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Ari Mermelstein

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ABSTRACTS

HAYIM TAWIL AND ARYĒ TAWIL

WAS CHIROPRACTIC KNOWN IN BIBLICAL TIMES?

HEBREW חָלַץ, A LEXICOGRAPHICAL NOTE VI

The precise denotation and evolution of the verb חָלַץ has long been a vexing problem for linguists. Sometimes used to connote the removal of an object and at other times to refer to warriors, this Hebrew verb has perplexed both medieval and modern scholars as to its precise meaning. In particular, scholars have disagreed as to the semantic development of the verb and even as to whether this verb consists of one root or multiple roots. However, many of the theories proposed are tenuous on both semantic and etymological grounds.

Hayim and Aryē Tawil, by inductively studying the verb in both biblical and post-biblical literature, conclude that Hebrew חָלַץ consists of one root with three distinct denotations. By identifying its primary meaning as "to pull off," the authors not only explain the evolution of the verb's meaning but also illuminate the meaning of a cryptic and long misunderstood passage in Isaiah that apparently describes an ancient precursor to the modern technique of chiropractic.

YEHUDA SARNA

THE CO-DIVINE READER: RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO AN OPEN BIBLE

The account of Dinah's rape and the subsequent pillage of Shechem in Genesis 34 exemplifies open-endedness in biblical narrative. The conclusion of the story, a zealous cry by the brothers in defense of their sister, leaves the reader to decide on his own where justice truly lies. Scholars debate the intended message of the story, though the implication

for devising a literary theory of the Bible is clear: at least in some narratives, the Bible purposely opens its moral questions to a diverse audience.

In seeking to define a literary theory that is both religious in character and reader-response in orientation, this essay explores each of these wings. Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser accurately describe reading as an experience, not as a static piece of art, the substance of which is identification with personalities and subconscious integration of values. Hasidic literature portrays the goal of Torah study as binding oneself to the Divine, justifying imaginative, subjective interpretations. The *co-divine reader* sanctifies reader-response criticism, merging it with a de-mystified Hasidic approach; by struggling with the intentional "problems" in the text, the reader seeks the Divine Will and sympathizes therewith on an emotional level.

ELIYAHU STERN

ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION IN WISDOM AND TREATY LITERATURE

The injunction against adding and/or subtracting from what God says appears three times in biblical literature—in Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. In this article, the author investigates the specific contexts in which each occurrence appears in an effort to establish precisely what is meant each time. He finds that in Deuteronomy, the clause is really a prohibition against idolatry; in Proverbs, it seems to be a warning against accepting innovative theological positions; and in Ecclesiastes, it seems to be neither a prohibition nor an injunction, but rather a deterministic statement of the futility of trying to alter what has occurred as a result of God's will.

Following the detailed textual analysis, the author turns to analyzing the relationship between the various texts. Taking issue with the accepted opinion that Deuteronomy borrowed the phrase from the other texts, he

argues from recent research on Deuteronomy's hermeneutical techniques that in fact it is more likely that it was that text which introduced the phrase into Israelite literature, and it was then borrowed from there by the other texts.

HAYYIM ANGEL

WAS SODOM DESTROYED BY AN EARTHQUAKE? A STUDY OF BIBLICAL EARTHQUAKES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

While the destruction of Sodom evokes images of Divine retribution throughout the Bible, the account of the city's ruin in Genesis provides few details as to the particular manner and method of its destruction. The text is cryptic, alluding only to a divine display of fire and brimstone. Some have suggested that Sodom was destroyed by a volcano, while others have posited that it was destroyed by an earthquake. Though archaeologists have preferred the latter thesis on the strength of archaeological and geographical evidence, it has never been considered through the lens of other biblical passages. Subjecting this theory to just such a test, it appears that biblical passages from Amos, Isaiah, and Zechariah support this proposition.

MORDY FRIEDMAN

BALAAAM—LOYAL PROPHET OF GOD? BALAAAM'S MISSION IN EARLY BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Balaam is one character few choose to defend. With rare exception, he has been vilified and held up as a paradigm of evil from the earliest exegesis through contemporary times. This paper sets out to accomplish two tasks. First, Friedman revives the possibility of viewing Balaam as a "good guy" in the narrative by documenting early exegetes, who are more

numerous than has been previously recognized. Second, he sets out to explicate one particular exegetical position that has been taken by two major Jewish biblical interpreters: Pseudo-Philo (1st-2nd centuries CE) and Nahmanides.

These two exegetes share the position that Balaam was a "loyal prophet of God," sent by God on a mission to carry out His will, who at some point made a mistake. The details of this position are teased out of the exegetes' comments, and a re-evaluation of the text puts this position in exegetical context. He shows what textual details pushed them in that direction and how they re-explained other parts of the text based on their understanding of Balaam.

YITZCHAK ETSHALOM

THE 'AKEDAH AS PARSHANUT: ESTABLISHING THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM

What inspired the rabbinic portrayal of Balaam as a wicked character? Allusions within the Balaam narrative to Abraham create a parallel that brings into greater relief the contrast between the two characters. Subsequently, Balaam's blindness is contrasted with Abraham's faith and commitment in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac.

This study reveals that it is specifically the parallels between the two characters in the biblical text that highlight the contrasts between them. Phrases and concepts used to highlight positive traits in Abraham perform exactly the opposite function in Balaam's narrative. Besides highlighting these literary features of the stories, the paper also explains the insight that went into the early exegetes' overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards Balaam.

GABRIEL POSNER

ANONYMITY IN GENESIS: THE PATTERN OF A LITERARY TECHNIQUE

It is unclear why many biblical characters, including some who seem to be very important in the narratives in which they appear, do not receive names. Several suggestions have been advanced to explain the phenomenon of anonymity in the Bible. The book of Genesis specifically, however, appears to follow a specific scheme that dictates which characters receive names and which do not: anonymous characters only appear once and then retreat from the narrative stage. While anonymity in Genesis follows a general pattern, particular aspects of its usage as a literary technique vary throughout the book. In one of its more significant forms, withholding character names connects several pericopes to the theme of the book as a whole.

NACHMAN LEVINE

THE TOWER OF BABEL DECONSTRUCTED: LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND STRUCTURAL STRUCTURE

Genesis 11 describes the building and subsequent deconstruction of the Tower of Babel. The narrative depicts a clash between man, builder of the tower, and God, creator of the universe. With the tower and its bricks representative of the society man has developed and with the narrative's incessant focus on language and its role in creating the tower, the author investigates the reciprocal structures of language, society, and city that emerge from a close reading of the account. These elements are all opposed to God, creator of language and the universe. The narrative's tight structure and its artful use of parallelism and wordplay help draw the reader's attention to the impulses of the tower's builders and ultimately to God's reaction as the conflict between man and God rises to a crescendo.

The narrative is replete with metaphors and symbols that reinforce the story's theme. Erection of the edifice and its later deconstruction serve as metaphors for the tensions between unity and dispersal, God and man, and organic and manmade. The tower, as this symbol, is the embodiment of man's societal impulses and his language; its subsequent deconstruction is the undoing of both society and language.

WAS CHIROPRACTIC KNOWN IN BIBLICAL TIMES? HEBREW חלץ, A LEXICOGRAPHICAL NOTE VI*

Hayim Tawil and Aryē J. Tawil

To Drs. Daniel Fenster
and Robert J. De Bonis

I.

The Biblical Hebrew verb חלץ appears forty four times in the Bible: it occurs fourteen times in the Torah, nine times in the Nevi'im, and twenty one times in the Ketuvim. The verb is attested twenty two times in the Qal (four in the Qal active¹ and eighteen in the Qal passive participle,² i.e., חלוצ). It occurs seven times in the Nif'al,³ fourteen times in the Pi'el,⁴ and once in the Hif'il.⁵

It should be observed that while lexicons such as BDB,⁶ Ben-Yehuda,⁷ Even-Shoshan,⁸ and DCH⁹ account for two homonyms of the

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Aryē J. Tawil is a practicing Athletic and Family Chiropractor in NYC.

* See H. Tawil, "Hebrew חלץ/חלצו, Akkadian ešēru/šūšuru, A Lexicographical Note," *JBL* 95 (1976), 405-413; *Idem.*, "Hebrew חלץ, Mishnaic Hebrew חלץ, Akkadian šalāpu / šullūpu, A Lexicographical Note II," *Beit Mikra* 146 (1996), 276-292; *Idem.*, "Hebrew חלץ, Akkadian šalāpu: A Lexicographical Note III," *Beit Mikra* 153 (1998), 203-216; *Idem.*, "Late Hebrew-Aramaic חלץ, Neo-Babylonian sirpu/sirapu: A Lexicographical Note IV," *Beit Mikra* 154-5 (1998), 339-344; *Idem.*, "Late Hebrew-Aramaic חלץ, Akkadian na'āsu: A Lexicographical Note V," *Beit Mikra* 156 (1998), 94-96.

I would like to thank my student, Jonathan Strauss, for his assistance in completing this article.

¹ Deut 25:9; Isa 20:2; Hos 5:6; Lam 4:3

² Num 31:5; 32:21, 27, 29, 30, 32; Deut 3:18; 25:10; Josh 4:13; 6:7, 9, 13; Isa 15:4; 1 Chr 12:23, 24; 2 Chr 17:18; 20:21; 28:14.

³ Num 31:3; 32:17, 20; Ps 60:7; 108:7; Prv 11:8, 9.

⁴ Lev 14:40, 43; 2 Sam 22:20 (= Ps 18:20); Ps 6:5; 7:5; 34:8; 50:15; 81:8; 91:15; 116:8; 119:153; 140:2; Job 36:15.

⁵ Isa 58:11.

⁶ BDB, 322-3.

word חלץ, 1. "to draw off or out, withdraw," and 2. "equip for war" (primary idea of strength, vigor), KB³ maintains one entry of חלץ with two connotations: 1. "to draw off (a shoe)" and 2. "ready for fighting."¹⁰ KB³ further equates Heb. חלץ with the Akkadian verb *halāṣu*, rendered as "to squeeze out, to clean by combing."

However, KB³'s assertions are unwarranted on both semantic and etymological grounds. A) Semantic – It fails to show the semantic development of חלץ "to draw off, withdraw" > "ready for fighting." B) Etymological – While Akkadian *halāṣu* and Heb. חלץ are related etymologically, they are semantically distinct. Akk. *halāṣu*, which is employed in sequence with *ṣabātu*¹¹ (=Heb. שחט)¹² "to press" (grapes and other fruits), also means "to press." It seems better to equate Akk. *halāṣu* with Heb. לחץ, "to press, oppress," invoking a metathesis which commonly occurs between those two languages.¹³

While KB³ fails to convey the semantic development of חלץ "to pull off" > חלוצ "ready for fighting," Ibn Janāḥ, along with various other medieval commentators, advocates two possibilities. His first suggestion concerning the development of the primary meaning חלץ "to pull off" (i.e., שלף) > חלוצ goes as follows: "וקרוב מן הענין הראשון 'ועבר לכם כל חלוצ' (שלף) > חלוצ (Num 32:21), 'and very close to the first meaning (i.e., to pull off) is 'and all *ḥālūṣ* shall pass (the Jordan) before you,' which means those who take off their clothes to go to war."¹⁴ Ibn Janāḥ's second possible interpretation is not concerned with the semantic development of the verb and explains חלוצ as follows: "וכבר פרשו במלות 'האל האזירה והחגירה למלחמה... ושני פרושים יכונ' (חלוצ, i.e.) was

already explained in these words: the girding and belting (oneself) for war...and both interpretations are possible."¹⁵

Although Ibn Janāḥ presents his two explanations as mutually exclusive, Kutscher,¹⁶ commenting on the vocable בחלץ employed in the Genesis Apocryphon,¹⁷ attempts to reconcile Ibn Janāḥ's two definitions of חלוצ as follows: "בחלץ cf. Syriac 'חליצותא' 'fortitudo.' That the Biblical root חלץ is sometimes close to this meaning is indicated by the fact that the T.O. translates the root חלץ with זרו (e.g., Deut iii, 18).... If this be true, we would have in all these instances a survival of the root חלץ 'strengthen' which probably is an offshoot of the root חלץ 'strip' etc. as a development from the word חלוצ 'equipped for war' (=stripped for fighting)." However, Kutscher's proposed semantic development of חלץ is not universally accepted, for he confesses that "admittedly, the Midrash Wayyiqra Rabba 34, which deals with the different meanings of this root, does not explain it in this way." More significantly, Kutscher's theory is tenuous on semantic grounds, something we will have occasion to examine shortly.

II

The purpose of the present paper is to inductively study the verb חלץ in biblical and post-biblical Heb. and attempt to show that Heb. חלץ consists of one single root that has three distinct semantic denotations, one of which expresses the notion of chiropractic.

At the outset, it should be observed that the primary meaning of the verb חלץ is indeed physical and concrete. Thus, a) three times in the Qal it refers to חלץ נעל, "to pull off a sandal,"¹⁸ rendered by Tg. Onq. שרה סינא, "to untie the sandal"; Tg. Neof. and Tg. J. שלף סנדלה, "to pull off the sandal" b) It is employed twice in the Pi'el in the idiom חלץ אבנים, "to pull

⁷ Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* (Hebrew) (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 2:1564.

⁸ Abraham Even-Shoshan, *The New Dictionary* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1966), 2:779.

⁹ David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 4:239-240.

¹⁰ KB³, 1:321-2.

¹¹ CAD HJ 40a; AHw, 1074a.

¹² Gen 40:11; See Harold R. (Chaim) Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 35.

¹³ H. Tawil, "Lexicographical Note IV," 340-1.

¹⁴ Yona Ibn Janāḥ, *Sepher Haschorashim* (Hebrew) (Wilhelm Bacher, ed.; Berlin, 1896), 156-7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ E.Y. Kutscher, "The Language of the Genesis Apocryphon: A Preliminary Study," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1965), 29.

¹⁷ J.A. Fitzmayer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), p. 52 2:8.

¹⁸ Deut 25:9, 10; Isa 20:2.

out stones,"¹⁹ rendered by Tg. Onq. שלף אבניא; Tg. Neof./Tg. J. שטט אבניה , "to detach stones" c) It is employed once in the Qal in the idiomatic hapax חלץ שד "to pull off (i.e., expose) the breast,"²⁰ rendered by Tg. Ket. as טלען תד "to take off the breast."

So, too, the verb חלץ "to pull off" is employed in post-Biblical Hebrew in a concrete and physical sense in the following idioms: חלץ "to pull off phylacteries";²¹ חלץ גידין ועצמות "to pull off tendons and bones";²² חלץ בשר (מן העצם) "to pull off meat from the bones";²³ חלץ גלעין "to pull off pit";²⁴ חלץ כתף (מן חלוק) "to expose the shoulder (from the garment)."²⁵

The secondary connotation of חלץ is employed exclusively in wisdom literature, twelve times in the Pi'el and four times in the Nif'al. Here, the verb חלץ/נחלץ expresses the notion of "to pull off" > to save, rescue. Tg. Ket. renders the verb once by דחק "to push away," eight times by the verb פצה "rescue," and seven times by the verb שויב "to save."

Indeed, this very specific connotation of the verb is attested in both Punic and Old Aramaic inscriptions. In Old Aramaic, the verb is employed in the Pa'el as *hsl*, a metathesis for חלץ "to save, rescue" (lit. "pull off"). Thus, in the Zakur inscription we read: [ואנה א] [ק]ם עמך ואנה "pull off"). Thus, in the Zakur inscription we read: [ואנה א] [ק]ם עמך ואנה "and [I (Baal-Shamayn) shall lit. stand] with you, i.e., help you (Zakur), and I shall deliver you from all [these kings who] have imposed a siege upon you."²⁶ Likewise, in Imperial Aramaic, the Adon papyrus from Saqqara (482 B.C.E.), we read: למשלח [י] "to send an army to deliver me (Adon), let him (the Pharaoh) not abandon me."²⁷ In Punic, however, we find the verb employed in the Qal passive participle in the sense of "to rescue, save"

e.g., לעשתרת לפגמלין ידע מלך בן פדי חלץ אש חלץ פגמלין, "to Astarte, to Pygmalion, Yada'milk son of Paday the saved one (i.e., hālūs) whom Pygmalion saved."²⁸

The third connotation that the verb חלץ exhibits is attested solely in the passive, in both the Qal passive participle as well as in the Nif'al. Besides appearing four times in the Nif'al, where חלץ carries the connotation of "to pull off > to save" (from danger, calamity, evildoers, etc.),²⁹ the verb is likewise attested three times in the Nif'al in a military context: a) החלצו מאתכם אנשים לצבא (Num 31:3); b) ואנחנו נחלץ חשים לפני ה' (Num 32:17); c) אם תחלצו לפני ה' למלחמה (Num 32:20). Following the rendering of LXX and the Peshitta, "to arm oneself," Tg. Onq./Tg. J. זרז, and Tg. Neof. זין, medieval and modern biblical scholarship understood the verb to mean "to equip, to arm, to take up arms."

However, this explanation is not without its problems. Specifically, the accepted translation of the Qal passive participle חלוצ as "equipped for war," or "ready for fighting," results in the unsatisfactory explanation of the semantic development from the primary meaning "to pull off, draw off" > "to equip, ready for war." Sensing the difficulties, Milgrom states that the NJPS rendering "Let [men] be picked out... although conjectural, is preferable."³⁰ Thus, NJPS consistently understood חלוצ to mean "picked for," "shock-fighter, troops," "vanguard."

The best solution to the present confusion is to take the Nif'al החלצו (Num 31:3)/נחלץ (Num 32:17)/תחלצו (Num 32:20), as well as the Qal passive part. חלוצ, as a direct semantic offshoot of the primary meaning "to pull off, draw off, detach." According to this reconstruction, חלוצ would express the notion of a person or a group of persons who is (are) "pulled off, drawn off, detached," from the "main body of the people, army," i.e., "vanguard," as opposed to the מאסף "rearguard" (Josh 6:9).

¹⁹ Lev 14:40, 43.

²⁰ Lam 4:3.

²¹ C.J. Kasowski, *Thesaurus Talmudis* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ronald, 1965), 14:481 ff.

²² Ibid., 482.

²³ Moshe Kosovsky, *Concordance to the Talmud Yerushalmi* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1984), 3:650.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 8 A:12-15.

²⁷ Ibid., 113 N-21:17.

²⁸ Ibid., 3:69:1-6. cf. also J. Hofstijzer and K. Kongeling, *Dictionary of the North West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1:378.

²⁹ Ps 60:7; 108:7; Prv 11:8, 9.

³⁰ J. Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1990), 255-256, n. 3.

Accordingly, the expression חלוצי/חלוצ צבא is in a sense similar to the idiom יוצא/יוצאי צבא "one who goes out to the army."³¹

The above interpretation of the military term חלץ is indeed strengthened by the Talmudic understanding of שלף=חלץ "to draw off, pull off" involving both non-military and military contexts:

אמר ליה רב כהנא לשמואל ממאי דהאי וחלצה נעלו מעל רגלו מישלופ הוא דכתיב וחלצו את האבנים אשר בהם הנגע ואימא זרזי הוא דכתיב החלצו מאתכם אנשים לצבא התם נמי שלופי מבייתא לקרבא.

"Rabbi Kahana said to Shemuel: whence is it derived 'vehālēṣā his shoe from his foot' signifies 'pulling off'? Because it is written, 'They shall take out the stones in which the plague is.' But I might suggest that the meaning is that of *zerūzē*, for it is written: 'hēhālṣū from among you men for the army!' [No,] there too [the meaning is] those who are pulled off from the house to war."³²

III

The verb חלץ is likewise employed once in the Hif'il in the idiomatic hapax עצמות חלץ in Isa 58:11:

1. ונחך ה' תמיד
 2. והשביע בצחצחות נפשך
 3. ועצמתך יחליץ
 4. והיית כגן רוח וכמוצא מים
 5. אשר לא יכזבו מימיו
1. "The Lord will guide you continually
 2. He will satisfy yourself in dry places
 3. He will *yahālṣ* your bones
 4. so that You will be like a watered garden and like a source of water
 5. whose waters never fail."

The verse raises both lexicographical and contextual problems, confronted by medieval and modern scholars alike: a) what is the precise connotation of the hapax expression יחליץ? b) What is the contextual relationship between clauses a-b/d-e and c? Namely, what

does the idiom יחליץ have to do with the notion of quenching one's thirst in dry places and being like a well-watered garden and a spring whose waters fail not? In order to answer the above questions, one has to fully understand the denotation of the hapax expression יחליץ.

At the outset, it should be observed that the ancient translations, medieval commentators, and modern biblical scholars³³ dispute the exact meaning of this idiom. LXX and the Peshitta render it as "strengthen," and Tg. J. freely translates it as יחי וגופך, "He shall invigorate (lit. make live) your body." Medieval exegetes as well as modern biblical scholars have suggested two primary interpretations: 1. Strengthen—Sa'adia renders קוה אלעטאם "strengthen the bones";³⁴ Rashi reads יזין, "to make strong"; Isaiah of Trani offers לשון חזוק, "a meaning of strength"; Eliezer of Beaugency comments יזרו אברייך, "He shall strengthen your limbs." 2. The second explanation is semantically non-committed, that is, it translates the expression on contextual grounds. Accordingly, Ibn Janāh renders ירוה וירטיב, לפי הענין, "He will moisten, he will make wet, according to the context."³⁵ Such is also the interpretation of Qimhi, who renders ידשן as יחליץ, "to make fat."

Ibn Ezra rejects both explanations and states:

יש אומרים כמו 'ידשן' בלי חבר. ואחרים אמרו 'חזק' כמו חלוצי צבא (במ' לא, ה). ויש אומרים ש'יחליץ'—כמו 'יחליץ' (איוב לו, טו), כאשר מצאנו 'ישליח' (שמ' ח, יז)—'ישלח' (תה' עח, מה); 'ישמיח' (יה' פט, מג)—'ישמח' (איכה ב, יז). וזהו הנכון, כי הנה הוא 'שומר כל עצמותי' (תה' לד, כא), והנה יחלצם משבר.

"Some will declare it to be a hapax legomenon, and explain it as 'He will make fat'; others render it 'He will strengthen,' comparing it with 'armed' (Num 31:5); still others think that *yahālṣ* and *yehālṣ* 'he delivers' (Job 36:15) are the same in meaning; as in the case with *yašlāh* (Ex 8:17), and *yešālāh* 'he sends' (Ps 78:45), with *yasmiah* (Ps 89:43) and *yasammāh* 'he causes to be glad' (Lam 2:17). This latter explanation is right; cf. 'He keeps all his bones, [not one of them is broken]' (Ps 34:21)—he is *protecting* them from breaking."

³¹ Cf., e.g., Num 1:3, 45; 26:2; 1 Chr 12:9 and passim.

³² bTal Yebam 102b.

³³ See, for example, E.J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1943), 23; John D. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 270-71; John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 164.

³⁴ See J. Dermbourg, *Oeuvres Complètes de R. Saadia ben Josef Al-Fayyome* (Paris, 1893).

³⁵ Ibid., n. 14.

means, therefore, 'He delivers his bones from the danger of being broken.' Although some moderns unnecessarily resort to emending the verb *יחליץ*, rendering the idiom "(will make your bones) young and fresh again,"³⁶ the majority follow the medieval interpretation "to strengthen (the bones)."

Prior to discussing the idiomatic hapax *יחליץ*, which may indeed constitute the first reference to the practice of chiropractic in biblical times, we should examine some of the post-biblical texts related to this matter. It is interesting to note that in the liturgy, in the prayer of *קדוש*, "the sanctification of the New Moon" (i.e., the new month) on the Sabbath preceding the new month, the petition for *עצמות* חיים של חלוץ, "life of *hillūs* of the bones" is included. This appeal is based upon the prayer of Rav (3rd century CE) that appears in Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 16b: "רב בטר צלותיה אמר הכי: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' א-לקינו שתתן לנו חיים ארוכים, חיים של שלום, חיים של טובה, חיים של ברכה, חיים של פרנסה, חיים של חלוץ עצמות"; "Rav, after his prayer (i.e., his *שמונה עשרה* prayer) would say: 'May it be your will, O Lord our God, that You give us a long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of sustenance, a life of *hillūs* of the bones.' Practically all understood the nominal idiomatic hapax *עצמות חלוץ* as lit. "strengthening of the bones" (i.e., "life of physical health").

In truth, the petition utilizing the verb *יחליץ* is employed prior to Rav, in Mishnah Erubin 3:9. There, R. Dosa b. Harkinas (first-second century CE) says: "העובר לפני התיבה ביום טוב של ראש השנה אומר: *יחליצנו ה'*"; "The person who passes before the Ark on the holiday of Rosh Hashanah says, '*habāḥālīṣēnū*, O Lord our God on this day of Rosh Hodesh (i.e., the first of the new month), if today, if tomorrow." Here again, the verb *יחליצנו* is commonly rendered as "strengthen us."

One final post-biblical text in which the verb *יחליצנו* appears is the Midrash Leviticus Rabba 34:15, which alludes to the prayer that was later

incorporated into the grace after meals on the Sabbath.³⁷ "רצה והחליצנו ה' א-לקינו במצותיך ובמצות יום השביעי השבת הגדול והקדוש הזה, כי יום זה גדול וקדוש"; "Let it be according to Your wishes *wēhabāḥālīṣēnū* through Your commandments and through the commandment of the seventh day, this great and sanctified Sabbath. This day is indeed great and sanctified for You to abstain from work and to rest on it with loyalty according to Your will." Here too, the majority of prayer books translate the verb *יחליצנו* as "strengthen us."

As noted above, there is no semantic justification for such a rendering. On the contrary, we have shown above that the verb *יחליץ* has almost the opposite meaning, namely, the verb developed from its primary-concrete meaning to pull off > to be detached (from the main body of people) > to rescue. To our mind, such is also the case concerning the idiomatic hapax *יחליץ* in Isa 58:11. The prophet Isaiah intentionally employs the concrete verb *יחליץ* in the Hif'il to express the idea of God separating, detaching, and pulling off one's bones from each other, a sign of relaxation and physical health. Indeed the contextual relationship of clause "c" to clause "b" on the one hand and clauses d/e on the other demands an understanding of clause "c" which implies physical health. The clause, which according to our suggestion describes a chiropractic-like procedure, is taken as conducive to good health.

We know from elsewhere in the Bible that the bones are regarded as the seat of health and vigor; their weakened condition parallels the general state of deterioration in old age. Accordingly, note the following idioms: "דבקה עצמי לבשרי", "my bones are charred from dryness" (Job 30:33; cf. also Ps 102:4); "עצמי עששו", "my bones are wasted away" (Ps 32:3); "עצמי עששו", "my bones are wasted away" (Ps 31:11); "צפד עורם על עצמם יבש היה כעץ", "their skin has shriveled on their bones it has become dry as a wood" (Lam 4:8). The converse, of course, is that their sturdiness earlier in life is representative of the robust state of the rest of the body; see *שמועה טובה*, "good news puts fat on the bones" (Prov 15:30); *ועצמותיכם*

³⁶ See, for example, Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 352.

³⁷ See the standard prayer books.

כדשא תפרחנה “your bones shall flourish like a tender grass” (Isa 66:14); ומה עצמותיו ישקה “his bone marrow is watered” (i.e., juicy) (Job 21:24).

It was out of recognition for the healthy, relaxed state conveyed by the idiom "החלץ עצמות" that R. Eleazar characterized it as the best of blessings.³⁸ הוא דכתיב ועצמתך יחליץ, ואמר רבי אלעזר, זו מעולה שבברכות, "[what explanation is there, however, for] the Scriptural text 'and he shall loosen up your bones,' of which Rabbi Eleazar said that this was the best of blessings..." This very state of relaxation, rest, and repose expressed by separation and loosening up of one's bones, is the reason for the inclusion of the petition in the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah (i.e., החליצנו את, חיים של, i.e., קידוש החדש and in the prayer of Rav and in grace after meals on the Sabbath, where והחליצנו רצה, חלוץ עצמות); and in grace after meals on the Sabbath, where "let it be according to Your wishes and loosen us" (i.e., our bones), is followed and juxtaposed with ולנוח בו, "and to rest on it."³⁹

Our understanding of the semantic range of חלץ and more specifically the juxtaposition of החלץ עצמות נוח "to rest" is clearly advocated in Leviticus Rabba 34:15:

ובחן' ה' תמיד והשביע בצמחצות נפשך ועצמחך יחליץ'—א"ר טביומי, אם עשית כן, יהי את כבוראך, כאותו שכתוב 'יודי צח ואדום' (שה"ש ה' א'), 'ועצמחך יחליץ'ך, שמוט, זיווי, ויניח, שמוט, כד"א 'חלצה נשם רגלי דב' (דב' כה, ט); זיווי כד"א 'חלוצים חבורו לפני אחיכם בני ישראל' (שמו, ג), שזיבו, 'חלצני'ה שבת. מאדם רע' (תק, חג, ב); ויניח, כמאן קבעו חכמים לומר רצה והחליצנו שבת. והיית כנן ורה מכאזום מים אשר לא יכובו מימיו' (יש' נח, יא), זה עזר.

“And the Lord will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in *sahjahot* and make loose thy bones.’ R. Tabyurni explained: If you have done this you will be like your Creator, of whom it is written, ‘My beloved is white (*sah*) and ruddy’ (SOS 5:10). ‘And make strong (*yahali*) thy bones.’ ‘*Yahali*’ means ‘He will loose’ ‘He will arm,’ ‘He will deliver,’ and ‘He will give rest.’ ‘He will loose’ is a meaning proved by the text, ‘and she pulled off his shoe from his foot’ (Deut 25:9). ‘He shall arm’ is a meaning proved by the text ‘Ye shall pass over armed’ (Deut 3:18). ‘He shall deliver’ is a meaning proved by the text, ‘Deliver me O Lord, from the evil man’ (Ps 140:2). ‘He shall

³⁸ BTal Yebarnot 102b.

³⁹ This idea is expressed even more clearly in the Yemenite and Sephardic books, where רצה והחליצנו במצוהיך is followed by רצה ונצטו יום המנוח השביעי הזה, "and through the commandment of the day of rest, this seventh day." See Yahya Salih, *Tiklal* 1:169 (Hebrew) (Y. Hasid, ed.; Jerusalem, 1961). Note that the Yemenite and the Sephardic prayer books seems to have a better version of the line that follows, i.e., נשבת בו וננוח בו, "so we shall stop working on it, and we shall rest in it."

give rest.' It is for this reason that the Sages have ordained that one should say, 'Be pleased and give us rest on the Sabbath.' 'And thou shalt be like a watered garden that is, literally, a garden. And like a spring of water, whose waters fail not'—this alludes to Eden."

IV

Our analysis of the verses in Isaiah implies that the prophet, in antiquity, anticipated what later became known as chiropractic. Separating the bones creates optimal space between them to promote proper fluid retention and nerve flow. If the space between the vertebrae is reduced, the fluid that lies between the bones and insures the health of the joint is impaired and the nerves that run between the bones are pinched. Of course, proper nerve flow is crucial for the body to function properly. If a nerve is damaged or constricted, the information that it carries is interrupted. Thus, without proper separation of the bone, mobility, nerve communication, and above all else optimal health are put at risk. Isaiah, prophesying some 2700 years ago, seems to have acknowledged the beneficial effects of this treatment.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For iconographic images from the ancient world depicting practices very reminiscent of the modern technique of chiropractic, see the appendix to this article, pp. 12-13.



The hippocratic method to manipulate the spine relied on combined traction applied with a thrust or sustained pressure. Traction was by means of a winch or from a folded cloth pulled by helpers. The thrust could come from a person sitting or standing on the back of a patient or by means of a board acting as a lever.



Examples of Roman manipulation.



Minor spinal displacements may be the modern counterparts of Aesculapian manipulations.

THE CO-DIVINE READER: RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO AN OPEN BIBLE

Yehuda Sarna

"Damn the consequences"—Meir Sternberg paraphrases the concluding line of the story of Dinah's rape, proudly condensing the brothers' rhetorical rebuff while preserving their "voice of idealism"—as he sees it. "Their concern," he confidently claims, "has been selfless and single-minded: to redress the wrong done to their sister and the whole family."¹ Hear his conviction. It's as if the passion of the brothers caught Sternberg on fire, bounding over cultural and temporal chasms. But who is to say for certain that the brothers themselves escape damnation?

