

נחל ה

Yeshiva
University
*Journal for the
Study of Bible*

Volume 1 1999

נחלה

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF BIBLE

Published annually

Vol. 1, 1999

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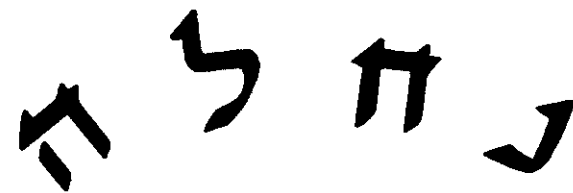
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The editorial board of נחלה would like to thank
Dr. Herbert Dobrinsky
for his tireless efforts on behalf of this journal.

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Yeshiva University Journal for the Study of Bible

Ari Mermelstein
Editor

Vol. 1 1999

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The Editorial Board of **נחלה**
express profound thanks and appreciation to
our good friends
Louis and Pauline Shapiro
for the generous support which has made
this publication possible.

The editors would also
like to express their thanks
to the officers of

SOY,

TAC

and the

Dean's Office of Yeshiva
College,

for their financial support.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday)
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANE	ancient Near East(ern)
ANET	J. B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs' <i>Lexicon</i>
BDD	בכל דרכיך דעוה
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
B. T.; bTal; B. Tal.	Babylonian Talmud (Bavli)
BZAW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CAD	Dictionary of Akkadian of the University of Chicago
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LXX	Septuagint
M	Mishnah
Maharsha	R. Shmuel Eliezer b. Judah Halevi Idlish
Malbim	R. Meir Leibush b. R. Yechiel Michel
MT	Masoretic text
OLZ	<i>Orientalitische Literaturzeitung</i>
Presb	<i>Presbyterian</i>
P. T.; pTal; P. Tal	Palestinian Talmud (Yerushalmi)
Radak	R. David Kimchi
Rashi	R. Shlomo Yitzchaki

Rashbam	R. Shmuel b. Meir
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SVT	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
T	Tosefta
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
Tg	Targum
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCJS	World Congress for Jewish Studies
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

New trends in the world of biblical scholarship also suggest new opportunities for dialogue between our community and the society of Bible academicians. A newfound interest in literary issues has emerged in the academic world, and, coupled with an awareness of the narrator's perspective, has heightened our appreciation for Tanakh as literature. Deflecting attention from source-critical analysis, proponents of this approach furnish new categories of *peshat* that we can safely use to enhance our analytical arsenal. Nor does such an approach compromise our commitment to Tanakh as God's word. The literary approach to Bible study does not mute the didactic element of Tanakh, but instead asserts that the authors of the works in Tanakh choose to convey their most serious messages in the form of the highest quality literature. Several articles contained herein demonstrate an intimate familiarity with these methods.

Thus, as the scholarly world begins to undertake analysis of the text and not just its historical composition, we are in a perfect position to meet them and show them the way. As bearers of a three thousand-year-old torch, we should feel both the privilege and the responsibility of intellectual leadership on our shoulders, and, standing in turn on the amply broad shoulders of giants from the *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im* through the *Rishonim* and until the recent *gedolim*, we can bring light to our sacred texts. Let us together lay claim to our inheritance, to the נחלה that is Tanakh.

ארבעה נקראו נחלה: בית המקדש נקרא נחלה שנאמר בהר נחלתך. ארץ ישראל נקראת נחלה שנאמר בארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נותן לך נחלה. וכן התורה נקראת נחלה שנאמר וממתנה נחליאל. וכן ישראל קרויין נחלה שנאמר עמי ונחלתי ישראל. אמר הקב"ה יבא ישראל שנקראו נחלה ויבנו בית המקדש שנקרא נחלה בזכות התורה שנקראת נחלה לכך נאמר בהר נחלתך.

Yeshiva University, New York
כ"ב טבת, תש"ס
December 31, 1999

ABSTRACTS

Hayyim Angel Differing Portrayals of Hezekiah's Righteousness: Narratives and Prophecies

Noting the complex portrayal of Hezekiah in the Bible, the author examines the composite depiction of the Judean king. In considering the trend that emerges from biblical narrative, we see that II Kings assumes a more objective posture than does Isaiah 36-39, which affords a more realistic presentation than does II Chronicles.

In addition, the author contrasts the narrative and prophetic depictions of Hezekiah. Although Hezekiah had made great strides in effecting religious reform, he failed to meet Isaiah's benchmark for success. The prophet, once impressed by the messianic potential that resided in Hezekiah, was particularly sensitive to some of Hezekiah's policies because he suspected that they might hamper the monarch's successes.

Nathaniel Helfgot The Transformation of the Consecration Ceremony

The author explores the two accounts of the Tabernacle's consecration, the first in Exodus 29 and the second in Leviticus 8-9. Noting the most glaring discrepancies between the two sections, the author suggests that each has a different conception of the event it outlines. While Exodus 29 describes a seven-day ceremony whose purpose is to commence ritual worship, Leviticus 8-9 describes an eight-day ceremony centered on securing atonement.

In accounting for the addition of an atonement motif in the consecration ceremony, the author implicates the sin of the Golden Calf, which transpired between Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8-9, as the source. The unprecedented directive to specifically offer a calf as a sin offering in Leviticus 8-9 hints to the role of the Golden Calf in this section.

Robert Klapper, Gavy Posner, and Mordy Friedman
Amnon and Tamar: A Case Study in Allusions

In recounting the episode of Amnon and Tamar, II Samuel 13 alludes to several other biblical narratives: Dinah and Shechem (Genesis 34), Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37, 39-45), and Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38).

Allusions serve three types of literary functions in the narrative: they compare two character roles, such that one is a parallel or antithesis to the other; correlate similar plots, such that the reader anticipates a certain sequence of events; and clarify the moral of one passage against the backdrop of another similar or contrasting episode.

Character allusions central in II Samuel 13 link Amnon and Tamar to Joseph, as well as Tamar of II Samuel to Tamar of Genesis 38. Allusions connected to plot development relate to the narratives surrounding Joseph, Tamar in Genesis, and Dinah and Shechem. These lead the reader to anticipate a resolution to the tension that spans the narrative in II Samuel, and highlight the absence of such a resolution.

Aaron Koller
Habakkuk: Beleaguered Supporter of Babylon

After showing that the first chapter of Habakkuk is in fact an integral unit, it is proposed that the prophecy contained therein was uttered in the year 601, as the Babylonians were returning from a failed military excursion to Egypt, as seen in

a published chronicle. Habakkuk was a member of a party that allied itself politically with Babylon against Egypt, and the chapter details the progression of his reactions to the events unfolding around him. As the Babylonians march down, he complains about his domestic political opponents, when they lose he is depressed, and when they are returning, he is fearful. The chapter is further unified by the last section, which claims that the problems and opposition he faces on both the domestic and the international fronts are examples of the larger question of the righteous suffering at the hands of the wicked.

Furthermore, it is suggested that in this chapter we see hints of a severe rift within the Jews between those who were pro-Babylonian and those who were pro-Egyptian, and that the two groups disagreed about more than politics: they were split along religious lines, as well. Habakkuk and his party supported both Josiah's politics and his religious reforms, whereas the foes of the prophet, led by King Jehoiakim, were both pro-Egyptian and differed in some religious beliefs. In any event, the answer that eventually comes to the prophet is that the righteous will live by their faith.

Ari Mermelstein

Retribution, Repentance, Restoration: The Motives and Message
Underlying Absalom's Rebellion

The author explores the different social, political, and religious issues underlying Absalom's rebellion against David. The various motives inciting the revolt figure prominently in the message of the narrator. The uprising, coming in the aftermath of David's sin of II Samuel 11, constitutes the punishment for David's abuse of power in the Bathsheba episode. Refusing to be impressed by the genuine historical factors responsible for sparking the insurgency, David acknowledges the role of the rebellion as a divinely issued punishment. This recognition is the motivation and substance of David's repentance, subtly recorded in these chapters. The narrator details the account of the rebellion to justify David's enduring fitness to rule even after his sin with Bathsheba.

Hillel Novetsky and Ari Mermelstein

The Scarlet Cord and the Conquest of Jericho: The Handicap of the "Omniscient Reader"

The authors analyze Joshua 2 in considering the potential pitfalls of approaching the biblical text as a well-acquainted omniscient reader. Noting the inconsistency between a covert military operation and a divinely inspired miracle at Jericho, they question Joshua's intentions in sending a spy mission. Equally perplexing is the decision by the spies to remain in Jericho overnight, increasing the chances of their capture, their decision to proceed to Rahab's house, their insistence that Rahab not divulge the substance of their conversation, and the role of the scarlet cord, which was destined to fall with the walls. The authors therefore conclude that in undertaking this espionage mission, Joshua assumes that the Israelites would vanquish Jericho by natural means. He therefore dispatches the spies to procure the assistance of a resident of Jericho in gaining access to the city, alleviating the problem of a protracted siege of a walled city. Novetsky and Mermelstein conclude in explaining why God did not originally divulge His battle plans to Joshua.

Yehuda Sarna

The Salt Saga: Lot's Wife or Sodom Itself

The famous narrative of the overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah is subjected to a close reading. It is pointed out that the standard version of the tale, in which Lot's wife is punished for looking behind her by being transformed into a pillar of salt is problematic for a number of reasons. First, such a harsh punishment seems to be inappropriate for such a minor infraction. Second, it is very difficult to envision how this mutation took place, and the motif of mutations is never found otherwise in the Bible. Third, the text in other places seems to imply otherwise: salt is mentioned in the story, but as part of the *city's* punishment.

This inspires an alternative possibility, espoused by several medieval commentators but more or less forgotten since then. A new reading of the crucial verse reveals that it is likely that the description is of the city, and that in fact Lot's wife is never explicitly punished in the text. It is pointed out that this explanation, too, suffers from problems, but that those are relatively innocuous and that this interpretation is to be preferred.

Chaim Strauchler

A Defeat in Victory: Isaiah's First Chapter

The first chapter of Isaiah describes a state of rampant destruction, although neither the players involved nor the area described is identified. By examining all of the foreign invasions into Palestine during the time-frame possible, it is shown that the chapter is set on the background of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701. Noting that if this is true, the sixth chapter of Isaiah was actually the first prophecy delivered by the great prophet, the author investigates the motivation for placing what is now chapter 1 in that leading position. He claims that the organization of the book does not depend on chronological factors alone, but literary factors actually drove this important stylistic decision. The first chapter is shown to be a fitting thesis for the book of Isaiah as a whole.

Reuven Taragin

"מה' יצא הדבר" - Perceiving Providence in Genesis 29-32

It is first shown that the unit in Genesis from 28:10 through 32:2 is an independent cohesive unit. After demonstrating that this is true and delineating the structure found within, we begin to investigate the reasons for, and the meaning of, this structure. The unit read holistically has a chiasmic structure, and at the center of the unit is the birth narrative, in which twelve children are born to Jacob. Upon investigating, we find that this narrative itself has a chiasmic

structure, and that the turning point is in fact the key to understanding the entire section.

The narrative focuses upon the recognition by the characters of the divine hand guiding all events, and the climax is the moment where Leah manages to show everyone that indeed nothing that happens to them is coincidental but is actually part of an intricate plan. We are shown various characters both before and after the turning point, and the image of each fits this pattern: in the first half of the narrative, they are seemingly unaware of the unfailing divine guidance, and in the second half they are unfailing in their appreciation of it.

Avraham Walfish

Chaotic Language and Systematic Interpretation: An Analysis of Genesis 1:2

The second verse of the Bible presents many thorny exegetical problems. Subjecting it to literary analysis, however, provides insight into the meaning of the verse. Beyond the philological analysis, the difficult words "תהו" and "תהום" are analyzed for their aesthetic values. In addition, there is extensive treatment of intrascriptural linguistic parallels, and reference to the ancient Near Eastern mythological background upon which the biblical account of Creation must be read.

These complementary lines of analysis portray God as faced with obstacles in creating the world, as well as the methods He employed to overcome them. The spirit of God is seen as an inspirational consciousness that affords its possessor insightful problem solving. God can be seen, then, not only as a divine being beyond human comprehension, but also as a model for human behavior.

Differing Portrayals of Hezekiah's Righteousness: Narratives and Prophecies

By Hayyim Angel

All words of the Torah require one another; what one [source] locks the other opens...(Numbers Rabbah 19:28).

I. Introduction

The biblical narratives about Hezekiah (II Kings 18-20, Isaiah 36-39, and II Chronicles 29-32) underscore that he was one of the most righteous kings ever to have reigned in Israel. His faith is likened to that of King David himself¹ (II Kings 18:3,5), and he is possibly even considered superior to David.² Hezekiah was the first of the Southern kings to extirpate the sacrificial high places and eliminate the brass serpent made by Moses, which had become a pagan symbol for many Judeans.³ The national spiritual revival he engendered, with an emphasis on reuniting the Northern and Southern kingdoms, receives much favorable attention in II Chronicles 29-31. The extended description of Hezekiah in the Bible accentuates his personal righteousness, as well as his meriting the miraculous eradication of the Assyrian military by an angel of God.

¹Comparison to King David is an unusual praise in the book of Kings, reserved only for Hezekiah, Asa (II Kings 15:1), and Josiah (II Kings 22:2).

²II Kings 18:5 states: "בה' א-לקי ישראל בטח ואחריז לא היה כמותו בכל מלכי יהודה ואשר היו לפניו." This verse implies that Hezekiah was greater than both his predecessors and successors. Radak, noting that the verse specifies Hezekiah's superiority vis-a-vis the "Kings of Judah," (as opposed to all Israelite kings) adds: "This means to exclude David and Solomon..." (who reigned over the United Monarchy, not just over Judah). Gersonides, however, asserts that the second half of the verse teaches that Hezekiah was superior to David, who sinned. In addition to their argument over the reading of this verse, this debate is hinged upon the broader argument over the nature of the incident involving Bathsheba and Uriah. See Radar and Gersonides on II Samuel 11-12, I Kings 15:5.

³See II Kings 18:4. Some commentators are puzzled by the fact that earlier righteous kings, such as Asa and Jehoshaphat, preserved the brass serpent even as they purged idolatry from the Southern kingdom. Tosafot (Hullin 7a) argue that the earlier righteous kings felt that since Moses had made it by God's decree, it should be left in commemoration of the great miracle in the desert (cf. Maharsha Berakhot 10b). Alternatively, Radak suggests that perhaps the misuse of Nehushtan was not yet a problem in the time of Asa or Jehoshaphat, so there was no need to eliminate it; only during the reign of Ahaz, with the proliferation of idolatry, did the misuse of the serpent begin (see also Abarbanel, and Yehuda Kiel, *Daat Mikra: Kings* [Hebrew], [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989], vol. 2).

Although, based on a cursory reading all accounts of Hezekiah laud the king's righteousness, the biblical portrayal of Hezekiah is remarkably complex. This complexity exists on two planes: 1) within the narrative sections: a close reading of the three narratives pertaining to Hezekiah reveals a tendency to portray the king in an increasingly positive manner; 2) Between the narratives and Isaiah's prophecies: whereas the narratives generally offer a favorable assessment of the monarch's achievements, Isaiah's prophecies convey his willingness to criticize several of Hezekiah's policies.

In this paper, we will trace the different portrayals of Hezekiah through the narratives in II Kings, Isaiah, and II Chronicles. We will then consider the contrasting religious evaluations of Hezekiah in Isaiah's prophecies.

II. The Portrayals of Hezekiah in Biblical Narrative

Generally speaking, the books of Kings and Chronicles interpret the same chronological intervals, although at times their accounts have distinct focal points.⁴ Where Kings provides scant data, Chronicles elaborates; where Kings is more thorough, Chronicles is more concise. In our particular study, we must add Isaiah 36-39 to the discussion: although closely resembling the account in II Kings, several variations draw attention to the different purpose of each version. Even as these three narratives reflect aspects of truth, they offer slightly different portrayals of Hezekiah.

A careful contrast between the narratives in II Kings 18-20, Isaiah 36-39, and II Chronicles 32, all of which review the events of Hezekiah's reign, confirms that the discrepancies between the three accounts follow a specific pattern: the portrayals of Hezekiah in these three accounts move in the direction of minimizing Hezekiah's flaws. The narrative in II Kings judges Hezekiah favorably; the parallel accounts in Isaiah and in II Chronicles each offer an increasingly positive portrayal of Hezekiah.

A. *The Accounts in II Kings and Isaiah*

The accounts in II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39 are nearly identical. The close similarity accentuates the subtle but significant variations; a close

⁴Malbim (see, for example, I Chronicles 9:2, Nehemiah 11:4) is of the opinion that Kings and Chronicles supplement each other, as both books rely on earlier literary sources. See also Abarbanel's introduction to the Early Prophets and Radak on I Chronicles 9:1. For interesting alternatives to explaining the discrepancies between Kings and Chronicles, see R. Mordechai Breuer, "Torat Hateudot Shel Ba'al 'Sha'agat Aryeh'" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 2 (1986), pp. 9-22. For a survey of traditional opinions on this topic, see Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: II Chronicles* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986), pp. 76-104 in the appendix.

reading of the two narratives reveals that the Isaiah narratives portray Hezekiah as a greater man of faith than does II Kings.

1. Hezekiah's Response to His Own Illness:

An interesting distinction between the two accounts occurs in their description of Hezekiah's illness. In describing the aftermath of Hezekiah's recovery, the text in Isaiah includes a long prayer which Hezekiah formulated (Isaiah 38:9-20), accenting his strong faith during this episode. However, there is no mention of this prayer in II Kings.

A similar pattern is reinforced elsewhere in this account. In II Kings, when Isaiah promises Hezekiah that he will recover, Hezekiah immediately requests a sign of assurance (II Kings 20:7-8). Although commentators tend to justify this appeal,⁵ the plain reading of the text seems to reveal some deficiency in Hezekiah's trust of the prophet. In Isaiah, however, the request for a sign surfaces only at the conclusion of the narrative (38:22), thus rendering it a mere afterthought. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in II Kings, Hezekiah himself requests a sign; in Isaiah 38:7, it is the prophet who offers a sign before the king asks for one. Thus, the enigma of Hezekiah's requesting a sign never arises in the narrative in Isaiah. The image of Hezekiah as faithfully abiding by the will of God is sustained.

2. Hezekiah's Tribute to Sennacherib:

The narrative in II Kings reports that although Hezekiah defiantly revolted against Assyrian control, he later suffered the consequences of this decision. Sennacherib seized many Southern strongholds, and then marched on Jerusalem. Initially capitulating to Sennacherib, Hezekiah was forced to strip the Temple of precious metals in order to pay the extravagant tribute demanded by the Assyrian (II Kings 18:13-16). In contrast, the narrative in Isaiah omits the account of Hezekiah's initial submission and tribute to Assyria. It appears that even in these closely parallel narratives, Hezekiah is depicted more positively in Isaiah than in Kings, since Hezekiah's military success is accented

⁵Radak (II Kings 20:8) suggests that Hezekiah was concerned that he would not fully recover from his illness even after Isaiah had healed the boils. Thus, he requested a sign for something else—that he would recover to the point where he could go to the Temple. Alternatively, Gersonides suggests that Hezekiah was concerned that perhaps his recovery was still conditional on perfect behavior; Hezekiah wanted an unconditional recovery (see also Tosafot Yebamot 50a). See also P. Tal. Sanhedrin 11:6 and Exodus Rabbah 9:1, which assume that Hezekiah's request for a sign is acceptable just by virtue of his righteousness.

more than his initial submission.⁶ This discrepancy also underscores Hezekiah's faith in God to deliver the Judeans to victory, rendering the need for tribute moot.⁷

B. *The Accounts in II Kings (~Isaiah) and II Chronicles*

The depiction of Hezekiah in II Chronicles is significantly different from its parallels in II Kings and Isaiah. Most noticeable is the fact that the narratives in II Kings and Isaiah characterize Hezekiah's reign by his national policies (most notably his clash with Assyria), with scant information regarding the religious renewal he initiated. In contrast, II Chronicles apportioned three chapters (29-31) to Hezekiah's religious reformation, and provides only a cursory review of his political endeavors. Moreover, the narrative in II Chronicles (30:1-12) credits Hezekiah for attempting to unite the Northern and Southern kingdoms, a positive feature omitted in the other two narratives.

Additionally, the narratives in II Kings and Isaiah do not apportion much space to Hezekiah's military buildups,⁸ whereas II Chronicles elaborates on these accounts.⁹ In light of the overwhelmingly positive depiction of Hezekiah in II Chronicles, one may assert that the detailing of Hezekiah's military preparations there implies that since Hezekiah was a righteous king, he consequently enjoyed wealth and military strength.¹⁰

Perhaps the most important distinction between the narratives, however, emerges from a careful reading of II Chronicles 32, which directly parallels the accounts in other narratives. A contrast of these accounts again

⁶See especially the analysis of the entire chapter in Yair Hoffman et al. (ed.), *Encyclopedia Olam Hatanakh* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Revivim, 1986), pp. 160-185.

⁷See B. Tal. Berakhot 10b and Pesahim 56a, which criticize Hezekiah for his submission. Rashi (Pesahim 56a) explains that since Isaiah had prophesied the miraculous salvation of Jerusalem, Hezekiah should have trusted him rather than submit.

In contrast, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 9:3 judges Hezekiah favorably, likening his actions to those of Jacob, who prepared for his confrontation with Esau with prayer, a gift, and military preparations. The biblical account of Hezekiah reveals that he prepared for his encounter with Assyria in the same manner.

Alternatively, Malbim (II Chronicles 32:2) defends Hezekiah's initial submission by suggesting that the king paid tribute only to stall until he could prepare for battle; therefore, he never really paid obeisance.

As is often the case with biblical characters, there is a wide range of Midrashim pertaining to Hezekiah's actions and character. For a fuller review of relevant midrashic literature, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1954), vol. 4, pp. 266-277, and vol. 6, pp. 361-370.

⁸See II Kings 20:20 for the lone exception.

⁹See II Chronicles 32:3-6, 30.

¹⁰See Bostonai Oded in Gershon Galil (ed.), *Encyclopedia Olam Hatanakh: II Chronicles* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Dodzon-Iti, 1995), pp. 240-250.

reveals a considerable improvement of Hezekiah's image in II Chronicles from the earlier narratives.

1. Sennacherib's Attack:

Similar to the narrative in Isaiah, II Chronicles also makes no reference to any compliance by Hezekiah. But the account in II Chronicles goes even further than its parallel in Isaiah: in 32:1, there is no clear reference to Sennacherib's conquest of any Southern cities at all! The text simply states: "בָּא סַנְחֶרִיב מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר וַיִּבֶּן בִּיהוּדָה וַיִּחַן עַל הָעָרִים הַבְּצֻרֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לְבָקְעָם אֹלֶי" ("...Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came to Judea, camped against its fortified cities, and intended to conquer them"). Although the term "intended to conquer" ("וַיֹּאמֶר לְבָקְעָם אֹלֶי") would mean "conquered" (Radak), the ambiguous language ultimately softens the effects of capture.¹¹

2. Hezekiah's Military/Foreign Policy:

a. The Alliance with Egypt:

In the narratives of both II Kings and Isaiah, Hezekiah is reported to have allied himself with Egypt against Assyria.¹² II Chronicles, however, makes no reference to this association, thereby implying that Hezekiah depended exclusively on God for salvation from the Assyrian invaders.¹³ Once again, II Chronicles leaves the reader with a more favorable impression of Hezekiah than do II Kings and Isaiah. Hezekiah is shown as a righteous king with absolute faith in God, rather than as one who also turned to a foreign power for military aid.

b. Hezekiah's Flaunting his Wealth to Merodach Baladan of Babylonia:

The most explicit error committed by Hezekiah in the narratives of II Kings and Isaiah occurred when the monarch showed off the treasures of the kingdom to Merodach Baladan of Babylonia. In both narratives, Isaiah rebukes Hezekiah, considering his boasting a sign that Babylonia will eventually conquer Jerusalem (II Kings 20:16-18~Isaiah 39:5-7). II Chronicles offers only a cryptic summary of this account, stating that God wanted to test Hezekiah's

¹¹ See James B. Pritchard (ed.), *ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 287-288 for Sennacherib's description of his invasion. The monarch lists forty-six cities that he captured during his sweep of Judea.

¹² See II Kings 18:21 and Isaiah 36:6.

¹³ See II Chronicles 32:9-12.

faith by sending the king of Babylonia (32:31). However, the narrative does not state that Hezekiah failed this test.¹⁴

To conclude, II Kings presents Hezekiah in the most "balanced" manner in focusing on Hezekiah's faults while still clearly relating that Hezekiah was one of the greatest kings in the South, and in Israel's history. The narrative in Isaiah portrays Hezekiah in a more positive light, and II Chronicles all but completely eliminates negative traces from the king's stellar career.¹⁵

A SUMMARY CHART OF THE TRENDS IN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVES

	II Kings	Isaiah	II Chronicles
Tribute to Sennacherib	Full mention	No mention	No mention
Sennacherib's conquest of Southern fortresses	Yes	Yes	Unclear reference
Alliance with Egypt	Yes	Yes	No mention
Flaunting wealth to Merodach Baladan	Full mention	Full mention	Allusion, but unclear reference

¹⁴ Admittedly, we do find a vague reference to Hezekiah's having become arrogant in 32:25. It is possible that this cryptic allusion refers to Hezekiah's response to Merodach Baladan's visit (see Pseudo-Rashi and Radak on II Chronicles 32:23-25). But in any case, the next verse quickly adds that Hezekiah repented from his arrogance, averting disaster (32:26). Thus, the picture in II Chronicles remains more positive than that of the parallel narratives.

¹⁵ In accounting for the trend whereby Hezekiah is depicted as flawless in II Chronicles, we might suggest that this is actually part of a broader tendency on the part of the Chronicler. See D.N. Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *CBQ* 23 (1961), pp. 436-442. Freedman concludes that "the principal objective of the Chronicler was to write a history of the dynasty of David, not primarily in terms of its historical and political achievements, but its accomplishments in the religious and specifically cultic areas" and that "the occasion and inspiration for the work was the return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel, leader of the Jewish community, and himself a direct descendant of David and head of his house." In his attempt to champion the cause of Zerubbabel and the Jews returning from exile, the Chronicler may have intentionally presented the Davidic dynasty as nearly infallible. The attempt to touch up the portrait of Hezekiah in Chronicles may be part of this tendency on the part of the Chronicler to depict the Judean kings in the best possible light. (ed.)

Request of sign	Central to story	Afterthought, and offered by Isaiah	Sign given, not explicitly because of request
Prayer thanking God for recovery	No mention	Long prayer	Prayer before healing

III. Isaiah's Prophecies

Although the narratives in II Kings, Isaiah, and II Chronicles all portray Hezekiah very positively, the prophecies of Isaiah clearly indicate that the prophet himself was more critical of the righteous king. Let us consider some of Isaiah's opposition statements to Hezekiah.

1. *Isaiah's Reaction to Hezekiah's Religious Reformation*

Although the narratives about Hezekiah, particularly those of II Chronicles, emphasize the magnitude of Hezekiah's religious reformation, Isaiah apparently was not convinced of its success. In Isaiah 29:13-14 the prophet offers a biting critique of the people for serving God but doing so mechanically.¹⁶

ויאמר ה' יען כי נגש העם הזה בפיו ובשפתיו כבדוני ולבו רחק ממני ותהי יראתם אתי
מצות אנשים מלמדה: לכן הנני יוסף להפליא את העם הזה הפלא ופלא ואבדה
חכמת חכמיו ובינת נבניו תסתתר (ישעיהו כט: יג-יד).

Isaiah may have remained more skeptical of Hezekiah's reformation because he deemed it a short-term, superficial change, insufficient to alter the deeper psyche of the nation.¹⁷ Thus, Isaiah appears to negate (or at least diminish) what appeared to have been the most successful aspect of Hezekiah's regime.

¹⁶ Although the prophecy does not explicate to which time period it refers, Amos Hakham in *Da'at Mikra: Isaiah* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 305-306 argues that it must have been stated during the reign of Hezekiah since his was the only period during Isaiah's lifetime when a righteous monarch imposed religious observance on the masses.

¹⁷ The immediate relapse to paganism under Manasseh's regime proves Isaiah's suspicions correct. Cf. B. Tal. Sanhedrin 94b, which relates that Hezekiah threatened the death penalty on anyone who would not study Torah. While such an order would guarantee religious observance during Hezekiah's lifetime, it would not necessarily promote true religious feelings among the people. Isaiah's critique appears to be in this spirit.

a. Hezekiah's Alliance with Egypt:

As noted above, the narratives in II Kings and Isaiah indicate that Hezekiah had forged an alliance with Egypt.¹⁸ In contrast, II Chronicles portrays Hezekiah as depending exclusively on God. Unlike any of the narratives, however, Isaiah explicitly articulates his opposition to the alliance. In Isaiah 31:1-3, the prophet links the Judean dependence on Egyptian military support with a decline in their faith:

הוּי הִירָדִים מִצָּרִים לַעֲזָרָה עַל סוֹסִים יִשְׁעֻנוּ וַיִּבְטְחוּ עַל רֶכֶב כִּי רַב וְעַל פָּרָשִׁים כִּי
עֲצֻמוֹ מֵאֵד וְלֹא שָׁעוּ עַל קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת ה' לֹא דָרְשׁוּ: (ב) וְגַם הוּא חָכֵם וַיִּבֹּא
רַע וְאֵת דְּבָרֵי לֹא הִסִּיר וְקָם עַל בֵּית מִרְעִים וְעַל עֹזֶר פְּעִלֵי אֹן: (ג) וּמִצָּרִים אָדָם
וְלֹא א-ל וְסוֹסִיהֶם בָּשָׂר וְלֹא רוּחַ ה' יִטֶּה יָדוֹ וְכַשֵּׁל עֹזֶר וְנָפַל עֹזֶר וַיִּחָדּוּ כָלֶם יִכְלִיּוּ
(יִשְׁעִיהוּ לֹא א-ג).

Isaiah's opposition to an alliance with Egypt is also expressed in Isaiah 30.¹⁹

b. Hezekiah's Military Buildups:

As noted earlier, the narrative in II Chronicles mentions Hezekiah's military buildups and strength in the context of a fitting compensation for a righteous individual. In stark contrast to this portrayal, however, was Isaiah: the prophet viewed the elaborate military preparations as indicating a lack of faith on the part of Hezekiah and the nation.²⁰ Isaiah perceived the increased confidence in fortifications as a sign of decreased confidence in God's protection. Isaiah 22:1-14 contains a prophecy strongly critical of these military

¹⁸ Gersonides (II Kings 18:20) and Abarbanel (II Kings 18:21) both aver that Rab-shakeh was wrong in assuming that Hezekiah had allied himself with Egypt. Perhaps they base their opinions on the fact that the narrative itself never admits such an alliance; they also may have been impressed by the absence of any reference to this alliance in II Chronicles. However, most commentaries assume that Rab-shakeh was correct in his report of the political situation. Given Isaiah's passionate tirades against associating with Egypt, it would appear that there was at least some formal relationship between Hezekiah and Egypt.

¹⁹ Prophets often opposed alliances with other nations, mainly because 1) excessive dependence on these alliances often was symptomatic of a decreased faith in God; 2) alliances often led to cultural influence as well; 3) it was politically unsound - nations would help only when it was in their own best interests, not because they genuinely cared; 4) the powerful nations might abuse the alliance, enslaving Israel. For a fuller exposition of this issue, see Menahem Boleh, *Da'at Mikra: Jeremiah* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1983), p. 29.

²⁰ Petiḥta DeEkhah Rabbati 24 distinguishes between Hezekiah himself, who had faith, and the people, who trusted too much in their military prowess. One could argue that this midrash is attempting to defend the righteous Hezekiah from Isaiah's criticisms. In any case, Hezekiah could still be blamed for reinforcing the lack of faith in the people.

buildups, demonstrating the prophet's contention that the Judeans were relying on their military power rather than on God.^{21 22}

c. The Conflict between Hezekiah and Isaiah Regarding the Visit of Merodach Baladan of Babylonia:

Although Isaiah opposed Hezekiah's policies in several prophecies, the only direct confrontation between the two figures related in the narrative sections pertains to the meeting between Hezekiah and the delegation from Babylonia headed by their king, Merodach Baladan. Isaiah confronted Hezekiah, requesting the identity of his guests. Hezekiah proudly responded that they were from the distant Babylonia, prompting Isaiah's fateful prediction that this action would sow the seeds for an eventual exile to Babylonia.

(ו) הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים וְנֹשָׂא כָל אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵיתְךָ וְאֲשֶׁר אֶצְרָךְ אֲבָתִיךָ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּבֶל כִּי לֹא
יִתֵּר דְּבַר אִמְרֵי ה': (ז) וּמִבֵּיתְךָ אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאוּ מִמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר תוֹלִיד יִקְחוּ וְהִיוּ סְרִיסִים בְּהִיכַל

²¹ This critique was a common one among prophets of the period. See, for example, Hosea 8:14, where the prophet condemns the Judeans' overdependence on their own strength. See also Hosea 1:7, where the prophet mentions God's promise to have compassion on Judah, even as He prepares to mete out judgment on the Northern kingdom: "But I will have compassion on the house of Judah...but I will not save them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or charioteers." Kara *ad loc.* notes that the formulation of the prophecy indicates a subtle critique of the Southern kingdom, which was excessively dependent on its military buildups. Hosea wanted the people to realize that while God would save them, He would do so miraculously (Ibn Ezra and Radak *ad loc.* note that this verse probably foretells the miraculous salvation from the Assyrian Empire in the time of Hezekiah).

²² In a key passage in the Talmud pertaining to Hezekiah, the Rabbis criticize Hezekiah for his military preparations:

Our Rabbis taught: King Hezekiah did six things; of three of them they [the Rabbis] approved and of three they did not approve...He stopped up the waters of Gihon (II Chronicles 32:30), and they did not approve of it... [Berakhot 10b; Pesahim 56a] [all translations of Talmudic passages taken from Soncino Press, with minor modifications].

Rashi *ad loc.* explains that the Rabbis criticized Hezekiah's military buildups as indicating a lack of faith considering that Isaiah had predicted that God would save Jerusalem (see Isaiah 37:35).

In light of the positive narratives about Hezekiah, the Talmud's criticism of Hezekiah's military buildups as a deficiency in Hezekiah's faith appears difficult. Radak (II Chronicles 32:30) is puzzled by the Talmud's ambivalence:

And I am perplexed by what our Sages stated, that Hezekiah stopped up the Gihon but the Rabbis did not approve--for it says above (32:3) that Hezekiah took counsel with his officers and brave warriors to stop up the springs, and among the officers were the Sages of Israel! ... I found an Aggadah (see *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, chapter 2) which states that Hezekiah stopped up the Gihon, and his will agreed with God's will.

In light of our above analysis, however, it becomes clear that this passage in the Talmud is consistent with the prophecies of Isaiah, which condemn the military buildups as well despite the more positive depiction in the narratives.

מלך בבל : (ח) ויאמר חזקיהו אל ישעיהו טוב דבר ה' אשר דברת ויאמר כי יהיה שלום ואמת בימי : (ישעיהו לט ז-ח)

Hezekiah's response is remarkable: "טוב דבר ה' אשר דברת ויאמר כי יהיה שלום ואמת בימי." Rather than being perturbed by the prediction that the Southern kingdom would fall to Babylonia, Hezekiah appears selfishly relieved that he and his generation would be spared the destruction.

However, Hakham explains the king's response in a different manner: Hezekiah was arguing with Isaiah on a fundamental level.²³ The prophet, looking into the future, saw that an alliance with Babylonia would eventually lead to ruin. Hezekiah, in contrast, believed that his job was to make what appeared to be the best decision for the moment ("...for there will be true peace in my lifetime")--in this case, an alliance with Babylonia could assist Hezekiah in his own revolt against Assyria. According to this interpretation, Hezekiah never repented his actions (even as he accepted God's decree in the first half of the verse); on the contrary, he stood firmly by them, against the will of Isaiah.

We may view the other conflicts between Hezekiah and Isaiah in the same manner: Hezekiah allied himself with Egypt and made extensive military preparations against Assyria because he was adhering to timely and responsible political and military strategy. Additionally, he implemented a massive religious reformation (even if more superficial) in order to bring the people closer to God. Isaiah, in contrast, opposed Hezekiah because the latter was not looking far enough into the future, and therefore was exposing the people to longer-term problems, both religious and political.

One might add that Isaiah had a deeper motivation for formulating his criticisms so sharply. During the reign of the wicked Ahaz, Isaiah prophetically looked ahead, finding a more optimistic future in Hezekiah. In Isaiah 9:5-6, a prophecy apparently about Hezekiah,²⁴ the righteous king is presented in honorific terms as a spiritual savior of Israel:

(ה) כי ילד לנו בן נתן לנו ותהי המשרה על שכמו ויקרא שמו פלא יועץ א-ל גבור
אבי-עד שר-שלום : (ו) למרבה המשרה ולשלום אין קץ על כסא דוד ועל ממלכתו
להכין אתה ולסעדה במשפט ובצדקה מעתה ועד עולם קנאת ה' צב-אות תעשה זאת:

Indeed, it would appear that Isaiah considered Hezekiah not only as a brighter future, but also as a potential messianic savior of Judah:

²³ See Hakham, *Kings* vol. 2, p. 407.

²⁴ Nearly all traditional commentaries adopt this interpretation.

