TRADITIONS OF THE BIBLE

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A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era

JAMES L. KUGEL

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Once again, to R.

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Preface

THIS BOOK was written for students and scholars alike. It is intended to be a new kind of guide for anyone interested in the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament). Let me begin by saying why I think that such a guide is needed.

The Hebrew Bible contains the history, prayers, songs, laws, and prophecies of ancient Israel. These texts were written down over a long period of time, more than a thousand years. Recently, thanks in part to advances in archaeology, linguistics, and ancient history, scholars have been able to learn much about how the Bible came to be. We now know a great deal of the historical background of various biblical stories, as well as about how different parts of the Bible first came together.

When people study the Bible nowadays in schools and universities, it is often this "new knowledge" that is highlighted. Most standard guides and introductions to the Hebrew Bible discuss little else. Thus, people learn about the various stages in which the Bible was written, and about the work of different editors or redactors. They are told about the background history of Israel, and about other texts from the ancient Near East that shed light on biblical events. All this is extremely interesting information.

But it is really only half the story of the Hebrew Bible.

The other half has to do with what happened to these texts once they were written down. For, even before the Bible had attained its final form, its stories, songs, and prophecies had begun to be *interpreted.* From very early times, sages and scholars in ancient Israel had made a practice of looking deeply into the meaning of these sacred writings, and, with each new generation, their insights and interpretations were passed on alongside the texts themselves. As a result, as each new age inherited what were to become the Bible's various books from the previous age, it also inherited a body of traditions about what those texts meant.

The traditional interpretations were of all kinds. Some simply aimed at explaining the meaning of a difficult word or resolving an apparent contradiction. But others were more wide-ranging and imaginative. Interpreters sometimes felt themselves obliged to explain why a particular person in a biblical story should have behaved the way that he or she did, or to find some connection between what a particular prophet had predicted and some later event in history. Often, interpreters ended up actually adding to what the biblical text said, "deducing" whole incidents or facts that, the interpreters felt, were implied if not stated outright in the Bible's words.

More than anything, though, these interpretations tried to bring out the universal and enduring messages of biblical texts, for the interpreters considered Scripture to be a sacred guidebook for human existence. Interpreters therefore tried to look beyond the obvious content of what was being said to find some relevant, usable lesson, even if it was less than obvious at first glance. And so, whatever their particular form or purpose, these interpretive traditions all tended to *transform* the apparent meaning of biblical texts.

Such transformations were immensely important. As any reader of this book will see, chapter after chapter of the Bible took on a new, sometimes radically different, significance when its words were scrutinized in the characteristic manner of early interpreters.

The story of Adam and Eve, for example, only *became* the story of the Fall of Man thanks to a certain ancient interpretation of one of the verses in the story. The snake in the story came to be identified as the devil—but only by later interpreters, not by the story itself! And it was only because of another interpretation that the Garden of Eden (also known as paradise) came to be thought of as a *heavenly* garden, one in which the righteous would live eternally after their death.

Similar transformations occurred with other biblical narratives. Interpreters came to the conclusion that Abraham was the son of an idol-maker, that he was the first person to believe in one God, and that among his many virtues was an extraordinary generosity toward strangers. None of these things is stated outright in the Bible, though each of them *is* based on some slight peculiarity in the biblical text. Other creative interpretations helped to change the "images" of Sarah, Jacob, Rachel, and Joseph—what each of these biblical figures did and stood for took on an entirely different aspect when their stories were read and interpreted in the special fashion of these early interpreters. The shape and significance of the entire Bible came to be modified because of their work.

Then, gradually, as the centuries passed, these traditional understandings came to be *the* meaning. The historical circumstances in which a particular biblical passage might have originally been uttered were eventually forgotten or, in any case, considered irrelevant. What was important by, say, the third or second century B.C.E. (and, quite possibly, even somewhat earlier) was what was thought to be the text's deeper significance, that is, how it was explained by the traditional interpretations that now accompanied it. And this traditional, *interpreted* Bible—the Bible itself plus the traditions about what it really meant—was what was taught to successive generations of students, expounded in public assemblies and, ultimately, canonized by Judaism and Christianity as their sacred book.