Not Sternberg, argue D.N. Fewell and David Gunn.² Though Sternberg appeals to literary competence as the guarantor of his confidence—a confidence I want to prod in developing a religious literary theory for biblical narrative—an androcentric compass directs his account of how Genesis 34 guides the reader toward a single ideological judgment: that the brothers acted heroically. A bird's eye view, according to Fewell and Gunn, undermines Sternberg's appropriation of objectivity, exposing the super-literary assumptions driving their interpretive debate:

Sternberg's reader turns out to hold normative values that hinge on an ethic of rights, the so-called higher, principled, morality. Sternberg seeks justice, seeks to equalize, seeks a balance. Damn the consequences. Our reader, on the other hand, responds with an ethic of responsibility, where relationships, care, and consequences shape

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¹ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), p. 472.

² D.N. Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the rape of Dinah," *JBL* 110:2 (1991), pp. 193-211.

moral choices... You don't want to look at just equality. You want to look at how people are going to be able to handle their lives.³

In hasty carelessness, the brothers usurp Dinah's own freedom to determine her destiny as a shamed, devalued, debauched maiden. Perhaps Dinah would have liked to marry Shechem, considering the alternative offers only of desperate courtiers—or no offers at all. Perhaps Sternberg pre-judges Shechem, missing his genuine and repentant romantic hindsight—"Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly" (Gen. 34:3).⁴ The brothers, Fewell and Gunn complain, have condemned Dinah to damned consequences.

Different ethics—of rights or responsibility—act as the cogs and wheels which manufacture interpretations, yet they merely form part of the larger machinery, one which encompasses not only other moral calculations, but also cultural, religious, political, economic, gender, and literary dispositions. But Sternberg looks only at his factory, notes its productivity, then publicizes its objectivity in deciphering the Bible's simple messages:

The Bible is difficult to read, easy to underread and overread and even misread, but virtually impossible to counterread... But follow the biblical narrator ever so uncritically, and by no great exertion you will be making tolerable sense of the world you are in... and the point of it all [Emphasis mine].⁵

The "point of it all" depends, as Sternberg claims, on the competence of the reader, but only on its degree, not its type. Readers boasting the same *degree* of fitness but in different *types* of interpretive exercise don't always see eye to eye when a text stands between them, as Fewell and Gunn—and two millennia of multi-varied exegesis—show us.

Open Versus Closed: Dinah's Case

³ Ibid., p. 209.

⁴ All translations are taken from *The Torah*, edited by Harold M. Orlinsky (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962).

⁵ Sternberg, pp. 50-51.

At odds with this convincing history sits the weakening belief in a text's univalence. The persuasive power of the variegated synchronic and diachronic interpretations springs from the nature of biblical narrative: drawings unfinished with corners untouched. As John Goldingay puts it in his *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*:

Traditional biblical interpretation has difficulty tolerating ambiguity and openness; it assumes that the author aimed at clarity and precision... It is likely to assume that apparent ambiguity in texts is there because we do not share the conventions and assumptions that the text's author and first audience shared. But there are aspects of the intrinsic meaning of biblical stories for which such data seems to be missing.⁶

Not only do texts tolerate multiple interpretations, but they also cannot escape it. Furthermore, the case of Dinah's rape deepens the wound in the "traditional" belief; not only can texts not escape multiple interpretations, but this text even intends it.⁷

Jacob questions the correctness of Simeon and Levi's slaughtering of the entire village of Shechem, an act premeditated and pre-justified by its perpetrators. The two sides at that point in time definitely disagree, nor does the Torah ever clear up the uncertainty, or even mediate between family loyalty and murder. The concluding rhetoric of the brothers leaves the question mark unresolved in the reader's mind: "Should our sister be treated like a whore?" Are the brothers apologizing to Jacob, explaining their original thinking to calm his anger? Or do they merely stick to their swords? Perhaps they overwhelm Jacob with their zealous logic, for Jacob does not issue a response. Even Jacob's first statement, "You have brought trouble upon me ... I and my house will be destroyed," sits indecisively atop a sharp ledge. Does he condone the act from an ethical

⁶ John Goldingay, *Models For Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), p. 40.

⁷ See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 12. A univalent text would reduce the complexity and complexion of people, the world, and God to an infantile conception and a baby face. There are no easy answers. For more examples of biblical multivalent episodes, see Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), pp. 224-226. McKnight concentrates on temporary suspension of clarity that the story later resolves (as in Jonah), not inconclusive endings (233). An interested student can efficiently contrast his work to my essay since he too pries into the psychology of the reader.

perspective but consider it bad politics, or does he put his condemnation into political language to render it comprehensible to two young brutes?

This case is better stocked to demonstrate biblical ambiguity than most other narratives. First, although ambiguities abound in the biblical text, the open conclusion here, effected by the unresolved argument and echoed by the rising intonation, flaunts its vulnerability to different interpretations. Second, the ethical stakes—family sanctity, pride, murder, revenge—do not permit us to downplay this ambiguity. Were a semantic cloud to complicate a poem praising God's Glory, leading to the question, 'Is the poet exalting God in way A or way B?' we could easily acknowledge its presence because practical value judgments aren't up for grabs—either way, God is great. But the bold ambiguity at the close of a front-page feature begs for a literary theory that embraces its multivalence.

Over the past two decades, biblical openness has welcomed post-modernist musings. Ranging from the feminist to the materialist, articles such as many featured in David J.A. Clines' two-volume *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998* purposively boast the limit of their interpretations: the reader, his limitations, and pre-dispositions.⁸ Among Christian intelligentsia, a resurgence in the art of preaching, or "hermeneutics," basks in its concordance with the freer reader-response theories.⁹ On the Jewish front, Kenneth Dauber coins "relationality" as the collapsing of the division between reader and text; the Bible is not an object that can be interpreted but a world that the reader "bangs around in" (my colloquialism).¹⁰ But the psychologically-oriented theories account both for pluralism and for how text changes readers, a general direction I want to follow here in constructing a religious brand of reader-response.

⁸ David J.A. Clines (ed.), *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

⁹ See, for example, McKnight (note 7), Goldingay cited earlier in-text, and J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

¹⁰ Kenneth Dauber, "The Bible as Literature: Reading Like the Rabbis," *Semeia* 31 (1985), pp. 27-48.

None of the above, however, sufficiently accounts for a reader who believes that each biblical word is a divine pronouncement. The "religious" flavor of their theories comes from a selective spice; the reader chooses palatable moral teachings. But many biblical readers feel as if they meet God and hear His words through textual experience. What do literary buzz-words such as 'text,' 'reading,' 'valid interpretation,' and 'mind of the reader' mean for such readers? Can we create and define a religious literary theory for the Bible? My attempt, in congruence with other reader-response theorists, will bridge exegesis, phenomenology, and history, but extends to the less plotted island (in the literary context) of religious experience. Let us first explore the foundations of throughways already built.

The School of Fish

Reader-response criticism grounds itself in the natures of text and language, not to mention the history of debate and intentional ambiguity we already discussed. Stanley Fish argues that text is not an object but an experience, that the meaning of a text resides not in it, waiting to be discovered, but in the reader.¹¹ Literature is "Kinetic Art"; it changes over time. The reader changes correspondingly, a transformative reality masked by the physical, static appearance of a book that yields such an experience.¹² Reading is not spatial, but temporal.¹³ Fish's criticism moves "away from evaluation and toward description" of the reader's cognitive and emotional journey;¹⁴ he defines it as "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader to the words as they succeed one another on the page."¹⁵ His question is not 'What does the text mean?' but 'What does it do?'—how does each word guide the emotion and imagination of a certain type of reader.

¹¹ Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980), esp. pp. 21-67.

¹² Ibid., p. 43.

¹³ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

By defining that type of reader—the “informed reader”—Fish avoids wild subjectivism. The informed reader is:

someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of “the semantic knowledge... that a mature listener brings to his task of comprehension,” including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and a comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) has literary competence... In this theory, then, the concerns of other schools of criticism—such as questions of genre, conventions, intellectual background—become redefined in terms of potential and probable response.¹⁶

This demand for linguistic, semantic, and literary competence places the individual informed reader within a cultural community that determines the properties of language, the standards of competence. The function of the community, however, is not to establish the determinate meaning of a text by majority rule, but only to facilitate discussion, to clarify for those engaged in dialogue the assumptions of each participant.

Whereas Fish does not go so far as to establish a meta-description of how the reader's imagination will flow through the text's dams and waterfalls, Wolfgang Iser seeks to systematize the reader's psychological response.¹⁷ Building on Fish's foundation that the text guides the reader, Iser investigates this relationship more closely, examining how exactly words lead imagination and sympathy. The reader identifies with four main perspectives in the literary text: those of the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the “implied reader,” a fictitious reader created by the author and formed by the text.¹⁸ The actual reader does not observe each perspective as he would a physical object, but travels within it, a continuous shifting of psychological identification which Iser calls “the wandering viewpoint.” In the narrative, for instance:

The reader's role is pre-structured by three basic components: the different perspectives represented in the text [the characters, plot, narrator, implied reader], the vantage point from which he joins them

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan to Becker* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

¹⁸ Iser, pp. 34-35.

together [the actual reader's own history and opinions], and the meeting place where they converge [the actual reader's mind, the stage where ideation occurs].

The components of this triad join in the reading experience to change the reader's actual self:

The instructions provided stimulate mental images, which animate what is linguistically implied, though not said. A sequence of mental images is bound to arise during the reading process, as new instructions have continually to be accommodated, resulting not only in the replacement of images formed but also in a shifting position of the vantage point, which differentiates the attitudes to be adopted in the process of image-building. Thus the vantage point of the reader and the meeting place of perspectives become interrelated during the ideational activity and so draw the reader into the world of the text.¹⁹

Iser thus defines two “selves” of the reader, one that willingly suspends disbelief, entering the role carved out for him by the text, and the “real” self that tries to integrate with each other the various perspectives “entered” during the reading experience. The real self never totally disappears during the act of reading. Rather, “it will tend to form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending.”²⁰ The tension between these two selves produces the change in the reader, often experienced as an “awakening” after reading.²¹

The power of this tension relies on the deep identification with the perspectives in the text, not simply their observation. The reader internalizes the perspectives through ideation, image creation, a process that occurs only, ironically, in the absence of words. Perception requires an object's presence; ideation requires its absence. Thus, Iser emphasizes the significance of “gaps,” holes in the text which ask for the reader's imagination to fill them in.²² In contrast to aestheticians who value literature *despite* the undetermined, disharmonious, and contradictory chords, Iser claims these gaps prod the reader, driving him to make sense

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

²¹ Ibid., p. 140.

²² Ibid., p. 168.

of the text and create a *gestalt*, to integrate the perspectives and take what he will from the experience.

Iser does not limit gaps to incongruities within the text, but extends them to portrayals of reality dissonant with the reality of the reader. Thus, Iser focuses on two types of "strategies" which drive the reader to integrate perspectives: 1) the internal re-assessment, created by the wandering viewpoint and literary cacophony; and 2) deviation from cultural norms. Dinah's rape highlights these two strategies, confirming the suitability of reader-response theory to biblical narrative.

Fish-Iser in Dinah's Rape

For Fish and Iser, the question is not one of interpretation, but one of experience. How does the reader feel throughout the story as described in Fish-Iserian terms? A reader of Dinah's rape essentially witnesses a superficially mild, but fundamentally explosive, dispute between two clans: the village Shechemites and the nomadic Israelites. Several behaviors in this context fly in the face of established norms. The most obvious instance, noted by Henry McKeating, obtrudes because of the Torah's elaborate description of the disproportionate revenge cunningly executed by the brothers:

Clan law, when operating properly, is not simply a free-for-all, it is a *system of justice*, albeit a crude one. It has recognized machinery (frequently in the shape of a system of arbitrators, or a set of conventions about the amounts of compensation appropriate for particular delicts) which normally prevents the 'escalation' of violence, the development of a vendetta, or the exaction of disproportionate penalties. In Gn. 34, no such machinery operates because the parties concerned do not recognize any common code of behaviour or procedure.²³

Dinah's rape, in McKeating's view, "illustrates not so much the operating of clan-based law as what happens when clan-law breaks down."²⁴

²³ Henry McKeating, "The Development of the Law on Homicide in Ancient Israel," *VT* 25 (1975), p. 49.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

The violation is flagrant. The clan normally understands offenses or damages against one member as inflicted on the clan as a whole. It is this broader entity, not the individual, which demands retribution from the perpetrating clan. Since clans, not persons, dispute cases, it is usually the patriarch, the head of the tribe, who decides the course of action. The Torah flouts this cultural-legal standard on several occasions within Dinah's rape. First, Shechem (the son of the patriarch, Hamor), by raping Dinah without consulting his father, independently commits an act that endangers the entire tribe. He then unabashedly demands of his father, "Get me this girl as a wife." Apparently, Hamor's rule over and respect within the clan fall below the standard the reader expects.

Weakened authority fetters Jacob as well. When Jacob hears that Dinah has been raped, he keeps silent until his sons come home. A powerful tribal head who registered the insult to his tribe would rush to the fields and summon his council—or troops—to take action. The heat of the news magnifies his silence's importance; the report travels by another informant to the brothers at work before Jacob, waiting at home, can tell them. Contrast Jacob's passivity with the ominous reaction of the brothers: "The men were distressed and very angry, because he [Shechem] had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done." Indeed, as soon as the brothers receive the news, they march back from the field, fatigued but eager to settle the score. They return to see their weak father negotiating with the enemy.

Their filial insubordination slips into, then dominates, the negotiations. Hamor requests Dinah as a wife for Shechem, offering the Israelites the opportunities of intermarriage and business relations. Shechem, pushing his father aside, addresses "her father and brothers," promising to pay any bride price in return for Dinah. After Shechem's intrusion, the brothers, in turn, grab the reins from their father (who hasn't yet said a word), presenting to the Shechemites a guileful scheme. This deviation from the cultural standard, parallel in both families, leads the reader to consider whether to sympathize with the insubordination in each case—in other words, with whom to side.

As if the external gaps didn't suffice, the internal shifting compounds the pressure on the reader to fill in the question of insubordination. How does the reader's identification change in moving through the temporal text? The implied reader's sympathies undoubtedly favor Jacob's family, considering the rape an act of lust, violence, and violation rather than an expression of overflowing romantic feeling. We feel for the innocent Dinah, her physical pain, her shame, her emotional collapse. We enter Shechem's mind briefly only to experience its shallowness and insensitivity. Naturally drawn to the victim, we despise Shechem. Jacob's frozen silence could have induced a sense of grief in us were the words to indicate it more overtly. Instead, his totally emotionless reaction seems incongruous with our feeling of violation for Dinah and antipathy towards Shechem. We do not despise Jacob, we just don't see him; our apathy toward him mirrors his toward the current situation.

In contrast, the vivid description of the brothers excites our imagination: we see them throwing down their hoes in bitter "distress" and "anger." Their expression of personal and moral outrage—"a thing not to be done"—carves the vessel for our pain and disgust to fill. Shechem's insubordination reveals his arrogance; the brothers' stepping forward demonstrates their passionate heroism.

Then, with the introduction of the brothers' deceptive plan, the Torah begins to test our heroic picture of the brothers. Should we approve or disapprove of their guile? Though we recognize the vengeful purpose of the plot, the Torah does not reveal its contents, asking us if we will continue to identify with the brothers on blind faith. This absence, a 'gap,' inspires questioning; Jacob's silence, the lack of an alternative, encourages the reader to bank on them. The more trust invested, though, the harder it is for the reader to withdraw his sympathy while he still can—or the harder the fall will be when he must.

The Torah then records the lengthy discussion between the tribal leaders, Hamor and Shechem, and the village Shechemites. Innocence, which drew us to Dinah, similarly pulls us toward the Shechemites, who, in accordance with the cultural norm, follow their leaders loyally. The

attraction increases in magnetic power since their circumcision demonstrates both self-sacrifice and submission to Israelite culture. We cannot point to any fault of theirs; they unluckily find themselves in a city ruled by selfish leaders. The same people victimize both Dinah and the townspeople.

By directing the reader's sympathies toward both the brothers and the Shechemites, the Torah sets the stage for the clash between them. It forces us to judge the patient, mass killing of smarting, innocent townspeople while still seeing the heinous sins of their leader's son in the background. To compound the need for re-assessing our identification with the brothers, we recall that this type of revenge shatters the norms of clan law, as McKeating, showing historical competence, points out. The collision of sympathies and the breaking of the external norm can send the reader in three divergent directions.

First, the reader may rebound from the horrible vengeance, retrospectively understanding the wisdom in Jacob's silence and calm. The reader may thus dissociate himself entirely from his previous sympathy, blaming the text for not having informed him of the overall plot during its first stages. Or, the reader may retain his original sympathy with the brothers, still disapproving of Jacob's quietism, but chastise them on having gone too far. Finally, the reader may persist in adoring the brothers' passionate commitment to the family's honor. A reader so inclined leans back from the story, reflecting, "My, how weighty the sin of rape, a breach of modesty so heinous that an entire town warranted death for the sin of its leaders!"

These diverging perspectives flow through and color the concluding rhetorical question discussed earlier. The overwhelming silence after the Jacob-brothers argument echoes whichever tone the reader heard the last line uttered in, reinforcing its power. Jacob's anticipated but absent rebuttal leaves his final position to the imagination of the reader. Perhaps after witnessing their passion and hearing their stark formulation, Jacob now recognizes the offense's gravity, replaces his original silence with a silent admission, acknowledging that the tribe must avenge such an

offense although revenge might put the entire tribe at risk. Or perhaps Jacob, disgusted with the hot-headedness of his sons, turns away from the bloody murderers, speechless. Perhaps he is too weak to respond at all.

Iser's Psychology and Classical Exegesis

An example of how such varying perspectives "converge" in a reader—an actual psychological tension—steers Nahmanides' interpretation of this story. His question displays an unwillingness to admit that either Jacob or the brothers acted incorrectly:

There is a problem here. It seems like the brothers answered with Jacob's consent, for they stood in front of him, and he knew that they were speaking deceptively. If so, why did he grow angry?... And many ask: how could the righteous sons of Jacob spill innocent blood? [Nahmanides quotes Maimonides' *halakhic* justification.] In my opinion, his words are incorrect, for if so, Jacob our forefather himself would have been obligated to act first and merit having them killed. And if he was afraid of them [the Shechemites], how could he be angry at his sons, curse their anger several times, punish them and split them up, for they were mentorious, they performed a good deed, relied on God and He saved them!²⁵

Nahmanides initially resists seeing the difference between Jacob and his sons since the conflict between two sympathetic characters causes psychological distress. Distress leads to ferment, which gives way to his resolution: Jacob doesn't rebuke his sons for murder *per se*. The blood of the "wicked" Shechemites, in moral terms, costs no more than water. Jacob berates them, rather, for deceiving the Shechemites and for not having faith that the sinners would genuinely turn to the God of the Israelites. He removes the boldest ethical divider, avenging innocent people, by "finding" the Shechemites' evil in their promiscuous and murderous lifestyle; Nahmanides tries to bring the two sympathetic characters closer together.

But other factors beside the psychological propel interpretations like that of Nahmanides. Fish recognizes his method as "radically historical" since "the critic has the responsibility of becoming not one but a number

of informed readers, each of whom will be identified by a matrix of political, cultural and literary determinants."²⁶ For instance, Jewish exegetes demonstrate the usefulness of considering such factors, the relationship to gentiles in particular. The Jewish reader living in a closed Jewish environment, hostile and contemptuous toward gentiles, will not consider the brothers' vengeance as shocking as will a Jewish reader who has numerous meaningful friendships with gentiles and sees them as equals. Thus, Rashi (1040-1105), for example, a contemporary of the Crusades in Christian Europe, unsurprisingly justifies the revenge. Samson Raphael Hirsch, an integrated citizen in enlightened, 19th century Frankfurt, condemns it.

Religious, not Mystical Experience

For these exegetes and many in their discipline, the Fish-Iser model leaves room for further sophistication because of an additional aspect of reading these students embrace. The dimension of a religious experience, an encounter or unity with the Divine Author, eludes both religious readers of secular literature and secular readers of religious texts. Can we breed a species of Iser's psychological system that will suitably support a literary religious experience? What are the defining boundaries and principles of this interpretive community? How does such an experience differ from one in which God is absent from a text, being neither a character nor an author? Even if we limit it to ones inspired by reading and define it by bonding with God, "religious experience" still includes a wide variety of sensations. For which brand of experience can we psychologically account?

For the purpose of contrast, let us investigate a theoretical precedent which likewise sought to combine and describe the reading and religious experiences. R. Zadok of Lublin (1823-1900), a Polish Hasidic thinker, proffered "post-modern" ideas on the nature of text, sounding similar to the reader-response critics. Alan Brill situates R. Zadok's position on

²⁵ Moses Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, edited by Hayyim Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1962) pp. 191-192.

²⁶ Fish, *Is there a Text*, p. 49.

"Oral Law," the interpretation—or rather the experience—of the Written Law, within the Hasidic tradition:

R. Zadok, however, never had a verbal icon that needed to be deconstructed. Eastern European approaches to texts were always fluid and open-ended, reflective of the oral character of the house of study. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the infinite meaning of the text was rationalized into a theory of rabbinic creativity in which talmudic scholars became the creative authors of their ideas... The culture of the beit midrash was an oral culture, and texts were reflective of their source in oral lectures, discussions, and debate.²⁷

This fluidity of text, represented and controlled by the oral culture of its students, lends itself to multiplicity:

The revealed written law and commandments, which are identical for all, interact with the unique heart of the individual to become the Oral Law... The Torah is understood through its role as guidance for the human process of comprehending the divine.²⁸

But despite the individualism of the Oral Law's interpretation of the Written Law, R. Zadok resolves the multifaceted results with God's unity by dissolving the plurality on a mystical level. In *Dover Zedek*, R. Zadok refers to a "future, messianic Oral Law" through which the student realizes that "all is from God."²⁹

We should not see this individualistic Oral Law as a human construct to the exclusion of the divine will. R. Zadok states in *Resisei Layla* that "when scholars get an insight, it is not their own thought but it is God that lights up their eyes. The world's vitality is Torah, and therefore man's creation [of Torah] is divine."³⁰ R. Zadok limits this enthusiasm to students who have purified their hearts, blasting Sabbatians for relying on their Oral Law at the same time that lust still rotted their personalities.³¹ Translated into Fishian terms, R. Zadok's

reader needs more than *information*; he also needs piety and selflessness to welcome the divine spirit into his mind.

R. Zadok's model diverges significantly from the Fish-Iser reader-response criticism, bordering on subjectivism. Empowering the imagination by calling it divine, R. Zadok sees the text more as an inspiration than as a guide, straying from Iser's view of the text continually directing the reader. R. Zadok leans more on the perfection of the heart than linguistic information and literary know-how, resulting in the futility of dialogue and the abandonment of the search for consensus. Fish values interpretive communities, favoring *persuasion* over *demonstration* as the mode of communication. For R. Zadok, a common literary framework and the evaluation of interpretive assumptions do not improve the reading experience whereas self-scrutiny does. The different experiences of individual readers is, for R. Zadok, not a drawback to be overcome nor a bridge to be built, but a conscious goal to be reached.

His Hasidic model diverges not only in its subjectivism, but also ironically in its reduction of the reader's power. The reader's ideation is not his own, but belongs to his imagination possessed by God. R. Zadok sacrifices the role of the individual in the reading experience, letting the reader finally evaporate into a misty union with God's will.

Our final—and heaviest—critique falls on the elitism of R. Zadok's religious experience. How many people can reach higher mystical states, crystal purity, and their own God-given messianic Oral Law? Is there no room for the layperson in reading the Torah religiously? The style and themes of the stories in Genesis have long appealed to the masses—why now cut them off from their heritage? We seek to construct a reader-response theory that is more widely accessible, amenable to dialogue and persuasion, and more closely bound to the text than R. Zadok's mystical conception. We recoil from his extreme empowerment of the imagination. We take power back from God and return it to the reader.

We do, however, appropriate R. Zadok's fundamental idea that the reader attempts through his study to become one with the divine will, though we want to demystify this union. Iser spoke in emotional and

²⁷ Alan Brill, forthcoming book on R. Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin, chapter nine: "Text Language and Experience," pp. 19-20.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁹ R. Zadok Ha-Kohen, *Sifrei HaRav Zadok Ha-Kohen MiLublin* (Hebrew) (Bnei Brak, Israel: Yahadut, 1966) *Dover Zedek*, p. 152.

³⁰ Ibid., *Resisei Layla*, p. 18.

³¹ Ibid., *Takkanat HaShavim*, section 143.

psychological terms, not mystical ones; we see the union not as ineffable, but analogous to sympathy with characters in a story. To further contrast with our demystified union, let us consider the words of R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira (1889-1943), the Hasidic master of Piesetznów who later died in the Holocaust:

The *Zohar* states: "A person who thinks that the garment covering the Torah is all there is to Torah, has no portion in the World to Come." ... The manifest intellectual content of the Torah is only the outer garment of the Torah. And who is wrapped in this garment? God is.

...It is true that during the time you are actually learning it is very difficult to arouse your soul with lofty thoughts, you need to concentrate on the subject matter deeply, with your entire mind and your whole self... You must therefore arouse your soul before you begin to learn, become aware of it, reveal it, and bind it to God. Then, as you learn Torah, while you labor at uncovering the simple meaning of the text, your soul, aroused and revealed, will speedily pierce through the garment to its king... it will unite with Him.³²

In R. Shapira's version, the mystical union occurs subconsciously while the student's conscious mind swims in the depths of intellectual analysis. We, in contrast, want to bond with God through a conscious, overt process.

Sympathy With God, Not For Him

This conscious process can be defined by borrowing an experiential description from Abraham Joshua Heschel's understanding of prophecy in *The Prophets*. Heschel rejects the popular notion of a prophet serving merely as God's microphone, seeing the prophet instead as holding onto his sense of self while sympathizing with the divine will:

The prophet is not a mouthpiece, but a person; not an instrument, but a partner, an associate of God. Emotional detachment [in prophecy] would be understandable only if there were a command which required the suppression of emotion...

...[Aforementioned] terms hardly convey what happened to his soul: the overwhelming impact of the divine pathos upon his mind and heart, completely involving and gripping his personality in its depths... The task of the prophet is to convey the word of God. Yet

the word is aglow with the pathos. One cannot understand the word without sensing the pathos...

...the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a *sympathy with the divine pathos*, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos.³³

Heschel sees prophetic unity with the divine not as God possessing the body of the prophet, but as the prophet consciously, deeply sympathizing with Him. Prophecy is thus an emotional act, not a wholesale forfeiture of the self:

The unique feature of religious sympathy is not self conquest, but self-dedication; not the suppression of emotion, but its redirection; not silent subordination, but active cooperation with God; not love which aspires to the Being of God in Himself, but harmony of the soul with the concern of God.³⁴

God calls; the prophet must answer with all his heart.

Closely analogous to the relationship between sacred text and reader, Heschel's formulation of the prophetic experience casts it in terms of understanding the divine approach:

The nature of man's response to the divine corresponds to the content of his apprehension of the divine. When the divine is sensed as a mysterious perfection, the response is one of fear and trembling; when sensed as absolute will, the response is one of unconditional obedience; when sensed as pathos, the response is one of sympathy.³⁵

How he sees God's nearness molds the prophet's mode of reception.

Similarly, we formulate the role of the reader not as a passive recipient of meaning from the text—as many traditionalists would see it—but as God's "partner," His "associate" in creating that meaning. As with prophecy, the divine in reading does not appear as "an absolute will" demanding "unconditional obedience"; the text does not heave a neatly wrapped package on the reader's shoulders. Instead, the gaps in the text call upon the reader—or, in Iserian terms, imply that he is—to zealously pursue the divine voice, to chase it with his sympathy. This exercise is

³² R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, *A Student's Obligation: Advice From The Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, translated by Micha Odenheimer (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1991), p. 69.

³³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 25-26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

neither mystical nor informational, but emotional, since in biblical narratives God often lives as a character. The difference between Iser's theory and ours is that Iser does not recognize any pre-reading sympathies—each character, regardless of name, stands a fair chance. We, on the other hand, commit ourselves to identifying with God whether He acts like a hero or not. "Unheroic" behavior on His part merely raises the mountainous challenge the *co-divine reader* must overcome to internalize the divine pathos. The gaps instruct our imagination to appropriate God's mind, our reasoning His judgment. That is the *co-divine* reading experience.

We part from R. Zadok in that we demand piety and selflessness not to clear the pathway for God to enter the mind, but to clear the mind's pathway to God. The attachment to the divine is not a subconscious mystical unity, but a sympathy driven by the text. Since the mind does not house the divine, God does not necessarily figure into every reading exercise, especially in those narratives where He does not fill the role of a character, remaining in the background. Such cases insist that we reaffirm the importance of the interpretive community; because the imagination is not divine, interpreters can *persuade* each other to find divinity in alternative voices. Sympathy with God in the Torah resembles sympathy with an author of his text: they don't always disclose their personal opinions, though we can see them shining through their characters. The differences between the *co-divine* and Iser's reader—pre-dispositions to sympathize with God as a character or with characters consistent with a prior construction of God's will, a heightened emotional sensitivity to textual indices of God's favor—do not renovate reading into a mystical experience.

However complicated by each other and common, "secular" emotive forces, these differences may steer the *co-divine reader* on a new path through Dinah's rape. True, God Himself does not meddle in the clannish war, but our sympathies can still find "Him" indirectly. Our magnetized sense of identification, sensitive to hints of divinely ordained characters, leaps at the narrator's early sentence, "a thing not to be done." Interestingly, the text does not present this judgment as a direct speech of

the brothers as it does with similar phrases in other cases of moral wrongs (Gen. 9:26, 20:9).³⁶ Though a reader can interpret this line as indirect speech, not an objective statement, he might still witness the passion of the brothers overwhelming the Narrator's viewpoint, or becoming one with the Narrator. In contrast to the pure reader-response account presented earlier, the *co-divine reader* who would identify with the brothers would do so not only because he thinks they are morally justified or compelled, but also because he senses God's approval behind their passion. This difference in terminology, however subtle, reflects the difference in reading experience:

Theoretical Comparison

Components of Reading	Iser	Co-divine Reader
Perspectives	Characters of equal initial standing	Some characters favored because God favors them, because they are pious, or because they are divinely inspired
Vantage point	Reading for self-edification, enjoyment, etc. Not necessarily a believer in God	Reading to hear God's voice, religious experience
Meeting place	Ideation impartial to divinely preferred perspectives	Ideation partial to whatever God says, integrates God's perspectives

Applied Comparison

	Iser	Co-divine Reader
Dinah	Sympathy with her as victim, daughter of protagonist OR Antipathy because she brought it upon herself	Sympathy with her as daughter of Jacob, God's chosen OR Antipathy because promiscuous
Brothers	Sympathy because agree with moral	Sympathy because identify divine passion

³⁶ In those cases, the plaintiff, not the narrator, says "such a thing is not to be done."

	assessment OR Antipathy because disagree with moral assessment	working through them OR Antipathy because they disagree with Jacob's judgment; Jacob has God's confidence
Conclusion	With whom does my sympathy lie, with which aspects of each character	With which characters (or what parts of them) does God's sympathy lie and I'll sympathize with them

The role of our reader streams midway between R. Zadok's deterministic God-driven enthusiasm and Iser's pure meaning-in-the-reader. Iser remarks that "the reader's task is not simply to accept, but to assemble for himself what is to be accepted" (97). The *co-divine reader* does not, strictly speaking, gather only the seashells that catch his eye, but picks up those he thinks belong to God. He actively works to uncover the divine voice, but then dutifully sympathizes. Thus, in a *co-divine* read contrary to our earlier one, Jacob may garner more emotional support from the *co-divine reader* than from the implied reader response explicated earlier. Jacob's history as a prophet, a man of God, and an elder statesman grant him divine intuition in the mind of the reader. We can dissociate from wise but spineless men; men of God, however, attract us, even if they're silent in the case at hand.