(א) ויצא חטר מגזע ישי ונצר משרשי יפרה : (ב) ונחה עליו רוח ה' רוח חכמה ובירה
רוח עצה וגבורה רוח דעת ויראת ה' : (ג) והרחיבו ביראת ה' ולא למראה עיניו ישרו
ולא למשמע אוזניו יוכיח : (ד) ושפט בצדק דלים והוכיח במישור לענוי ארץ והכה
ארץ בשבט פיו ברוח שפתיו ימית רשע : (ה) והיה צדק אזור מתניו והאמונה אזור
חלציו (ישעיהו יא א-ה).

Some commentators²⁵ argue that this prophecy, laced with messianic overtones, was originally intended for Hezekiah.²⁶ However, because his generation was deemed unworthy to merit the full messianic redemption, this prophecy remained unfulfilled, deferred until the arrival of the Messiah in a later generation.

Thus, it would appear that what made Isaiah particularly sensitive to some of Hezekiah's political policies, which he judged to be shortsighted, was his contention that they would delay the onset of the messianic age. Isaiah's anguish in seeing a messianic opportunity slipping away is reflected in his harsh condemnatory tone towards the righteous king.²⁷

²⁵ See Nachmanides on Leviticus 26:6, Ibn Kaspi and Malbim on Isaiah 11, and Hakham, *Kings* vol. 1, p. 136.

²⁶ Many other commentators aver that the prophecy in Isaiah 11 was originally intended not for Hezekiah but for a later messianic era. Nachmanides, Ibn Kaspi, Malbim, and Hakham fundamentally agree that the prophecy augurs the arrival of the Messiah; however, they follow the principle enunciated in Sanhedrin 94a that Hezekiah indeed could have been that Messiah. In the words of the Talmudic passage they cite:

"The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah, and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog; whereupon the Attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe! If You did not make David the Messiah, who uttered so many hymns and psalms before You, will You appoint Hezekiah as such, who did not sing praise to You in spite of all these miracles which You wrought for him?'"

²⁷ Tension between prophet and king was not unique. Indeed, from the very inception of the monarchy, perceptible friction existed between them. Samuel and later prophets were apprehensive that kings would not comply with the word of God in governing the nation; hence, the existence of a monarchy posed a potential spiritual hazard to Israel. A king with a faulty religious outlook could devastate the religious life of the entire nation. In contrast, an upright king had the opportunity to infuse society with a certain spiritual vitality. Therefore, in their efforts to guide the people, the prophets tried to become the religious conscience to both kings and nation.

Ideally, kings should have submitted to prophetic directives, but even the most righteous kings sometimes found it difficult to comply fully with the lofty standards demanded of them by the prophets. Consequently, they had to grapple with balancing their politics and listening to the word of God as dictated by the prophets. A classic example of this conflict occurred when Saul offered a sacrifice at Gilgal before the arrival of Samuel (see I Samuel 13:5-14). Saul saw his army deserting him, and had to choose between the more evident solution of continuing his preparations for battle, or completely trusting Samuel's instructions to wait until he arrived no matter how imminent the

This perspective on Isaiah's prophecies might also provide insight into the treatment of Hezekiah in the narratives of Isaiah as well. Isaiah's contention was that Hezekiah was a monarch with tremendous potential that went unrealized. However, the first 35 chapters of the book did not prove this point; they simply presented this critique in extended form. It was necessary, therefore, to include a brief section of narrative whose purpose was to detail, in historically objective form, the highlights of Hezekiah's reign and serve as a basis for Isaiah's claims of 35 chapters. The intention was that the reader could turn to this brief narrative section and extrapolate from it Isaiah's conclusions. To achieve the desired effect, therefore, it had to contain the best of Hezekiah and the worst as well. It had to demonstrate that he had tremendous potential and also show that he failed to live up to his billing. The narratives therefore presented a more favorable depiction of Hezekiah's reign than did II Kings because it was necessary to highlight in lucid fashion Hezekiah's greatness. However, it was not as positive in its conclusions as was II Chronicles because it was also necessary to convey to the reader Hezekiah's failures.

Philistine threat appeared. Although the text deems Samuel correct and Saul loses his kingdom, one understands how difficult it was for kings to comply with every word a prophet said. Sometimes, the standards were almost unattainable.

The point being made here, therefore, is not that Isaiah's critique of Hezekiah was unique, but simply that the anticipated standoff was here exacerbated by Isaiah's expectations.

The extent of their rivalry is expressed poignantly in the Talmud:

Rabbi Hamnuna said: What is the meaning of the verse, Who is as the wise man, and who knows the interpretation [פֶּשֶׁר] of a thing (Ecclesiastes 8:1)? Who is like the Holy One, blessed be He, who knew how to effect a reconciliation [פְּסוּלָה] between two righteous men, Hezekiah and Isaiah? Hezekiah said: "Let Isaiah come to me, for we find that Elijah went to Ahab, as it says, 'And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab'" (I Kings 18:2). Isaiah said: "Let Hezekiah come to me, for we find that Jehoram son of Ahab went to Elisha" (see II Kings 3:12). What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He brought sufferings upon Hezekiah and then said to Isaiah, "Go visit the sick." For so it says, "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet, son of Amotz, came to him..." (Isaiah 38:1)... [Berakhot 10a].

Relationships between prophets and kings are complex. Elijah, the impassioned prophet of truth, paid homage to the most infamous Northern king, Ahab. Jehoram, the wicked son of Ahab, enjoyed a favorable relationship with the prophet Elisha. Perhaps most enigmatic is the fact that Hezekiah, one of the most virtuous kings of the Southern kingdom, still resisted total deference to his own prophet, Isaiah. In light of our above analysis, this tension is to be expected, rather than surprising, and was here exacerbated by the background described above.

IV. Conclusions

The narratives in II Kings, Isaiah, and II Chronicles take the side of Hezekiah. This great religious personality serves as a powerful example of the positive influence of an outstanding leader. In contrast, the prophecies of Isaiah reveal that Isaiah wanted Hezekiah to accept his higher standards while Hezekiah believed himself to be sufficiently righteous as to deserve universal approbation.

Both were correct: the prophetic historians of the narratives recognized that Hezekiah certainly was a man of remarkable faith who should be remembered as a powerful religious force in Judea. Isaiah the prophet, however, realized that on a deeper level, Hezekiah had the opportunity to be more than a great spiritual reformer in Israel; he could have been the Messiah. Therefore, he still expressed frustration at the righteous king's policies for not having fully adopted the prophet's advice.

Through sensitively taking the variegated perspectives of Hezekiah into account, we are able to capture the complexity and profundity of the righteous king's impact on our nation. In this manner, Hezekiah comes to life, and the reader is directed to the multifaceted portrayals of an outstandingly righteous individual, who nearly was the Messiah himself.

The Transformation of the Consecration Ceremony

Nathaniel Helfgot

I. Introduction

The consecration of the Tabernacle, or מלוואים, with its elaborate seven-day ceremony, is delineated in intricate detail in Exodus 29 as a command to Moses; its execution is reported with the same concern for details in Leviticus 8. This account is followed in chapter 9 by the events of the eighth day of consecration. Comparing the directive to Moses and the report of its execution, one notes many subtle differences, including discrepancies in the sequence of events.¹ This essay deals with some of the more significant discrepancies whose resolution may shed light on the role of the ceremony in the scheme of the Book of Exodus in particular and the overall building process of the Tabernacle in general.²

II. The Consecration Ceremony in Exodus 29

Let us first outline the order of the sacrifices offered during the consecration ceremony as described in Exodus.³ The following sacrifices were brought every day of the seven-day period of consecration:

1. A bull (v.1). The animal is initially referred to as "פר אחד בן בקר" and is subsequently identified as "פר" without any further qualification (vv. 3, 10, 11, 14).
2. A ram which is brought as a burnt offering (vv. 16-18).

¹ See, for example, when the priests are anointed with oil, the precise order of the wearing of each vestment, etc. See especially Malbim in his commentary to Leviticus 8, where he lists and attempts to explain many of these differences. See also Jacob Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1-16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 545-549, for a comprehensive survey of the discrepancies between the two accounts.

² See Meir Paran in Moshe Weinfeld (ed.), *Encyclopedia Olam Hatanakh: Leviticus* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Revivim, 1987), p. 50, who attributes the discrepancies between the two versions of the consecration process to the fact that one comprises the command for this process and one details its execution. Although this assessment is accurate, it does not do justice to the most striking thematic discrepancies that I will explicate shortly.

³ All references to Exodus are to chapter 29 unless specified otherwise.

3. A second ram which is brought as a *שלמים*, a sacred gift of greeting (vv. 19-22). This ram is later termed the "איל המלאים," or ram of consecration.
4. A meal offering (v. 23).

These sacrifices along with other parts of the consecration ceremony are to be offered repeatedly for seven days (v. 35).

Juxtaposed to these details of the consecration ceremony are the laws of the daily sacrifice (though the laws of all other sacrifices are delineated in Leviticus), concluding this section with the anticipated revelation of God's presence: "For there I will meet with you, and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified in My presence. I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. I will abide amongst the Jewish people, and I will be their God (vv. 43-45)."⁴ This is then followed by the section devoted to the building of the incense altar and the directive to offer incense upon it daily.

A consideration of the above details should help in establishing what role the consecration ceremony was originally intended to play. Apparently, this seven-day service was conceived of as a consecration ritual initiating worship in the Tabernacle in which the basic types of sacrifices were to be brought. In effect, the *מלאים* ceremony was to consist of a representative sample of the classical sacrifices that are part of the order of Leviticus: a sin offering, a burnt offering, a sacred gift of greeting, and a meal offering. Even the sin offering was brought as part of an initiation process and not as atonement for any sin. Evidence to this effect can be brought from the procedure through which this sacrifice was offered. Although the procedures of the classical sin offering, outlined in Lev. 4:3-12 and 6:17-23, are performed on it, v. 14 introduces a significant deviation from the standard procedure by informing us that its meat, fats, and inner organs are burned outside of the camp. This is anomalous considering that the meat of the sin offering is eaten by the priests, and the fat is always burned in the Tabernacle, on the altar outside the Tent of Meeting. Hence, the priest performs the ritual and procedures of the sin offering with this animal, though the impetus for its sacrifice is not expiation of sin. Thus, the unique nature of this sin offering yielded the anomalous phrase "פר החטאת" rather than "חטאת הוא".⁵

⁴ Translations are taken from *Tanakh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

⁵ The reference to a *פר חטאת* in 29:36 is in relation to a second *פר*, as I will note in n. 10. The only sin offerings that are burned outside the camp are those in which the sprinkling of the blood takes place outside the Tent of Meeting, such as the *פר כהן משחו* (Lev. 4:12) or that of the Day of Atonement ceremony (Lev. 16:27). Thus, this motivates the midrash, cited by Rashi in his comments to v. 14, to note that this is the only *חטאת חיצונה* that is burned outside of the camp.

This initiation ceremony was only intended as a seven-day event. The revelation of God's presence would have automatically begun at that point with daily worship in the Tabernacle in the form of the daily sacrifices and the daily incense offering as implied by the references to these rituals at the end of Exodus 29. It is in this section that the Bible uses the elevated language describing the purpose of the Tabernacle that was cited above. The implication is that once the altar was purified, the constant *תמיד* sacrifice and the daily incense offering would consecrate the Tabernacle for subsequent use.

III. The Consecration Ceremony in Leviticus

A glimpse at the discrepancies between the Bible's presentation of the consecration ceremony in Leviticus and in Exodus will reveal an apparently altered conception of the event in Leviticus. As noted above, there are numerous discrepancies between this account and that of Exodus. I will focus on three striking distinctions that emerge from a consideration of these two texts:

- A. In Leviticus, Aaron and his sons are instructed not to leave the vicinity of the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, *פתח אוהל מועד*, for the entire seven-day consecration period in order to bring atonement upon themselves, "לכפר עליכם" (8:34).⁶ In Exodus, this element of the ceremony is conspicuously absent.
- B. The text in Leviticus describes an elaborate atonement ceremony to take place on the eighth day, repeating the verb *כפר* a number of times,⁷ and as Nachmanides and others point out, sets up the model for what is later expanded into the annual ritual of *יום הכיפורים*, the Day of Atonement, described in Leviticus 16.⁸ On the eighth day, Aaron is commanded to bring

⁶ Note carefully the language used to describe this new directive in contrast to the other components of the consecration ceremony. Regarding all the other elements, elements that are in effect fulfillments of the commands in Exodus, such as the wearing of the vestments, the sacrifice of the various sacrifices, etc., the Bible repeatedly writes that they were done *כאשר צוה ה' את משה* (vv. 9, 13, 17, 21, 29). However, in describing the command not to leave the front of the Tent of Meeting, the Bible modifies its formulation, with Moses encouraging the priests to fulfill this command "כי כן צויתי" (v. 35).

⁷ See 8:15, 35, 9:7.

⁸ There are numerous parallels between the consecration process and the Day of Atonement. The *פר* of the priest and the *שעיר* of the people are prominent features of both. In addition, the sin offerings of the eighth day of the consecration period are described as securing atonement for the High Priest himself and the people, i.e., "וכפר בעדך ובעד העם," in the same way that those of the Day of Atonement are brought to induce atonement "לכפר את ישראל." Finally, the Rabbis derive the model for the mishnah's ruling that seven days before the Day of Atonement the High Priest is sequestered in order to practice the rituals of atonement from the seven day period followed

a calf as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering (Lev. 9:2). The people are to offer a goat as a sin offering, a calf and a sheep as a burnt offering, an ox and a ram as a sacred gift of greeting, and a meal offering, "for today the Lord will appear to you" (v. 4). The text describes the appearance of "the Presence of the Lord," followed by Nadab and Abihu's attempt to offer incense and their tragic deaths by the hand of God. In Exodus, there is no mention of the need for an eighth day to bring about the process of divine revelation.

- C. In Exodus, the פר is never called "פר החטאת"⁹ and only later, in Exodus 29:14, is it even associated with the term "חטאת." However, in Leviticus, it is immediately termed as such and thereafter consistently referred to in that fashion.¹⁰

The modified motif of the consecration ceremony, as related in Leviticus, is one of atonement. The repeated references to the פר החטאת, the seven-day vigil of the priests at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting whose purpose is "לכפר עליכם," and the institution of an eighth day dedicated to כפרה all underscore this assertion.¹¹ Apparently, something had transpired between Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8-9 that fundamentally transformed the focus of the consecration ceremony and induced the need for atonement.

by an eighth day during the consecration period. See B. Tal. Yoma 3b. For a fuller treatment of the parallels, see Yoel Bin-Nun, "The Eighth Day and the Day of Atonement" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 8 (1989), pp. 9-34, and Israel Knohl and Shlomo Naeh, "The Consecration and the Day of Atonement" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 62,1 (1992), pp. 17-44.

⁹ See n. 5.

¹⁰ This is already noticed by Mekhilta to Lev. 8:12: "מתחלה לא נקרא פר חטאת." See also R. Menachem Kasher's reading of this midrash in his *Torah Shelema* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Beth Torah Shelema, 1992), vol. 5, Tezaveh, p. 200, n. 19. Related to this point is a further discrepancy between the two accounts of the consecration ceremony. It is unclear whether the פר referred to in Exodus 29:36 is identical to the פר mentioned in 29:1 and is revisited to emphasize its seven day purificatory role or whether this פר is a distinct sacrifice. The latter possibility makes for the smoothest reading of the text and is championed by Abarbanel in his comments to these verses. Similarly, 11 QT 15-17 explicitly describes the consecration as consisting of two distinct פרים. It would thus emerge that the two different sin offerings served two different functions. The first was part of the range of sacrifices brought in order to initiate worship in the Tabernacle. In contrast, the second was part of a specific purification ritual performed on the altar (see further n. 15). However, neither one served as a sin offering in the classical sense. In contrast, Leviticus 8 only speaks of one sin offering that was to be brought during the duration of the first seven days. One may argue that this change from one פר חטאת to two is connected to the altered role of the פר חטאת. In the wake of the necessity to bring a פר חטאת that would atone, only one sacrifice was necessary. At that point, either the role of the ceremony as initiating Temple worship was relegated to the background, or the role of the sin had to be highlighted, and bringing multiple sin offerings for different purposes would only detract.

¹¹ Admittedly, Exodus 29:37 does invoke the need for כפרה in relation to the altar. I will address this point further on in n. 15.

IV. The Source of the Need for Atonement in Leviticus 8-9

In order to understand this change in focus, we must consider the chronological context in which these chapters appear. Exodus 32 marked the nadir in the brief Israelite history with the sin of the Golden Calf. Several groups were culpable for their participation in the sin. The Israelites were guilty for taking the initiative to pressure Aaron and partake in the revelry. Aaron as well was not personally blameless for acceding to the people's demands. Moreover, his participation not only had personal consequences but also had broader implications for his extended family: as the head priest, Aaron's participation left an indelible stain on the institution of priesthood.

Thus, Leviticus 8-9 describes a ceremony in the wake of the cataclysm of the sin of the Golden Calf,¹² an event which almost destroyed the relationship between God and the Israelites and nearly erased Aaron and his sons as central players in the divine scheme.¹³ Atonement for the events of Exodus 32 was mandated, and that necessity transformed the nature of the consecration ceremonies. This need for atonement can account for the change in function of the פר in the consecration ceremonies. The free standing פר החטאת of Exodus 29 is transformed into one true פר החטאת to expiate for the Israelites and for Aaron and his family as they seek to reestablish contact with God.¹⁴ Whereas in

¹² We are assuming the position of Nachmanides that the placement of the sin of the Golden Calf is found in its proper chronological location.

¹³ As Nachmanides notes in a critical passage in his commentary to Leviticus 25:1, this theme is central to an understanding of the progression of the Bible from the first half of Exodus through the entire book of Leviticus. Nachmanides points out that the section of reproof at the end of Leviticus is a direct result of the sin of the Golden Calf. In the original scheme, God intended to present the covenant in its totality without recourse to warnings and sanctions. This plan, however, was upset by the tragedy of the Golden Calf.

"At the beginning of the first forty days of the first tablets, Moses wrote in the Book of the Covenant all the words of the Lord...but when the people sinned with the Golden Calf and the tablets were broken, that was equivalent to the breaking of the covenant with the Holy One blessed be He. Therefore, when the Holy One blessed be He reconciled to Moses by giving him the second tablets, He commanded him concerning a new covenant...and he repeated there some of the stringent commandments that had been said in Exodus 24 at the first covenant...now the Holy One blessed be He wanted to make this second covenant with them with greater stringency and that it should be upon them by means of oaths and curses [i.e., those found in the section of reproof]...therefore, Scripture states at the end of the reproof section 'These are the statutes and ordinances and laws, which the Eternal made between Him and the children of Israel, at Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses' (Lev. 26:46), this being an allusion to all the commandments and ordinances which had been said at the first covenant, for they were all embodied in this second covenant."

¹⁴ Commentators have long searched for a sin that would account for the presence of a true sin offering in Leviticus. Thus, Yalkut Shimoni (1:515) says the sin offering is needed for the sin of the builders of the Tabernacle and the tribal heads, all of whom entered the Tabernacle despite their non-priestly status. The glaring problem with this suggestion is that the sin offering seems to atone at least in part for the priests and the people generally. Philo (*Vita. Mos.* 2.147) does implicate the

Exodus, the Bible demands that the sin offering be offered all seven days "לכפר על המזבח",¹⁵ in Leviticus, the sin offering is presented as functioning additionally for the atonement of the priests and the people.

The content of the consecration ritual was modified in other ways as well. The consecration ritual in Exodus was focused on initiating sacrificial worship in the Tabernacle, and the focus was on the sacrifices as props in this ritual. The entire gamut of sacrifices was offered, and the blood of the חטאת sprinkled on the altar in a purification ceremony. Once this initiation ceremony had been completed, the priests would assume their posts in the

priests in wrongdoing, but maintains that their sin was seminal release during the seven-day period. The difficulty with both of these suggestions is that unlike the approach that I have espoused, these approaches concoct sins not referred to explicitly in the text in accounting for the atonement motif. For a survey of scholarly attempts to account for the presence of the sin offering in Leviticus 8-9, see N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), pp. 42-43. There are, however, several medieval exegetes who were sensitive to the impact of the Golden Calf on some of the details of the consecration ceremony. In his comments to Leviticus 9:3, Nachmanides writes: "It is possible that it was to atone for the incident of the Golden Calf that He now gave them these added offerings (i.e., those of the eighth day) for at the time that he commanded the section of [Exodus 29]...the Golden Calf had not yet been made." Ibn Ezra was more terse in his treatment in Lev. 9:2, stating simply that "this עגל was to atone for Aaron." See also Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on 8:2 and 9:2, who echoes these sentiments. In truth, they were all preceded by Sifra on Lev. 9:3: "יבא עגל ויכפר על מעשה עגל." However, this midrash, and its citation in Nachmanides, extends the necessity for atonement beyond just the sin of the Golden Calf, and explains that the שעיר was needed to atone for the sale of Joseph (whose association with a שעיר relates to the שעיר slaughtered by the brothers in order to soak Joseph's coat in its blood). This more strained insertion of the sale of Joseph into the context might lead us to look askance at the midrash's suggestion regarding the sin of the Golden Calf as well. However, see also Rashi on Lev. 9:2, who cites a similar Midrash in Tanhuma (cited later in n. 17). That midrash, and Rashi in its footsteps, does not attribute any significance to the inclusion of the שעיר on the eighth day, and limits the need for atonement to the sin of the Golden Calf. After completing this article, I did manage to identify a modern scholar sensitive to the role of the Golden Calf in the consecration process. See Walter C. Kaiser in David L. Petersen (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), vol. 1, p. 1056, who asserts that because of the High Priest's participation in the sin, "there was no assurance that Aaron would be named high priest," and views the role of atonement in Lev. 8 against that backdrop. However, he seems to only see the atonement in terms of Aaron and his sons, and does not attribute the addition of an eighth day to this need for atonement.

¹⁵ The appearance of the verb כפר in Ex. 29:37 before the sin of the Golden Calf need not imply that the consecration period was focused on atonement from the very outset and was never associated with the events surrounding Exodus 32. See Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), pp. 56-67, where the author argues at length for translating the verb כפר as "to purify": "An...explanation of the verb *kipper* is supplied by the cognate evidence of Akkadian, where the D-stem of *kaparu*, *kuppuru*, has the sense: 'to wipe off,' hence 'to purify'." See CAD, s.v. *kaparu*, which gives as its secondary application of this purifying motif the purification of a temple. It thus is very likely that the כפרה referred to in relation to the altar is part of the כפרה ritual involved in purifying temples in the ancient Near East. The כפרה with which we are concerned in asserting that there was need for atonement during the consecration ceremony relates to the primary application of this purifying motif, namely purification of people. Our assumption that this כפרה relates to the people is based primarily on the formulation of the verse: "לכפר עליכם."

Tabernacle. However, after the sin of the Golden Calf, the priests themselves required a purification, or כפרה, ritual. They could not simply begin work once the Tabernacle had been purified, but they instead had to be incorporated into the process of purification because of their post-sin tainted status. God therefore imposed on them the new restriction to remain within the Tabernacle for the duration of the seven days in order that they, too, should merit inclusion in the purification then underway. "לכפר עליכם" had become a top priority.

The need for atonement also motivated the addition of an eighth day dedicated to atonement. It would appear that had the sin of the Golden Calf not occurred, there would have been no ceremony on the eighth day, and the seven days alone would have sufficed. However, it clearly emerges from the text that by the time Leviticus 8-9 arrives, the initiation ceremony has been transformed from a unit in which the consecration itself is implemented into one of preparation for an eighth day. It is no longer an organic seven-day unit followed by regular patterns of religious existence as represented by the תמיד and incense.¹⁶ At this point, that alone would not suffice to heal the rupture between God and the Israelites. Following the sin, the מלואים become a preparatory seven-day period, paving the way for the climax on the eighth day with its elaborate יום הכיפורים-type atonement ceremony for the priests and the people and its sacrifices of "עגל," a term absent from Exodus 29 and so suggestive of the sin of the Golden Calf.¹⁷

God's revelation at that juncture of Israelite history could not occur with the simple execution of the planned מלואים and the transition into the routine pattern of sacrifices. Things were not simply as they had been, and there was a need to reestablish contact with God and delineate the new boundaries and contours of that relationship. Only in the aftermath of the ritual of the eighth

¹⁶ See Milgrom, p. 571: "The eighth day is not like the previous seven. The latter serves as...the investiture of the priesthood...and the consecration of the sanctuary...whereas the eighth day serves an entirely different purpose- the inauguration of the public cult conducted by its newly invested priesthood." By superimposing the motif of atonement in Leviticus 8-9 onto Milgrom's distinction, we might suggest that the first seven days were intended to atone for Aaron and his sons (who were therefore commanded to remain within the confines of the Tabernacle for those seven days as a medium for atonement), while the eighth day was intended to also atone for the people.

¹⁷ In fact, this is the only sacrifice of an עגל in the entire Bible, making its possible role in an atonement ceremony for the sin of the Golden Calf even more compelling. See Midrash Tanhuma on Leviticus 9:2: "חכמה בידך ולא עוד אלא שלא ידו ישראל אומרים שלנו ענתו ממעשה העגל לפיך ואף." See Bin-Nun, p. 13, n. 16, where the author attempts to connect the roles played by Aaron and the Israelites with the type of sacrifice each brought on the eighth day. Aaron, who was coerced into taking an active role in the sin, brought an עגל sacrifice as an עולה, which according to Nachmanides on Lev. 1:4 atones for ריחוק לב. Bin-Nun also speculates that the שלמים sacrifice brought by the Israelites on the eighth day was intended to atone for the שלמים brought at the sin of the Golden Calf according to Ex. 32:6.

day, the mini-היפּוּרִים of Aaron and his sons, would God's presence be manifest. The natural process was interrupted and repairing the damage, of literally restoring the loving relationship between God and the Israelites, required that much more work.

Amnon and Tamar: A Case Study in Allusions

Robert Klapper, Gavy Posner, and Mordy Friedman*

I. Introduction

The tale of Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom recounted in II Samuel 13 is liberally sprinkled with words and phrases also found in Genesis. These parallels would seem to indicate conscious authorial intent to recall to the reader's mind sections of Genesis,¹ and I seek to examine their literary roles within the story and establish their contribution to its meaningful interpretation.² Meaningfulness initially involves placing particular allusions within the context of broader comparisons that relate the alluding and alluded-to texts. On a deeper level, it involves determining what, if anything, an allusion adds to the development of a narrative – in other words, interpreting the allusion. In very general terms, allusions serve three functions in developing the narrative: a) generation of character development; b) heightening of plot expectations; and c) development of theme.

* Based on a paper by Robert Klapper; edited by Gavy Posner; annotated by Mordy Friedman.

¹ In determining what is an intended allusion and what is coincidentally similar to another text, I have used two criteria, distinctiveness and clustering:

1. Distinctiveness is a function of the frequency with which a particular phrase or word is attested in the Bible, as well as its emotional or artistic memorability.

2. Allusions should cluster; that is, several should occur within one literary unit and allude to the same other literary unit. An unusually large number of allusive words or phrases in a unit can compensate for lack of distinctiveness and vice versa. In addition, once allusive intent is established via particularly distinctive phrases, less distinctive references can be given more interpretational weight.

² For more general readings on biblical allusions, see: Moshe Garsiel, "Models of Analogy and Sets of Comparison in the Bible" (Hebrew), *Milet* 2 (1985), pp. 35-48, Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 365-440, Yair Zakovitch, *Through the Looking Glass: Reflection Stories in the Bible* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 1995). See also several articles written by Zakovitch on the subject, such as "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993), pp. 139-152, and "Reflection Story – Another Dimension for the Valuations of Characters in Biblical Narrative," *Tarbiz* 54:2 (1985), pp. 165-176. For an excellent case study, see Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: a Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels*, (English and Hebrew; Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1985). See especially his introduction, in the English, pp. 16-32, and in the Hebrew, pp. 9-31.

A. Character development - allusions can draw comparisons or oppositions between characters in different texts that ask readers to view one as a parallel or antithesis of the other. By comparing and contrasting the actions and behavior of two characters in the same role, brought to the foreground through the use of allusions, the reader gains a sharper understanding of the biblical portrayal and assessment of the story's characters.

B. Plot expectations- allusions can lead readers to anticipate, correctly or incorrectly, the development of the plot.³ This function raises a special problem: while for most purposes allusions seem useful even if perceived only after careful re-reading, plot expectations are irrelevant when the reader already knows the entire plot. However, such allusions may be significant not because they tell first-time readers what might transpire, but rather because they tell even familiar readers what might have been.

C. Development of theme- allusions can clarify the moral or purpose of a text by placing it within the framework of a past tale or tradition.

Some allusions are tied to a particular alluding word or phrase, while others serve to recall entire stories or units; many function on both levels. All such allusions will be explored and treated in terms of the three categories defined above.

The Amnon and Tamar episode alludes to four distinct literary units: sections of the Joseph narrative (Genesis 37, 39-45), that of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), the narrative detailing the relationship between Shechem and Dinah (Genesis 34), and the laws of sexual libel in Deuteronomy 23.⁴ Below I examine the role that allusions to these episodes assume in literary analysis of the story's characters and plot.⁵

³ The implicit assumption is that multiple biblical narratives can share an identical plot. For a useful exposition of this assumption, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 47-62, where Alter relates to the issue within his discussion of biblical typescenes.

⁴ The purpose of this last allusion in our story is quite obvious: reference to these verses convicts Amnon immediately. There is, therefore, no need to elaborate on this point.

⁵ Although scholars have already noticed some of the parallels that will be discussed, none undertakes an exhaustive survey. See Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), pp. 259, 263, 271, 274, who cites several of the parallels, but fails to clarify their contribution to the meaningfulness of the passage, only using the parallels to help define words. There are several scholars who develop the parallels to Dinah alone (cf. Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary: 1,2 Samuel* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], pp. 380-381, and David Noel Freedman, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997], pp. 485-495). There are also those who compare Amnon and Tamar to Joseph (cf. Amnon Bazak, "'Tov Lifnei HaElokim Yemalet Mimmennah, Ve'hot' Yilakhed Bah' - Bein Yosef Le-Amnon" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 27 (1997), pp. 29-41 and Zakovitch's "Through the Looking Glass"). However, they do not extensively detail the comparisons to the original Judah and Tamar incident in detail, and more importantly, they do not highlight all three allusions together. My treatment will introduce a more meaningful interpretation of the passage by taking a closer look at

II. Establishing Character Roles

The substance of the Amnon and Tamar episode is largely the behavior and interaction of the story's characters. To understand them is, to a great degree, to understand the story. Understanding them, in turn, requires interpreting allusions, as the text develops characters roles, personalities, and motives by deliberately paralleling them with other biblical characters and episodes.

A. Joseph⁶

Amnon is initially depicted as the antithesis of Joseph through a series of stark contrasts that make him everything Joseph is not. In 13:2,⁷ he seeks to perform "מאומה," precisely what Joseph was known for not performing.⁸ The term, though commonly used throughout the Bible, is clustered densely in the section of the Joseph narrative detailing Joseph's relationship with the wife of Potiphar.⁹

In 13:9, Amnon intensifies the character opposition by commanding "הוציא כל איש מעלי" as Joseph did in Genesis 45:1; the phrase occurs nowhere else in the Bible and its emotion-laden tone and the drama of its context in Genesis make it unforgettable.¹⁰ However, Joseph used the phrase before revealing/transforming himself from stranger to brother; Amnon uses it before revealing/transforming himself from brother to stranger.

In 13:11, Amnon tries to seduce Tamar with the words "שכבי עמי"; Potiphar's wife employs the identical and rare¹¹ phrase "שכבה עמי" in her attempts

each allusion and by then incorporating all three allusions into the broader explication of the narrative.

⁶ The comparison of Amnon and Tamar to Joseph is already found in Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:42, and in the Geonic commentary of R. Samuel ben Hofni (Genesis 39:7, 9). This parallel between the two stories is developed further by A. Bazak, "Tov Lifnei HaElokim," although he only notes the similarities between the two, while we will also stress their differences. Yair Zakovitch (*Through the Looking Glass*, pp. 81-82; "Through the Looking Glass," pp. 149-151), develops several areas in which the accounts diverge, as well: whether the seducer is a man or a woman, if the seducer and seducee are married or not, whether there is a formulated plan or not, who rips whose garments, who cries out, who is punished, and whether the outcome is death or salvation.

⁷ All references are to II Samuel unless specified otherwise.

⁸ See Genesis 40:15: "והם פה לא עשיתי מאומה."

⁹ See Genesis 39:6, 9, 23, 40:15.

¹⁰ We see from Judges 3:19 and Eglon of Moab's command of "חס" that there are alternative ways of expressing a command to evacuate the area, justifying our assertion of allusion here.

¹¹ "שכבי עמי" is attested only one other time in the Bible, in Genesis 19:34. This is duly noted by R. Samuel ben Hofni.

to seduce Joseph in Genesis 39:7 and 39:12. However, whereas Joseph resisted the incessant call of the seducer, Amnon refuses to listen to the resister.

In 13:16, Tamar accuses Amnon of performing a "רעה גדולה," precisely what Joseph was unwilling to commit (Genesis 39:9).¹²

Ironically, Tamar too is consistently contrasted with Joseph. While Joseph escapes "החוצה," Tamar is expelled (by Amnon) "החוצה." Joseph escapes by slipping out of his clothing; in 13:18-19, the narrator first tells us of the clothing Tamar is wearing as she leaves, violated. The opposition is made nearly explicit when Tamar tears the כתונת פסים, symbolically rending her initial identification with Joseph as potential victims of seduction.

Thus, in a story of sexual entanglement, the narrative has interwoven contrasts to Joseph's sexual purity into all the characters involved.

B. Judah and Tamar¹³

The name Tamar itself immediately recalls Genesis 38; aside from Absalom's daughter, who appears later within our tale, Tamar-Genesis and Tamar-Samuel are the only Tamar's in the Bible. Other, more subtle allusions reinforce the connection. In 13:3, a "רע" named Jonadab enters, recalling Judah's "רעהו העדולמי" of Genesis 38.¹⁴ In 13:20, "ותשב תמר ושממה בית אבשלום" (Genesis 38:11) recalls "ותשב בית אביה" (Genesis 38:11).

In 13:23-24, "ויהיו גוזזים לאבשלום" and "הנה נא גוזזים לעבדך" recall Genesis 38:12-13, "ועל תמנתה לגו צאט" and "ויעל על גוזי צאט."

Finally, the plot parallelism is so convincing, and the shared name such an obvious opportunity, that an author would have to make more of an effort to avoid allusion than to use it. Most strikingly, both Tamars engage in an illicit and seemingly incestuous relationship.

These allusions determine our expectations for Tamar of II Samuel 13. Parallelism in plot and language to the Tamar-Genesis narrative unavoidably create expectations of apparent immorality that will lead to children and redemption. However, it remains unclear who in the episode of II Samuel 13 will redeem Tamar and play the role that Judah does in Genesis.

¹² The rarity of this phrase in the Bible would seem to underscore its use as an allusion here. The phrase appears in only three other places, Jeremiah 16:10, 32:42 and Nehemiah 13:27, despite the fact that one could suggest many other cases where the Bible could have used the formulation and chose not to.

¹³ For another study on allusions to the Judah and Tamar episode that are beyond the purview of this article, see Ellen van Wolde, "Texts in Dialogue with Texts: Intertextuality in the Ruth and Tamar Narratives," *Biblical Interpretation* 5 (1997), pp. 1-28.

¹⁴ Hiram and Jonadab are two of only four רעים named in the Bible (see I Chronicles 27:33 and Job 2:1 for the others), although there are numerous unnamed רעים.

C. The Rape of Dinah¹⁵

Several literary parallels can be identified as alluding to the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. Thus, in 13:12, the phrase "כי לא יעשה כן בישראל אל" closely matches the phrase in Genesis 34:7 describing the brothers' indignation following the rape of Dinah: "כי נבלה עשתה בישראל לשכב" "את בת יעקב וכן לא יעשה."

In 13:20, the word "החריש" appears, which shares a root with the word "החריש" in Genesis 34:5. The word is not distinctive, but its juxtaposition to other, more convincing allusions argues for it as an intended parallel. In addition, in both texts it surprises: silence is not the expected response to rape, strengthening the likelihood of allusion.

In sum, a number of linguistic parallels connect II Samuel 13 and Genesis 34, though they are given weight mainly because of the plot and theme parallels.¹⁶ The allusions to Dinah suggest comparing David to Jacob: both react passively to a "גבלה בישראל," allowing their children to assume authority. Absalom adds irony to the identification by telling Tamar "החריש": she should be passive, not David. Absalom, of course, plays the morally ambiguous role of Simeon and Levi at Shechem.

III. Plot Development

With a sense of the story's characters and their roles within it, we may now turn to the literary progression of the story. Here too, the narrator uses allusions as a method through which he conveys the details of the story to the reader.¹⁷

II Samuel 13 opens by introducing Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar. The description of Amnon and Absalom as David's sons immediately plants a seed of suspicion in our minds; just twenty verses earlier, in 12:11, the prophet Nathan had warned David in the name of G-d that "הנני מקים רעה עליך מבתך."¹⁸

¹⁵ This parallel has already been noticed and independently developed in Bergen, pp. 380-381, and Freedman, pp. 485-495.

¹⁶ Besides the obvious rape theme, both accounts share other similarities in plot. Both Amnon and Shechem were the first born sons of a ruler, and both narratives culminate in their demise at the hands of the sibling/s of the girl.

