the covenant-between-the-pieces, and according to the testimony of the Bible itself, the children of Israel did not stay in Egypt more than two or three generations. In the Septuagint the passage is translated as follows:

*Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt and in the Land of Canaan was four hundred and thirty years.*

The sages confirmed this translation (Megillot 9), and Rashi explained:

So that it should not be said that a falsehood is written in the Bible, since Kohath was among those who went down to Egypt, and when you count the years of Kohath's life and the years of Amram's and the years of Moses', all together do not amount to 400 years. Moreover, many years of the sons' lives were included in the years of their fathers.

The same thing is stated in such commentaries as *Seder Olam*, *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, *Pesikta d'Rabbi Kahana*, *Midrash Rabba* and so forth. All this is incompatible with the dictum in Sanhedrin 9:



Anyone who says that the Bible was not given by God, even if he says that all of it was given by God except for a particular passage, which came not from God, but from Moses himself, has no portion in the world to come.

We also find a debate between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon on the eight last verses in the Bible, as to whether they were written by Moses or by Joshua (Baba Batra 15).

The greatness of Kaufmann's book lies in the fact that, though it is not bound by tradition and does not utterly deny the conclusions of biblical criticism, it shows that the Bible is basically correct and proves the antiquity and the originality of the Jewish faith in one God.

On the 10th anniversary of the Bible Study Conferences organized by the Israel Bible Research Society, we again return to the Book of Genesis — after completing the study of the entire Bible in recent years.

This Book does not begin with the life of Abraham, but with the creation by God of the world and all that is therein, and by contemplating the unity of mankind, which had not yet been divided into tribes, peoples, and races, and was created entire in the image of God. Here we find two of the basic, universal ideas in the Jewish conception of life, which distinguished our people from all its predecessors or any that lived up to the end of the Second Temple: the faith in one God, Creator and Guide of the world, and the unity of the human race.

The barrier between the Creator and man is not absolute according to the scriptural conception. The bond between the two is the Divine spirit. We find as early as the second verse of Genesis that the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. This does not refer to a movement in the air or a physical breath of wind; it denotes one of the expressions of the Divine that inspires men from time to time, and serves as a kind of bond between the Creator of the world and man.

This too, is what is meant when it is said that man was created in the image of God. Man's body — in this passage called flesh — came from the dust and will return to the dust. The unique thing that raises him above the plane of mere flesh is the spirit or breath of God in him. Without this spirit man would return to dust, as it is said in the Psalms:

*Thou hidest thy face, they vanish;  
Thou withdrawest their breath, they perish,  
And return to their dust (104:29).*

And when God told Moses to take Bezalel, the son of Uri, to work in the Tabernacle, He said:

*And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding and in knowledge, and in all matters of workmanship (Ex. 31:2, 35:31).*

It was said of Othniel the son of Kenaz: *And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel (Jud. 3:10)*, and of Samson: *And the spirit of the Lord began to move him (Jud. 14:45).*

The Bible uses such expressions as: *The spirit of the Lord came mightily upon ... The spirit of the Lord clothed ... or The spirit of The Lord rested upon ...* For example: *But the spirit of The Lord clothed Gideon (Jud. 6:34); And the spirit of God clothed Zechariah (II Chr. 24:20).* Of Samson: *And the spirit of The Lord came mightily upon him (Jud. 14:19);* of Saul: *And the spirit of The Lord came mightily upon him (I Sam. 10:10)* and again: *And the spirit of God came mightily upon Saul (11:6).* Also about David: *And the spirit of The Lord came mightily upon David (16:13).*

The idea of Moses was that God should impart His spirit to the entire people. When Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, and Joshua son of Nun came running to Moses crying: *'My lord Moses, shut them in,'* Moses replied, *'Art thou jealous for My sake? Would that all The Lord's people were prophets, that The Lord would put his spirit upon them'* (Num. 11:29).

The whole of Hebrew prophecy is the product of the spirit of God, which inspires the prophet, and is poured down upon him from above, as Isaiah says: *Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high ... (32:15).*

## NOT TO INFLICT HURT ON ANIMALS

SHIMON BAKON

By the middle of the 19th century, the consciences of some individuals and progressive governments were troubled by the lack of legislation to protect animals from the cruelty of man. The noted German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860) assailed the "occident" for this barbaric failure but, characteristically, blamed Judaism for it. Some governments, among them the State of New York in 1866, granted charters to Associations for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Such individuals, associations and governments are to be commended for what they thought was an important "first" in the advancement of man toward more humanity.

If one peruses the Hebrew Scriptures even superficially one will note a goodly number of statements and laws concerning the treatment of animals. These show that Schopenhauer and those who followed in his steps were entirely wrong in their assessment of Judaism. The Bible had instituted humane laws reflecting profound concern for the welfare of animals thousands of years before modern associations thought of doing so. Such laws are not to be found in one block, but are dispersed throughout the Bible. Later, the sages of the Talmud, following the lead of the Bible, elaborated on them and summed them up as a fundamental law of **צער בעלי חיים** — not to inflict hurt on animals.

### FROM CREATION TO NOAH

It is true that in the narration of Creation, man is charged with ruling the *fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all living things that creep on earth* (Gen. 1:28). However, immediately following, man is told: '*See I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food*' (1:29). Thus, in the ideal state of paradise existence, man is a vegetarian and abstains from eating meat. It is noteworthy that also in the idealized state of the messianic future, as envisioned by Isaiah (11:6, 7), there will be a

reversion to the original state of paradise, where even *the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw*. Between pre-history and post-history, the eating of meat is a concession granted to man and beast alike.

Furthermore, we note a continuum in the process of Creation, from lowly creatures to man. After the Flood, God establishes a covenant not only with Noah and his sons, but with *every living thing* (Gen. 9:8). The “bow in the clouds” is the sign by which God will remember His everlasting covenant with all living creatures. It is only then that man is permitted to partake of meat, with the notable restriction *not to eat flesh with its life-blood* (9:4). This prohibition, considered in the Jewish tradition as one of the seven Noahide laws binding on all mankind, has been interpreted by the rabbis to have two layers of meaning. The first and obvious one is based on the biblical perception that “blood is life” (Deut. 12:23). As Hertz observes:

Life in every form has in it an element of holiness, since God is the source of all life. Therefore, though permission was given to eat the flesh of an animal ... life must have altogether have departed from the animal ... before partaking of the flesh.

The second, clearly a deduction by the rabbis, prohibits the cruel practice of cutting the limb from a live animal. As long as life is still in the animal, both its flesh and blood is prohibited. From here there is only one step to the law of *אבר מן החי*, a conclusion reached by the Jewish sages. So insistent were the rabbis that this was a biblical law incumbent on mankind, that they forbade an Israelite to sell such a limb to a non-Jew. If, indeed, this prohibition is biblical, we have here the first law against inflicting pain on an animal.

#### ANIMALS HAVE RIGHTS

The institution of the Sabbath is universally acknowledged as one of the crowning achievements of the Hebrew Bible. Appearing among other passages in the Decalogues in Exodus and in Deuteronomy<sup>1</sup> as the Fourth Commandment, two different reasons are offered for its observance. Irrespective of the reasons given, both Decalogues insist on granting a day of rest to the owner's beasts of burden.

1. Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12.

There is a rabbinic prohibition against emasculating an animal, based on Leviticus 22:24.

*You shall not offer to the Lord anything [with its testes] bruised or crushed or torn or cut ... You shall have no such practices in your land ...*

Admittedly, the last phrase can be interpreted in two ways. It could mean that such emasculated animals may not be brought as a sacrifice. It could also be interpreted as a practice prohibited "in your land," under any circumstances. Thus Rashi, the great exegete, reflecting talmudic thinking on this matter, comments "Such practices, namely to castrate any animal or beast, are prohibited even if it is unclean." This prohibition was extended by the rabbis to be valid for Jews every where.

A daring exploitation of a seemingly innocuous verse in Deuteronomy led rabbis to a deduction which gives credit to their concern for the rights of animals. In that passage it is stated:

*And I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied (11:15).*

From the fact that "cattle" is mentioned before "man," they deduced that man must feed his animals before himself. Thus R. Judah said in the name of Rav: "It is forbidden for man to eat before he has provided food for the cattle" (T. Berakhot 40:a).

It may be questioned whether the ban on emasculation and the requirement of feeding one's animal before one partakes of food are biblical or rabbinic rules. The injunction *You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing the corn* (Deut. 25:4) is a distinct biblical law and is in the spirit of God's tender consideration for all His creatures as reflected in Psalm 36:7: *Your beneficence is like high mountains ... man or beast You deliver, O Lord.*

#### RELIEF FROM DISTRESS

In Deuteronomy 22:4 we read:

*If you see your fellow's ass or ox fallen on the road do not ignore it; you must help him to raise it.*

Here is a commandment going far beyond the prevention of cruelty to animals. The Israelite is obliged to offer assistance to an animal fallen under the weight of its burden. It could be argued that this law is primarily directed toward helping

one's fellow-man; to be kind and to assist him in his effort to raise the animal. That is, to strengthen inter-human relationship. However, the rabbis clearly and unequivocally understood it to be another of the rulings of *צער בעלי חיים*, preventing pain to animals. They ruled that "unloading" the animal is without remuneration. However, one may request payment for assisting in "reloading" (Talmud B.M. 32). Maimonides, the great codifier of Jewish law, states that in case of a conflict arising from both obligations — loading and unloading — the latter must be given priority because of *צער בעלי חיים*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in their view, the primary purpose of this biblical injunction is to give relief to the fallen animal.

What of the beast belonging to one's enemy? The Torah declares:

*When you see the ass of your enemy prostrate under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him* (Ex. 23:5).

To deny one's assistance to the beast of an enemy constitutes a violation of biblical ethics, for the animal was not to suffer for the enmity of its owner. Again, to emphasize that the thrust of biblical intent was to relieve the animal, the Talmud ruled: "Whence do I know [that one must raise the fallen beast], even if the owner is not with it? From the verse: *You must nevertheless raise it* — in all circumstances" (Talmud B.M. 31a). In fact, from the two precepts Raba inferred that the principle of *צער בעלי חיים* was a biblical law (32b); being a biblical law, the rabbis ruled that one must busy himself with an animal belonging to a heathen just as with one belonging to an Israelite (32b). Whether the owner is a friend, foe or heathen, one is obligated to help the animal for its own sake and for the sake of the creature of the One *Who is good to all, and Whose tender mercies are over all His works* (Ps. 135:9).

#### ANIMALS AND THEIR YOUNG

We have noted before that in the biblical view there is a continuum in the realm of living creatures. This thought found radical expression in Ecclesiastes:

*For what befalleth the sons of man befalleth beasts ... so that man hath not pre-eminence above beasts* (3:19).

Man, observing his environment with empathy, notes that animals are sentient, are capable of sensations, they can be terrorized, they evidence affection and hurt.

2. M.T. Nezikin, Hilkhot Rotzeah (13:13).

Observing the life of living creatures, one must be impressed by the special relationship that exists between a mother animal and her young. It is no wonder, then, that we encounter three, perhaps four, pieces of biblical teaching, touching on that special relationship, and legislating how to deal with it.

*When an ox or a sheep ... is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering to the Lord (Lev. 22:27).*

Immediately following it we read:

*However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.*

These are two separate legislations, yet woven from the same fabric. Scripture offers no reason for either. Deuteronomy Rabba suggests: "For as God shows mercy to man, so too He shows mercy to cattle" (6:1), thus proposing God's mercy to all His creatures as the rationale for the above laws. It is cruel to separate the young from its mother, at least for the first seven days, when the mother-animal is at her most caring and protecting, and the young most dependent.

As for the second: the Mishnah teaches by the process of hermeneutic deduction that such a rule applies both to sacrifices and to everyday consumption (Hullin 5:1). It further teaches that it is prohibited to slaughter the young in the presence of either female or male parent. Maimonides, who maintained that every one of the 613 scriptural precepts has a rational basis, offered the following reason for such legislation:

For the pain of the animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference between the pain of man and the pain of other living things.<sup>3</sup>

A third biblical teaching dealing with the dam and her young is found in Deuteronomy:

*If, along a road, you chance at a bird's nest ... with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother with her young. Let the mother go and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life (22:6, 7).*

3. More Nevukhim III, 48.

These verses stirred considerable controversy among the ancient rabbis and medieval commentators regarding its rationale.<sup>4</sup> Briefly summarized: Some reject any purpose other than this is the will of the Creator, and man has to submit to His will. Others maintain that such precepts indicate the Creator's compassion for His creatures. There is the third school, foremost among them Ramban, which believes that such laws are primarily designed to educate us to conduct ourselves with mercy.