Granted, the reader's personal construction of God will mold his sympathies. Is God a God of mercy or justice? A God of rights or responsibility (to use terms of our opening debate)? Is He zealous or peace-loving, "male" or "female"? Is He graceful? If God is a God who dotingly looks for penitents, trying to bring them closer to Him, then Shechem will attract a *co-divine reader*. This reader will "find" Shechem's repentance in his genuine post-rape emotion ("Being strongly drawn to Dinah... and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly") and his shaky-toned offer to meet even the highest bride-price. Perhaps this reader—that is, if his sympathy for Shechem hasn't turned too

sharply into revenge toward the brothers—will also see the last line as a mere explanation of regretted events, an apology for an earlier state of mind—because God loves penitents.

Theory of Exegetes

Religious exegetes share His love, or their constructions of it. That is why we can use the *co-divine reader* not only to study the Torah text, but also to develop a new mode of studying exegetes. Instead of the classical dialectic of charting the textual pros and cons of each position, then evaluating their real or potential responses, the *co-divine* critic sleuths exegetical literature for psychological resolutions to interpretive problems, imaginative constructions of characters, and textual spurs of those two. As an example, the question of the brothers' motivation opens the field for the creativity of exegetes. Whereas Nahmanides sees the brothers as deceptive, pessimistic, yet justified avengers, Samson Raphael Hirsch constructs them as morally hyper-sensitive, soft-natured gentlemen who, once having reasonably taken the law into their own hands, carried it too far:

This idea awakens in them the realization that there are moments in which even the House of Jacob must brandish a sword to protect its honor and purity. As long as the world will only recognize those whom power and might favor, Jacob must also train his hands to fight. They didn't *want* to act deceptively. They wanted to frighten everyone so that others wouldn't dare do something despicable like this. Jacob's daughters will not be whores. But they went too far in killing innocent people for the sin of the wicked.³⁷

Though Hirsch doesn't support the brothers to the last ounce of spilled blood, he does enter their minds to discover their motivation. The powerful rhetoric of the last line clearly influences this process of sympathy, as Hirsch echoes it: "Jacob's daughters will not be whores." Though he disapproves with the extent of their vengeance, he sees the divine in the brothers, whose motivation and purpose he describes as

³⁷ R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, translated into Hebrew by Mordecai Breuer (Jerusalem: Mossad Yitzchak Breuer, 1966), pp. 351-352.

"holy and righteous." The *co-divine* critic watches Hirsch see God through sympathy with the brothers.

This early appreciation of the *co-divine reader* invites further sophistication and systematization. Is "sympathy" too broad a term for what are actually different types of identification with characters? Can we further subdivide our category of "religious experience," possibly discovering how textual styles, gaps, and strategies induce each? What criteria should be used in comparing exegetical exploration in the minds of characters? These questions beg a response from future investigators; accepting the *co-divine reader* poses that challenge to respond—hardly a consequence which deserves to be damned.

ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION IN WISDOM AND TREATY LITERATURE*

Eliyahu Stern

Introduction

The warning against "adding or subtracting" to the words of the author is found in many ancient Near Eastern documents. In addition, this admonition appears both in biblical wisdom texts and in Deuteronomy, though its meaning is different in each. The caution against adding and subtracting in these books has become an important source for understanding the historical and exegetical relationship between these two corpuses of biblical literature. Unfortunately, many have ignored the complexity surrounding the meaning of each verse and its interpretive tradition, and have rushed to understand the relationship between these sources in light of more general theses regarding the interrelationship between the texts in which they are found. To correct this trend, this paper will first attempt to understand the meaning of the phrase, each time it is attested, in its own context. Only after thoroughly understanding how each text employs this phrase will we try to analyze the connection between Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1 on the one hand and Ecclesiastes 3:14 and Proverbs 30: 5-6 on the other.¹

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¹ One could claim that from the fact that Ecclesiastes includes the admonition against both addition and subtraction it may easily be considered the most pristine and complete source of this admonition found in wisdom literature. While in Proverbs 30:5 we also see the warning against adding to God's words, we do not see an accompanying warning against subtracting from his words. At the same time, as it will be demonstrated later on in this

Along these lines, we will ask questions such as: Why does this prohibition appear twice in Deuteronomy, and what is the meaning of each in context? How does the warning in Deuteronomy differ from how it is employed in Ecclesiastes? Did Ecclesiastes and other wisdom documents take the statement from Deuteronomy, or was their some other relationship between these texts?

Where this paper differs with past studies on these hotly debated verses is that it will not subject its results to broader general theories regarding the historical and exegetical relationship between wisdom and treaty literature. Rather, it will analyze only the multiple meanings of this phrase and its intra-biblical interpretive history, and from these basic issues try to extrapolate conclusions regarding the broader questions of textual borrowing and inner-biblical interpretation of these particular verses.

Part 1: The Texts

1. Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1

Canonically speaking, the first appearances of this phrase are in Deuteronomy. Although these verses served the Rabbis as sources for the prohibition of adding or subtracting commandments from the official count of 613, it seems that the plain sense of the verse lies elsewhere. Jeffrey Tigay, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, follows the lead of Moshe Greenberg² and explains that these verses “do not attempt to stymie legal innovation” but rather come to warn against the prohibition of idolatry.³ He explains that the warning against addition or subtraction to God’s laws

paper, the manner in which the warning is used in Proverbs differs from how it is used in Ecclesiastes. Therefore, one could easily assert that Ecclesiastes is not necessarily taking the warning from Proverbs, but rather from a third source. In other words, just as easily as one could assert that the language used in Proverbs is the most pristine wisdom source for the admonition, one could also make that case for Ecclesiastes.

² See M. Greenberg, “Ezekiel XX and Spiritual Exile” (Hebrew), *Oz Le-David, Biblical Essays in Honor of David Ben-Gurion* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1964), 437, n. 3.

³ It is interesting to note that both Hizkuni and Seforno’s comments on verses 4:2 and 13:1 come to the same conclusion as Tigay in a slightly different manner.

appears twice in biblical law and in each case, it is connected with warnings against the worship of other gods and other pagan practices. In 13:1, it follows a warning not to imitate pagan practices and precedes a prohibition against following a prophet who claims that the Lord has commanded Israel to worship additional gods. Here (4:2) it precedes a reminder that all who worship another god perish. Evidently, then, in both passages the prohibition is invoked to stress that one may not nullify the first commandment of the Decalogue by adding a commandment ordaining the worship of additional Gods.⁴

In other words, based on the context of 13:1—following immediately on the heels of 12:30-31, which warn, “אִיכָה יַעֲבֹדוּ הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֶת אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְאַעֲשֶׂה כֵן גַּם אֲנִי. לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כֵן לָהּ אֶל־לֵהִיךְ כִּי כָל תּוֹעֵבַת ה' אֲשֶׁר שָׁנָא עָשׂוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם, כִּי גַם אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם וּבְנֵיהֶם יִשְׁרְפוּ בָאֵשׁ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם”—we can infer that the referent of the pronoun in “do not add to it or subtract from it” is *the way to worship God*. This warns of the grave proscription against innovating new ways of worshipping God, or subtracting from the conventional ways of worshipping God, based on what the surrounding peoples are doing.

Moshe Weinfeld deals with these verses in the context of explaining how the presence of this admonition in Deuteronomy is evidence that Deuteronomy borrowed material from early Wisdom literature. In that context, he dismisses Greenberg’s reading by commenting that “his interpretation of that verse does not elucidate the meaning and background of Deut. 4:2.”⁵ As an alternative, Weinfeld offers us an answer that attempts to prove his thesis that Deuteronomy took the warning from Proverbs 30:5-6. He apparently argues that the same

⁴ See J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1996), 43 (comments on verse 4:2). For further analysis by Tigay, see his comments in “The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 34:10-12),” in M. Fox et al. (eds.), *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute To Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 142-143.

⁵ See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972), p. 264, n. 2. It should be noted that Tigay, who follows Greenberg’s thesis, does not attempt to defend himself, neither in his commentary on Deuteronomy nor in his essay “The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy” (above, n. 4). In the latter (p. 142, n. 22), he mentions Weinfeld’s interpretation, but does not address the fact that Weinfeld’s conclusions call into question his and Greenberg’s interpretation.

sapiential background that one encounters in Wisdom literature is still recognizable in 4:2, claiming that

the purpose of 4:6 is to declare that the defined and given Torah constitutes true wisdom and consequently one should neither add to nor detract from it.⁶

However, in trying to prove his thesis that Deuteronomy drew from Wisdom literature, Weinfeld creates a circular argument, basing his reading on the assumption that these sapiential themes are to be found in crucial, seemingly legal, passages in Deuteronomy.

Even if one were to agree with Weinfeld's far-reaching interpretation of 4:2, one is still left asking: how does he interpret 13:1? For was it not Weinfeld who objected to Greenberg's interpretation of 13:1 by saying: "his interpretation of that verse [13:1] does not elucidate the meaning and background of 4:2"?⁷ It seems, rather—as mentioned above—that we should retain Greenberg's interpretation, and in response to Weinfeld, maintain that interpretation without admitting that either warning (13:1 and 4:2) is superfluous. The key point is that each is of independent significance since each addresses different forms of idolatry.

As M. Halbertal and A. Margalit have pointed out,⁸ the biblical view of idolatry is twofold, comprising both "betrayal" and "rebellion." Each of these perspectives is distinct, with each focusing upon a different aspect of Israel's relationship with her God:

1. The aspect of *betrayal* is part of the metaphor of marriage. "God's relationship to Israel is construed by the prophets as exclusive. Within the marriage metaphor, God is the jealous and betrayed

husband, Israel is the unfaithful wife, and the third parties in the triangle—the lovers—are the other gods."

2. The other way in which the biblical writer sees idolatry is as a *rebellion* against God. This perspective stems from viewing God as Israel's "exclusive political leader." Thus, just as citizens must abide by the laws of the ruler so, too, Israel must abide by the laws of its king. In both cases, the punishment imposed by the king or the jealous husband is Israel's expulsion, either from the king's land or from the husband's house; in other words, idolatry can undermine Israel's security in their homeland.

It seems further that each type of idolatry is connected to different types of actions. In the former type—betrayal—the act of idolatry is the worship of any gods other than God. In the latter—rebellion—on the other hand, the idolatrous act is worshipping God Himself, but in ways not ordained by Him.

This said, I would now argue that verses 4:2 and 13:1, based on their respective contexts, are representative of two specific warnings directed to Israel. Both verse 4:2 and 13:1 are necessary for warning against idolatry, for each verse comes to caution Israel against a different type of idolatry. One verse (13:1) teaches Israel not to *rebel* against God through repugnant acts aimed at serving him, while the other verse (4:2) teaches Israel not to *betray* God by worshipping other gods.⁹

The idea of rebelling against God is stressed in verse 12:30; as developed above, this verse cautions Israel against following the practices of other peoples in their service of God. We can add here that, in fact, all of chapter 13 is a series of warnings against idolatry, and is cast in the language of political rebellion against God.¹⁰ Our verse, then, provides a

⁶ Ibid., 264

⁷ Although one may respond at this point that a reasonable approach would be to accept Weinfeld regarding 4:2 and Greenberg regarding 13:1, this seems untenable. We have the right to assume, I believe, that the same phrase used twice in such close proximity in a work of such homogeneity (as demonstrated by the structure and theology; cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, *passim*, and contra. the baseless theories of Alexander Rofé) will have the same meaning each time.

⁸ Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 237.

⁹ Prof. J. Tigay, in a personal correspondence, agreed with this claim that each admonition was directed at a different form of idolatry.

¹⁰ Cf. on this point Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 91-100; Paul Dion, "Deuteronomy 13: The Suppression of Alien Religious Propaganda in Israel During the Monarchic Period," in B. Halpern and D. Hobson (eds.), *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel* (JSOTSS 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 147-216; and Bernard M. Levinson, "But You Shall Surely Kill Him! The Text-Critical and Neo-Assyrian Evidence for MT Deuteronomy 13:10," in Georg Braulik (ed.), *Bundesdokument und Gesetz: Studien zum Deuteronomium* (Freiburg: Herber, 1995), 37-63.

perfect bridge between the end of chapter 12 and the entirety of chapter 13: it ties in to the idea of rebellion found in 12:30-31, and it introduces the concept of idolatrous rebellion that pervades chapter 13.¹¹ Thus, 13:1 prohibits importing idolatrous modes of worship to the Israelite worship of God.

On the other hand, the idea of betraying God is highlighted in chapter 4; the following verse, 4:3, warns Israel against worshipping other gods, such as Baal-peor. It is also most interesting to note that 4:2 directly follows a general statement that makes remaining in the land conditional on Israel's adherence to the commandments. Based on the understanding of the verses just developed, it becomes clear that this sequence is no coincidence: the nation's dwelling in the land of Israel is contingent upon their faithfulness to God. It is also no coincidence that this drastic punishment appears in the context of the theologically more serious form of idolatry, the denial of God (as opposed to a foreign form of worship towards God).¹²

2. Proverbs 30:5-6

We can now turn to the task of explaining how Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are employing this catch phrase and the warning it contains. While we will not yet directly address the question of the textual relationship between the verses in the different books, those in Deuteronomy do provide an effective ideological and thematic foil in the following analysis. The warning against adding to God's words appears in Proverbs 30:5-6, which is in the middle of the unit known as Agur's words (30:1-14). Many have pointed out the tendency of this section to

¹¹ On the transitional function of 13:1, cf. also Tigay, "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy," 142.

¹² Although it is true that the polytheism practiced by First Temple period Israelites did not mean to deny God, but only to add to the pantheon (for an apologetically motivated argument of this sort, cf. Reuven Margalit, המקרא והמסורה [Hebrew] [reprint edition; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986], 52-53), to the mind of Deuteronomy, such worship would have been tantamount to denying God altogether, since His worship demands absolute monotheism.

borrow words and phrases from Deuteronomy.¹³ As J. Crenshaw has stated:

The sayings of Agur (30:1-14) and instruction of Lemuel's mother (31:1-9) probably followed the larger collections temporally, despite stylistic features in Agur's remarks that echo Canaanite literature. Actually, numerical sayings were widespread in the ancient world; and Agur seems to cite Job and certainly quotes from Psalms and Deuteronomy.¹⁴

In light of this observation, we would be inclined to say that the warning against "adding to Gods words" recorded in 30:5-6 is part of the material in this section taken from Deuteronomy.

The phrase adopted by the writer of Proverbs ("do not add") is only part of the original phrase found in Deuteronomy ("do not add or subtract"). Why does the author leave out the warning against subtracting from God's words? Garrett attempts to answer this question by suggesting that the warning in verses 5 and 6 not to "add to God's words" was not directed at the

unbelieving interpreter but to the believer. The temptation [was] to improve on the text if not by actually adding new material than by interpreting it in ways that [made] more of the passage's teaching than [was] really there.¹⁵

The verse warns that such an interpreter (one who adds to God's words) "will be found to be a liar." The act of lying entails a false statement. In other words, the liar is not—as might have been thought—the one who "omits," but rather the one who adds, one who *expresses something untrue*. The author of verses 5 and 6 is concerned with the storyteller who

¹³ Of course, if critical scholars argue that this section borrows from Deuteronomy they must also argue that it was composed at a later date, and so the two arguments tend to be strung together in scholarly literature on the pericope.

¹⁴ See J. Crenshaw, "Proverbs," *ABD*, 5:515. It should be pointed out that Toy goes even further and argues that verses 5 and 6 are inserted into the text at an even later date than 30:1-4 and 7-14. See C. H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs* (ICC; London: Scribner, 1959), 253. Along the same lines, R. Gordis contends that Ecc 3:14 and Deuteronomy 4:2 demonstrate that "Koheleth utilizes the passages in *Deuteronomy*, which stress the immutability of law, in order to express man's hopelessness before an unknowable and uncontrollable universe." Cf. Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 43-44.

¹⁵ D. Garrett, *The American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 14:237.

exaggerates and attributes things to God that are not necessarily His doing. According to this interpretation, the "words of God" would include God's religio-moral wisdom, which in contrast to cosmogonic knowledge, has been tried and demonstrated and is consequently not to be doubted nor modified. One could also speculate that "God's words" encompass God's promises or oracles.¹⁶

A striking difference between how the phrase is used in these verses and its meaning in Deuteronomy is that in Deuteronomy, the phrase "God's words" refers to "that which he commanded you to do." Following the words of God entails doing something or acting in a certain way. On the other hand, vv. 5 and 6 mention nothing about deviant actions. Rather, these verses seem to be concentrating on the interpreter "telling" an untrue story.¹⁷ The warning expressed in verses 5 and 6 is not about changing ritual, but rather about changing doctrine; these verses do not indict he who acts in a foreign manner, but rather he who tells something which is foreign to people.

I would agree with those who suggest¹⁸ that perhaps the warning is directed against new or different doctrines, such as immortality, which are found throughout other wisdom works like Ecclesiastes.¹⁹ Though by the time of Ecclesiastes, these beliefs were generally accepted, they were only beginning to surface during the period when Proverbs was redacted.²⁰

Thus, we might suggest that Proverbs 30:5-6 was designed to warn against these new, deviant doctrines. In formulating this warning for his contemporary readers, the author of Proverbs reached into his stock of phrases for an admonition that would be familiar to his audience. Spotting such a phrase in the Bible would also give his comments more authority.²¹ The author of verses 5 and 6 looked to the context of Deuteronomy to satisfy both objectives.

3. Ecclesiastes 3:14

Unlike Proverbs, the warning as it appears in Ecclesiastes includes the negative side of the warning: "עליו אין להוסיף וממנו אין לגרוע." There are two possible explanations of this phrase in context. It may mean—as it has meant in every context up to this point—"one **must not** add to whatever God has brought to pass." However, it is perhaps more likely that here, the meaning is that "one **cannot** add to whatever God has brought to pass."²² While for the former interpretation, one, in theory, is able to change what God has brought to pass, for the latter interpretation, it is not even theoretically possible for one to change God's will. These two interpretations need not be exclusive, as my teacher, Prof. M. Bernstein, has pointed out to me; it may be that the author's point here is that *since* one cannot add or subtract to whatever God has brought to pass, he should not attempt to do so for his own sake. In any event, the idea that it is impossible to change what God has done seems to certainly appear in this verse, which reads fully, "ידעתי כי כל אשר יעשה א-להים הוא"

in Ecclesiastes may be beginning to take shape during the period in which Proverbs is redacted. See J. Crenshaw, "Proverbs," *ABD*, 5:515.

²¹ Along the same lines, we should note that the writer of verses 5 and 6 updated the language of the phrase to make it consistent with the Hebrew spoken (late biblical Hebrew) in his generation. As C.L. Seow points out in the context of Ecclesiastes, the idiom לא, which is used in the phrases in Deuteronomy, is replaced by אין in Proverbs. The change in language tells us that the author is trying to write a text that can be understood by readers in his time. See C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday Press, 1997), 164-165.

²² In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, C. L. Seow explains that the construction אין ל- followed by the infinitive construct has three meanings: cannot, must not, and may not. Though he does not make this point explicitly, it is obvious that each one of these interpretations will lead to different explanations of our verse. See C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 164.

¹⁶ Weinfeld points out (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic school*, 263) that in Psalms, the "word of God" includes things such as God's oracles and promises. Since he contends that verses 5-6 in Proverbs come from an early layer of Wisdom literature (as opposed to Psalms; cf. Psalms 12:7), he believes it would be difficult to assert that in this context "the word of God" already included God's oracles and promises. However, as we will discuss further on, the context of the verses implies that the warning is directed to those who add to God's oracles and promises. Though Psalms was redacted well after Proverbs, if we accept Toy and Crenshaw's thesis that verses 5-6 come from later wisdom literature, it would not be difficult to suggest that the meaning of the "word of God" in Proverbs 30:5-6 could also include oracles and promises. If we assume that oracles and promises are included in the phrase the "words of God" it would help clarify what Proverbs was warning against, namely, those who make false claims that God has commanded or promised "x" or will deliver "y."

¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, the writer is concerned with lying (i.e., saying something incorrect), not acting incorrectly.

¹⁸ Cf. Toy and Crenshaw, *op. cit.*, among many others.

¹⁹ For parallels to Ecclesiastes and Daniel, see Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 523.

²⁰ Assuming chap. 30-31 are of a later period than the rest of Proverbs, and that these two verses are an even later addition, it would not be far-fetched to say that doctrinal ideas found

”יהיה לעולם, עליו אין להוסיף וממנו אין לגרע, והא-להים עשה שיראו מלפניו.” Additionally, this interpretation is consistent with the other deterministic overtones of the chapter.²³

If so, we see that the author of Ecclesiastes took the verse familiar to us from Deuteronomy, and certainly originally used in a prohibitive sense, and reinterpreted it in a theological sense. No longer is it a prohibition against adding and subtracting, whether theologies or actions, but it is now rather a deterministic statement of fact; not that one ought not to add or subtract, but that one cannot do so. This is, then, a bold interpretive sleight of hand on the part of Ecclesiastes, lifting the words but altering their connotation.

Part 2: The Relationship

Having fully analyzed each individual text containing this phrase, we are in position to confidently address the larger question of the relationship between these texts. A priori, there are manifold possibilities to explore:

1. Two may have borrowed from one original text.
 2. All three may have borrowed from a common extra-canonical source or from disparate extra-canonical sources.
 3. All three may have independently originated the phrase.
- Other options and nuances of the above possibilities are also possible.

1. Moshe Weinfeld's Thesis

In his seminal work *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, Moshe Weinfeld accepts the position of W. F. Albright²⁴ and W. Baumgartner regarding the early nature of Wisdom literature. Weinfeld then attempts

to demonstrate that in cases of Wisdom-Deuteronomy parallels, Deuteronomy adopted material from Wisdom literature and not vice versa. As Weinfeld writes:

The book of Deuteronomy contains many laws which have almost literal parallels in both Israelite and non-Israelite wisdom literature... Recent decades [of scholarship on] wisdom compositions... clearly demonstrate that Israelite wisdom teaching is substantially of ancient origin and consequently antedates the book of Deuteronomy.²⁵

Among the most notable examples that Weinfeld brings to buttress his early dating of Wisdom literature is that of the admonition against “addition and subtraction”: the literary parallel between Deuteronomy 13:1, 4:2, and Ecclesiastes 3:14 and Proverbs 30:6. Weinfeld rejects the possibility that the latter two drew from Deuteronomy, based on the following argument. Since it is clear that Ecclesiastes and Proverbs—in addition to whatever Israelite sources they were drawing on—were drawing from ancient, international Wisdom traditions, and since we find the warning against addition and subtraction in Babylonian and Egyptian literature as well, we are forced to either conclude that Egyptian and Babylonian literatures also borrowed from Deuteronomy, or that Deuteronomy borrowed from Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, which had borrowed from foreign Wisdom literature.

Weinfeld next attempts to debunk the conventional understanding of how this ubiquitous phrase in ancient Near Eastern literature reached Deuteronomy, namely that Deuteronomy had borrowed it from Mesopotamian treaties, to which it owes a great deal in terms of forms and formulations.²⁶ But Weinfeld argues that precisely because of the impressive affinity between Deuteronomy and Near Eastern treaties, the

²⁵ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 260.

²⁶ The bibliography on this general point is too vast to list exhaustively in a footnote. In brief, see R. Frankena, “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy,” *OTS* 14 (1965), 122-154; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, part 2; Ernest Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), chap. 1, with bibliography up to that point, and Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1991), 7-8, with the literature cited there. Another useful list of parallels between Deuteronomy and VTE can be found in J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), at 395-397.

²³ On the deterministic elements in chapter 3, see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 174. Cf. also O. S. Rankin, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (The Interpreters Bible; Nashville: Pantheon Press, 1956), 43-45.

²⁴ The identification of very early material in Ecclesiastes is not surprising considering W. F. Albright's thesis that materials found in Wisdom literature can come from many early sources. See W. F. Albright, “Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom,” *Congress Volume* (SVT 3; New York and Leiden: Brill, 1955), 1-15.

treaties could not have been the source for the Deuteronomic formulation of the warning.²⁷ In treaty literature, the warning against addition to the laws contained in the document traditionally appears at the end of the document. However, neither attestation of the warning in Deuteronomy appears at the conclusion of the book—one was placed before the main body of laws while the other is found towards the beginning of those laws. In Weinfeld's words, "as [the warning] does not occur in the closing section of the covenant in the book of Deuteronomy and has no reference to 'the words of the covenant,' it is difficult to regard it as a juristic formula."²⁸ In other words, because the warnings are placed in the middle of the book and not at its end, it could not have been borrowed from other treaty documents.

At this point, Weinfeld asserts that "[s]ince we have already observed that there is no justification for assuming deuteronomic influence on wisdom literature we only need to consider the alternative hypothesis, that the deuteronomic formula was adopted from sapiential composition."²⁹ While it is beyond the purview of this paper to explore Weinfeld's general approach to the relationship between Wisdom literature and Deuteronomy, it is clear that there are many problems with his hypothesis as he applies it to this particular case.

2. Critiquing Weinfeld

The first two points of contention we have with Weinfeld's analysis relate to his treatment of the texts involved. His conclusions rest on—among others—two premises: the sapiential interpretation of the verses in Deuteronomy and the early date attributed to the verses in the Wisdom works. As for the second point, we have seen above, based on the analyses of Toy and Crenshaw, that 30:1-14 in Proverbs is actually a *late* section of the Proverbs. Therefore, we are disinclined to accept any argument dependent on an early date for these verses. As for the first point, we saw at length above (section 1.1) that in fact the verses in

²⁷ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 262.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 263.

Deuteronomy are better understood as warning against idolatry than anything else.

Next, we note that Weinfeld's conclusion is in fact a non sequitur: "[s]ince we have observed that there is no justification for assuming deuteronomic influence on wisdom literature, we need only consider the alternative thesis."³⁰ This reasoning is flawed. Just because we need not necessarily assume that wisdom literature borrowed from Deuteronomy does not impel us to assume that the opposite is the authoritative interpretive history of this phrase. Similarly, the fact that one should not "assume" that Wisdom takes from Deuteronomy should not exclude the possibility of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or other wisdom texts borrowing from Deuteronomy.

The final and most intriguing difficulty with Weinfeld's theory is his treatment of treaty literature and its relationship to Deuteronomy. He assumes that because Deuteronomy does not place the warning against addition and subtraction in the same location as one would find it in ancient Near Eastern treaty documents, Deuteronomy could not have taken the warning from treaty documents. However, in light of recent research published by Bernard Levinson on Deuteronomy's radical hermeneutical strategies,³¹ Weinfeld's reason for dismissing such a possibility is problematic. In his important book, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation*, Levinson maintains:

Deuteronomy co-opted those [earlier] texts, accommodating them to their innovations, by citing several key words and phrases (lemmas) from their source text and giving them new contexts and meanings. In the process, the authors camouflaged the radical...nature of their innovations, as the new textual content was often expressed, quite literally, using terms of older dispensation. Such learned textual recycling left in its wake a number of clear markers, including citation

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ It should be pointed out that Sinaitic revelation is not an obstacle for the acceptance of Levinson's thesis. For, as my teacher Professor Y. Elman has pointed out, according to the Abarbanel and Nahmanides, "In the case of [Deuteronomy] we have a divinely inspired oral presentation written down and edited at a later date." This would allow for Deuteronomy to be perceived not only as a primary text but also as an interpretive text. See Y. Elman, "The Book of Deuteronomy as Revelation," in Y. Elman and J. Gurock (eds.), *Haizon Nahum* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 246.

formulas, repetitive resumption, devoicing, revoicing, and intertextual allusion.³²

Along those lines, Levinson goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Deuteronomy 12 in particular is a prime example of what he terms "textual recycling."

Levinson's research refutes Weinfeld's argument that Deuteronomy could not have taken the warning from other treaty documents because it employs the warning in a place and manner inconsistent with earlier treaty documents. For as Levinson has demonstrated (specifically regarding those verses found in chapter 12), Deuteronomy had no problem changing the place and manner in which words and phrases were originally used and placed. Along the same lines, one could question Weinfeld's theory by posing a logical question: why would one assume a particularistic-legalistic document like Deuteronomy would sooner borrow from a universalistic corpus of literature, such as Wisdom, than it would from Treaty literature, whose style and content it shares so much with?

Levinson himself does not exploit our verse, though it would have served his thesis well. In his comments on 13:1, which he says should really be part of chapter 12 (12:32),³³ he falls into the trap of many nineteenth century scholars by saying that the verse deals with textual addition and subtraction.³⁴ He contends that the sudden importuning of textual fidelity in this context suggests that Deuteronomy was well aware of the radical changes it had implemented and therefore employed this warning in order to "camouflage" the textual revolution it had just created.

³² Though the thrust of Levinson's research examines how Deuteronomy dealt with materials from Exodus, he points out that the same hermeneutic could apply to the manner in which Deuteronomy deals with other early sources. See Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

³³ This point is justified by the open paragraph (פרק) that follows the verse, as well as the LXX version that actually appends it to chapter 12 as 12:32. See also the comments of J. Tigay in "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy," 142, n. 24.

³⁴ Herrmann in his work "Zu Koheleth 3,14" *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl Marx Universität, Gesell und Sprachwiss. Reihe*, 3 (1953), 295, n. 21, already disproved the argument that this verse deals with textual rigidity. Cf. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 43. See further on, n. 36.

I would contend that more irony exists in Deuteronomy's use of this phrase than Levinson admits. To agree with Levinson's thesis that 13:1 is being employed in order to account for Deuteronomy's radical interpretive strategy, one need not say that the warning against addition and subtraction deals with textual rigidity. Rather, working with Greenberg and Tigay's explanation of the verse, namely that it is a warning against idolatry, one could suggest that Deuteronomy caps off its major "textual recycling" revolution by changing the meaning of what it (Deuteronomy) might see as one of the most problematic laws in Jewish History. Instead of attempting to "camouflage" its radical interpretive method, Deuteronomy justifies it by saying that what was once thought of as a warning against the radical textual recycling found in the book actually means something entirely different. In other words, by recasting the warning against addition and subtraction of text into a warning about idolatry, Deuteronomy tells the concerned reader not to worry because the admonition against addition and subtraction was never directed towards textual interpretation and recycling. By reinterpreting the phrase now found in 12:32/13:1, the book continues its radical hermeneutic and specifically applies that method to its most problematic law.

3. Towards a New Interpretation of the Relationship

Based on the above critique, it is not only clear that Deuteronomy did not have to take the warning from Wisdom Literature but also had good reason to take it from Treaty documents. One such treaty document that it may have borrowed from reads as follows:

To this tablet I did not add a word nor did I take one out. O gods, my lord, look, I do not know whether any of those who were kings before (me) added [a word] or took one out.³⁵

This document, which is from the 17th century BCE, predates both Deuteronomy and Wisdom literature. This document clarifies that the

³⁵ Cf. H. G. Guterbock "Mursili's accounts of Suppiluliuma's dealings with Egypt," *Revue Hittite et Asiatique*, (Paris, 1960), 59-60 ll. 7 ff., cited by M. Weinfeld, *ibid.*, 262. Cf. also the Code of Hammurabi (ANET, 178-179).

phrase "do not add or subtract" was not uncommon in the ancient Near East. It also provides a window into how the term was being used by treaty documents and allows us to see just how easy it would be for a treaty document like Deuteronomy to have employed such a warning.³⁶

However, the fact that our research suggests Deuteronomy took the warning from treaty literature does not necessarily permit us to conclude, as did W. Herrmann and others,³⁷ that texts such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes then took this phrase from Deuteronomy. At the same time, both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes shared a textual relationship with Deuteronomy and to say Deuteronomy did not affect them (Ecclesiastes and Proverbs) would be patently wrong. And while we actually do not have in this case any examples of this phrase's occurrence in foreign wisdom literature, we should not discount the possibility that it was used in wisdom literature as well, since it was apparently quite popular in other genres of Mesopotamian literature.³⁸

Therefore, I would suggest that a combination of two elements contributed to the phrase being employed by Proverbs and Ecclesiastes:

1. The particular language employed by Deuteronomy, תגרע and תוסף, undoubtedly had an effect on the acceptance and use of this phrase by Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
2. In addition, we must not ignore the effect that the phrase's popularity in ancient Near Eastern culture in general must have had on the Israelite Wisdom authors. This textual relationship is all the more plausible given the universal nature of Wisdom literature.