¹⁷ I assume throughout this paper that Samuel is a text to be re-read. Thus, my interpretation of allusions assumes that readers are aware at the outset of which texts are alluded to, i.e., that they are aware of the evidence presented in this paper's second section.

¹⁸ Interestingly, Tamar is described in terms of her brothers instead of her father, and thus remains untainted. The fact that she is strictly referred to as "אחותי" would seem to be a literary device used

The adjective "יפה" that modifies Tamar's name, as well as Amnon's lust for her, implies that the plot will be sexual. This gives added significance to Tamar's name, which recalls her namesake in Genesis. The allusion enhances our plot expectations, as Tamar-Samuel's fate may parallel that of Tamar-Genesis; we now anticipate an illicit, possibly even incestual relationship. The presence of two brothers of the royal line, one of who is an eldest son, raises several intriguing possibilities. Will Tamar marry Amnon, and will he then die young, as Er and Onan, husbands of Tamar-Genesis, did? Will she then marry David, her father? Will she have sexual relations with Absalom at some point? No matter which, if any, of the above scenarios transpires, one may reasonably assume two things based on the allusion: Tamar will be blameless, and the ending will be fortunate, probably involving the birth of children. Tamar gains our sympathy, and though her immediate fate is daunting, any long-term fear for her is assuaged.

As verse one ends, then, Tamar has gained our sympathy, whereas Amnon and Absalom are somewhat shady characters. In verse two, Amnon is degraded further; he is represented as wanting, though unable, to do "מאומה" to Tamar. The use of "מאומה" is significant; Joseph uses the very same word in his assertion that he is innocent (Genesis 40:15). Of course, that tale has not as yet been clearly alluded to, and so the implications are not immediately apparent; however, as we read on, this verse will help develop an important character opposition.

Verse three introduces Jonadab, the "רע" of Amnon. Judah also had a "רע," and Jonadab's appearance intensifies our expectation that Tamar-Samuel's fate will parallel that of Tamar-Genesis. But Jonadab is not, unlike the Adullamite, an ordinary man; he is a "חכם." Joseph was also described as "חכם," and although the word appears often elsewhere in the Bible, the comparison intensifies when Jonadab asks in verse four essentially the same question that Joseph asked to Pharaoh's imprisoned servants: "מדוע אתה ככה" as compared with "מדוע פניכם רעים היום" (Genesis 40:7). The comparison to Joseph, as well as the generally positive connotation of "חכם," creates a positive impression of Jonadab. On the whole, then, the reader is optimistic at this stage of the story, as allusions to Tamar-Genesis and to Joseph imply that, despite difficulty and challenge, the plot will culminate with a positive resolution.

by the narrator to highlight the fact that this episode is occurring between siblings. See Bar-Efrat, p. 241, who already noted this fact.

Verses 5-7 appear redundant at first glance. Jonadab advises Amnon what to ask David to tell Tamar, Amnon asks David to tell Tamar, and then David tells Tamar. But the repetition is not exact, and the seemingly minor linguistic variations have major implications. Both Amnon and Jonadab stress the former's desire to see Tamar, but David omits that component of Amnon's request in his instructions to Tamar. This dramatizes his ignorance and helplessness throughout the episode. David instructs Tamar in verse 6 "לכי נא" לך נא ראה את שלום;" in Genesis 37:14, Jacob instructs Joseph "לכי נא ראה את שלום;" before sending him to his brothers and slavery. The text thus begins to implant ambivalent expectations for the ensuing plot in the reader's mind. While the allusions to Tamar-Genesis forecast an authoritative, strong-willed character who brings about her own redemption in a favorable plot ending, the allusions to Joseph's fateful journey anticipate a character who will be helpless and in grave danger.

Tamar arrives at Amnon's house as ordered by the king. At this point she still seems completely passive and blameless. But she also seems rather forward, for she does prepare the remedy "לעיני" even though David had not instructed her to. She also agrees to Amnon's request, made after the room empties, that she serve him personally.

Amnon initially refuses to eat, then suddenly cries out "רוציאו כל איש מעלי." Those are, of course, the words used by Joseph just before revealing himself (Genesis 45:1), and Amnon now proceeds to expose his true self. Joseph, despite his "חכמה" never did the "מאומה" that Amnon now uses Jonadab's חכמה to do to Tamar. The opposition is completed with his words to Tamar, "שכבי עמי," the phrase used by Potiphar's wife in her attempted seduction of Joseph.

With those words, of course, Tamar is cast once more into the role of Joseph, and we extend her our sympathy even as we anticipate her escape. At the same time, though, we wonder why she is still in Amnon's reach. He has sent all the servants from the room for no reason, invited her into an inner room without justification; why is she not suspicious? And so a note of worry creeps into our minds as we await her response to Amnon - and she intensifies that concern with the answer that she provides.

Tamar's response to Amnon is "אל אחי אל תענני," whereas Joseph's to Potiphar's wife was flight. Casting Tamar as the parallel to Joseph serves to highlight and emphasize the instances in which the characters differ. Expecting Tamar to flee like Joseph, the reader is jarred by the dissonance between the characters. The effects are a sharpened focus upon Tamar's passivity, and an

implied criticism that while Joseph made the right move, Tamar has made the wrong one. Suddenly, the situation bodes quite poorly.¹⁹

The substance of Tamar's response serves to undermine what had been the reader's optimism. Mention of rape recalls the turbulent story of Dinah. This specter gains solidity with her next words, "כי לא יעשה כן בישראל אל תעשה" – the words used to describe the reaction of Dinah's vengeful brothers to her being raped. A similar phrase, "כי עשתה נבלה בישראל," occurs in Deuteronomy 22:21 regarding a man who takes a woman and then develops a hatred for her. Another possible resolution is thus brought to the fore.

Amnon disregards Tamar's plea, "ולא אבה לשמוע לה." This again opposes him to Joseph, who similarly disregarded Potiphar's wife, "ולא שמע, וינענה וישכב אותה;" similar language was used to describe Shechem's rape of Dinah: "וישכב אותה וינענה." We anticipate that, like Shechem, Amnon will now wish to marry his victim.²⁰ Instead, having taken his woman, he develops an unreasonable hate for her and in a sudden, ironic reversal of his earlier "שכבי עמי" tells her "קומי לכי." She replies that he is magnifying his sin by sending her away.

Thus far, Tamar has been identified with three Genesis characters: Joseph, Tamar and Dinah. The comparisons are as yet indeterminate; the expected evil has occurred, but we do not know whether there will be a resolution. The dialogue to follow will capitalize on our expectations to emphasize the irony and tragedy of what has transpired.

After Tamar condemns Amnon for his actions, he responds with words that emphasize Tamar's failure to flee; whereas Joseph escapes with "וינס ויצא" (Genesis 39:12, 13, 15 and 18), Amnon commands his servants "שלחו נא את זאת מעלי החוצה" (17).

As Tamar reaches the street, the narrator suddenly informs us that she is wearing a "כתונת פסים" cementing the parallel to Joseph even as it distinguishes Tamar from him. Joseph, of course, is the only other biblical wearer of a "כתונת פסים," but it was stripped from him when the brothers attacked him. He also left his clothing in the hands of Potiphar's wife when escaping from her. The lack of congruence raises the possibility that there will be no happy ending after all, a scenario made even more likely when she goes

¹⁹ Cf., however, P.K. McCarter, *The Anchor Bible: II Samuel* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), p. 322, where the author adopts an entirely different perspective by comparing Tamar's response to Abigail's in I Samuel 25:24-31.

²⁰ For the rabbinic solution as to how they could be wed despite their sibling status, cf. bTal. Sanhedrin 21a; for discussions of the issue, see McCarter, p. 323, and A. A. Anderson, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Samuel* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), pp. 172-175.

on in verse 19 to rip the coat, thus symbolically rending her identification with Joseph.

In verse 20, Tamar meets her brother Absalom, who tells her "החריש." She then remains in his house, "ותשב תמר ושוממה בית אבשלום אחיה," raising our hopes again as we recall that regarding Tamar-Genesis, the verse stated that "ותשב בית אביה" (Genesis 38:11). Is Amnon the equivalent of Judah, who also at first rejected a Tamar? Is he the equivalent of Er or Onan? Perhaps. But the next verse points to more depressing possibilities.

The text next tells us that "והמלך דוד שמע" rather than "וישמע המלך." This recalls Jacob's reaction to the rape of Dinah, "ויעקב שמע" (Genesis 34:5), as does the word "החריש" in verse 20 recall "והחריש" of Genesis 34:6. This is the second time within the narrative that David has been compared with Jacob (see verse 7), and both times the comparison conveys his inability to control his children. The comparison is made more ominous in verse 22 as Absalom's anger reaches a level at which "ולא דבר אבשלום עם אמונו למרע ועד טוב," Joseph's brothers hated him to the extent that "ולא יכלו דברו לשלום" (Genesis 37:4), the similarity again indicating that the children will take action beyond the knowledge and control of their father. Absalom, however, may not be a blameless instrument of retribution; he is compared to Simeon and Levi at Shechem and the brothers at the selling of Joseph, comparisons that make his motivations suspect.

Verse 23 strikes a new note of hope as "שנתיים ימים" have passed; Joseph's final redemption after the brother's sold him occurred "מקץ שנתיים ימים" (Genesis 41:1). And furthermore, the context provided is "לאבשלום ויהי גוים." Knowing that Judah met Tamar-Genesis when "ויעל על גווי צאנר," the prospects for redemption are temporarily revived as we hope that we will get our happy ending after all. However, in verse 24, Absalom asks the king "ועבדו ילך נא," an ominous recalling of verse 17's "ילך נא." The tension mounts again. David at first puts Absalom off, but he finally agrees to send Amnon and the rest of his own sons. When Absalom has Amnon killed, the possibility of salvation by the most likely party dies as well. At last the fading possibility of salvation seems to have disappeared, and there shall be no happy ending after all.

Finally, the episode concludes with David's reaction to Amnon's death, rightly portrayed through the prism of Amnon and Joseph's contrasting characters. David mourns Amnon ("ויתאבל על בנו כל הימים") as Jacob had for Joseph ("ויתאבל על בנו ימים רבים"), but the opposition between Amnon and Joseph concludes with poetic justice in verse 39 as David is "נחם על אמונו," whereas Jacob was "וימאן להתנחם."

IV. Establishment of Theme/Purpose

As the narrative ends, we review it in light of the allusions that we have established. The Deuteronomic allusions serve no purpose other than immediately emphasizing the reprehensible nature of Amnon's actions, but the allusions to Genesis provide insights which are not apparent at first.

The character of Amnon is uniformly downgraded by the allusions; he is portrayed as the antithesis of Joseph, as worse than Shechem, and as one who rejects Judah's role as Tamar's redeemer. But while he is uniformly downgraded, he is not downgraded uniformly; the various means by which his failings are exposed help identify and clarify them.

Amnon is crown prince and heir apparent as the tale begins. His failure to succeed David is at least literally inevitable, however, since Solomon must eventually become king. (We readers may not know yet that Solomon must become king, but the author knows we will find out soon). The author preempts any sympathy for Amnon, however, by portraying him as unfit to follow in the shoes of Judah and Joseph, Israel's monarchical ancestor and prototype respectively. Joseph's integrity qualifies him for royalty in Egypt and leadership among his brothers; Amnon disqualifies himself by acting deceitfully. Joseph uses his wisdom for good; Amnon uses Jonadab's for evil. Judah accepts responsibility for Tamar-Genesis; Amnon has Tamar-Samuel removed from his house. Finally, and most tellingly, Amnon can hardly become king if he fails to match even Shechem's behavioral standards!

Absalom also invites some apparently unfavorable comparisons. He is associated with the brothers' cabal against Joseph and with Simeon and Levi's disobedience to Jacob. Although Absalom's actions seem more justifiable than Amnon's, who is the anti-Joseph and deemed worse than Shechem, he still is not worthy of kingship. His motives may be impure, as suggested by the last allusion to the Shechem story; whereas Simeon and Levi "הבאישו" Jacob for the sake of their sister's honor, Absalom does so to satisfy his own hatred. Furthermore, as Amnon stood between Absalom and the monarchy, the fratricide may have been prompted by ulterior motives.

Tamar is associated with Joseph, Tamar-Genesis, and Dinah. The comparisons to Joseph and Tamar seem favorable, but that interpretation is cast into doubt when she fails to merit the good fortune they received. The contrast with Joseph highlights her failure to take action when necessary. In fact, Tamar's failure to act decisively marks her role in the story, as she never

captures the energy and vigor of Tamar-Genesis. Despite the initial comparisons, Tamar-Samuel remains remarkably passive and manipulated.

David is compared only to Jacob, and the identification is obvious and apt; both are past their prime and losing control over their children through inaction. David, like Jacob, is fated to see much trouble in his lifetime, and his anguish is all the more affecting when compared to Jacob's.

Each story alluded to in II Samuel 13 highlights an aspect of the narrative, while their combination allows for meaningful interpretation from numerous vantagepoints. The parallels with the Joseph story remind the readers that this is a family struggle, those with the Tamar-Judah story that this is a story of justice, and those with the Dinah tale that this is a story of crime and base, human tendencies. Finally, the mere placing of the story in the biblical tradition emphasizes the rabbinic version of historical repetition; the deeds of the fathers foreshadow those of the sons, and those who learn history are required to improve upon it.

Habakkuk: Tormented Supporter of Babylon

Aaron Koller

The first chapter of Habakkuk presents the exegete with layers of concentric challenges.¹ The ultimate goal is of course to understand the message of the prophet in the text. In order to ascertain that, however, the setting in which the prophet was operating must first be established and understood. And particularly in this chapter, an understanding of the construction of the chapter and the relationships between the obviously distinct sections within is a prerequisite for discovering the history of the text.

The purpose of this paper is first to investigate the structure of the chapter, after which we will propose a setting in which the prophet worked and wrote this chapter. Finally, we will try to understand, based on our understanding of the historical background, what the prophet was trying to impart to his own generation as well as generations of future readers.

I The Unity of the Chapter

It has long been the mainstream view that the first section of the book, which includes all of chapter 1 and the first 4 (or 5) verses of chapter 2,² can be subdivided into four units, excluding 1:1, which is a superscription introducing the chapter:³ 1:2-4; 5-11; 12-17; 2:1-4(5).⁴ Within this broad understanding of

* I owe a debt of gratitude to many people who assisted in the process of writing this article, but my thanks especially to my friend and *chavrusa* Baruch Hain, with whom I learned not to take anything for granted.

¹ The dominant view among scholars is that the book in its present form can be divided into three broad sections: 1:1-2:4(5) (see next note); 2:5(6)-2:20; 3:1-3:19, and we will accept this proposal here.

² The end of this section is, as previously noted, not altogether clear. It is clear, however, that by 2:6, another section has begun, for stylistic reasons: from there until the end of chapter 2 is a series of "woe oracles," identifiable by the characteristic "חיי" found in each. The claim that 2:5 begins a new section is dubious, yet neither is it obvious how it would be part of the section through 2:4. Wellhausen, always free with the emendations, dropped the first two words of v. 5 and changed the third from MT חיי to חיי, thus forcibly creating another woe oracle similar to those in the series that follows.

³ Keil (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets, Nahum - Malachi*, translated by J. Martin [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1989], p. 55) claims that

the structure, various views have been expressed regarding the content of most of the sections.

What is clear is that the opening verses describe a tragic situation: a wicked persona or group is oppressing another, more righteous than the first. The prophet complains bitterly that already for a long while he has been bemoaning the situation, and yet the travesty continues before his eyes. His opening complaint does not seem to question any theological doctrines, but only laments the pitiable situation in which the speaker finds himself. On the other hand, he is not bewailing physical pain and suffering, but rather gives it a religio-moral twist.⁵

"How long, O Lord, shall I cry out and You not listen? Shall I shout to You,
'Violence!'⁶ and You not save? Why do You make me see iniquity; why do You look⁷

this verse actually serves as a heading not only for this section, and not only for the first two chapters, but for the entire book. If so, it cannot be viewed as parallel or equivalent to 3:1, as the latter is actually structurally subsumed under the former. Most scholars, however, disagree with this claim, even if allowing for the unity of the book. Most biblical books have multiple headings within; few have a heading that means to introduce the entire work. It is possible that Jeremiah has a general heading, prefacing the entire book. This would then explain the seeming double heading at the beginning of the book: the first verse is that of the entire book, and the second is the introduction of the immediately following section. On superscriptions, outside of Psalms, in general, see G. M. Tucker, "Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of a Canon," in G. W. Coats and B. C. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 56-70 and H. M. I. Gevayaru, "Biblical Colophons: A Source for the 'Biography' of Authors, Texts, and Books," in *SVT* 28 (1975), 42-59.

⁴ Neither is this division unanimous. I. Abarbanel grouped v. 5 of chap. 1 together with v. 4, and began a separate unit with v. 6. This is also the view of B. Peckham, "The Vision of Habakkuk," *CBQ* 48 (1986), 617-636. Haak, *Habakkuk* 23 and 41, claims that God speaks 1:5-6, and then in v. 7 Habakkuk again begins to speak. Haak also groups 1:12 with the verses that precede it. Other variations have been proposed, but the adoption of the dominant view is certainly adequate for our purposes.

⁵ All translations are taken from *Tanakh* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 5746/1985), unless otherwise noted.

⁶ The exact denotation of חסד will prove crucial for reaching a precise understanding of the entire passage; for now, "violence" conveys an image that is appropriate enough.

⁷ The word בָּרַיִט is generally taken as the hiphil second person singular imperfect, which should be translated as "do you look." The parallelism with the first clause, however, dictates that here, too, the looker should be the author, and not God. Accordingly, the Vorlage of the Peshitta and the Targum apparently read אֲבִיט, the first person singular imperfect. This is not ideal, either, though, as a precise parallel would require a meaning that denoted that God had actively shown the evil to the prophet. In fact, it may be possible to retain the MT and simply translate the word as a causative. BDB (p. 613) cites H. Ewald, who claims that indeed the word as found in the MT can be understood in this way, such that the phrase should be translated, "Why do You make me look upon wrong?" A. Guillaume, *Hebrew and Arabic Lexicography: A Comparative Study*, Part III (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 4-5, also argues that the word is causative, but that it does not mean "cause to look," but rather "cause to appear." He offers that the verse should be translated, "Why dost thou let me see iniquity and allow wickedness to appear?" Most probable, however, is that the simple meaning of the word should be retained, at the expense of the exact semantic parallel between the two halves.

upon wrong? Raiding and violence⁸ are before me, strife continues and contention goes on. That is why חסד⁹ is paralyzed¹⁰ and justice never emerges; for the villain hedges in the just man - therefore judgment emerges deformed."

The complaint is, then, that because of the oppression under which the righteous, presumably including the prophet, find themselves, justice cannot be carried out.

The next issue that must be illuminated is the purpose of the section that follows, 1:5-11. The section describes the imminent rise of the Chaldeans, and describes in vivid and fearful terms both that nation's capabilities and its intentions. The question that we must answer is the relationship between this section and the one that immediately precedes it.¹¹ The most simple approach is to claim that vv. 5-11 are a divine response to the problem outlined in the first verses.¹² This proposition is apparently dictated by the simple observation that v. 6 seems to be God speaking in the first person, as opposed to the preceding

(See also n. 38, which provides additional impetus for retaining the simple meaning of the term here.)

⁸ The Hebrew is חסד חסד, and I do not believe that the given translation is accurate. The meanings of the terms also have a significant effect on the interpretation of the passage, and later we will attempt to bring out their full meaning and implications. For our present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that the complaint remains free of any theological nature, other than the fact that the addressee is God, of course.

⁹ The exact meaning of this term in this context has also been the subject of much debate, upon which we will touch shortly.

¹⁰ *Tanakh* translates the Hebrew חסד חסד as "fails," but this seems to miss the point of the complaint; again, we will soon deal with this issue more fully.

¹¹ Many suggestions have been offered in explanation of the relationship between these two sub-units from a historical perspective: whether the same prophet said them, and if so, whether they were said at the same time, etc., but on the conceptual level these still leave the question open as to what the relationship is between the two. For example, K. Budde, "Habakuk," *ZDMG* 4 (1930), 139-147, proposes that 1:5-11 is out of place and should be in the middle of chapter 2. Wellhausen, cited in O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, translated by P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 418, and in A. Weiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, translated by D. M. Barton (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 260, claims that 1:5-11 are a later addition by a different author; K. Marti, *Das Dodekapropheten* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904), 330, claims that 1:2-4 are late. Almost a century later, J. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of Twelve* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 138-154 has adopted a similar view, claiming that 1:2-4, 12a, and 13-14 are an early wisdom layer, supplemented by a later Babylonian layer, consisting of 1:5-11, 12b, and 15-17. See also W. H. Brownlee, "The Composition of Habakkuk," in A. Caquot and M. Philonenko (eds.), *Hommages a Andre Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Librairie D'Amerique et D'Orient, 1971), 255-275, who claims that the four units within the first section are all historically distinct, and proceeds to identify the historical background of each. I am interested, however, in the passage's thematic content, regarding which I presume unity and coherence, notwithstanding these textual issues.

¹² This view has been the most popular since medieval times. See the comments of R. Joseph Kara and Ibn Ezra to 1:12. It is the dominant view among modern scholars, too; all standard commentaries give the sections titles that reflect this understanding.

verses, in which Habakkuk was the speaker addressing God. This proposal is also attractive because of the structure it then creates for the entire unit: question-answer-question-answer, since 2:1-4 is easily explained as the response to the complaint found in the last section of chap. 1.

However, in order to advocate the claim that these verses are God's response to the voiced complaint, one must be able to explain how they answer the problems raised. This explanation, however, seems to be lacking. Most commentators, medieval as well as modern, explain that the coming of the Chaldeans will take care of the problems previously bemoaned, as the oncoming army will destroy the רשע of the first verses. That this indeed may happen is obvious, but that this is the intent of the verses is dubious. The verses describe the rise of the Chaldeans, a nation described in most horrific terms, and not even one word of praise is found in the description. Every verse offers more reasons to be frightened by the impending threat from this powerful foreign oppressor.

To explain the apparent lack of solution provided by the passage presumed to be the response, scholars have proposed a number of changes to *matres lectionis* in the text. S.J. de Vries¹³ emends the text of v. 7b from משפטו ושאתו, effectively forcing the text to be read as a message from God that the Chaldeans are actually His messengers. Similar in strategy, although slightly different in attack, B. Uffenheimer¹⁴ changes ממנו of that verse to ממני. This produces a different meaning, in that משפט can then imply justice from the perspective of the Chaldeans, whose sense of justice is certainly skewed, but the effect for understanding the section is the same: God answers that the Chaldeans are nonetheless divine messengers.

The conclusion necessitated by these arguments is that as the text stands, the proposition that vv. 5-11 are meant to serve as a response to dispel the prophet's complaints found in vv. 2-4 cannot be defended. While textual emendation remains an option, it is clearly methodologically sounder to attempt to understand the text on its own terms than to approach the text with foreknowledge gleaned from unspecified sources of the text's message, and then to utilize brute force to ensure that this message is indeed found within. If the option is open to understand the text as is, and I believe it is, it is to be championed, even at the expense of literary and stylistic advantages gained through emendation.

¹³ "The Book of Habakkuk," in C. M. Laymon (ed.), *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 495.

¹⁴ "Habakkuk Protests Against Heaven" (Hebrew), in H. Beinart and S. Y. Levinstam (eds.), *Investigations in Scripture Published Upon the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of M. D. Cassuto* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1987), 72.

It seems to me that the view of M. D. Johnson must in this respect be correct.¹⁵ He writes, "When we keep before us the fact that i 5-11 does not picture the Chaldeans in any way in a positive light we can see that the passage is not intended to be the solution of the problem raised in i 2-4."¹⁶ In searching for an alternative explanation, then, it may be wise to keep in mind the chapter break-up. Although often these divisions are, and should be, disregarded, one ought not do so without a moment's thought. In this case, the fact that the first 17 verses are grouped together as one chapter and 2:1-4 are presented as separate may imply that the latter provides a response to the entire first unit, and that in fact there is only one question-answer pair, not two.

This is reinforced by the fact that the first verse of chap. 2 sets the stage for the forthcoming response, and v. 2 is God's own introduction to His response, explicitly separating it from the preceding section. We see, then, that the author knew how to utilize explicit border-verses to delimitate questions from responses. But no such division is found separating 1:4 from v. 5, or v. 11 from v. 12 for that matter, and the lack of such a separation mitigates for the position that in fact these spots are not transitions. It would then seem more reasonable to search for a unifying theme of the entire first chapter, such that it can be understood as one complaint whose answer is found in the following chapter.

Towards this end, Johnson proposes that vv. 5-11 are actually an intensification of the problem raised in the first section (vv. 2-4). In his words, "the opening complaint of Habakkuk in i 2-4 is a general statement of the injustice experienced for generations by Judah at the hands of foreign nations. But now, the prophet learns, the situation is becoming worse instead of better." This is based on the interpretation of the key phrase in 1:4: "על כן תפוג תורה." Johnson understands תורה as a reference to the Deuteronomic promises of the blessings of security and divine kindness for those who observe the laws of the Bible.¹⁷ He claims that Habakkuk is a "disillusioned Deuteronomist"¹⁸ complaining that the promise of good for the righteous and bad for the wicked has not been fulfilled.¹⁹ 1:5-11 is an intensification and specification of the general complaint already outlined in the first few verses of the book.

¹⁵ "The Paralysis of Torah in Habakkuk I 4," *VT* 35 (1985), 257-266.

¹⁶ "Paralysis," 261.

¹⁷ On the topic generally, cf. M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1972), 307-319.

¹⁸ This was the title of Johnson's paper when he originally read it: "Habakkuk - Disillusioned Deuteronomist," read at the SBL Annual Meeting, Dallas, Texas, November 5-9, 1980.

¹⁹ "Paralysis," 264.

Habakkuk adds that not only have the Deuteronomic promises not been fulfilled, but he has also watched the situation worsen, as the Chaldeans, the epitome of all that is evil, are now oppressing Judah, and of the two, certainly Judah is the more righteous.

While I believe Johnson to be right in his general view that chapter one is a single integral complaint,²⁰ I cannot agree with his interpretation of the first few verses of the book for a number of linguistic reasons. The crucial question that must be raised concerning these verses is the identification of the רשע about whom the complaint is formulated. Broadly, the two options that stand in front of the exegete are to identify the רשע with a foreign oppressor or to match him with a domestic enemy of the prophet. Scholars have espoused both views. Among the foreign nations identified as the רשע have been the Assyrians,²¹ the Chaldeans,²² the Egyptians,²³ the Macedonians under Alexander the Great,²⁴ and even Nicanor.²⁵ Scholars identifying the רשע as domestic have generally identified him with Jehoiakim.²⁶

A number of specific nouns employed in the first verses, both those of the iniquities themselves as well as the victims of the depravity, imply that the רשע must be a domestic foe. The two primary proofs are from the words "חמס" and "תורה." The term חמס has been dealt with extensively, since it is crucial for understanding other passages in the Bible as well, notably Genesis 6:11 and 16:6. Most recent scholars have been in agreement that the strict meaning of the

²⁰ Cf. also R. I. Vasholz, "Habakkuk: Complaints or Complaint," *Presb* 18 (1992), 50-52.

²¹ Budde, "Habakkuk," identifies the רשע as the Assyrians and therefore dates the book at around 715 BCE. He repeats his views in "Zum Text von Habakuk Kap 1 und 2," *OLZ* 34 (1931), 409-411, and his view is held also by S. Mowinkel, "Zum Psalm des Habakuk," *TZ* 9 (1953), 1-23.

²² J. Wellhausen, *Die Kleinen Propheten* (Berlin: 1891³), 166, and F. Gesebrecht, *Beiträge zur Jesajkritik* (Göttingen: 1891), p. 1980, both cited by Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 418; Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche, 1929). Clearly, if the sections of the text in front of us are believed to be integrated, and vv. 5-11 are meant to be the solution to the problem previously described, it is impossible to claim that that problem was the Chaldeans. This has led to textual emendation by all of the above scholars.

²³ G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* 2 (London: Harper & Bros., 1928), 113-159.

²⁴ This view, first proposed by Duhm, *Die Zwölf Propheten* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1910), xxxiif. and later held by Torrey, "Alexander the Great in Old Testament Prophecies," *BZAW* 41 (1925), 281-286, clearly cannot co-exist with the word כשדים found in 1:6, and so Duhm changed the word to כתיאים. Since then, the fact that 1QpHab interprets the word כשדים as a reference to the Kittim, spelled כתיים, has all but proven that the text is now as it originally was, and that Duhm's change, and hence his view, is untenable.

²⁵ P. Haupt, in *The Johns Hopkins University Circular* (1920), 680ff. According to Haupt, the composer was one of the Hasmonian victors.

²⁶ Cf. J. W. Rothstein, "Über Habakuk Kap. 1 u. 2," *TSK* 67 (1894), 51-85; De Vries in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary*; E. Nielsen, "The Righteous and the Wicked in Habakkuk," *ST* 6 (1953), 54-78; Haak, *Habakkuk*, 137-139.

term is legal,²⁷ a corruption of the justice that should exist. Surely this is not a crime of which it is usual for a speaker to accuse a nation on its way to destroy him and his people. Rather, this is a more fitting accusation when leveled against an adversary within the nation, one who has access to the traditional means of securing justice for the inhabitants of the land: the courts in the social realm and the Temple in the cultic realm.²⁸ Its significance in our passage is proven by its repetition: it is both the cry the prophet has long been uttering (v. 2), and the abomination with which he is now faced (v. 3). It therefore seems clear that the perpetrators of the evil are not foreign, but rather a domestic group adversarial to the prophet.²⁹

Secondly, the prophet wails that תורה has been paralyzed.³⁰ Although Johnson, as mentioned, claims that torah is a term that can refer to the divine promises of reward and punishment,³¹ this claim has subsequently been criticized by other scholars.³² Rather, it seems that תורה is a term for "justice," and the phrase is, in Sweeney's words, a description of "the general breakdown of social order."³³

²⁷ See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 117 n. 5; H. Haag, "Chamas," in G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT* vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 478-487; Haak, *Habakkuk*, 30-31; P. J. Harland, *The Value of Human Life*, SVT 64 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 32-39. Contra. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 2: From Noah to Abraham, Genesis 6:9-11:32* (Jerusalem: 1964), 52.

²⁸ V. 9 is not a problem for this interpretation. After Habakkuk opens by complaining of חמס rampant around him, his use of the same term in v. 9 is clearly meant to play off the previous occurrence. In other words, although the lexicographer will tell you that חמס is not the right term to use in that context, the poet or reader with a literary sense will tell you that its use there is more effective than any other term that could have been used.

²⁹ A detailed analysis of all the nouns of injustice appearing in these verses would require more space devoted to philology than is appropriate in this context. We may briefly add, however, that און also generally implies social wrongs (K. H. Bernhardt, "aven," *TDOT*, vol. 1, 140-147, esp. 143-144), and the suspension of מדין, from ד-י-י, clearly implies a socio-legal wrongdoing (BDB, 193; M. J. Gruenhaner, "Chaldeans or Macedonians? A Recent Theory on the Prophecy of Habakkuk," *Bib* 8 [1927], 136; V. Hamp, "din - Derivatives," *TDOT* vol. 3, 189), while עמל, שד, and ריב present no objections to such an understanding. In fact, for ריב the LXX has δίκασμα, which although it would appear to mean "judgment," as it does in other contexts (LXX to Gen 14:7, Isa 1:17), here it would be best translated as "iniquity," and is in fact found in the LXX of Prov 19:28 for MT און.

³⁰ This is the translation of תפוג developed by Johnson ("Paralysis," 259-260), and accepted by J. G. Janzen, "Eschatological Symbol and Existence in Habakkuk," *CBQ* 44 (1982), 396-397, and M. A. Sweeney, "Structure, Genre, and Intent in Habakkuk," *VT* 41 (1991), 74. The LXX has δεικναι, which means literally "Rejected" or "thrown away" in the passive. Here it is probably used to describe a state of the torah where it should be effective but cannot be enforced. Haak (*Habakkuk*, 34) argues that תפוג should be translated as "made weak."

³¹ "Paralysis," 262, 265-266.

³² Sweeney, "Structure," 74; Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 139.

³³ The term denotes "law," which in this context, parallel to the other terms just discussed, clearly means civil law, the enforcement of which produces justice. P. Enns, "Law of God," in W. A. VanGeren (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand

Scholars have shown³⁴ that in ancient Israel, justice was the responsibility of the king, and so the complaint about the lack of justice leads us immediately to suspect that the thrust of the complaint is directed against the king. It must be that in the prophet's eyes, the king is corrupting the justice system and forcing the existence of pervasive unlawfulness.

Given the claim that the prophet opens by complaining about a domestic enemy, we may now see whether vv. 5-11 are in fact meant to be an answer. The verses say:

Look around the nations, observe well, and be utterly astounded, for a work is being wrought in your day which you would not believe if you were told. Behold! For lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce impetuous nation, who cross the earth's wide spaces to seize homes not their own. They are terrible, dreadful; they make their own laws and rules. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fleetlier than wolves of the steppe. Their steeds gallop – their steeds come flying from afar. Like vultures rushing toward food, they all come, bent on rapine. The thrust of their van is forward, and they amass captives like sand. Kings they hold in derision, and princes are a joke to them; they laugh at every fortress, they pile up earth and capture it. Then they pass on like the wind; they transgress and incur guilt, for they ascribe their might to their god.

The major reason for assuming that this is an answer is that the speaker has shifted from the prophet to God. However, as implied by various scholars,³⁵ it is only v. 6 that carries with it any strength of argument for a new divine speaker. Indeed, not only is there no hint in the following verses (7-11) that God is speaking, but it is here that problems arise with this explanation: there is no type of consolation offered for the problems delineated in vv. 2-4; the events now described actually exacerbate the problem! Now, not only is the prophet to

Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), Vol. 4, 893-900, lists four "well-defined categories" of uses of the word. The second is "civil, social, and judicial matters," and in this context, Enns claims that "Habakkuk cries out to Yahweh about his apparent reluctance to punish the injustices committed in Judah: 'The law is paralyzed' (Hab 1:4)." Haak (*Habakkuk*, 33-34) claims that the phrase is "reporting the breakdown of 'the whole fabric of human society'."

³⁴ Cf. M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 45-56. This conclusion reminds one of the 11th Lecture in the *Sermons of R. Nissim of Gerondi*, in which he struggles with the fact that halakhic courts can only very infrequently punish people, and so postulates the existence of a second court system under the auspices of the king. It is not clear from Weinfeld's analysis whether the king's system was separate from the halakhic system or identical to it, but it may prove fruitful to see the two analyses in light of each other.

³⁵ See the views of Peckham and Haak cited above, n. 4. Their views are only tenable because there is nothing in any of the other verses pushing in the direction of the claim that God is speaking.

worry about a domestic opponent, but he also has to worry that an awesome foreign power is about to overrun his land. And yet, these verses describe the same event foretold in v. 6, which makes us very suspicious of v. 6 as a solution as well.

Based on all of the above, we may suggest that the prophet speaks all of these verses. How do we explain v. 6? It seems to me that the prophet speaks this, too, mocking the help he is apparently not getting from God. It is as if to say that while he turned to God with his problems and hoped to hear solutions, instead, all he received was more problems. After airing his complaints, he waits, and when he sees the new developments, he begins to speak again, with v. 5. His thoughts in the next two verses are panicked, and should be read as follows:

"Look around the nations, observe well, and be utterly astounded," he says to his audience, "for a work is being wrought in your days which you would not believe if you were told." We complained to God and looked forward to His salvation, but "Behold! For lo," what is actually happening is not at all what we hoped for. Instead of telling us that He will save, he apparently responded, "I am raising up the Chaldeans!" How could He do this to us? "That fierce impetuous nation, who cross the earth's wide spaces to seize homes not their own!" This is the salvation He sends us?

The prophet then proceeds to elaborate on the frightfulness of the new attacker, describing them in terms that reflect the dread he feels when faced with the realization that his predicament is becoming increasingly dire.³⁶

In this manner, the entire first chapter can be read as one monologue, spoken by the prophet, bemoaning his catastrophic situation.³⁷ The chapter can still be divided into three parts: 1:2-4 is a lament about his domestic enemy; 1:5-11 is the complaint about the foreign attacker on the horizon; 1:12-17 is the general theological problem underlying both. The prophet, suffering from every

³⁶ Radak and Abarbanel also argue that the prophet is the speaker throughout the entire chapter. Abarbanel takes a slightly different position regarding this verse, however: to his mind, the fact that the prophet foretells the imminent arrival of the fearsome Chaldeans is enough to make words "For lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans" true when uttered by the prophet in the first person. Although I find his claim to be tenuous at best, I fully agree with him that the accepted reading of the verses as God's answer is unproven and in fact untenable. What exactly Radak holds cannot be ascertained; his entire comment reads, "The prophet speaks in the language of God, may He be blessed." It is possible that he means to say the explanation proposed here.