What is new and even strange in the last two verses cited, is the promise of reward of "long life" for obeying this law, almost identical to that promised in the Fifth Commandment of honoring father and mother (Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16). If we follow the lead of Ramban that the purpose of the law on the dam and the young is educative, one can rightfully interpret the remarkable concurrence of a similar reward as follows: Conduct affects our way of thinking. To respect the tender relationship existing between animal parents and their young, will also affect one's conduct toward parents.<sup>5</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Kindness toward animals has a long tradition in Jewish history. The matriarch Rebekah was chosen by Abraham's servant to be Isaac's bride on the basis of her eagerness to *draw water also for the camels*. Legend has it that Moses was chosen by God to be the shepherd of Israel after proving himself a compassionate shepherd of his father-in-law's flock. It is told about R. Judah HaNasi, the compiler of the Mishnah, that when a calf was led to slaughter, and in its distress sought his help, he refused. Instead of taking pity on it, he turned it over to the butchers. As a punishment he was afflicted with a prolonged illness.

Within the framework of the long tradition of *צער בעלי חיים*, a strong contempt for hunting as a sport should also be mentioned. The Bible does not seem overly sympathetic to Nimrod "the mighty hunter," nor to Esau, the "skillful

4. For a profound understanding of this controversy, it is recommended to read Nehama Leibowitz on this issue.

5. The promise of length of days appears a few times in Deuteronomy. There are, however, three specific instances deserving this reward. To send the mother bird away, to honor one's parents, and to have honest weights and measures.



hunter.” Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, relates that of all the kings of Judea, only Herod hunted for sport. Simeon b. Pazi expounded: *Happy is the man who has not ... taken the path of a sinner* (Ps. 1:1) as: *לא עמדם כקנגיך* “Who does not attend contests of wild beasts,” which Rashi interprets as: *hunting with dogs for the sake of sport*.<sup>6</sup> The sages of the Talmud viewed with horror the attendance of Jews at the Roman circus. They attacked the brutalizing effect of the bitter fights of gladiators, gladiators and beasts, and beasts against beasts. Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg went so far as to maintain that he who hunts for the sake of sport has no part in the world to come.

In our era of progress and enlightenment, when fox-hunting, shooting for trophies and sport, bull-fighting, dogfights and cockfights is considered pleasurable activities, the various associations for the prevention of cruelty to animals could learn a lesson from the great teaching of *צער בעלי חיים*.

6. T. Avodah Zara 18b.

## WAS ABRAM BORN IN UR OF THE CHALDEES?

SHUBERT SPERO

The question as to the birthplace of Abraham, father of the Hebrew nation, sounds simple and straightforward, the answer to which should be easily obtainable. However, a careful reading of Genesis 11:24-32 yields only inferential evidence.

*Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah begot Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah, in the land of his birth [moladito] in Ur of the Chaldees.*

The text explicitly mentions only Haran, the brother of Abram, as having been born in Ur. Nevertheless, in the absence of reasons to think otherwise, one can plausibly infer, as does Ibn Ezra, that Terah's other sons were born there as well. We are next told (Gen. 11:31) that Terah, accompanied by Abram and his wife Sarai and by Lot, set forth from Ur to go to the land of Canaan but came to the place Haran where they settled. Although there is no mention here of Nahor, Abram's other brother, from the information we get from Genesis 22:20-24 regarding Rebekah, who is descended from Nahor, we are compelled to say that Nahor and his wife Milcah also, at this point, found themselves together with the rest of the family in Haran.

This assumption that Abram was born in Ur encounters its first problem with the call of God to Abram: '*Get thee out of thy land and from thy birthplace [moladitkha] and from the house of thy father unto the land that I will show you*' (Gen. 12:1). If this call comes to Abram in the place we last left him, in Haran, which is here called "thy birthplace," then it would appear that Haran is declared Abram's birthplace. However, those who are already committed to the proposition that Abram was born in Ur are compelled to say that this divine call must have come to Abram earlier, when he was still in Ur. Support for this view would appear

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to come from a passage in Nehemiah 9:7: *Thou art the Lord, the God who did choose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees ....*

Let us consider the broader consequences of the hypothesis that Abram originated in Ur of the Chaldees. In the biblical context, ethnic origin and geographic location are often very much intertwined. Thus, Abram is called the *ivri* [Hebrew], which could mean that he is descended from Eber, a great-grandchild of Shem, or it could mean that he comes from “beyond” [*ever*] the river Euphrates. Indeed as we find in the Book of Joshua:

*Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘Your fathers dwelt of old beyond the river [ever la’nahar], even Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from beyond the river ... (Josh. 24:2, 3).*

Ur of the Chaldees was located in the southeast corner of Mesopotamia, deep in the heartland of the ancient kingdoms of Sumer and Akkad, some ten miles west of the present course of the Euphrates. According to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, this was the territory of Cush son of Ham, whose son was the “mighty hunter” Nimrod whose empire extended over *Babylon, Erech, Akkad, Calneh in the land of Shinar* [Sumer?] (Gen. 10:10). On the basis of origin, this would make Abram a Hamite rather than a Shemite! Furthermore, someone coming from Ur would hardly be called from “beyond the river” since Ur from the perspective of Canaan would be on *this* side of the river.

When Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, he instructs him: ‘... *but thou shall go to my land and to my birthplace [moladiti] and take a wife for my son*’ (Gen. 24:4). The dutiful servant *arose and went to Aram of the two-rivers until the city of Nahor* (Gen. 24:10). Later, Isaac tells Jacob: ‘*Arise and go to Paddan-Aram to the home of Bethuel, thy mother’s father*’ (Gen. 28:2). And we are told that Jacob, in response, *went out from Beersheba and went towards Haran* (Gen. 28:10). Thus, by a tightly-connected chain of references we find Abraham himself designating Haran as his birthplace. Also, the term “Aram” is significant, as Aram is the name of one of the sons of Shem (Gen. 10:22) and occurs again as a name of a son of Kemuel son of Nahor (Gen. 22:21). Bethuel is called an “Aramean” (Gen. 28:5) for geographic as well as ethnic reasons. However, in the formal declaration recited by one who brings his first fruits, reference is made to Jacob as a “wandering Aramean” (Deut. 26:5), registering the

fact of his descent from Abraham who was born in Haran, the area of Aram-Naharayim.

Nahmanides, who argues cogently for Haran as the birthplace of the patriarch, reconstructs Abram's early history as follows:<sup>1</sup> Terah originated in the area of Haran where his two older sons, Abram and Nahor, were born. At some point, Terah, leaving Nahor and his family in Haran, travels to Ur with his son Abram. There another son, Haran, is born who subsequently dies after having begot a son, Lot. Terah then returns to Haran accompanied by Abram and Lot and their families. It is then that Abram receives the call from God to leave his birthplace and go on to Canaan.

The Bible gives no hint as to the reasons for Terah's migrations or for Haran's untimely death, leaving room for all sorts of speculation. Rabbinic tradition plausibly relates these early events to Abram's critical interest in religious belief and worship of the gods. Abram's developing belief in ethical monotheism, with its strong iconoclastic undercurrent, evidently got the Terah clan in trouble with the priestly authorities in Ur, a center of moon worship, in the course of which Haran is killed and the others are forced to flee the city.

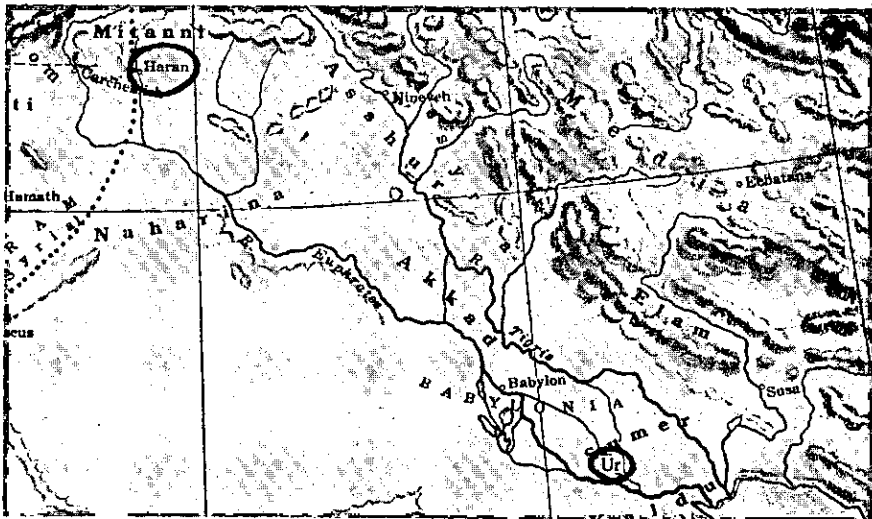
Nahmanides finds support for this in the language used by Nehemiah quoted above ... *and [God] brought him [Abram] forth [vehotzaito] out of Ur ...*, in contrast to Joshua's '*... and I took [va'ekah] your father Abraham from beyond the river ...*'. The latter expression is often used to mean "to draw somebody by means of words," "to persuade" or "to summon"<sup>2</sup> whereas the expression *lehotzi*, "to take out from" can often mean "to extricate," "to pull out of a difficult situation" or "to liberate," as we have in the verse: '*I am the Lord, your God who brought you out [hotzaiticha] of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*' (Ex. 20:2). Since Nehemiah wished to stress not simply God's *charging* of Abram as does Joshua, but God's *rescue* of Abram, he refers to the events that occurred in Ur since it was there Abram was in danger because of his beliefs and God saved him.

We earlier alluded to Isaac's instructions to his son Jacob to '*take there a wife from the daughters of Laban, thy mother's brother*' (Gen. 28:2). He is sent directly

1. See his Commentary on Genesis 11:28.
2. See Rashi on Numbers 16:1.

to choose a wife from the family circle. Abraham's instructions to his servant are more general: 'Go unto my land and my birthplace and take a wife ...' (Gen. 24:4). Evidently, the patriarchs believed that there was an important difference between the daughters of Haran and the daughters of Canaan in terms of their religious beliefs and moral values. Perhaps the area of Haran in the West Semitic cultural orbit was less centralized, less under the control of city-states and powerful priesthoods so that the elaborate mythologies were not as widespread (see Gen. 31:53). It is also possible that these descendants of Shem had preserved appreciation for certain moral values such as benevolence (Gen. 24:17-19) and rights of the individual (Gen. 24:57, 58). However, it is only out of the deep intuitive knowledge that a native has of his *land and his birthplace* that Abraham could have developed his strong convictions about the superior cultural values of the people of his area and transmitted them to Isaac.

Our conclusion is best expressed in the words of E. A. Speiser: "The weight of the evidence, internal as well as external, points clearly to the region of Haran as the actual home of Abraham."<sup>3</sup>



3. "The Patriarchs and Their Social Background" in Benjamin Mazar (ed.), *The World History of the Jewish People*, Vol. II, "The Patriarchs" (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970) pp. 160-62, notes p. 275.

## ATBASH (אֲתַבֵּשׁ) IN JEREMIAH AND ITS LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE: PART 2

SCOTT B. NOEGEL

*Perhaps no other type of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible is as rare as atbash [אֲתַבֵּשׁ], a cryptic writing technique in which the first letter of the alphabet [א] is used as a substitute for the last [ת], the second [ב] for the penultimate [ש], the third [ג] for the antepenultimate [ר], and so on. Though the rabbis of the talmudic and medieval periods recognized atbash as a legitimate literary device, to date only three or possibly four sure instances of atbash have been discovered.*

*Professor Noegel exploits the use of computer technology and finds nine hitherto undiscovered examples of atbash in the book of Jeremiah. In his first of a series of three articles, he suggested two such atbash terms. In this article he explores five more.*

JEREMIAH 22:10 — בכה

*Do not weep for the dead; and do not lament [תבכו] for him. Weep [בכו בכו] rather for him who is leaving, for he shall never come back to see the land of his birth!*

The prophet's three-time repetition of the root בכה [weep] signals its importance. Reading the words formed from the root בכה as *atbash*, we get אשף and שלף שלף — *I will unsheath [my sword] and he surely has unsheathed [his sword]*, respectively.

Commentators note little here other than who might be the object of the lament.<sup>1</sup> It is of interest that Rashi suggests a relationship of *lex talionis* between

1. The moderns differ from the ancients in this regard. Rashi sees the "dead" as a reference to Jehoiakim. Radak reads the verse as a restriction on how much one should mourn for the dead and cites Mo'ed Qatan 27b as support. Cf., Driver, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, p. 128; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 476 who see the "dead" as Josiah.