The way in which these traditions of interpretation came to cling to the biblical text may be difficult for people today to comprehend. We like to think that the Bible, or any other text, means "just what it says." And we act on that assumption: we simply open up a book—including the Bible—and try to make sense of it on our own. In ancient Israel and for centuries afterward, on the contrary, people looked to special interpreters to explain the meaning of a biblical text. For that reason, the explanations passed along by such interpreters quickly acquired an authority of their own. In studying this or that biblical law or prophecy or story, students would

do more than simply learn the words; they would be told what the text meant—not only the peculiar way in which this or that term was to be interpreted, but how one biblical text related to another far removed from it, or the particular moral lesson that a text embodied, or how a certain passage was to be applied in everyday life. And the people who learned these things about the Bible from their teachers in turn passed on the same information to the next generation of students.

And so, it was this *interpreted* Bible—not just the stories, prophecies, and laws themselves, but these texts as they had, by now, been interpreted and explained for centuries—that came to stand at the very center of Judaism and Christianity. This was what people in both religions meant by "the Bible." Of course, Judaism and Christianity themselves differed on a great many questions, including the interpretation of some crucial scriptural passages, as well as on just what books were to be included in the Bible. Nevertheless, both religions had begun with basically the same interpreted Bible. For both inherited an earlier, common set of traditions, general principles regarding how one ought to go about reading and interpreting the Bible as well as specific traditions concerning the meaning of individual passages, verses, and words. As a result, even when later Jews or Christians added on new interpretations—sometimes directed against each other or against other groups or ideologies within the world in which they lived—the new interpretations frequently built on, and only modified, what had been the accepted wisdom until then.

This book is essentially an attempt to reconstruct this traditional Bible, the Bible as it was understood in the closing centuries B.C.E. and at the very start of the common era. I have tried to assemble evidence of the things that scholars and ordinary people believed about the most important parts of the Torah or Pentateuch (that is, the first five books of the Bible).[1] But how does one go about reconstructing this Bible-as-it-was? Unfortunately, there is no single text that contains, chapter by chapter, the commonly accepted interpretations of the Bible in the closing centuries B.C.E. Instead there is a mass of literature of various sorts—sermons, apocalypses, retellings of biblical stories, and other writings—in which these interpretations are mostly only hinted at or else taken for granted, assumed to be known to every reader. Trying to reconstruct the Bible as it was has thus been largely a matter of reading between the lines, figuring out interpretations that are rarely presented as such, from this mass of different sources.

Of course there is more to the Bible as it was than I have been able to include here. But I hope that the present volume[2] will give readers the essential, a view of

1. While, for the period covered, the precise contents of the Bible—which books were to be part of the canon and which not—were still a subject of debate, all agreed that these first five books were Scripture *par excellence,* the very heart of the Bible and the essence of God's sacred teaching for the people of Israel.

2. A shorter version of this volume, consisting only of the main part of each chapter without the "Other Readings" sections, was published in 1997 as *The Bible As It Was.* The present volume represents the original complete manuscript. I have not attempted a systematic updating of references to secondary literature that has appeared since the manuscript was completed, although I have tried to include all relevant new primary texts, including much recently published Dead Sea Scrolls material.

the most important interpretive traditions that circulated during the crucial period of the Bible's emergence as such, when it was becoming the defined corpus of texts that would lie at the very heart of Judaism and Christianity.

I would like to thank the many colleagues and students who have helped me with various aspects of this book. In particular, I thank those who have consented to read through and offer suggestions on individual chapters: Professors Gary Anderson, Ellen Birnbaum, Robert Brody, Hanan Eshel, Jay Harris, Marc Hirshman, and Bernard Septimus. Throughout the stages of preparing the manuscript I have been aided by the comments and suggestions of Hindy Najman. My thanks go as well to Melissa Milgram, who helped at an early stage of the compilation, and to Luke Whitmore for assistance with the illustrations. I am grateful to Chanta Bhan, James Robinson, and Valerie Stein for help with the index. I am also thankful for the assistance of Carol Cross and Rachel Rockenmacher of the Department of Near Eastern Languages at Harvard. Elizabeth Hurwit admirably edited the manuscript for publication, while Mary Ellen Geer and Margaretta Fulton helped it through production at Harvard University Press. I should also like to express my deep gratitude to my literary agent, Ellen Geiger of Curtis Brown Ltd., for her help and guidance at every phase of publication—I could not have managed it without her.