³⁷ A similar conclusion in this respect is reached by M. H. Floyd, "Prophetic Complaints About the Fulfillment of Oracles in Habakkuk 1:2-17 and Jeremiah 15:10-18," *JBL* 110 (1991), 397-418, esp. 402-406. He actually goes beyond this, and claims that chap. 2 does not even constitute a response to the prophet on the part of God.

imaginable misery, cannot comprehend how God, who controls all and is wholly good, can allow evil to exist and vanquish the good. This is asked regarding the dominance of the prophet's domestic enemy in v. 13, "Why do You countenance treachery, and stand by idle while the one is the wrong devours the one is the right?"³⁸ The same problem is raised concerning the antagonist from abroad as well in vv. 14-17, concluding with the heartfelt cry, "Shall he then keep emptying his trawl and slaying nations without pity?"³⁹

It is only in chapter 2 then that the prophet awaits an answer. What the answer is has also been the subject of an inordinate amount of literature, and the analysis of each view is far beyond the purview of this paper.⁴⁰ Janzen has proposed the most convincing reading of the verses (2:2-4):⁴¹

"Write the vision, make it plain upon the tablets, so that he may run who reads it. For the vision is a witness to a rendezvous, a testifier to the end - it does not lie:

*'If he tarries wait for him; he will surely come, he will not delay!'*⁴²

As for the sluggard, he does not go straight on it; but the righteous through its reliability shall live."

³⁸ This verse contains a number of terms that hark back to the complaint about the domestic enemy found in the opening verses: the *רשע* oppressing the *צדיק* is a theme from v. 4, and the term *תביט* was used in v. 3 in the same way as here, to describe God looking at evil and yet not acting to prevent it (see n. 7).

³⁹ This claim, that the complaint in 1:12-17 encompasses both the domestic and the international problems previously portrayed, is soundly grounded in the text, as shown by the previous note and the obvious international references found in the concluding verses. According to this, we may be allowed insight into the methodology of the author of the Peshar commentary found in Qumran. We propose that whatever methods the *פסרן* used to arrive at his interpretation, he did in at least one sense remain true to the original text: where the subject of the text was a domestic problem, the *פסרן* also spoke of domestic problems; when the text dealt with international problems, the *פסרן* followed suit. On verses 1:2-4, the *פסרן* speaks of domestic foes: those who have despised the Law of God (Col. I.1.12) and the Wicked Priest (I.14). Throughout vv. 5-11, the Peshar describes the Kittim, an international enemy (II.11.14; III.4; IV.5.10). The Peshar on v. 13 reverts to discussing enemies within the nation, the House of Absalom (V.10) and the Man of Lies (V.12), but on vv. 14-17, the references are exclusively to the Kittim once again (VI.1, 10). The exact identification of the various adversaries is not important for us; all that we want to note is that the dual theme, reflecting both an inter- and an intra-national enemy, is here reflected.

⁴⁰ For a summary of the issues with which the would-be translator must deal, as well as a history of scholarship on the verses, see J. A. Emerton, "The Textual and Linguistic Problems of Habakkuk II.4-5," *JTS* 18 (1977), 1-18.

⁴¹ "Habakkuk 2:2-4 in the Light of Recent Philological Advances," *HTR* 73 (1980), 1-18.

⁴² This sentence, besides all other problems it involves, also contradicts itself: "If he tarries" admits such a possibility; "he will not delay" precludes it. Haak, *Habakkuk*, 25 and 37, suggests reading "He tarries?!" thus having both phrases explicitly rule out the possibility of any delay in the appointed time's arrival.

However one reads the answer, though, and the precise translation is not presently our issue, what has emerged is a coherent interpretation of 1:1-2:4 such that they form one integral unit, consisting of but one lament and one response. We can now hope that within this unit, it will be possible to identify some historical references, which will provide us with the opportunity to identify the specific events to which the prophet is referring.

II The Setting of the Chapter

It has long been noted that the only clear historical allusion anywhere in the entire book is in 1:6, where the forthcoming rise of the Chaldeans is described.⁴³ However, the uniqueness of this reference has been established only because for centuries, even millennia, writers have circumvented another apparent clue to the historical context because it did not seem to fit. 1:9 reads, "They all come, bent on rapine. The multitude of their faces"⁴⁴ is קדימה and they amass captives like sand." The word קדימה, as noted by nearly all commentators, is most simply translated as "eastward." This presents serious geographical problems in the reconstruction of the events: Babylonia is east of Judah, and so if the Chaldeans are coming to attack, their faces should be turned westward. Therefore, the vast majority of writers have reinterpreted the term.⁴⁵

It seems, however, that there is no reason to do so. Babylonian texts report that in 601, Nebuchadnezzar brought his army to Egypt and tried to conquer the land itself.⁴⁶ He was defeated, however, and turned back to his

⁴³ And even there numerous propositions have been set forth to emend that word, so as to obliterate all historical context from the book. For the appropriate reaction of disbelief to such attempts, cf. Haak, *Habakkuk*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Tanakh* has "the thrust of their van," van here being used in the military sense (cf. *Tanakh* to Joel 2:20). The translation above, taken from Haak, seems more reasonable.

⁴⁵ 1QpHab has קדים instead of the MT's קדימה, which should be translated as "the east wind." This is what is found in the Targum, Vulgate, Symmachus, and Theodotian, as well. W. H. Brownlee, commenting on the relationship between the Tg and 1QpHab ("Biblical Interpretation Among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BA* 14 [1951], 63, and numerous times since then), used this as an example of a case where the Tg had a Vorlage corresponding to the text reflected in 1QpHab as opposed to the MT. R. P. Gordon, *Studies in the Targum to the Twelve Prophets*, SVT 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 84-85, however, points at all of the other ancient translations that show the same interpretation, and reasonably concludes that all of them had the MT in front of them, but interpreted to avoid the difficult reading. The best proof for his claim is that various other, later commentators, who were certainly working with the MT, reached the same conclusion. See for example Rashi, J. Kara, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Abarbanel, and Tanhum ben Joseph of Jerusalem (ms. published by H. Shai [Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1991], 208). Modern commentators still struggle with the issue; see for example W. H. Hayes, "Habakkuk," in J. M. P. Smith, W. H. Ward, and J. A. Brewer (eds.), *ICC* Vol. 13 Part 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 9, who concludes that the entire phrase in 1:9b is an "untranslatable intrusion." See also the very interesting solution made by Y. Kaufmann, *The History of the Religion of Israel*, Vol. 3 (Hebrew; Tel-Aviv: Ofek, 1967), 361 n. 2.

⁴⁶ Tablet B. M. 21946, published by D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626-556) in*

homeland. Judah lies in between Babylonia and Egypt, and so, if we had some historical proof, it would be reasonable to conjecture that at that point, smarting from his defeat at the hands of the Egyptians, Nebuchadnezzar would have taken the opportunity to subjugate Jerusalem on his way home.⁴⁷

It further seems that we do, in fact, have reason to believe that Nebuchadnezzar may have conquered Jerusalem at this point. II Kings 24:1 records that Jehoiakim was vassal to Nebuchadnezzar for three years and then revolted, but which years these were is not delineated. Now, Babylonian chronicles inform us that in 598, Nebuchadnezzar made a special trip, apparently for the sole purpose of attacking Judah, and it was at this time that Jehoiakim died. It is very likely that this was an immediate response to a rebellion on Judah's part.⁴⁸ Moving backwards three years, we find that Judah's subjugation began in 601, precisely when Nebuchadnezzar and his army were in the area anyway, as just described.

The scenario we have developed for 601 is now complete, and it provides an explanation, historically and geographically accurate, for the Babylonians approaching Jerusalem from the west, with their "faces eastward."⁴⁹ At this point, they were returning from their excursion to Egypt, and on the way back, they spent the little time needed to subjugate the small state of Judah that had been annoyingly allying itself with Egypt for a number of years.⁵⁰ We can then read 1:9 and the surrounding verses in their simplest sense:

the British Museum (London: British Museum Publications), 29.

⁴⁷ Other scholars have attempted to take seriously the word מדימה, and so conclude that the enemy was arriving from west, but the historical information in their hands did not allow them to do so convincingly. Duhm refused to accept any interpretation of the term other than the simplest, and so was forced to change the name of the enemy to allow the reference to be to the Macedonians under Alexander and the date of composition of the book c. 333 BCE. F. Hitzig, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1881), 273f. concludes that the Babylonians must have been returning from a military excursion to Jaffa, a suggestion dismissed by C. von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1893), 245, as an "absurd notion." It should be noted that Babylonia's "defeat" was not the type that ravaged their army. All that is meant by "defeat" is that they failed to conquer their objective: Egypt. It stands to reason that they were weakened somewhat (see below), but Nebuchadnezzar certainly would have had enough power to warrant description as fearful and awesome by the Judean prophet, and would still not have had a problem easily defeating Jerusalem.

⁴⁸ Contra. A. Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem," *IEJ* 18 (1968), 142-143, and E. N. von Viogtlander, *A Survey of Neo-Babylonian History* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1963), both of whom paint a very different picture of the history. For a survey of the views, see Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *SVT* 28 (1974), 123-145.

⁴⁹ W. Holladay has also proposed the date of 601 for Habakkuk's prophecy, for very different reasons. In a personal communication to Haak (quoted in the latter's *Habakkuk*, 133 n. 93), he argues that 3:17 refers to a drought, which fits the known circumstances of 601.

⁵⁰ This phenomenon, that powerful nations that suffer unexpected defeats turn around and inflict

the prophet, and the rest of the people of Judah, saw the Babylonians' power as they marched by them on their way down to Egypt, and it is quite clear to the observers that their alliance with Egypt will not serve them well in this case. Fear is rampant in the land, as it is not known whether the events about to unfold will spell the end of the Judean state. In fact, had the Egyptians not weakened Nebuchadnezzar, he may have seized the opportunity to completely vanquish Judah and rid himself of this bothersome little foe. In any event, we now have a precise date for the occurrences described in the first chapter of Habakkuk.

It is now incumbent upon us to search for a domestic enemy against whom Habakkuk may have been polemicizing in 601. Haak, who thinks that Habakkuk is speaking in 605-603, proposes that the צדיק is Jehoahaz, who, although exiled in 609, has remained in captivity for years. Haak claims that Habakkuk is "a supporter of the deposed king Jehoahaz...and [belongs] to a group that held that an essentially pro-Babylonian foreign policy was in the best interest of Judah at the time." While the latter statement seems to be true, the former seems precarious. The entire notion that Jehoahaz may still have been alive is purely conjectural, and in my opinion, unwarranted.

That there was then a major dividing line between the people is beyond question.⁵¹ It is entirely possible that there is no single person with whom the צדיק, or the רשע, can be identified. Rather, Habakkuk, following in the tradition of his prophetic predecessors and contemporaries, is a supporter of Babylonia, and the basic thrust underlying all of his complaints in chapter 1 is that Jehoiakim, then king, appointed by and supporter of Egypt, seems to be successful in his politics.

defeat on smaller enemies who cannot put up any serious resistance, is a common one in the history of warfare. It is more frequently found in ancient times, when such "uncivil" wars were not going to invite the ire of the international community. Such lethal joyrides were either to simply let out frustration or because the army could not return home without a victory to show for their troubles. For example, after Alexander the Great was nearly killed in battle in late 326 BCE, his armies ravaged all communities they came upon during their next voyage, from February through July of 325, as they traveled down the Indus River. Similarly, after Attila failed to capture Orleans on June 14, 452, he set out to conquer Italy soon thereafter. (See J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* [New York: Dover, 1958], 294.)

⁵¹ This is the implication of the events described in II Kings 23-24 and II Chron 36. See J. A. Wilcoxon, "The Political Background of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," in A. Merrill and T. Overholt (eds.), *Scripture in Theology and History* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977), 151-166, esp. 158-162; B. O. Long, "Social Dimensions of Prophetic Conflict," *Semeia* 21 (Chico, CA: SBL, 1982), 31-53; and the literature cited above in n. 48, all of whom trace the development and views of the various groups operating at this time.

III The Meaning of the Chapter

Just a few months earlier, things had seemed to be going well for the prophet and his camp. Babylonia was on the march to Egypt, where its fearsome war machine would certainly overrun its archenemy, establishing once and for all its dominion in the region and forcing all nations to submit to its yoke. Locally, Nebuchadnezzar would take the time to oust Jehoiakim and install a new king who would be friendlier to Babylonia, and hence to the prophet and his cause. Events did not exactly unfold as they were supposed to, though, and Habakkuk begins his burden:

His first cry of distress is that his rival domestic group seems to be gaining the upper hand. Their supremacy affects not only foreign policy, but the religious situation as well. It stands to reason, although it is difficult to prove, that there was a correlation between the camps in the nation as split along political lines and those split along religious lines. The two facets of Josiah's reign which distinguish it—the Great Reform of 622, in which he encouraged a rejuvenation of conformation with biblical law in everyday lives, and the pro-Babylonian political philosophy that he preached—are not disconnected.

Even after his death, there remained a correlation between those who supported the Babylonians and those who advocated religious observance.⁵² Therefore, Habakkuk can accuse his political opponents of paralyzing the *תורה*, as they, as supporters of the Egyptians, also oppose efforts to enforce justice as dictated by the Bible.

Further hints of this may be found in another episode involving Jehoiakim, as well. Jeremiah 26:20-24 tells the tale of Uriyahu, a prophet who prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem. When Jehoiakim found out, he wanted to kill Uriyahu, who fled to Egypt. Jehoiakim sent an envoy into Egypt, extradited Uriyahu, and then killed him. The commentators struggle with the political situation that would allow Jehoiakim to send men into Egypt, at the same time that Uriyahu felt that Egypt would be a safe haven for him.⁵³

⁵² Cf. Wilcoxon, 60; Long, 47-48. This may begin to explain why all of the prophets, who were clearly religiously bent, preached submission to Babylonian reign, although this question must be developed more fully.

⁵³ J. Bright, *Jeremiah*, in the AB series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 170-172, and W. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 238-239, are both silent. Others come up with various comments. D. R. Jones, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 345: it must have been a situation in which there was "easy movement to and from Egypt, allowing both flight and extradition." R. P. Carroll, *The Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 520: "Like a fool Uriah fled to Egypt, where (could he not have known?) the authorities supported Jehoiakim because he was their vassal." W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 2.109: "Since Jehoiakim's posse had the freedom to enter Egypt to extradite Uriah, the event must have taken place early in Jehoiakim's reign when he was still an

Depending on how this is resolved, it seems again that we have a mixture of religion and politics, with those who sided with Jehoiakim's religious views, and so were inclined to assume that Uriyahu was lying, also sided with the Egyptians.

After lodging his complaint against the leadership, the prophet is not through. It is more than just the fact that he is losing a domestic political battle. In fact, he now sees the political philosophy he preached coming to haunt him and his people. The Babylonians, although they failed in their attempt to conquer Egypt, are now on their way back to their native land, and will pass by Judah on the way. Habakkuk knows that Nebuchadnezzar will not pass up this opportunity to conquer the land, as the ruling political party is not Habakkuk's pro-Babylonian party, but rather Jehoiakim's pro-Egyptian party. So although he was correct in his predictions of the political future, he does not feel vindicated by the fact that he will be proven right; he feels threatened. God finally tells him, "Lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans." In other contexts, this may have been music to Habakkuk's ears. But now, Habakkuk thinks that this can only be a cruel joke on the part of God. He thus embarks on the tirade that is vv. 5-11, cynically mocking the "help" he is getting from God.⁵⁴

After lamenting these two tragedies on a personal level, Habakkuk raises the level of his challenge one notch more. He is now (vv. 12-17) complaining not only as an individual, or even as a member of a faction. He is now a theologian, confounded by the apparent injustice surrounding him. He asks the timeless question of theodicy: How can the all-powerful, all-good God allow the two major evil forces now in the world to prevail as they are? How can it be that the party that opposes fulfillment of the commandments is gaining the upper hand? And how can it be that the Babylonians, the fierce and bitter nation, are about to ravage Judah, worshippers of the one true Lord?

After presenting this challenge, Habakkuk stops to await an answer. The answer that arrives is that the entire situation is ephemeral, and indeed, when all the forces have played out their effects, it will be clear that the prophet was justified in his views, and the righteous, Habakkuk and his party, will live by their faith.

Egyptian vassal." G. L. Klein, P. J. Scalise, and T. G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 31: "It may seem foolish for Uriah to have sought refuge in Egypt, yet Jeroboam had found safety there when Solomon, Pharaoh's son-in-law and vassal, wanted to kill him (1 Kgs 11:40)."

⁵⁴ See above for how we read these verses.

Retribution, Repentance, Restoration: The Motives and Message Underlying Absalom's Rebellion*

Ari Mermelstein

I. Introduction

The events recounted in 2 Samuel chapters 11-20 mark the nadir in David's 40-year reign as king of Israel. Absalom's rebellion in particular threatened the stability of his monarchy and nearly undermined all that David had achieved. In analyzing the Bible's depiction of the event, several global questions present themselves:

- 1) What was the historical background to the rebellion? Much of the early portion of the book recounts David's far-reaching successes. Given his success, what causes for disillusionment impelled the populace to rebel?
- 2) Why did Absalom not succeed in toppling David's monarchy?
- 3) How does the rebellion fit into the general scheme of the book, whose theme is the promotion of David's candidacy to rule?

It is in the interface between these questions where solutions present themselves. By probing the historical background to the rebellion, we will better position ourselves to account for the revolt's failure, and ultimately for its role in the book. We will relate to each question over three successive sections of this article. Let us turn, then, to the issue of historical background.

In considering the chronology of the events, we must reflect upon the state of affairs in David's monarchy generally. By the time of the rebellion, David had essentially completed building his powerful empire, which stretched deep into Syria in the north and included annexed lands of vanquished foes. He had systematically undertaken an unprecedented program of expansionism on the international plane and of consolidation and unification on the domestic plane. His wars had been fought and his domestic reforms implemented. David by that time had essentially realized his objectives as king, an assertion

* My thanks to Shoshana Mermelstein, Dr. Harold and Rhena Mermelstein, Dr. Bernard Monderer, Rabbi Joseph Bronner, Dr. Leila Leah Bronner, and Dr. Chaim Trachtman for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my teacher and friend, Rabbi Hillel Novetsky, for his insightful critique and constant encouragement.

supported by the fact that the book of Samuel records very few details from the last years of the monarch's reign.¹

Thus, it was a logical time for the Israelites to reflect upon and respond to the upheaval that they witnessed in David's twenty-something years in power. We would anticipate a popular expression of either approval or resentment towards his aggressive military campaigns and ambitious attempts at effecting change and fostering unity. Absalom's rebellion, while sparked by the ringleader's aspirations to ascend the throne, was primarily a reflection of widespread dissatisfaction.² A closer look at the sources of the ensuing resentment will facilitate bringing this portrait into sharper focus.

¹ Admittedly, arguing from silence is never entirely compelling. However, considering that David had by this point accomplished almost everything that a king possibly could, we would in fact be surprised to see substantial progress made subsequently. The fact that the Bible records no major events after this is therefore expected, and in this case, convincing. Although four chapters do follow the events of the rebellion, we might dismiss most of the details there by claiming that they were recorded out of their correct temporal sequence. Thus, although the Bible recounts a series of battles against the Philistines in 21:15-22, we might suggest that these battles were placed achronologically. The oath referred to in 21:17 in which David swears not to lead his men in battle would seem to have been imposed before the battle against Rabbah of the Ammonites in 12:26-31, in which David only presides at the ultimate defeat of the city. Cf. also 8:1, where David finally "subjugates" the Philistines, an event that presumably postdated the battles of chapter 21. In addition, the census of chapter 24 might also have been an earlier event. Assuming that like other ancient Near Eastern censuses, its function was partially for taxation purposes and partially for drafting purposes (a point I will return to later), it is doubtful that given David's concerted efforts to improve the efficiency of his bureaucracy and consolidate resources he would have waited more than 30 years to undertake this census. Finally, the events of 21:1-14, in which David delivers the remnants of Saul's house to the Gibeonites, were also apparently placed achronologically. In 9:3, it seems that Mephibosheth was the sole heir to the house of Saul, although in chapter 21, the Bible refers to at least seven other members of the Saulide clan still alive. Thus, there is essentially nothing recorded from David's reign after Sheba's rebellion until the beginning of 1 Kings, which commences in his 40th year.

In all of the above cases, even if one were to reject my assertion of achronology, it is clear that none of these events constitute breakthroughs in David's rule, and my assertion that little was left for David to do remains.

² Determining the date of the rebellion might help to prove that it was a popular rebellion and not just Absalom's isolated attempt at ascending the throne. According to the Masoretic text, the rebellion commenced "at the end of forty years" (15:7). B. Tal. Temurah 14b and Seder Olam Rabbah, ch. 14, contend that this refers to David's 37th year by claiming that the 40th year refers to the 40th year since the inception of the monarchy. Dating the rebellion to the twilight of David's career suggests that the rebellion was motivated by the question of succession. As David aged, Absalom sensed the urgency of acting to secure the monarchy, especially if he felt that David might pass him over. Even if he surmised that David would select him as his successor, he may have been seeking a guarantee that the monarchy would pass to him uneventfully. However, the validity of this approach is suspect for two reasons. First, David died a frail and sickly man in the 40th year of his reign. Yet at the time of the rebellion, the insurgents considered David a formidable enough foe that Hushai's statement to Absalom that "your father is a warrior...all Israel knows that your father is a crack soldier" is sufficiently convincing as to undermine Ahithophel's authority. The possibility that just three years prior, David was virile and active is dubious. Moreover, this approach relies on the questionable premise that Saul's reign spanned only two years. However, considering the flurry of

II. Sources of Resentment

As a preface to our analysis, we should note that the causes of the rebellion were not monolithic, a misconception that the Bible's generally oblique treatment of motives might reinforce. With this in mind, we will attempt to isolate the different factors into distinct categories of resentment.³

1. General Sources of Resentment

A. Social Resentment

The text contains a veiled reference to one source of frustration for the people. In 15:1-6, we witness Absalom mingling with the people who were to appear before David for judgment. Absalom greeted them by stating that "what you have to say is good and straight, but you will get no hearing from the king."⁴ He added that were he appointed to the position, he would function as a more effective judge. Apparently, Absalom capitalized on the collective perception that David was neglecting the imperative of justice, a fundamental component of the monarchy,⁵ or at least not implementing it efficiently. Meting out justice was one function of many in David's job description,⁶ and as in other areas, he likely delegated responsibility to others while he oversaw its execution.

events during his reign, it is highly unlikely that he ruled for such a brief time. Indeed, David's sojourn at Ziklag alone lasted 16 months (1 Samuel 27:7). Abarbanel therefore posits a more likely theory that Saul's reign lasted 17 years. Accepting Abarbanel's reckoning and the supposition that the forty years harks back to the inception of the monarchy, we would date the rebellion to sometime in the middle of the third decade of David's reign. We would reach a similar conclusion based on the texts of the Lucianic LXX, Peshitta, and Josephus (*Antiquities*, VII. 196), which replace "forty" with "four," transforming the date of the rebellion to four years after Absalom's return from exile. The timing of the rebellion to sometime in the middle of David's reign would presumably point to its function as a popular rebellion more than as an attempt at insuring succession. Of course, both elements are necessary for any attempted rebellion; the question here is which was the primary impetus.

³ Admittedly, some of the motives outlined here are not clearly delineated in the biblical text, particularly 1b, c, and d. In these cases, my reconstruction relies on a combination of the identity of the insurgents coupled with prominent and novel features of David's monarchy against which they might reasonably have taken issue.

⁴ Cf. 15:3. All translations taken from P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *The Anchor Bible, II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984). All references are to 2 Samuel unless indicated otherwise.

⁵ Cf. 1 Samuel 8:6 and 8:20. See also the article by A. Koller in this volume, p. 42, n. 34.

⁶ Regarding David's participation in the halakhic judicial process, see B. Tal. Berakhot 4a.

B. Political Resentment

In addition, the Israelites likely resented David's intrusion into tribal affairs.⁷ The establishment of a centralized government whose responsibilities included overseeing the taxation⁸ and drafting⁹ of the entire nation reflected David's efforts to break down traditional tribal lines. The presence of the "elders" in Absalom's camp,¹⁰ who until that point functioned in a tribal leadership capacity,¹¹ buttresses the assertion that there was a constituency of people who faulted David for undermining the traditional regional authority figures in molding a more paternalistic central government.¹²

C. Resentment of Military Activities

The Israelites may have also found David's expansionist policies excessive and oppressive. David's string of battles entailed the maintenance of a standing army and an elaborate drafting procedure. This need to enhance the efficiency of the draft may have motivated the census taken in chapter 24.¹³ The people likely resented the imposition of a draft and taxes to support David's unprecedented aggressive policy.¹⁴ We can understand their displeasure with David's military policies against the backdrop of earlier policies. The battles led by the Judges were all undertaken in response to the aggressive posture assumed by their foes. This trend continued with the commencement of the monarchy during the reign of Saul, a leader who eschewed implementing an aggressive military policy, and instead focused necessarily on freeing Israel from the subjugation of the Philistines.¹⁵ In contrast, David was not provoked into engaging in the battles recorded in chapter 8. Moreover, the route traveled by

the census takers indicates that David had expanded Israelite holdings in the region, further highlighting David's aggressive policy.¹⁶

Another aspect of David's foreign policy may have also incited the people to rebel. David, in attempting to guarantee the loyalty and efficiency of his army, established an elite corps of mercenaries and soldiers. The Cherethites and Pelethites, apparently a brigade of mercenaries, are referred to several times in 2 Samuel,¹⁷ and their loyalty in times of crisis is noteworthy.¹⁸ In addition, the band of 37 warriors named in 23:20-39 also comprised a formidable and loyal presence in David's court. Thus, David eschewed the traditional composition of the army, in which each tribe contributed their mightiest warriors, called "the men of Israel," to protect the nation.¹⁹ Here, too, David impinged upon the fierce pride of individual tribes in their local warriors and in their contribution to national security. It is therefore not surprising that these "men of Israel,"

¹⁶ Other elements of David's foreign policy may also have upset the Israelites. The evidence suggests that David incorporated tracts of vanquished land into the Israelite infrastructure, presumably to more closely monitor goings-on in those places. We thus see that the route traveled by the census takers in chapter 24 included excursions through foreign territory that David presumably incorporated into the Israelite empire (see Alt Abrecht, *Essays on Old Testament and Religion*, [Garden City: Anchor Books, 1968], pp. 288-9). This influx of non-Jews into the heart of Israel may have been a source of friction for many. As a corollary to this, the general non-Jewish influence on the composition of David's bureaucracy may also have upset some. See Benjamin Mazar, "The Era of David and Solomon," in Abraham Malamat (ed.), *The World History of the Jewish People* (Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1979), vol. 4, p. 86, who claims that the titles of "remembrancer" in 8:16 and "scribe" in 8:17 were imported from neighboring countries.

¹⁷ Cf. 8:18, 15:18, 20:7, 20:23. Considering that כרתים/כרתים is used several times in the Bible in reference to a region or nation, the assertion of many scholars that these brigades functioned as foreign mercenaries seems justified. Cf. 1 Samuel 30:14, Ezekiel 25:16, and Zephaniah 2:5. The identity of the Pelethites is less obvious, and many scholars speculate that they are of Philistinian extraction. Cf. for example W.F. Albright, "A Colony of Cretan Mercenaries on the Coast of the Negeb," *JPOS* 1 (1920), pp. 187-194.

¹⁸ Cf. 15:18 and 20:7.

¹⁹ Regarding the role of "the men of Israel" in the military, cf. Joshua 10:24, Judges 7:8, 23, 9:55, 20:11, 17, 20, 22, 33, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 48, 1 Samuel 10:8, 13:6, 14:22, 14:24, 17:2, 19, 24, 25, 2 Samuel 17:24, 20:2, 23:9, 1 Chronicles 10:1, 7. Regarding the role of "the men" of a particular tribe within the military, cf. Judges 7:24, 8:1, 12:1, 20:41, 1 Samuel 4:12, 11:8, 15:4, 2 Samuel 20:2, 4, 2 Chronicles 13:15, 20:27. Regarding their role in leadership, cf. Joshua 9:6-7, Judges 8:22, 2 Samuel 17:14. Presumably, their leadership role was a natural outgrowth of the centrality of the military in the ancient Near East. Although one might argue that the term "the men of Israel" does not refer to the soldiers of the nation, but simply denotes the Israelites, several factors render this an unlikely possibility. First, the Bible typically refers to the Israelites as "the sons of Israel" or "the nation of Israel" rather than "the men of Israel" (for example, see 16:18, where the text contrasts "חַיִּים" with "the men of Israel"). It would therefore appear that "the men of Israel" should be understood as a proper name referring to a specific class of people. Second, considering that the phrase "the men of Israel" is used almost exclusively in military or leadership contexts, it would appear that the term refers to a class of people who functioned primarily in those contexts. Finally, the almost complete disappearance of the phrase after the time of David would seem to underscore the fact that their utility diminished with the military framework established.

⁷ Cf. Shemuel Yeivin, "Mered Avshalom" (Hebrew), in B.Z. Luria (ed.), *Iyunim Besefer Shemuel* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Haolami Letanakh, 1992), vol. 2, p. 286 and M.Z. Segal, *Sifrei Shemuel* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1964), p. 324.

⁸ Cf. 20:24.

⁹ See n. 13.

¹⁰ Cf. 17:4 and 17:15.

¹¹ Cf. Joshua 24:31 and Judges 2:7.

¹² Although we could account for the presence of the elders in Absalom's camp by claiming that the leaders necessarily followed the whims of the people, I assume that each group acted independently and with distinct concerns.

¹³ Cf. George E. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," *JBL* 77 (1958), pp. 53-55. The author notes the widespread practice in the ancient Near East of employing censuses for military levies. I assume here that the census of ch. 24 actually predated or at least coincided with the battles David fought in ch. 8 and 10. Logically, a census related to a military levy would likely have taken place during David's fighting days.

¹⁴ Cf. Segal, *Sifrei Shemuel* *ibid.*

¹⁵ Thus, all of Saul's military campaigns involved the Philistines with the exception of his battle against the Ammonites and his holy war against Amalek.

resentful of their diminished role in the leadership, played a prominent role in the revolt.^{20 21} The people were thus disgruntled not only because they felt that David was making excessive use of the military, but also because when David was engaging in warfare, they were no longer the central players.

D. Religious Resentment

David's religious initiatives may have also elicited an enraged response. In particular, some may have looked askance at David's plans for religious centralization in Jerusalem. The fact that David only succeeded in bringing the ark into Jerusalem while the altar remained in Hebron would seem to point to the revolutionary nature of David's agenda and to the potential resistance that he knew he would encounter.²² Since the destruction of Shiloh nearly fifty years before, religious worship had been decentralized.²³ Although this was certainly initially traumatic to a nation habituated to a central site of worship, the regional tensions described above likely reinforced a growing sentiment to leave religious worship under local aegis. In addition, some likely grew accustomed to the convenience of localized worship. Thus, when David articulated his plans to once again provide for centralized worship, he may have offended the sensibilities of many who preferred to maintain the status quo.²⁴

²⁰ Cf. 15:13, 16:15, 18, 17:14, 24. Cf. also Hayim Tadmor, "Traditional Institutions and the Monarchy: Social and Political Tensions in the Time of David and Solomon," in Tomoo Ishida (ed.), *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (Tokyo: Yamakawa-Shappansha, 1982), pp. 246-7.

²¹ Alt asserts that Sheba did not intend to promote the efforts of an alternative candidate for the monarchy, but rather sought to usher in a period of leadership dominated by the "men of Israel." Such a view, though highly speculative, gives expression to the preference that the Israelites had for the old order.

²² In 2 Samuel 6, David brings the ark to Jerusalem, though the altar remained in Hebron (cf. for example 15:7). Of course, also at stake here may have been his already damaged relationship with the Judeans. Not wanting to alienate them further, David may have refrained from confiscating the altar.

²³ For textual evidence, see 1 Samuel ch. 7 (in which the Philistines were alarmed by the mass gathering of the Israelites) 9:12, 20:6, ch. 21 (in which David goes to Nob, site of the Tabernacle, and does not anticipate being spotted), 2 Samuel 15:7, 2 Kings 3:2, 4. Religious worship had essentially been decentralized throughout the reign of the Judges; the Tabernacle is in fact only mentioned twice throughout the book of Judges (cf. 18:31 and 20:27-28). Suggesting that the destruction of Shiloh simply sealed the inevitability of local worship is therefore intuitive. See also mMeg 1:11.

²⁴ Although one could argue that David did not divulge his intentions to reunite the site of worship, there is no reason to think that the elaborate plans that David undertook in preparation for the erection of the Temple, preparations detailed in 1 Chronicles 28:11-19 and 29:2-9, remained a covert operation.

An additional possible objection to the suggestion that the populace opposed David's religious initiatives might note the uniform acceptance of Solomon's Temple. However, we can discard this objection by supposing that with the passage of time, some of the initial resistance subsided. Understandably, the Israelites forgot their initial resistance in the wake of fantastic domestic and

2. Singular/Local Sources of Resentment

A. Judeans

The Judeans clearly occupied a prominent role in the rebellion.²⁵ Several observations provide support for this assertion. First, we can best explain the overtures made to the Elders of Judah and to Amasa in 19:12-14 following the suppression of the revolt as attempts at reconciliation with the revolutionaries. Second, two of the prime movers in the rebellion, Ahithophel²⁶ and Amasa,²⁷ were Judeans.²⁸

international advances. Moreover, even Solomon's Temple apparently failed to eliminate all resistance. Jeroboam's two calves, intended as substitutes for centralized worship, would have proved an unacceptable alternative without a constituency of adherents who continued to support a more decentralized, democratic mode of worship. While the tragic destruction of Shiloh may have left many traumatized, the success of Jeroboam's alternative sites would suggest that at least for some, complete centralization of worship was not ideal.

Obviously, the destruction of Shiloh was a traumatic event that likely left many irreversibly scarred. The claim espoused here need not imply that the entire nation was opposed to David's plans for religious reunification, but just that some sector of the population stubbornly resisted.

The possibility remains that the people did not oppose religious centralization in principle but only opposed the designation of Jerusalem as the site. David's choosing Jerusalem, a neutral city that heretofore had not even been under Israelite control, may have irked more than just the tribe of Judah. However, even if this was the source of the resistance to David's religious agenda, the thrust of the argument here, that the people on some level were resistant to David's particular agenda, remains intact.

²⁵ Cf., however, Alt, *Essays on Old Testament*, pp. 297-301, where the author suggests that the revolt did not include the Judeans. However, this position is untenable given the considerations that I will explicate shortly.

²⁶ Although the text never explicitly identifies Ahithophel as a Judean, my assumption that he belonged to that tribe is based upon a number of passages. According to Joshua 15:51, Gilo was a city in Judah's possession and 2 Samuel 15:12 refers to Ahithophel as a "Gilonite," leading me to the conclusion that Ahithophel was Judean.

²⁷ Admittedly, Amasa may have only been half-Judean: 1 Chronicles 2:17 names Jether the Ishmaelite as his father. However, as a cousin of David's (according to 1 Chronicles 2:16, the mothers of Joab and Amasa were sisters of David's father Jesse), he likely had strong ties to the tribe and felt slighted by David's perceived impropriety. Assuming that Jether was not originally Jewish, it stands to reason that Amasa would have felt closest to the tribe of his mother.

²⁸ Cf. 15:12 and 17:25. Presumably, Ahithophel and Amasa had personal issues as well that impelled them to join the rebellion. B. Tal. Sanhedrin 69b and 101b assert that Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter, a suggestion embraced by many modern scholars as well (for example, cf. J.W. Wesseliuss, "Joab's Death and the Central Theme of the Succession Narrative," *VT* 40:3 [1990], p. 349) who superimpose 23:34 onto 11:3 in making this claim. If we accept this assumption, then it would seem that enmity-stemming back to the Bathsheba incident motivated Ahithophel to rebel. Nonetheless, even were we to presume that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, it seems unlikely that revenge would have motivated him in this case. Considering that Bathsheba enjoyed the status of a queen and that her son was destined to ascend the throne, it is unlikely that Ahithophel would have taken steps to reverse the good fortunes of his family by promoting the efforts of an insurgent. Amasa may also have had personal issues that motivated him. The family dynamics of the military, in which David promoted his cousin Joab over his cousin

One final piece of evidence concerning Judah's involvement comes from references to Judean cities as hotbeds of resistance. In particular, Absalom's coronation in 15:10 occurred in the Judean city of Hebron. This observation provides insight into the source of Judean resentment. We should view Judah's opposition to David against the backdrop of earlier events. Even as a fugitive on the run from Saul, David realized that in order to ascend the throne, it was necessary to procure the loyalty of his tribe. Thus, we witness him making overtures to the elite such as Nabal the Calebite,²⁹ arranging marriages with two prominent Judean women,³⁰ and establishing cordial relations with the Elders of the tribe by providing them with spoils of war.³¹ The Judeans reciprocated in kind and in 2:4, they anoint David as king over them. David thus intimated that they occupied a central role in his plans, and they naturally expected that David continue to reciprocate the goodwill that they had shown him.

Moreover, historical precedent demanded that David always identify himself as a Judean first. Saul, Israel's first monarch, maintained ties with his native tribe, establishing his residence at Gibeath Saul and undertaking his first military campaign on behalf of Jabesh-Gilead.³² Thus, when David moved the capital from Hebron to the unaffiliated city of Jerusalem, the Judeans felt slighted.³³ This affront left the people resentful of David and impelled them to join forces with Absalom. To the Judeans, the move reflected David's discarding his pro-Judean allegiances in favor of national unity. This suspicion was only reinforced when David began to court disparate factions within the Israelite camp as he had once courted Judah.³⁴

B. Saulides

Amasa, may have been a source of contention. The fact that David further passed Amasa over by appointing Benaiah son of Jehoiada to lead the Cherethite and Pelethite brigades (cf. 8:18) likely further infuriated Amasa to the point of rebellion.