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this verse and Jeremiah 36:30 wherein we find a play on the word "sword" [חרב]: *I will expose his corpse to heat [חרור] by day and cold by night.*

Contextually these *atbash* also make sense. They refer us back to the Lord's message of doom in 22:7: *I will appoint destroyers against you, each with his weapons* [כלי]. In I Samuel 21:9 we find the expression גם חרבי וגם כלי [also my sword, and also my weapons] which directly connects כלי with חרב. The *atbash* on שלף/בכה in Jeremiah 22:10 gains support when we add to this the frequent association of חרב with שלף (e.g., Num. 22:23, Jud. 8:10, II Sam. 24:9, et al.).

Further, as Jeremiah 23:16-20 clarifies, the prophet advocates peaceful resistance. He wants the rulers of Jerusalem to perform acts of peace<sup>2</sup> and not profit (22:17), and to avoid confrontation with Babylon. If they do not, Jeremiah warns, they will suffer from the sword [חרב] (cf. Jer. 21:7, 21:8, 22:7), and come to ruin [חרבה] (Jer. 22:5). The frequent repetition of the word חרב in this chapter and the play on חרבה in connection with a Babylonian reprisal underscores the importance of the *atbash* on בכה [weeping] in 22:10-12. We are not to weep for the righteous King Josiah who was slain in battle at Megiddo (II Kg. 23:29-30), but rather for "he who goes"; namely, the evil King Jehoahaz, who will eventually be exiled to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho (II Kg. 23:31-33).

If we, along with the consensus of modern scholars, accept these two personages as the objects of weeping in Jeremiah 23:10, then we must ask why we should not weep for a good king, but weep for an evil one. This problem is solved if we read the three appearances of בכה as *atbash*. The message is that one should not "unsheath the sword" in battle (as Josiah did) and die, but rather "unsheath the sword" against Jehoahaz, who has repeated the evil of his ancestors (II Kg. 23:32), and live. The prophet's inverted message again describes a soon-to-be inverted power struggle.

#### JEREMIAH 25:20-26 — כלה

These verses list the nations for whom the Lord promises His wrath. Included in this roster are the kings of the Philistines, Tyrians, Sidonians, Arabians,

2. This might explain why Jeremiah uses Jehoahaz's private name שלום [lit.: he is at peace] in 22:11.

Elamites,<sup>3</sup> and a host of others to whom the Lord addresses His woeful word with the repeated phrase *all the kings of ...* In Hebrew, this construct phrase is מלכי which when read as an *atbash* is יכלם [he will destroy them] from כלה.

Commentators with reference to the last line containing the *atbash* on ששך (25:26) have been noted in my first article on *ATBASH* (*JBQ*, vol. XXIV-2, p. 83). Regarding the list of nations, Bright avers that the section has suffered some expansion.<sup>4</sup> Outside of its syntactical difficulties, the passage has elicited few comments.<sup>5</sup>

Like the previous example, this *atbash* is underscored by its constant repetition. This *atbash* also is extra-special because it exploits the middle four letters of the Hebrew alphabet. W. G. E. Watson has demonstrated that the same letters also appear frequently in Psalm 145 and are crucial to the psalm's message.<sup>6</sup> The same device is at work here in the form of a *atbash*-palindrome.

The *atbash*, which appears as "he will destroy them" in reference to the previous list of kings, takes on a different nuance when connected with ששך/בבל in 25:26 permitting us to read ששך מלך בבל as יכלם בבל [he will humiliate Babylon] (from כלם because כלה does not fit grammatically). In essence, though the rabbis did not catch it, it is a double *atbash*.

As with the other *atbash*, this double *atbash* is bolstered by contextual references. We hear the root כלה [destroy] several times in Jeremiah (e.g., 5:3, 9:15, 14:12, 16:4, et al.), often in association with Babylon and frequently in connection with the sword [חרב]. It is no wonder, therefore, that just prior to these *atbash* Jeremiah equates the wrath of The Lord upon the kings of the nations with the peril of the sword (25:16).

As for the root כלם [humiliate], observe how Jeremiah uses it previously in 20:11 in reference to the כלמת עולם [perpetual humiliation] which the Lord will inflict on the Babylonians! In effect, *atbash* in this passage equates destruction [כלה] with the other nations and humiliation [כלם] with Babylon. Such lingual

3. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 518 and Bright, *Jeremiah*, p. 161, note that if the "kings of" is a mistake for "the kings of זמכי," as some suggest, then it too is an *atbash* for עלים [Elam.] The lack of textual evidence, however, makes this mere speculation. The LXX omits this verse.

4. Bright, *Jeremiah*, pp. 162, 164.

5. See, e.g., Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 518.

6. Wilfred G. E. Watson, "Reversed Rootplay in Ps 145," *Biblica* 62 (1981), pp. 101-102.



inversion again must be seen within the context of words and their power. Just as God is able to invert מלך to כלם, so also can He bring “kings” to “shame” through his word.

JEREMIAH 25:30 — שאג

*The Lord roars [ישאג] from on high, He makes His voice heard from His holy dwelling. He roars aloud [שאג ישאג] over His earthly abode, He utters shouts like the grape-treaders, against all the dwellers on earth.*

The repeated use of the root שאג [roar] again flags its importance. The *atbash* of this word is בתר [cut (into pieces)] (cf. Gen 15:9-21) and for ישאג it is the *pi'el* infinitive absolute construction בטר מבתר [He surely will cut (off)] (cf. Jer. 41:6, I Sam. 17:41).

The Targum renders ישאג with יכלי [he destroys, finishes,] suggesting that at least one tradition saw in שאג a veiled message of destruction. *Metsudat David* also connects the word with destruction: “he calls for a decree of desolation [גזירת חורבן] upon Jerusalem.” Interestingly, the latter also hints at “cutting [off]” by way of גזירה [decree (lit.: “cutting”)] and “sword” [חרב] by way of חורבן [destruction]. Radak too sees here a reference to the “destruction” [להחרב] of the Jerusalem Temple. Modern commentators have missed the *atbash* here, preferring instead to comment on the over-all meaning of the passage or its intertextual connections.<sup>7</sup>

A lack of exegetical awareness of the device notwithstanding, intratextual references again support the *atbash*. Observe how Jeremiah reinforces the notion of “cutting [off]” by preparing the reader with: ותפוצותיכם ונפלתם ככלי חמדה [(I will) break you in pieces and you shall fall like a precious weapon] (25:34).<sup>8</sup> Like the previous example, this *atbash* also anticipates the final line of the prophecy: *He delivers the wicked to the sword* (Jer. 25:31).

In addition, 25:32 informs us that The Lord’s roar will come in the form of a tempest which when unleashed from the earth’s most “remote parts” [מירכתי ארץ],

7. See, e.g., Driver, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, p. 152, n. b; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 519; Bright, *Jeremiah*, p. 161.

8. The preposition כ in ככלי [as a weapon] (often translated “vessel”) has caused problems for translators. I take it to convey the image of a weapon dropped in defeat. The translation “vessel” makes no sense in the context of Jeremiah 25 which concerns The Lord’s battle against the nations.

will reach the “ends of the earth” [עד קצה הארץ]. This verse rehearses the connection between שואג and בתר by associating the Lord’s storm with swords and cutting. See, for example, how the word ירך [lit.: thigh], which frequently occurs with חרב “sword” (e.g., Ex. 32:27, Jud. 3:16, Ps. 45:4, S.S. 3:8), describes the source of the storm. Similar is the twice-occurring expression “ends of” which derives from the verb קצה [cut]. The *atbash*, therefore, informs us that The Lord’s “roar” [שואג] will “cut off” [בתר] the wicked from on high.

Most interesting is the fact that Jeremiah later employs Abraham’s division of the calf (Gen. 15:9-21) as a metaphor for the Babylonian destruction of Judea.

*I will make the men who violated My Covenant, who did not fulfill the terms of the Covenant which they made before Me, [like] the calf which they cut in two so as to pass between the halves [בתריון]. The officers of Judah and Jerusalem, the officials, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the halves [בתרי] of the calf shall be handed over to their enemies, to those who seek to kill them (Jer. 34:18-20).*

Jeremiah’s use of the *atbash* שואג/בתר in 25:30, therefore, anticipates his later comparison, and if we remember the ancient mindset regarding words, The Lord’s roar does not become that of a paper tiger, but rather it becomes a dangerous word prepared to cut asunder the unfaithful.

#### JEREMIAH 25:38 — סכו

*Like a lion, He has gone forth from His lair [סכו]; the land has become a desolation. Because of the oppressive wrath, because of His fierce anger.*

The *atbash* for סכו [His lair] is חלף [sweep over, pass over], a poetic verb used with storms (cf. Isa. 8:8, Job 4:15, Hab. 1:11). In Job 9:11 and 11:10 חלף refers to God’s wrath. Thus, the *atbash* permits us to read Jeremiah 25:38: Like a lion He departs, He storms over; the land becomes a desolation.

Though the verse is difficult,<sup>9</sup> the word סכו has caused some grief for translators. Driver renders it “His covert.”<sup>10</sup> Thompson and Bright read it as “His

9. Most difficult is how to treat 25:38: מפני חרון היותה and the variant reading found in the LXX: μάχαλας [sword].

10. Driver, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, p. 154.

thicket."<sup>11</sup> The Targum reads סכו as מכרניה [His fortress] adding: מן קדם חרב סנאה דהיא כחמר מרויני [from before the sword of the enemy, which is like an intoxicating wine.]<sup>12</sup>

However, when we recall the word's context dealing with the storm of The Lord and the previous connection between The Lord's lion-like roar [שאג] and His destruction [בתר], we find support for the *atbash* חלף/סכו. The latter reinforces the former by referring us to the mention of The Lord's tempest in Jeremiah 25:32. Note also how this passage refers us to the previous three *atbash* in this chapter by mentioning a "lion," which reminds us of בתר/שאג [roar/cut]; "desolation" (25:36-38), which harks to יכלם/מלכי [kings of/destroy them]; and היונה [the oppressor] (25:31-32), which recalls בבל/ששך [Sheshak/Babylon] (cf. Jer. 50:16). Moreover, in addition to the literary sophistication of the *atbash* is the power which such lingual inversions possessed for the ancients. God's lion-like dwelling becomes quite literally the storm on which He rides.

#### JEREMIAH 34:14 — חפשי

*In the seventh year each of you must let go any fellow Hebrew who may be sold to you; when he has served you six years, you must set him free [חפשי].*

Commentaries note very little other than the odd switch from plural to singular address in 14a,<sup>13</sup> or whence Jeremiah derives his material (i.e., Deut 15:1, 15:12).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the repetition of חפשי suggests that it should be scrutinized closely. As in the cases above, this repetition serves to mark the presence of an *atbash*; חפשי [free] becomes סובם [their turning].

This *atbash* also finds rehearsal elsewhere in the chapter. In this case, the echo comes in the form of a synonym to the root סבב, namely שוב: *Lately you turned about [תשבון] and did what is proper in My sight ... and but now you have turned*

11. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 519; Bright, *Jeremiah*, p. 160.

12. We also may read the latter half "as wet clay." Is this a reference to the *atbash* סיג/חמר in Jeremiah 18:2-4?

13. See, e.g., William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 241.

14. See, e.g., Bright, *Jeremiah*, p. 222.

back [תשוב] and have profaned My name (34:15-16). The root סבב, like שוב, can mean “repent” and “backslide” (e.g., I Kg. 18:37 [hiph’il] and Ps. 71:21 [kal] where it appears along with תשוב), suggesting that Jeremiah chose to emphasize the case of the freed slave in order to deliver an *atbash*.<sup>15</sup> That elsewhere Jeremiah exploits the connection between the roots שוב and סבב for rhetorical purposes suggests that this is the case.<sup>16</sup> Further, Jeremiah provided a clue to the *atbash* here by adding: *But your fathers would not listen to Me, nor turn [הטו] their ear* (34:14).

Moreover, shortly after his harangue in 34:18-20, Jeremiah compares the backsliders to the calf which Abraham divided into two pieces [בתרין] (Gen. 15:9-10, 17-21). We have mentioned this pericope already in connection with the *atbash* in 25:30 [בתר/שטאג]. Jeremiah’s comparison, therefore, is apt and provides for the reader an important clue for its decipherment by referring us (like many another *atbash*) to a previous *atbash*. The language of reversal again encapsules the reversal which Jeremiah 34:14 describes: slaves are turned into [סבב] free men.