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A final note: Despite all the time spent assembling and checking the material presented herein, no doubt errors of commission and omission remain; moreover, texts now being published for the first time or yet to be discovered will likely provide further insights that might have enriched this study. And so I cannot but make a request of my learned readers: I will be most grateful for any corrections or additions that you might be kind enough to pass along, either via the publisher or to me by means of my Web page, http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~jlkugel/, where I intend to maintain a regularly updated information sheet about this book and related matters. I can also be reached directly by e-mail, at jlkugel@fas.harvard.edu or kugelj@mail.cc.biu.ac.il. It is my hope that the age of electronic publishing may yet provide a release from the dire sentence of Eccles. 1:15.

TRADITIONS OF THE BIBLE

Note on Transcriptions

In transcribing Hebrew words and names, I have chosen not to confuse nonspecialists with the use of unnecessary diacritical marks and the like. Thus, biblical figures and places are generally rendered by their standard English equivalents (Joshua, Bethlehem); the same is true of the names of texts cited in this book (the Mishnah, *Yalqut Shimoni*) and certain other, fairly common, transcriptions (*halakhah*, the Shema). When a particular point has required more exact transcription, I have relied on that in current use in most scholarly journals.

I

The World of Ancient Biblical Interpreters

THE OLDEST PARTS of the Hebrew Bible go back very far into ancient times, some to before 1,000 B.C.E. These ancient texts may have been transmitted orally for a time, but soon enough they were committed to writing. Since the materials on which they were written were perishable, the texts eventually crumbled or wore out and had to be recopied. The stories, psalms, laws, and prophecies that have reached us today as part of the Bible must therefore have been copied many, many times even within the biblical period itself. (There were doubtless other texts, such as the "Book of Yashar" or the "Book of the Wars of the Lord" mentioned in the Bible itself,[1] which did not survive; for one reason or another, they ceased to be copied and so have been lost.)

The scribes who did the work of copying were not mindless duplicating machines, nor did they likely execute their copies so that the texts might then be put into some kind of "cold storage." If these texts were repeatedly copied within the biblical period itself, it was because they were *used;* they played some part in daily life. Some texts, especially the history of past events and of ancient heroes, were doubtless used in the royal court, perhaps for purposes of literacy instruction, royal propaganda, or simply record keeping. Other texts were just as certainly associated with temples and sanctuaries—songs and prayers and priestly instructions and the like. Still others—ancient statutes, prophecies, speeches, proverbs, and so forth—may have likewise had their place in court or temple, or they may have belonged to yet some other site. But wherever they were preserved, the very fact that they were attests to the role that these texts must have played somewhere in ancient Israelite society. No one would go to the trouble of copying texts for no purpose.

To say only this is virtually to assert that, from a very early period, the texts that make up the Hebrew Bible were *interpreted* texts. For, judges who seek to enforce written statutes have to do more than simply read the texts involved; they have to apply the law's general prescriptions to specific situations and, sometimes, adapt fixed formulations to new circumstances. (This is especially true with the laws contained in the Bible, which often function by describing a specific case while leaving to others the job of deriving from that case principles that might apply elsewhere.) The same applies to priests seeking to follow an established procedure for temple sacrifices or trying to diagnose a disease from a specific set of symptoms. Teachers, royal counselors, propagandists, or others who might make use of histori-

1. 2 Sam. 1:18, Num. 21:14. On this subject generally: Leiman, *Canonization of Scripture.*

cal records doubtless did more than simply read them aloud: however much the records might have seemed to speak for themselves, even the clearest point in a text must sometimes be driven home to an audience through restatement, elaboration, and the like. And not all texts are clear. Writers often leave ambiguities in what they write, so that *all* the figures mentioned—judges, priests, teachers, and so forth—were of necessity also interpreters because of the simple fact that their work involved using texts.