²⁹ Cf. 1 Samuel 25:2-9

³⁰ Cf. 1 Samuel 25:43-4.

³¹ Cf. 1 Samuel 30:26-31.

³² If we adopt Alt's assertion (*Essays on Old Testament*, pp. 264-267) that Saul's reign simply marked the institutionalization of the charismatic leadership of the Judges, then Saul's rule was modeled even more after the paradigm of the Judges, and Judah's expectations that David assume that model would be even more intuitive.

³³ Cf. Hugo Gressman, "The Revolt of Absalom and Sheba," in David M. Gunn (ed.), *Narrative and Novella in Samuel: Studies by Hugo Gressman and Other Scholars, 1906-1923* (Sheffield: Almond, 1991), p. 39, and Segal, p. 324.

³⁴ Cf. 2:5-8, 3:13, 5:3, 9:1-13. The verses in ch. 9 are especially significant because they represent David's attempt at courting Saul's family. Thus, he was so intent on securing the support of the Israelite camp that he even made advances to the family of his predecessor.

A second group that David antagonized was the Benjaminites, and particularly blood relatives of Saul.³⁵ We thus see Shimei son of Gera, a relative of Saul's,³⁶ cursing the king upon the latter's exit from Jerusalem.³⁷ In addition, David took Ziba's claim that Mephibosheth was eyeing the throne as entirely plausible, understandable if there were a rising pro-Saulide faction.³⁸ This faction, appreciating the urgency of acting, may have spearheaded a movement to reestablish the derailed monarchy of Saul.^{39 40}

III. Relationship between Historical Background and David's Repentance

Thus, genuine political motives clearly served as the driving force behind Absalom's rebellion. However, we will see that the message of the narrator is that David resisted the temptation to see the challenge to his authority

³⁵ Of course, in addition to the Judeans and Saulides, the Israelites also joined the ranks of the rebellion, a fact made explicit in 15:7, where Absalom addresses people from "one of the tribes of Israel." Absalom's obsequious behavior in attempts to rally support was directed at "all Israel," not just Judah (cf. 15:2, 6). However, their motives, already delineated, were not unique to that community, and were likely shared by the Judeans and Saulides as well.

³⁶ See 16:5.

³⁷ Cf. 16:5-8. Although we might be tempted to isolate this incident as the machinations of a single man, the fact that 1000 men escorted Shimei in seeking a royal pardon in 19:17-18 would seem to underscore the fact that he enjoyed a significant following among the Benjaminites. In addition, the fact that Solomon placed him under house arrest and ultimately had him killed for violating it implies that Shimei was an influential personage.

³⁸ A final, though admittedly more speculative piece of evidence for the role of the Saulide clan in the rebellion can be spotted in the rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri. Some (see, for example, Yeivin, "Mered Avshalom," p. 289, and Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964], p. 371) identify Sheba as a relative of Saul's. This suggestion is based on an association of Bichri with Becher, the son of Benjamin alluded to in Genesis 46:21 and 1 Chronicles 7:6, 8, and Becorath, an ancestor of Saul's mentioned in 1 Samuel 9:1. Thus, Sheba may have seized the opportunity after the failure of Absalom's revolt with the intentions of refounding the Saulide dynasty. In light of this, the fact that Sheba is always identified as "son of Bichri" might highlight the implied association between Sheba and Saul, and underscore Sheba's intentions in that regard.

³⁹ Presumably, the Saulide faction joined the rebellion despite Absalom's Judean background because they saw Absalom as weaker and more easily manipulated than David. The basis for this perception of Absalom could be the almost laughable extent to which Absalom was under the influence of his advisors. Cf. 16:20-22 and 17:1-14. This character trait is further highlighted if we adopt Yeivin's assumption ("Mered Avshalom," p. 285) that Ahithophel sparked the whole rebellion when he cunningly coaxed Absalom into leading it. The Saulide faction might therefore either have felt that Absalom would generally weaken the state of the Davidic dynasty, or they might have intended to ultimately rebel against the weak Absalom in favor of one of their own.

⁴⁰ The fact that diehard supporters of Saul such as Barzillai the Gileadite and Machir son of Amiel backed David's cause would not necessarily militate against the possibility that there was a movement to reinstall a member of Saul's family. Rather, it would instead seem to reflect the appreciation that the Israelite community to the east of the Jordan had for David's military campaigns against their foreign neighbors. See Yehuda Elitzur et al. (ed.), *Daat Mikra Atlas* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1993), p. 222.

in purely political terms. The rebellion thus serves as a turning point in David's career. To understand why, we must place the rebellion in context.

By juxtaposing the rebellion to chapters 11-12, in which David committed adultery with the wife of one of his fiercest warriors⁴¹ and arranged for the latter's murder in order to avoid the consequences,⁴² the narrator asserted that Absalom's rebellion constituted more than just the initiative of disgruntled groups. Rather, it was God's response to a sin that demanded a divine reaction.

Chapter 12, detailing Nathan's rebuke of David's monumental misstep, provides the reader with the theological perspective of that sin. Obviously, the most basic element of the sin was that David, a citizen of the Jewish nation, violated the two capital crimes of murder and adultery. However, David's sin transcended the violation of these two prohibitions. Nathan's parable involving the rich and poor man is a telling indictment of David's misuse of power. It is an indictment of David, king of Israel, more than anything else.⁴³

Thus, the sin includes two elements. One exists on the personal level as a breach of David's relationship with God. In addition, there is a second element that involved a violation of David's charge as king. God expected David, in the latter's capacity as king, to transcend petty desires and work on behalf of God and His people. By succumbing to the perks of his office, David had misappropriated those powers that God and the Jews had invested him with. This element, then, was comprised of a breach of both his relationships with God and with his subjects.^{44 45}

⁴¹ Cf. 23:39.

⁴² We are following the simplest approach to the events of ch. 11, which clearly suggests that David sinned. Although the Rabbis in B. Tal. Shab 56a assert that "כל האומר דוד חטא אינו אלא טועה," this position is not unanimously accepted in Rabbinic literature; see Yaakov Medan, "Megillat Bat-Sheva" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 18 (1993), pp. 67-167, for many dissenting sources. Moreover, Medan makes a compelling argument against taking the Rabbinic statement at face value, which further supports our contention that David did in fact sin.

⁴³ Lack of overt reference in Nathan's speech to the sins of adultery and murder would support the assertion that Nathan was not primarily interested in the private component of his sin.

⁴⁴ The fact that the crime is portrayed as having compromised David's public position is consistent with the fact that the narrator almost exclusively focuses on David's public role at the expense of his private side. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 122, where the author notes this general tendency on the part of the narrator: "The private (David)... has been displaced through the strategy of presentation by the public man, and the intimate David remains opaque."

⁴⁵ The nature of this element of the sin, which I will explicate more fully later in this paper, is hinted at by one of the keywords in the text. Forms of the verb שָׁחַד find expression in chapter 11 no fewer than ten times (cf. 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6 [twice], 12, 14, 18, 27). This constant refrain reminds us that although David was designated as God's שָׁחַד to the people, by abusing his power, he was essentially transformed into the שָׁחַד and was thereby compromising his intended role in the process. Ironically (and intentionally), God substituted the people as His שָׁחַד, using them as His vehicle for punishing David for failing in his own charge as שָׁחַד.

Nathan's speech clarified that God would spare the king's life. However, David did not escape unscathed. Chapters 13-20 contain the punishments for both elements of David's sin. His personal sin comprised the destruction of a family by seducing Bathsheba and killing Uriah. Consequently, David's own family deserved to bear the onus of the punishment. By the end of his life, David had buried three sons and confronted his violated daughter. A fourth son, Adonijah, later met his demise as the second victim of fratricide in David's family.⁴⁶

However, these chapters contain an additional retributational component. The national element of the sin also could not go unaccounted for. The two rebellions recorded in chapters 15-20 constitute the punishment for David's abuse of power. Here as well, God delivered the punishment measure for measure: David's abuse of power results in successive challenges to his fitness as leader.⁴⁷

It is in the connection between the two aspects of the rebellion heretofore discussed, its historical basis and its divinely imposed punishment, that David recaptured his claim as the divine-elect. As outlined above, the rebellion contained bonafide political motives. Nonetheless, David succeeded in understanding that the popular insurrection was the divinely decreed upheaval of his monarchy. He internalized the ubiquitous message of the Bible, that the divine hand is manifest in and controls the pulse of the historical. Of course, this should not blind us to the genuinely historical hand in the revolt. Admittedly, many of Absalom's proponents, such as the Elders or the Saulides, supported him out of unabashed opportunism. Nonetheless, the narrator's message is that David acknowledged that God was in this case the greatest of puppeteers.

The text highlights David's perception of divine intervention despite compelling historical motives. Following his recognition of God as the source

⁴⁶ Cf. Charles Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), p. 116, states that "David in his indignant reaction orders a fourfold restitution (see 12:6); one can note that four of David's sons would subsequently die untimely deaths." According to this, the tragic deaths of David's sons as punishment find explicit expression in chapter 12.

⁴⁷ This theme, of rejection following in the wake of abuse of power, is one of the important themes of the book. According to 1 Samuel 2:29, Eli's priestly dynasty is upended by Eli's abuse of his position. Similarly, Samuel twice accuses Saul of abuse of power, first at Gilgal and finally following the Amalek debacle. We would thus have expected that as in earlier, parallel scenarios, God would thwart David's efforts at founding a dynasty. Why God doesn't is thus the central question in this episode, and one that we will address further on.

of authority, David repeatedly invokes God as the ultimate arbiter of his fate.⁴⁸ David consistently downplays the pernicious intentions of his foes and assumes that they were acting as part of a divine plan. Thus, David repeatedly implies that the rebellion is simply a reflection of divine disfavor. In addition, he reacts mildly to the blasphemous actions of Shimei because "if someone curses that way, it's because God has said 'Curse David!' to him."⁴⁹ His perspective on Divine Providence also accounts for his readiness to reconcile with his foes following his own victory. Thus, in 18:5, he demands that his soldiers spare Absalom's life, and when they violate this directive, he weeps incoherently over the tragedy.⁵⁰ In addition, he pardons Shimei in 19:24 rather than avenging the latter's blasphemous tirade. Finally, he embraces Amasa, one of the insurrection's ringleaders, appointing him as his own general. He acknowledges that his predicament stems from God, and the outcome also rests in God's hands.

David's acknowledgment of God's role in the events marks the turning point in chapters 15-20 and essentially constitutes his repentance for the sin. David had sinned with Bathsheba because he forgot from where his power ultimately derived. The monarchy was conceived of as a shared enterprise between man and God, a notion alluded to in Deuteronomy 17:15: "*Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the L-D thy God shall choose.*" In this scheme, the king was charged with fighting Israel's battles, paving the way for an era of tranquility in which the Israelites could realize their ultimate objective of building the Temple.⁵¹ Centralized government would promote more uniform stability, and dynastic rule would insure that this situation would endure.

By abusing his power, David demonstrated that the authority of his office ultimately resided in him. It took God's reversal of his monarchy in order

⁴⁸ Cf. 15:25-26, 31, 16:10-12. The narrator as well makes a point of attributing the events of the rebellion to God, particularly as far as contravening the efforts of Ahithophel. See 15:31, 16:23, and 17:14.

⁴⁹ Cf. 16:10.

⁵⁰ Cf. 19:1, 5.

⁵¹ Cf. B. Tal. Sanhedrin 20b: "Three commandments were given to Israel when they entered the land: to appoint a king, to cut off the seed of Amalek, and to build themselves the chosen house... we must infer that they had to first set up a king... it is to be inferred that the extermination of Amalek (was next)..." This Talmudic passage captures the essence of Israelite monarchy. Israel as a political entity would only be truly fulfilled with the realization of their ultimate religious charge of erecting a Temple. However, tranquility and the fighting of God's battles were obvious prerequisites to this, and the election of a king was necessary to help achieve all of these objectives. This connection is already implicit in the progression from Judges to Kings, in which increasing centralization of worship coincides with more established, dynastic rule, implying that the former is only possible in tandem with the latter. Cf. also 1 Chronicles 21:8, where David clarifies that while his mission was on the battlefield, Solomon's was in the religious realm.

for him to once again recognize that he was simply working on behalf of God and His people. Thus, chapters 15-20 constitute David's repentance. Only with the punishment for the national element of his sin does David kneel in contrition, correcting the fatal perspective on the monarchy that impelled him to sin in the first place.^{52 53}

IV. The Prophet's Message

We can now suggest what message the narrator intended to convey in relating the details of Absalom's rebellion. Although the narrator had convincingly established David's credentials for the throne, the Bathsheba incident raised fundamental questions regarding his fitness to serve as king.

In the aftermath of this event, it was natural to question David's fitness for the throne. Just as Saul was rejected after he twice transcended the institution of monarchy by ignoring God's directives at Gilgal and against Amalek, we might have expected a similar treatment of David. Just as Saul had violated the prophetic instructions at both Gilgal and at Amalek, so too did David violate the strictures that God delineated as part of the king's job description.

The prophet's message, then, is that unlike Saul before him, David repented his sin. David's sin, in which he betrayed a loyal officer and compromised his allegiance to God and the nation, did not leave an indelible stain on his throne, though, because of the sincerity of his repentance.

It was thus necessary for the author to return to the question of David's fitness in the wake of the Bathsheba incident. By again emphasizing David's fitness for the throne through relating his genuine act of repentance, the narrator asserts

⁵² Besides repenting his abuse of power as it related to God, David repented this misuse of power as it related to his subjects as well. The king had violated the trust of the people and demonstrated that he was working over them and not for them. Whereas he earlier displayed a blatant disregard for his subjects and his charge to protect them, David now repented by exhibiting noteworthy selflessness. David's initial concerns do not focus on his own situation but on the welfare of others. In 15:14, he expresses concern for the safety of the city. He then expresses his concern for the safety of Ittai in 15:19-20, and afterwards directs his attention to the safekeeping of the ark in 15:25 and to the welfare of the priests in 15:27. Only once the welfare of others has been considered does David begin to devise a plan to save himself in 15:34-37.

⁵³ The repentance for David's personal sin occurred in 12:13 following Nathan's scathing indictment of the monarch's behavior. That that was the repentance for David's sin on the personal level exclusively is apparent from Nathan's response there of "Yes, but God has transferred your sin... you won't die." David repented the capital crime and therefore would not receive the capital punishment, though some punishment was still mandated.

that the events of chapter 11 are an aberration, and that the attitude attested in the account of the rebellion is the rule.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The understanding of the relationship between chapters 11-20 would militate against the notion of an organic "succession narrative." These chapters are not intended simply to portray the demise of the two most likely successors to David's throne, Amnon and Absalom, as scholars suggest. Rather, these chapters outline David's sin and subsequent punishment. The message does not relate to Absalom's attempts to usurp the throne but rather to David's fitness to retain it.

The Scarlet Cord and the Conquest of Jericho: The Handicap of the "Omniscient Reader"*

Hillel Novetsky and Ari Mermelstein

- A. Potential Pitfalls of the Omniscient Reader
- B. A Close Encounter: Examining the Spies' Mission and its Execution
- C. Divine Conquest vs. Human Conquest
- D. The Weaning Process

I. Potential Pitfalls of the Omniscient Reader

Our intimate acquaintance with Biblical stories simultaneously stimulates and stifles insightful exegesis. When we read the initial stages of a narrative with foreknowledge of its final outcome, we more easily detect foreshadowing and more readily appreciate plot development. However, this omniscience comes with a price tag.

Frequently we attribute to others what we ourselves possess. Superimposing our own knowledge of the story's outcome, we presume that the Biblical characters also anticipate how the story line will unfold and act accordingly. Yet, while various Biblical characters were at times endowed with prophetic inspiration, even these great figures could not necessarily divine the future unless and until God revealed it to them.

Consequently, in order to relive a Biblical story and comprehend what actually transpired, we must divest ourselves not only of our extra-textual baggage, such as Midrash, but also of our knowledge of the later stages of the text itself. At each step of the way, we must challenge all instinctive assumptions predicated upon ensuing plot development. We must place ourselves in the position and mindset of the characters themselves and live out their dilemmas and decisions without the benefit or impediment of the subsequent historical record.

Our familiarity with Biblical lore leads to a second pitfall as well. Because we grow accustomed to Biblical stories as children, we frequently

* We wish to gratefully acknowledge the critique of earlier drafts of this paper provided by Dr. Abraham Greenberg, Prof. Will Lee, Dr. Allan Novetsky and Neima Novetsky.

remain passive readers as adults. Our simplistic conception of a story prevents us from contemplating how it exactly happened. We neglect to consider whether the characters' actions seem sensible, and we forget to ask why the Bible incorporates ostensibly insignificant details.¹

The more famous the story, the more we take the Biblical text for granted, and the more we succumb to these two problems. Only by consistently reanimating celebrated narratives with fresh approaches can we prevent them from becoming stale. Thus, if we find a preponderance of seemingly superfluous details, we must reexamine these details. If the entire subplot seems unnecessary for the broader picture, we must uncover its deeper significance.

Let us consider the early chapters of the book of Joshua. Among all of the Bible's stories it is one of the best known, most taken for granted, and least well interpreted.

II. A Close Encounter: Examining the Spies' Mission and its Execution

The second chapter of the Book of Joshua recounts Joshua's dispatch of the spies, in advance of the Israelite assault on Jericho. Upon arriving in the city, the two spies elect to spend the night at the home of Rahab, the prostitute,² whose house was built into the wall of Jericho. Nearly discovered there by the King of Jericho's counterintelligence agents, the spies elude capture only by the grace of Rahab's ingenuity and subterfuge. In gratitude for Rahab's efforts, the spies vow to save her and her family upon conquering Jericho, but only on condition that she hang a scarlet cord from her window and not divulge their pact.

In contrast to this tale of espionage and human preparation for combat, Chapter 6 records how God topples Jericho's walls in a miraculous battle. Although the spies ultimately fulfill their pledge and rescue Rahab, the Biblical text never reveals the impact of the spies' espionage or what became of the scarlet cord. From the divergence of these two accounts several difficulties emerge:

- 1) The Mission: The text obscures the motivation underlying Joshua's reconnaissance mission. Ostensibly, the stealth with which Joshua sent the spies confirms that their purpose was a covert military operation designed to

¹ The economy of detail in the Bible leaves little doubt that what it does choose to record constitutes part of the fundamental message of the text or provides the necessary backdrop for understanding the flow of the narrative. Simply having transpired is not sufficient justification for inclusion in the Biblical text.

² The original Hebrew "זונה" has also been interpreted as innkeeper. We will address this issue later.

discover the weak points in Jericho's fortifications. At the very least, the people and King of Jericho perceive the mission in this light (2:2-3).³ However, we never hear of any concrete results from the spies' efforts. Additionally, if Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho through a Divine miracle in which the walls came tumbling down, why risk lives for superfluous military intelligence?⁴

Perhaps this very issue motivated Gersonides (2:1) to alternatively explain that the mission intended to gauge the depths of the morale of Jericho's inhabitants, thereby providing a confidence booster for Israel's novice warriors.⁵ While the almost exclusive focus of the spies' report in 2:24 on the "quaking" of the inhabitants of the land might bolster this contention, it is perplexing that the report was delivered only to Joshua and not to the entire nation. Additionally, this theory still begs the question of whether such a report warranted jeopardizing human life.

2) The Implementation: It is rather striking that the first Israelites to enter the Promised Land in thirty-nine years elect to spend their first night in Israel visiting Jericho's red-light district. This odd choice, lending an ironic flavor of sexual intrigue to the account, begs for an explanation. To be sure, not all agree that Rahab engaged in prostitution. Josephus (*Antiquities* 5.1.2) and perhaps the Targum (2:1)⁶ propose that Rahab owned not a brothel but a motel.⁷ However, the simple reading of the text⁸ and the dominant Rabbinic view⁹ sustain the position that Rahab was a prostitute.

³ All references are to the Book of Joshua unless otherwise specified.

⁴ To those who would argue against relying on miracles (see Talmud *Pesahim* 64b), we might retort that, if so, why would Joshua rely on a miracle to save the lives of the spies? Was their near capture so wholly unanticipated?

⁵ Gersonides suggests that the story of Gideon and his lad in Judges 7:9-15 provides a parallel case of an espionage mission designed to strengthen morale. However, the risk/reward ratio in that instance was much lower as they undertook their surveillance unobserved under the cover of night, and Gideon's explicit fears demonstrated a compelling need for the mission. In addition, only in the case of Gideon does the text expressly record a psychological motivation.

⁶ The Targum renders זונה as פתדקאית, an Aramaic word usually used to denote an innkeeper, and Rashi understands the Targum in this manner (though Rashi himself in 2:15 assumes that Rahab was a prostitute). Radak, however, notes that the Targum often employs פתדקאית when the original Hebrew reads זונה, and he therefore maintains that the Targum merely intended to literally render זונה as a prostitute. See also Judges 11:1, 16:1 and 1 Kings 3:16 and their Targum.

⁷ This approach identifies זונה as a form of the root זנ, to nourish, rather than the root זנה, to stray. The suggestion has little textual basis; conceivably, it originated from a desire to protect both the reputation of the spies whom Midrash Tanhuma (*Shelah* 1) identifies as Caleb and Phineas and the reputation of Rahab who according to the Talmud (*Megillah* 14b) married Joshua.

⁸ The contexts of other Biblical occurrences of the word זונה support the meaning of prostitution.

⁹ See Talmud (*Zevahim* 116b and *Megillah* 15a) and Sifrei Zuta (Numbers 10:29).

Ibn Kaspi (2:1) offers a pragmatic explanation. He proposes that the spies' selection of Rahab's home was motivated by a desire to remain inconspicuous among other visitors. Alternatively, we might posit that any unannounced visitor looking for lodging would face limited options; only a motel or a brothel would have occupant turnover.

Yet, both of these attempted solutions encounter the same fundamental difficulty. Why did the spies decide to remain in Jericho for the night?¹⁰ After all, it stretches the imagination to believe that their reconnaissance or morale appraising activities mandated intimate knowledge of a prostitute's home. If so, why risk being cornered and caught inside a city which locked its gates at night rather than simply exiting before nightfall and reentering the next morning?

3) The Deal - Why did the spies condition their pledge to save Rahab upon her hanging a scarlet rope from a window overlooking the outskirts of Jericho?

Many medieval commentators¹¹ posit that the scarlet cord functioned as an indicator of Rahab's whereabouts, to ensure that the invading Israelite soldiers would spare her the fate of the other inhabitants.¹² Yet a cord hanging outside of the walls of Jericho would be of dubious value in this regard, as invading soldiers would enter Rahab's home from inside the city and not from its exterior. Moreover, when the walls of the city would miraculously collapse, what would remain of the scarlet cord?

The Vilna Gaon (2:15) proposes that Rahab owned two homes, one built into the wall, and one located only near the wall. According to his theory, Rahab hung the rope out of a window in the house near the wall, and that house, fortunately enough, remained standing.¹³ The blatant problem with this

¹⁰ If the spies entered Jericho at night, as it appears from 2:2, the question is even stronger. Why enter the city merely to go to sleep? If the spies entered during the daytime, one still wonders why they did not exit before the gates closed.

¹¹ See Rashi (2:12), R. Isaiah of Trani (2:12), and Gersonides (2:17). They all assume that Rahab requested such an identifying sign, an "אֶת־אֶמֶת" in her first conversation with the spies in 2:12, despite the scarlet cord being mentioned for the first time only in their subsequent dialogue in 2:18. However, their interpretation inevitably leads one to wonder why the spies would wait until exiting Jericho before responding to Rahab's request (see footnote 25), and why the cord would constitute specifically an "אֶת־אֶמֶת" rather than just a plain "אֶת־". In contrast, Radak (2:12) interprets the words "אֶת־אֶמֶת" as a promise of good faith, and as synonymous with "חֶסֶד," noting that both terms appear together as the hendiadys "חֶסֶד וְאֶמֶת" in the spies' response to Rahab (2:14). According to Radak, Rahab merely requested that the spies reciprocate her kindness and be true to their word, and the scarlet cord was purely an initiative of the spies. Our subsequent analysis adopts Radak's rendering of "אֶת־אֶמֶת."

¹² According to this line of thought, the cord paralleled the blood of the Paschal sacrifice placed on the doorposts and frame in Egypt.

¹³ The Septuagint arrives at a similar result, but via a very different exegetical method. It obviates the contradiction between Chapters 2 and 6 by omitting reference to Rahab's house being built into

possibility is that the text nowhere mentions the existence of a second home. Alternatively, Radak (6:5) suggests that the entire wall did not topple, and that Rahab's house was located in a region of the wall which remained standing. However, the difficulty with this suggestion is that it presupposes that the spies knew which parts of the wall would fall and which would remain standing.¹⁴

Additionally, what prompted the spies' concern lest Rahab reveal their pact? What did they have to lose? Was it not Rahab herself who should have feared publicizing that she had betrayed her nation by abetting the escape of enemy soldiers and making a selfishly motivated deal with the enemy?

Radak (2:14) explains that the spies feared that others would also hang scarlet cords from their houses. Gersonides (2:14) similarly posits that the spies wished to avoid a situation in which all of Jericho's residents would seek refuge by mingling with Rahab's family in her home. However, is it likely that these considerations would have been paramount for the spies? Could they not have ascertained which house was Rahab's and which people were members of her family?

All of the above questions challenge assumptions made about the text by omniscient and passive readers. Noting the excessively risky gambit of the spies and the inconsistencies between their plan and its implementation leaves us little alternative but to challenge the conventional wisdom regarding the plans to conquer Jericho and to reevaluate the roles of Rahab, her home, and the scarlet cord.

III. Divine Conquest vs. Human Conquest

The Bible's underlying objective is to convey to its readers that natural law is in fact Divine law. As such, it highlights God's overt manifestations of His will and power, even at the expense of minimizing human roles and initiatives. Biblical narrative challenges its reader to reconstruct both the Divine and human levels of the story and to then integrate the two.¹⁵ The Battle of Jericho is a case in point.

the wall (see translation of 2:15). Yet, placing Rahab's home in the midst of Jericho only creates a more serious difficulty: How were the spies able to exit the locked city? While the Septuagint's response remains a mystery, the Vilna Gaon contends that the spies exited through the window of the home in the wall whereas the scarlet cord hung from the window of the home adjacent to the wall. This, however, directly contradicts 2:18, which states that the windows were one and the same.

¹⁴ The positions of both Radak and the Vilna Gaon highlight the obstacles facing the "omniscient reader." Both exegetes make unsubstantiated assumptions regarding the spies' plan in order to reconcile it with the way the events ultimately unfolded.

¹⁵ Our teacher, Professor Yehuda Elitzur, wrote extensively on this topic. For example, see his article, "תפיסת ההיסטוריה במקרא" *חברת ומסורת* (הכינוס השנתי למחשבת היהדות), 331-340, and also his

When was Joshua first apprised of God's intentions to vanquish Jericho through supernatural means? To our surprise, only at the beginning of Chapter 6 do we hear of such a communication. Thus, if we take caution not to fall into the trap of the omniscient reader, it would appear that at the time Joshua sent the spies, he was unaware that Jericho would be conquered by a miracle. Joshua presumed that the residents of Jericho would succumb to the Israelites the old fashioned way: through a hard-fought battle.¹⁶

Eliminating the obstacle that a walled city presented was central to Israelite success. Jericho was "shut up tight because of the Israelites; no one could leave or enter," (6:1) and the Israelites desperately wished to avoid a protracted and morale-sapping siege.¹⁷ Time was on the Canaanites' side. Sieges could last for years,¹⁸ and even if the Israelites ultimately prevailed, the resulting depletion of resources might exact the price of defeat in their broader war against all of the nations of Canaan. In addition, the longer Jericho could stave off Israelite forces, the greater the odds that the untested Israelite army might panic.

Given this historical backdrop, we may return to our original theory that Joshua dispatched the spies with the hope of obtaining military data and aid which could expedite the conquest of Jericho.¹⁹ The spies tour Jericho and come to Rahab's house. Not merely a lodging place which the spies chance upon, her home is a location they select during their reconnaissance of the city for the military opportunities it presented.

Built within the actual walls of Jericho, with a window large enough to allow access from outside the city, Rahab's home affords a perfect place for an Israelite commando force to penetrate the walls of Jericho.²⁰ All that remains

article, "מגמתה וערכה," *פרשת אחרי בן גרא* - *WCJS* 1996, vol. 1, pp. 217-221.

¹⁶ See Menachem Leibtag, *Sefer Yehoshua - Shiur #1* (Tanach Study Center Website: URL: <http://www.tanach.org>, 1998). See also Yigal Ariel, *Oz Va-anavah* (Hebrew), (Hispin: Simanim Press, 1995), pp. 30-32, who agrees that Joshua's spies were sent on a purely military mission and that Joshua's intended course of action was altered by a Heavenly decree.

¹⁷ In the battles of Jericho and Ai, the Canaanites relied on their walls for protection instead of directly confronting the numerically superior Israelite army. It was only the ease of the Israelite victories that forced a shift in Canaanite tactics. Subsequently, they collectively gathered to encounter Israel on the battlefield (9:1-2). This ultimately worked to Israel's advantage as it accelerated the conquest by reducing the number of major battles.

¹⁸ See for example the three-year siege of Samaria in 2Kings 17:5 and the multi-year siege of Jerusalem described in 2Kings 25:1-2.

¹⁹ It is very possible that the mission included other cities as well, but was curtailed due to the spies' near capture. See Joshua's instructions in 2:1: "Go get the lay of the land and Jericho." Others, though, suggest that the words "את הארץ ואת יריחו" in the original Hebrew should be rendered "the land, the land of Jericho."

²⁰ Josephus in *Antiquities* 5.1.2 insinuates that the spies were in the vicinity of Rahab's house for precisely this reason: "For, undetected at the first, they had surveyed their entire city unmolested,

for the spies to accomplish is to obtain Rahab's assistance in implementing their plan. Reckoning that their best chance for a deal is to wait for the privacy of the dead of the night,²¹ the spies decide not to exit the city before the gates close.²²

The spies' luck nearly runs out when the King of Jericho's men come to arrest them. However, their gamble regarding Rahab pays off when she saves their lives with her ingenuity. Rahab has demonstrated her capacity and inclination to act as a fifth column, and the stage is set for the spies and Rahab to consummate a deal.²³ Rahab negotiates not only for her own life but also for the lives of her entire family, and the spies acquiesce. In return, Rahab agrees to hang an identifying scarlet cord from her window so that the Israelite advance unit will know where to gain entry into the city, thus enabling them to open the gates for the rest of the besieging army.²⁴

Herein lies the significance of the scarlet rope and its placement outside the window in the wall. The rope was intended to designate Rahab's house and the spot where the soldiers would scale the wall and enter through her window. It therefore needed to be placed **outside** the city so that the Israelites on the **outside** could locate it. In contrast to the conventional wisdom that the rope was intended to allow the spies to rescue Rahab after entering the city, it emerges that the rope was integral to the Israelites' initial access to the city.²⁵

noting where the ramparts were strong and where they offered a less secure protection to the inhabitants, and which of the gates through weakness would facilitate entrance for the army. Those who met them had disregarded their inspection, attributing to a curiosity natural to strangers this busy study of every detail in the city, and in no wise to any hostile intent. But when, at fall of even, they retired to an inn hard by the ramparts, to which they had proceeded for supper, word was brought to the king, as he supped, that certain persons had come from the camp of the Hebrews to spy upon the city and were now in Rahab's inn..." (emphasis ours).

²¹ Compare to King Saul's waiting for nightfall to persuade the Witch of Ein Dor to engage in illicit activity (1Samuel 28). The advantages of the cover of night are both privacy to converse and the ability to more easily dispose of Rahab should she resist their solicitations.

²² According to our approach, the spies did not risk remaining in Jericho at night merely in order to be up bright and early to continue their mission, but rather because they could better execute their scheme at night.

²³ It is possible, though unverifiable, that the spies and Rahab had already conducted preliminary negotiations by the time the King's men knocked at her door. In her subsequent conversation with the spies, Rahab evinces a clear awareness of their identity; however, this very possibly could have resulted from her conversation with the King's men (although it is not explicit there). If there had been no earlier communication between Rahab and the spies, what would have possessed her to dupe the King's soldiers?

²⁴ An intrascriptural parallel may buttress this supposition that the spies went to Rahab in an effort to procure the aid of an "insider." Judges 1:23-25 also speaks of an espionage mission, undertaken by the tribes of Joseph, who sought help from one of the residents of the city. That resident assisted their entry into the city, and in return, was saved along with all of his family.

²⁵ In footnote 11, we asked why the spies waited to stipulate the hanging of the scarlet cord in 2:18, although they had already been lowered out of the city in 2:15. Yehuda Kiel, *Sefer Yehoshua* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1970), p. 16, suggests that the spies merely prepared to

At this point, of course, nobody knew that the walls were supposed to take a Divine tumble, and the spies reasonably assumed that the scarlet cord would have been clearly visible. However, once the Israelites discovered that the walls would collapse, the need for the scarlet cord was obviated. Consequently, it is never again mentioned, even during the rescue of Rahab in Chapter 6.

This explanation also provides insight into the puzzling demand of the spies that Rahab not disclose their conversation. If we suppose that the spies and Rahab had reviewed and formulated the Israelite battle plan, then the need for her discretion becomes intuitive. Rather than being concerned with Rahab disclosing their pact to a few friends and saving a few more Canaanite souls, the spies were much more anxious that Rahab not double-cross them and reveal the secret strategy to the King's officers. Had Rahab acted as a double agent, the Israelite forces would most certainly have suffered serious losses.²⁶

* * *

Returning to our point of departure, the reader of the book of Joshua encounters an apparent discrepancy between the military mission of the spies in Chapter 2 and the miraculous collapse of Jericho's walls in Chapter 6. Wrestling with this contradiction, exegetes may choose one of three options:

The Documentary Critic, ridiculing any possible integration, posits two divergent traditions.²⁷ Consequently, Chapter 2, the vestige of a tradition of

leave the city in 2:15, but had not yet left before the subsequent dialogue in 2:18. However, the use of the past tense, "וַיִּרְאוּ" in 2:18, argues against his theory. Conceivably, the spies first appreciated the utility of the scarlet cord only after seeing it from their vantage point outside Jericho. While still inside the city, they had sealed the military pact with Rahab, but were relying on other means of identifying the window of her home.

²⁶ Our thesis may also help reconcile the chronological inconsistency between 1:11 and 3:2,5 regarding the extra day added to the three-day waiting period before the crossing of the Jordan. Following the spies' close encounter, they remained hidden in the mountains for three days. Their unexpected detour forced a delay of the crossing until they could return with the intelligence critical for Israelite battle plans.

²⁷ See Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), pp. 41-42, who shares our conviction regarding the military purpose of the scarlet cord, but deploys it to bolster his contention that the Rahab story once existed as an independent account: "Although tied redactionally to the fall of Jericho, the Rahab story is fundamentally independent of it. Chapter 2 certainly envisions the capture of Jericho, but hardly in the miraculous way reported by chapter 6, which fails to pick up the motif of the house, which would have been destroyed in the wall's collapse." Blindly adhering to documentary criticism, Nelson fails to consider or acknowledge that seeming inconsistencies might easily result from the dynamic nature of military strategy (especially when God enters the equation), as presented above.

conquest facilitated by espionage, need not conform to the tale of Divine conquest recorded in Chapter 6.

In contrast, the "Omniscient Reader" instinctively reinterprets the story of Chapter 2 to synchronize it with the subsequent developments of Chapter 6. This approach, exemplified by the traditional exegete, faces the dual challenge of manufacturing an alternative motivation for the spies' operation and accounting for the ultimate survival of the scarlet cord.²⁸ Thus, Gersonides contends that the spies embarked on a morale assessing mission rather than military reconnaissance, and Radak and the Vilna Gaon propose that the wall of Rahab's home remained standing even while the rest of Jericho's walls crumbled.

The "Critical but Harmonizing Reader" stands alone. Fully cognizant of dynamic plot development within the narrative, he asserts that the discrepancies between Chapters 2 and 6 stem from the distinct stages of a gradually evolving plan for the capture of Jericho. Chapter 2 reflects the human scheme, while Chapter 6 records the Divine plan which supplanted it.²⁹ Accordingly, he acknowledges the disparity between the two accounts but regards it as natural and even inevitable. Our above analysis supports this third approach and obviates the need for the unwarranted assumptions made by the first two readers.

IV. The Weaning Process

Our hypothesis also impacts on our general evaluation of the Israelite mindset during the conquest of Canaan. Instead of waiting for the hand of God to manifest itself, Joshua and the spies took matters into their own hands and actively planned a winning strategy. Even the spies' near capture did not impede the success of their operation and, in fact, may have cemented their relationship with Rahab. That the spies' scheme was never implemented was due only to the subsequent Divine decision to conquer Jericho through supernatural means and not to their impromptu escape.

²⁸ The Lower Critic may respond to this issue by modifying the Biblical text. See note 13 for our discussion of the Septuagint's omission of the location of Rahab's home and the new difficulties it raises.

²⁹ We will subsequently explain why God replaced the human plan despite its potential for success. The alternative possibility, that the foiling of the spies' plans compelled the Divine intervention, fails to account for the hanging of the scarlet cord outside the walls. For a somewhat crude version of the latter approach, see Yair Zakovitch, "Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2," in Susan Niditch (ed.), *Text and Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 75-96. Zakovitch, amused by what he perceives as the comical inefficiency of the spies, uses this chapter as evidence for the existence of humor, albeit subtle, in the Bible.