*Richard C. Steiner’s article “The Two Sons of Neriah and the Two Editions of Jeremiah in the Light of Two Atbash Code-Words for Babylon,” VT 46 (1996), 74-84 came to my attention only after my article went to press. Since he too discusses atbash in Jeremiah, a few brief remarks seem warranted. Steiner examines the atbash data with an eye toward uncovering the purpose of the repeated cipher sheshak/Babel, and concludes that concealment served to avoid political repercussions. As he remarks: “Only during the Neo-Babylonian period was there reason to disguise anti-Babylonian sentiments” (pp. 83-84). In the light of the newly uncovered examples of atbash discussed here, it is clear that Steiner’s thesis requires modification, since these additional examples must be considered as well.*

15. Though Radak also is correct in conjecturing that Jeremiah chose this case in order to stop the poorer classes, who were freed from their wealthier overlords and then re-enslaved, from defecting to the Babylonian side.

16. See, Bernhard W. Anderson, “‘The Lord Has Created Something New’: A Stylistic Study of Jeremiah 31:15-22,” in Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs, eds., *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays on Jeremiah Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), pp. 367-380, especially 380.

# BALAAM

## SOME ASPECTS OF HIS CHARACTER

BENJAMIN GOODNICK

Frequent have been the calumny, scorn and venom heaped upon Balaam by our Jewish authorities — scholars, writers and commentators, up to the present, as an individual deserving eternal condemnation. He has been accused, for example, of self-aggrandizement, because he spoke of being offered a house full of gold and silver (Num. 22:18). He has been also charged with bestiality because he had his own she-ass who was accustomed to the ways of her master (Num. 22:30).

Indeed, the talmudic consensus (especially Sanhedrin 105a-106b) is that Balaam was completely evil. Everything he said or did was distorted to expose its blemish and negative intent. Rabbi Yohanan stated: "From every blessing of that wicked man one can learn his true intention." Rabbi Eleazar claims that Balaam never spoke the blessings; an angel was sent to mouth the words. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana says that, except for *Ma Tovu* — '*How fair are your tents, O Jacob ...*' (Num. 24:5) all the other blessings turned out to be curses. Yet it is remarkable that this one sentence, starting with these two words, was selected to adorn and initiate the morning service since gaonic times. On the other hand, just because the sentence stems from Balaam's recitation, Rabbi Shlomo Lurie (the Maharshah) was greatly opposed to giving it a place of prominence in the prayerbook.

However, we shall put aside such extra-biblical observations and attempt to use the text itself as a basis for understanding this person and his role in the world that surrounded him.

Let us now try to analyze his situation; what he did and how he was perceived. Note that nowhere is he described as a prophet, as were Moses and Abraham and the later prophets. Indeed, the biblical text titles him correctly; we read *Balaam, the son of Beor, the soothsayer* (Josh. 13:22). Basically, he was a self-promoting

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and subserving person who, through his divine "contact," was alleged to exert power, presumably by magical means (tools of divination and incantations), over human events.

The Hebrew word employed in the above passage to define his status as soothsayer is קוסם [*kosem*] related to קסמים [*kesomim*] the expression used to name the "instruments of divination" brought by the Midianites in their visit to Balaam. Evidently, these two words are closely related in meaning; we are dealing with wizardry, not prophecy.

By contrast, the true prophet asserts his independence and upholds moral principles. As Abraham and Moses did, prophets can go so far as to challenge divine actions. Not so Balaam. In other words, the prophetic function is not merely or primarily foretelling but rather forth-telling, confronting and condemning princes, peers, peoples and nations for their evil and demanding their repentance. Prophets acted as counterfoils to kings and judges, insisting on true justice at the risk of their lives. Biblical prophecy, then, is a unique phenomenon, *sui generis*, not found anywhere else in the world.

Apparently this basic difference between Balaam and the prophets is not sufficiently recognized. Thus it is clearly unfair to label Balaam a prophet as Rabbi Yohanan did — and then denigrate him for being what he truly was. Plainly, Balaam was a wizard, well paid as he carried on his trade. Various biblical sources express this fact directly: e.g., Balak hired Balaam against them [i.e., Israel] (Neh. 13:2) and *who hired against you Balaam to curse you* (Deut. 23:5). Given an assignment, he did his best to expedite his job successfully for his client. And, like any professional, he found it hard to refuse a customer, especially one in a high position. Indeed, it would appear that Balaam seems to fit the description of a Babylonian Baru,<sup>1</sup> a diviner, frequently called upon by kings and rulers when facing a crisis or before embarking on a major activity (e.g., war).

Here lies another fundamental contrast between prophets and Balaam. The former could not be hired for payment by private persons or potentates for carrying out individual purposes or determining their actions.

1. See S. Daiches, "Balaam, A Mesopotamian Baru," (1909) Hilprecht Anniversary Volume. (London) pp. 70-80.

They did, evidently, share one special trait: a strong desire to help others — if in entirely different ways. Also,<sup>5</sup> unlike priests, they carried on their tasks beyond the established cultic system.

Yet, we learn that sacrifices appear to be a significant part of the preparation for divination, as acts of propitiation. Interestingly, the Talmud states that Balak, because of his many sacrifices (42) was rewarded by having Ruth as his great-granddaughter and thus, becoming an ancestor of King David — while Balaam gets no credit for his participation and requesting the sacrifices.

As the biblical text reads, Balaam's character reveals some interesting features, at one point rising to the prophetic plane. He accompanied the first two sets of sacrifices with his means of enchantment נחשיים [*nehashim*], even as he gave his first two positive pronouncements regarding Israel. With the third set of sacrifices he finally freed himself from his usual pattern of divination. Only then did his voice — in his last poetic delivery — embody an oracular quality, a pre-vision of Israel's future. This finale was preceded by a series of descriptive phrases extolling the greatness of this people.

It is illuminating to learn that Balaam ben-Beor's identity, as a seer of the gods, must have been well established in those days. Wall inscriptions,<sup>2</sup> apparently copied from manuscripts, have been found with his precise name. These inscriptions are located in Tel Deir Alla in Jordan just above the River Jabbok, northwest of the land area presumed to be Moab, close to where the biblical events took place. While there is no way of determining whether Balaam actually lived there, the story of his life was apparently preserved for religious-educational instruction.

Here, as in the Bible, his powers of divination stemmed from nightly visits ascribed to the gods. His positive traits are related in a story wherein Balaam is found by his compatriots fasting, crying and despairing because of his vision of an impending catastrophe that would overwhelm the local population—which he may have averted.

A somewhat different turn is seen in the Bible. Balaam recognizes the limitations of his power when he says there is no augury in Israel. Here he does not

2. See A. Lemaire, "Fragments from the Book of Balaam," *Biblical Archaeology Review* XI:5 (1985) pp. 26-39.

deny the efficacy of wizardry but simply realizes that it has no effect upon Israel because of this people's spiritual qualities. Indeed, Israelites were prohibited from engaging in these heathen practices (Deut. 18:10-14).

Actually, Balaam was wary of the task Balak requested of him. The latter, terrified, said plainly: '*A people has arisen out of Egypt,*' vast and powerful, which threatens to overwhelm his nation (Num. 22:5). He did not know how to handle this new phenomenon without Balaam's help. Balaam's uncertainty is evident in his hesitation and delay in going to Balak as well as his thoughtless, blundering behavior with respect to his she-ass, which appeared more understanding than he.

Over-all, it would seem that Balaam took on this assignment not primarily to gain wealth — although a proper payment is a normal part of a transaction for services rendered — but to maintain his unique reputation within the world of his pagan culture. Failure to perform would undermine his authority and status.

In this regard, it is interesting that Balaam's stature remained high despite the failure of his mission. When they parted, Balak, though distraught and angry, did not directly blame him but said that the Lord prevented him from being highly honored (Num. 24:10-11). Indeed, Balaam's advice was soon sought again.

Since sacrifices and incantations had not been effective in obtaining divine support for Moab, Balaam apparently developed a new approach. This time he would achieve his goal of aiding Balak by relying on presumed human frailty. According to the words of Moses (Num. 31:16), Balaam, with the aid of the willing Midianites, succeeded highly in misleading the Israelites through seduction into idol-worship (Num. 25:1).

The position of Midian in this affair is very puzzling. We know of Moses' contact with Midianites, his living with them many years and his marriage to the daughter of a priest of that tribe. At the same time, there is an early reference in the Bible (Gen. 36:35) of a battle in which "Hadad ... smote Midian in the field of Moab." Elsewhere we find Midian associated with Amalek (e.g., Jud. 6:3). Evidently, different groups of Midianites had traveled to various regions, with a large tribal contingent settling in Moab.

Thus, when Israel encamped near Moab, the Midianites, particularly, were discomfited. Indeed, the words of the king of Moab to the elders of Midian, '*Now this horde [Israel] will lick clean ... the grass of the field*' (Num. 22:4) may be a



reference to the "field of Moab" where Midian had settled. They felt insecure since they were living by tolerance in the territory of another country. Perhaps that is why they were willing to listen to the further advice of Balaam, with the subsequent disastrous results for their existence.

The "Moabite women" (Num. 25:1-3) as the seducers of Israel would therefore refer to Midianites, since directly afterwards a Midianite princess is named (25:15) and the Israelites war against them and not the people of Moab. The biblical text also informs us of the later wars with Midianite groups that Israel endured during the period of the Judges.

It is noteworthy that the divine command was "even-handed," making the Israelites as guilty as the Midianites in their shared harlotry. Yet nowhere is there any directive to seize and slaughter Balaam, the possible planner of this sordid situation. We must assume that leaders of Israel, on their own, decided to kill Balaam.

Why did they do so? Obviously, they blamed him for their troubles. It can only be concluded that this was an act of revenge, stemming from an unwillingness, an inability, to face and accept one's own fault and blame. For, in the final analysis, it was Israel's own weakness that led to the whole incident of idol-worship and harlotry.

A question remains as to why Balaam, based on the statement of Moses, advised Moab (i.e., Midian) to attempt the path of seduction. Let us view the situation from Balaam's perspective. Balak, Balaam's client, had just left, still helpless and fearful about the future of his country confronted by the armed power of Israel. Balaam, himself, is quite concerned about the immediate future of those familiar to him. He has just praised, because of divine demand and with divine approval, the people of Israel. He is caught now in a bind. What can he do? He can test his own concepts. If Israel is truly as righteous as he has been told and as he has proclaimed them, then they should be immune, impervious to seductive efforts, to the attempts at debauchery through pagan women—which was probably their usual practice in association with their worship (consider the events associated with the golden calf).

He must have reasoned that if his new approach was unsuccessful, then at least he tried to be helpful and make the best of a difficult situation — and, at the same

time, had found himself justified in having followed the divine request of blessing Israel. If, on the other hand, he succeeded, then he could not be blamed; after all, if the people of Israel sinned, it was their own doing, their failing, a loss of moral discipline for which they were solely responsible. Had he not extolled their virtues!

In retrospect, Balaam appears to have been right. He would indeed have preferred to have his own public declarations vindicated, thereby proving to Balak that Israel was invincible rather than have his own character blemished and diminished as a result of Israel's moral weakness.

#### ERRATUM

We regret an error in the article "The Trope" written by Dr. Alexander Tobias, in Vol. XXIV-1, p. 24. Instead of "stubborn trope" it should have read "shtuben trope."

# ISAIAH AND CYRUS

## JOSIAH DERBY

The Judean exiles in Babylon must have been astounded when they heard Isaiah<sup>1</sup> say to them:

*... in the name of the Lord who confirms the word of His servant and fulfills the predictions of His messengers; who says of Jerusalem 'It shall be inhabited' and of the towns of Judah, 'they shall be rebuilt ...' (44:26).*

And it must have been even more incredible to them when he continued with: *'says to Cyrus [you are] My shepherd [meaning king] who shall fulfill all My purposes'; he shall say of Jerusalem 'She shall be rebuilt' and to the Temple, 'you shall be founded again' (44:28).*

And Isaiah went on to say:

*Thus said The Lord to Cyrus, His anointed one (45:1).*

Aside from the surprise of this sudden declaration that their deliverance was near, and that it would be accomplished by the mighty conqueror Cyrus II, king of the Persians and the Medes, the exiles might also have wondered about a prophecy that was so detailed and specific. For Isaiah's pronouncement was unprecedented in the history of Hebrew prophecy. No prophet before him had been so direct and particular in foretelling the future.<sup>2</sup> Why had this prophet chosen to deviate from the centuries-old prophetic tradition of speaking only in broad, sweeping and vague generalities, only of hope or despair? Why, indeed, had he dared to do so? Was he not putting his credibility, his reputation, his prophetic

1. Some Bible scholars attribute Chapters 40 and onward in the Book of Isaiah to an unknown prophet whom they name "Deutero-Isaiah." For the sake of brevity I shall refer to him simply as Isaiah.