Thus, it is probably safe to say that, at least in these ways, the interpretation of the Bible goes back virtually as far as the oldest texts within it. Indeed, evidence of this process is to be found within the Hebrew Bible itself. Later biblical books frequently mention or allude to things found in earlier books, and in so doing they often modify or change—sometimes radically—the apparent sense of the earlier text. The book of Daniel, for example, specifically interprets a prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11–12, 29:10), in which Jeremiah's reference to "seventy years" is asserted to mean in reality 490 years (Dan. 9:2, 24). In somewhat less dramatic fashion, the entire book of Chronicles may be seen as a kind of commentary on (especially) the biblical books of Samuel and Kings, with numerous additions or modifications of the earlier material, plus a few blatant omissions.[2] Daniel and Chronicles are relatively late books in the biblical canon, but there is evidence of such interpretive activity far earlier, well before that "great divide" in biblical history, the point at which the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and sent the Jews into exile (586 B.C.E.). Such ancient bits of interpretation, while generally less striking than later examples, nonetheless bear ample witness to the work of interpreters from very early times.

The Age of Interpretation

And yet, it would be wrong to conclude that interpretation proceeded at pretty much the same pace throughout the biblical period. On the contrary, the Babylonian conquest just mentioned seems to mark the dawn of a new age with regard to Scripture and its interpretation. The Jews, exiled from their homeland for half a century, were suddenly informed in 532 B.C.E. that they were free to return home; this right was granted to them by an edict of the Persian king Cyrus following his stunning victory over mighty Babylon. Many Jews did indeed return home, and the society that they established in Judea was one in which—for reasons to be examined presently—the interpretation of ancient Scripture came to play a central role. As a result, a distinctive approach to interpretation began to develop, and in the ensuing centuries individual interpretations of biblical laws and stories and prophecies slowly accumulated and coalesced into a great body of lore that came to be known widely throughout Israel.

Some of the first fruits of this activity may be found among the latest books of the Hebrew Bible, but the great mass of ancient biblical interpretation appears in

2. See on this Seligmann, "Voraussetzung der Midraschexegese"; idem, "The Beginnings of Midrash in the Book of Chronicles"; Willi, *Der Chronik als Auslegung;* Japhet, *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles.*

books that, for one reason or another, did not end up being included in the Jewish canon. These books—expansive retellings of biblical stories, first-person narratives put in the mouths of biblical heroes, pseudonymous apocalypses, the sayings and proverbs of ancient sages, plus actual biblical commentaries, sermons, and the like—were composed from, roughly, the third century B.C.E. through the first century C.E., although some of the interpretations of the Bible found in them doubtless go back still earlier. These old texts allow us to reconstruct in some detail how the Bible was read and understood during this crucial period. They are the focus of the present study.

The Need for Interpreters

As mentioned, almost any written text contains potential ambiguities. Normally, we ordinary readers deal with such ambiguities ourselves, so that there is no need for a special class of text interpreters. Perhaps it was so, for a time, in ancient Israel as well—although the job of being a judge, a priest, or a teacher certainly could imply some skill in interpreting texts. But the postexilic period marked (among other things) a time in which this interpretive function became a thing unto itself and in which, therefore, the interpreter of Scripture emerged as a figure in his own right.

Part of the reason for this figure's emergence had to do with the passage of time itself. For, however much *all* texts contain ambiguities, such ambiguities—and even out-and-out incomprehensibility—tend to increase with old texts, for the simple reason that language and culture are always in the process of changing. A word whose meaning may have been clear two or three hundred years ago may no longer be clear now; indeed, it may now mean something else entirely. Few speakers of English nowadays would understand that to call someone "lewd and silly" in Chaucer's day was hardly to criticize; the person was, in fact, being described as uneducated and defenseless.