4. Conclusion

In summation, we can conclude, contrary to Weinfeld, that Deuteronomy borrowed the warning against addition and subtraction from Mesopotamian treaty literature, and employed the phrase in its modified sense to warn people against two distinct forms of idolatry. Following Deuteronomy but also influenced by the frequent appearance of the term in ancient Near Eastern literature, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes employed the warning in radically new ways.³⁹ What emerges from our research is a completely new understanding of these much-debated biblical phrases resulting in a new understanding of the historical development of the phrase and its intra-biblical history. By not positing an overarching historical theory prior to beginning our research, we were better able to understand the meaning of these verses in context and their own intra-biblical historical relationship.

³⁶ For other examples of the many ancient Near East documents that contain the warning against addition and subtraction see M. Fishbane, "Varia Deuteronomica," *ZAW* 84 (1972), 350. However, it should be noted that Fishbane's assumption that Deuteronomy is employing the warning in the same manner as other Near-Eastern documents, i.e., as an admonition against textual deviancy, is incorrect. Along those lines, as J.A. Sanders has noted, the nineteenth century assumption that these verses are a reflection of Deuteronomy's insistence that the addition or subtraction of its word is a grave sin, is an incorrect reading that derives from nineteenth century biases. Cf. J.A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 40. On the implausibility of reading this verse as discussing textual rigidity, see the comments of U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 256-264. As pointed out above, the interpretations offered by M. Greenberg and J. Tigay (Deuteronomy is employing this phrase to warn against worshipping forms of idolatry) seem to be the most precise and accurate.

³⁷ See Herrmann, "Zu Koheleth 3, 14," 294, cited by M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 264.

³⁸ Hammurabi's Code ends with a curse against anyone who alters the text at all (ANET 178c-d), the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon contain a curse against one who "changes...or erases the oaths of this tablet" (ll. 397-399), and most tellingly, see lines 43-44 in W. G. Lambert, "The Fifth Tablet of the *Era* Epic," *Iraq* 24 (1962), 123, cited in this context by Michael Fishbane, "Varia Deuteronomica," 350. My thanks to Aaron Koller for these latter two references.

³⁹ A full investigation of how this phrase was interpreted after Deuteronomy would have to include also Matthew 5:17-18; see the comments of Bernard M. Levinson, "The Hermeneutics of Tradition in Deuteronomy: A Reply to J. G. McConville," *JBL* 119 (2000), 284. Pursuing this topic remains outside the purview of this paper.

WAS SODOM DESTROYED BY AN EARTHQUAKE? A STUDY OF BIBLICAL EARTHQUAKES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY¹

Hayyim Angel

I. Introduction

The destruction of Sodom and the other wicked Cities of the Plain left a lasting mark on the rest of the Bible. The Torah and later Prophets often appeal to Sodom as a model of consummate depravity, and as an illustration of God's ability to obliterate entire populations for their wickedness.²

The Bible's account of the actual destruction occupies a relatively small portion of the narrative; the text's focus is primarily on the evils of the cities, and God's forceful response to their iniquities³:

The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground... Abraham... looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace (Gen. 19:24-28).⁴

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¹ I would like to thank my students Ezra Fass, Natan Kapustin, and Chananya Weissman for reviewing earlier drafts of this essay and for their helpful comments.

² See Deut. 29:32; 32:32; Isa. 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Ezek. 16:46-56; Hos. 11:8; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9; Lam. 4:6.

³ Nahum Sarna (*Understanding Genesis*, New York: Schocken Books, 1970 [paperback edition], p. 138) aptly notes that "the purposes of Scripture become abundantly clear if we consider that of the forty-seven verses devoted to the entire episode, the description of the actual disaster occupies but six and is terse almost to the point of obscurity. Obviously, the question of historical detail is of far less importance than the treatment of the theme."

⁴ All translations of biblical passages in this essay (with a few minor modifications) were taken from Soncino Press Judaica Classics CD-Rom.

How was Sodom overturned? At first blush, it appears that a shower of fire and brimstone fell from the sky. While the fire simply could have been lightning, brimstone normally does not rain from above. As a result, most traditional commentators conclude that Sodom was destroyed by supernatural means.

At least two traditional commentators, however, maintain that Sodom and the other Cities of the Plain were devastated by natural disasters. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch contends that a volcanic eruption destroyed the wicked cities: the "brimstone falling from heaven" in fact originated from beneath the earth's surface, but fell from the skies after being propelled upwards. Similarly, Gersonides avers that the wicked cities met their doom "from the bowels of the earth." This cryptic comment implies a belief that either a volcano or perhaps an earthquake caused the sudden destruction of Sodom. From a biblical standpoint, God certainly is capable of using supernatural means to serve His purposes; nevertheless, traditional commentators sometimes consider the prospect of God's achieving His will using the powerful forces of nature.

Nahum Sarna notes that contemporary geologists consider unlikely the possibility of volcanic activity in the vicinity of Sodom.⁵ Thus, it appears that the scientific evidence uncovered over the past century militates against the position of R. Hirsch.

Many recent scholars, therefore, favor the suggestion that Sodom was destroyed by a massive earthquake—a scientifically sound explanation that fits the evidence from the geological terrain of the Jordan valley.⁶ As Sarna writes:

⁵ Sarna, p. 142. See also Denis Baly & A.D. Tushingham, *Atlas of the Biblical World* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1971), p. 104: "A volcanic eruption seems very much less likely [than an earthquake], because, though the Dead Sea has been known to throw up blocks of asphalt, which float on the surface...there is only one known small basalt intrusion in the valley itself, all the others being on the Trans-Jordan plateau."

⁶ See also Baly & Tushingham op cit. See D. Kelly Ogden, "The Earthquake Motif in the Book of Amos," in Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin (eds.), *Goldene Apfel in silbernen Schalen: Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Leuven 1989* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 73-74, nn. 14-15 for a partial list of scholars who adopt the earthquake hypothesis. For a

It is well known that the entire Jordan Valley is part of an immense system of rift valleys... This great fracture in the earth's crust was, of course, brought about by geological spasms... We are most likely, then, dealing with a description of one of the last earthquakes that shaped the lower Jordan Valley area. As is frequently the case, the earthquake was accompanied by lightning which ignited the natural gases...causing a terrible conflagration. This would also explain why, when Abraham looked down over the area, he saw "the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln" (p. 142).

Although the biblical account of the suddenness of the destruction and the available geological evidence are both consistent with the earthquake hypothesis, the account of brimstone falling from the sky does not appear to sustain this suggestion. After all, earthquakes strike from beneath the earth's surface. Though it is possible that the Bible is describing lava being propelled into the air during an earthquake, this argument does not appear convincing from the text of Genesis. Abarbanel sharply rejects Gersonides' suggestion of a naturalistic destruction out of hand, observing that the text explicitly states that Sodom was destroyed by a bombardment of brimstone from above, which must be viewed as supernatural.⁷

Thus, scholars who believe that Sodom was destroyed by an earthquake appear to be caught between a plausible scientific proposition and what seems to be the simplest reading of the Genesis narrative. This would lend support to the majority of traditional exegetes, who maintain that Sodom was destroyed by supernatural means. However, a neglected body of evidence in this discussion is the evidence found elsewhere in the Bible. In this essay, we will investigate the earthquake hypothesis in light

fuller listing of scholarly opinions, see Meir Weiss, *The Book of Amos* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 2: 203, nn. 230-232. For a recent book-length study on the scientific background of Sodom's destruction via earthquake, see David Neev & K. O. Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho: Geological, Climatological, and Archaeological Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁷ Malbim adopts a middle position, suggesting that a supernatural bombardment of fire and brimstone from the sky ("גפרית ואש מן השמים") may have triggered an earthquake below as well ("ויהפך את הערים האלו"). Adopting a more naturalistic approach, S.D. Luzzatto suggests that lightning may have ignited the minerals on the ground, which in turn left a stench of sulfur (this would account for "גפרית ואש מן השמים"). Luzzatto further suggests that the resulting conflagration may have set off an earthquake as well.

of later biblical portrayals of earthquakes, and consider how they might illuminate the passage in Genesis 19.

II. Amos

The tiny country of Israel is situated on an earthquake fault line, and has suffered numerous major earthquakes over the centuries.⁸ In the biblical record, no earthquake ("רעש") left as deep an impression on the Israelites as the one that struck during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah (c. 788-736 BCE).⁹

The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1).

One of the most unusual features of the Book of Amos is that its very superscription defines the prophet's tenure in relationship to Uzziah's earthquake. Indeed, this is the only specific event included in a superscription to any prophetic book. Following this lead, most commentators identify a sizeable number of potential allusions to this earthquake throughout the Book of Amos.¹⁰

⁸ See Natan Shalem, "Earthquakes in Jerusalem" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem* 2 (1949), pp. 22-54; D.H.K. Amiram, "A Revised Earthquake-Catalogue of Palestine," *IEJ* 1 (1951), pp. 223-246, *IEJ* 2 (1952), pp. 48-65, for catalogues and discussions of earthquake activity in Israel in the past two thousand years.

⁹ The fact that it is the only quake specifically mentioned in the Bible testifies to the devastating destruction it must have wreaked. For recent treatment of archaeological findings as they pertain to Uzziah's earthquake, see W.G. Dever, "A Case Study in Biblical Archaeology: The Earthquake of Ca. 760 B.C.E.," *Eretz Israel* 23 (1992), pp. 27*-35*.

¹⁰ See 1:2 (Ibn Ezra, Malbim); 3:14-15 (Ibn Ezra, Kimhi); 4:11 (Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Twelve Prophets* [Hebrew], vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1990]; cf. Ibn Ezra); 6:11 (Ibn Ezra, Kimhi, Hakham); 8:8 (Kimhi, Hakham); 9:1-6 (Kimhi, Hakham). In each instance, some commentators believe that Amos is referring to Uzziah's earthquake, while others aver that Amos is using earthquake imagery poetically to describe the impending Assyrian invasion. In particular, Abarbanel maintains that the reference to the earthquake in Amos 1:1 dates the prophet, but is not an indication of Amos' predictions; consequently, Abarbanel understands all earthquake terminology in the Book of Amos as poetic (generally references to the impending Assyrian invasion). For a recent treatment of all the earthquake-related passages in Amos, see Ogden op cit., pp. 69-80. For a comprehensive survey of scholarly opinions of earthquake-related passages in Amos, see Weiss, *Amos*, 2:12, n. 106.

Perhaps the most striking of these references is found in Amos 4:6-11. Amos recounts a series of natural disasters that struck Israel: God sent famine, blight, locusts, and pestilence; yet the Israelites ignored each of these divine warnings, persisting in their evil ways. Amos then continues to the climax of this prophecy:

I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel! (Amos 4:11-12).

In 4:11, Amos equates some unnamed recent disaster with that of Sodom. Since Israel refused to repent, God now threatens an even greater calamity than the aforementioned natural disasters¹¹: the Assyrian invasion.¹²

To what extent did the disaster in Amos 4:11 resemble the destruction of Sodom? Kimhi, Abarbanel, and Malbim maintain that Amos is merely making a broad poetic parallel between Israel's partial desolation from Assyrian invasions and Sodom's complete annihilation. This argument has strong precedent, as all other biblical comparisons to the destroyed state of Sodom relate to desolation from military disasters, rather than from natural forms of devastation.¹³

However, there are at least three reasons to postulate that this reference in Amos 4:11 is different from all the others: 1) Amos is referring to some disaster that has already befallen Israel; Assyria did not begin its invasions of Israel for another 15-25 years from the time of

¹¹ This appears to be the smoothest reading of "הכון לקראת א-להיך ישראל" (4:12). See Ibn Ezra, R. Eliezer of Beaugency, Abarbanel, and Amos Hakham (*Da'at Mikra*) ad loc. Several traditional commentators, following the lead of Tg. Jonathan and bShabbat 10a, interpret 4:12 as a further call to repentance, not a threat. See, for example, Rashi, Kara, Kimhi, R. Isaiah of Trani, Malbim. For a more thorough survey of interpretations on this verse, see Weiss, *Amos*, 1:123-4; 2: 210-1, nn. 286-292.

Cf. Isa. 5:24-28, which follows the same logic. Amos Hakham, in his comments to Isa. 5:25 (*Da'at Mikra: Isaiah* [Hebrew], vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1984]), notes that these verses may refer to Uzziah's earthquake.

¹² Throughout the Bible, God views Israel's enemies as His agents of destruction. Cf. Isa. 10:5; Jer. 27:6, among others.

¹³ See Deut. 29:32; Isa. 1:9; 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Hos. 11:8; Zeph. 2:9.

Amos' prophecies.¹⁴ Therefore, it is unlikely that Amos is referring to a recent military defeat. On the contrary, Israel was enjoying a period of prosperity resulting from the conquests of Jeroboam II.¹⁵ 2) All the other plagues in Amos 4:6-11 clearly refer to a recent succession of natural (not military) disasters. It would be more likely that 4:11 is yet another tragedy from nature, continuing the prophet's message that the people have failed to detect theological meaning in the recent natural catastrophes. 3) In Amos 4:11, the term "הפכה" (=overthrowing) is used not only for Sodom, but also for Israel. In all other poetic references equating a nation's desolation to Sodom, this term appears only regarding Sodom.¹⁶ This linguistic comparison also supports the thesis that Amos is equating some recent natural disaster to the method of Sodom's destruction.¹⁷ In light of the above evidence, it appears most likely that Amos is referring to Uzziah's earthquake in 4:11, and that he is indicating that an earthquake destroyed Sodom.¹⁸ However, what still remains to be resolved is how the

¹⁴ W.G. Dever (op cit., n. 9) notes that the common scholarly dating of the earthquake to c. 760 BCE follows the assumption of Josephus, who states that the quake struck at the time Uzziah was stricken with צרעת (cf. Seder Olam Rabbah 20). See also Ogden, op cit., n. 6. However, Ibn Ezra and Kimḥi (Amos 1:1) already note that this assumption has no textual basis, so this early date may be more conjectural. For a survey of opinions on the dating of the earthquake, see Weiss, *Amos*, 1:5, 2:12-13, nn. 106-110. Weiss cites different scholarly opinions, which place the earthquake anywhere from 760 BCE until 749 BCE. Tiglath-pileser's invasions began in c. 735 BCE. See II Kings 15:29; chapter 16.

¹⁵ Meir Weiss (*Amos*, 2:203, n. 232) quotes scholars so troubled by this argument that they post-date Amos 4:6-11 to Josiah's reign (over a century after Amos). Others argue that Amos is referring to the military disasters from the time of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:3,7); however, Jeroboam II's victories (2 Kings 14:23-27) were sufficiently decisive that it is difficult to conceive of Amos' referring to the Northern Kingdom as desolate as Sodom. Alternatively, Kimḥi adopts the argument that Amos is speaking in the "prophetic past" in 4:6-11, i.e., the disasters had not yet befallen Israel. However, it is difficult to assume prophetic past in this instance, since Amos expects the people to have used each successive disaster as impetus to repent.

¹⁶ See Gen. 19:25; Deut. 29:32; Isa. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40.

¹⁷ F. I. Andersen & D. N. Freedman (*Amos* [AB], Garden City: Doubleday, 1989, p. 444) note that the term "הפכה" itself is a more general reference to an extreme or complete change, not specifically related to earthquakes. Nevertheless, they maintain that the reference to Sodom's (and Israel's) destruction in Amos 4:11 is a literal reference to a natural disaster, probably a combination of seismic disturbance accompanied by a firestorm (see p. 42). Meir Weiss (*Amos*, 2:203, nn. 230-232) provides a comprehensive survey of scholarly opinions debating whether Amos 4:11 indeed refers to Uzziah's earthquake or not.

¹⁸ See Amos Hakham 4:11, n. 19b. Ibn Ezra also assumes that Amos is likening the *method* of destruction to that of Sodom, suggesting that 4:11 is a reference to fire from heaven, which struck Israel. However, there is no corroboration for this divine plague of fire elsewhere in

earthquake theory is compatible with the language of fire and brimstone raining from heaven in Genesis 19. For this we must turn to several passages in the book of Isaiah.

III. *Isaiah*

In perhaps the greatest earthquake-related passage in the Bible, Amos' Southern contemporary, Isaiah, appears to threaten the arrogant Judeans with Uzziah's earthquake:

Man is humbled, and man is brought low; forgive them not. Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the arrogance of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one who is arrogant and lofty, and upon every one who is lifted up and shall be brought low; And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the lofty hills, And upon every high tower, and upon every fortified wall, And upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all delightful craftsmanship. And the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the arrogance of men shall be brought down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall completely abolish.

And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth. In that day man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made for him to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crevices of the rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth. Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for in what is he to be accounted for? (Isa. 2:9-22).

This passage seems to refer unambiguously to an earthquake: God will shake the earth terribly (vv. 19, 21), and the objects in vv. 13-16 all will be affected dramatically by a violent earthquake,¹⁹ thus undermining the

the Bible. Consequently, it is simpler to argue that Amos is referring to a prominently known and discussed disaster: Uzziah's earthquake, which itself probably was accompanied by a firestorm. See previous note.

¹⁹ Besides all the objects on land that would be affected, ships at sea would be destroyed by an accompanying storm. Ships in the gulf of Elath would be devastated by the tidal waves (tsunamis) that follow a major earthquake. See Jacob Milgrom, "Did Isaiah Prophecy During the Reign of Uzziah?" *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 178-182. Meir Weiss (*Amos*, 2:12, n. 106) provides

people's confidence in their military strength and wealth. People in their panic would flee to caves and the clefts in the earth to avoid the deadly upheaval.

However, several commentators understand much of this passage more figuratively, interpreting vv. 19 and 21 as referring to God's destroying the *residents* of the earth, not the earth itself.²⁰ Some consider the "objects" in vv. 13-16 as allegorical references to people.²¹ Given the proximity in time to Uzziah's earthquake,²² why would these commentators conspicuously avoid the more literal interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy?

In his summary to Isaiah 2, Amos Hakham furnishes a formidable argument against the plausibility of Isaiah's prediction of an earthquake: Isaiah notes that people will hide in holes in the ground from the impending disaster (vv. 10, 19, 21), a most unintelligent response to an earthquake. But Jacob Milgrom (p. 179, n. 8) convincingly rebuts this argument: besides the ensuing panic that an earthquake would cause (leading to irrational behavior), many ancients believed that earthquakes came from the heavens, not the earth!

From other biblical evidence, Milgrom's hypothesis appears correct. Centuries after Uzziah's earthquake, the prophet Zechariah appeals to it as the most devastating and horrifying natural event in Israel's past. He equates the dread of the quake in the war at the end of days to that terror:

Behold, the day of the Lord comes...I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women raped; and half of the city shall go into exile, and the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall

the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. His feet shall stand on that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in its midst toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall be moved toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And you shall flee to the valley of the mountains...like you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah (Zechariah 14:1-5).

Noteworthy is the description of the future earthquake, likened to Uzziah's earthquake over 250 years earlier: God's "feet" will stand on the Mount of Olives, causing it to split. This poetic description reflects the idea that God is "above," and earthquakes are caused when God "descends," and tramples on the earth.²³

Significantly, Isaiah himself later uses earthquake imagery in one of his messianic visions:

And it shall come to pass, that he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he who comes up from the midst of the pit shall be taken in the trap; for the windows of heaven are open, and the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is completely broken down, the earth crumbles away, the earth is violently shaken. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall sway like a hut; and its transgression shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again (Isa. 24:18-20).

In perhaps the most vivid description of an earthquake anywhere in the Bible, Isaiah states, "the windows of heaven are open, and the foundations of the earth shake." The consistent picture emerging from the prophetic depictions of earthquakes yields the conclusion that the ancient Israelites perceived earthquakes as emanating from God, who is "above."²⁴ From this vantage point, the safest hiding places would be in the clefts of the rocks and holes in the ground—the *lowest* points on earth! Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Isaiah (2:9-22) is to be taken literally as a prediction of Uzziah's earthquake: Isaiah stated this prophecy within Uzziah's lifetime, and he describes exactly how the ancient

a comprehensive survey of scholarly opinions discussing possible earthquake references in the Book of Isaiah to Uzziah's earthquake.

²⁰ See Tg. Jonathan, Rashi, Kimḥi, Malbim, Amos Hakham.

²¹ Rashi and Malbim aver that the "cedars of Lebanon" in v. 13 refer to heroes; Kara: kings and officers; Kimḥi: pagan kings. The "mountains" in v. 14 refer to people living there (Rashi), or people worshipping idolatry there (Kara).

²² The prophet Isaiah witnessed Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem in 701 BCE. Since he began his prophetic tenure during the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham (some time before 742, according to Hayim Tadmor's chronology), his career was lengthy. For a fuller discussion of chronological issues in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, see Yehuda Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: 2 Chronicles* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986), appendix, pp. 68-75.

²³ Cf. Amos 4:13; Mic. 1:3; Ps. 18:8.

²⁴ Cf. Ibn Ezra, Kimḥi, and R. Isaiah of Trani, who assert that since the decree comes from God (who is "in heaven"), Isaiah employs this terminology.

Israelites would have perceived the quake—as emanating from God, who is “above.”

IV Conclusions

From the prophetic descriptions of earthquakes of Isaiah (2:9-22; 24:18-20) and Zechariah (14:1-5), we see that the ancient Israelites perceived earthquakes as coming from the sky. The above discussion yields the conclusion that if the ancient Israelites believed that earthquakes come from above, then the Torah—which speaks according to the language of people²⁵—could be (and probably is) describing an earthquake as fire and brimstone raining from the sky. This is precisely how the ancient Israelites would have understood the expression as stated in the Torah.²⁶ As noted above, Amos (4:11) likens the devastation at Uzziah’s time to that of Sodom, lending further support to this argument.

Amos Hakham (Amos 4:11, n. 19b), while acknowledging the possibility that an earthquake destroyed Sodom, voices his skepticism by contending that explicit earthquake terminology is absent from the Sodom account. From our above analysis, however, it appears that the Torah still is describing the downfall of Sodom by means of an earthquake accompanied by a firestorm.

But the Bible does not appear merely to be reflecting the perception of the ancient Israelites; it also appears to be presenting a theology: The Bible does not want people to believe that “miracles” fall solely in the realm of God’s suspension of natural laws. On the contrary, all “natural” phenomena were created by God and therefore are miraculous.²⁷

Similarly, R. S.R. Hirsch (Gen. 19:24) understands the devastation of Sodom as a result of volcanic activity. He claims that the text’s

description that the destruction of Sodom was “from God in heaven” teaches that the “natural” occurrence in fact originated from God:

The volcanic nature of the district explains the foundation of the Dead Sea. The causes are quite natural and earthly and need not be referred specially to God and heaven. Against this erroneous view the Word of God proclaims “It was from God, from the heaven” that it came. You are confusing cause and effect. What you take to be cause is in reality effect. The present geological nature by which you explain the catastrophe is only the effect of the catastrophe which was not brought about by terrestrial conditions but by God from heaven.”²⁸

From this vantage point, the instance of Sodom is but one illustration of a broader biblical theology of God’s control over nature, and how people should perceive all natural occurrences as miraculous.

²⁵ See bBerakhot 31b; Yebamot 71a; Ketubot 67b, among many others.

²⁶ Cf. R. David Tzvi Hoffmann (Lev. 11:6) who employs this principle as it applies to “sunrise,” “sunset,” and the fact that the rabbit (“אֶרֶנֶבֶת”) only *appears* to chew its cud (although the Torah states that it does chew its cud).

²⁷ For further elaboration, see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, translated and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 70-72.

²⁸ *Pentateuch: Translated and explained by Samson Raphael Hirsch. Vol. 1 Genesis.* Rendered into English by Isaac Levy, 2nd Edition (Gateshead: Judaica Press, Ltd., 1982).

BALAAM—LOYAL PROPHET OF GOD? BALAAM'S MISSION IN EARLY BIBLICAL EXEGESIS¹

Mordy Friedman

I. INTRODUCTION

Most readers of the Bible would characterize Balaam as an undisputed "biblical villain."² The majority of scholarship and discussion of Balaam traces the development of the traditions surrounding his villainous character.³ This paper will explore the downplayed, ignored, and misread early Biblical interpreters, offering a more positive view of Balaam, with textual support.⁴ Although it might come as a surprise to the reader, there exists a strong tradition among biblical commentators

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¹ I would like to thank the entire *Nahalab* editorial board, particularly Aaron Koller, for assistance in this study. I owe an additional debt of gratitude to Professors Moshe Bernstein and Leslie Newman for reading earlier versions of this paper and providing many helpful comments.

² This term is from Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 173.

³ See Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1911), 3.354-382; Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 127-177; Jay Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," in Sidney B. Hoenig and Leon D. Stitskin (eds.), *Joshua Finkel Festschrift* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1974), 41-50; Judith R. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), 75-115; Michael Moore, *The Balaam Traditions* (SBLDS 113; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions* (Brown Judaic Studies 244; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Martin McNamara, "Early Exegesis in the Palestinian Targum (*Neofiti* 1) Numbers Chapter 24," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 16 (1993), 60-67; James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 482-497; Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bemidbar (Numbers)* (tr. Aryeh Newman; Jerusalem: Ha-Omanim Press, 1993), 282-327.

⁴ There have been a few studies that attempt to defend the character of Balaam. See George W. Coats, "Balaam: Sinner of Saint," *BRev* 18 (1973), 21-29; reprinted in George W. Coats (ed.), *Sage, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 56-62. Judah Goldin, "In Defense of Balak: Not Entirely Midrash," *Judaism* 40 (1991), 455-460; Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), *ad loc.*; and Mordechai Sabato "Mah Ya'atz u-mah 'anah 'oto Bila'm" (Hebrew), *Daf Kasher* vol. 4, no. 396, pp. 404-408.

who see Balaam as a loyal prophet of God. This tradition can be found in writing as far back as the second Temple period, by interpreters such as Josephus and Pseudo-Philo, and may also be found in the Talmud and Midrash. This paper will focus on the approach I term "the mission of Balaam," as suggested by Pseudo-Philo and Nahmanides, which shows that God sent His prophet Balaam on a mission to Balak.

II. THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT

INTRODUCTION

We need to take a fresh look at the biblical evidence to properly assess the character of Balaam. To do this we will focus on three bodies of evidence. First, we will briefly examine the traditional basis for claiming that Balaam was a villain and will note its weak textual support. Second, an unbiased reading of the Bible will reveal that Balaam is actually portrayed in a positive light. Third, we will identify a number of questions in the Balaam narrative that provide further basis for challenging the traditional villainous view of Balaam. A synthesis of these sources will allow for a new and more comprehensive understanding of Balaam.

VILLAINOUS INDICATIONS

When looking at the Biblical text for villainous indications, an honest reader will in fact find a dearth of support. The fact that God was upset with Balaam and sent an angel after him (22:22), which leads to the embarrassing scene involving the talking donkey⁵ (no matter how one understands it),⁶ and perhaps the fact that Balaam tries repeatedly to curse Israel support this view.

⁵ It is interesting to note that all the negative indications are concentrated in the donkey story (22:21-35); if not for this story, Balaam would look like a saint. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 469; and see Alexander Rofé, ספר בלעם (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Simor, 1979), 10-30, and Michael Barre, "The Portrait of Balaam in Numbers 22-24," *Interpretation* 51 (1997), 254-266.

⁶ This story casts aspersions on the character who until this point had appeared wholly positive. In a similar fashion, the Bible introduces Saul as a "hero," but immediately afterwards recounts his role in an embarrassing story (1 Sam 9). The commentators there are divided on its implications. See Ruth Paz, "The Choice of Saul and his Worthiness to

Other negative indications of Balaam's character may be found elsewhere in the Bible. The book of Numbers offers two further pieces of evidence. Balaam is credited with the plan to seduce the Israelites to sin with the daughters of Midian; thus, the Bible calls the scheme, "דבר בלעם," the "plan of Balaam" (Num 31:16). (Although it should be noted that when the Bible records the actual event in Numbers 25, Balaam's name is conspicuously missing.) Second, in the battle against Midian (Num 31:8), Balaam is killed along with the other enemies of Israel (and cf. also Josh 13:22). This only makes sense if Balaam was an enemy of Israel, as Nahmanides writes, "God forbid that they [Israel] should stretch forth a hand against a prophet of God."⁷

Deuteronomy 23:5 records the reason for the non-admittance of Ammonites and Moabites into Israel as, "they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-Naharayim to curse you." Similar sentiments can be found in Joshua 24:9-10, which records, "Thereupon Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, made ready to attack Israel. He sent for Balaam son of Beor to curse you, but I refused to listen to Balaam; he had to bless you, and thus I saved you from him." Finally, Nehemiah writes (13:2): "Since they...hired Balaam against them to curse them; but our God turned the curse into a blessing."

POSITIVE INDICATIONS

Nonetheless, the Bible also portrays Balaam as a loyal prophet of God. Balaam's first reported remarks to Balak's messengers are "spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as the Lord may instruct me." Balaam repeatedly declares himself to be a loyal prophet of God; in fact, even Balak speaks of Balaam as God's divine contact.⁸ Balaam does

the Throne," (Hebrew) *Megadim* 8 (1989), 35-43, and the responses to that article found in volumes 10 (1990), 45-53, and 12 (1991), 102-105.

For a completely fresh reading of the donkey incident, see Rashbam to Gen 32:29, who compares Balaam's punishment via the angel and donkey to the fish who swallowed Jonah (2:1), to the angel that struck Jacob in the thigh (Gen 32:25), and to God's attempt to kill Moses (Ex 4:24-26). All of these stories involve a person who hesitated after being sent on a divine mission. This paper will discuss why Balaam belongs in this list.

⁷ 22:31.

⁸ 23:17, 24:11.

nothing without the express approval of God, and his unconditional submission to the will of God is emphasized from the very beginning. Balaam declares no fewer than eight times that he can only do that which God wishes.⁹ Balaam is so resolute that he announces: "all the money in the world cannot make me do anything against the will of God." Moreover, only after God gives him permission to go with the messengers does he do so, and when he reaches Balak, the first thing he tells him is that he can only say what God places in his mouth. Balaam defends this position upon each failed attempt to curse the Israelites, despite the fact that this arouses Balak's anger and puts his own reputation and payment on the line. If anything, it would appear that Balak is indeed the enemy of Israel, not Balaam.

Many of the evil traits commonly attributed to Balaam do *not* actually appear in the Biblical text:

1. The Bible never tells us that Balaam hates the Israelites. Nor does the Bible record that Balaam desired to curse and destroy them. Instead, the Balaam narrative is introduced with a practical motivation for cursing the Israelites. King Balak fears Israel will overrun his country, and he turns to Balaam for help. The impetus to destroy Israel came from Balak, not Balaam.
2. There is no mention of greed or lust for power and money in the biblical description of Balaam. If anything, Balaam distances himself from money and pledges his allegiance to God, when he says: "Even if Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of the Lord my God."
3. The Bible does not associate Balaam with Israel's sin with the daughters of Midian in its presentation of the Balaam narrative in Numbers 22-24.¹⁰ The two stories are juxtaposed, and it would have

⁹ 22:8, 13, 18, 38; 23:3, 12, 26; 24:13. This is the same response Jeremiah gave to the officers who visit him in Jer 42:4.

¹⁰ The only reference to Balaam's involvement is later in Num 31:16. Why this seemingly important detail is only mentioned later in chapter 31 and not in the narrative of chapters 22-24 will be addressed by Nahmanides later in this paper.

been easy for the Bible to credit Balaam with this sinister plan – but it did not. One must wonder why the Bible did not directly implicate Balaam in the sin; if the Bible truly felt he was a villain, why not add this to his criminal record?

Perhaps the strongest support for a positive view of Balaam can be found in the prophet Micah: "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab devised and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him!" (Micah 6:5). Balak is the enemy, and Balaam is the defender of God—not the threat.

QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED

Beyond the evidence for the positive nature of Balaam from the biblical text, the final challenge to the traditional approach of Balaam the wicked derives from questions on the Balaam narrative that compel reevaluation.

- Why does God "change His mind" and allow Balaam to depart with the messengers upon his second request and not the first?
- Why is God upset with Balaam after having just given him permission to go?¹¹
- If God indeed frowned upon Balaam's mission, why does the angel not command Balaam to return home when Balaam offered to do so?
- Why does God send an angel to stop Balaam, if the angel told him nothing more than God had already told him in 22:20?¹²
- Is there any intrinsic relationship and continuity between the story line and Balaam's oracles?

This paper will propose that viewing Balaam as the loyal prophet of God can best answer these questions.

III. HISTORY OF BALAAM EXEGESIS

¹¹ As Nahmanides (22:20) asks: "Far be it from God to punish [a person for doing] something for which he had [previously] given permission!"

¹² See Abarbanel on 22:22 and R. Yitzhak Arama, עקידת יצחק, chap. 82, both of whom suggest several differences between the two commands.

INTRODUCTION

How does an exegete come to grips with these conflicting bodies of evidence and questions surrounding Balaam's character? As opposed to a source-critical view of the Bible that is not bothered by these inconsistencies,¹³ a holistic view of the biblical text must arrive at a more integrated and harmonious reading. If one is convinced of the negative character of Balaam, all of the seemingly positive details and the questions must be explained. If one chooses the positive view of Balaam, the few negative details and the questions must be integrated into the analysis of his biblical role in order to provide a new perspective on Balaam's character.

THE TRADITION OF BALAAM THE WICKED

Balaam has been reviled in all brands of literature, both popular and scholarly, from ancient times through the present.¹⁴ Among early biblical interpreters, this approach was adopted by numerous sages in the Talmud and Midrash,¹⁵ several Targumim and other ancient translations,¹⁶ Philo of

Alexandria,¹⁷ Samaritan literature,¹⁸ the New Testament,¹⁹ the Church Fathers,²⁰ and the majority of Medieval commentaries.

These sources make bold statements about Balaam's wickedness by labeling Balaam (each in its own language) as בלעם הרשע, "Balaam the wicked." They also take every opportunity to incriminate and insult Balaam without any textual support. They accuse Balaam of hating Israel, and ridicule Balaam's arrogance, sinful ways, and stupidity. Some even challenge whether Balaam was a real prophet or just a charlatan.²¹ One sage in the Talmud even accuses Balaam of having committed bestiality with his donkey.²²

In their crusade against Balaam, they distort apparent positive evidence, and turn seemingly neutral statements into incriminating evidence for Balaam's wickedness. The primary example is the introduction of money and greed as Balaam's underlying motivation.²³ Similarly, although Balaam admitted to the angel that "I have sinned," the Midrash refuses to accept the sincerity of Balaam's statement, and instead interprets it as a sly maneuver on the part of Balaam. "Balaam said to the angel: 'I have sinned,' for he knew that...the angel has no power to touch

¹³ For a summary, see Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: OTL, 1968), 171-194; Jo Ann Hackett, "Balaam," *ABD* 1.569-570; John T. Greene, "Balaam: Prophet, Diviner, and Priest in Selected Ancient Israelite and Hellenistic Jewish Sources," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers* (ed. David J. Lul; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 70-81; David Frankel, "The Deuteronomic portrayal of Balaam," *VT* 46 (1996), 30-42; and the approach of Rofé and Barre (above, n. 5). A number of objections leveled against the application of this approach to these chapters in particular can be found in John Van Seters, "The Story of Balaam," in his book, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1994), 405-435; M. Margalit, "The Connection of the Balaam Narrative with the Pentateuch," *WCJS* 6 (1973), 1.285-90; and in the many literary studies exploring the repeated motif of the number three throughout the story, testifying to the story's unity.

¹⁴ For Balaam in modern literature, see the composite article "Balaam" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 4.119-125, and Greene, "Balaam: Prophet, Diviner and Priest," 104-108. Recently, there was even a rock band called "Balam and the Angels."

¹⁵ For lists of Rabbinic sources, see: Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 3.354-382; Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 80-93; Adler, "Balaam" (Hebrew), *Aspaklaria: Compendium of Jewish Thought* 3 (1995), 814-866; and Jonathan Slater, "The Character of Balaam as a Villain in Midrash Numbers Rabbah" (B.A. thesis in Folklore and Mythology: Harvard University, 1974). Many have posited extra-textual reasons in accounting for the negative characterization of Balaam. Early scholarship felt that Balaam was used as a code name for Jesus. Others maintain it was because Balaam's prophecy was used by Christians to augur the coming of Jesus. Still others suggest that Balaam was used as a model of Jewish opposition to foreign prophets, magicians, diviners, idols, and immorality. It has even been suggested that Balaam

represented the leader of a rival cult that claimed to have experienced a direct revelation from God. Others claim that Balaam represented the anti-Moses, anti-Abraham, or alternatively, was identified with various biblical villains, such as Laban.

¹⁶ Specifically, the Vulgate, Fragmentary Targum, and Pseudo-Jonathan.

¹⁷ *On the Life of Moses* I, chapters 48-55 (263-300). See also discussion by Robert M. Berchman, "Arcana Mundi Between Balaam and Hecate: Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in Later Platonism," *SBL 1989 Seminar Papers* 28 (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 112-117, 122-124.

¹⁸ See Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters*, 123-135; Greene, "The Balaam Figure and Type Before, During, and After the Period of the Pseudepigrapha," *JSP* 8 (1991), 74, 106-127; and Greene, "Balaam: Prophet, Diviner, and Priest," 104.

¹⁹ 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14, all of which condemn Balaam as an evil teacher and stress his lust for money.

²⁰ Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters*, 44-5; Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," 41-50; and especially Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 101-113.

²¹ See Philo of Alexandria, *Midrash Tanhuma* (4.68 and others in Adler, "Balaam," 857-866), as well as Theodoret and Cyril of Alexandria, cited in Baskin, 93-96.

²² Sanhedrin 105a. See also *Tanhuma Noah* 217, according to which Balaam is the inventor of dice.

²³ Avot 5:19, Bemidbar Rabbah 20:10, *Tanhuma* 4.136, Avot De-Rabbi Nathan 45, and Kugel, *The Bible As it Was*, 485-487.

any sinner who says 'I repent.'"²⁴ These are but a few examples of the extent to which the commentators malign Balaam's character.

THE TRADITION OF BALAAM, LOYAL PROPHET OF GOD

Although Vermes states that there are at most two early interpreters who do not accept Balaam as a villain,²⁵ there are actually a considerable number of proponents of the view that Balaam was a biblical "good guy."

First, it should be noted that the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Onqelos offer a completely neutral reading of the Balaam narrative. The Samaritan Pentateuch as well presents a neutral reading with several small additions that might perhaps be interpreted as defending the character of Balaam.²⁶ These sources establish that there could (and did) exist a tradition of Balaam without a negative bias.

Further evidence that some early biblical commentaries portrayed Balaam as a biblical hero comes from references to Balaam's character and oracles in sources where a villain would be out of place. Balaam was well respected in the Qumran tradition and is cited prominently in the Dead Sea Scrolls.²⁷ In addition, the opening chapter of the book of Enoch is modeled around the Balaam story.²⁸ Why would the book of Enoch, which attempts to portray its protagonist in a near-angelic fashion, invoke the image of Balaam?²⁹ The only credible interpretation is that its author saw Balaam as a heroic rather than a villainous character.

Balaam's oracles have also been recognized throughout the ages, from the Midrash to Nahmanides, as a holy, prophetic, and messianic

²⁴ *Beridbar Rabbah* 20:15, *Tanhuma* 4.139, and Philo.

²⁵ Namely, Josephus and Pseudo-Philo (Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 173-4).

²⁶ 22:7, 22:22. For a verse-by-verse comparison of the Samaritan treatment of the Balaam narrative, see Greene, "Balaam as Figure and Type," 106-127.

²⁷ See the War Scroll 1QM 7:19-20, 1QM 11:6-7, 12:11; Greene, "Balaam as Figure and Type," 94-106.

²⁸ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1.13f. For parallels, see Enoch 1:2 (=Num 24:15), 91:11-17 and 93:10 (=Num 24:15). For secondary literature, see Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters*.

²⁹ This question was asked by James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (Washington DC, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 16, 1984), 115-118, and nn. 29-30, but he is unable to answer it, since there has been scant attention paid to the positive traditions concerning Balaam and the malicious traditions have achieved such hegemony even in contemporary times.

text,³⁰ something that we would not expect had they come from the mouth of a villain.

Berchman writes that early Christianity also struggled with how to label Balaam's character, and viewed Balaam as "both a legitimate prophet and illegitimate sorcerer."³¹ There are a number of early Church Fathers, such as Origen (184-253 C.E.)³² and Jerome (345-420 C.E.),³³ who are bothered by the incrimination of Balaam and try to reconcile his simultaneously positive and evil character and attributes. This tension over Balaam's status is eloquently expressed in the following comment from Origen:

First of all, let us ask about Balaam himself; why is he presented in the Scriptures now as blameworthy, now as praiseworthy? When he persists in hiring out his services, builds altars to the demons and gives his evil counsel concerning the cult of Midian, he is blameworthy. He is praiseworthy, however, when the word of God is placed in his mouth, and the spirit of God comes over him; when he prophesizes...and when he bestows blessings on the people instead of curses and extols the names of Israel above its visible glory by mystical words.³⁴ Therefore, since Holy Scripture proclaims these

³⁰ For the messianic interpretation of the oracles in Talmudic and Midrashic sources, see Larry Moscovitz, "Josephus' Treatment of the Biblical Balaam Episode" (M.A. diss.: Yeshiva University, 1979); Louis Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 110-136; Kugel, *The Bible As it Was*, 487-493.

For other references to the Balaam oracles as messianic prophecies, see Nahmanides in "ספר הגאולה," in "כתבי הרמב"ן" (ed. Chavel), 1.265-266; a manuscript attributed to R. Yehiel of Paris (13th century) cited in Alexander Marx, "מאמר על שנת הגאולה," in *הצופה לחכמת ישראל* 5 (1921), 196; Ibn Ezra *ad* Num 24:16, Gedalia ibn Yahya's (1515-1587) *Sefer Shalsbelet ha-Kabbala* (Amsterdam, 1697), 36b.

For sources that used the oracles as a holy text: the Jewish daily prayers begin with one of his oracles, "...מה טוב אלהיך יעקב," and the Talmud (bBerakhot 12b, and pBerakhot 3c) records that some would include the entire narrative of Balaam in their daily prayers.

³¹ Berchman, "Arcana Mundi Between Balaam and Hecate," 124.

³² See Baskin, 86, 103-108, and Braverman, 44. Berchman writes: "Origen thus elevates Balaam to the level of an ambiguous figure – one who is a malevolent sorcerer and a divine prophet." But, he concludes, "Balaam is not a true prophet, for his divine possession is unwanted and short-lived. He may prophesize, but this does not make him a genuine prophet" (127, and see his discussion at 124-127).

³³ On *Ezekiel* 6.18.3 (PL 25, col. 170c), *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (tr. C. T. R. Hayward; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 56 (commentary *ad* Genesis 22:20-2); see Baskin, 103-112.

³⁴ This is especially important to Christianity, for Balaam's oracles are taken to be the earliest proof of Jesus' coming. See Kugel, 487-493. For its messianic significance to Judaism, see the references cited in n. 30.

things about him, so different and so various, it seems to me to be very difficult for the facts given to define his personality.³⁵

Josephus rereads the entire story in a positive light. He contextualizes the story, taking the focus off of Balaam and putting it on the true enemy, Balak, and the other military enemies of Israel. Josephus also suggests that God was upset with Balaam based on a simple misunderstanding. After the messenger's second visit, God did not give Balaam permission to go with them, but because it was the second time Balaam asked God the same question, He answered Balaam sarcastically. However, Balaam misinterpreted this sarcastic response, as he writes: "So Balaam, not dreaming that it was to delude him that God had given this order, set off..."³⁶ Josephus also minimizes the sin of Balaam by transforming him into a tragic hero. Balaam goes from being a loyal prophet of God to being seduced by the noble trait of friendship and ultimately turning against God in order to help a friend.³⁷

Positive statements may also be found in Rabbinic literature. A number of Rabbinic sources readily acknowledge Balaam as a legitimate and powerful prophet of God.³⁸ Balaam is one of the seven non-Jewish prophets of the Bible, and in fact, is considered the supreme gentile prophet, parallel to Moses.³⁹ As the Midrash writes, "No prophet like Moses had risen in Israel"—but such a one has risen among the peoples of the world. Who is he? Balaam."⁴⁰ In fact, some Rabbinic sources even boast that Balaam was superior to Moses:

³⁵ *Numeros Homilia XIII-XIX in Migne, Patrologia Graeca* (MPG) 12.669ff, especially 12.683 d. The translation is from Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," 44. For further discussion of this passage, see Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 103-4.

³⁶ *Jewish Antiquities* IV:107-8, p. 529 (Loeb ed.). This approach is also taken by the medieval Rabbi Joseph ibn Kaspi.

³⁷ *Jewish Antiquities* IV:100-158, pp. 525-553 (Loeb ed.).

³⁸ Baba Batra 15b, Zevahim 116a, Tanhuma 4.68b, Leviticus Rabbah 1:12, Mekhilta Yitro 1, Aggadat Bereshit 65.130 [ed. Jellinek; Bet ha-Midrash vol. 4, p. 89], Seder Olam, chapter 21, Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, chapter 26.

³⁹ Baba Batra 14b, Sifrei ad Deuteronomy 34:10, Bemidbar Rabbah 14:20, 20:11; 22:2; Sifrei ad Deuteronomy 34:10; Yalkut Shimoni Num 765, Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, chapter 26 (or ed. Friedman, chapter 28, p. 141), Pseudo-Jonathan 23:9, and Zohar, III.305a. For other sources, see Adler, "Balaam"; Margalit, "The Connection of the Balaam Narrative," 285; Baskin, 84-5; Ginzberg, 1.298, 2.159, 3.334; and Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters*, 124-132 and 145-6.

⁴⁰ Sifrei Deuteronomy, end.

There were three features possessed by the prophecy of Balaam that were absent from that of Moses: (1) Moses did not know who was speaking with him, whereas Balaam knew who was speaking with him (24:4). (2) Moses did not know when the Holy One Blessed be He would speak with him, whereas Balaam knew (24:16)... (3) Balaam spoke with Him whenever he pleased, for it says: 'prostrate, but with eyes unveiled' (24:4, 16), which signifies that he used to prostrate himself on his face and straightway his eyes were unveiled to anything he inquired about. Moses, however, did not speak with Him whenever he wished.⁴¹

Now that we have identified a strong tradition that views Balaam as a hero and not the villain, this positive view must be tested against the text of Numbers 22-24. The Midrash only contains isolated statements without presenting a full picture, and the Christian Fathers such as Origen and Jerome do not read the entire narrative positively. Josephus was probably the first to reread the entire narrative in a positive fashion. We will focus on the reading championed by Pseudo-Philo and Nahmanides, one that we will term "the mission of Balaam." This analysis will reveal the heroic side of Balaam, an aspect of the story's protagonist that has been buried under centuries of negative exegesis.

IV. BALAAM'S MISSION

A. Pseudo-Philo⁴²

INTRODUCTION

Pseudo-Philo (2nd century CE) retells the biblical stories while including his own commentary through omissions from and additions to the biblical narrative (known as Rewritten Bible). In his retelling of the Balaam narrative, the omissions eliminate some of the villainous evidence,

⁴¹ Numbers Rabbah 14:20; and similar versions in Sifrei Deuteronomy [end]; Midrash Aggadot Numbers 24:17; Aggadat Bereshit 65.

⁴² Charlesworth, *OTP*, 2.324-326. See Vermes *Scripture and Tradition*, 174-176, and Baskin, 99, who make note of Pseudo-Philo's positive treatment of Balaam.

Other scholars have tried to downplay this positive view of Pseudo-Philo. L. Feldman, "Prolegomenon," in M. R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York: Ktav, 1971), C, sees this as an exaggeration, and compares Pseudo-Philo's account to that of Origen, who "notes both the praiseworthy and blameworthy aspects of his character." Charles Perrot, *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités Bibliques*, 2.124-125, also limits this positive view, claiming that it applies only to the beginning of the account, and not to the end.

while the additions serve to provide two new twists to the story line that project Balaam as the faithful prophet of God. Simultaneously, Pseudo-Philo admits to a sin by Balaam and creates a balanced and harmonious picture of Balaam.

THE REAL ENEMY: BALAK

Pseudo-Philo's first innovation is turning Balak into the real enemy, whereas Balaam joins an exclusive group by being called "servant of God" in Pseudo-Philo's narrative.⁴³ Upon being approached by Balak's messengers, Balaam's immediate reaction to the sinister plan to curse the Israelites is:

He [Balak] does not know that the plan of God is not like the plan of man...he does not realize that the spirit that is given to us is given for a time. But our ways are not straight unless God wishes it (18:3).

This reaction reveals Balaam's righteousness and directs the reader to focus on the true criminal of the story – Balak. Balaam realizes that Balak has an improper conception of God. Balak assumes that by hiring a prophet he can change God's will. Balak thinks God can be bought and sold, and that the powers of prophecy can be wielded at will by the prophet.⁴⁴

Balaam makes a similar comment after Balak's second request for assistance. Balaam again righteously responds: "Behold the son of Zippor is looking around and does not recognize that he dwells among the dead." Although the exact meaning of this verse is unclear, "the dead" either refers to idols or to those with the same improper conception of God. Either way, Balaam is saying that Balak is the true

⁴³ The other servants of God in Pseudo-Philo are Abraham in 6:11, the patriarchs as a group in 15:5, Moses in 20:2, and 7 people who refused to sacrifice to Baal despite Jair's death threats in 38:4.

⁴⁴ How God really works is a general theme found throughout Pseudo-Philo; see Frederick J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 84, 108, 128, and 157.

enemy of Israel and is walking amongst the dead⁴⁵ due to his fatal misconception of God.⁴⁶

Balak's fatal misconception of God is confirmed by his response to the messengers who report that Balaam has refused their request:

Behold I know that when you offer holocausts to God, God will be reconciled with men. And now ask even still more from your Lord and beg with as many holocausts as He wishes. But if He should be propitiated regarding my evil deeds, you will have your reward and God will have offerings (18:7).

Here we see explicitly that Balak intended to bribe God.⁴⁷ He had a distorted conception of the Divine and thought that the Israelite God, like the other pagan gods who depended on the sacrifices of man, could be corrupted by money and offerings.⁴⁸

Pseudo-Philo, in his summary of Balaam's oracle, explicitly relates that this was Balak's sin:

And behold the days will come, and Moab will be amazed at what is happening to it because Balak wished to persuade the Most Powerful with gifts and to buy a decision with money (18:11).

BALAAM'S MISSION TO BALAK

How does God plan to teach Balak, the true enemy of the story, a lesson about how God really works? How does God teach Balak that He cannot be bribed?

The answer is found in Balaam's second dream. God commands Balaam: "Go with them, and your way will be a stumbling block, and that Balak will go to ruin." God commands Balaam to go with the messengers to teach Balak a lesson. Balaam acts as a messenger of God, doing His bidding, when he sets out to meet Balak.

⁴⁵ Perhaps foreshadowing his fate.

⁴⁶ See Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, 87 for a summary of interpretations and scholarly literature on this statement.

⁴⁷ Vermes, 133, understands these words in a different manner.

⁴⁸ This is one of the fundamental differences between pagan gods of the ancient Near East and the Israelite God, cf. Y. Kaufmann, *The History of the Israelite Faith* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1960), vol. 1 and *passim*; J. J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," *Commentary* 26:5 (1958), 431-444.

The plan was for Balaam to demonstrate to Balak that God could not be bribed. Balaam would show Balak that no matter how hard he tried, no matter how many sacrifices he would offer, God could not be seduced by physical bribes. In fact, the opposite would come true. The more Balaam would try to curse the Israelites, the more the Israelites would be blessed, and the closer Midian would come to bringing about their own destruction.

TEXTUAL SUPPORT

Micah 6:5 is perhaps the greatest support for the idea that God sent Balaam on a mission to teach Balak a lesson. "Remember what *Balak* planned to do and what *Balaam* answered him." In other words, Balak is the enemy and Balaam is the hero, as if to say, 'Balak tried to destroy you and Balaam saved you.'

Deuteronomy 23:3-5, Joshua 24:9-10, and Nehemiah 13:2 can also be explained in this same fashion. Each source shares the same focus – on Balak. Deuteronomy and Nehemiah state: "they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-Naharayim to curse you." Similarly Joshua records, "Thereupon Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, made ready to attack Israel. He sent for Balaam..."

A number of the previously asked textual questions can now be understood. God did not randomly change His mind, deciding one time to forbid Balaam to go to Balak, and permitting it another time. Rather, it was because of Balak's persistence in asking Balaam to curse the Israelites, revealing his misconception of God, that God found it necessary to send Balaam to teach Balak a lesson.

This mission of Balaam also explains why Pseudo-Philo interprets the angel incident as words of (redundant) encouragement. The angel's message is interpreted as, "Hurry and be gone," as if to say, 'go complete your mission.' This encouragement is understandable, for who knows

what Balak's reaction would be when Balaam teaches him this lesson. Both his life and his reputation as a successful prophet could be at stake.⁴⁹

Furthermore, this explains why chapter 22 begins by introducing Balak, as opposed to Balaam, for Balak is the main villain.⁵⁰ This will also serve to counter the claim that Balaam's numerous futile attempts to curse the Israelites testify to his wickedness and desire to curse the Israelites. These multiple attempts to curse Israel were all part of God's plan to show Balak that no matter how hard Balaam tried he would be unable to curse Israel.

This theory also shows an intrinsic relationship between the theme of the narrative and Balaam's oracles. The oracles are not in fact separate from the rest of the story, but are the climax of God's intended message to Balak. Consider the following excerpts from Balaam's oracles: "From Aram has Balak brought me, Moab's king from the hills of the East: Come, curse me Jacob, Come, tell Israel's doom! How can I damn whom God has not damned, How doom when the Lord has not doomed." (23:7-8). Moreover, "Give ear unto me, son of Zippor! God is not man to be capricious, or mortal to change His mind." (23:18-19). "Lo, there is no enchantment in Jacob, No divining in Israel" (23:23). These oracles reinforce the point that man cannot bribe God, the fundamental message of the entire narrative, and are thus a fitting culmination of the entire story.

⁴⁹ 18:9. Just as Moses needed extra encouragement before he embarked on his mission (Exodus 3-5), Balaam needs encouragement as well. Negal (Mail-Jewish Digest, vol. 28#83 [http://www.ottmall.com/mj_ht_arch/v28/mj_v28i83.html#CYU]) suggests that this answers another perplexing question: why was it that Balaam was alone with only two lads during the angel incident? Where did all the messengers of Balak go? His answer is that perhaps Balaam was alone because he was running away. Thus, the angel came to urge him to continue on his trip.

⁵⁰ It would also explain why Balaam had to travel to Balak and could not simply curse Israel from his home, for he needed to go to Balak and teach him a lesson. For other interesting answers to this question, see Malbim (22:11), and Netziv (22:6, and see also 22:11, 12, 20, 23:7).

BALAAM'S "EVIL INCLINATION"

Despite this positive portrayal of Balaam, even Pseudo-Philo admits to some fault on the part of Balaam. Although he is a prophet of God, he is not a pristine character.⁵¹

There are several indications of sin on the part of Balaam in Pseudo-Philo's narrative. At the very beginning of Pseudo-Philo's account, God harshly rebuked Balaam, saying that the latter should have known better than to even ask for permission to curse Israel.⁵²

Pseudo-Philo explicitly records that Balaam received punishment as a result of sin: "And he [Balaam] did not know that his consciousness was expanded so as to hasten his own destruction" (18:10).⁵³ In fact, Balaam himself recognized this and said: "And the wise and understanding will remember my words that, when I cursed, I perished, but though I blessed

⁵¹ The prerequisites for being a prophet are disputed by medieval philosophical authorities. Maimonides believed that maximum cultivation of the intellect was required (*Mishneh Torah*, יסודי התורה 7:1-2; *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin, introduction to chap. 10, *yesod* 6; *Introduction to Avot*, chapter 7; *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:32, 36-38). On the other hand, R. Judah HaLevi (*Kuzari* 1:11, 79-99, 2:49, 3:23) sees moral perfection (and not intellectual perfection) as the prerequisite, stressing prophecy as a supernatural gift of God. Continuing in this vein, R. Joseph Albo (*Sefer Ikkarim* 1:21, 3:6, 8) and Abarbanel disagree along the same lines (see Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides and Abarbanel on Prophecy* [Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1970]). Characters like Laban, Abimelech, and Saul all received prophecy, despite their less than pristine characters and intellectual capabilities. For this reason, Kesef Mishneh ad יסודי התורה, *loc. cit.*, cites Rabbenu Asher to the effect that the above rule of Maimonides only applies to a permanent prophet, and not to a temporary or one-time prophet. On the other hand, Moses Idel, "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988), 40-41, points to a fundamental difference between the view of a prophet in biblical and medieval times. He claims that the medieval and kabbalistic view of prophecy as the culmination of a process of intellectual and character training is not true of the Bible.

⁵² As God says (18:4-6): "Is it not regarding this people that I spoke to Abraham in a vision, saying, 'Your seed will be like the stars of the heaven,' when I lifted him above the firmament and showed him the arrangements of all the stars? And I demanded his son as a holocaust. And he brought him to be placed on the altar, but I gave him back to his father and, because he did not refuse, his offering was acceptable before me, and on account of his blood I chose them. And then I said to the angels who work secretly, 'did I not say regarding this, "I will reveal everything I am doing to Abraham and to Jacob his son, the third one whom I called firstborn, who, when he was wrestling in the dust with the angel, who was in charge of hymns, would not let him go until he blessed him." And do you propose to go forth with them to curse whom I have chosen? But if you curse them, who will be there to bless you?"

⁵³ This statement is especially important because of Pseudo-Philo's strong emphasis on the concept of causality, i.e., that there is always a reason for punishment. See Murphy, 88, and especially his article, "God in Pseudo-Philo," *JSJ* 19 (1988), 1-18.

I was not blessed" (18:11-12).⁵⁴ Most explicitly and revealing, Balaam admits: "For I know that, because I have been persuaded by Balak, I have lessened the time of my life... But I will gnash my teeth, because I have been led astray and have transgressed what was said to me by night" (18:10-12).

Finally, Pseudo-Philo credits Balaam as responsible for the plan to seduce the Israelites to sin with the daughters of Moab.

How are we to understand this seemingly inconsistent portrait of Balaam painted by Pseudo-Philo? Is Balaam still a heroic character?

PSEUDO-PHILO'S VIEW OF BALAAM

The key to understanding Pseudo-Philo's characterization of Balaam lies in a close reading of Balaam's admission to sin. Balaam's sin was that "I cannot resist... I have been persuaded by Balak... I have been led astray and have transgressed..." (18:10-12). Balaam, despite being a loyal prophet of God, also disliked the Israelites and wanted to curse them.⁵⁵ It is the tension between his loyalty to God and his personal feelings that causes him to sin and creates the ambivalence of his character.

When Balaam speaks of his unwavering loyalty to God, he is completely sincere, thus earning him the title of the loyal prophet of God. At the same time however, he allowed his desire to curse Israel get the best of him. With respect to this desire, Balaam candidly states: "I cannot resist." Even though he knows that doing so would violate the wishes of God, his desire to curse Israel prevails. As he admits: "I have been persuaded by Balak... I have been led astray and have transgressed what was said to me by night."

When the messengers again approach Balaam, he impetuously asks God a second time if he might curse Israel. At that point, God makes a

⁵⁴ In fact, because of this, Pseudo-Philo does not mention that Israel killed Balaam, but rather implies that he caused his own death.

⁵⁵ This idea of hatred is quite common in the treatment of Balaam in Classical literature, see n. 15. With respect to the source of Balaam's hatred, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (45) states, "as long as the Israelites were in Egypt, Balaam was considered the wisest of all men; and all nations came to him for advice. But after the Exodus a Jewish bonds-woman possessed more wisdom than Balaam. Therefore he hated the Israelites out of envy." See also *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:12.

pivotal decision. God decides to "kill two birds with one stone" by simultaneously teaching Balak a lesson and punishing Balaam for his desire to curse Israel. A close look at the words of God reveals this dual purpose: "Go with them, and your way will be a stumbling block, and that Balak will go to ruin" (18:8). What does the word "and" mean in this context? The conjunctive is the key to the sentence; there are two separate clauses in the sentence. It should be read: "Go with them, and your way will be a stumbling block [for yourself], *and* Balak will go to ruin." In other words, the mission had two purposes: to teach Balak a lesson and to assure the downfall of Balaam.⁵⁶

Once Balaam has lost his prophetic status,⁵⁷ Pseudo-Philo continues the narrative with Balaam's plan to seduce the Israelites to sin. As he writes: "And then Balaam said to him, 'come and let us plan what you should do to them. Pick out beautiful women'" (18:13).⁵⁸ Pseudo-Philo embraces this negative action of Balaam in constructing his narrative, for once Balaam had forfeited his prophetic status he had nothing to lose by defying the word of God and following his desires. Therefore, Balaam architects the plan to seduce the Israelites to sin.

Balaam was a complex character, originally a loyal prophet of God, but torn between his loyalty to God and his desire to curse Israel. It was only after he lost his prophetic status that he turned completely against Israel.

PRECEDENT

As precedent for having a biblical character function as the messenger of God and, at the same time, tragically fall prey to his evil inclination, let us look at Samson, another complex character who cannot easily be labeled a villain or a hero.

Samson is clearly a messenger of God, appointed to save Israel in the book of Judges. In Pseudo-Philo's re-telling of the story there are

⁵⁶ This understanding of Pseudo-Philo is rejected by Jacobson, 591, and Baskin, 99.

⁵⁷ The tradition that Balaam lost his powers of prophecy because of sin can also be found in Numbers Rabbah 20:19; Sanhedrin 106a; and see Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 87-88.

⁵⁸ 18:13.

numerous indications of Samson as a biblical hero. His birth is foretold: "for this one will be dedicated to your Lord" (42:3), and throughout his life God is with him on the battlefield.⁵⁹ He is a messenger of God who saves Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Simultaneously, however, the reader notices his lust for foreign women, a tragic flaw that ultimately leads to his downfall. Thus, he too is a loyal messenger of God with a strong evil inclination that leads to his demise.

Supporting this parallel is one further episode involving Samson. After Samson married his second foreign wife, God became upset with Samson and, as Pseudo-Philo elaborates, said:

Behold now Samson has been led astray through his eyes, and he has not remembered the mighty works that I did with him⁶⁰...and now Samson's lust will be a stumbling block for him, and his mingling a ruin. And I will hand him over to his enemies, and they will blind him. But in the hour of his death I will remember him, and I will avenge him upon the Philistines once more (43:5).

It is significant that the same phrase "be a stumbling block" (and that important word "and") that appears in the context of Balaam resurfaces here. This word in the original, "*scandalum*," "stumbling block," is a rare one in Pseudo-Philo.⁶¹ Connected as it is to the next clause by the conjunctive, it basically means that God will kill two birds with one stone: God will simultaneously punish Samson, for his sins, and the Philistines. Thus, both Balaam and Samson are loyal messengers of God, who sin and are punished, while at the same time deliver Israel from its enemies.

B. Nahmanides⁶²

INTRODUCTION

While most Medieval commentaries reinforce Balaam's bad reputation,⁶³ Nahmanides (Ramban) is the significant exception.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ See for example, 43:2.

⁶⁰ This language should also remind the reader of Balaam's admission: "because I have been led astray and have transgressed what was said to me by night" (18:12).

⁶¹ It appears with respect to Balaam (18:8), Samson (43:5), the idol of Micah (44:8) and twice regarding Saul (58:3-4 and 65:4).

⁶² For an alternative analysis of the position of Nahmanides, see Sabato, 405, and Leibowitz, 310.