2. There are several instances where a specific time is mentioned in a prophecy: Isaiah 23:15, 17; Jeremiah 14:11, 12, 29:10. In each of these pronouncements the prophet uses the number 70, which is spurious because it is a standard, round number. In Ezekiel 29:11-13 the number is 40, also a standard number, as is the case with Jonah 3:4. Scholars believe that these numbers were not original with the prophet, and in any event, history did not prove them to be correct.

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influence on the line? What emboldened him to declare that the world's most powerful ruler would obey the charge of a God he did not even know? Might there not have been even some risk to his personal safety? Why did Isaiah do it?<sup>3</sup>

I believe that the prophet had such a compelling purpose that he was prepared to gamble everything for it. That purpose was the possible redemption of his people, the hope that by these utterances he could achieve the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, to renew their national existence in their historic homeland. But, was there any evidence in reality that there was even an outside chance that his hope could be realized?

In 546 BCE, Cyrus conquered Lydia and turned his attention to Babylon. Seven years later, in the summer of 539 BCE, Babylon opened its gates to the Persians, and Cyrus became its master without a struggle. His reputation as a man of tolerance and amnesty had already preceded him. He soon showed respect for the gods of other peoples — even conquered peoples — and thereby gained the loyalty of the priests and the populace.

Shortly thereafter, Cyrus issued a decree, inscribed upon a barrel-shaped chunk of clay now known as the Cyrus Cylinder.<sup>4</sup> In a rather lengthy inscription Cyrus (who was a Zoroastrian) thanked the Babylonian god Marduk for choosing him and granting him success in all his endeavors. Marduk had given Nabonidus, king of Babylon, into Cyrus' hands, and all the inhabitants of Babylon rejoiced and welcomed him into the city. Furthermore, Marduk now commands him to restore all the gods whose dwelling places had been abandoned, together with their peoples, to their original places. The Cylinder lists a number of cities where the restorations were to occur: Nineveh, Assur, Susa, Akkad and others.

One can assume that the promulgation of such an important decree was accomplished with great fanfare and public celebration. It is not farfetched to

3. The orthodox have a simple answer: God told him to say these things, and he had no choice but to say them. Others might suggest that this prophecy was uttered by Isaiah after the fact, that he was only putting the events into a Jewish framework. If this were so, it would not have been necessary for Israel to bestow upon Cyrus those highest of titles: "My shepherd," "My anointed one."

4. It was found in 1879 at Omran, near the site of ancient Babylon, and is now in the British Museum. For a translation and analysis of the entire inscription see A. Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, No. 25 (1983) pp. 83-97.

imagine that the Jews of Babylon, and Isaiah among them,<sup>5</sup> participated in this event and heard the text read in public.

This experience must have stirred in Isaiah profound hopes and inspired the vision which he expressed in words of deep elation and expectation: the prophecy quoted above. He dares to replace Marduk with The Lord and proclaim that it was He who

*treaded down nations before him [Cyrus], ungirded the loins of kings and opened the doors before him ... will give him treasures concealed in darkness and secret hoards (45:1, 2).<sup>6</sup>*

Jerusalem was not listed among the cities to be restored. Was it because Jerusalem was so far away, in a distant corner of his realm, that it had escaped Cyrus' attention? Or was it because the God of Jerusalem was not represented by a physical image to be set up again in its own Temple? Isaiah decided to make his vision public. Could he hope that Cyrus would hear about it and be influenced by it? There was reason for him to believe that these questions had affirmative answers.

For one thing, the suggestion that the Temple in Jerusalem also be rebuilt was in keeping with Cyrus' announced policy. It was not asking for special consideration. Moreover, Cyrus might be flattered by the exalted titles conferred upon him by this strange, unseen God of the Judeans, even higher than those bestowed upon him by Marduk. More significant, perhaps, was the fact that Mesopotamia was the home of astrology, soothsaying and all forms of divination. Here was a diviner who was making grandiose pronouncements in the name of a God who might continue to bless Cyrus if he accepted His charge, or might harm or hinder him were he to reject the charge. Why not do for The Lord and His people what he was doing for the other gods?

5. J. Skinner, in his notes to the Cambridge Bible (1930) on Deutero-Isaiah says that the prophet was "perhaps a court official like Daniel or Nehemiah."

6. The resemblance between Isaiah's rhetoric and some passages on the Cylinder are so striking that it could hardly be coincidental. Compare Isaiah 45:1, 2 with "He [Marduk] pronounced the name of Cyrus to become the ruler of all the world. He made the Guri country and all the Manda hordes bow in submission to his [Cyrus'] feet ... without any battle he made him enter Babylon ...." J. B. Prichard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) pp. 315-16.

But did Cyrus know of Isaiah or hear his prophecy? In the cultural milieu it is not unreasonable to assume that the king would have been apprised of this prophet and his glowing utterances. One can imagine another or an additional scenario: Is it not conceivable that following Cyrus' proclamation the leaders of the Jewish community presented themselves to the king with Isaiah's prophecy, requesting permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple to their God, as he had commanded be done for all the other gods?

That Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled and his hopes realized is attested in Ezra 1:1-3:

*In the first year of king Cyrus of Persia, when the word spoken by Jeremiah<sup>8</sup> was fulfilled; the Lord roused the spirit of king Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows: 'Thus saith the king of Persia: The Lord God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Anyone of all His people — may his God be with him — let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and build the house of the Lord, God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem.'*

There are critics who contend that this account is a fiction. They suppose that after Cyrus conquered Babylon the exiles did return to Jerusalem (some critics deny even this) and began the rebuilding of the Temple presumably with the permission of Cyrus. But they consider such a rescript to be an invention of the editor of Ezra, an effort to add authority and glory to this enterprise. They further challenge the historicity of Ezra 6:1-4 which tells that Darius found a scroll in the archives of Babylon containing a copy of this rescript.

These arguments have no merit. When the Jews in Jerusalem began to rebuild the Temple conflict with the Samaritans ensued. This indicates that the Jews required official authorization from the king for any building project, and such permission would be in writing. Moreover, the Cyrus Cylinder was to become part

7. Jacob B. Myers, "Ezra-Nehemiah," *Anchor Bible*, p. 7.

8. The reference is to the letter that Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon *Thus saith the Lord when the seventy years of Babylon are over, I will take note of you and I will fulfill My promise of favor to bring you back to this place (29:10)*. In order to come close to this number some traditionalists reckon this period from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, 605 BCE.

of the foundation of the temple that the king was to build for Marduk. So it is reasonable to assume that rescripts would be sent to all the cities listed, with the proper orders. This is quite in keeping with royal procedures as described in Esther 3:12, where the decree to exterminate the Jews was sent out *to every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language*. (There is no reason to doubt that this was the method of publicizing royal decrees.)

It may be that the rescript sent to the Jews in Jerusalem was written in Aramaic, as would appear from Ezra 3:3-6, and that the editor of Ezra translated it into Hebrew. On the other hand, since Hebrew was the native language of the Jews in Jerusalem, this could well be the original order to rebuild the Temple, while Ezra 6:3-6 was a second document containing specific building instructions.

Scholars have characterized Cyrus as one of history's greatest liberators and humanitarians who practices "a policy of liberality and religious toleration." He also granted special privileges and tax-exempt status to certain cities strategically located throughout his domain, presumably for the purpose of securing their loyalty. Ezra 4:13 might perhaps be hinting that Jerusalem was such a city. Whether it was this political policy or the intercession of the Jews of Babylon, I believe that Isaiah's prophecy played a significant, if not decisive, role in moving Cyrus to act on Jerusalem.

Isaiah's gamble had paid off.

## DARSHANUT

*Daily correspondence on the Internet newsgroup, soc.culture.jewish, spans an inordinately wide range of topics, discussed at very different levels of discourse. Among the hundreds of postings that appear every week — most of them trivial — an occasional query raises a biblical or talmudic issue that is worth pursuing. The results of a cursory search of the sources on two such topics is presented below. Neither pretends to be more than a superficial excursion through the Jewish sources; they are offered in the hope that they can afford the reader some amusement, and perhaps too an unfamiliar slant on familiar subjects.*

### DOES GOD HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR

AMITAI HALEVI

A good deal of serious discussion was devoted to this topic, in the course of which a well-known Yiddish saying was cited: *A mann tracht und Gott lacht*. This is reminiscent of the English proverb: "Man proposes and God disposes," but differs in that it endows the Creator not only with omnipotence but with a benign sense of humor as well. The correspondent added that he was not aware of anywhere in the Humash where it is stated that God laughed.

This statement caught me up short, as I had always thought that letting Sarah get pregnant at 90 (Gen. 21) was a good-natured practical joke played on her by the Almighty. Unfortunately, none of the authorities agree. As you will see below, I have been persuaded to abandon this idea, but let me put my case for it anyway.

I have always understood the meaning of Genesis 21:6, that reads: ותאמר שרה לי צחוק עשה לי אלהים, כל שומע יצחק לי [vatomer Sarah, tzhok asah li Elohim, kol shome'a yitzhak li] to be: God has played a joke on me (or had a laugh at my

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expense), anyone who hears about it will laugh at me. Instead, in the old Jewish Publication Society translation (1917, 1955) this passage reads: *And Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who heareth will laugh on account of me'*. The new JPS translation (1962) puts the same idea into more modern language, departing a bit farther from the Hebrew text: *Sarah said, 'God hath brought me laughter; every one who hears will laugh with me'* [lit. *for me*, not at me, as I would have preferred — A.H.].

The King James Version circumvents the idea of a humorous God by translating the verse: *And Sarah said, 'God has made me to laugh* [which is even less true to the original.— A.H.], *so that all that hear will laugh with me.'*

I could not see the reason for this universal conspiracy to deny God a sense of humor, until I read Onkelos' Aramaic translation, in which *tz'hok* is translated as *hedvah* [joy] and *yitzhak li* as *yehedei li* [be happy for me]. Even though, to my knowledge, this particular translation of צחוק [*tzhok*], or of its synonym and near homonym שחוק [*s'hok*], appears nowhere else in the Bible, what Onkelos says goes. As far as the Pentateuch is concerned, he has the final word.

We know this from the well-known Talmudic statement (Kiddushin 49a): *המתרגם פסוק כצורתו הרי זה בדאי* [He who translates a scriptural passage literally is a liar (i.e. guilty of misrepresentation)]. In order to make it clear that this is not merely a prohibition of word-for-word translation, that can distort the *pshat* [plain sense] of the text, the Talmud goes on to say: *תרגום דידן אלא מאי תרגום* [What is (the correct) translation? (It is) our translation]. This is explained in Megillah 3a: The translation of the Torah was said by Aquila [Onkelos] the convert out of the mouths of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. Nobody likes to be called a liar, so I decided to abandon my *pshat* of Genesis 21:6 and go along with Onkelos like everyone else.

Still, Onkelos' unusual interpretation of *tzhok* as "happiness" rather than "laughter" disturbed me. Of course, laughter need not be derisive; it can be happy, as in the familiar expression in Psalms 126:2: *Az yimalei s'hok pinu* [Then was our mouth filled with laughter], but "laughter" and "happiness" are hardly synonyms. Realizing that Onkelos is not the authoritative translator of the Book of Psalms to Aramaic, I continued to scan it for evidence of God's laughter:

Psalms 2:4: *Yoshev bashamayim yis'hak, adonai yil'ag lamo*

[Old JPS: *He that sitteth in heaven laugheth, the Lord hath them in derision*].

Psalms 37:13: *Adonai yis'hak lo, ki ra'ah ki yavo yomo*  
 [The Lord doth laugh at him; For He seeth that his day is coming]

Psalms 59:9: *Ve'atah adonai tis'hak-lamo, til'ag lekol goyim*  
 [For Thou, O Lord, shall laugh at them; Thou shalt have all the nations in derision].

None of the above is very good-natured laughter, but it is laughter all the same.<sup>1</sup>

In all three of the verses cited above *yis'hak* (*tis'hak*) is translated as *yig'hakh* (*tig'hakh*), which is defined in Jastrow's Dictionary as "laugh," "jest" or "smile." Perhaps the Psalmist — if not the author, authors or Author (as the case may be) of the Humash — is/are prepared to concede that God does have a sense of humor.