In the same way, many Hebrew words had shifted their meaning by the end of the biblical period. Even such basic concepts as "get," "take," "need," "want," "time," and "much" were expressed with new terms; the old words had either shifted their meaning or dropped out of sight entirely. As a result, someone trying to read a text from the ancient past could not always make sense of it; an expert, someone acquainted with old texts and their meanings, was needed.

Words were not the only thing to change: ideas, social institutions, and political reality likewise shifted. Some of Israel's bitterest enemies of days gone by no longer existed, replaced by new foes unheard of in an earlier age. Old forms of organization and governance had likewise fallen from view. Successive waves of conquerors—the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks (subdivided into the Hellenized Ptolemies of Egypt and the Hellenized Seleucids of Syria), then the Romans—had introduced not only new words into the Hebrew language, but also new ideas and ways of thinking, indeed, whole new civilizations. Taken together, such changes had a way of distancing people from their own past: texts that had at one time been quite comprehensible might now appear to be an encoded mystery. There is little doubt that, for just such reasons, many of the particulars in the stories of Genesis or the laws of Exodus

were no longer clear to readers as early as the time of the return from Babylonian exile. Henceforth interpreters of Scripture would increasingly be necessary.

Such interpreters were needed even more because of a curious feature in the transmission of ancient Hebrew Scripture. The Hebrew writing system was more than a little ambiguous. Like certain other Semitic languages, Hebrew was written down by recording the consonants alone: there were no letters to represent vowels. (Eventually, the consonants corresponding to our H, Y, and W came to be widely used as a way of indicating *some* vowels, but this was done only inconsistently at first and in any case still left many ambiguities.)

Of course, writing only the consonants in words would not work at all in English. The letters BRD, for example, could be interpreted as standing for "bird," "bard," "bared," "barred," "beard," "broad," "bored," "board," "brad," "bread," "bred," "breed," "braid," "by-road," "buried," "borrowed," and so on. In Hebrew, things are far easier: most words are built on a triconsonantal root and there are relatively few homonyms. The basic meaning of BRD, for example, is "hail." But even within the triconsonantal root structure, context alone will often determine whether a particular word is to be construed as a noun or a verb, or as belonging to one class of verb as opposed to another, or as being in the passive or active voice. Here, certainly, was plenty of room for ambiguity!

What is more, biblical texts were written without the use of capital letters, periods, commas, or any other kind of punctuation. Thus, even where a sentence began or ended was often a matter of opinion: it all depended on how you interpreted it. Indeed, even the separation between individual words was, in ancient times, frequently left ambiguous by author or scribe. And within the sentence, basic decisions about which words went together with which others and where, therefore, syntactic pauses were to occur—these too were a matter of interpretation.

Such ambiguities might at first seem rather minor, even trivial. However, especially when combined with other obscurities resulting from the passage of time, they created a significant barrier between text and reader. As a matter of fact, this ambiguous writing system was responsible for a great many of the interpretations charted in this book. The existence of such a writing system not only seemed to call forth interpreters to explain the biblical text, but soon enough, it furnished those interpreters with a flexible tool for tipping the interpretive scales in one particular direction or another. Carried to an extreme, the freedom of interpreters to read a single word in different ways or to break up a block of text into various syntactic combinations could at times allow them to make a text out to be saying exactly the opposite of its apparent meaning. The importance of the Hebrew writing system can thus hardly be overstated.

The Mode of Return

Many of the above factors, however, had existed from earliest times; while the passage of time may have heightened their effect, they alone are probably not sufficient to explain why it was the period following the return from Babylonian

exile that inaugurated a new interest in the interpretation of Scripture. To account for this, a number of further historical considerations must be mentioned.[3]

The first might be called the "mode of return" in which the Jews found themselves after the return from the Babylonian exile. Not all those who had been exiled to Babylon did return; a number of them stayed in their new home. Those who went back to Judah[4] doubtless did so for a variety of reasons, but certainly one of them was a straightforward desire to return to the place and the way of life that had been their ancestors' in days gone by. Yet here was a problem. For, while the physical places previously inhabited may have been clear enough, the way of life that had been followed in them was not. One could not interrogate the hills or the trees to find out how one's forebears had acted two or three generations earlier: that information depended on the restored community's collective memory, a memory embodied in (among other things) its library of ancient texts. Thus, the very mode of return—the desire to go back to something that once existed—probably made this community bookish to an abnormal degree.