Nahmanides refines the approach of Pseudo-Philo,⁶⁵ anchoring it further in the text, and suggests an alternate explanation for the sin of Balaam and how it meshes into an overall positive view of Balaam.

⁶⁵ Positive indications among Medieval scholars are very hard to come by. Ibn Ezra writes that Balaam wanted to reveal the days of the Messiah (24:16). Maimonides (*Guide* II:45 [ed. Kafih, 264]) discusses Balaam's prophetic prowess. R. Yehiel of Paris interpreted the oracles of Balaam as messianic (see note 30). Sefer Hassidim says Balaam did not realize he had sinned and vindicates him somewhat (see also the introduction to Sefer Hassidim, and no. 153, 1145 for a different picture). See also the aforementioned comment of Rashbam to Gen 32:29 (above, n. 6) who groups Balaam together with the likes of Jonah, Jacob, and Moses.

⁶⁶ Nahmanides' position was cited by several of his students, though they did not develop it any further, nor did they make it their central thesis. Rabbenu Bahya, in his usual fashion, cites large chunks from Nahmanides' commentary amongst many other interpretations; see his comments to Num 22:9, 20, 22, 23; 23:4; 24:4, 25. Seforno, who also usually follows Nahmanides, briefly cites some of Nahmanides comments (22:20, 22, 28, 34). There are other commentators who may have been influenced by Nahmanides and the theory of "Balaam's mission," see: Abarbanel *ad* 22:1, 7, 24, 23:13.

אור החיים is the only commentator who develops Nahmanides' idea further, although he is convinced of the wickedness of Balaam. Nevertheless, he writes that Balaam was also the prophet of God, and being so, God honored him and defended his honor. For example, he was not allowed to go the first time the messengers came because God felt they were not in accordance with his honor. Once more honorable messengers arrived, God allowed him to go with them, for that was what God wanted all along (22:9, 12, 13). The purpose of sending Balaam was twofold. First, had He not let Balaam go, it would have appeared that God was afraid that Balaam might curse the Israelites (22:20, 35). Second, echoing Pseudo-Philo, אור החיים writes: "Balaam's coming to Moab and failing to curse the Israelites also became the reason that Balak was forced to return to Midian and be killed by the sword during the punitive expedition involving 12,000 Israelites," as described in 31:8. If Balaam had not traveled all the way to Moab and assured the Moabites that they were safe from the Israelites until the distant future, Balak would have remained on his throne in Moab, secure from all the wars the Israelites would be involved in. Instead, he became the personification of Psalms 37:15 'their swords shall pierce their own hearts' (22:6). In other words, he was sent to cause the destruction of Moab.

⁶⁷ That Nahmanides of all commentators would take this position should not come as a surprise. This is only one of numerous examples in which Nahmanides defends the character of ambiguous figures against the uniformly evil characterization provided first by the Rabbis and later by Rashi. See, for example, his comments regarding Nimrod (Gen 10:10), Lot (Gen 13:7), Ishmael (Gen 21:9), Esau (Gen 25:34 & 27:33), Laban (Gen 31:10, 19), and Eldad and Medad (Num 11:28). On the other hand, bear in mind Nahmanides' criticism of Ibn Ezra on Genesis 10:9 for being "מצדיק רשע" (exonerating a wicked person) with respect to Nimrod. I am indebted to Aaron Koller for his help in compiling this list.

Could Nahmanides have seen and used a copy of Pseudo-Philo? Had he had access to it, it is possible that he would have used it, for he occasionally cites books from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; for example, in Deut 21:14 he cites the book of Susanna, and he cites from Wisdom of Solomon in his introduction to the Torah, in "דרשת חורת ה' תמימה" (ibid., 1.182). Barring direct evidence that Nahmanides possessed a copy of Pseudo-Philo, or that one was circulating in Spain during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we would have to assume that the similarities between the two approaches result from the efforts of two close readers of the text struggling with the same issues and suggesting similar approaches.

QUESTIONS

There appear to be a number of blatant contradictions within Nahmanides' comments on Balaam. In ספר הגאולה, while discussing the various messianic prophecies of the Bible, Nahmanides writes,

There is another prophecy of the future in the Torah; it is [in] the section of Balaam. It is known from Scripture that he was a great prophet, and God, blessed be He, put those words in his mouth; whose prophetic level the Kabbalistic tradition praises effusively. Indeed, since the section concerning him is recorded in the Torah in its entirety, Moses our teacher knew from the mouth of the Almighty that it is true; he did not transcribe the words of a madman for us.⁶⁶

Nahmanides also mentions in a number of places in his commentary on the Bible that Balaam was a true prophet who delivered messianic prophecies.⁶⁷

On the other hand, in several places in his commentary to Numbers, Nahmanides emphasizes that Balaam was primarily an enchanter and soothsayer and should not be compared to the other prophets of Israel. His comments on the words, "And the Eternal opened the eyes of Balaam" are a good example:

From this verse we learn that Balaam was not a prophet, because had he been a prophet, how could it be that he required 'opening of the eyes' to see the angel, which is a term used by Scripture about someone who has not reached the degree of prophecy...Scripture does not speak in this manner about the prophets!⁶⁸ And indeed, Scripture calls him, 'Balaam the son of Beor, the soothsayer'...But for the sake of the honor of Israel.⁶⁹ God came to him that night, and afterwards he was favored with 'opening of the eyes' in seeing the angel, and speaking to him, and finally he attained the degree of

⁶⁶ כתבי הרמב"ן (ed. Chavel), 1.566.

⁶⁷ See also his comments to Num 24:14, 17-18, 20 where he explains the messianic references to Balaam's oracles. See also *ad* Num 24:1, where he says explicitly: "The spirit of the Eternal God is upon me"...Balaam now referred to himself as him who heard the words of God, for he was a prophet."

⁶⁸ Hirsch (22:8) elaborates on this difference.

⁶⁹ He repeats this phrase a number of times here, as well as in his comments to 23:4, 23:16. It is also mentioned by Rabbenu Bahya, and can be found earlier in the commentary of R. Eleazar of Worms, in his דרוש on Num 22:9.

[seeing] 'the vision of the Almighty'; all this being for the sake of Israel and in their honor. But after he returned to his land, however, he [reverted to the status of a mere] soothsayer, for that is how Scripture describes him at his death...and God forbid that they [Israel] should stretch forth a hand against a prophet of God.⁷⁰

Yet Nahmanides apparently rejects his own identification of Balaam as a soothsayer when he castigates the Rabbis and Rashi for maligning the character of Balaam, and instead defends his status as a true prophet of Israel. For example, he comments(23:5):

'And the Eternal put a word in Balaam's mouth.' Some commentators explain that Balaam did not understand the words [he said]... But the meaning of 'וישם' is 'instruction,' signifying He taught him the words so that he should recite them with his mouth, and he should not forget or omit any part of it..."

Even as Nahmanides defends the prophetic character of Balaam, he also admits to Balaam's sinning⁷¹ and to God's dissatisfaction with him. In fact, Nahmanides agrees with the assessment of the Rabbis that Balaam lost his prophetic powers as punishment for his actions. Moreover, Nahmanides asserts that Balaam was the mastermind behind the fiasco involving the Midianite women,⁷² and that Balaam thus deserved to be killed along with Israel's enemies in the war against the Midianites.⁷³

How do all these contradictory ideas fit together? Was Balaam a prophet or a magician? What is Nahmanides' ultimate assessment of Balaam?

BALAAAM'S MISSION:

In order to understand Nahmanides' view of Balaam, we must first note that Nahmanides also invokes the "mission of Balaam." In explaining why God "changed His mind" and sent Balaam to Balak, Nahmanides writes (22:20):

The correct interpretation of this matter appears to me to be that at first God forbade him to curse the people, for they are blessed, and so there was no purpose in Balaam going with them.... But now that they have come back to you, if the men are come merely to call you, meaning that they will agree to your going with them on condition that you shall not curse the people, as I informed you at the beginning, then rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak unto thee, that you shall do – and do not be scared of Balak. This then is the meaning of 'if the men are come to call thee.' And this was the wish of the Glorious Name – that he [Balaam] should go with them after telling them that he would not curse them [Israel], and that he would conduct himself towards them as God would command him – because it was the Will of God, to bless Israel through the mouth of the prophet of the nations.

Upon reading this passage, one might come to the conclusion that the entire purpose of Balaam's service was, as the above passage concludes, "because it was the Will of God to bless Israel through the mouth of the prophet of the nations." But is this a sufficient explanation? Does it explain why Balak was the specific impetus for this blessing? If all God intended was to bless Israel through the gentile prophet, what is the purpose of the surrounding narrative?

It appears to me that Nahmanides, like Pseudo-Philo, assumes that God sent Balaam on a mission. God granted Balaam permission to go to Balak the second time because of Balak's persistence. The lesson Balaam was to teach Balak, according to Nahmanides, was contained in God's command to Balaam that "only the word that I shall speak unto you should you speak." The critical element was not the blessing per se, but rather the fact that no matter how hard Balaam would try, he would not be able to do *anything but* bless the Israelites.

For this reason, Nahmanides places disproportionate emphasis on this Divine condition. "Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak unto you should you speak," means that Balaam must inform them of this divine condition. In fact, the angel also reminds Balaam about this divine condition. According to Nahmanides, Balaam recognized the importance of this divine stipulation: "It is for this reason that Balaam informed Balak at the very start of his speaking to him... 'I have only been permitted to come, but as far as [cursing] the people [of Israel] is

⁷⁰ 22:31. See also his comments to 22:5, 23 (end), 23:4, 24:1, and his commentary to Genesis 18:1.

⁷¹ See his comments to 24:1.

⁷² See his comments to 24:14 and 25:1

⁷³ See his comments to 22:31 and 25:1.

concerned, have I now any power at all to speak any thing...the word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak – whether it be a curse or a blessing. Decide therefore if you want me to speak about them, and if you do not want it, I will go back.”⁷⁴ With these words, Balaam was explaining the divine guidelines for his mission, which would eventually teach Balak his lesson.

RESOLUTION

It appears therefore that Nahmanides suggests a more complex picture of Balaam than we have seen until now. On the one hand, Balaam's primary job was not as a prophet of God, but as a magician and an enchanter. But on one lone occasion, Balaam was chosen by God to go on His mission and to act as His prophet and messenger. Thus, this one time Balaam was a real and legitimate prophet of God, and here Balaam was truly loyal; his prophecies, therefore, have real and lasting significance.

The Balaam of Number 22-24 was a loyal prophet according to Nahmanides, and he therefore constantly defends Balaam's questionable actions throughout the narrative. For example, like Pseudo-Philo, Nahmanides downplays the incident involving the angel and the talking donkey, preferring instead to interpret the scene as one designed to provide encouragement.⁷⁵ Nahmanides also justifies Balaam's second request to curse the Israelites, calling it “properly given.”

Nahmanides' analysis, then, distinguishes two different periods in the life of Balaam. When interpreting Numbers 22-24, Nahmanides insists that Balaam should be considered a true prophet of God and not maligned or slandered. But at the same time, Nahmanides criticizes Balaam's earlier indiscretions and his later actions, for then he was not a prophet of God.

The strongest textual support for distinguishing the character of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 from the character of Balaam at all other times

⁷⁴ 22:35.

⁷⁵ 22:23, 35. See also the evidence he adduces in his comments to 22:33.

emerges from the fact that the Bible does not explicitly associate the plan involving the Midianite women with Balaam in the Numbers narrative. The Bible wants the reader to view Balaam, still under the employ of God, as a real and loyal prophet.

BALAAAM'S SIN

If Balaam was on a mission, why did God become upset with him when he embarked upon the mission? Nahmanides explains Balaam's sin in a completely different fashion than did Pseudo-Philo. Nahmanides rejects the opinions of Rashi and the Rabbis (and, we may add, Pseudo-Philo), who ascribe a malicious intent to Balaam. Nahmanides does not impute wickedness to Balaam, but instead describes his sin as an act of omission.

Thus, Balaam *ought* to have disclosed this to the princes of Balak and to say to them: ‘now God has only permitted me to be invited by you on the express condition that I do not curse the people, and that if He commands me to bless them, that I shall do so, and if they are not agreeable to these [conditions], they should leave me alone.’ But even on this second occasion... because of his overriding desire to go,⁷⁶ he *did not inform them* of this [Divine message with the conditions mentioned above], and did not tell them anything at all; [instead,] ‘Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with them’ like someone who is eager to fulfill their wish.⁷⁷

In other words, when Balaam received permission to go with the second group of messengers, he did not offer any explanation to the messengers for the sudden change in God's decision. Instead, Balaam simply “arose in the morning...saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite

⁷⁶ Unfortunately, Nahmanides does not elaborate on the nature of this “overriding desire,” and the role that it plays.

⁷⁷ In other words, a close comparison of what God told Balaam and what Balaam repeated to the messengers reveals that Balaam did not repeat the message faithfully and fully. This has also been noticed by Abarbanel (on 22:7), R. Moses Alshikh in his *חזקת משה* (on 22:12) and R. Moses Sofer (on Num 22:15 s.v. *ויסוף עוד בלק*). R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (22:21) writes: “Balaam suppressed the second part, the really essential part of God's warning... Nevertheless, Balaam rose up in the morning and went, keeping silent, with the princes of Moab. Without giving them any explanation at all, more, implicitly agreeing to both parts of their mission, he went with them.” See also his comments to 22:12.

dignitaries" (22:21), telling them nothing. That was his sin: not telling the messengers the divine conditions accompanying his mission.

Understanding Balaam's sin as his omission of the divine conditions of his mission can answer the perplexing question of why God became upset with Balaam immediately after giving him permission to go to Balak (22:22). God was not upset with what Balaam had done, i.e., that he saddled his donkey and set out to meet Balak, but rather with what he had not done. This also explains why the angel did not tell Balaam to return home, but instead gave Balaam the redundant message of "do only that which I place in your mouth," a reiteration of the divine conditions of his journey. The angel's reminder was appropriate because Balaam had still neglected to mention it to the messengers.

But why was Balaam's omission of the Divine conditions such a terrible sin? There are three parts to Nahmanides' answer (22:20):

1. Therefore 'God's anger was kindled because he went,' for had he informed them [of the conditions], he would not [necessarily] have gone [because they might have refused to let him come under such conditions].⁷⁸
2. Furthermore, a profanation of God's Name was involved in this [behavior], for since he went with them without explanation...they thought that He had given him permission to curse the people for them.
3. Therefore [they thought that] God had reneged on that which He had said originally, 'thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed' – according to what Balaam had told them – and when they saw later on that he did not curse them, they said that He changed [His word] yet again...Far be it from God to do after this manner, for the Eternal One of Israel will not...repent!

⁷⁸ See also Nahmanides at the end of 22:32, 24:12, and his comments to 22:35, where Balaam actually says to Balak, "Decide therefore if you want me to speak about them, and if you do not want it, I will go back."

Nahmanides says that Balaam's omission of the divine conditions of his services caused a profanation of God's name (חילול השם).⁷⁹ This was because the omission resulted in a mockery of God (even if Balaam did not intend for that to happen). Balaam made God appear fickle, constantly changing His mind to satisfy the wishes of man. So by Balaam neglecting to mention God's conditions, he both failed in his mission and committed a terrible sin. Perhaps for this reason, God Himself clarifies the issue in Balaam's oracle: "Give ear unto me, son of Zippor! God is not man to be capricious, Or mortal to change His mind" (23:18-19).

Although this notion of a mockery and profanation of God's name recalls a similar idea we observed in Pseudo-Philo, Nahmanides does not use it as the reason for Balaam's mission (i.e., to correct Balak's notion of God). Rather, it was an unintended result of Balaam's actions, and one that mandated his punishment. Thus, according to Nahmanides, even Balaam's sin was not a malicious act, but only a sin of omission, though one which from God's perspective was a grave infraction.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this study, we have analyzed the positions of various biblical interpreters, yielding a better appreciation of the ambiguous character of Balaam. Based on ambiguities, inconsistencies, and questions in the biblical text, the early biblical interpreters employed several ways of reading the text harmoniously. After briefly surveying those who portray Balaam as a complete villain, this paper focused on the possibility of a more positive reading of Balaam as the loyal prophet of God. We analyzed the 'mission of Balaam' found in Pseudo-Philo and Nahmanides, both of whom defend the character of Balaam as a loyal prophet of God,

⁷⁹ The severity of causing God's name to be profaned through an omission appears elsewhere in the Bible. According to Num 20:12, the sin of Moses was that "you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me (להקדישני) in the eyes of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them." Similarly, in Deut 32:51, "For you both broke faith with Me (מעלתם בי) among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to sanctify (קדשתי) Me among the Israelite people." The lack of sanctifying God's name, which led to a profanation of God's name, resulted in the punishment of death. Regarding this, see also Luzzato (Num 22:2) and the comments of St. Anselm Astruc cited in Leibowitz, 305-306.

though each in a different way. This analysis not only sheds light on the problems that faced the ancient holistic readers of the biblical narratives, but also illuminates the problems faced today by readers and hopefully helps elucidate further available options for a comprehensive and contextual understanding of Balaam's character.

THE 'AKEDAH AS PARSHANUT: ESTABLISHING THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM

Yitzchak Etshalom

I The Wickedness of Balaam

The character of Balaam is frequently maligned in rabbinic literature¹ to such a degree that he is often referred to as בלעם הרשע, "Balaam the wicked."² Moreover, he is characterized, in a famous Mishnaic dictum, as the diametric opposite of Abraham—which certainly paints him as the epitome of evil:

Whoever possesses these three things, he is of the disciples of our father Abraham; and whoever possesses three other things, he is of the disciples of the wicked Balaam. The disciples of our father Abraham possess a good eye, a humble spirit and a lowly soul; the disciples of the wicked Balaam possess an evil eye, a haughty spirit and an over-ambitious soul. (Avot 5:19)

Much has been written³ on the Midrashic development of Biblical characters in which the ambivalent and ambiguous treatment by the text is

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¹ See, for example, bGittin 57a, Rashi ad loc., and Otzar ha-Midrashim, #46, among many passages.

² See Mordy Friedman's article in this volume, "Balaam- Loyal Prophet of God? Balaam's Mission in Early Biblical Exegesis," for an investigation of more positive post-biblical treatments of Balaam.

³ See the list compiled by Mordy Friedman, "Balaam—the Loyal Prophet of God?" n. 3. For more on this general issue—albeit on the other side of this coin, the infallibility of biblical righteous men—see the work of David Berger, "On the Morality of the Patriarchs in Jewish Polemic and Exegesis," in C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (eds.), *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 49-62, reprinted in S. Carmy (ed.), *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1996), 131-146. See also Allen Schwartz, "Rabbinic Reflections on Violation of Pentateuchal Law in the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel" (MA thesis, Bernard Revel Graduate School, 1987).

waived in favor of an absolutist caricature-like presentation in rabbinic literature (Esau is perhaps the most obvious example of this phenomenon). It would appear, *prima facie*, that the castigation of Balaam is wholly the product of "the rabbinic imagination" (see below). In this essay, I hope to demonstrate, based on a new investigation and using the recent literary studies on the Balaam pericope,⁴ that the damning judgment of Balaam's character—and specifically the presentation of him as Abraham's counterpoint⁵—are well-anchored in the text and are the result of inner-Pentateuchal exegesis.⁶

II Inner-Scriptural Commentary

The notion of inner-Scriptural commentary is well founded in Midrashic literature, although, to be sure, not under that rubric. Whereas exegesis found in later books as reflecting an understanding of Pentateuchal texts (e.g., 2 Kings 14:6 on Deuteronomy 24:16) is a much more prevalent and well-documented phenomenon,⁷ we find, for instance, that the placement of certain Pentateuchal texts is understood by the Rabbis to be motivated by pedagogical concerns.⁸ Moreover, the events which took place during the Patriarchal narratives which are midrashically associated with Sinaitically-ordained holidays⁹ serve (and those Midrashic connections are likely intended) to shed light on our understanding of the event in question. In addition, the many Midrashim which associate later

⁴ Especially Jonathan D. Safren, "Balaam and Abraham," *VT* 38 (1988), 105-113. See also David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 38-39.

⁵ The puzzling nature of this midrashic pairing is chiefly due to the temporal distance which separates protagonist and antagonist. Regarding their shared native land, see below. Generally, characters who are presented in Aggadic literature as opposites co-exist and interact; indeed, their differences are highlighted within the scope of those interactions. See, for example, Midrash Tehillim 7:12, where Mordechai is contrasted with Haman.

⁶ See Yair Zakovitch, *מבוא לפרשנות פנים-מקראית* (Jerusalem: Even Yehudah, 1992). Although it is a greater challenge to defend inner-Scriptural commentary without recourse to any version of a documentary hypothesis, that need not stand as an obstacle to one who maintains that *textus receptus* is also *textus revelatus*. The thesis of inner-Scriptural commentary, presented herein, addresses this issue.

⁷ See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York and Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), and Zakovitch, *ibid*.

⁸ E.g., M. Hullin 7:6 and Rashi Hullin 100b s.v. ואמר לו.

⁹ E.g., Exodus Rabbah 15:11; bR.H. 10b-11a.

events - even from the post-Biblical period—with narratives belonging to the beginning of history¹⁰ are prime examples of "retro-fitting" events into passages which serve both as commentary on those events as well as on those passages.

Thus, it is clear that the Rabbis were sensitive to the fact that one text may inform another (earlier or later) and that one text may illuminate the setting, meaning, or message of another passage.¹¹ This alone does not prove the thesis that the specific presentation of a given passage is intended *primarily* as commentary on another passage. We will return to this point at the end of the essay. Let us first turn away from abstractions and engage the narratives concerning Balaam.

III The 'Akedah: Foreshadowing Balaam

Safren notes that as soon as Balaam is introduced, there are immediate associations with Abraham. Compare Balak's message to Balaam: *אֵת אֲשֶׁר תְּבָרֵךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תָּאָר יוֹאֵר*, "...he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed" (Num 22:6), with God's charge to Abraham: *וְאֵבְרַכְהָ מְבָרֵךְ וּמְקַלֵּל אָאֵר*, "and I will bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you" (Gen 12:3). Although the speakers are diametric opposites (God as opposed to the Moabite king¹²), and the theological underpinnings of the messages are likewise dissimilar (for Balak, Balaam is the one who initiates the blessing/curse; in Abraham's case, it is God who blesses and curses), there nevertheless is a commonality both in phrasing and theme that draws Abraham and Balaam together. This analogy drawn between Balaam and Abraham is only reinforced by virtue of their common roots: both of them came from Aram-naharaim.¹³

¹⁰ E.g., Genesis Rabbah 2:4, associating the primordial chaos with the "four kingdoms."

¹¹ The Rabbinic sensitivity and treatment of biblical intertextuality, and their unique application of it in the context of midrash, has been extensively documented by Daniel Boyarin in his *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹² Yet note the curious use of *"כֹּה אָמַר"* in Num 22:16. See F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Amos* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1989), 229-230.

¹³ See Gen 24:10 and Deut 23:5.

When we begin reading the story of Balaam's journey to see Balak, we are immediately assaulted by a certain dissonance and a sense of near-surrealism. Since the beginning of chapter 12 in Genesis, the focus of the Torah has been exclusively devoted to the development of the Children of Israel and their ongoing relationship with God. Like a bolt from the blue, the story of Balak is at once surprising and unnerving: why is the Torah bothering to tell us this story at all?¹⁴ Besides the eloquent prophecies contained in the second half of the pericope, why would the Torah concern itself with this Petorite prophet and his negotiations with the Israelite enemy—and above all, why would the Torah outline, in painstaking detail, the story of Balaam, his donkey, and the angel?

I submit that besides the fundamental theological and socio-historical lessons about the conflict of monotheism vs. paganism, the "Balaam narrative" (as distinct from the "Balaam prophecies" found in chapters 23-24) also provides precious and valuable insights into the personality of Abraham.

IV The 'Akedah and Balaam's Journey: A Study in Contrasts

The pinnacle of Abraham's life—and the ultimate test of his greatness—is the tragic-heroic story of the 'Akedah (Genesis 22:1-19).¹⁵ Since the Torah has already drawn these two *personae dramatis* together when it introduced us to each (via the "bless/curse" formula), we will examine how their respective journeys—Balaam's trek to meet Balak and do his evil bidding and Abraham's pilgrimage to Mount Moriah—match up against each other:

Safren points to several parallels at the beginning of the Balaam story that serve to confirm our suspicion that there might be a connection:

1. Regarding Balaam it says (Num 22:21), ויקם בלעם בבקר ויחבש את אתו, "Balaam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey," like

¹⁴ This disjunction presumably lies behind the talmudic tradition in bBB 16a that Moses wrote his book and "the book of Balaam."

¹⁵ Cf. A.Y. Kook, עולת ראיה (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1984), 1:84, s.v. ויהי אחר הדברים האלה.

- Abraham, about whom it says (Gen 22:3), וישכם אברהם בבקר ויחבש אתו, "Abraham arose in the morning and saddled his donkey."¹⁶
- Both set out with an entourage made up of two lads (Num 22:22 and Gen 22:3).¹⁷

But as soon as the association has been created, the text begins to distinguish the two:

1. Abraham responds to God's initial call—terrifying though it may be—and arises early the next day to begin his pilgrimage; Balaam, on the other hand, "comes back" to God a second time, to ask again for permission to go with the Moabite princes.
2. Abraham moves towards greater levels of isolation, first taking only Isaac and his two servants and then leaving the servants behind; Balaam takes his two servants and then catches up with the entourage of princes before reaching Balak.
3. Abraham nearly slaughters his son, following the Divine command; Balaam threatens to slaughter his donkey, who is the one responding to the Divine presence (the angel).
4. Abraham is praised by the angel; Balaam is threatened with death by the angel.
5. Abraham says nothing to the angel, merely following the Divine command of "staying his hand"; Balaam is cowed by the presence of the angel and offers to return home.
6. Most significantly, Abraham sees everything, whereas Balaam sees nothing. The "key word" (מילה מנחה) in the 'Akedah pericope is ראה—Abraham casts his eyes up to "see the place," God will "show us the lamb," the place will be called "God sees" etc.; in all, forms of

¹⁶ Cf. Safren, "Balaam and Abraham," 108-109, who points out that although these phrases for "rising in the morning" and "saddling one's donkey" both appear numerous times in the Bible, these are the only occurrences of the two in conjunction. See also bSan 105b, Genesis Rabbah 55:8, and Numbers Rabbah 20:12, where the Rabbis also note the relationship between these 2 verses.

¹⁷ Safren points out that other eminent personages inside and outside of the Bible also have a retinue of two: Abimelech (Gen 26:26); Saul (1 Sam 28:8); Baal (UT 51 7:54, 8:47; 67 1:12).

the verb appear five times in that story (Gen 22:4, 8, 13, 14[2x]).^{18 19} A central element of the message of the 'Akedah is Abraham's vision—his ability to see the place and all it implies—and to recognize the substitution ram for his son. His vision is closely tied in to his fear of God, as it is his recognition of his place in this world that is driven by his awareness of God's grandeur and awe.²⁰

As Safren points out, the root ר"א appears frequently in the Balaam story as well—five times, in fact (Num 22:23, 25, 27, 31, 33). When this story is considered against the apparently similar trek made by Abraham, we see that Balaam, the great visionary, the one who feels he can outfox God, sees absolutely nothing. Four usages of ר"א are in the context of the donkey seeing the angel; the fifth says that Balaam failed to perceive it.²¹ His donkey sees more clearly than its master and, when Balaam finally encounters his angelic adversary, he retreats.²² The cowardice and blindness are as inextricably wound together as Abraham's vision and awe (very far, morally and spiritually, from "cowardice").

V Back to the Questions

Earlier, we noted that three qualities are ascribed to students (i.e., followers of the path) of Abraham and three opposite qualities to the students of Balaam.

We have answered the key question: Balaam is pitted against Abraham by virtue of the many textual associations in these two pericopes. The Bible, beyond telling us about the trip a certain Petorite prophet made, in which his mission was turned upside-down by God, also

¹⁸ On the concept of the key word generally, cf. Martin Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," in M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig (ed.), *Scripture and Translation* (tr. L. Rosenwald with E. Fox; Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 114-128.

¹⁹ See Yairah Amit, "The Multi-Purpose 'Leading Word' and the Problems of its Usage," *Prooftexts* 9:2 (1989), 107-109, who notes this and other keywords in Gen 22.

²⁰ See R. Kook's elegant treatment of "vision" in this episode, עולת ראיה, 1:87, s.v. ביום השלישי and 1:90, s.v. ויאמר.

²¹ Safren, "Balaam and Abraham," 112.

²² Cf. bBerakhot 7a: "השתא דעת בהמתו לא הוי ידע" ("Now, he [Balaam] did not even know the mind of his animal").

tells us much about the beloved patriarch Abraham.²³ We appreciate more now his vision, his valor, and his moral greatness, after seeing them against the backdrop of the self-serving, morally blind, and cowardly Balaam.

Finally, although most of the Mishnaic contrasts between the two characters are self-evident, one seems to emerge out of thin air: how do we know that Abraham had a "good eye" and that Balaam had an "evil eye"? Based on the preceding analysis, however, we understand that this is a clever pun on the מילה מנחה "see" in each story: Abraham saw all; Balaam was blind.

VI Conclusions

The character of Balaam is enigmatic and shadowy; nothing is disclosed about his background, and precious little is revealed about his character. Yet the text tells us much about him via inner-Pentateuchal commentary, using the "mirror story"²⁴ of the 'Akedah to tell us much about Balaam, while the Balaam narrative in turn highlights the greatness of Abraham.

We close with a final observation. Having established that Balaam and Abraham are intended to be viewed as parallels—thus allowing for both comparison and contrast—the question remains as to how far we allow this parallel to affect our judgment of both the hero and the anti-hero. Is the text drawing them together solely with the intention of highlighting the gulf that separates them, or is there a deeper message at work here? Is it possible that the comparison alludes to a possible equation—that Balaam had the same potential for greatness as did Abraham?²⁵ That being the case, the dramatic distinction between the two

²³ Cf. Isaiah 41:8.

²⁴ See also Yair Zakovitch, מקראות בארץ המראות (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Ha-Meuchad, 1995).

²⁵ Balaam's prophetic potential is alluded to in a telling analogy proposed by the midrash Sifre on Deuteronomy, 357:10: (ed. Reuven Hammer; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses' (Deut 34:10): None has arisen in Israel, but one has arisen among the nations. And who was he? Balaam son of Beor." The midrash proceeds to explain that Balaam's prophetic prowess was, in fact, even greater than that of Moses. Post-biblical sources such as these (see Mordy Friedman,

journeys we assayed takes on additional meaning: just as the 'Akedah was Abraham's test, and his success therein sealed his future destiny, so too was the episode related in ספר בלעם Balaam's test, and his actions too dictated his tragic and failed future.

74-77) demonstrate the rabbinic conviction that Balaam had potential. The allusions to Abraham in the biblical text might reinforce this notion.

ANONYMITY IN GENESIS: THE PATTERN OF A LITERARY TECHNIQUE

Gabriel Posner

*... a book will never draw me out of myself if I only accept as
belonging to it what I have already decreed should be there.*
(Gabriel Josipovici)¹

I Introduction

Whatever shall we do with the anonymous characters that populate the biblical narrative? On the one hand, it is evident in the biblical corpus that character names are not taken for granted. Some characters are meant to have names while others are meant not to, as the narrative is conscious of the phenomenon of anonymity and thinks in terms of named and unnamed characters. And this not only in as much as the Bible is a Divine text where nothing can be arbitrary, such that there must be a reason for the naming and anonymity of different characters, for the text is itself explicit about giving and withholding characters' names. One needn't look further than Jacob's fight at the ford of the Jabbok, where he asks his opponent for his name and is refused. Moreover, is it likely that the text has no reason at all for withholding the name of Abraham's servant who finds and returns with Rebecca, who is privileged with the longest speech anywhere in Genesis, who is clearly the protagonist of the story in which he appears, and who receives meticulous treatment regarding his title – the text deliberately oscillating between העבד, "the

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¹ Cited in Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 8.

servant," and הָאִישׁ, "the man"? All this and no name!²

Yet, when one searches the text for the reasons behind anonymity and the meaning it imputes, there is virtually nothing to be found. The text nowhere reveals the criteria it associates with its named and anonymous figures. What is the pattern? Who receives a name and who does not? What does withholding a name mean for a character and the surrounding plot? It is so clear that the narrative does *not* want to give certain names, but so mysterious as to why.

