

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Words of Gad the Seer*, Meir Bar-Ilan, ed. (Israel: 2015), 390 pp. Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg. Hebrew with an introduction and translation of the text in English.

I Chronicles 29:29 states, *Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer.* There is no extant copy of the books of Nathan or Gad, they are considered lost books, like Sefer ha-Yashar, mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and II Samuel 1:18. A pseudepigraphic book, claiming to be authored by Gad, was in the possession of the Jews of Cochín, India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A copy of the work was brought from Cochín to the Cambridge Library around 1806. For years the manuscript was misidentified and inaccurately described, so it remained in limbo until Meir Bar-Ilan, a professor at Bar-Ilan University, published this edition of the book, based on the Cambridge manuscript (Ms. O0.1.20). This book represents over thirty years of his research on this manuscript.

This is a very handsome and comprehensive and, as of now, the only edition of this pseudepigraphic work. It is presented in an oversized, coffee table book format, on glossy paper with many illustrations. The book includes over seventy pages of introductory material, describing the Pseudepigrapha in general and its relation to rabbinic literature, the history of the manuscript and the scholarship surrounding it, literary parallels to Biblical books, and the purpose of the author in writing this book. There is a long discussion of when the original text was written, and the author offers two basic approaches, either that it was composed around the first century BCE, or between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The later date is more in line with other researchers of the manuscript, and is considered the more conservative approach, but Bar-Ilan points out the pros and cons of each theory in the form of a handy table (p. 66).

In terms of the text itself, the 14 chapters of the manuscript do not comprise one long sustained narrative, but are more of an anthology of different styles and genres. Two chapters are basically copies of Psalms 144 and 145, and one chapter is a harmonization of I Samuel 24 and I Chronicles 21. Other

*Rabbi Dr. Simcha Rosenberg teaches Tanakh in Jerusalem at a variety of yeshivot and seminars.*

chapters tell stories of King David's wisdom, messages he received from God through prophets, and a story of King David's interaction with Hiram, king of Tyre, where David advises him to observe the Noahide laws. These new narratives are the most interesting parts of the work.

Chapter 3 tells the story of a Moabite shepherd who wants to convert to Judaism, but is denied. When he questions why Ruth was allowed to convert while he is not, Nathan the prophet comes back with a response from God, known to us as the rabbinic teaching that Moabite women may convert to Judaism, but not Moabite men. The Moabite shepherd is distraught, but in a happy ending of sorts he is appointed to be the chief shepherd of King David's flocks, *and he was there until the day when Solomon reigned over Israel* (v. 102). Later, the shepherd's daughter, Sefirah, becomes the chief concubine of King Solomon.

Chapter 13 continues the story of Tamar from II Samuel 13. After being raped by Amnon and avenged by Absalom, here Tamar moves to Geshur, her mother's birthplace. There she encounters the lovesick Pirshaz, a friend of the King of Geshur, who attempts to rape her. After lulling him to sleep with her harp playing, she kills him with a sword. Later, King Solomon arranges to have her rescued from prison in Geshur and brought back to Israel where she marries the son of Abinadab and changes her name to Taphath, a sweet smelling incense.

These kinds of stories are familiar to readers of the midrash and Pseudepigrapha, and have many Biblical parallels, noted by Prof. Bar-Ilan. Each chapter is discussed with a thorough verse by verse commentary, similar to that of the *Daat Mikra* series on the Tanakh. An interesting feature of the manuscript is that it contains masoretic notes in the margins, as well as scribal peculiarities (oversized letters, a reversed letter *nun*), phenomena found in Biblical books but highly unusual in the Pseudepigrapha. These are discussed extensively in the current volume.

This book contains examples of the original manuscript and a description of the scribal style used, the text of the *The Words of Gad the Seer* in modern Hebrew font and in English translation, and a long commentary in Hebrew on each chapter. It is the only available edition of a lost pseudepigraphic work, and will be the definitive edition for years to come.