Two final questions remain: Why did God choose to overrule the carefully crafted plans of man? And why did He not at least divulge His intentions to intervene miraculously in the conquest of Jericho before the spies went through all of their trouble?

Evidently, entering the Land of Israel created a tension between two contrasting principles. On the one hand, God sought to wean the Israelites away from their child-like dependence on God and the ubiquitous miracles He performed on their behalf throughout the forty years in the desert.³⁰ This mandated that the Israelites plan to conquer Canaan without knowing that, ultimately, God would supernaturally intercede.

At the same time, it was vital that God work His wonders alone, without human participation. God's overt display of his power achieved three fundamental objectives. It led to increased Israelite recognition of God's greatness,³¹ an acknowledgment of Joshua's potent leadership skills, and the instilling of a genuine fear of God and His people in the hearts of the Canaanite enemy.³²

Thus, it seems that God wanted the Israelites to prepare for normal modes of warfare in anticipation of their shift to the natural order, but simultaneously wished to establish that Divine providence will always protect Israel through supernatural means. By revealing His battle plan only at a later stage, He maximized the potential gains and satisfied both aspects of the dialectic above.

And our battle plan? As bold and challenging readers, we overcome the proclivities of the omniscient and passive readers, allowing us to emerge with a greater appreciation of both the glories of God and the machinations of man.

³⁰ The cessation of the manna supply, almost immediately after they entered the land, also symbolized this change. See 5:12, "On that same day, when they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. The Israelites got no more manna; that year they ate of the yield of the land of Canaan."

³¹ It also prevented the human impulse to assume that their own power created victory. The capital punishment administered to Achan for taking from the booty of Jericho underscored the principle that to God belonged the spoils, as He was responsible for the victory.

³² The miraculous crossing of the Jordan elicited similar responses. See 4:14 and 4:24.

The Salt Saga: Lot's Wife or Sodom Itself

Yehuda Sarna

In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), the reader takes interest in and follows the fate of several characters: the hospitable, hesitant Lot; the scornful sons-in-law; the empowered, compassionate angels; Lot's daughters, whom he willingly offers to the Sodomite mob; the humanistic Abraham, watching sympathetically from afar. All these characters play key roles in either pushing the story onward or bringing out moralistic themes, and are woven in and out of the narrative.

The one figure who stands alone in this respect is Lot's wife. In one quick verse, she is introduced into the scene and then quickly vanishes from it: ותבט אשתו מאחרי ותהי נציב מלח (Gen. 19:26). Yet, despite her so limited appearance, no reader retells the story without her: the bold image of a salted woman, frozen in a horrified gaze, obtrudes in the reader's mind as a magical symbol of justice. This image, however, may be based on a problematic textual reading. In the following essay, I attempt to show how this classical interpretation of the words ותהי נציב מלח of 19:26 should be rejected in favor of a creative alternative to be here explained.

I. Three Questions

1. Unjust Punishment

Several difficult questions surround and penetrate the story of Sodom and Lot's wife. The first difficulty emerges upon consideration of Lot's wife being punished for such a trivial disobedience of the angels' command, being punished for such a trivial disobedience of the angels' command, אל תביט אחריך (Gen. 19:17). Many commentators attempt to justify God's punishment by expanding her sin far beyond what appears in the biblical text. Josephus, for example, in *The Jewish War*, seeks to magnify her sin by describing her as overly curious and as continually looking back towards the city (4.8.4).¹ *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* (25) interprets that her life is taken because she

¹ Cf. T. J. Franxman, *Genesis and 'The Jewish Antiquities' of Flavius Josephus* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), p. 145: "Josephus seems to wish to make the divine penalty meted out to Lot's wife somewhat less harsh by making her do what was forbidden more than once and out of the idleness of curiosity."

gazes at the divine presence that had descended to destroy the city.²

In a more contemporary article in *Commentary*, Rebecca Goldstein offers an opposite explanation: Lot's wife warranted the death penalty simply for disobeying God's word, no matter how seemingly insignificant the sin.³ Besides from the most apparent difficulty in this approach, namely that not every act of disobedience in OT is met with the death penalty, there is yet another: Lot too seems to transgress the instructions of the angels.

The angels first "press" Lot to leave in 19:15, yet are not met with compliance. Lot "hesitated" and God has the angels physically drag him out of the city only "because of God's mercy upon him." This justification for Lot's salvation implies that by the strict legal measure, Lot should have perished for his disobedience. Again, in 19:17, the angel commands Lot, "ויהי כהוציאם אתם, החוצה ויאמר המלט על נפשך אל תביט אחרך ואל תעמד בכל הכר ההרה המלט פן תספה." Although the reader is well aware of the urgency being expressed in the words of the angel, Lot's reaction in 19:18-21 seems to ignore it, as he dallies in the Plain in which he was told not to remain:

And Lot said to them: Oh no, my masters. Behold your servant has found favor in your eyes, and the mercy with which you acted towards me was abundant, to keep me alive, but I cannot flee to the mountain, lest the evil cling to me and I die. Behold, that city is close enough to flee there and it is small; let me flee there—it is such a little place—and my life will be saved.

Lot commits two sins here worthy of punishment: (1) his blunt refusal to leave the plain (which is blatantly contrary to the instructions of the angels), and (2) his hesitance.⁴ Ignoring the former for now, let us consider Lot's wordiness and verbosity. In the verses cited above, Lot prefaces his request with an exclamatory rejection of what the angels had said, a record of the angels' favor for him, and a history of this favor.⁵ Seforno on 19:16 points out that Lot, "כיון, שהיה מאחר ומתעכב אחר הזהרת המלאכים היה ראוי להיות נספה." Lot stands in

² Gerald Friedlander, ed., *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer' with Introduction, Translation and Annotation* (New York: Hermon Press, 1965), p. 186.

³ Rebecca Goldstein, "Looking Back at Lot's Wife," *Commentary* 94 (1992), p. 38.

⁴ It is interesting to note that the Masoretic musical reading notation on the word "he delayed," is a *shalshet*, a rare and extended series of notes, emphasizing his delay.

⁵ Lot's behavior is characteristic "of the city-dwellers' way of life; they feel more secure in the city (v. 14) and only with great difficulty tear themselves from their fixed residence and property." Cf. John J. Scullion, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), p. 303.

⁶ Avraham Darom and Ze'ev Gottlieb, eds., in Mordechai Leib Katzenelenbogen (ed.), *Chumash Torat Chaim* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1986), p. 229.

violation of the divine command, yet continues to walk; his wife, in contrast, does not.⁷

Furthermore, it seems Lot's transgression warrants punishment more than that of his wife; the danger of being consumed or swept up in the destruction of the city is presumably more intense while they are still in or just outside the city, where Lot hesitates. His wife, however, looks back only after Lot has come to Zo'ar and the plain is destroyed.⁸ Thus, it is quite difficult to suppose that Lot's wife was punished while Lot was spared.

2. The confounding description of punishment

This brings us to our second question, and that is how exactly the narrative wishes the reader to envision Lot's wife "turning into salt." Here, two options present themselves, yet both are escorted by serious questions. The "external" approach, as we shall refer to it, claims that the salt which was being strewn over Sodom caught up with Lot's wife because she slowed (or stopped) to gaze back at the city. This approach can be found in two variations: 1) Bekhor Shor sees Lot's wife being smothered by a blanket of salt, similar to a snowstorm,⁹ and 2) J. D. Wiseman has her being overtaken by a sulfur cloud which came over Sodom.¹⁰ In fact, the angel's warning supports such an approach; "lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city" seems to imply that the sinner would be included in the same punishment.

The difficulty here is twofold. First, as we already noted, Lot and his family had already come to Zo'ar, a city which the angel promises he will not harm: "Behold, I will grant you this favor too, not to overturn the city concerning which you have spoken."¹¹ Ibn Ezra quotes Deut. 29:22 as a proof

⁷ Although one may counter that Lot eventually obeyed the angels, this is irrelevant, since the sin was not "remaining in the city," but delaying his exit from it.

⁸ Presumably, when verse 23 states that "Lot came to Zo'ar," it refers equally to his family. Compare to verse 16, "and they [the angels] brought him out, and placed him outside the city."

⁹ *Ad loc.*, in Joseph b. Isaac Bekhor Shor of Orleans (12th century), *Perush al HaTorah: Perushei Rabbi Yosef Bekhor Shor al HaTorah*, introduction and notes by Yehoshafat Nevo (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1994).

¹⁰ J. D. Wiseman, "Lot," *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986), 172.

¹¹ To consider an alternative, it is possible that the promise only applies to the הפכה ("overturning"), but not to being covered with salt; Zo'ar would not be overturned, but it would be blanketed by salt, allowing for Lot's wife to be included in the salt punishment. In other words, there are two stages, the overturning and the blanketing. One may see the הפכה as only occurring in v. 25, which states, "And He overturned these cities," leaving the "rain" of fire, brimstone, and salt as finishing blows. This cannot be, though; since the הפכה occurs in the verse following the rain. One may posit the following sequence of events: the introductory description of fire and brimstone, the הפכה, and the concluding salt blanket, only the final one affecting Zo'ar. This approach would not seem to fit with Deut. 29:22, though: "Brimstone and salt, burning throughout the land, it shall neither be planted nor

that the city was not destroyed, since only four out of the five cities of the plain are mentioned, Zo'ar being the lone exception. Second, verse 26 states, "and his wife looked מאחרי," literally, "behind him."¹² This implies that rather than being caught trailing behind Lot and his two daughters, Lot's wife was in fact *ahead* of him. Nachmanides paints Lot as "walking behind them, 'gathering' his entire household, hurrying them to flee." With this picture in mind, it is difficult (though not entirely inconceivable) to imagine how Lot's wife could be consumed without her husband. In short, if Lot's wife would have been consumed, so would have either Lot or Zo'ar, neither of which is the case.

In defense, there are two unattractive options. The first, proposed by Radak, is to reread the verse to say "and Lot's wife, behind him, looked." Speiser rejects this option on the basis that the verb רתבט, i.e. "looked," alone does not imply direction, and is always accompanied by a term supplying that information.¹³ Speiser offers another interpretation, that the text has been corrupted and originally read מאחריה, i.e. "behind her."¹⁴ Although this is the anticipated meaning of the verse, it is no simple task to argue in favor of text corruption.

The second approach, what we term "internal," posits that the narrative portrays an actual metamorphosis, not merely a saline onslaught from the exterior. The internal approach escapes the literary problems posed according to the first, since it is conceivable that Lot's wife, standing ahead of Lot, could turn into salt without Lot or the city Zo'ar being affected. Metamorphoses, argues Brevard Childs, are not unheard of in the OT.¹⁵ He cites two other examples: the snake in the Garden of Eden, whom God "changes" from a walking serpent to a slithering one (Gen. 3:14), and the giants, who are the offspring of the illicit affair between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of man" (6:4). These two precedents, however, represent a type of metamorphosis quite different than that

grow any vegetation, nor shall grasses rise from it, as the *hafekha* of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, which God overturned in His wrath and anger." There, the salt appears between the brimstone and the burning (which is presumably equivalent to Genesis' fire), which would work against any proposal of the salt coming at a separate stage.

¹² This is the understanding common among the medieval commentators; cf. Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Nachmanides.

¹³ E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, in the Anchor Bible series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), p. 141.

¹⁴ This second option is adopted by J.J. Scullion, who translates "but his wife looked behind her," in *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 158. Some commentators gloss over the inconsistency. The New JPS translation has: "Lot's wife looked back" (*Tanakh* [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1974/1985]).

¹⁵ Brevard J. Childs, "The Etiological Tale Re-examined," *VT* 24 (1974), pp. 388-397.

of Lot's wife; the subjects mutate, their nature is altered, not exchanged for one which is totally foreign, as is humanness for stone.

A possible precedent might be found in Exodus 4:3-4 and 7:9-11, where a wooden staff turns into a snake and back to a staff again. The metamorphosis in that instance, however, seems to integrate better into the theme of the entire plague account: God shows Pharaoh that He is the true Ruler by changing nature in front of his very eyes. In the case of Sodom, the metamorphosis protrudes noticeably.¹⁶ Though the singularity of a narrative resulting from a given interpretation does not necessarily disqualify the interpretation, it certainly does beg the interpreter to take a step back and reevaluate his position.

3. No Mention of Salt

A morbid hallmark of the Dead Sea Plain is the abundant presence of salt. It is fitting that the divine decimation of Sodom should include the "final touch" of being invested with salt, a mineral that prevents any further agricultural activity in the area. Sarna notes that "in the ancient Near East, a site was strewn with salt as a mark of eternal desolation in punishment for disloyalty and a breach of a treaty."¹⁷ For example, Abimelech uses this finishing blow after having conquered Shechem, as is told in Judges 9:46, "and he planted it with salt."¹⁸

Furthermore, Tanakh uses Sodom as a paradigm of destruction, and mentions salt as a defining trait. For example, Deuteronomy 29:22 compares the fate of the land of Israel if the Jews do not heed God's laws: "גפרית ומלח שרפה" כל ארצה לא תורע ולא תצמח ולא יעלה בה כל עשב כמפהכת סדם ועמרה אדמה וצביים אשר הפך ה' באפו ובחמתו." Similarly, Zephaniah's prophecy to the nations also features salt as a devastating element, as "Moab will be like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah, a land overrun with weeds, a salt mine, desolate

¹⁶ There is a popular "human-to-stone" motif in Greek mythology. J.J. Scullion cites several examples: the "Earthshaker" turned the ship of the Phaiakans to stone (*Odyssey* 13:159-64), the serpent who devoured the sparrow turned to stone (*Iliad* 2:319), the son of Kronos, who "made stones out of the people" (*Iliad* 24:611), and Niobe turned into a stone which shed tears every summer (*Metamorphoses* 6). However, Scullion's attempt at normalizing the metamorphosis of Lot's wife actually has the opposite effect: what should be emphasized is not the commonness of this motif in Greek mythology, but its absence in the OT. See *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers*, p. 160.

¹⁷ N. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 138.

¹⁸ Through a comparison to non-biblical texts of the same era, Stanley Gevirtz argues that salting a city was a means of purifying it before consecration to a deity ("Jericho and Shechem," *VT* 13 [1963], 52-62).

forever" (2:9). It is indeed ironic that the area that is described earlier in Genesis 13:11 as "entirely lush . . . like the garden of God" ends up being a dry salt mine. Sodom is notoriously and justifiably associated with its saltiness.

It is nothing short of perplexing, then, that there is no reference at all to the land being smitten with salt, at least according to the classical interpretation we began with. It is merely stated that "God rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire . . . and He overturned these cities and the entire plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the earth" (Gen. 19:24-25). The only mention of the mineral is where Lot's wife is punished for looking back by being turned into a "pillar of salt."¹⁹ We now move to an alternative reading of the verse, one that is better equipped to deal with the difficulties raised thus far.

II. The Alternative: the City, not the Wife

These three difficulties, however, can be avoided if an alternative approach is adopted. Three medieval commentators, Gersonides,²⁰ Bachyay,²¹ and Hizkuni,²² all offer the same creatively simple understanding, steering the salt verse away from its classic interpretation. Bachyay and Hizkuni are brief, offering only one line: "And Lot's wife looked behind her, and it, *the entire land*, became a pillar of salt, as it says (Deut. 29:22) "Brimstone and salt, burning through the entire land."²³ Gersonides elaborates, claiming that the "strength of the burning renewed salt there," basing his scientific claim on a cryptic *Sefer Ha'Otot*. All scientific criticisms aside, the interpretive value of this position deserves full explication.

¹⁹ One may try to dismiss this difficulty by saying that the salting of the city can be inferred; the angels warn Lot that if he turns around, "תספה בעון העיר" (19:15). Since Lot's wife turns to salt after looking behind her, it can be inferred that the city too had turned to salt. In response, it may be that the verse merely refers to the same general punishment of the city, i.e. death. Even if the former reading were accepted, it is still difficult that the hallmark of the destruction, the eternally devastating saline blanket, does not merit explicit mention in the text.

Radak here posits that "ואף על פי שלא נזכר בהמטרה, עם הגפרית היה מלח." This merely creates a larger question: why, then, is it not mentioned?

²⁰ Yaakov Leyb Levi, ed., *Perush Hatorah LeRabbeinu Levi Ben Gershom*, Vol. 1: Genesis (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1992), pp. 128-129.

²¹ C. D. Chavel, ed., *Rabbeinu Bachyay: Be'ur 'al HaTorah*, Vol. 1: Genesis (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1966), p. 184.

²² Commentary edited by C. D. Chavel, in *Torat Chaim: Chamisha Chumshei Torah*, Mordechai Leb Katzenelenbogen, ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1986), p. 232.

²³ Bachyay and Hizkuni insert the word ארץ, "land," which is feminine and fits the feminine verb ותהי, "and it became." There are a few other possibilities which are in the same interpretive spirit as the Hizkuni, such as כנר, "plain," אדמה, "earth," and עיר, "city," all of which are found in the preceding verse. The term ארץ הכנר is mentioned in the following verse and is also feminine.

Let us envision it: Lot's wife gazes back to see what has become of her hometown, and is suddenly struck with a powerful image of desolation. Her gaze is contrasted with Abraham's:

(26) And Lot's wife looked behind him, and behold [*the land*] became a pillar of salt

(27) And Abraham awoke early in the morning, [and he returned] to the place where he has stood in communion with the Face of God.

(28) And he gazed upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and upon all the land of the Plain, and he saw, *behold the smoke of the land rose like the smoke of a furnace*.

There is much room for speculation regarding why the salt impresses Lot's wife and the smoke Abraham. It may be a matter of sheer proximity; Abraham, standing high on the Judean mountain range sees only (or mostly) the rising of the smoke and is not close enough to perceive the salt. Alternatively, perhaps what shocks Lot's wife is the *permanence* of the destruction, classically symbolized by the salt.²⁴ Abraham, who had asked to spare not only the righteous, but also even the entire city because of them, is struck by the *totality* of the destruction; everything, "the entire plain" was reduced to ash like in a furnace. We now approach a clearer understanding of Lot's wife's function in the narrative: she brings the destruction, seemingly distant and arguably just, a personal perspective, one that deserves our attention.

One fascinating way in which this interpretation affects the rest of the narrative is in understanding the word נִצִּיב, usually translated here as "pillar." Everywhere else in OT, without exception, the word נִצִּיב means "fort," "stronghold," or "garrison." For example, twice in Chron. it refers to kings establishing נִצִּיבִים, forts, in lands which they conquered (I Chron. 18:13, II Chron. 17:2).²⁵ Thus, when Lot's wife turns back to see the city which she remembered as a bustling demographic and economic center, overflowing with agricultural produce, she is met with the image of a cold, menacing, eternally desolate stare of city walls covered in (or composed of) salt.²⁶ The glance of

²⁴ See Deut. 29:22 and especially Zeph. 2:9. Salt is used in several places as a symbol of permanence or eternity. God promises Aaron a "covenant of salt," connoting that it would be everlasting (Num. 18:19). See also II Chron. 13:5 regarding the salt covenant between God and the Davidic dynasty.

²⁵ I Chron. 18 bears several parallels to Sodom and Gomorrah – the Valley of Salt, the term נִצִּיבִים, and David's acting in accordance with צדק ומשפט, literally "righteousness and justice" – which all point to some connection, though the matter must be investigated further.

²⁶ I do not wish to engage in the question of how the destruction occurred physically, only how the story is portrayed as occurring. The text says that God rained "brimstone and fire" but makes no mention of how exactly the salt appeared. I assume here that the salt too came from the heavens, though it is certainly plausible otherwise. It may be that in addition to contrasting Lot's wife and Abraham, the text is contrasting the fire and brimstone on the one hand, which came from the

hope is dutifully debunked, and there is no chance of return to the city guarded by salt. Furthermore, one may sense an ironic touch here; Lot's family, as Sodomites, who felt "more secure in the city and only with great difficulty tear themselves from their fixed residences," must now bear witness to the disintegration of city walls which they thought could protect them against all. Lot's sons-in-law mocked him when he tried to convince them to leave. The all-powerful Sodom has fallen in battle to the mighty and righteous God.²⁷ The fort has fallen.

According to this, all three aforementioned questions can be dealt with easily. The hallmark of Sodom, the eternally decimating effects of salt, is explicitly mentioned and bears symbolic significance. God does not mete out an unjust death sentence upon Lot's wife merely for gazing behind her.²⁸ There are no contradictions in how the narrative wishes the audience to perceive the destruction as occurring. Finally, the account does not include the biblically anomalous element of human-to-stone metamorphosis.

There are, however, several questions that arise even according to Gersonides' approach. If Lot's wife does not actually suffer the same fate as the Sodomites, why does she vanish from the story? Lot and his daughters continue on from Zo'ar and make their way up the mountain range; why does she not follow? If she does follow, how likely is it that she stands idly and silently by while her daughters proceed to drink their father silly and commit incestuous relations?

There are, in turn, several directions one could take. First, one could argue that in fact Lot's wife ascends to Zo'ar and is present throughout the incest, yet remains noticeably silent. This is not the first time that she keeps her silence while severe moral decay rots in the family. Earlier in the story, Lot offers the Sodomite mob his two daughters in exchange for it not harming three strangers whom he had never met before. Where is her protestation? Where is her sense of family values? Could she stand idly by as her husband willingly tossed her two precious pearls to the mob? This line of argumentation has brought us to a very interesting portrait of Lot's wife, induced entirely from silence. It may also be that she remains silent because she actively supports the

heavens, and the salt, which was a result of metamorphosis or some natural phenomenon on ground level.

²⁷ According to the interpretation I have chosen, it seems most fitting to insert the term עיר, as discussed in footnote 23. Alternatively, one could argue that ארץ or כר should be inserted to contrast with the earlier description of Sodom and Gomorrah as being "entirely lush . . . like the garden of God" (Gen. 13:11).

²⁸ One may still view Lot's wife, along with Lot and his two daughters, as being punished with exile for living in a corrupt community, but this could hardly be considered unjust.

incest; she is beyond childbearing age, and concedes that incest may be the only way for humanity to continue.

Alternatively, Gersonides argues that, although Lot's wife did not turn to salt, she was killed for disobeying the angels' command. If she had survived, the narrative would have continued to follow her. According to this suggestion, the role of Lot's wife in the narrative is actually quite similar to that suggested by the classical approach: she is there to give closure to the angels' warning not to look back.

To consider a third option, it is possible to interpret Lot's wife's gaze not as motivated by mischievous curiosity, but by concern and hope, to view her character not as devoid of family morality, but as motherly tender. Rashbam and Nachmanides both point to the probability that Lot had sons and daughters who remained in the city, and claim that because of this, the angel warns them not to look back, as they would be tempted to determine the fate of their loved ones (19:17). While the firestorm and virulent upheaval are enough to convince Lot and his daughters of the unfortunate fate of the rest of their family, his wife—the inconsolable mother of children who remained in the city—refuses to accept this. It may be for this reason that she chooses to remain in Zo'ar, close to the other cities, despite her husband's fear (19:30). The narrative wishes to explain why Lot's wife does not mount the hills with the rest of the family: she turns around, looks and lingers. The scene shifts to Abraham on the mountain, then to Lot and his daughters in the cave, leaving the image of a mother, locked in concern, in the plain.

This final option gives us the opposite picture of Lot's wife as proposed by the first. Here, Lot is the one morally unfit: he offers his daughters to a hungry mob without a moment's consideration; he abandons hope of other members of his family surviving; and then he runs up to a cave to drink himself out of misery. His wife, however, waits for the four toasted cities to cool down before she can begin to turn over the salted rubble of her old home. Thus, Lot's wife plays quite a significant role in developing the theme of family (im)morality by being contrasted to Lot.

III. Conclusion

As has been shown from this textual analysis, it seems improbable that it is the narrative's intention to describe Lot's wife as actually turning to salt. The anomaly of metamorphoses in the OT, the lack of reference of the actual location being strewn with salt (though salt is Sodom's hallmark), the ring of injustice in such a severe punishment for a meager crime, and the difficulty even

of conceiving what the text purports to have happened to Lot's wife are all factors which work in favor of Gersonides' reading. The literary implications of this approach can be sensed in the various emerging portraits of Lot's wife, a character whose limited appearance leaves a lasting impression.

A Defeat in Victory: Isaiah's First Chapter

Chaim Strauchler

I The Problem

The sixth chapter of Isaiah seems to be the typical prophetic introduction. God asks for a man to send to the Jewish people (6:7), and Isaiah eagerly replies in the following verse, "send me." Couched in a larger prophecy in which Isaiah describes the heavenly court, this mission on its surface would appear to be Isaiah's first. The only difficulty with this straightforward explanation is that chapter six is not chapter one. Five chapters of prophecy appear before the words "and it was in the year of King Uzziah's death" (Isaiah 6:1).

Two approaches to deal with this problem arise: 1) The sixth chapter was not actually Isaiah's first prophecy. 2) Although the sixth chapter was actually his first prophecy, five chapters were placed before it because of editorial considerations.¹ The basic issue distinguishing between these two options is the chronological issue: we must determine if chapter one historically predated chapter six and the chapters proceed in the expected chronological

¹ This question has been discussed by many generations of exegetes. The Rabbis in Mekhilta, Beshalah, §7, say that the chapters are in fact achronological. This position is adopted by Rashi (1:1), R. Isaiah of Trani (6:8), Ibn Kaspi (6:8), R. Joseph Kara in his comments at the end of chap. 6, and cited by Radak both in his introduction to the book of Isaiah and in his comments on 6:8. On the other hand, R. Eliezer of Beaugency (1:1), Radak (6:1), and Ibn Ezra (6:1) argue that the chapters are in proper chronological order.

Modern scholarship overwhelmingly prefers the possibility of achronology here. J. Milgrom, "Did Isaiah Prophecy During the Reign of Uzziah?" *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 164-182, writes that "all commentaries, to our knowledge, ancient and modern, are in agreement that ch. vi represents Isaiah's call to prophetic office...." He modifies this slightly in n. 2 there, and says that "we are aware of only one scholar who demurs, M. M. Kaplan ["Isaiah 1-11," *JBL* 46 (1926), 251-259], concurred with by Kaufmann, [Toledot Ha-Emunah Ha-Yisraelit, vol. III (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Mosad Bialik, 1955), p. 206f. and p. 176 n. 4]." We may add two more scholars who demur: M. Tsvat, "Isaiah 6," in B. Z. Luria (ed.), *Kovetz Mehkarim Be-Mikra, Be-Yedi'ot Ha-Aretz, Be-Lashon, U-Ve-Sifrut HaTalmudit, Mugash le-Rav Zalman Shazar* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1973), and A. Kaminka, in his *Mehkarim Be-Mikra U-Ve-Talmud U-Ve-Sifrut Ha-Rabbanit* (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1938-1951), 189ff. Milgrom himself offers a middle position, suggesting that only the first 9 verses of chap. 1 are achronologically placed.

order. If it does not, we must look for logical motivations which would have prompted its placement at the beginning of the book Isaiah.

The point of departure for this investigation is ascertaining the year in which chapter 6 took place. The book of Isaiah gives us the historical context for chapter six in its first line, "In the year of Uzziah's death, I saw...." I must prove that the events in chapter one occurred after Uzziah's death in c. 740 BCE² to show that it could not have chronologically preceded chapter six.

Chapter one begins with a verse that sets the chronological bounds for the entire book. Introducing the prophet Isaiah, the first verse relates that he prophesied "on Jerusalem and Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah." Thus, the text limits Isaiah's prophecy to these four reigns, which range from 792 to 691 BCE.

However, the date of chapter 1 itself remains shrouded in mystery. No explicit date or reference to any king appears in the remainder of the chapter. The possibility exists that no historical context accompanies this prophecy, because it was a generic warning to the people delivered at many points through Isaiah's career.³ However, by examining the military and political events as well as religious and spiritual faults described within the chapter, it seems that we can establish the approximate date to which the prophecy refers, thus implying that it was in fact grounded in specific events.

II The Date of Chapter 1

After describing the people's rebellion against God, Isaiah describes a desolate land in verses 7-9. Only Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion, remains unconquered.

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned by fire, as for your land strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as though overthrown by strangers. (Isaiah 1:7)

The verse speaks of a time when enemies have devastated the land and now enjoy the land's harvest. To date chapter one, we must identify the foreign invasion that it describes. Nowhere in the Bible is an invasion recorded in the 792-740 time frame that would allow us to place the events in chapter one chronologically before those in chapter six. However, scouring through the

² Cf. S. J. de Vries, "Chronology of the OT," *IDB* 1.593; contrast M. Cogan, "Chronology," *ABD* 1.1010, who dates his death to 733.

³ This possibility is found in a number of the medieval commentators; cf. Radak, Abarbanel, and R. Eliezer of Beaugency.

three reigns following the death of Uzziah, we find three times when enemy forces overran Judah.

Option 1: The Syro-Ephraimite War

The first instance of destruction during Isaiah's prophetic period dates to the reign of Ahaz, in c. 734. Peqah, king of Israel, and Retzin, king of Aram, besieged Jerusalem (II Kings 16:5-8). Ahaz was forced into alliance with Assyria to defend against these attackers. The extent of the destruction is unclear, but the descriptions of Judah's losses in battle are horrifying.

Peqah the son of Remalyahu slew in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, who were valiant men; because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers.

(II Chronicles 28:6)

Thus, we might suggest dating chapter 1 to the reign of Ahaz.⁴ However, this approach has many difficulties. Verse seven depicts a desolate land and foreign nations that control the land. Considering that it was Peqah, king of Israel, who led Aram to battle with Judah, the prophet would not emphasize the "strangeness" of the occupying force by mentioning the word *ר* twice in the verse.⁵

Additionally, II Kings describes that as a result of the Aram-Israel invasion, Eilat alone was permanently removed from Judean control (II Kings 16:6).⁶ II Chronicles mentions a more substantial attack, which includes the attacks of the Edomites and the Philistines, as well as the capture of Ayalon, Giderot, Shocho, Timneh and Gimzo (II Chronicles 28:17-18). However, even with II Chronicles' larger description of defeat, the enemy only captured a few frontier cities, and presumably there was limited impact on daily life in Judah. It

⁴ A. Dillman, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (Leipzig: 1890), who says that the Aramean-Israelite invasion during the reign of Ahaz matches the description in Isaiah's first chapter. Yehoshua Gitay, *Isaiah and his Audience: The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah 1-12* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991) also espouses this view, in order to unify chapters 1-12 into one theme. Isaiah first describes the cause of the Syro-Ephraimite siege in chapter 1 and then develops the prophetic-theological approach to Ahaz's political orientation in the following chapters.

⁵ Cf. G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, I-XXXIX* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1912), p. 13, who points this out.

⁶ In the MT's version, Aram captured only Eilat. This would seem improbable because Eilat, the southern-most city under Judean control, would not be the sole, or first, victim of an attack by Aram from the north. (John Gray, *I & II Kings* [London: SCM Press LTD, 1970], 632, claims that the 'ר' in *אֲרָם* should actually be a 'ד,' changing the nation from Aram to Edom, which solves this problem.)

certainly cannot be said that these losses left Judah with only one uncaptured fortress, like "a booth in a vineyard" (Isaiah 1:8).

Option 2: The Exile of Israel

An alternative attack to consider in dating chapter 1 of Isaiah is the destruction of Samaria and the exile of the ten tribes in 722—during the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign (II Kings 18:9-12). This view is espoused by R. Joseph Kara, but although this campaign indeed presents us with a significant foreign invasion, it fails to account for many important details in the chapter. It is true that Israel's defeat and the land's subsequent resettlement receive special attention in II Kings, specifically chapter 17, which describes how Israel's sins prompted God to supplant them with foreign settlers. However, the destruction was limited to the ten tribes and did not extend to Judah. No mention of a siege of Jerusalem by Sargon exists.⁷

Moreover, v. 10's attack on "the officers of Sodom" relates to the metaphor in the previous verse that equates the destruction to that of Sodom. In v. 10, Isaiah can only chastise Judah, because they alone remain to hear his words. If the metaphor to Sodom remains consistent, then the scope of destruction in v. 9 can only refer to a destruction within Judah and not the now-defunct ten tribes.⁸

Additionally, although this is more tenuous, it seems that when speaking to "Judah and Jerusalem," it would be inappropriate for Isaiah to describe the attack as "your land is destroyed" (Isaiah 1:1, 1:7). While it is true that there are a number of examples in which the fate of Israel is invoked to scare Judah into repenting,⁹ this example is more extreme: the land destroyed is called "yours." Since throughout II Kings and in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Israel is used to contrast Judah and serves as an example not to be followed,¹⁰ it would seem strange to refer to Israel as one with Judah.¹¹

⁷ See T.K. Cheyne, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*, (London: A. & C. Black, 1895), p. 3.

⁸ R. Joseph Kara (Isaiah 1:9) explains that the vision of a greater unified Jewish people now broken apart may be alluded to in the vision of Isaiah: "If God had not left a small remnant, we would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9). One could claim that God left the entire tribe of Judah as a "remnant" after Israel's exile, but this seems improbable because of the considerations just delineated. Abarbanel on v. 5 says that the question "על מה תבין עוד תוסיפו סרה" means, "What do you want Me to do? Should I destroy Judah, as well?"

⁹ See for example Jer. 31:14, "קול ברמה נשמע," even though Ramah was an Israelite city. See the Targum there, "קלא ברם עלמא אשתמע בית ישראל דבין מותאחר," as well as the comments of Radak: "על עשרת השבטים אמר על דרך משל."

¹⁰ II Kings 17:7, Jeremiah 3:6, and Ezekiel 16:51-58 are good examples of this trend.

¹¹ This topic – the relations between Judah and Israel from Rehoboam until Sennacherib – is a complicated issue. As J. A. Soggin succinctly states, "the two states lived side by side, sometimes as

Option 3: Sennacherib's Invasion of Judea

Partly for lack of a good alternative, and partly because of compelling positive identifications, many scholars have concluded that the events of Isaiah 1 are to be identified with Sennacherib's invasion during Hezekiah's reign, in 701.¹² Occurring in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, this third invasion was the most devastating for Judah, immediately making it our prime candidate for the background of chapter 1. This invasion led by Sennacherib, King of Assyria laid waste to the entire land of Judah except for Jerusalem. According to the Bible's account, only an eleventh-hour miraculous plague spared Jerusalem from impending defeat and exile. According to Assyrian chronicles, Sennacherib called off his invasion at the last moment to pursue battle with Kush and subsequently to address other battles in the north.¹³

Regardless of the explanation for the Assyrian retreat, the entire encounter receives disproportionate attention in both the Bible and the Assyrian records. The extent of destruction parallels the severity of that described in Isaiah; only Jerusalem remained of all the Judean cities.

In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them. (II Kings 18:13)

The narrative in II Kings goes into great detail describing the encounter. Spending several chapters on Sennacherib's taunting messengers and the prayers of the distraught King Hezekiah, it emphasizes the severity of the Assyrian threat to Judah.

In claiming that chapter 1 refers to the events surrounding Sennacherib's invasion, we should note Isaiah's personal role in the II Kings narrative. In II Kings 19:20-34, Isaiah predicts the complete withdrawal of Assyria and counters the Assyrian hubris with a prophecy of divine salvation.

enemies, at other times bound by alliances, until the fall of the North in 722-720" (*An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah* [London: SCM Press, 1993], p. 198). For our purposes, it is sufficient to assert that the two groups of tribes, even if occasionally concurring on a particular issue, were never united again. Thus, a prophecy delivered to Judah containing a reference to Israel's land as "yours" would be unexpected.

¹² That Sennacherib's attack best explains chapter 1 was already recognized by the medieval commentators; see Radak, R. Joseph ibn Kaspi, and Abarbanel. In the 19th century, this view was espoused by both Shadal in the Jewish camp and Cheyne in the academic circles, and has since become the dominant view. See for example Christopher Seitz, "Isaiah, Book of (First Isaiah)," in D. N. Freedman et al. (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 3, pp. 481–482.

¹³ ii 37-iii 49, *ANET*, p. 288.

This is especially striking, because Isaiah's only appearance in Kings is in the context of Hezekiah. Additionally, the entire story is recorded almost verbatim from the Kings account in the book of Isaiah itself (36:1-37:38). Thus, Isaiah's crucial role in the events may begin to explain why this occurrence would be given a prominent place in his composition.

In addition to special attention given to Sennacherib in the Bible, Hezekiah receives unique treatment in the Assyrian chronicles.

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to countless small villages in their vicinity and conquered them.

(Pritchard, 288)¹⁴

In giving the intricate details of their failed attack on Jerusalem, the Assyrians mention a very interesting picture of a besieged Jerusalem:

I drove out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female...Himself (Hezekiah) I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving the city's gate. (Ibid.)

This selection might further bolster our contention that chap. 1 dates to the attack of Sennacherib. It might even be suggested that both Isaiah and the Assyrian chronicler were forced to use similes ("like a booth in a vineyard" and "like a bird in a cage," respectively) to portray the scenario because the strange situation of Hezekiah's tenuous survival could not be described by either's conventional repertoire for military reporting. To portray the significance of a nation trapped alone, victorious in its war for survival and yet physically devastated, both scribe and prophet must unpack poetic tools to create this image in their works of prose.¹⁵ Jerusalem is at once both a cage imprisoning Hezekiah and a lone shelter protecting Judah from the enemy's forces, depending on the perspective of the writer.