I use the word "pattern" above intentionally. One might suggest that there is none, that in each particular episode where an anonymous character appears there is a specific reason, embedded in the particulars of that episode, for withholding a name. This is possible, and it is no doubt true that there is more than one reason for withholding character names. But if there is a new reason for anonymity every time we encounter it, our reasons lose potency and anonymity its effect as the whole affair becomes arbitrary. It would almost be possible to say that a character could be named or just as well not; either way, we will be able to cook up another reason to explain it. By uncovering a pattern of anonymity, we can test our assertions across different configurations of plot and character depiction, and, importantly, root our corroboration not in the hypothetical but in the text itself.³

² We shall be returning to this example throughout. A very broad survey of the literature on this passage includes: Lieve Teugels, "The Anonymous Matchmaker: An Enquiry into the Characterization of the Servant in Genesis 24," *JSOT* 65 (1995), 13-23; Wolfgang M. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Tradition-Critical Study of Genesis 24," *CBQ* 34 (1972), 177-187; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 129-152; Pinhas Mandel, "The Servant, the Man, and the Master: An Inquiry into the Rhetoric of Genesis 24" (Hebrew), *Mehkarei Yerushalayim beSifrut Ivrit* 10-11 (1988), 613-627; Kenneth Aitkin, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Study in the Development of the Tradition," *JSOT* 30 (1984), 3-23.

³ It should be noted that the study offered here is limited not only to one biblical book, but also to the stories solely as they appear in Genesis without attention to their parallel occurrences in other narratives from the ancient Near East. Myths that bear striking resemblance to the stories of Noah and the flood and to Joseph and Mrs. Potiphar, both with respect to plot and to those characters who remain unnamed, will not be treated. This is due in part to the absence of a larger narrative context to which such myths belong, as the thesis offered below rests largely on the assumption of such a context, and in part to the author's lack of familiarity with the broader literary history of the ancient Near East.

II Interpretations of Anonymity to Date and their Difficulties

Anonymity has meant a number of things to different readers. Most obviously, characters who are unimportant tend not to receive names. But this does not seem to be the case in biblical narratives. To take one example among quite a few, is Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, an important character? Is she more important than Potiphar's wife? Others note that withholding the name of one character can deflect attention from him or her to the other, more important characters, upon whom the reader is meant to dilate. This, in some cases, is a persuasive argument. Moses, for example, is the only character in the pericope of his birth to receive a name while others remain suspiciously nameless: "וַיֵּצֵא אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת" "בֵּת לֵוִי," "A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman" (Ex 2:1). He furthermore does not receive a name at the time of his birth, as is usually the case in birth scenes, but does in the finale to his fortuitous (miraculous?) escape from Pharaoh's decree. In other instances, however, the unnamed do anything but deflect attention to other characters. In the case of Abraham's servant, the עַבְדֵּי אַבְרָהָם, it is hard to focus on anyone other than the servant from beginning to end. And if we insist nevertheless that the spotlight falls most brightly, if only briefly, upon Rebecca, why are the names of Laban and Bethuel (24:24, 29) presented? Do they not divert attention from the episode's important character?

A position literary theorists have advanced correlates anonymity with the effacement of personal identity. Characters who have no name in the text have no identity in it; that is, as described by Adele Reinhartz, they have no "individuality, uniqueness, or personality."⁴ Much like our

⁴ Adele Reinhartz, *Why Ask my Name? : Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. Reinhartz's work is the first book length study of biblical anonymity, and we shall return to her thesis throughout.

I say "no identity in the text" deliberately. One might claim that the "real" people of whom the text speaks were thought to have no identity in their material lives, and then one could proceed to uncover their identity professedly departing from the text. One would only use the text for clues to reconstruct the real life of these figures in such a case, but claim that the narrator is equally or more biased in interpreting reality than the reader is, and that characters with no identity projected in the text have quite a real identity that is missed by it. Reinhartz, however, does not make this claim. For applications of the above, specifically regarding the positions of W. Booth and B. Uspensky, to biblical narrative and character, see

cousins in the department of literature, readers of the Bible have posited that the absence of character names in biblical narratives indicates the absence of character identity.⁵ What is the source for this claim, and how can it be proven or tested?

Reinhartz cites W. J. Harvey, who notes that nameless characters create depth in the narrative, such that certain characters "stand out from, or are immersed in, a world of other human beings seen briefly, shallowly, or in fragments."⁶ She cites E. J. Revell as well: "An individual who was not named was not sufficiently prominent in the biblical narrative, or in the history of the community to warrant specific identification."⁷ Meir Sternberg offers a variation of this principle, comparing biblical names to descriptive prose in 19th century literature.⁸ The latter is used to create realistic figures, ones that are irreducibly singular. Biblical narratives accomplish the same by describing a character's "surplus inner life" and "dramatizing a character beyond the point required for making him intelligible."⁹ And, claims Sternberg, realism is achieved additionally by giving characters names: "To bear a name is to assume identity: to become a singular existant with an assured place in history and a future in the story."¹⁰ Is there evidence in the Bible itself to corroborate these abstractions of literary theory and form a pattern of anonymity in these terms?

Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia* 46 (June 1989), 151-166, especially 152-153.

⁵ Reinhartz, 5-12; Don Michael Hudson, "Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19-21," *JSOT* 62 (1994), 53-54; Sternberg, 329-332; Teugels, 16; On anonymity of the angel at Jabbok, see Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 181 and Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *Genesis: the Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 234-235.

⁶ Reinhartz, 5.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sternberg, 329-331.

⁹ Ibid., 329.

¹⁰ Sternberg, 332. We shall develop Sternberg's notion of a "future in the story" quite further than he does. He does not explicate the connection between "identity" and having a future in the story. His central argument speaks primarily of the former, though some of his examples, notably David, who does not receive a name until after he is anointed (1 Sam 16:13), support the latter. While Sternberg does not explicate the connection, one could link character identity with a "future in the story," or more generally, identity with the character in time. See William Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), 118 ff.

Certain variations on this theory of anonymity seem dubious indeed. For example, David Beck applies Thomas Docherty's theory of anonymity for post-modern literature to biblical narrative:

Anonymity erases the identity distinction of the name and instead creates a gap that the reader is invited to fill with his/her own identity, entering into the narrative and confronting the circumstances and situation of the character in the text.¹¹

This position, with its dissolving of distinctions between reader and text, offers a postmodern version of the same kernel that identifies anonymity with character effacement. But taken in this direction, the thesis seems weak.¹² When Jacob fights the angel, is the reader to feel as though he or she is stepping into the angel's place and combating Jacob? The more reserved formulations in Reinhartz and Sternberg seem more promising, and will be even more so to the extent that the text corroborates them.

And indeed it does, claims Reinhartz. Names serve four functions in general literature and the Bible alike:

1. Names carry meaning inherently, such as that of Moses ("כי מן המים" "משיחתו" in Ex 2:10);
2. Names give unity to a single character who appears in numerous contexts;
3. Names offer the clearest and simplest way to refer to a character; and
4. Names distinguish one character from another (such as Jacob and Esau).

Names therefore impute a character with coherence, unity, and distinction; the anonymous have none of these.

¹¹ David Beck, "The Narrative Function of Anonymity in Fourth Gospel Characterization," *Semeia* 63 (1994), 147. See also Thomas Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 74, 83.

¹² Robert Polzin, "Divine and Anonymous Characterization in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia* 63 (1994), 205-213, especially 209, notes that Docherty is dealing with postmodern work, and questions the applicability of his theses to other – specifically biblical – genres.

This notion – that anonymity veils identity, and is therefore used wherever the narrative wishes to accomplish that aim – might solve our question of why and where it is used quite simply. However, an empirical survey of biblical characters really works against us. Let us examine why this claim, and in fact this *type* of claim, is so problematic. In the first place, many anonymous biblical characters have very familiar identities. For example, again, Abraham's servant. The reader has no problem identifying him, at points describing and characterizing him, and perceiving the distinctions between him and the other characters he interacts with. Potiphar's wife offers a memorable example of an individual's lust, and of cunning in presenting her tale.¹³ She is quite human, and carries identity indeed.

Reinhartz feels the pressure, and dedicates the greater portion of her work as a response to it. "Character identity cannot be suppressed even in postmodern texts that deliberately set out to do so,"¹⁴ much less biblical narrative whose only attempt at such suppression is withholding the character's proper name. To accommodate the posited correlation between anonymity and facelessness, Reinhartz molds her interpretation of the passages where it appears. The narrative becomes a complex of distinct and often conflicting components. On the one hand, Abraham's servant is nameless, and therefore faceless. On the other, he has a unique and creative personality. His identity emerges in the contrast between these two elements:

The story conveys a delightful dissonance between the anonymity of the servant and his narrative centrality. His anonymity might signify self-effacement... but the high degree of his participation, the initiative and prayer attributed to him, and the demonstration of his

¹³ See, for example, Alter, *Genesis*, 226-228. James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), *passim*.

¹⁴ Docherty, as cited in Reinhartz, 10.

persuasive powers all belie his anonymity and allow us to construct a more complex and detailed picture of him.¹⁵

He is a servant, and acts in the narrative *qua* servant. He does nothing more than fill a role his master created for him, and for this reason he, like other servants, has no identity, and therefore no name, of his own. But in filling that role he demonstrates remarkable creativity, personality, and individualistic human traits. He is one instance in which "personal identity... emerges in the contrast between the role designations by which the anonymous character is identified and his or her behavior as recounted in the narrative."¹⁶

Thus, Reinhartz recognizes personality and identity in the anonymous. In this example, as in others (to which we shall return), however, Reinhartz sees that identity *despite* characters' anonymity. Characters' creativity and uniqueness are in tension with their facelessness. "... Personhood emerges despite the best efforts of the narrator to keep it under wraps."¹⁷ Never does Reinhartz return to the initial assertion that anonymity signifies facelessness and question it in light of the characters that are anonymous yet individualized.

But is this the only way, or even the most satisfying way, to react to the anonymous yet personally identifiable character? Why, when the dust settles, does this man have no name? It cannot be *because* he is a servant, for other servants in the Bible receive names, such as Hagar (Gen 15:2) and Eliezer.¹⁸ In Egypt, the "שר המשקים" (chief cupbearer) and "שר האופים" (chief baker), two of Pharaoh's סריסים (courtiers; see 40:2), do not

¹⁵ Reinhartz, 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸ It beyond question that servants actually had names in the ancient Near East. See Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 214. Our only question is whether the Bible, as a matter of convention, never refers to a servant by name.

have names, but the "סרים פרעה שר הטבחים" (a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward), i.e., Potiphar, does.¹⁹ On the whole, many servants do not receive names, but it is not categorically true that none receive names, especially when it comes to important ones. And עבד אברהם, Abraham's servant, seems quite important indeed (24:1). In fact, the narrative ceases to emphasize his role as servant when it no longer labels him "העבד," "the servant," but "האיש," "the man" (21, 22, 26, 30, 32), a point Reinhartz neglects to deal with.²⁰ Why, in the end, is the "dissonance" between his anonymity and central role in the narrative so "delightful"?

A character who is at once unnamed but central to the story line is as much cause to move forward and wrap our view of character with intricacies and complexity as it is to stop and rethink the initial assertion that anonymity veils identity. How compelling is the biblical evidence that corroborates this assertion? In light of the example of Abraham's servant, one ought to return to and reevaluate the suppositions that hit empirical turbulence in the text. And, reevaluating those suppositions, we are not surprised to find that the text has less to say about them than originally thought.

The initial argument was that names serve four functions (they carry

¹⁹ Admittedly, after Joseph is released from prison, Pharaoh gives him the name Zaphenath-paneah, perhaps suggesting that before hand Joseph had no name in Egypt because he was a servant. However, it is unclear whether Joseph is receiving a name for the first time in Egypt or just having his existing name changed. Furthermore, this could at best prove that prisoners had no names, but would say little about servants. Lastly, it is not clear how long after Joseph was set free did he receive the name. If it was significantly later than when he first stood before Pharaoh (as implied by Gen 41:43, though 41:46 implies otherwise), it cannot be deduced that the naming was part of his being set free.

²⁰ Sternberg and Mandel's development of perspective in this story might be offered as a response on Reinhartz's behalf. From the narrator's perspective, this man is only העבד, while from the character's perspective he is האיש. However, if Reinhartz accepts Sternberg's analysis here and his development of perspective generally, she is confronted by those instances where from the reader or narrator's perspective a name is given to a character who the other characters within the story see as anonymous. See below, specifically the example of Isaac, whose name is never supplied to Bethuel and his family.

their own meaning, they unify one character who appears in various scenes, they distinguish one character from another, and they are the easiest way to refer to a character). The "natural corollary" (6) was that all four aspects of the name are absent in the anonymous. However, this is not a corollary (if x implies y then x implies z as well) so much as it is simply the converse (if x implies y then the absence of x implies the absence of y – Reinhartz accurately uses this term on p. 9), and on closer examination this is rather a weaker argument, for it is an argument from silence. Names may serve different functions, but evidently they are not the *only way* to accomplish those functions. Reinhartz adduces further evidence from scenes in which biblical characters, speaking to each other, offer proper names as a means of identifying one another. When David asks about the woman he has seen bathing, he is told that her name is Bathsheba. Again, however, this and other examples prove only from silence; because the named has a face, the anonymous must not. The example of Abraham's servant – indeed, all the examples of individualized, personable characters, whom Reinhartz concedes to be so – demonstrate that the named and unnamed may be equally unique, creative, and differentiated from others, and may carry with equal prominence all those characteristics that we associate with "identity."

This gives us great cause to question whether the notion of the faceless character is really evident anywhere in the text. When Jacob asks his enemy's name at Jabbok, the answer is "Why do you ask my name?" This is a strange response, but it is an exceedingly strange one if the name is tied to identity. Abraham's servant does not once mention the name Isaac;²¹ are we to suppose that Rebecca was sent off to marry a faceless

²¹ Sternberg, 146.

character?²² Reinhartz generates a class of faceless characters as opposed to those who have identity, and, convinced that the biblical narrative thinks in the same categories, interprets its literary nuances in those terms. The literary device of revealing and suppressing proper names signifies revealing and suppressing identity. But while the former is a textual reality, the latter is a fictive product of the analyst, a notion with which the text does not explicitly operate. There is in fact nothing in the narrative that suppresses the servant's identity. His name is lacking, but only his name. He can otherwise be described in more vivid detail than Bethuel or even Isaac. The entire notion of suppressed identity has been imported from elsewhere and hung upon the literary peg of the servant's missing name.

III An Alternative Explanation

To understand why the servant is missing a name, one must look in the text itself. One need only tally the named and anonymous characters throughout Genesis to decode the otherwise arbitrary collection of anonymous characters. The following are the named characters in Genesis:

Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Lemech, Adah, Zillah, Noah,
Shem, Ham, Jepheth, Abraham, Sarah, Lot, 8 out of the
9 kings who go to war in ch. 14, Aner, Eshkol, Mamre,
Moab, Ben-ammi, Hagar, Ishmael, Abimelech, Phicol,

²² This particular question presumes a mimetic read, but Reinhartz operates largely from the same stance. See pp. 11-12. See Polzin, 206-207, who points out the inconsistency in Reinhartz's mimetic interpretation.

The question becomes even sharper in light of Mandel's point that the family are hesitant to release Rebecca (24:55-58) because they are sending her to a remote person (619. Contra. Rashbam, who attributes the hesitation to the distance that they know she must travel). If Isaac's obscurity is the problem, and the name masks and reveals identity, why is the servant insistent on keeping Isaac anonymous?

Ephron, Isaac, Rebecca, Eliezer, Laban, Bethuel, Esau,
Jacob and his sons, Leah, Rachel, Deborah, Bilhah,
Zilpah, Dinah, Shechem, Hamor, Hirah, Shua, Tamar,
Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, Zerah, Potiphar, Manasseh,
Ephraim, Machir son of Manasseh.

In contrast, the following are characters that remain unnamed:

Noah's wife, his son's wives, King of Bela (ch. 14),
Abraham's נער (15:7), Abraham's two נערים (19:3), the
angels who visit Abraham, Lot's family members (sons,
sons-in-law, daughters), אחוזת מרעהו (26:26), Rebecca's
mother, the shepherds Jacob meets at the well, Laban's
sons, the messengers Jacob sends to Esau, the servants
with whom Jacob sends gifts to Esau, Rachel's midwife
(35:17), the man Joseph encounters outside Shechem
(Gen 37:15), Judah's wife (referred to simply as "Shua's
daughter"), Potiphar's wife, Pharaoh's chief baker and
cupbearer, chief jailer (40:21-23), the interpreter of
42:23, Joseph's house steward (האיש אשר על בית יוסף) in
43:19, Machir son of Manasseh's children (50:23).

The *general pattern* seems to be the following: named characters appear in more than one context, while the unnamed appear once and then disappear. Many of these are self-evident. Some are less so, but nevertheless fit the pattern, and we shall examine them in a moment. Let us first dispense with the exceptions. Most obviously, I have omitted the long genealogical lists on the grounds that they are not narrative material as we understand it. They are lists of names, but not lists of characters. Perez and Zerah disappear from the narrative, but they most likely receive names as part of the birth scene – a "type scene" with certain

expectations, here specifically the naming of the child. Like those on the genealogical lists, Perez and Zerah are really only named, but they are not introduced as characters. The same can be said of Ben-ammi and Moab. Eliezer is referred to by Abraham, but not introduced as a character, and, as we shall see, he is named with good reason. Shua, Judah's father-in-law, is only mentioned once, though we are not really introduced to him directly in the first place. He is introduced via his daughter and not in his own right, which makes clear that he will not be appearing later on. Perhaps he is mentioned to foreshadow Judah's own role as a father-in-law later in the episode. Finally, people with titles, such as Pharaoh and Melchizedek, are generally referred to as such.

Another important caveat, though it is not an exception as such, is that we are offering one reason for anonymity, but not the only reason. Characters receive no name because they only appear in one context, but some characters receive no name for other reasons, as, for example, we discussed toward the outset. Or, for example, the angels who visit Abraham do not receive names because they are angels, and angels, as a matter of convention, do not receive names. This means that while characters that appear once are always anonymous, the converse may not hold; those who appear twice may or may not be named, for there could be other, important considerations for giving or withholding their names.

Most importantly, we shall see that this convention can be used in different ways that will bear varying degrees of resemblance to one another. Literature is not mathematics, and interpreting it is not solving an equation. The general principle and the gist of resonance it has among the different cases and with the reader's own common sense is as important as the variations and applications. Let us explore and see just how.

IV Testing the Theory in the Text

A useful type of case for such a study is one in which characters are introduced together or play similar roles in a story yet stand in contrast in that some are named and others are not. This will help to isolate those features that belong uniquely to the anonymous. One example is Noah's family. His sons are named at the flood story's outset, yet whenever they are referred to in the ensuing narrative, the text lists them, their wives, Noah, and his wife. Clearly, the episode's main role belongs to Noah alone. Noah specifically is a "צדיק," a righteous man (6:9, more explicitly in 7:1), and Noah is said to "have found favor with the Lord" (6:8). God speaks only to Noah, and it is he, apparently, who is responsible for carrying out the Divine instruction to build an ark and gather animals. Throughout the flood story the sons are lumped together with the rest of Noah's family, and there is no indication anywhere that the sons are more important in the story than their wives. Yet only their names are stated.²³ After the flood, however, the sons will appear prominently while Noah fades. First, they will carry on the lineage of humanity after the flood (10:1)²⁴ – Noah does not have any more children. Second, the sons will play a role in the vineyard story.

There are several additional examples of characters that are listed together or appear to have similar roles in a story, but stand in contrast to

²³ It might be argued that Noah's sons are named to parallel the genealogy lists throughout Genesis. Thus, one could argue that Genesis is structured around such genealogy lists punctuated by fleshed out narratives about more significant figures. A contrast is established between those who live, have children, and die, and those whose lives are worth elucidating. Still, the fact that the story does not appear to be about the sons any more than it is about the rest of the family, implies that the text is essentially not elucidating the lives of his sons, and that therefore mitigates against this argument.

²⁴ Though their wives will be the ones to actually birth the children, this, for better or worse, is not important to genealogical lists in Genesis which consistently give father-son lines of descendants.

one another in that some are named and others are not. Genesis 26:26 mentions Abimelech's two servants: one by name, Phicol, who appears twice in the book (21:22, 26:26) and one anonymously, "אחוזת מרעור,"²⁵ who appears only once. Joseph had many children in Egypt (48:6) who remain nameless, yet Manasseh and Ephraim are mentioned by name at the time of their births even though we will not know until Jacob blesses them (48:1) that they will become independent tribes.

Perhaps the most striking example of one set of characters with named and unnamed members is the list of kings who battle each other in chapter 14. Four kings go to war with five. Of the nine, eight receive names and one, the king of Bela, does not. There is no indication anywhere in the episode that the king of Bela plays a different role than any of the other kings. Both times the kings are listed by name, the king of Bela remains the only one to be unnamed. That his identity is for some reason suppressed as opposed to the other kings does not seem a viable option even for those who regularly correlate anonymity with effacement. This instance of anonymity is quite perplexing indeed.²⁶ It will be necessary to isolate what is different about the king of Bela to see why he specifically remains anonymous, but it is difficult to see anything unique in him, tacked on to a list of eight others who do receive names.

In truth, we know rather little about these characters. However, we

²⁵ Rashi and Rashbam explain the phrase to mean a group of friends or supporters. Admittedly, though, the translation of אחוזת מרעור is itself a knotty issue. Modern commentators have generally interpreted אחוזת as the name of Abimelech's servant, and מרעור as the title of his position. See ABD, 1:125. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 296-7, makes this point based upon comparative material. For a study of the office of רעה in biblical and ANE literature, see A. Van Selms, "The Origin of the Title 'The King's Friend,'" *JNES* 16 (1957), 118-123. It is unclear why more recent scholars have discarded the interpretation advocated by Rashi and Rashbam, though a full analysis of this question is beyond the purview of this paper. My thanks to Professor Richard Steiner for his assistance in this matter.

²⁶ Rashi (14:1, 2), following the Rabbis, also appears bothered by the detail of names here.

do know something about the places they represent. Sodom and Gomorrah are soon to be destroyed by God. Along with them, the entire surrounding area seems to be destroyed as well (19:25) "... He overthrew those cities and all the plain (ככר), and all the inhabitants of the cities..." We again see that more cities than are mentioned were destroyed when Moses states in Deuteronomy (29:22): "... like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger..." Of the five king alliance to which Sodom belonged in its war, this list, referring to Sodom's destruction, corresponds exactly with four members of the five king alliance, the one omission, of course, being Bela, whose city was spared (19:20-21). The Bible does not mention the destruction of the other cities but this is likely due to rhetorical brevity more than factual accuracy. Put differently, the text names eight specific cities together with Sodom in one episode (the war), and says in another (the destruction) that a number of other cities were destroyed with Sodom. It is logical to suppose that those cities destroyed with Sodom are the same as those mentioned in the war. This is corroborated at least in part by the verse in Deuteronomy, where a fuller list of the cities destroyed with Sodom in fact corresponds, as expected, with those that appear in the war. This would explain the awkward opening to the story of the war, "ויהי בימי..." (14:1). This story occurs in the days of these people, before they were destroyed. The text is explicitly sensitive to precisely this difference between the area before and after the destruction of Sodom in verse 13:10 "... it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah..." Thus, we know the fate of the eight kings with names in the list of nine; they meet their demise with the destruction of Sodom. As for the king of Bela, we know nothing more than what appears in this text.

It is indeed fair to argue that the story of the battle between the kings alludes to the upcoming destruction of the area, particularly in the verse where they are listed by name. While the king of Bela will not appear again, the town as such will, and this in itself is alluded to in the very same list where the kings' names are given. The city is redundantly called "בלע" *בלע*, "היא צער" *היא צער*, "Bela which is [also called] Zoar," both times that it is mentioned in the context of the war. We would have known quite well by the second time that this Bela is still also called Zoar. In fact, עמק השדים *עמק השדים* also has a second name, "הוא ים המלח" (14:3), but the second time the valley is mentioned, the appellation is left off. We are to remember Zoar specifically because it will receive that name when we again meet it, when Lot escapes to it as a refuge, in the midst of the destruction of the other cities in the area (19:19, 22). Precisely where the king of Bela is jarringly distinguished from the other kings, the hint is dropped as to why this is so: his is the "מצער," the "little place," the sheltered land.

There are other examples to add. Lemech takes Adah and Zillah as his wives (4:19) and, after they give birth, he finds an audience with them for his lamenting poetry (23). Ephron first conducts negotiations with Abraham, and is later referred to at the time of Abraham's own death (25:9) as well as Jacob's (49:30 and 50:13). Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, is mentioned in 24:1 and at the time of her death (35:8) as well. Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre appear twice: before Abraham goes off to fight the kings (14:13) and after he returns (14:24). Potiphar's wife is of course the central character in the episode where she appears, but because she does not appear again for the duration of the book her name is not given. Potiphar, on the other hand, appears as the buyer of Joseph (37:36) and subsequently in the story involving his wife. The angel responds to Jacob, "why do you ask my name?" because Jacob has won the battle and the

angel is leaving, never to be seen again.

Hamor and Shechem are best known for their connection to the rape of Dinah. However, they are first introduced before hand, at the end of chapter 33, as selling land to Jacob. Lest one think it coincidental that Shechem and Hamor appear in these two contexts, that their initial appearance as selling land is innocuous and hardly of literary import, let us quote: "And he [Jacob] bought the piece of land on which he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father..." (33:19). We might concede on the issue of whether the text had to give us this information altogether; if it wants to tell us that Jacob bought land, it is natural to tell us who he bought it from. Indeed, Genesis likes to boldface the sale of land in Israel to the forefathers. But it actually does not tell us who the seller is. Strangely, it states that the "children of Hamor" sold Jacob the land. Had Shechem been the seller, it would have said that Jacob bought from "Shechem son of Hamor." Had it only wanted to tell us who sold the land, it would have said Jacob bought from "the children of Hamor," and ended there. Instead, it says that Jacob bought from the children of Hamor, and adds parenthetically that this Hamor is also the father of Shechem who we are about to meet. The reason these two are mentioned is not because they were the ones who sold the land, but because they sold the land *and* they are about to appear again, before the reader can bat an eyelash, in a very different context.

Returning, of course, to Genesis 24, Bethuel and Laban are introduced in the story of Rebecca's betrothal to Isaac, while Rebecca's mother is anonymous, even though her role in the betrothal does not appear to be significantly smaller than Laban's (see 24:28, 53, 55).

Laban's role in the account of Rebecca's betrothal is no more important than that of his other sisters, yet he is mentioned by name

because he will appear again in a later narrative. Bethuel too, though he does not appear directly, remains a character in the story line as Jacob escapes to his home (28:2) and the protection of his son Laban (28:5).

The servant of Abraham who figures so prominently in the story does so according to the same scheme. He too will drop from the book never to be heard from again. Now, one might question whether a character as central as the servant might not deserve a name regardless of the number of episodes where he appears. Or, put differently, is it fair to claim that the servant appears in only one context if that context, albeit thematically enclosed and coherent, is so drawn out? Here, we recall that our literary principle need not, indeed ought not, conform to mathematical measurement and testing. The text does not simply conform to this pattern in adherence to a literary convention. Naming and anonymity is not only a matter of technical style, but is a literary technique of foreshadowing and plot development.

At the simplest level, once the reader sees the name of a character, he or she can be sure to come across that character later on. With Laban, for example, the reader suspects that this is not the last we will see of him. As Abraham is securing his lineage with the betrothal of Rebecca, we already begin to worry that somehow the plot will again bring us out of Canaan and back to Haran.²⁷ When Abraham acquires a burial plot from Ephron, it becomes likely that the reader will meet that burial plot again later on. As Abraham tends to the burial of Sarah, one realizes that the land will appear again, that Abraham too must at some point return to

²⁷ Gunkel (286) notes that the Jacob cycles are filled with allusions to his eventual return from Haran to Canaan (27:36, 45; 28:15, 20ff; 29:12ff; 30:25, 29-30; 32:5, 11). It is clear that a significant motive in the plot is Jacob's leaving Canaan and the question of his return. Sarna (174) explains that Laban's appearance here, particularly his greed, foreshadows his later relationship with Jacob.

Ephron's plot, and the reader is thus prompted to think about the closing years of Abraham's life. Naming the plot as belonging to Ephron sets the stage for the ensuing narrative that will focus on Abraham's successor. Shechem and Hamor are not only named immediately before their appearance in the episode of Dinah's rape, but immediately following Jacob's parting with Esau. Thus, the reader sees a figure who escapes one trial, and hopes, returning to Israel, to settle in tranquility. In the very same sentence in which Jacob purchases the land on which to settle, however, the reader already sees that foreign characters are again intruding into the plot. Jacob is bouncing from one adversary to the next.

A more involved example where character names are used for plot development is the introduction of Judah's friend Hirah (38:1). Initially, it appears awkwardly detailed to state this character's name. Hirah seems utterly irrelevant, and does nothing – does not even appear – for 10 verses following his introduction.²⁸ Hirah's disappearance from the story intrigues the reader. The narrative creates an open-endedness in introducing a character by name and then having him disappear. We expect him to do something; we expect that something will happen. As the plot develops, the sense of open-endedness aligns with Tamar's unfulfilled expectations. She too expects certain action, and her position is similarly open-ended. The introduction of a named character has helped to color the text with the dissonance that is thematically central to the plot, and pulls the reader toward action and resolution of the second half of the story. In verse 12, Hirah again appears, and the reader suspects that things will start happening now. Indeed they do. Hirah begins to fill a role (12, 20 ff.) to justify his being named. As the open-endedness

²⁸ See Gunkel, 396.

surrounding Hirah's introduction is closed, so Tamar's situation is resolved, and by the end of the passage the reader feels that the loose ends have all been tied. Hirah was at no time central to the plot, but his being named is a useful literary tool within the narrative nonetheless.

Returning to the case of Abraham's servant in the story of Rebecca's betrothal, we find a cogent example of anonymity used for plot development. It is certainly striking that the story never identifies the servant by name regardless of whether he will or will not appear again in the book, but that striking move is meant to send a message. By leaving his name out, the text implies that the nexus of his influence is bound by this episode and that we will not meet him again. The most senior, paramount member of Abraham's household will not appear again. This adds a significant dimension to the text that recounts Abraham's establishing his lineage and the house of his inheritor; Abraham will be inherited by his son, not by his servant as he had feared. In this example, our principle is applied rather differently than it was in the case of Hirah and Judah. In the latter, a character was irrelevant at the point of introduction but came back later in the same story to play an important role. Here, the servant never leaves our sight for the duration of the entire story but is anonymous because of his role in the book. The category of characters that "appear in more than one context" is not rigid or absolute, but this should not bother us. The general principle operates throughout, only once it is used locally to develop a particular story, and once it is used with respect to the selection process that is the book's overarching theme.

The notion that a name implies that a character will reappear may be useful beyond the interpretation of the narrative's literary strategy. For example, Abraham voices concern over his having no children (15:2-3)

with a seemingly odd introduction. Without analyzing the double introduction of "ויאמר אברהם," and without considering who "בן ביתי" refers to in the latter verse, the reader is immediately struck by the awkward construction of Abraham's statement: "ואנכי הולך עירי וכן משק" and "ביתי הוא דמשק אליעזר." What has the name of Abraham's servant to do with his successor? The non-sequitor is resolved, however, if one understands that naming the character asserts his permanence and is a prediction of presence and continuity in the ensuing story line. It is the reference to Eliezer by name that alone expresses Abraham's fear that he will succeed him into the future. True, Eliezer's name will not appear again, but Abraham could not have known that. To the contrary, his fear is that his future *is* tied to Eliezer.