### Does דודאים [*duda'im*] Necessarily Mean Mandrake

Another question raised on soc.culture.jewish was whether the classical Jewish sources mention aphrodisiacs, and — if so — which. One respondent suggested mandrake, citing the story of Rachel and Leah in Genesis 30:14-16, and the expression: נתנו ריח הדודאים [The mandrakes give forth fragrance] in Song of Songs 7:14.

In all of the common translations, *duda'im* is read as "mandrake," and Onkelos on Genesis translates it as *yavrukhei*, which Jastrow identifies as such. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 99b) and Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 72,2) both support this translation, by and large, though minority opinions cited therein include *sigalei* [violets], *seviskei* [mandrake flowers — as distinct from the root]), *maishin* [berries of a particular tree], and even *seorin* [barley]. Note that the talmudic sages were quite familiar with the plant that they knew as *yavrukhei* and with its reputed magical therapeutic properties,<sup>2</sup> but its identification with *duda'im* is not unani-

1. Our translation here means that of Jonathan ben-Uziel, who lived before Onkelos and — according to Megillah 3a — derived his translation of *Nevi'im* [Prophets], albeit indirectly, from the last three prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. So it is putatively much closer in time to Sinai than Onkelos' translation of the Humash. According to a *bat-kol* [divine voice], Jonathan was forbidden to translate *Ketuvim* [Hagiographia], but the Aramaic translation of Psalms is part of what *Mikraot Gedolot* refer to as *Targum Yonatan le-Na"Kh*, so let us go along with them for present purposes, since it evidently is our translation as far as traditional Judaism is concerned.

2. See Yerush. Eruvin X, 26.

mous. In his commentary on Sanhedrin 99b, Rashi explains that most of the different Aramaic terms suggested for *duda'im* refer to different aromatic herbs; in his commentary on Genesis 30:14, he settles on jasmine.

While mandrake has long been credited with being an aphrodisiac, as well as having the capacity to ease childbirth, the former property is more legendary than real and the latter is probably due to its narcotic qualities. In the biblical story, Rachel evidently believes that the mandrake's influence would help her overcome her barrenness, but she certainly did not need it as an aphrodisiac. Jacob was so enamored of her that Leah had to "hire" him from her sister for a night in exchange for the plant. Ironically, although Rachel got the mandrake, it was Leah who became pregnant. (Might this not too be taken as an indication of God's sense of humor? — *vide supra*.)

Evidently, Rashi's concentration on the aromatic properties of *duda'im* — like those of the sages before him, was prompted by Song of Songs 7:14. There, however, he gives the word an entirely different interpretation. Whereas Ibn Ezra defines it as a plant with a human form, i.e. a mandrake, Rashi says surprisingly that it refers to vessels filled with figs, and refers to the opening verse of Chapter 24 of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 24:1 reads: *her'ani adonai shnei duda'ei te'anim*, in which *duda'im* is taken to mean the same as *dudim*, the plural of *dud* [vessel]. In Eruvin 21a, Rashi says that *dudim* are copper vessels, but Jonathan translates it as *salei* [baskets], and — as his is our translation of Prophets — JPS renders it *The Lord showed me, and behold two baskets of figs*.

Clearly, we have to go back to the Song of Songs, and try to understand why Rashi made this surprising connection, rather than giving the straightforward reading adopted by Ibn Ezra. The relevant verses as they appear in the old JPS translation are as follows, except for retention of *duda'im*:

*I am my beloved's,  
And his desire is toward me (7:11).  
Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field;  
Let us lodge in the villages (12).  
Let us get up early to the vineyards;  
Let us see whether the vine hath budded,  
Whether the vine-blossom be opened,*

*And the pomegranates be in flower;  
There will I give thee my love (13).  
The duda'im give forth fragrance,  
And at our doors are all manner of precious fruits,  
New and old,  
Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved (14).*

It seems fairly obvious that Ibn Ezra reads the first line of 7:14 as a direct continuation of 7:13, whereas Rashi reads 7:13 and 7:14 as two individual, self-contained verses. According to the latter reading, the only aphrodisiac involved is the sights and smells of the vineyard, as described in 7:13. Afterwards, in 7:14, the lady promises to lead her spent and no doubt famished lover back to the cottage for a late but sumptuous breakfast. Mandrakes makes no sense in this context. The aroma from the *duda'im*, i.e. the baskets of figs, drying in the sun at the cottage door acts not as an aphrodisiac but as an appetizer.

## NOTES ON MEGILLAT RUTH — CHAPTER 4

### AHARON POLLACK

*Meanwhile Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now the redeemer whom Boaz had mentioned passed by. He called, 'Come over and sit down here, So-and-So!' And he came over and sat down. Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, 'Be seated'; and they sat down. He said to the redeemer, 'Naomi, now returned from the country of Moab, must sell the piece of land which belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: 'Acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you.' 'I am willing to redeem it,' he replied. Boaz continued, 'When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate.' The redeemer replied, 'Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate. You take over my right of redemption, for I am unable to exercise it' (Ruth 4:1).*

\* \* \*

From the dialogue between Boaz and the redeemer, one might suppose that at the start the near-redeemer actually intended to redeem the property of the deceased. However, if we consider the weak reason the redeemer gives for his refusal to redeem, and the earlier words of Boaz which were spoken with great tactical design, we will understand that the entire discussion between Boaz and the near-redeemer, in the presence of ten town elders sitting at the gate (the place

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for public deliberation and judgment of communal matters) was a contrived drama from the beginning. The agreement of all interested parties was reached beforehand.

In my opinion, the word *kanita* (v. 5) was spoken by Boaz, and amended by the Mesorah to the second person by deleting the second *yod* as is found in the text. I think that Boaz actually said *kaniti* and not *kanita* as emended. In this manner Boaz explicitly hinted to the redeemer that he himself intended to redeem, he and not another.

It is difficult to suppose that Ruth's having spent the night on Boaz's threshing floor was not known to the men of the town. This fact alone was sufficient cause for the redeemer to renounce his obligation, and thus the matter is understood.

If we compare this scene with the life-style of village Arabs and Bedouin today, we will note similarity.

For example, a guest will come to a village. Although it is understood with whom the guest will lodge, and where he will spend the night, and take his meals, according to custom, nevertheless, the host is not permitted to begin the procedure of hospitality until they [the village dignitaries] arrange first a kind of public debate and judgment. A gathering is called of the town dignitaries who sit at the gate of the entrance. A venerable elder is chosen as judge and he will serve as chairman, the guest is seated in a central location, next to the host, and around them, as in the semi-circle of a threshing floor, the rest of the dignitaries who serve as eye and audio witnesses to the proceedings.

The host rises and, turning to the president of the session, opens with these words: 'Your Honor, Mr. President, I claim that I have legal priority to win this guest, since I am the first to have noticed him while he was still far from my house, a distance of about two furrows of land ploughed in a day by a pair of oxen.' All those seated answer with a call of encouragement and agreement: 'Right! True, true!'

Immediately, a second claimant rises and says: 'Gentlemen, this is not legal and this is not justice, for I have the legal priority to win the splendor of the guest. The corner of his garment is mine since many decades ago, his father and I together shepherded the neighborhood sheep in the district of Rabbatah-Ammon.' Some of those seated answer him with a call of encouragement and agreement.

Then, a third claimant stands up and says: 'My lord, the president, and all dignitaries of the town, this is not legal and this is not justice, for I have the legal right of priority. It is not a hereditary right but rather my right of proprietary claim of the guest himself since when the two of us were boys, naughty young colts, we used to pick the dates from the top of the trees.'

Thus the discussion continues. Meanwhile, the pot is boiling and the festive meal is already cooking in the house of the first and primary host concerning whom it was clear to all that they would eat there and there they would spend the rest of the session.

This entire production was done only for the splendor of the fine words, and the decision to be rendered by the president was known from the beginning. Nevertheless, the discussions continue in honor of the guest and the host in order to fill the time until the meal would be properly cooked.

Similarly, in the Book of Ruth it is known from the beginning who will actually be the redeemer. The near-redeemer understood this, for it was not by chance that he was summoned to the gate. The ten elders understood it, for Boaz had invited them. In short, all interested parties understood the matter from the beginning. The entire meeting, the discussions and arguments between Boaz and the redeemer, took place only to fulfill traditional custom.

I am convinced that this performance was concluded with excellent food and drink, in accordance with established practice. And everything was at Boaz's expense.

## REFLECTIONS OF READERS

### “HIDDEN TREASURE” IN SCRIPTURE

SAUL LEEMAN

A traditional *Humash* (Pentateuch) divides each *Sidra* (weekly portion) into seven sections to accommodate the seven *aliyot* (individuals called to the Torah when that section is read) that are prescribed for the Sabbath Torah reading. The sections are designated רביעי שלישי שני to mark the divisions. Not every *aliyah* has the same number of verses; some have a few more, some a few less. The average *aliyah* has about 16 verses.

But, give or take a half-dozen verses, all *aliyot* are approximately of the same length — except for the *Sidra* of כי תשא (Ex. 30:11-34:35).

The first *aliyah* in this *Sidra* contains 45 verses; the second, 47, while the third *aliyah* consists of merely 5. It is quite obvious that “45-47-5” is certainly a most lopsided division. Could this possibly be random? What, then, is the reason for this unusual and disproportionate allocation?

In this *Sidra* we read about the incident of the Golden Calf. The ancient rabbis who determined this division asked themselves: Can we assign this section to a Kohen? No, they answered, for to do so would be to embarrass the Kohen by reminding him of the role played by his ancestor Aaron, who was the actual, though reluctant, architect of the Calf. Can we assign the reading to a Yisrael? Again, no! For the Israelites bore the main guilt for this grievous misdeed and it would be insensitive on our part to involve a Yisrael in the *aliyah* that relates the details of his ancestors’ backsliding. The only one to whom we can assign the reading of the Golden Calf incident without casting any aspersions on his ancestors is, of course, the Levi. Therefore, in order to do so, we have to resort to this most unusual division of “45-47-5.”

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Now, of course, the teaching that one must ever be sensitive to the feelings of others is a lesson that lies at the heart of all true religion. It is a lesson that is deeply imbedded in our tradition and is expressed over and over again in all our classical literature.

What I find most striking, however, in this instance, is the beautifully *subtle* manner in which the lesson is imparted — not stated explicitly; not even expressed in words; expressed merely *in the slicing!*

Another such teaching, expressed in an equally subtle manner, can be found in the same *Sidra* of כִּי תִשָּׂא (Ex. 30:11-34:35).

Moses asks of God: הוֹדַעֲנִי נָא אֶת דַּרְכְּךָ (Ex. 33:13) *Show me Your paths.*

We note, however, that the word דַּרְכְּךָ “Your paths” is written defective, that is, without a *yod*. Therefore, in earlier times, before the vocalization was instituted, when the text was strictly consonantal, it most probably was read “Your path” — singular, rather than plural.

It is to the everlasting credit of the Masoretes that, when they introduced the vowels (in the 6th or 7th century), they rejected the reading of דַּרְכְּךָ “Your path” and in spite of the lack of the *yod* vocalized the word as דַּרְכְּךָ “Your paths.” In doing so, they teach us that there is more than one path to truth — there is more than one path to God. Therefore, when one path seems to be the preferred one in *your eyes*, you must be understanding and sensitive to the other fellow who chooses an alternative path.

To sum up, the above illustrations are instances where important lessons can be overlooked if one reads the text in a casual fashion. Not all of its teachings lie on the surface. It is often necessary to *dig* to uncover treasure.

## AN OBSTETRIC PROBLEM

**J. JACOBS**

Rachel suffered from primary infertility. She was then delivered of a child and from the account in Genesis 30:23 it appears that the delivery was normal.

A grave problem arose in the second delivery. Rachel had gone into labor on the way to Ephrathah (Gen. 35:16-17) and the labor pains were severe: *And during the course of the birth, while her pains were strong, the midwife said to her: 'Be not afraid for this child, too, is a boy.'*

We know the outcome. The child survived but the mother, sadly, did not.

What was the complication that caused this catastrophe? It is clear that the midwife was able to determine the sex of the child during the course of the delivery. This is possible only in a breech delivery where there may be a prolonged interval between the birth of the lower half of the body and the aftercoming head. In a normal delivery where the head and shoulders are born first the birth of the remainder of the body follows almost immediately. The midwife in a normal delivery cannot determine the sex of the child before complete delivery.

Breech presentation, nowadays mostly treated by Caesarian section, was a severe complication. It frequently brought about maternal death.