¹⁴ Hayim Tadmor, "Milhemet Sanherib be-Yehudah" [Hebrew], *Zion: Sefer HaYovel* (Jerusalem: Israel Historical Society, 1985), p. 75, points out that the Assyrian texts seemingly over-emphasize the extent of destruction inflicted on Judah. Tadmor suggests that this may be because the description of Judah's capitulation lacks one fundamental component found in depictions of other battles: the rebellious king is not killed and his city not captured. The chronicler apparently felt that since he could not record these usual climaxes, he had to emphasize the campaign's other successes by going into great detail.

¹⁵ It is especially significant when we consider that this is the only instance in the entire chronicle that the chronicler resorts to the use of simile or metaphor to describe an event.

The Assyrian chronicles continue to describe the foreign domination of land formerly controlled by Judah:

His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them over to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, King of Ekron, and Sillibel, King of Gaza. (Ibid.)

The description of Assyrian vassal kings taking over parts of King Hezekiah's realm correlates with the portrayal of the situation in verse 7 of chap. 1: ארצכם שממה עריכם שרפות אש אדמתכם לנגדכם זרים אוכלים אתה ושממה כמהפכת זרים. Foreign nations feast on Judah, while the Jews holed up in Jerusalem can do nothing.

Combining the unique description of the lone Jerusalem in both Isaiah and the Assyrian chronicles, Isaiah's personal involvement in the Sennacherib story, and the extent of the destruction as described in the text, the political evidence strongly indicates that Isaiah 1 refers to the Assyrian invasion in the year 701 BCE.

III When was the Prophecy Delivered

Having determined to what event the description in chapter one refers, we must address when that message was delivered. Even if the prophecy refers to Sennacherib's invasion, Isaiah may have presented these words before, after, or during the invasion.¹⁶ If Isaiah, before the death of Uzziah, prophesies the future invasion by Sennacherib, chapter one could chronologically assume a proper position before chapter 6.

IIIa Evidence from the Political Description

The prophet consistently employs the participle throughout the chapter to describe the events, which, without any accompanying verbs, would *a priori* suggest that the prophecy took place shortly after the invasion, while the land remained in a state of destruction. "From the sole of the foot to the head, nothing in it is whole; wounds, bruises, and festering sores; they have not been medicated, bandaged, nor softened with oil" (v. 6) constitutes a medical report soon after battle while national devastation is still fresh. "Your land is

¹⁶ A distinction between the event to which a prophecy refers and the time at which it was delivered has bearing on other parts of the Bible as well. Cf. for example Exodus 12, in which Moses received a prophecy on the first day of the first month (v. 1), and yet in it the Exodus is described as if it already happened: "for on this day I have taken your hosts out of Egypt" (v. 17). Apparently, it was not to be delivered until some date after the Exodus of the 15th of the month.

destroyed, your cities burned with fire" (v. 7), indicates that the land was decimated before the prophet spoke these words.

The objection could be raised, however, that the tense is actually the prophetic past, and that the prophecy was delivered, too, before the destruction took place.¹⁷ To prove that this is not the case, we must make one other point. The use of the metaphor of Sodom here is multifaceted. There is, of course, the implicit reference to the Sodomites as the quintessential sinners. Beyond that, however, the city is invoked in this context to evoke association with the utter destruction of that locale at the hands of God. For the metaphor to work, then, Judah must have already experienced devastation comparable to that experienced by Sodom. Therefore, such a metaphor would only be employed after the destruction of Judah's countryside, when the prophet can properly castigate "the rulers of Sodom" (Isaiah 1:10).¹⁸

¹⁷ R. Eliezer of Beaugency and Abarbanel both interpret v. 7 as "your land *will be* destroyed." In a related exegetical tactic, Ibn Ezra proposes that the imagery is actually only meant as a metaphor.

¹⁸ On the other hand, the claim that this prophecy was delivered before Hezekiah's reign has some advantages as the chapter continues. Some sins of the people enumerated in the chapter may have only existed before Hezekiah's religious reform in 715 BCE. Vv. 29-31, which mention "gardens" and "trees," might insinuate idolatrous practices, and we would not have to reinterpret them as references to dependence on foreign or domestic military power in place of God. The disappearance of idolatry after 715 would make it unlikely that this chapter was recited to the people before then. One further advantage of dating the transmission of this chapter to pre-715 is that the predictions of redemption in the chapter, to appear in the form of a just ruler (vv. 24-27), can take physical form in the personage of Hezekiah. The prophet would then be addressing a more immediate future than if the prophecy is given in Hezekiah's time and we are forced to understand that to the foretold ruler is someone later, perhaps Josiah.

Milgrom, "Did Isaiah Prophecy During the Reign of Uzziah?," splits verses 2-9 of chapter 1 from the rest of the chapter, as mentioned above (n. 1). He explains that these first verses refer to the reign of Hezekiah, and the remainder of the chapter dates to the reign of Uzziah. The central argument for breaking apart the chapter is that it would be unrealistic for Isaiah to promise future bliss at the end of the chapter in the face of such rampant destruction at its beginning. He claims that verses 2-9 were placed at the head of the book to prove that Isaiah was right in his predictions of imminent destruction. Milgrom fails to recognize that in many respects the defense of Jerusalem from Sennacherib could be appreciated as a victory, regardless of the destruction of the countryside. The Russian response to war with Napoleon, in which they were losers in many respects, as seen in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, serves as a useful parallel. Although they were not objectively victorious, they rejoiced in the knowledge that they had caused the destruction of the invincible Napoleon and they could exult in their preservation. In such a culture, Isaiah's rebukes are most appropriate even to describe, as he does in verse 20, further enemy invasion upon the already devastated Judah. In any event, Milgrom's proposal would solve this problem, for the references to idolatry later on would not affect our dating of the beginning of the chapter.

Similarly in this respect, Gray (pp. 3 and 31) and others have suggested that verse 21 begins an elegy on Jerusalem separate from the beginning of the chapter. Again, if we accept such an approach, there would be no need to reconcile the reference to idolatry at the end of the chapter with the historical placement of the first section.

IIIb Religio-Spiritual Evidence

Until now, I have discussed international political evidence to position the prophecy in chapter one; I will now bring religious evidence explicit in the accusations that Isaiah levels against the people in this chapter. While the political evidence may allow for the possibility that the prophecy was transmitted before the actual destruction, the prophet's verbal attacks on the people's sins assure that the delivery postdates the sins themselves: the prophet can not criticize the people for something they have not yet done. The chapter makes reference to a number of sins committed by the people at the time of the prophecy. Verses two through six refer to general rejection of God. The prophet strikingly does not chastise them for idol worship, but rather only for moral depravity.^{19 20}

The specific sins mentioned later in the chapter emphasize the nature of Judah's rebellion. Verses ten through eighteen refer to sins between man and his fellow man. If this prophecy had been given in the time of Ahaz, idolatry would presumably have assumed a more prominent position in the list of sins. In his reign, idolatry was by far the most rampant and serious of sins, especially at the time of Israel's exile (II Kings 17:7-23). The lack of any such admonition compels us to place the transmission of the prophecy at the time when the people worshipped God but still had interpersonal faults whose persistence warranted the people's destruction.²¹

Beyond the lack of reference to idolatry, the references to the improper worship of God (Isaiah 1:10-15) date the delivery of the prophecy to a time when Judah attempted to serve God. The specific mention in verse 12 of "when

¹⁹ Samuel David Luzzatto (*Perush Shadal Al Sefer Yeshayahu* [Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1970], p. 4) challenges those who assume that the rebellion referred to in these verses is idolatry. He explains that perversion of laws such as theft, murder and perversion of justice also constitute rebellion. Nathan rebuked David for his relationship with Bathsheba with the words אפס כי טעף נאצת (II Samuel 12:14), even though David's sin did not involve idolatry. Isaiah himself later rebukes the people for perversion of justice and manipulation, and refers to it as תסוג מאחר אלקינו (59:13).

²⁰ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 111, explains that the trees in the chapter's last three verses need not refer to idolatry, but rather may represent the proud, dominating, and self-sufficient people in the nation. Along these lines, the trees in the context of this chapter may represent reliance on military might or foreign alliances in place of God. The description of Jerusalem's defenses in 22:1 also uses the term גומה to describe the platforms for Jerusalem's protection.

However, even if the last three verses do refer to idolatry, and we accept that they are an integral part of the chapter, I believe that my argument would be valid, since idolatry receives so little attention in this chapter relative to other chapters in Isaiah and other prophets.

²¹ For a similar line of argumentation regarding chap. 2 of Jeremiah, cf. Jacob Milgrom, "The Date of Jeremiah 2," *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 65-69.

you come to appear before me" implies continued adherence to a ritual of appearance before God. Such service would not have taken place in the time of Ahaz, the king who built an Assyrian altar in the Temple.²²

Political and spiritual evidence emerging from the text indicates that Isaiah delivered this prophecy after Hezekiah's reforms and after the Assyrian attack. It describes a people who seek God but fail, because they only recognize His presence in the Temple and not in the market place and the courthouse.²³ Isaiah criticizes them and promises that a new regime will be created to correct these ills (Isaiah 1:24-27). We must, therefore, place the transmission of this prophecy soon after 701 while Sennacherib's destruction loomed large in the eyes of Jerusalem's populace and long after the death of Uzziah in 740.

IV The Message of Chapter 1

Having established that both the events and the transmission of Isaiah's prophecy in chapter six took place at least 39 years before those of chapter one, we must now determine why the later prophecy earns the distinction as the book's leadoff chapter. We must first carefully define the political context and the prophetic message of the first chapter. Only after we understand what the chapter means in its historical context can we suggest an explanation for why such a message would head the book as a whole.

After Sennacherib's attack on Hezekiah, the spiritual reformation that Isaiah had supported collapsed. We can recognize this downward turn by its ultimate consequence, the reign of Manasseh. Manasseh does not emerge from a vacuum. He saw his father's reforms and the failures therein, and decided that he had a better chance of prospering if he simply gave up the religious cause and pursued a course of contrition to the Assyrian war machine by adopting their idols.

²² Even during the reigns of Jotham and Uzziah, the people continued to worship on altars outside the Temple (II Kings 15:3-4, 24-25). While the priests did worship in the Temple, such practices would certainly have detracted from the significance of Temple worship for the common Jew. Only in the times of Hezekiah were these altars removed and central worship in Jerusalem firmly established. The emphasis on "bringing before God" and "God's courtyards" would imply an intense national focus on Temple worship which only existed during the reign of Hezekiah after his religious reform and the destruction of the *במות* (II Kings 17:3-6).

²³ Shadal feels that this criticism is leveled at a specific minister named Shebna (see 22:15) and that the prophecy will be fulfilled later during Hezekiah's reign when Shebna is replaced (Shadal 1:1 p. 3). This seems unlikely, however, because it would be very awkward to place such a specific prophecy at the beginning of the book. Rather, it seems that there is a more general problem with the populace that Isaiah is addressing, and that Shebna, as he appears in chapter 22, is only an example of the problem, not the cause.

Hezekiah had based his efforts on the belief that once the people served God properly in the Temple, they would no longer suffer before their enemies (II Chronicles 29:4-11). After Sennacherib invaded, however, and Judah lay in ruins, the people believed that their reforms had failed. In the wake of Sennacherib's attack, the people began to question why God had subjected them to such devastation despite their aggressive reforms.

Isaiah's work responds to this seeming failure by shifting blame for the Assyrian rampage from God to the people's own moral failings. Isaiah challenges the assumption that God had dealt with the people unfairly in light of their ritual adherence to God's law. He dares the people and their king to go to court and find out who was really just, God or Judah (1:18). Isaiah demands a closer look at the people's spiritual state. The text emphasizes the people's shortcomings in interpersonal relations, while leaving out all reference to idol worship. The point was that the people's focus on ritual had left them blind to their other spiritual obligations. The realization of Judah's faults prompts God's final promise at the chapter's conclusion: when the people fix the social wrongs and truly repent, they will be indestructible. Only when it is a "just city" will it be "a trustworthy metropolis" (Isaiah 1:26).

In essence, Isaiah is fighting a war of perception. The prophet demands that the people recognize the true causes of their devastating losses – their failure to implement social justice. He calls for further spiritual reforms, this time not only looking to the Temple but also at themselves and at their own moral failings.

V The Motivation for the Achronological Sequence

The best explanation for the placement of the chapters out of their chronological order invokes the literary concerns of the author.²⁴ This general way of dealing with the problem has been proposed before. G. Fohrer²⁵ suggests that in a succinct manner the first chapter describes Judah's position in the eyes of God, setting the groundwork for the rest of the book. G. H. A. von Ewald²⁶ termed the chapter "The Grand Arraignment," because it sets up all the accusations that God would level against the people and justifies their punishment. I mean to take these explanations one step further in understanding the chapter not only as an introduction, but also as an introduction that

²⁴ For an alternative, see A. Hakohen, "Seder Ha-nevuot Be-Yeshayah 1-4" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 4 (1988), 55-62, who compares these chapters to Deuteronomy, 1-4, and claims that this comparison dictated this sequence.

²⁵ "Jes 1 als zusammenfassung der Verkündigung Jesajas," *BZAW* 99 (1962), 148-166.

²⁶ Cited by Gray, *ibid.*

emerges from a historical context. The position of Judah described in the chapter is the position of Judah after Sennacherib's attack, and the sins described are those still committed after Hezekiah's reform. From the outset, Isaiah establishes the failure of his career-long efforts to spark true repentance, allowing the rest of the book to supply the evidence and reasons for this failure.

Once we appreciate that this chapter presents Isaiah's explanation for the utter destruction that capped his prophetic term, we can understand why it opens the book. He cites the sins that evoked God's wrath, explains where Hezekiah's reforms fell short, and describes how they could be rectified. This masthead summarizes the spiritual shortcomings of Judah at the end of Isaiah's prophetic career and places them at the beginning of the book to establish a frame of reference from which all subsequent prophecies are to be appreciated.²⁷

This chapter specifically was chosen to lead, and not any of the others that also encapsulate some of the same themes (see below), precisely because of the historical context in which it was spoken. The events of 701 BCE were the culmination of all that Isaiah had been working to prevent for four decades. He consistently warned of impending destruction and spoke of how to remedy the prognosis, but no one listened. This one chapter epitomizes the frustrations that are the result of the work about to be detailed in the succeeding chapters. The message essentially is: here, chapter 1, is all that I wanted you to hear, and here we are, in 701, and you have not heard me and destruction has been wrought. Had you only listened to this one message, all this could have been avoided.

To clarify, I do not wish to suggest²⁸ that every part of the chapter finds a parallel later in the book. Rather, it seems to me that this prophecy was independent in construction – originally just one of the many delivered by Isaiah – but was chosen to lead the book because it epitomizes the one message that Isaiah wants to be sure to convey. Even after all of the prophet's pleading, chastising, and castigating, the people have met destruction at the hands of

²⁷ Recently, another scholar has proposed an explanation along similar lines. Navah Gutman, "Iyunim Be-mivneh Sefer Yeshayahu" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 5 (1988), 79-85, claims that the first chapter serves not only as an introduction, but also as a table of contents for the entire book, setting forth the possibility for destruction and redemption. She explains that verses 1-20 parallel chapters 2-38 in that they present the people with the opportunity to repent. Verses 21-23 parallel chapter 39, which seals the people's fate after the reign of Manasseh. Verses 24-31 then parallel chapters 40-66 that constitute words of solace to the people destined for exile.

While similar to my approach in that it suggests a literary structure to account for the placement of chapter 1 in particular and the organization of the book in general, Gutman's outline fails to take into consideration the first chapter's historical context. A prophecy uttered at the end of Isaiah's reign depicting the failure of all attempts at repentance is not effective as an introduction to a section that permits repentance.

²⁸ As Gutman does.

Sennacherib, and they must understand that the problem was not improper ritual practice, but a failure to act justly towards their fellow man.

Evidence that this message is central to the book, and that this justifies the placement of chapter 1 at the head of the book, can be garnered from sections throughout the following 38 chapters. In 5:18-25, Isaiah attacks the people for gluttony and injustice, promising that for these sins God's anger will be aroused. In 10:1-2, Isaiah targets the failure to deal honestly in business. The theme that Assyria is merely the weapon by which God metes out justice is the essence of chapters 8 and 9, and is found again in 10:5 and 26:20-21. Justice and righteous treatment of the widow and orphan become a refrain that reverberates throughout: 3:5, 5:7, 5:16, 11:4, 26:2-11, 28:16-18, 29:13-14, 32:1-8, 32:16 and 33:5-6. The idea that redemption will be achieved through justice and righteousness, as 1:27 describes, "Zion will be redeemed through justice and those that return to her with righteousness," is revisited in chaps. 11 and 12, and again in 26 and 27.

In the end (that has become the beginning), Isaiah's first chapter sets forth a pitiful panorama of Judah as Isaiah completes his period of prophecy. The people have achieved proper adherence to ritual law but have failed to initiate a society of righteousness and justice. The chapter retrospectively scans the reigns of four kings, analyzing spiritual faults, political errors, and the interface between the two. By looking at past and present sins, the chapter adopts a perspective on future destruction and ultimate redemption, which makes it the perfect masthead for the book. Isaiah justifies God's actions in allowing the Assyrian invasion, recognizing the nation's disbelief, yet responding to them with a call for true repentance that will invite total redemption.

“מה' יצא הדבר” - Perceiving Providence in Genesis 29-32

Reuven Taragin

I) *An Independent Cohesive Unit*

Although the narrative in Genesis 28:10 through 32:2 presents stories that unfold over a period of more than twenty years, it contains no masoretic breaks, but it appears between two that frame it. This paper attempts to highlight the passage's status as an independent unit and reveal the message implied by the relationship between its various stories.

A) *The Frame*

Parallels between the beginning and end of the narrative reinforce the unit's independence. The first narrative relates Jacob's voyage from Canaan on the heels of an angelic dream within which God promises to be with and protect him in exile and eventually return him to Canaan; the last concludes with the ultimate fulfillment of these promises - Jacob's return.¹ The journey back ends like the first one began with Jacob's encounter with angels.²

Additional textual similarities link the conclusion of the narrative to its beginning.³

¹ The relationship between the beginning and end of the passage account for the beginning's repetition of Jacob's departure from Be'er Sheva. Although we are already informed of the trip in 28:5, it is reiterated here as an introduction to the following independent passage, which closes with Jacob's return.

² Based on this parallel and the appearance of angels in both Jacob's departure and his return, the Rabbis claimed that some angels belonged to Canaan and others belonged to the other lands (Genesis Rabbah 68:10; cf. Rashi's comments to 28:12, 32:2-3).

³ Most scholars regard these chapters as part of the "Jacob cycle," spanning from chap. 25 through 36. For them, these parallels are significant, but not as bookends, only as part of a larger chiasmic structure. See for example J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1975), 190-191; M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle," *JJS* 26 (1975), 20 & 29; S. K. Sherwood, *Had God Not Been on My Side* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990), 375. Although not all of the parallelisms to be cited are compelling when viewed individually, the fact that there are at least seven easily recognizable parallels easily compensates for that fact. Also, the observation that the subjects of the verbs are not consistent is irrelevant to our point here, as the effect of the parallels is literary, not thematic. See Fokkelman (*Narrative Art*, 123-196) for a detailed literary analysis of chaps. 29-32. Cf. also W. M. W. Roth, "The Text as the Medium: An Interpretation of the Jacob Stories in Genesis," in M. L. Buss (ed.), *Encounter With the Text: Form*

Chapter 28

(28:10) וילך חרנה

(28:10) וילך שם

(28:11) ויפגע במקום

(28:17) ויאמר...אין זה כי אם בית אלקים

(28:18) וישכם יעקב בבקר

(שם) ויקח את האבן וישם אתה מצבה

(28:19) ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא בית אל

Chapter 31-2

(32:1) ויעקב הלך לדרכו

(31:54) וילינו בהר

(32:1) ויפגעו בו

(32:2) ויאמר ויעקב...מחנה אלקים זה

(31:55) וישכם לבן בבקר

(31:45) ויקח יעקב אבן וירימה מצבה

(32:2) ויקרא שם המקום ההוא מחנים

B) The Picture Within

Within the framework of Jacob's departure from and return to Canaan, the Torah presents five stories that pertain to the interim exile years. Like the opening and concluding portions of the unit, these stories also exhibit a distinct relationship:

A 28:10-24- Jacob's departure & angels

B 29:1-14- Jacob's escape to Laban⁴C 29:15-30- Jacob's labor for his wives⁵

D 29:31- 30:24- The birth of the children

C' 30:25-42- Jacob's labor for money⁶

B' 30:43- 31:55- Jacob's escape from Laban

A' 32:1-2- Jacob's return & angels

The birth narrative's placement at the center of the unit's structure seems strange. How does the birth narrative, which apparently conveys mere technical data, function as the unit's turning point? In addition to expressing Jacob's ability to flourish in exile,⁷ the births also re-define the preceding stories

and *History in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 103-116, and J. G. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," in the same volume, pp. 118-134.

⁴ The story opens with another repetition of Jacob's journey and concludes with Jacob's acceptance of Laban's offer of shelter.

⁵ The beginning of the story is accented by the contrast between 29:14 and 15. In v. 14, Laban seems willing to allow Jacob to reside with him unconditionally. In v. 15, on the other hand, although Laban offers to pay Jacob for the labor he is about to do, Jacob is clearly not welcome to stay as a guest any longer despite his status as family.

⁶ 30:43 serves as a transition from this story to the next.

⁷ This is seen clearly in comparing Jacob's interaction with Laban at the beginning of their relationship as compared to that at the end. In the beginning, he is victimized by the conniving Aramean, whereas at the end it is Jacob who gains the upper hand in his battle with his father-in-law, which climaxes with Jacob's escaping with Laban's two daughters and all his grandchildren, in addition to what Laban still views as his flocks.

and introduce the following ones. This point becomes more evident after a careful study of the birth narrative.

*II) The Birth Narrative***A) Structure**

The birth narrative, like the entirety of the unit, subdivides into two chiastically related sections:⁸

A 29: 31-5- Birth of four children to Leah

B 30: 1-2- Story (Not of birth)

C 30: 3-8- Birth of two children to Rachel's maid

C' 30: 9-13- Birth of two children to Leah's maid

B' 30:14-16- Story (Not of birth)

A' 30:17-24- Birth of four children to Leah/Rachel⁹**B) Message**

Both sections describe God's favoring of one sister and the reaction of the other. The difference between the two sections lies in the sister chosen and the attitudes of each towards her own chosen-ness. In the first section God "opens the womb" of Leah while closing that of Rachel. Leah chooses names for her children that reflect her recognition of and thanks to God for his merciful intervention.¹⁰

⁸ As opposed to the passage as a whole, which forms a chiasmic structure that contains an independent turning-point story between the two sections, the birth story contains merely two parallel sections. There is a significance to this difference between these two structures: in the latter, the two halves are meant to be contrasted on their own, whereas in the former, there is a centerpiece that defines the relationship between the two.

On the birth narrative in general, see D. Amir, "Ha-Mesorot shel Sippur Leidat Bnei Yaakov (Hebrew)," *Beit Mikra* 17 (1972), 220-224, and B. Halevi, "Seder Shemot Shneim Asar ha-Banim be-Sippurei Yaakov," *Beit Mikra* 18 (1973), 494-523.

⁹ Leah's alternative usage of the different names of God in this section reinforces the structure. In the first section she calls God אלקים while in the second she uses the name יי. See n. 15 for an explanation of the switch.

¹⁰ Although clearly Leah's chief benefit from the births is the fact that she will now enjoy a better relationship with her husband, the names are linked to her recognition of the fact that she has received this benefit from the hand of God. The naming of Levi, an exception to this rule, is singled out in an additional way. The naming is introduced with the third person masculine singular perfect, קרא, instead of the feminine imperfect with the *waw* consecutive, ותקרא. See Rashi and the other commentators who deal with this issue.

R. Shimon b. Yochai (bBerakhot 7a) highlighted this point by identifying Leah as the first to offer thanks to God. Cf. G. G. Nicol, "Genesis 29:32 and 35:22a: Reuben's Reversal," *JTS* 31 (1980), 535 n. 1; Amir, "Ha-Mesorot," 222; S. H. Dresner, "Rachel and Leah," *Judaism* 38 (1989), 152-154; and Sherwood, *Had Not God Been on My Side*, 139.

After listing Leah's four births, the narrative depicts Rachel's reaction. Instead of turning to God, the sole granter of children, she assails Jacob. The latter stresses her error by angrily retorting, "התחת אלקים אנכי אשר מנע ממך פרי" (30:2).¹¹ Only after her misplaced complaint does Rachel, presumably begrudgingly, offer her maid in her place.

The second section opens with Leah's realization of the termination of God's providence on her behalf: "ותרא לאה כי עמדה מלדת" (30:9). Hearing this, we expect Rachel to conceive next, but in actuality God does not "hear" her (v. 22) until after He has "heard" Leah (v. 17).¹² One wonders why Rachel is heard so late in the story, and why even when she is heard, she bears only one son, a far lesser share than the six children awarded Leah.

The structure of the narrative, which focuses our attention on the divergent reactions of the two sisters to the same circumstances, explains the inequity. As opposed to Rachel, who offers her maid only as a last resort, after having inappropriately complained to Jacob, Leah immediately presents her maid in her place. Like the first matriarch, Sarah, as soon as Leah realizes her inability to contribute personally, she steps aside, willing to be involved only vicariously in procreation, and not personally. Rachel, though, is more stubborn, unwilling to sacrifice her own good for the good of her husband.

The second story – mandrakes – reinforces this difference between the two. The aphrodisiacal symbolism of the mandrakes aside,¹³ Rachel's sale of a night with Jacob defiles the sanctity of the relationship that begets conception. Nachmanides' appraisal of the mandrakes as fertility flowers attributes new significance to the transaction. Rachel has not yet realized the need to rely on God. There is no reason for Rachel not to utilize the available medicine, but doing so at the expense of a night with her husband reflects once again Rachel's improper value system: she believes that the flowers will help her conceive, but ignores the fact that giving up a night with Jacob guarantees that she will not yet do so.¹⁴

¹¹ The narrative's presentation of Jacob having the last word reflects the correctness of his assertion. Cf. the comments of Radak, *ad loc.*

¹² Fittingly, the Rabbis quote this verse (v. 22) as the source of God's exclusive hold on the "key" of birth: "ויזכר אלקים את רחל וישמע אליה אלקים ויפתח את רחמה" (cf. bTa'anit 2a); fitting because Rachel learned the hard way – from the frustrating failure of all other means.

¹³ Cf. J. M. Sasson, "Love's Roots: On the Redaction of Genesis 30:14-24," in J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (eds.), *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East* (Guilford, Connecticut: Four Quarters, 1987), 205-209. Sasson also claims there that the mandrake episode is the central account in the Jacob cycle.

¹⁴ R. Eliezer summarized the exchange: "הפסידה וזו הפסידה, זו נשתכרה וזו נשתכרה לאה הפסידה וזו הפסידה וזו הפסידה וזו הפסידה" (Bereishit Rabbah 72:2). See also Alshich (30:14). The sarcasm in the phrase "she lost and she lost; she gained and she gained" is

Leah, on the other hand, recognizes God's exclusive role as bearer of the "birth key" and happily exchanges the flowers for an additional night with Jacob and another opportunity to be rewarded by God. And God comes through, as he quickly rewards Leah's faith with three more children – two boys and Dinah. Based on the parallel to the first section and what would seem to be the fair basis of distribution, all four boys should have been born to Rachel; two were given to Leah in recognition of her exemplary faith.¹⁵

Eventually, even Rachel concedes that God, not Jacob or mandrakes, grants children, when at the birth of her first child she beseeches Him for a second. Her request, rooted in her painfully learned lesson, is eventually granted, but at the cost of her life.

C) Role of the Birth Narrative as Turning Point

The message of the birth narrative facilitates the transition from the first to the second section. Despite God's promises to Jacob at the unit's inception, the first section brings Jacob only frustration. Although he safely reaches his destination, his stay with Laban soon turns into interminable work on behalf of a wife he does not immediately receive. The reader cannot help but wonder how God allowed such a thing – what happened to the protection promised?

Only after Leah's influence is felt does Jacob finally recognize God's providence. Once Jacob recognizes that God is pulling the strings, he merits more explicit help on the part of God, first in the form of the angel who assists Jacob in outsmarting Laban and finally by personally intervening to secure Jacob's escape.

manifest when followed by the explanation that the equation is between the loss (and gain) of mandrakes with the gain (and loss) of tribes.

Fuller developments of Rachel's character in Genesis can be found in A. Steinsaltz, "Rachel," in his *Biblical Images* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 49-54, and J. Z. Abrams, "Rachel: A Woman who Would be a Mother," *Dor LeDor* 18 (1989), 213-221, esp. 217-218.

¹⁵ Seforno hints at the distinction between Rachel and Leah by characterizing God's delay in answering Rachel's prayer as a punishment for her previous inappropriate attempts at becoming pregnant through other means. The difference between the two sections just outlined accounts for the alternative usages of God's various names. In the first section Leah calls God יי and Rachel calls him אלקים, while in the second section Leah calls Him אלקים and Rachel employs both names. Assuming the Rabbis' association of יי with the attribute of mercy and אלקים with the attribute of justice explains the switch. In the first section Leah realizes that her exclusive births are the expression of God's merciful intervention on her behalf, while Rachel claims what she sees as hers by right. In the second section Leah realizes that now she is being constantly judged discriminately and that she receives children in merit of her faithful actions, and therefore refers to God in her thanks as אלקים. Since Rachel feels that she surely deserved at least one child, she thanks אלקים for Joseph, but beseeches יי to graciously grant her a second.

That the birth narrative is the turning point of the entire passage is evidenced by another simple observation. From the time that Jacob reached Haran until the birth narrative (the second and third sections of the unit), God's name is never mentioned.¹⁶ Suddenly in the birth narrative, however, His name appears fourteen times, emphasizing that it was now that His presence began to be recognized. It is very appropriate that the catalyst for this dramatic turnaround is Leah's recognition of God's exclusive control over nature: it is Jacob's unintended wife, whom Jacob married only because of a divine plan, who directs Jacob, and us, to recognize God's hand even in its obscurity.

This is a pattern well worth noticing: the narrative shows us that God can operate in two ways, subtly and overtly. However, only those who recognize His providence when He operates subtly merit seeing Him operating overtly.

III) The Second Part of the Unit - Providence Perceived

In contradistinction to the first, the second half of the unit, after the birth narrative, leaves no doubt as to providence's presence and its recognition by all characters.

A) Jacob and Family

Jacob realizes, after sensing Laban's unwarranted jealousy, that it has been "only the God of his fathers (31:5)" who has cared for him. The angel's aid in outsmarting Laban proved to Jacob that the angels he met at his journey's inception had indeed remained with him all along.

Jacob makes this point to his wives - Laban's daughters - and challenges them to fulfill God's command (31:3) to abandon their home and family. Leah and Rachel, the first to have recognized God's providence, immediately concede (31:17). By doing so they reaffirm their place in the family of Abraham and Rebecca who likewise abandoned their families in compliance with God's will.

B) Laban

The ultimate recognition of God's providence comes from Laban in the context of his pursuit of Jacob. Despite God's demand that Laban refrain from telling Jacob "good or bad" (31:24), Laban proceeds with his verbal attack.

¹⁶ It is no argument to claim that there was no place for Him in the story; it is obvious throughout the Bible, and particularly in Genesis, that God is a prominent theme and is seen in many stories not otherwise obviously theological.

Although Laban realizes that he will not succeed in repossessing his family and belongings, he feels that he bears a just claim. Was he not the catalyst of Jacob's growth? Did he not offer Jacob refuge, work, and a wife when the latter had nowhere to turn? Did he not deserve at least to be informed of Jacob's migration? Additionally, Laban is intent on finding his *teraphim*, which he views as responsible for his, and thus Jacob's, successes.¹⁷

When Laban first reaches Jacob, Jacob allows him to vent his frustration, but his aggressive, suspicious search of Jacob's possessions as if they were Laban's own forces Jacob to respond. Jacob reminds Laban that despite Jacob's faithful service, Laban took every opportunity to deceive him – "אבי אלקי אברהם ופחד יצחק היה לי כי עתה ריקם שלחתי" את עמי ואת יגיעי כפי לולי" (31:42).

Jacob explains the true significance of the events that had unfolded. God's protection of Jacob reflected His exclusive role in his success. By protecting Jacob, God was merely asserting his deserved right to Jacob; Laban did not deserve even the right to give his blessing.¹⁹ God used the phrase "טוב עד רע" to remind Laban of the conclusion he himself had reached as a youngster after having heard the providential story of Abraham's servant, "לכן ובתואל ויאמרו מה יצא הדבר, לא נוכל דבר אלק רע או טוב" (24:50). In addition to God's revelation to Laban, his inability to find his own *teraphim* was meant to signify their and his own irrelevance to Jacob's success.

C) Jacob's Pillars

The meeting ends with Laban's request to formalize a treaty. Jacob responds by constructing two stone structures- a "מצבה" (pillar, 45) and a "גל" (mound, 46). Significantly, the creation of the pillar precedes that of the mound and is carried out by Jacob alone. Before assenting to Laban's request and joining him in the construction of the mound, which symbolized their mutual

¹⁷ The exact role the *teraphim* played in Laban's home and the ANE in general is certainly beyond the purview of this paper. On the issue see A. E. Draffkorn, "Ilani/Elohim," *JBL* 76 (1957), 216-224; M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *JBL* 81 (1962), 239-248; K. van der Toorn, "The Nature of Biblical 'Teraphim' in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *CBQ* 52 (1992), 203-222; K. Spanier, "Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *VT* 42 (1992), 404-412; D. Sperber, "Teraphim: Mummified Red Men," in his *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1994), 115-118; and J. Paradise, "what did Laban Demand of Jacob," in M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler, and J. Tigay (eds.), *Tehillah le-Moshe* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 91-98.

¹⁸ The word *שלחתי* specifically implicates Laban: "You sent me," not "I left."

¹⁹ The Rabbis recognized this as the goal of Jacob's speech and asserted that Jacob succeeded in convincing Laban, who later proposed God as a witness of the treaty between the two parties, as seen in 31:50 (cf. Zohar 378).

treaty, Jacob expressed through the pillar his thanks to the one truly responsible for his success - God. The pillar created here parallels the one Jacob constructed in response to God's promises at the beginning of the narrative. By constructing this second pillar, Jacob expressed his appreciation of God's fulfillment of the promises He made during the angelic vision Jacob had commemorated by creating the first.²⁰

This narrative passage, then, is perhaps the most crucial in the storyline of Genesis, the choosing of a founder of the people who were to be Israel. Before the narrative, Jacob appears as a meek figure, whose sole victory over his brother was by the hands of his mother. His timidity might have precluded the possibility of his being a progenitor of a nation. It is in our passage, however, that his character develops.²¹ His recognition of the consistent providence shown to him during his years in exile with Laban readied him for his return to Canaan and his encounter with Esau and served as the precedent for his descendants - a nation whose ideology centers on the belief in providence's universal consistency.

²⁰ The *מצבה* was meant to commemorate the *סולם מוצב ארצה* (28:12), as indicated by the use of the same root (מ-צ-ב) to describe both. The *ראשו מגיע השמימה* paralleled the ladder's *ראשו מגיע השמימה*. Cf. Nachmanides (ibid.) who explains the significance of the ladder imagery in line with this theme, and J. Berman, "The Four Pillars of Jacob - Their Foundations in One Basis" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 13 (תשנ"א), 9-24.

²¹ Cf. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 30-35; Sherwood, *Had God not Been on my Side*, 376; and S. Spero, "Jacob's Growing Understanding of his Experience at Beth-El," *Dor LeDor* 26 (1998), 211-215.

Chaotic Language and Systematic Interpretation: An Analysis of Genesis 1:2

Avraham Walfish

A.

Few biblical verses have generated as much confusion as the second verse in the Bible, and with good reason. Neither the sense of the individual words nor the sense of the sentence is clear. What exactly do the rare words *תהו* and *בוהו* mean? Is the *רוח* to be taken literally as a physical entity (i.e. a wind) or metaphorically as something non-physical (i.e. a spirit)? How, accordingly, are we to understand *מרחפת*? Beyond the semantic problems - what does the Bible intend to convey by offering this description? How does this depiction of the scene that confronted God as He commenced His creation enhance our understanding of the meaning of that creation?¹ Would our marveling admiration of divine Power and Creativity be adversely affected by imagining a different opening scene - or, indeed, by omitting an opening scenario?

The enigmatic nature of this verse may indeed be part of its meaning. We might posit that the Bible intentionally cloaks the description of the initial stages of creation in enigmatic language to give literary expression to its mysterious nature.² The language and style of this verse lend support to the Sages' strictures against delving into the mysteries surrounding what is "above,

¹ This article will not address the thorny exegetical issue regarding the syntax of the first three verses, and its theological corollary regarding the biblical view concerning *creatio ex nihilo*. It would appear to this writer that the Bible is not overly concerned with what may or may not have preceded the state of *תהו ובוהו*. Insofar as biblical exegesis is concerned, the first task confronting us in understanding creation is to make sense out of verse 2.