Political differences among different groups within the returning exiles reinforced this tendency. To judge by the biblical evidence itself, some Jews at that time were bent on restoring the Davidic dynasty to full political leadership. (David's descendants had continuously ruled in Judah from the time of David himself, in the tenth century B.C.E., until the Babylonian exile.) Hopes eventually crystallized in the figure of Zerubbabel, heir to the Davidic throne. Many apparently looked to Zerubbabel to bring about drastic changes in the Jews' situation, perhaps through out-and-out rebellion against the Persian authorities; this hope is reflected in, among others, the writings of the biblical prophets Haggai and Zechariah (see Haggai 2; Zech. 4:6–7). At the same time, however, other Jews were more reserved in their political opinions. It is striking, for example, that the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah nowhere mention Zerubbabel's Davidic origins in their treatment of him; apparently, the author of these books saw the Persians as legitimate rulers.[5] Indeed, the author of Ezra begins by asserting that the emperor Cyrus had been commissioned by God Himself to rule "all the kingdoms of the earth" and to build a temple for Him in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–2).

Such political differences might exist at any time and in any place. But it is

3. I have discussed these factors at greater length in Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 31–51.

4. Here it might be appropriate to clarify a matter of terminology. Judah was one of Israel's original twelve tribes, eventually, the dominant one in the south. King David had united the twelve tribes into a single monarchy at the start of the tenth century B.C.E.; when this United Monarchy subsequently split in two under David's grandson Rehoboam, the southern part became the kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom was subsequently conquered by Assyria in the eighth century B.C.E. and its citizenry dispersed; only the southern kingdom, Judah, continued to exist, still ruled by David's descendants. It was this kingdom that the Babylonians conquered early in the sixth century B.C.E. and to which the exiles returned at the end of that century. In Greco-Roman sources, the country is called Judaea (or Judea) and its people the Jews. However, the general term "Israel" also continued to be used as a name for the Jewish people.

5. Japhet, "Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel"; see also her *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 395–504.

significant that the Jews of this period turned to their own ancient writings to legitimate their political views. Thus, when the prophet Haggai, a proponent of Zerubbabel, first prophesied about him,

> On that day, says the Lord of Hosts, I will take you, Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, and make you **like a signet ring**, for I have chosen you, says the Lord of Hosts. —Hag. 2:23

his words had a somewhat "biblical" ring, perhaps intended specifically to evoke a dire prophecy of Jeremiah's from an earlier age:

> As I live, says the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were a **signet ring on my right hand**, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life. —Jer. 22:24–25

The same prophet Jeremiah was evoked by members of the opposite camp—in the opposite sense, of course. The opening words of the book of Ezra, alluded to above, might be cited in full here:

> In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, **in order to accomplish the word of the Lord uttered by Jeremiah**, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation. —Ezra 1:1

According to this source, not only was Cyrus a legitimate, divinely chosen ruler, but his deeds were nothing less than the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy uttered by the same Jeremiah.

So, more generally, the returning Jews used the stories, prophecies, songs, and prayers saved from before the Babylonian exile to bolster their own ideas on all manner of different issues. For example, the book of Chronicles has been shown to contain a detailed program for the restored Jewish community after the Babylonian exile: its author was a firm supporter of the Davidic monarchy; he was in favor of uniting the northern and southern parts of the country into a single polity, a state whose very existence was predicated on what he saw as the people's eternal (and, in his view, virtually uninterrupted) presence on its own land and loyalty to its God.[6] Yet how interesting, and typical, that this author sought to put forward his political program not as such, but in the form of a history of bygone times—specifically, a retelling of much of the biblical books of Samuel and Kings. It was no doubt the mode of return that led this author, like so many others, to present his ideas not as innovations but as a return to the glorious past. That is, by omitting some things and adding others, this author reshaped the past and so made it into a more perfect model of what he himself wished to prescribe for the future.