The birth of Benjamin may well have been the first ever recorded breech delivery.

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## JACOB'S TWO DREAMS

SIMON NOVAK

Genesis 31:1-15 contains, on superficial reading, a number of non-sequiturs. The beginning is quite cogent. Jacob, outsmarting the crafty Laban, has become a wealthy man. One day he summons his two wives, Rachel and Leah, to share with them a decision, the result of a divine call that had come to him in a dream: *return unto the land of thy nativity.*

He offers three reasons for his resolve. He had heard the words of Laban's sons saying: *Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's.* He also noticed that *the countenance of Laban ... was not toward him as beforetime.* But it was a dream that tipped the scales. This dream came to him at the time when the flock conceived. During the dream, containing seemingly three disjointed sequences of vivid visions, Jacob is addressed by an angel of God:

*... see all the he goats leap upon — עולה — the flock are streaked speckled and grizzled*

*I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. I am the God of Beth-el, where thou didst anoint a pillar, where thou didst vow a vow unto Me.*

*Now arise, get thee out from this land and return unto the land of thy nativity.*

What is the connection between the mating of the flock and all *that Laban doeth unto thee*? What indeed did Laban do to him? After all, it was Jacob's clever manipulations that had brought him great wealth. And what is the relation between the reminder that He is the God of Beth-el and what precedes and follows it?

This biblical dream, though seemingly confusing, when read carefully, is full of significance, mirroring Jacob's state of mind. He is aware that he is a man of destiny, through whom the blessings bestowed on Abraham and Isaac would be transmitted to his children. He is reminded of the seminal event in Beth-el, 21 years before, when he had fled from his brother Esau. There he had another dream: a ladder reaching from the ground to the heavens; angels ascending עולים and

*Simon Novak is a retired Jewish educator, now residing in Israel.*

descending on it; and the glory of God above them. Twenty years with Laban has changed him: he now dreams of speckled, grizzled and streaked flock, mirroring the fact that all his energy is now focused on acquiring possessions; the acquisition of wealth has become his highest aspiration. The vision of the ladder had been replaced by the vision of the mating of flock! This is, what Laban has done to him. Jacob is shocked. He is stung by the irony of the same Hebrew term עלה used in the two dreams, in the first, for angels ascending, and in the second one, for the mating of the goats. He has reached a spiritual crisis and is shaken to the core.

The time has come to leave. Having reached a turning point in his life, he is preparing himself to change from Jacob to Israel, another seminal event that would occur shortly after.

# TORAH DIALOGUES

## THIRD SERIES

HAYYIM HALPERN

*These questions were devised with the intention of highlighting moral lessons and values in the Torah and Haftarah weekly portions. Many of the questions do not have definitive answers and the participants are encouraged to express personal views. Ideally, these dialogues will evince discussions of the weekly readings.*

### QUESTIONS

DEVARIM (DEUT. 1:1-3:22)

This *parashah* is always read before the fast of Tisha B'Av and the Haftarah, "Hazon," is specifically prescribed for this Shabbat. What direct allusions and themes make these readings appropriate for this week?

HAFTARAH (ISA. 1:1-27)

\* \* \*

VAET'HANAN (DEUT. 3:23-7:11)

The Torah states specifically in 4:2 that we *shall not add anything ... or take anything away ...* from the commandments. In light of that admonition how can we justify the many *halachic* (legal) additions and changes made by the Talmud and by rabbis through the ages?

HAFTARAH (ISA. 40:1-26)

How are the expressions *herald of joy to Zion* (מבשרת ציון) and *herald of joy to Jerusalem* (מבשרת ירושלים) in verse 9 used in modern times?

*Hayyim (Harold) Halpern was rabbi in New Milford, NJ and Valley Stream, NY where he led his congregation in Torah Dialogues. His first series of dialogues appeared in Dor leDor from 1975 to 1981. He resides in Jerusalem.*

## EKEV (DEUT. 7:12-11:25)

A verse in this parashah lists seven agricultural products for which Israel is famous. Which are they and what special blessing was ordained after eating them?

## HAFTARAH (ISA. 49:14-51:3)

This Haftarah includes one of the four passages referred to as "The Suffering Servant" poems. Numerous interpretations have been offered for these passages. In 50:4-9, to whom do you believe the prophet is referring?

\* \* \*

## RE'EH (DEUT. 11:26-16:17)

The term "fear" is often applied to our relationship with God in Jewish prayer and many times in the Torah and throughout scripture (New JPS translates the verb נָרָא as "revere"). In this *parashah* נָרָא occurs in 13:5, 12 and 14:23. Elsewhere, Jewish tradition speaks of fearing and loving God in the same breath (see especially Deut. 10:12). How do you reconcile fear with the frequent reminder to love God (Deut. 11:1, 13:4)?

## HAFTARAH (ISA. 54:11-55:5)

Judaism stresses education on all age levels. Find and discuss the verse in this Haftarah that indicates that emphasis. What well-known variant reading in that verse is often cited in the liturgy?

\* \* \*

## SHOFTIM (DEUT. 16:18-21:9)

Examine the third through fifth aliyahs (17:14-18:22). They deal with Kohanim (priests), pagan practices and superstitions, and prophets. Explain the juxtaposition of these topics.

## HAFTARAH (ISA. 51:12-52:12)

In this Haftarah of consolation the prophet seems to go well beyond the comforting promise of rescue and return to the land. Find the verse in which he claims a divine mission for Israel. How would you spell out the mission?

\* \* \*

## KI TETZE (DEUT. 21:10-25:19)

This *parashah* contains more mitzvahs (commandments) than any other (72). The Talmud also derives many additional rules from these. What general rules would you infer logically from the mitzvah to bury the executed criminal without delay (21:23)?

## HAFTARAH (ISA. 54:1-10)

The bond between Israel and God is often described by the prophets in marital metaphor. List the female/marital metaphors for Zion in this Haftarah.

\* \* \*

## KI TAVO (DEUT. 26:1-28:8)

From the nature of the offering described in 26:2, on which festival do you think this presentation was made?

## HAFTARAH (ISA. 60)

King Cyrus of Persia had given the Jews his blessings to return and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem (II Chr. 36:22f. and Ezra 1).

Study this chapter to determine if it was a pre-return or post-return to Zion prophecy.

\* \* \*

## NITZAVIM-VAYELECH (DEUT. 29:9-31:30)

When Moses announces that he is 120 years old (31:2) we are reminded of the popular tradition that this age is the limit of human longevity. Though the Psalmist

(90:10) speaks of 70 or 80 years as the usual span of life the folk salutation proclaims "till 120!" Where in chapter six of Genesis do we find the origin of that expression?

HAFTARAH (ISA. 61:10-63:9)

Here as in the Haftarah of Ki Tetze above, the metaphorical relationship of God with Israel is a marital one. But in this Haftarah there is an abrupt and startling change in divine imagery. Where is it and how is God described?

## RESPONSES

DEVARIM

Both the Torah and Haftarah readings sound the classic note of lamentation that begins with the word "alas" (אִיכָה in Deut. 1:12 and in Isa. 1:21). The content of the *parashah* is admonitory and redemptive in its historical review. The Haftarah speaks of sin, punishment and redemption. These themes are a suitable prelude to Tisha B'Av.

\* \* \*

VAET'HANAN

Condition may warrant some human modifications to Torah laws (J. Karo). Rashi (quoting Sifré) interprets the limiting verse to refer to internal changes to commandments, such as increasing the number of fringes prescribed on the tallit. Maimonides states that leading scholars may add "fences" to Torah injunctions in order to protect them. They may even temporarily dispense with a commandment in exceptional circumstances (הוראת שעה). Also all instances of rabbinic amendments (Oral Torah) must be clearly noted as such (דַּרְבֵּינֵן). See Hertz: *Pentateuch on Deut.* 4:2 and 13:1, Rambam: *Yad, Mamrim* 2:4.

HAFTARAH

They are the names of new western suburbs of Jerusalem.



## EKEV

The products are listed in 8:8: wheat, barley, vintage, figs, pomegranates, olives and honey (probably an extract of dates). All are presently cultivated in Israel. The special grace (ברכה אחרונה) for these may be found in the Prayer Book (Artscroll p. 200, *Sim Shalom* p. 782). It is also recited at the Pesah Seder after the last cup of wine.

## HAFTARAH

Many volumes of commentary are available on these passages from the latter part of Isaiah. Most contemporary scholars agree with the traditional Jewish commentators and identify the suffering servant with Israel (cf. Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban, Abravanel, Kuzari). Isaiah 42:1 and 49:3 clearly refer to the nation. Others, however, identify the servant with known or unknown individuals including the prophet himself or other prophets, a teacher, or a messiah.

\* \* \*

## RE'EH

Kabbalists speak of a blend of love and fear (דחילו ורחימו) as the ideal manner for relating to God (v. Tanya, Ch. 19). Some Hassidic leaders explain fear as primarily the fear of separation from God or the inability to live up to your spiritual capacities.

## HAFTARAH

In some rituals 54:13 is recited daily and in others only on Shabbat. The stress here is on religious education as the path to shalom. The variant reading cited at the end of Talmud Berachot (64a) is bonayich (בניך = your builders) for banayich (בניך = your children), meaning that your children are also your builders of a better society.

\* \* \*

## SHOFTIM

Perhaps the sequence means that the Kohanim (priests) and Levites will fulfill the Israelite need for religious expression and ritual. Therefore, there should be no need to succumb to pagan superstition and practice. Then the true prophet will complement the work of the temple officiants by raising the people's sights to the values, ideals and spiritual meaning inherent in the rituals.

## HAFTARAH

Commentators point to 51:16 as a specific indication of Israel's mission to preserve the God-given Torah and convey its message to all humanity (San. 99b. cf. Radak, Hertz, New JPS footnote, ad loc.).

\* \* \*

## KI TETZE

The sages in the Talmud derive a number of laws and practices regarding capital punishment from verses 22 and 23. They also derive from this passage that the proper disposition of the dead is by interment and, by a fortiori inference (קל וחומר), that prompt burial is required for all Israelites (v. San. 46a and b).

## HAFTARAH

Zion is referred to as a childless/barren woman and a married woman (v. 1); as a young woman and a widow (v. 4); and as a forsaken wife and a young wife (v. 6).

\* \* \*

## KI TAVO

Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, is the season for bringing *Bikkurim* or first fruits (v. Ex. 34:22, Lev. 23:16f.). Tradition connects the recitation here with the commandment in Exodus 23:19. The Mishnah (Bik. 1:3) states that the ceremony of the first fruits only applied to the seven species (Deut. 8:8, see Dialogue for Ekev above) and that they were "not brought before Shavuot." Actually, it was permissible to present first fruits for months after the Festival of Weeks (Bik. 1:6).

*Continued on p. 198*

## BOOK REVIEW

Samuel H. Dresner, *Rachel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 246 pp.  
Reviewed by P. J. Berlyn.

This first full-length study of Rachel presents her persona in both the biblical text and in later Jewish tradition, and traces how one evolved into the other. It is written with sensibility and compassion, clearly and fluently readable.

The book is not concerned with historical setting or socio-legal background for tales of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Rather, it probes the meaning of those tales within the framework of the transcendent theme of the Book of Genesis: The Divine Covenant with Abraham, and its transmission from one generation to the next. Matchmaking, progeny, sibling rivalry, become part of the quest for marriages and heirs that will ensure preservation of the unique spiritual heritage.

The author observes, "The children of Israel were not to marry frivolously ..." and in this light, Jacob's instant and intense love for Rachel was no mere romantic infatuation, but recognition of a soulmate. The characters of Rachel herself, Leah, Jacob, their offspring and the tribes descended from them, are construed in this same light. And here, in establishing the "primacy of Rachel" over Leah, there is a tendency to exalt the future historic role of Ephraim, a "Rachel tribe," over the ultimately prevailing one of Judah, a "Leah tribe."

The biblical text is supplemented by midrash and commentary, wherein Rachel is viewed to her best advantage: It was for selfless love of her sister that she enabled Leah to take her own place as Jacob's first bride; the barren Rachel "envied her sister" (Gen. 30:11) not for Leah's many sons but for her piety; she purloined her father's *teraphim* to wean him from idolatry.

This ideal befits an image of Rachel that comes less from the narratives of the patriarchal age than from a passage composed many centuries later, when captives were being borne away to exile in Babylon:

*Thus said the Lord: 'Hark, a cry is heard in Ramah,  
Lamentation and bitter weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children.*

*She refuses to be comforted for her children,  
Because they are gone. (Jer. 31:15)*

Here the lovely shepherd girl has become the ghostly mother of all the children of Israel, witness to their sufferings, inconsolable in her anguish for them. To this Rachel the sorrowful and the troubled — especially women — turn for solace, and seek her prayers on their behalf.