² Other passages lend support to the idea that the Bible employs enigmatic language to convey a feeling or create an ambience. For example, the apparent inconsistency in Numbers 5:12-14 between phrases asserting the Sotah's guilt (5:12-13) and those which establish a situation of suspicion and doubt may be understood as a literary projection of the husband's ruminations, teetering between certainty and doubt. Similarly, the obscurity of the verses which describe Jacob's nocturnal wrestling (Genesis 32:25 ff.) and the near killing of Moses (Ex. 4:24-26) may be seen as a literary reflection of the mysterious nature of the two encounters.

below, before and after" creation (M. Hag. 2:1).³ This cannot be understood, however, as more than part of the meaning of the verse. We hope, though, that alongside the feeling of mystery conveyed impressionistically by the enigmatic style, there is also a clear meaning available to the student who diligently analyzes them.

The difficulty confronting the analyst is formidable, however, as noted by Cassuto in his commentary:⁴

In order to elucidate the correct interpretation of this expression, תהו ובהו, it is not enough to rely, as commentators normally do, on the etymological meaning of the two words of which it consists... As in chemistry, so too in language, the compound may contain qualities not found in its components... Likewise, comparison with other passages where the words תהו or בהו may be found will not be of use for the same reason. Even from Jeremiah 4:23 we cannot glean the correct interpretation, even though the entire expression appears there (I have seen the earth and, behold, it is תהו ובהו), because it is nothing but an allusion to what is written here, without any exegetical increment. Similarly [we gain nothing by examining] Isaiah 34:11... We can only learn from the immediate context, namely the continuation of the verse: "and darkness upon the face of the deep."

Cassuto's ensuing comments, however, belie his methodological pronouncement. His elaboration upon the precise situation described by "darkness upon the face of the deep" leads him to the conclusion that:

This is the situation called תהו ובהו... the rough matter, out of which the earth is to be fashioned, was at the beginning of its creation... without differentiation, without order, and without life of any kind.

How does the depiction of "darkness upon the face of the deep" lead to the conclusion that תהו ובהו involves "rough matter" and undifferentiated disorder? Cassuto seems to have smuggled these terms in, without argument or foundation. He is not alone in doing so. Benno Jacob⁵ and BDB both translate

³ The connection between our verse and this mishnah is underscored by Gen. Rab. 1:5 (Theodor-Albeck, p. 3), which identifies "he who doesn't respect his Creator's honor" from the continuation of Hag. 2:1 as one who "comes to say that this world was created out of תהו, בהו, and darkness."

⁴ *From Adam to Noah* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 5738), pp. 11-12. Translation mine.

⁵ *The First Book of the Bible - Genesis*, abridged, edited, and translated by E.I. Jacob and W. Jacob (New York, 1974).

תהו ובהו as "without form." Tamar Ezer⁶ translates תהו ובהו as "unformed confusion, situation of disorder, chaotic situation" (chaos = disarray). Neil Gillman expounds this idea in a theological mode:⁷

...it teaches that creation involved God's forming cosmos out of primitive chaos (i.e. darkness, the deep and the "unformed and void" as described in 1:2), that God brought order out of anarchy...⁸

These interpretations, redolent of Greek thought patterns,⁹ seem to owe more to a subliminal reliance upon medieval modes of interpreting the creation story¹⁰ than to any systematic exegetical methodology. How do these exegetes discern that the biblical story of creation focuses on the issue of order vs. disarray?¹¹ What is the semantic foundation for equating תהו ובהו with formlessness? I believe that this exegetical approach has wrongly identified the

⁶ *Madrikh Le-Olamot Bereshit - Madrikh LaMoreh* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1991), 20. Translation mine.

⁷ *The Death of Death* (Woodstock, Vermont, 1997), p. 45. Further on, he draws theological conclusions from this understanding regarding the meaning of death.

⁸ Compare J. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (Princeton, 1988), p. 122: "... all that remains, apart from God and his 'wind' or spirit, is dark, inert chaos upon which form and order are about to be imposed." M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985), p. 325, translates תהו ובהו - correctly, as we will see - as "waste and void"; however, he continues by identifying these terms with 'chaos'.

⁹ Chaos and cosmos (= "the world or universe regarded as an orderly harmonious system," *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* [New York, 1989]) are both derivatives of Greek words. According to the Greek creation myth, Hesiod's *Theogony*, "Chaos was first of all." In similar fashion, other thinkers have imposed these categories on creation myths of other religions and cultures. See, for example, M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York, 1959), translated by W.R. Trask, pp. 18-19, 54ff. E. Ben Yehudah in his dictionary, s.v. תהו, vol. 16, p. 7670a n. 1, claims that the commonly-held identification of the Greek "chaos" with disorder is the result of a misunderstanding.

¹⁰ Nachmanides, for example, understands תהו as unformed hylic matter.

¹¹ One might build a case for the centrality of orderliness within creation on one of two arguments: (a) the repeated employment by God of division as a creative act. However, this aspect of creation centers on the first three days. The last three days (4-5-6) actually blur some of the divisions that have been established on the first three days: bodies placed in heaven to cast light on the earth, luminaries that function in the realm of darkness, birds that fly in the heavens but multiply on the land, and man who rules over the creatures of land, water, and sky. "Blessing" is as central to the last three days (5-6-7) as "division" is to the first three days. Without attempting to analyze the full significance of all these phenomena, we may conclude, for our purposes, that orderliness is certainly an important component of creation, but hardly its major purpose or dominant theme.

(b) N. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, 1978), p. 13 suggests that the "concept of the priority of water" in the biblical account, as well as in many unrelated mythologies - "arose from the fact that, being amorphous, water seems clearly to represent the state of affairs before chaos was reduced to order and things achieved fixed form." One may offer a similar explanation for the priority of darkness. Further on, I will suggest a different explanation of the priority of water within the biblical account.

meaning and the significance¹² of Genesis 1:2. Before subjecting our verse to a different reading, I will briefly outline its methodological foundations. Interpretative method is rooted in setting the text in its proper context.¹³ The language of our verse supports four contexts which can help illuminate its meaning: (1) the literary structure of the verse itself; (2) the literary unit of which this verse is a part - Genesis 1:1 - 2:3; (3) intrascriptural parallels to the language of our verse; (4) parallels between our verse and extra-biblical ancient Near Eastern literary works. In my view, only an approach to our verse that is fully attentive to all four contexts can fully explicate its meaning.

B.

The verse comprises three clauses, each depicting the same scene from a different vantagepoint. Analyzing these three clauses, we discover a striking wordplay, one that highlights the underlying connection between three central words in our verse. This may be readily seen by laying out the verse in the following manner:

והארץ היתה תהו ובהו
וחשך על פני תהום
ורוח אלקים מרחפת על פני המים

Pace the opinion of Saadia,¹⁴ תהו and תהום are etymologically unrelated, stemming from two different roots: ת-ה-מ and ת-ה-ה.¹⁵ However, the close juxtaposition of these highly assonant words hardly seem accidental,¹⁶

¹² E. D. Hirsch (*The Aims of Interpretation*, Chicago and London, 1976, pp. 2-3) has explained the difference between "meaning" and "significance" as follows: "the term 'meaning' refers to the whole verbal meaning of a text, and 'significance' to textual meaning in relation to a larger context... beyond itself." This distinction, first suggested by Hirsch in his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London, 1967), pp. 61ff., has been attacked by many critics of Hirsch's approach to interpretation, who reject not only his theory of allowing "authorial intent" as a criterion for interpretation, but also his overarching goal of establishing determinacy in meaning. Inasmuch as I share Hirsch's goals, even when I cannot fully accept the theoretical structure he establishes in order to achieve them, I have accepted and adopted his distinction between "meaning" and "significance" as intuitively clear and theoretically defensible.

¹³ This was grasped intuitively by Cassuto, in the passage cited above.

¹⁴ Cited by Ibn Ezra. Compare Rabbeinu Meyuhas and Shadal, as well, and see the analysis in Y. Kiel, *Sefer Bereshit* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1997), p. 6, n. 40. The equation of תהו and תהום has recently been suggested, in a different context, by Aviva Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*, p. 90, and see my critical comments thereon in "Comments on Tamar Ross's Review of *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* by A. Zornberg (B.D.D. 3, Summer 1996, pp. 49-57)," *Bekhol Derakhekha Daehu* 6 (1998), p. 48, fn. 12.

¹⁵ As noted by Ibn Ezra, and followed by biblical dictionaries.

¹⁶ F. Pollack, *HaSippur BaMikra* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1994), p. 98 notes the literary connection

especially when the poetic cadence of this verse is taken into account.¹⁷ The literary connection between these two words suggests that they relate to a common reality.

Before elaborating on this point, we should note that תהום is also related to מים: (a) semantically - תהום denotes a vast expanse of water;¹⁸ (b) literarily - two of the three letters of מים are *mem*, the letter added to תהו in order to produce תהום. Literarily, the word תהום serves as a middle term, which links the words תהו and מים, thus creating a triple link among the three clauses that constitute our verse.

To make sense of this triple association, we need to turn our attention to the term whose meaning is least clear - תהו. As noted by BDB, the "primary meaning [of תהו is] difficult to seize," but this is because this relatively rare word is used more often in a figurative manner than in its literal sense.¹⁹ If we confine ourselves to those verses where תהו is used in a literal sense, and set aside for the moment those instances where תהו refers to primordial creation, then a clear primary meaning emerges:²⁰ (a) in Deuteronomy 32:10, תהו serves as a parallel both to מדבר and ישמן, both of which refer to desert and desolation; (b) in Isaiah 45:18, "לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה," תהו is the antithesis of לשבת. In both of these verses, תהו is the opposite of habitation, especially human habitation. Similarly, Jeremiah 4:23-26 opens with "ראיתי את הארץ והנה תהו" and continues with "ראיתי והנה אין האדם...ראיתי והנה הכרמל המדבר,"²¹ and so

between these two words, confining himself to analyzing their aesthetic impact.

¹⁷ 1:27 has a similar poetic rhythm, as noted by Cassuto, *ad. loc.* Perhaps these two verses are versified in order to demarcate the commencement and the culmination of the divine creation. This suggestion conforms well to the interpretative line proposed in the continuation of this paper. It should be noted that 2:2-3 also display poetic cadence, but a different one than 1:2 and 1:27.

¹⁸ Note parallel usage of תהום and מים in Psalms 104:6, which parallels our verse, as well as in other verses: Isaiah 51:10, Ezekiel 31:4, Jonah 2:6. BDB suggests that in one verse - Psalms 71:20 - תהומות הארץ means "abyss" (a usage which exists in later Hebrew), but other interpreters understand the phrase to refer to subterranean waters. See further, Kiel, *Sefer Bereshit*, p. 6, especially his citation from Ibn Janah, *Sefer HaShorashim*.

¹⁹ See second figurative meaning of תהו in BDB (unreal, worthless, purposeless) and examples cited there.

²⁰ I am relating here to the primary meaning in biblical Hebrew, not in "proto-semitic." Furthermore, I am presuming - with BDB - that the more concrete meaning is the primary sense and the more abstract meaning is the figurative derivative. For biblical Hebrew, this assumption seems to tally with the normal usage of the root ת-ה-ה in other Semitic languages (see BDB). This, however, does not render conclusive evidence as to whether the primary biblical sense corresponds to the original sense of the word or is itself a derivative of an earlier sense (rage, roar, as in Aramaic, and compare Deut. 32:10, in which it may be seen that rage/roar and wilderness are related concepts). Compare Eliezer Ben-Yehudah's definition of תהו in his dictionary (vol. 16, p. 7670).

²¹ I have brought the passage in Jeremiah only as secondary support for this interpretation, because the immediate continuation of תהו ובהו there relates to the breakdown of the natural order: "אל...השמים ואין אדם...ההרים והנה רעשים..." It would appear that the main thrust of the prophet is to

we can conclude that תהו ובהו may be characterized as territory inhospitable to habitation.²²

If תהו's meaning is "uninhabitable territory," then characterizing the earth prior to Creation as תהו ובהו does not describe a situation so much as identify a problem: the purpose of creation is habitation, and the earth, in this initial stage of creation, cannot support habitation. Herein lies the solution to the much-discussed exegetical problem that presents itself upon reading the first word of the verse - why does the Bible describe the situation on earth and ignore the concurrent state of the heavens? The answer suggested by the continuation of the verse is that the creation account is goal-directed; hence the Bible, after introducing the topic in the first verse, immediately directs its attention to the problem that needs to be solved if the goal - creation - is to be attained.

We may now comprehend the relationship between the first two clauses of the verse. The first clause outlines the problem - inhabitability; the second clause breaks the problem down into its component parts: darkness and "the deep."²³ Such an environment cannot support habitation, at least not the type of habitation that God desires.²⁴ These are the two aspects of the environment confronting God, at the outset of the creation, which stand as obstacles to the divine plan. Indeed these two obstacles serve as guidelines for God's activity on the first three days of creation:²⁵ the first day confronts the problem of darkness, by creating light; the second and third days deal with the problem of תהום, by bounding its waters in order to create three realms - heaven, sea, and dry land.

describe the destruction of places of habitation and vegetation, which become places of desolation. The question may be raised, however, whether תהו ובהו is a heading that summarizes the entire ensuing description, or a description of the initial - cosmic - stages of the process that culminates in lack of habitation. The connection is clear, even if not conclusive.

²² Some commentators have translated תהו as 'lack of habitation,' including Rashbam, Radak, and N. H. Wessely in *Imrei Shefer*. Radak and Wessely have also noted that תהו involves inhospitability to habitation.

²³ This claim entails saying that the *waw* of על פני תהום is a *waw*-explicative, which has recently enjoyed a renaissance in the scholarly world; cf. H. A. Brougers, "Alternative Interpretationen de sogenannten *Waw* copulativum," *ZAW* 90 (1978), esp. 276-277; D. W. Parker, "Further Examples of the *Waw* Explicativum," *VT* 30 (1980), 129-136; B. A. Mastin, "*Waw* Explicativum in 2 Kings 8:9," *VT* 34 (1984), 353-355; P. Wilton, "More Cases of *Waw* Explicativum," *VT* 44 (1994), 125-128; and especially Parker's appendix on pp. 135-136.

²⁴ Lack of light would seem to be an obstacle to any kind of life, certainly to that of any multicellular organisms with which we are familiar. Whether or not life could have flourished in the primordial sea (תהום) depends on whether we understand it as being similar to post-creation oceans, but unbounded by land, or - as Nachmanides has suggested - a kind of primordial soup, in which water and earth are mixed together. However, even if we imagine that marine life might have existed in תהום, the purpose of creation will not be accomplished unless human life is made possible. The Bible does seem to presume that no conceivable form of marine life would be capable of the spiritual qualities of man, which make creation worthwhile for God.

²⁵ Compare Immanueli, *Sefer Bereishit - Hesberim Ve-he'arot* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, 1978), p. 49.

The result of the first day's creation is the establishment of cosmic time - day and night. The result of the second and third days' creation is the establishment of cosmic space, divided into its three distinct domains.²⁶ This same pattern is continued, as Cassuto has noted,²⁷ during the next three days of creation: on the fourth day, God delegates dominion over time to luminaries, which are placed in the heavens to illuminate the earth, thus regulating and further differentiating the measures of time (months, seasons, and years); on the fifth and sixth days God produces habitation of the spatial domains of sea and heavens (fifth day - parallel to second)²⁸ and earth (sixth day - parallel to third).²⁹

The Bible's wordplay on תהו - תהום may thus be explained as indicating the shift of perspectives regarding a single underlying reality. תהו indicates the problem - creation, as it currently stands, is an environment unsuitable for habitation. תהום identifies the root cause of the problem, the feature of the environment that renders it unsuitable. Furthermore, the wordplay further seems to focus our attention on תהום as the major problem that needs to be addressed³⁰ - indeed two of the first three days are devoted to this problem. It would appear that the creation of light and luminaries is a preliminary stage, setting the backdrop for the main focus of creation: creating the territory in which life can dwell.³¹ In fact, as the story of creation unfolds, light - and the temporal rhythm which light and darkness create - is a background condition for

²⁶ The double creation of the third day includes the creation of vegetation within the rubric of creating dry land. In my view, this reflects the ambiguous status of vegetation, from the Bible's point of view, as a life form. On the one hand, the Bible views vegetation as part of the environment, rather than as independently existing creatures, and thus includes vegetation as part of the establishment of the environment on the first three days. On the other hand, vegetation has the ability to reproduce (note the language of 1:11-12, and compare the term פרו רבו used for animal and human reproduction in 1:22, 28; 9:1, 7), and its inclusion on the third day may be seen as betraying God's eagerness to create life - the very moment land is created, God immediately sets about creating some kind of life form thereupon, without waiting for the passage of even one more day. These two ideas - which I have presented as complementary - appear as separate and independent explanations for the double creation of the third day among commentators; see Hoffman, p. 33; B. Jacob to verses 11 and 20; Cassuto to verse 11; contra Immanueli, p. 49, who suggests a different explanation. It should further be noted that the double creation of the third day is paralleled by the double creation on its "twin," the sixth day.

²⁷ Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, p. 8 and notes there.

²⁸ See Cassuto, *ibid*.

²⁹ The seventh day, of course, continues the pattern of first and fourth days, producing a further differentiation within the dimension of time - between sacred and secular time.

³⁰ The wordplay also focuses our attention on תהו, as opposed to בהו. Since בהו is a rare word, of unclear meaning, appearing only alongside תהו, this is not surprising. Perhaps בהו comes only to intensify the sense of תהו, rather than to indicate any sort of independent idea.

³¹ While the creation of cosmic time is accorded chronological priority, the creation of cosmic space is presented as having greater significance. Indeed, the granting to man in general, and to the seed of Abraham in particular, dominion over land is perhaps the central theme in the Bible (see R. Isaac, cited by Rashi to Gen. 1:1 and Nachmanides *ad loc.*).

the existence of life, whereas the territories created on the second and third days are the matrix of life: תדשא הארץ (1:11), ותוצא הארץ (1:12), ישרצו המים (1:20), תוצא הארץ (1:24).³²

C.

Our understanding of תהום's function within the story of creation may be sharpened by noting the parallel between תהום and the primordial ocean goddess, Tiamat, in the Mesopotamian creation epic, Enuma Elish. The etymological connection between תהום and Tiamat seems apparent;³³ hence it is of interest to note Tiamat's central role in the Enuma Elish, whose account opens as follows:³⁴

When heaven above was not (yet even) mentioned,
firm-set earth below called by no name;
(when) but primeval Apsu (= the god of the underground water), their
begetter,
and the matrix, Tiamat - she who gave birth to them all -
were mingling their waters in one;
when no bog had formed, (and) no island could be found;
when no god whosoever had appeared...
then were gods formed within them.

The pre-creation scene is again one of undifferentiated water, in which the two aspects of the biblical תהום, the oceans (Isa. 51:10, Jon. 2:6, etc.) and the underground waters (Gen. 7:11, 8:2, 49:25, Deut. 33:13, etc.), are intermingled, serving as the source for the birth of the other elements and forces of nature (i.e. the gods). However, Tiamat is soon stirred to turn against her offspring, and she emerges as the leader of a formidable rebellion against the gods. The creation of the world as we know it is accomplished by the leader of the council of the gods, Marduk, who subdues and slays Tiamat and fashions the cosmos from her carcass. Tiamat is thus both the matrix of all creation and the great obstacle to be overcome in order for creation to be accomplished. Of

³² Also relevant, although somewhat different, are the verses in chapter 2, in which God fashions man and the animals מן האדמה (2:7, 19).

³³ See BDB; Cassuto, p. 12; Y. M. Immanuel, p. 43. Regarding the relationship between the Enuma Elish and the various biblical accounts of creation, see B. Uffenheimer, "Hitmodedut HaMikra im Seridei HaMytos HaElili" (Hebrew), in F. Pollack and Y. Hoffman (eds.), *Or LeYa'akov - Mehkarim baMikra Uvimgillot Midbar Yehudah* (Jerusalem, 5757), pp. 17-35, and sources cited there, especially in nn. 5 and 12.

³⁴ T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven and London, 1976), p. 168.

course there are crucial differences between the mythological creation story of the Enuma Elish and the Bible's account, and we will address these discrepancies later. For our present purpose it is sufficient to note the striking similarities in the dual roles of both תהום and Tiamat, which serve in both accounts of creation as the primordial being from which the world was created, and at the same time the description of the obstacle which had to be overcome in order for the creation to be accomplished.

D.

Turning to the last clause of our verse, we need to focus on three issues: the meaning of רוח אלקים, the meaning of מרחפת, and the significance of the shift from תהום to מים. Throughout the Bible, רוח אלקים invariably³⁵ has the sense of "spirit," rather than the sense of "wind." In similar fashion, the cognate phrase, רוח ה', normally³⁶ refers to a spiritual sense of רוח, rather than a physical sense. Cassuto calls our attention to Job 33:4: "רוח א-ל עשתני,"³⁷ which further supports this reading. I believe that this consideration tips the scales decisively in favor of understanding the last clause of the verse in a spiritual sense.³⁸ We

³⁵ Even-Shoshan's *Concordance* lists 15 occurrences of this phrase in the Bible. An additional occurrence of רוח אלהים (Job 27:3) also carries a spiritual sense. It bears mentioning that the relationship between physicality and spirituality in the Bible would appear to be somewhat different from the way we would understand these terms today, but I do not believe that this difference is relevant to the issue under discussion.

³⁶ Even-Shoshan lists 18 occurrences, two of which are doubtful (Isaiah 40:13, Ezekiel 37:1). Of the remaining 16 occurrences, I have identified only three which refer to a physical wind: 1 Kings 18:12, 2 Kings 2:16, Hosea 13:15.

³⁷ Compare Kiel, *Sefer Bereshit*, who cites this verse as support for D. Z. Hoffman's interpretation that רוח אלקים is a vivifying principle.

³⁸ I find this consideration decisive, notwithstanding the use of רוח in two passages that clearly hark back to the creation story. In 8:1, God passes a wind over the earth, causing the water to subside and thus signaling the end of the flood and the renewal of creation. In Exodus 14:21, God reverses the natural order, creating a path of dry land in the midst of the sea by means of a strong east wind. These passages might suggest that, in our story as well, the רוח אלקים is a divine wind, which will in due time be employed to move the waters of תהום in directions which will divide them into the separate realms created on days two and three. This, moreover, parallels the role played by the winds in the Enuma Elish, where Marduk utilizes the winds, which he controls, to vanquish Tiamat. Despite the attractiveness of this suggestion, I think that the unquestioned meaning of רוח אלקים throughout the Bible is decisive support for giving the phrase a spiritual meaning. The parallel usage of רוח in the other two passages will thus be understood as a wordplay on רוח in our passage. See further on in this regard. It is also noteworthy that the Bible does not give us any depiction of how God divided the waters. רוח disappears from view, and plays no further role in creation: In other creation passages in the Bible, it is also unclear that wind was employed to tame and bound the sea. See, for example, Psalms 104:7, where תהום flees from the thunderous divine rebuke. While this may be poetic imagery for a storm, which lashes and drives the waters of תהום, the lack of reference to wind seems to be significant.

will therefore understand the term מרחפת in the sense of "hovering,"³⁹ rather than in the sense of "blowing."⁴⁰ Our translation seems to be the best rendering of the same verb in Deuteronomy 32:11,⁴¹ and also corresponds to the meaning of the verb in cognate languages.⁴²

What meaning is conveyed by the image of "the spirit of God hovering" over the water? This will become clearer if we note parallel formulations in several biblical passages. רוח אלקים is used in the Bible in two senses. The more common usage of this phrase relates to persons upon whom רוח אלקים has settled; thus, we find וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים with reference to Balaam (Num. 24:2).⁴³ In these cases, רוח אלקים denotes a connection between man and God, raising human consciousness and perception to higher, prophetic levels. However, there are two instances in the Bible of persons who possess רוח אלקים within them, and in these two cases the phrase seems to have a different meaning.⁴⁴ Joseph is said to have had within him רוח אלקים (Gen. 41:38) and Bezalel is said to have been filled by God with רוח אלקים (Ex. 31:3, 35:31). Neither Joseph nor Bezalel is seen to be blessed with the gift of prophecy, but both figures are noted for divinely inspired wisdom. More specifically, both figures are called upon to manage major national projects, and their רוח אלקים provides them with the knowledge and skills essential for the success of the project.

In both cases, the project must be carried out under apparently unfavorable conditions. Joseph must find ways of stretching resources from the years of plenty in order to cope with a seven-year famine. Bezalel must construct a sanctuary in unfavorable desert conditions, in which presumably some of the necessary resources are scant. We may suggest that רוח אלקים involves the ability to manage available resources in order to achieve a goal under unfavorable conditions. If this understanding is correct, then we can understand the role of רוח אלקים in our verse: God confronts an inhospitable environment, which seemingly thwarts His goal of populating the earth. Having

³⁹ Gen. Rab. 2:4 (Theodor-Albeck, pp. 18-19), Rashi, BDB, Immanueli (p. 44).

⁴⁰ Onqelos, Ibn Janah, Rashbam, Buber (*Darko shel Mikra*, [Hebrew], [Jerusalem, 1964], pp. 96-97), Kiel.

⁴¹ See Buber, *ibid.*, and Nehamah Leibowitz, *Iyyunim beSefer Shemot* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 5730), pp. 215-216. Kiel's reading of ירחף in the sense of "beating, trembling" may fit the literal sense of Deut. 32:11, but it does not fit the imagery of the verse.

⁴² BDB notes 3 meanings for the cognate verb in Syriac: move gently, cherish, brood.

⁴³ See further examples in Even-Shoshan's *Concordance*.

⁴⁴ I thank R. David Silber for calling this distinction to my attention. He applied this idea to Numbers 27:18, where Joshua is described as a man אשר רוח בו, thus qualifying him to be a leader of the people. The two uses were previously noted by S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London, 1920), p. 4. Driver contends that the two are in fact two manifestations of a single concept.

presented the problem (תהו ובהו) and having analyzed which components of the situation produce the problem (חשך, תהום), the stage is now set for the crucial moment which enables the creation to begin: the creative spark of רוח אלקים, which discerns within the תהו ובהו the resources which can make creation possible.⁴⁵

תהום רוח אלקים provides the explanation for the shift in the verse from תהום מים to תהום. תהום denotes vast quantities and expanses of water, and these are an obstacle to creating life; מים, on the other hand is simply an element, with myriad possibilities. In certain circumstances, water is inimical to life, but in other circumstances, is the basis and source for producing and preserving life. Psalm 104 is instructive: water is not only bounded, so that it cannot again cover the earth (v. 9), but is also channeled through various courses on the land (vv. 8, 10), so that it may quench the thirst of the land animals (v. 11) and irrigate the crops (v. 13). Psalm 104 spells out what is implicit in Genesis 1: water is a multifaceted element, which can be equally beneficial or inimical to life, depending upon the form that it takes. The ability to perceive in the unruly and destructive תהום the potentially creative (or destructive) מים represents the creative insight provided by רוח אלקים.⁴⁶

Finally, we now may understand the meaning of the verb מרחפת. Again we may find a parallel passage - to which we have already alluded - instructive. Dov Rappell has noted that Deuteronomy 32 "opens with allusions to the creation of the world."⁴⁷ These allusions include heaven and earth (32:1), God's act of creation (32:4 - עשך, 32:6 - ימות עולם, 32:7), תהו (32:10), and ירחף (32:11). The last two are of particular interest here, because these two successive verses both allude quite clearly to our verse.⁴⁸ The Bible plainly wants to suggest a parallel between the creation of the world and the creation of the people of Israel, presumably in order to indicate that the purpose of creation is for God to have a people responsive to His will and commandments. Indeed, this is why heaven and earth are called as witnesses to the covenant between

⁴⁵ This explanation of the verse was also proposed by Driver, *op. cit.*, 4-5, and J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC Vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1930), 17-18.

⁴⁶ The explanation offered here of the transition from תהום מים to תהום may help explain the opposite transition, from תהום מים to תהום, in Exodus 15:8. This verse gives us a triple parallelism, in which each clause intensifies the miraculous nature of the event. This is seen both in the progression of verbs (נערמו, נצבו, and כפר) and in the progression of nouns (מים, גוילים, and תהום).

⁴⁷ *Shirat Ha'azinu* (Hebrew), (Tel-Aviv, 1996), p. 49. He does not note all the allusions to which I refer.

⁴⁸ Neither of the two words in question appears elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

God and His people. The meaning of v. 11, and of ירחף in this context, has been analyzed astutely by Martin Buber:⁴⁹

In the vulture's nest there are fledglings, whose wings are newly sprouted, but who don't yet have the courage to fly. The vulture comes and arouses the fledglings in the nest, encouraging them to fly, hovering over them while gently striking them with its wings. This is a parable for God, like a vulture hovering over the nations, similar to His wind blowing over the waters at the beginning of creation.

Except for Buber's understanding of רוח אלקים as a wind, the rest of his analysis resonates beautifully with the interpretation of Genesis 1:2 which has been developed in this article, although from a slightly different angle. According to Buber, "hovering" is shown by Deuteronomy 32:11 to be an image of parental care and guidance. God's spirit hovering over the waters, in similar fashion, is designed to guide the water to realize its creative potential. Similarly, for us as well, the spirit is hovering, trying to extract the potential contained within the heretofore unconquerable תהום. For Buber, the verb to use is "coax;" for us it is "force;" the idea, however, is the same: God must determine how to transform the תהום into the inhabited world He wants.

To sum up, our verse has presented the scene confronting God at the outset of creation in three clauses, representing three successive perspectives, all of which are connected by a different word representing the same underlying reality. The wordplay, תהו - תהום - מים, underscores the identical reality that underlies the shift in language and in perspective. The first perspective alludes to the purpose of creation - to inhabit the earth - and indicates the problem: the environment is תהו ובהו, "waste and void," incapable of sustaining habitation. The second perspective breaks the problem down into its component elements, chief among which is תהום, a great unruly mass of water. In the third section of the verse, רוח אלקים hovers over the problematic mass, discerning the creative potential embedded in the element, מים, which comprises the תהום. This ability to discern within the problematic component, תהום, the element of water, with its tremendous creative potential, is the hallmark of the hovering spirit of God, Who then sets about redirecting and dividing the waters to create the three environments in which life will flourish.

⁴⁹ Loc. cit. (note 40).

E.

The meaning of our verse has now been explicated, to the best of our ability, and we have suggested what each clause seeks to depict. The components of our interpretation have been supported by viewing the language of the verse within four different contexts. However, this does not yet exhaust the meaning of our verse. We have seen the component parts of the verse in various contexts in order to fathom their individual meaning. Now we must attempt to see the verse as a whole within its proper context(s), in order to understand what meaning the Bible conveys by opening its creation story with a three-stage exercise in divine problem solving.

In my view, the significance of presenting the commencement of creation in this manner emerges from the apparent paradox involved in having an Almighty God confront an intractable reality. The Bible seems uninterested⁵⁰ in presenting man with the image, so important to medieval philosophers, of a God Who creates *ex nihilo*. This may be explained in light of the term that appears as creation reaches its climax - צלם אלקים.⁵¹ God has embarked on the enterprise of creation in order to reach the pinnacle of producing a creature that shall bear His image - the image of a Creator.⁵² It is reasonable to assume that the Bible's account of creation is designed to enable man, designed in the image of his Creator, to emulate the Creator. God thus structures His creation in such a way that the Bible's account of the creation will be instructive for man. Man cannot emulate *creatio ex nihilo* or (to use the Sages' image) the one who produces creation by simply uttering words. A God, on the other hand, Who confronts difficulties and finds solutions to problems from within the elements of the problem, is a model for His human emulator.

⁵⁰ Many modern biblical scholars (see, for example, Fishbane, Levenson, and Uffenheimer) delight in presenting an evolutionary picture of biblical theology, in which divine omnipotence is not to be presumed until the time of Deutero-Isaiah. Support for this thesis, in which mythical thinking is not alien to biblical theology, is founded on literal readings of biblical passages such as Psalms 74. I have argued here for a non-evolutionary position, based on a different conception of "mythical" (or preferably: quasi-mythical) elements in biblical theology, supported by reading the biblical passages in question in a less literal - sometimes a figurative - sense. Hence, for example, I speak here of the Bible's goals and concerns in Genesis 1:2, rather than of the metaphysical assumptions behind it.

⁵¹ Some modern scholars assume that צלם must refer to some physical form, and hence God must have some physical form, even if man cannot see or apprehend it. See, for example, Immanueli, pp. 55-58, who finds support for his view in the language of Rashi's commentary. Many scholars have disputed this point; and see discussions by Levenson, pp. 111-117; Uffenheimer, pp. 27-28. In any event, as N. Sarna has noted (p. 15), it is difficult to divorce 1:26-27 (צלם, דמות) from 1:28 (man's dominion over all creatures).

⁵² God's creativity is, indeed, the first and most salient divine attribute that emerges from the creation story.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik has expounded at length⁵³ on the idea that the Bible has narrated the story of creation in order to prepare man to be God's creative partner:

The peak of religious ethical perfection to which Judaism aspires is man as creator. When God created the world, He provided an opportunity for the work of His hands - man - to participate in His creation. The Creator, as it were, impaired reality in order that mortal man could repair its flaws and perfect it...When man, the crowning glory of the cosmos, approaches the world, he finds his task at hand... Man, the creature, is commanded to become a partner with the Creator in the renewal of the cosmos...

Our analysis of Genesis 1:2 suggests that this idea may be taken one step further. Not only has God impaired His creation in order to leave room for human partnership, but He has also carried out the act of creation in a manner designed to conform to a model of human creativity. Based on this idea, we can examine in a new light the relationship between the Bible's account of creation and pagan creation accounts. Following Yehezkel Kaufmann and Cassuto, it is commonly asserted that the major difference between Enuma Elish, for example, and Genesis is the difference between a mythological account and a "demythologized" account. Thus, whereas the Enuma Elish describes a pitched battle between Tiamat and her bevy of sea-monsters, Genesis describes a docile תרום, meekly following the divine program of division into different realms, while the sea-monsters - תנינם גדולים (1:21) are merely alluded to as one of God's creations.

It is undoubtedly true, as Yehezkel Kaufmann has demonstrated at length,⁵⁴ that major characteristics of mythology are conspicuously absent from the Bible. God is portrayed as unique and unrivaled, wielding absolute mastery over His creation.⁵⁵ However, our verse would suggest that the creation is not quite as effortless and bloodless as we might have thought. The Bible may lack

⁵³ J. B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, translated by L. Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 100-109.

⁵⁴ See summary of Kaufmann's positions in B. Uffenheimer, "Myth and Reality in Ancient Israel," in S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (New York, 1986), pp. 136 ff.; Levenson, pp. 6-9, 64-65.

⁵⁵ In recent years, this view of biblical monotheism has been challenged by Levenson and Uffenheimer, on the basis of passages which describe God as vanquishing monsters, such as ליתן and ררר, in passages such as Isaiah 51:9-11 and Psalms 74:12-23, 89:11. Levenson argues that the Bible contains different views of monotheism, whereas Uffenheimer stakes out a dialectical approach, which I shall discuss later.

the cosmic wars of classic mythology, but it does portray a somewhat "humanized" God, Who does not effortlessly call creation into being, but confronts problems, which require insight and ingenuity to solve. If this is not mythology, then perhaps we may call it quasi-mythology, or even adopt a term from Martin Buber - monotheistic mythology.⁵⁶ This mythological humanizing of God and His creation serves an aesthetic and devotional purpose. Introduction of a dramatic element into the creation story helps the story to engage the imagination and the emotions, as well as the intellect. Undoubtedly, the Bible cannot compete with real mythological accounts, as far as dramatic power is concerned. As C. S. Lewis noted, theology is not poetry.⁵⁷ However, the aesthetic dimension does serve to deepen the religious message of the Bible, and the dramatic component of the Bible's creation narrative heightens its aesthetic impact.

Beyond this, the humanizing element serves, as we have noted, a theological purpose: to enable man to learn from his divine model, to actualize his צלם אלקים, to perform *imitatio dei*, to enter into a relationship with God. B. Uffenheimer⁵⁸ notes that biblical "demythologizing" is balanced by a "remythologizing" trend.⁵⁹ Biblical theology is dialectically torn between a pristine monotheistic stress on God's Wholly Otherness and the need -

to deepen the anthropomorphic-mythic facet of God, which is necessary for delineating his dialogic relationship with man.

⁵⁶ See "Myth in Judaism," in *On Judaism* (edited by N. N. Glatzer; New York, 1967), pp. 95-107. See also Driver, *op. cit.*, 31, and Skinner, *op. cit.*, 16-18. This approach has been adopted and further developed by Uffenheimer ("Hitmodedut," nn. 32 and 51). More recently, see N. Wyatt, "The Darkness of Genesis I 2," *VT* 43 (1993), 543-554.

⁵⁷ "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (W. Hooper, ed., New York, 1949). Lewis observes (pp. 78 f.; compare *The Seeing Eye*, W. Hooper [ed.], [New York, 1967], p. 122) that the myth of natural selection is "one of the finest myths which human imagination has yet produced" and the biblical account of creation cannot compare with its aesthetic power.

⁵⁸ *Supra*, n. 32, at pp. 28-29. Translation mine.

⁵⁹ C. S. Lewis has used a similar, but opposite, formulation to convey a similar idea. In *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York, 1964), pp. 51-52, he has warned that too-rigorous demythologizing of our conception of God is liable to result in a surreptitious and pernicious "remythologizing," in which we substitute "a poorer mythology for a richer." One of the sources of kabbalistic thought's renewed popularity in recent years is its mythological flavor, as has been noted by such thinkers as Yehudah Liebes.

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