The Centrality of Laws

Texts from the ancient past not only served as a general guide to how life had been lived before the exile. These texts—and in particular what is called the Pentateuch

6. These points are discussed at length in Japhet, *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles.*

or Torah, the first five books of the Bible—contained numerous laws and commandments from an earlier day. Another result of the mode of return in which the Jews found themselves was the heightened importance of these laws.

Obeying laws is usually thought of in our society as a rather small and unimportant part of life. True, most people obey speed limits and traffic lights, stay off private property, and pay their taxes, but such acts of obedience hardly register in our daily consciousness. Ordinary citizens do not usually spend a lot of time in court. The whole subject of law seems rather specialized and marginal.

Among the returning exiles, by contrast, laws occupied a central position. According to the book of Nehemiah, the people at this time specifically took an oath "to walk in God's law which was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our master and perform His ordinances and statutes" (Neh. 10:29). It was, apparently, crucially important that all members of the restored community do their utmost to conform to the divinely given statutes of old.

One reason was that they were *divine*, God's own commandments. If this divine provenance were not in itself sufficient to command the sustained attention of the community, the whole atmosphere of the postexilic period made it sufficient. The Babylonian conquest and exile had been *the* traumatic event in Jewish history. Not only had the defeat cost the Jews their freedom and homeland—as well as quite a few lives—but it had challenged the very foundations of Israel's understanding of its God and His ways with the world. The Jerusalem Temple, God's physical home on earth, had suddenly been razed by the enemy, and the daily Temple sacrifices, a centuries-old routine by which, in the common esteem, the divine will was appeased and made favorable toward mankind, had now been brutally put to an end. How could such events be understood?

The explanation offered by Jewish prophets and sages was that these events constituted God's punishment for the people's failure to obey the divine laws. When, in conformity to Jeremiah's prophecy (and in contradiction to all that common sense or political science might have predicted), the Babylonians were in turn overthrown a few short decades after their defeat of the Jews, it certainly seemed as if the "punishment" explanation was indeed correct: God had used the Babylonians to show His people Israel the error of its ways but, once having done so, He in turn toppled the Babylonians from power lest anyone conclude that it was *their* military might, rather than God's will, that had brought them victory.

Back in their homeland, the Jews resolved to learn the lesson of history: henceforth they would be more careful, henceforth they would be sure to observe the divine statutes with punctilious zeal. But such resolve only heightened the interpretive crux of biblical law. How could one demand strict observance of laws that were frequently and notoriously short on particulars? For example, working on the Sabbath was forbidden—but what constituted "work"? Performing one's usual profession? Doing *any* work which was part of *a* profession, even if it was not one's own? Or perhaps something still more stringent? (For some answers, see Chapter 20.) Similarly, the book of Leviticus commanded that one not "take revenge or hold a grudge" (Lev. 19:18) against one's kinsman—but what did that mean? If "revenge"

here implied actually harming him or killing him to recompense a wrong suffered, did the further prohibition of holding a grudge mean that one could not even resent him for the harm inflicted? Was this humanly possible? And did the continuation of this same verse—"And you shall love your neighbor as yourself"—mean that one was actually ordered by God to love someone whom one might otherwise be inclined to hate? How can love be *commanded?* (For answers given to these questions, see Chapter 22.) Like these, dozens and hundreds of other laws had to be understood precisely and thoroughly if another catastrophe was to be averted.