The book concludes with visits to the Tomb of Rachel where it is believed Jacob laid her to rest beside the road to Bethlehem. It was already a landmark in the days of the Judges (I Sam. 10: ); and is still a cherished shrine today.

TORAH DIALOGUES *Continued from p. 196*

#### HAFTARAH

It is difficult to determine with certainty. Verses 7 and 13 seem to refer to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem that only needs beautification, while verse 10 speaks of rebuilding the walls. Actually, the walls were built some years after the return. From all indications in this chapter a small struggling community which had returned was being addressed and encouraged.

\* \* \*

#### NITZAVIM-VAYELECH

The phrase is found in Genesis 6:3, ... *let the days allowed him* (the human?) *be 120 years*. Despite the popular interpretation traditional commentators do not refer this to the human span of life (v. Rashi, Hizkuni, Ibn Ezra, Torah Temimah, ad loc.).

#### HAFTARAH

At the beginning of Chapter 63 the prophet goes from marital metaphor to martial metaphor. God is described as a warrior in blood-stained raiment returning from battle against Israel's enemies.

# A VISIT TO ARMAGEDDON

ABRAHAM RUDERMAN

*The following is adapted from an article by Abraham Rabinowich "Reclaiming Armageddon" in the Jerusalem Post Magazine, July 29, 1994.*

The first excavation at Megiddo was carried out in 1903 on behalf of the German Society for the study of Palestine. Excavations were resumed in 1925 by the University of Chicago and continued until 1939. Because this site is associated with Armageddon, the last great battle that the New Testament foresees will take place there, John D. Rockefeller lavished extensive funding on its excavation. A stone building erected to house the expedition still stands today serving as a visitors' center and museum. The American expedition was provided with tennis courts and a balloon for aerial photography. But their methods were obsolete and led to considerable confusion. In 1945 Yigal Yadin carried out three short seasons of excavations, but contributed little that was new.

Situated at the edge of the Jezreel Valley, the ancient settlement of Megiddo was supplied with ample springs. Armies and traders passed here for thousands of years on their way coming and going from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Its strategic location accounts for the frequent clashes which took place there. That is why the name Megiddo was associated with war long after the city ceased to exist. Many years after the *tel* had been abandoned, the writer of Revelations chose to name the final battle between the forces of good and evil, Armageddon, after Mt. Megiddo. One of the oldest accounts of a battle at Megiddo, some 3,500 years ago, is found on a hieroglyphic inscription from Karnak, in which Pharaoh Thutmose fought against a confederation of Canaanite City States. Urged by his generals to outflank them, Pharaoh overruled them and took his armies straight through the Canaanites who had not expected them, and were soundly trounced. Megiddo

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became an important provincial capital in the 10th century BCE under King Solomon. I Kings 9:15 speaks of his fortifying Megiddo, Hazor, Gezer, and Jerusalem, using forced labor. Earlier excavations had identified an important six-chambered gateway as the Solomonic entrance. Yadin confirmed this finding after his own probe noted the gate's similarity to Solomonic gates at Hazor and Gezer. I Kings describes the building of cities for chariots and cities for horsemen. Archeologists have disagreed as to the identity of Solomon's stables and believe they were storerooms.

With the breakup of the United Kingdom into Judea and Israel after the death of Solomon, Megiddo underwent a significant change. Under Solomon it had been an administrative center. Under the Northern Kingdom it became a fortified military outpost with stout walls, an impressive six-chambered gateway, and military stables. The reason for the fortification was the conquest of Israel by the Assyrians in 734 BCE, when Megiddo became an Assyrian district capital. The Americans excavated the Assyrian palace. In 1950 a shepherd from a neighboring kibbutz found a clay tablet with cuneiform writing. It contained part of the Gilgamesh epic compiled in Mesopotamia.

In 609 BCE Pharaoh Necho led an army through the pass at Megiddo and confronted the Judaeen King Josiah, who was slain. Megiddo was abandoned in the 4th century BCE, never to be resettled. Kibbutz Megiddo was established in 1949 by Holocaust survivors from Poland. When Pope Paul VI visited Israel in 1964 he was formally received by President Zalman Shazar at Megiddo. Archeologists have called Megiddo one of the cradles of biblical archeology. There is no site like it with such monumental buildings, gates, walls, waste system and temples. In one American expedition, a twenty meter cutting exposed more than twenty layers of civilization, covering some 3,000 years from the 4th millennium BCE, one civilization built upon another. Much care is being lavished on the manner of excavation to ensure thorough investigation. There is hardly an end in sight.

## **33RD INTERNATIONAL BIBLE CONTEST FOR YOUTH, 5756**

**JOSHUA J. ADLER**

Despite terrorist and Hizballah attacks, 41 young people from 21 countries came to take part in this year's annual Bible contest, whose themes were Jerusalem, industry and national unity. Romania and Austria were represented for the first time. As always, there were actually two contests, with the first being for diaspora students alone, and another for Israeli students. It is the highest scorers in these contests who then are invited to the International contest. The quiz for the 41 diaspora students took place in the Northern Negev town of Netivot on April 18th and was won by Yehuda Chanales of Teaneck, New Jersey. But Yehudah had to share the glory with a lad from Mexico City, Aaron Katz. (Last year Ezra Frazer of Teaneck came in second, which says something for the Jewish educational institutions of Teaneck).

In the main contest on Yom HaAtzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, which is both broadcast and televised, the Israeli youngsters again walked away with the best scores. Doron Shahar was crowned with the top award and Yohai Even-Hayim of Netivot, who missed being the champ by just one point, was runner up. (Yohai's brother was also a runner up in a previous year). The top diaspora scorer in the International competition, after the four Israelis, was Yehudah Chanales, followed by three other diaspora finalists, Aaron Katz of Mexico, Haya Erdman of Canada and Gavriella Cohen-Kichik of Argentina.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres asked the closing question and presented the International Bible champion, Doron Shahar, with his reward as well as with the special Professor Gevaryahu trophy (sculpted by Yitzhak Shmueli of Ein Hod). The trophy is transferred to the new winner each year by the previous year's winner.

Many organizations are involved in working and planning each annual contest such as the Education Department of the WZO headed by Rabbi Yosef Wernik, the Jewish National Fund headed by Moshe Rivlin, the Jewish Bible Association

and especially the Education-Gadna Sections of the IDF which has as its new head, an air force general, Avraham Asa-el.

The Bible contest held in the morning and the Israel Prize ceremonies in the evening, are the major features of Israel Independence Day. As usual, the presence of the Prime Minister, the chairman of the Knesset, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Religion, give the occasion an official status which emphasizes the fact that Jews have not forgotten their heritage and commitment to spiritual and cultural values even as we celebrate the anniversary of our reborn homeland and national independence.

It is our strong feeling that all Jewish communities should encourage their students to study the Tanakh in any language (indeed questions were translated into 11 languages in this year's quiz) and conduct local and regional contests so that they will be represented at the two week Bible camp and Bible quizzes. Coming to Israel and experiencing the feel and geography of the country, meeting with its leaders and making friends with other Jews from around the world is an unforgettable experience for any Jewish youngster and something which should be supported by every Jewish educational institution throughout the world.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Rabbi Saul Leeman (*JBQ* 93) discusses the acrostics anomalies in Psalms 25 and 34 where the *vav* verses are missing while a *peh* verse is added at the end after the *tav* verse. He suggests an ingenious solution to this problem.

He also mentions that the acrostics in Lamentations 2, 3 and 4 curiously have the *ayin* verse after the *peh* verse, where of course the reverse order would be expected. Here he gives no reason.

May I suggest a possible answer?

The letter *ayin* is closely related to the *tsadeh*, in fact the two are at times interchangeable (*Gesenius Hebrew Dictionary*). Aramaic often has an *ayin* where Hebrew has a *tsadeh*, e.g. ארעא - ארץ, עמרא - צמר, עאן - צאן.

It could therefore be that due to this fact the *ayin* verses in Lamentations are placed after the *peh* verses.

*Dr. J. Jacobs, London, England*

Sir,

The late David Wolfers penned his last paper on Job in your January/March 1996 issue. He writes correctly, I think, that Job is "an allegorical figure representing the people of Judah" but he places the event in the context of "King Hezekiah in the time of the Assyrian conquests."

With respect, I suggest a different time, though I emphatically agree that Job is Judah personified. The only clue is found near the end of the book (42:10) when God *shav et shvut Iyov*, God reversed the captivity — note: captivity, of Job, almost the exact words of Psalm 126:1 regarding the joy of the reversal of captivity of Zion. We simply must conclude that the period is that of the exile and return from Babylon, the same theme as that in Isaiah 53, Jeremiah and Lamentations (though before the return).

If we draw this inference then the curious name of *Iyov* must be set in a Babylonian context. Indeed it is; it is an acronym for *i* (or *oi*; see Numbers 21:29, Jeremiah 13:27, Lamentations 5:16), the *aleph* of *Iyov*, followed by the *yod-vav*, to be interpreted as *yordei*, going down (into exile), and *bet* for *bavel*, Babylon. *Iyov* is thus an acronym for *i-yordei-bavel*, Woe to those who have Gone Down to Babylon.

This subject — Code Words — was dealt with in my paper in *Midstream* (New York) of August/September 1994.

*S. Levin, Johannesburg, South Africa*

עשה תורתך קבע

**THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR**

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF  
CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

**August 1996**

1	Th	Psalms 60
2	F	Psalms 61
4	S	Psalms 62
5	M	Psalms 63
6	T	Psalms 64
7	W	Psalms 65
8	Th	Psalms 66
9	F	Psalms 67
11	S	Psalms 68
12	M	Psalms 69
13	T	Psalms 70
14	W	Psalms 71
15	Th	Psalms 72
16	F	Psalms 73
18	S	Psalms 74
19	M	Psalms 75
20	T	Psalms 76
21	W	Psalms 77
22	Th	Psalms 78
23	F	Psalms 79
25	S	Psalms 80
26	M	Psalms 81
27	T	Psalms 82
28	W	Psalms 83
29	Th	Psalms 84
30	F	Psalms 85

**September 1996**

1	S	Psalms 86
2	M	Psalms 87
3	T	Psalms 88
4	W	Psalms 89
5	Th	Psalms 90
6	F	Psalms 91
8	S	Psalms 92
9	M	Psalms 93
10	T	Psalms 93
11	W	Psalms 94
12	Th	Psalms 95
13	F	Psalms 96
15	S	Rosh Hashanah
16	M	Psalms 97
17	T	Psalms 98
18	W	Psalms 99
19	Th	Psalms 100
20	F	Psalms 101
22	S	Psalms 102
23	M	Yom Kippur
24	T	Psalms 103
25	W	Psalms 104
26	Th	Psalms 105
27	F	Psalms 106
29	S	Psalms 107
30	M	Psalms 108

**October 1996**

1	T	Psalms 109
2	W	Psalms 110
3	Th	Psalms 111
4	F	Psalms 112
6	S	Psalms 113
7	M	Psalms 114
8	T	Psalms 115
9	W	Psalms 116
10	Th	Psalms 117
11	F	Psalms 118
13	S	Psalms 119: 1-40
14	M	Psalms 119: 41-80
15	T	Psalms 119: 81-120
16	W	Psalms 119: 121-152
17	Th	Psalms 119: 153-176
18	F	Psalms 120
20	S	Psalms 121
21	M	Psalms 122
22	T	Psalms 123
23	W	Psalms 124
24	Th	Psalms 125
25	F	Psalms 126
27	S	Psalms 127
28	M	Psalms 128
29	T	Psalms 129
30	W	Psalms 130
31	Th	Psalms 131

**November 1996**

1	F	Psalms 132
3	S	Psalms 133
4	M	Psalms 134
5	T	Psalms 135
6	W	Psalms 136
7	Th	Psalms 137
8	F	Psalms 138
10	S	Psalms 139
11	M	Psalms 140
12	T	Psalms 141
13	W	Psalms 142
14	Th	Psalms 143
15	F	Psalms 144
17	S	Psalms 145
18	M	Psalms 146
19	T	Psalms 147
20	W	Psalms 148
21	Th	Psalms 149
22	F	Psalms 150
24	S	Proverbs 1
25	M	Proverbs 2
26	T	Proverbs 3
27	W	Proverbs 4
28	Th	Proverbs 5
29	F	Proverbs 6

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