V Contextualizing the Pattern of Anonymity within the Narrative

We have thus far developed a theory that explains anonymity in terms of the number of times a character appears in the text. We have done so in contradistinction to a theory that posits a correlation between anonymity and the effacement of characters and subversion of their identity in the text. The motive for searching out an alternative theory to explain anonymity was that while the narrative consciously uses anonymity as a device, there is little evidence that it thinks in terms of the effacement of its characters. The problem with correlating anonymity and effacement is *not* that the reader must produce the connection for want of a verse that states it explicitly. It is that there is no larger framework in the narrative into which this semiotic link can fit. When everything in the narrative works against effacement and vividly portrays character identity despite namelessness, it is a mistake to impose effacement on such characters and perceive tension between their identity and anonymity.

All of this means that whether our textual analysis is correct or acceptable or not, we are methodologically parting ways with Reinhartz in uncovering the beginnings of a literary framework in the text where anonymity can make sense. All of our groundwork literary analysis is the sort that is absent from Reinhartz's work. There is no reason to assume at any point that the narrative is thinking in terms of effacement and identity and might illuminate such matters with the use of anonymity as a literary sign. That is not what these characters or stories are about in any significant way. Of course, unimportant characters may remain "faceless" if they do not receive a name, but the notion that the text belabors anonymity at great length to employ effacement in subtle character development is unfounded. So minimal is the expression of effacement anywhere in the text that literary signs cannot be a reference to it without the reader importing from elsewhere major ideas and the very terms in which the narrative operates. The patterns, variations, and exceptions I have developed above could be right or wrong, but, in terms of methodology, conducting such literary analysis is a necessary step before taking the aloof stride forward, confident in the notion of effacement and its relationship to anonymity. And, in conducting such groundwork, we have discovered in anonymity a literary sign that clicks into place within the framework of the narrative, a reference to the terms and ideas with which the book clearly operates. There is a theme, a point, to the episode involving Abraham's servant, and it is not the degree of effacement or identity in the servant's character. The topic is who will succeed Abraham and how. That is present in the text, and to that the literary sign of anonymity points by indicating the terminus of the servant's role.

To further illuminate the differences between perceiving anonymity in and out of thematic context, we shall explore one more story, that of

Lot and his daughters. The story offers another cast of anonymous characters who are creative, individualized, and apparently have identity. Reinhartz will argue that the daughters' anonymity is meant to stress their position as daughters, as subservient to Lot, and thereby heighten the contrast between their subordinate status and their assertive, aggressive behavior in the cave where they beguile their father into an incestuous relationship with them. The *reversal* of their role receives the emphasis.

But is this really what the passage conveys? Has the narrative begun with Abraham and, moving to the destruction of Sodom, found some point tangent to its focus from where it departs on a meandering account of family role reversal? More likely, the episode is a backdrop to the events surrounding Abraham's lineage with their perverse, abortive counterparts in Lot's family. And it will be no surprise if the pattern of anonymity that the text suggests – namely, anonymous figures drop from the story line – points in exactly that direction.

Reinhartz correctly picks up on some details in the narrative, but is less than compelling in what she does with them, while still other literary aspects to the story she leaves altogether untouched. The cave could certainly symbolize something, but what?²⁹ Reinhartz sees it as "signify[ing]... the reversal of hierarchical norms."³⁰ Why would the cave symbolize this at all? Reinhartz sees that theme as central to the story, observes the cave featured uncharacteristically at the outset, and decides that the literary reality signifies her construction. Where, anywhere else in the Bible, does a cave come to mean the "reversal of hierarchical norms"? Perhaps the cave underscores how Lot and family have left the world of

²⁹ I do not discount the possibility that the cave may symbolize nothing at all. See Alter, *World of Biblical Literature*, 85-106.

³⁰ Reinhartz, 130.

the created, the constructed, and the human to live where their humanity will regress to the point of base animal existence. Or perhaps the cave is an allusion to the only other cave in Genesis, indeed, one of the few in the Bible, the cave of Machpelah. This might produce an opposition between Abraham and Lot, the one using a cave to bury the dead, the other using it as a home in which to live and produce life. All this will lead toward the contrast between these events and Abraham's very different version of them, a point that fits right in to the broader narrative's development.

As with the cave, so with the daughters' anonymity. Reinhartz asserts that the text

...differentiates the sisters, using the adjectives "elder" and "younger" (19:31-35). This minimal differentiation facilitated recording their communication with each other over their plan and yet does not obscure the agreement and harmony between them. In this respect they are unique among biblical sisters and cowives, who often display a high degree of jealousy and competition over the sexual abilities of their shared mates and over their respective procreative abilities... their cooperation and collusion bind them together in common purpose and apparently without jealousy.³¹

What the text uses to refer to a character is an important literary clue for its meaning, but it is not the only clue. Here, one does well to investigate just how collusive the sisters are. That the story refers to them as "בכירה" and "צעירה" is informative, but in what way ought to be determined by the narrative, not by our decision that this episode pits daughters against their father.

This passage repeats a number of phrases verbatim in describing the events of the first night and the very similar events of the second. In fact, the two nights are almost exactly the same: the daughters reason "ונחיה ותשקין (גם בלילה ההוא)" (19:32, 34), they proceed with the wine "מאבינו זרע

³¹ Ibid., 129-30.

"ולא ידע בשכבה ובקומה" (19:33, 35), and Lot is equally clueless, "את אביהן יין" (19:33, 35). In the midst of these precise repetitions, there is one variation, and that at the acute moment of the incestuous deed itself. On night one: "ותבא הבכירה ותשכב את אביה." On night two: "ותקם הצעירה." The text replaces the word "ותבא" with "ותקם," which is strange for two reasons. First, the entire event is recounted in nearly verbatim language, the only differences attributable to the fact that the second time pronouns may be used more freely. Second, the word ותקם in this story refers, in the verbatim refrain, to the completion of intercourse: "he perceived not when she lay down nor when she arose"—"קומה" (19:33, 35), while in this one variation from the original formulation it refers to the initiation of intercourse. And so one senses that events, like the text, were not quite exactly the same on both nights. The elder daughter hashes a plan, and convinces the younger to participate. The one is eager and direct, the other, hardly so fluid, had to be goaded to "get up" and commit the deed.³² Now the terms בכירה and צעירה mean the opposite of Reinhartz's mild interpretation of "minimal differentiation" and "agreement and harmony" between the two. One of these women is in charge, the בכירה, in more than just years. The terms are meant to contrast, not conjoin the two daughters.

How might the daughters' anonymity blend with the above analysis? The daughters are anonymous because they and their lineage will not appear again in the book. Add to this the tension between the elder and younger, and the theme of chosenness and rejection asserts itself unmistakably. Only, like the other aspects of this story, the ascendancy of the elder appears as the opposite of its counterpart in Abraham's tale and

³² Cf. Rashi 19:33 s.v. ותשכב.

the other chosen figures in the book, where "selected" characters are usually the younger among their siblings. Taken in this context, anonymity indicates that Lot's family is out of the selection process. He is not chosen, though he might have been,³³ and instead his lineage will end up producing Ammon and Moab. The narrative will return from the foil to Abraham and remain focused there.

This is not the place to proceed with a complete analysis of the story of Lot and his daughters in the cave. The above simply demonstrates the literary sensitivities that will find material in a narrative, attempt to understand it on its own terms, and build meaning up from the text. The conclusions one can reach are polar, depending on whether he or she will start with the text and work out of it or begin with an abstraction and presume its presence despite empirical shortcomings.

VI Conclusion

We began our inquiry with the assumption that anonymous characters have veiled identity and explored the position for which the relationship between anonymity and identity forms an irreducible semiotic element. Meeting numerous anonymous characters that do not fit that scheme, however, we chose to question the initial assumption rather than accept it and proceed to more intricate arguments that could accommodate it. Working through the text, we found little substance to the notion or literary usage of character effacement in the narrative.³⁴ As anticipated, applying the notion of character effacement yielded interpretations that ran against the grain of passages where anonymous characters appeared. The text, evidently, is simply not thinking in these

³³ Cf. *ABD* 4:373.

³⁴ Reinhartz, 187.

terms.

Reinhartz, in her conclusion, supposes that "the category I have called 'anonymous characters of biblical narrative' exists entirely in my imagination. There is no indication that these characters have any more in common with one another than they do with other figures in the narrative." This takes us back to our own point of departure, and, I think, reveals Reinhartz's overall freedom with constructing her own categories. From the outset, we have in contrast attempted to uncover the text's own terms of thought, signified meaning, and categories of understanding. The text has something to offer, to add, to teach. One can hardly have categories neatly defined before subjecting a work to a careful reading. The text has more to tell me than I could have known on my own. Only then could it ever "draw me out of myself," using the medium of narrative to transform my sense of the world, urgently alert me to spiritual realities and moral imperatives I might have misconceived, or not conceived at all."³⁵

³⁵ Alter, *World of Biblical Literature*, 9.

THE TOWER OF BABEL DECONSTRUCTED: LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND STRUCTURAL STRUCTURE

Nachman Levine

ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים
ויהי בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער וישבו שם
ויאמרו איש אל רעהו הבה נלבנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי
להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר
ויאמרו הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה לנו שם פן
נפוץ על פני כל הארץ
וירד ה' לראות את העיר ואת המגדל אשר בנו בני האדם
ויאמר ה' הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה לא
יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות
הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו
ויפץ ה' אתם משם על פני כל הארץ ויחדלו לבנות העיר
על כן קרא שמה בבל כי שם כלל ה' שפת כל הארץ ומשם הפיצם
ה' על פני כל הארץ
(Genesis 11:1-9)

"Twenty-two letters, He carved them out, He quarried them, combined them, weighed them, permuted them, and created with them all that was created and all that will be created." (Sefer Yezirah 2:2)

"... How did He combine them? Two stones build two houses, three stones build six houses, four stones build twenty-four houses, five stones build one hundred and twenty houses, six build seven hundred and twenty houses, seven build five hundred thousand and forty houses. From here on, go out and calculate what the mouth cannot speak and what the ear cannot hear..." (Sefer Yezirah 4:12)

It is obvious that at the simplest level, the narrative of the tower of Babel deals with the reciprocal structures of language, society, and the city/tower.¹ Each of them has its superstructure (שפה; עם; העיר) and its

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units (אבנים; דברים; רעיון; איש/רעהו). All are interchangeable or about each other: words, דברים, are the אבנים, stones, of language, and language generates the structure (of bricks, of stones) of the tower and city, which in turn embody the drives of the social *civitas*. The complex relationship between these elements is further highlighted in the narrative by linguistic parallelism and wordplay, which mirror the impulses of building the tower.

Just as the structures reflect each other in the construction of the tower, so too are they paralleled in their subsequent deconstruction. Here too, parallelisms and wordplays are employed in describing the conflict engendered between heaven and earth in man's use of these elements. And as deconstruction of language causes the tower's deconstruction in the narrative, the narrative's own linguistic *fragmentation* is used to describe the *deconstruction* of language, society, and the tower/city: the breakdown of language, of the people, and their project.

The text is elliptical and elusive. It never says they did build a tower or city, only that they *said* they would. Subsequently, when God comes down to see what they have built, He scrambled their *language* and they *stopped* building it. It seems as if the decoding of the building could be nothing but textual, as if there were nothing there but language.

The structures of language and the tower are parallel. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi notes that in the narrative the organic stones created by God parallel the words of the Divinely created Holy Tongue² as the man-made bricks parallel the human-created languages.³ Edward L. Greenstein

¹ Besides the multiplicity of structures in the narrative, there are a multiplicity of *structural* readings of the narrative: See U. Cassuto, *From Adam To Noah* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 231, Y. Raddai, "Chiasm in the Biblical Narrative" (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 20-21 (1964), 68, I.M. Kikawada, "The Shape Of Genesis 11:1-9" in J. J. Jackson (ed.), *Rhetorical Criticism* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 18-32, J.P. Fokkelman, "Genesis 11:1-9, The Tower of Babel" in *Narrative Art In Genesis* (Assen-Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 11-45, N. Leibowitz, *Studies in Genesis* (trans. Aryeh Newman; Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976), 90-115. For a deconstructionist reading, see J. Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel" in C. V. McDonald (ed.), *The Ear of the Other* (New York: Schocken, 1985), 100.

² According to Rashi and the Midrashim to 11:1, the language they spoke was Hebrew (and see pTal Megillah 1:9). Ibn Ezra writes it was Hebrew given the import and etymologies of the names Adam, Eve, Cain, Seth, and Peleg = "dispersal."

³ *Torah Or* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1978), *Mishpatim*, 77b.

cites Benno Jacob⁴ that "one speech" (דברים אחדים), in contrast to "one language" (שפה אחת), refers to syntax and vocabulary respectively, and observes that "because the narrative foregrounds wordplay and language, one can draw an analogy between the building of the city and tower and the linguistic practice of the builders: syntax binds words as mortar/bitumen binds stones/bricks. The building can be read as an allegory of language."⁵ Is the tower of clay bricks a tower of language — a pile of Babylonian clay tablets piled to the sky?

While language, the building, and the social subtext behind it are one, the narrative should be read as if there were several layers in which this interaction occurs:

1. The vertical plane: the conflict between heaven and earth embodied by textual upward and downward movement (the people want to go up, God comes "down") and their parallels.
2. The lateral plane (they travel from the east, afraid to be scattered laterally on the face of the earth; God scatters them laterally on the face of the earth) and the conflict between the vertical and lateral planes.
3. The conflict between unity and dispersal: the contrast between the narrative's beginning (the people unite to build) and end (dispersal).
4. The relationship between language, bricks, and society: words, as bricks, modify earth, society, and language. This relationship is *expressed* in wordplay, poetic parallelism, alliteration, and permutation. In the second half of the narrative, linguistic deconstruction and fragmentation *describe* deconstruction of language, society, and the building.

Throughout the narrative, building and deconstruction serve as metaphors for the oppositions of unity/dispersal, divine/human, organic/manmade.

The Vertical Plane: Conflict Between Heaven And Earth

⁴ *Das Erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), 297.

⁵ Edward L. Greenstein, "Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts* 9:1 (1989), 47.

In the shape of the narrative, heaven (up) and earth (below) are polarized:⁶

ויהי (כל) הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים
ויהי בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער וישבו שם
ויאמרו איש אל רעהו הבה נלכנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי
להם הלכנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר
ויאמרו הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה לנו שם
פן נפוצ על פני כל הארץ
וירד ה' לראות את העיר ואת המגדל אשר בנו בני האדם
ויאמר ה' הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה לא
יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות
הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו
ויפץ ה' אתם משם על פני כל הארץ ויחדלו לבנות העיר
על כן קרא שמה בבל כי שם בלל ה' שפת כל הארץ ומשם
הפיצם ה' על פני כל הארץ

Of course, "כל הארץ" refers to various things in these verses:

1. the people: ("And *all of the earth* [כל הארץ] was one language and unified words" [11:1]).
2. language: (שפת כל הארץ). Thus, the people *are* language: "ויהי כל הארץ" "And all of the earth [כל הארץ] was one language and unified words" (11:1).
3. the earth itself: [על פני כל הארץ] (11:4, 8, 9).⁷

In the narrative, organic God-created *people*, *language*, and *place*, (כל) are replaced by the structures of human-created *people* (=society), *language*, *place* (=the city/tower). Thus, (כל) (people/language/earth) = earth is opposed to שמים, "heaven," a word mentioned only once in the narrative's center (11:4). But שם, "there," (on earth), (2, 7, 8, 9) שם, "name," (in heaven, 11:4, and earth, 11:9), and ישמעו, "hear/understand" (=linguistic coherence) (7), play against שמים "heaven," (4) (the Divine and its unity), underscoring its conflict with the multiplicities of ארץ

⁶ Cassuto, 234, has noted the "כל הארץ" parallels, though our analysis diverges from his.

⁷ Fokkelman, 24, notes they mean both all the earth and all the people of earth.

(earth, language(s), and people). Words linguistically or alliteratively related to שם appear nine times in as many verses:⁸

ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים
ויהי בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער וישבו שם
ויאמרו איש אל רעהו הבה נלכנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי
להם הלכנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר
ויאמרו הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה לנו שם
פן נפוצ על פני כל הארץ
וירד ה' לראות את העיר ואת המגדל אשר בנו בני האדם
ויאמר ה' הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה לא
יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות
הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו
ויפץ ה' אתם משם על פני כל הארץ ויחדלו לבנות העיר
על כן קרא שמה בבל כי שם בלל ה' שפת כל הארץ ומשם
הפיצם ה' על פני כל הארץ

The narrative is preceded and followed⁹ by the genealogies of the sons of שם¹⁰ who migrate laterally from the permuted שם¹¹ to "שם" (there=שנער) (11:2). Fearing lateral dispersion over the earth (הארץ), they build from שם "there"=earth/down (ארץ שנער) (2) to make a שם שם ("name") up/in heaven (=שמים) (4). God descends from שמים to ארץ שם and there (שם, earth/down) (7-9) scrambles their language so they won't *understand* (לא ישמעו) (7). In place of a *unified* name up in heaven (שמים), they get a *scrambled* name שמה בבל ("its name was confusion" [9]) down in the city on earth (שם) (7-9). שם בלל permutes to שמה בבל ("there He confused") (9), and from there (ומשם) (9), they are scattered laterally.

⁸ Cited also in Cassuto, 233, Fokkelman, 20. In the Midrash (Seder Olam Rabbah 1, Genesis Rabbah 26:3), the tower is built three hundred forty ("ש"מ") years after the flood.

⁹ 10:22-32; 11:10-26. For the structural poetics of this, see M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 35.

¹⁰ J. Derrida notes the deconstructing שם = "name" of the sons of Shem in "Des Tours de Babel."

¹¹ Gen 10:30, see Nahmanides to 11:2. M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1991), 79, notes the alliteration found in 10:30-31: "ויהי מושבם ממשא באכה ספרה הר הקום/אלה בני שם למשפחתם ללשנתם בארצותם." לגויהם.

The Lateral Plane: The Conflict of Unity And Dispersal

The *people* (כל הארץ) (11:1) travel from the east laterally over the earth (11:4). They stop dispersing over the ארץ, uniting in a particular ארץ, Shin'ar, from where they go up vertically and from where they are scattered laterally.¹² Fear of lateral dispersal over that earth causes them to be laterally dispersed over the face of the earth.¹³ Thus, fear of lateral dispersal causes them to *unite* to form bricks *from* that *earth* to build *up* to the *heavens* (שמים), which itself incurs lateral dispersion.

Language is unified there and is scattered from there. God mixes כי: “(הפיצם) their language in Babel and from there disperses them (בלל) (9).” *שם בלל* ה' שפת כל הארץ// ומשם הפיצם ה' על פני כל הארץ ויהי בנסעם מקדם—“their end point of lateral arrival to which they move to unite—becomes their point of departure to be dispersed: “(2) ומשם הפיצם ה' על פני כל” (8-9).¹⁵ *הארץ*

In the text, unity (אחת) (11:1, 5) is opposed to נפץ, dispersal or fragmentation (4,8-9).¹⁶ It begins with כל הארץ (שפה)—monolithic *unity* (11:1) and ends chastically¹⁷ with כי *שם בלל* ה' שפת כל הארץ ומשם הפיצם ה' על פני כל הארץ—*scatteredness* (11:9). The narrative's two units (the people come up/God comes down), each with their mirrored הבה (3, 4/7),¹⁸ both begin with אחת = unity (1,5) and end with נפץ = dispersal (and alliterations of נפץ) (4, 8-9), placing אחת at the center (6).

¹² Rashbam (11:4) interprets their sin as disobeying the command to laterally fill the earth (see Gen 1:28).

¹³ Noted by Fokkelman, 16-17.

¹⁴ BDB: “mingle, mix, confuse, confound.” See Ex 29:40, Lev 7:10, 14:21.

¹⁵ *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* 24 describes them bringing bricks up the tower's eastern steps and descending from its western steps; R. David Luria's commentary ad loc. notes how this combines their upward and lateral westward movement with the sun's lateral movement (moving, we add, over the earth from above).

¹⁶ BDB; see “ויפצו אויבך” (Num 10:35); “והפיץ ה' אתכם” (Deut 4:27)—dispersal; “וכפטיש יפצץ” (Jer 23:29); “ככלי יוצר תנפצם” (Ps 2:9)—fragmentation.

¹⁷ Noted in Fokkelman, 25.

¹⁸ Noted in Tanhuma Noah 18, Cassutto, 231, Fokkelman, 14, 20.

The first unit:

ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים
ויהי בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער וישבו שם
ויאמרו איש אל רעהו הבה נלכנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי
להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר
ויאמרו הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה לנו שם
פן נפוצ על פני כל הארץ

The second unit:

וירד ה' לראות את העיר ואת המגדל אשר בנו בני האדם
ויאמר ה' הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה
לא יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות
הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו
ויפץ ה' אתם משם על פני כל הארץ ויחדלו לבנות העיר
על כן קרא שמה בבל כי שם בלל ה' שפת כל הארץ ומשם
הפיצם ה' על פני כל הארץ

Unity in the first verse, שפה אחת ודברים אחדים, becomes chastically in the second unit. And כל הארץ שפה (11:6) in the first verse becomes שפת כל הארץ in the last (people/language/unity = שפה/אחת). Fear of dispersal in the beginning causes dispersal at the end. This fear is expressed in alliterative fragmentation: פן נפוצ על פני כל הארץ (“lest we scatter on the face (פני) of the earth” (11:4). In this way, פן (“lest” = their fear) plays against פני, the plural construct of פן, “face,” to reflect the fear of their singularity being fragmented.¹⁹

¹⁹ Their concerns about multiplicity (“פן נפוצ”) and God's concerns about unity (“פן עם אחד”) echo the concerns that caused Adam's expulsion from the Garden (Gen 3:22) to east of Eden (“הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו/ועתה פן ישלח ידיו”) as they now come from the east. Genesis Rabbah 21:5 understands that as the concern that Man below might try to approximate God's oneness above (“He is singular in the lower worlds as I am in the upper worlds”). It is not good for Man to be monolithic; God opposes the monolithic city more than the monolith rising to the heavens.

Deconstruction Of Language/Society/The City and the Tower

God's words ("הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם" 11:7) mirror theirs ("הבה ויאמר ה' הבה נרדה" 3-4). His monologue ("הבה נבנה לבנים/הבה נבנה לנו עיר" 11:7) both paraphrases and quotes theirs ("ויאמרו איש אל רעהו הבה נלכנה לבנים" 3). Thus, His plan to deconstruct and disperse ("הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת" ויאמרו) paraphrases and quotes their plan to construct and unite ("איש אל רעהו: הבה נלכנה לבנים"). His plan to deconstruct their building and language ("הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו") sounds alliteratively like their plan to build ("הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים"). But just as the text never says explicitly that they built a tower/city but only that they said they would, God only comes down, speaks, and disperses (ויפץ, בבל), He says that He will deconstruct the structure of language, scrambling *נלכנה*, "הבה נרדה ונבלה", "Let's build," to "הבה נרדה ונבלה", "Let's deconstruct/scramble," linguistically scrambling their words for constructing.

"Let's go down and scramble/deconstruct שם (=earth/the city) their language so that each man (איש = individual social unit) will not hear (ישמעו) his friend's language" (שפת רעהו = social and linguistic structure).³⁹ Deconstructing language deconstructs the building just as scrambling language (*נבלה*) scrambles bricks (*לכנה*). Confusion, *נבלה*, is a permuted combination of *לכנה* = "brick". So *נבלה*, mixing, confuses by combining the letters of *לכנה* and *נבנה* as combining bricks builds the city/tower's structure. In combining language *in* Babel, He disperses them *from* there.

Scrambling words for language (שפת רעהו) that sound like (ישמעו) words for building deconstructs the tower and its social structure ([איש אל רעהו]), alliteratively scrambling the city (העיר). As non-monolithic language deconstructs the monolith, societal/architectural

בני גד את דיבון ואת עטרו...ערי מבצר" in 32:34-36 and plays against "שמות" in the next verse, 32:38, "ואת שבמה ויקראו בשמות את שמות הערים אשר בנו", where שמות means names. See Tzvi Betzer, "Some Names Being Changed: 'Musabot Shem' (Num 32:38), A New Interpretation of a Biblical Phrase" (Hebrew), *Daf Parashat HaShavua*, Bar Ilan University, 1998.

³⁹ "Will not hear" is the opposite of God's coming to see the city.

structure deconstructs automatically. God scatters them from "there" (*משם*), where their language is scrambled (*שפתם*), over the face of all the earth (*פני כל הארץ*), the lateral plane which began the narrative as "כל" (*החלם*) when שפת רעהו (stop) becomes *נבלה* and *החל* (begin) becomes *חול* (stop). Finally, *בלל* becomes *בבל*.

"Therefore [God?] called its name (שמה) Babel because there (=the city down on earth) God scrambled (*בלל*) the language of all the earth (*שפת כל הארץ*), and from there God scattered them on the face of all the earth (*על פני כל הארץ*)" (11:9). "שם בבל" ("there God confused") causes שמה ("its name was Babel"). Instead of a unified name (שם) up in heaven (שמים) they have a confused name (שמה בבל) there (שם), on earth. In the confusion, שם בבל becomes שמה בבל, where Babel in Hebrew means confusion and in Babylonian Akkadian, "(city) gate" or "gate of God."⁴⁰ Ironically, in the "confusion" that ensued, the city built to oppose God, to make a name for itself, is named for Him, "gate of God," God's city/architecture. Architectural construction is named for linguistic and social deconstruction. In the confusion, language and the social structure deconstruct and are scattered.⁴¹

Permutations: Words And Bricks

Metathesis permutes throughout: "לנו", "נלכנה", "נבנה", "לבנה", "לאבן", "לכנות", "בני", "בנו", "בבל", "הבה", "לאבן". There are permuted words for building/deconstruction and linguistic structure/deconstruction and social structure/deconstruction, as well as for the city's name.⁴² The way

⁴⁰ F. Delitzsch, *Wo lag das Paradies* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1881), 212ff., E. Unger in Erich Ebeling and Bruno Meissner (eds.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie I* (1932) 33ff., R. Campbell Thompson in *The Cambridge Ancient History I* (1928), 503ff. See E. J. Gelb, "The Name of Babylon," *The Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies* 1 (1955), 1-4, who argues that it may have acquired this meaning through later popular etymology as a secondary formation (*bab-ilim*) since the element *babil* was used for several geographic names in Sumer.

⁴¹ Genesis Rabbah 38:8 has the tower itself being destroyed.

⁴² Besides the other metathesized permutations of the city's name already discussed, one final one reaches back to the preceding narrative unit in 10:32. There, in the unit directly preceding the events in *בבל*, the text informs us that the people separated after the flood (*מבול*). Rashi and Ibn Ezra to 6:17 say "מבול" comes from "בבל", "confusion"; bShabbat

the narrative is constructed from these permutations becomes a metaphor for the way the tower itself is created. In this way, the message of the narrative is reminiscent of the *Sefer Yezirah's* metaphor⁴³ for words as the permuted bricks in the language of Creation.⁴⁴ The tower imitates the first Creation, which was permuted⁴⁵ with the words of the Holy Tongue from "the twenty-two letters He carved out and quarried" (*Sefer Yezirah* 1:11, 2:2) "from the Great Name" (1:3). From all twenty-two letters were constructed city gates ("Twenty-two letters in two hundred and thirty one gates forward and backwards: Aleph with all, all with Aleph, Bet with all, all with Bet, Gimel with all, cycling both ways to two hundred and thirty-one gates . . .," 2:4-5) or 22x21 (base two-letter combinations) and their

123b connects "בבל" to "מבול" in this way: the "מבול" brought down ("מוביל") the waters to the depths of "בבל."

⁴³ See the quotation on p. 131.

⁴⁴ In this context, it is worth noting another connection between the *Sefer Yezirah* and Gen 11. Jewish tradition has generally attributed authorship of *Sefer Yezirah* to Abraham (*Zohar Tosefta* II 275b, *Zohar Hadash* 37c, Commentary of R. Saadiah Gaon to *Sefer Yezirah*, *Kuzari* 4:25, R. Hai Gaon in *Rabbenu Bahya*, Ex 34:6, *Raziel* 8b). In this light, some of the connections occasionally made between Abraham and the builders of the Tower are illuminating. Ibn Ezra (11:1) has Abraham as one of the city's builders (that is, their contemporary; in *Zohar Behar* III 111b, his father Terah was one of the builders). Genesis Rabbah 38:6 reads the דברים אחדים of the tower's builders (11:1) as an attack on the two "ones," God and Abraham ("Abraham was one," Ezek 33:24). In *Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim* 26: "They told Abraham, 'Come help us since you are strong and we will build a tower and its head in the heavens.' He said, 'You abandoned 'A tower of strength is the name of God' (Prov 18:10) and say, 'Let us make for ourselves a name?'" In *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* 24: "He mocked and cursed them in the name of his God, they rejected his words as a stone thrown on the ground, of him it says, 'The builders rejected a stone, it became the cornerstone.'" There is a striking image in R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, *Ha-'amek Davar* ad. Gen 11:3: "Let us make bricks and burn burning," appears to allude to the tradition of the sages [Genesis Rabbah 38:13] that they threw Abraham in the furnace . . . the furnace here for the purpose of [building] the city and tower." (They throw Abraham [the rejected stone] into the brick furnace whose ideology he fights.) Pesikta Rabbati 21:81 and Genesis Rabbah 30 say Abraham recognized his Creator at forty-eight; Seder Olam Rabbah 1 says he was forty-eight when the tower was built. Did his recognition come as Mankind built the tower? The Hasidic thinker R. Tzadok HaKohen Rabinowitz of Lublin (*Pri Zaddik* I, Noah, p. 19) makes that connection: "The primary revelation of the Oral Law was in Babel as it says in bSukkah 20a. Therefore, when in Shin'ar they felt the place fitting for revelation of spreading the Oral Law they made a tower to parallel the Temple from which Torah goes out to all Israel (bSanhedrin 86b), this opposite that to spread their falsehoods . . . and Abraham was then forty-eight (bShabbat 10a) and he then recognized his Creator (as it says in Genesis Rabbah 30) and so merited all of the Oral Law..."

⁴⁵ To compute "what the mouth cannot speak and what the ear cannot hear" the *Sefer Yezirah's* interpreters used the N factorial (n!) formula, $n! = 1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 4 \cdot 5 \cdot 6 \cdot 7 = 5,040$, from two, the first possible permutation, through seven, the largest Biblical base word. See N. Allony, "The Anagrammatical System in Hebrew Lexicography in the 'Sefer Yesira,'" (Hebrew), *WCJS* 5 (1973), 127-129.

reversal: 462 permutations of words or stones permuted to the linguistic architecture of city gates. In *Sefer Yezirah*, permutations of all twenty-two letters are contrasted with the impermutability of the Creator's Oneness (6:1): "Know and calculate, the Master, the Creator, is One and has no second, and before One what do you count?" Permutation starts only with two, after the One.

But God, who is One, stands above permutation. And Oneness, as the tower's builders discover as they disperse, can never be approximated.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday)
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AH	F. Rosenthal, <i>An Aramaic Handbook</i>
ANE	ancient Near East
ANET	J. B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>
b	Babylonian Talmud (Bavli)
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs' <i>Lexicon</i>
BDD	בכל דרכיך דעוהו
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BZAW	<i>Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
Ibn Ezra	Abraham ibn Ezra
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>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>

JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KB	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros</i>
LXX	Septuagint
m	Mishnah
Malbim	R. Meir Leibush b. R. Yehiel Mikhel
MT	Masoretic text
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha...</i>
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>
p	Palestinian Talmud (Yerushalmi)
Radak	R. David Kimhi
Ramban	R. Moses b. Nahman
Rashi	R. Solomon Yitzhaki
Rashbam	R. Samuel b. Meir
R.H.	Rosh Hashanah (tractate)
San	Sanhedrin (tractate)
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SVT	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
t	Tosefta
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
Tg	Targum
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UT	C.H. Gordon, <i>Ugaritic Textbook</i>

VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTE	Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCJS	<i>World Congress of Jewish Studies</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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