Quite apart from what we would think of as the "religious" importance of obeying biblical laws—the desire of the community to find favor with God and to head off another disaster—there may have been a more immediate spur to making sure that these laws were definitively interpreted and explained. It is likely that biblical laws were quite simply the law of the land in the restored community of Judah. Persian imperial policy under Darius I apparently consisted of giving the empire's stamp of approval to the old legal systems of its various subject peoples. Thus, in the year 518 B.C.E., Darius wrote to his satrap in Egypt to send him Egyptian scholars who might write down "the former law of Egypt." The scholars apparently complied, writing their laws "on one roll."[7] It seems likely that something similar happened with the Jews: the ancient laws, presented in definitive form, acquired the authority of the ruling powers. The words of Artaxerxes I (who reigned from 465 or 464 to 424 B.C.E.), cited in the book of Ezra, are eloquent in this regard:

> "I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, requires of you, be it done with diligence . . . And you, Ezra, according to the **wisdom of your God which is in your hand**, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as **know the laws of your God**; and those who do not know them, you shall teach. Then, whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed upon him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment." —Ezra 7:21, 25–26

Henceforth, the ancient Hebrew laws stood on a par with, or were equated with, the laws of the Persian rulers: the "law of your God and the law of the king" comprised the legal corpus by which daily life was to be governed, and not only the Jews but, as well, the Persian government officials in their midst were required to make sure that ancient biblical statutes were widely understood ("those who do not know them, you shall teach") and fully enforced as the law of the land.

7. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age,* 30. Bickerman elaborated on this theme in a paper presented at the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, 1981. (Unfortunately, he died shortly after the conference and the paper was never published.) If it was similarly demanded of Jewish sages that they write down their "former law," this may have been an event of crucial importance not only to the ancient interpretation of biblical laws but to their very formulation in a final, fixed text of the Pentateuch.

The Rise of the Interpreter

For all these reasons, the interpreters of Scripture enjoyed an increasing prominence and authority in the period following the Babylonian exile. They were, first of all, the guardians of writings preserved from Israel's ancient past. With their bookman's skills, they could explain what that past was, what had been set down in writing by or about Israel's historic leaders; they could likewise look deeply into the words of ancient lore and traditions, the writings of divinely chosen prophets or sages from days gone by. Clearly, interpreting such ancient texts was a matter of more than merely antiquarian interest: the interpretation of Scripture could lend support for this or that political program or leader, and it determined as well the significance of divine law and its application to daily life.

Who were these interpreters? There is good indication that they came from within different groups and levels of Jewish society. Some of them were, like "Ezra the priest" (Ezra 7:21) just mentioned, priests or levites—people who, by birth, had a special association with the service of God—since part of their job had from earliest times involved not only interpreting divine statutes but promulgating and explaining them to the people. The book of Deuteronomy had said about the tribe of Levi (from which priests and levites were said to descend):

> They shall teach Your statutes to Jacob, and to Israel Your Torah.
>
> —Deut. 33:10

Elsewhere in the same book, the role of members of this tribe in interpreting the law is made specific (Deut. 17:8–13). So too in later times:

> "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Ask the priests to decide this question."
>
> —Hag. 2:11

> True instruction was in his [Levi's] mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips . . . For the lips of the priest guard knowledge, and people seek instruction [*torah*] from his mouth, for he is an emissary of the Lord of Hosts.
>
> —Mal. 2:6–7

But priests and levites were hardly the only interpreters. We have glimpsed above the special association that judges, teachers, sages, and scribes probably had with the interpretation of ancient texts, and people from these walks of life as well served as Scriptural interpreters on into the Second Temple period and beyond. (Note that Ezra the priest is further described in the same verse as "the *scribe* of the law of the God of heaven"; Ezra 7:21.) No doubt for a time at least, interpreting Scripture had merely been a function—one among many—associated with each of these various offices; indeed, certain areas of interpretation were probably long associated specifically with certain types of interpreters (for example, laws of sacrifices, purity, and impurity with priests). From the closing centuries before the common era, however, comes evidence of more "all-purpose" interpreters, people who held forth on every area of scriptural interpretation, and such continued to be the case in the centuries thereafter.

In explaining Scripture in their particular fashion, interpreters ultimately came to encroach on territory that had previously belonged to another, rather different figure: the biblical prophet. For centuries before the Babylonian exile, prophets had acted as divine spokesmen in Israel. They were seen, quite literally, as messengers of God, and the messages they brought—words of rebuke and announcements of divine judgment and punishment, as well as messages of hope and divine encouragement, or simply divine directives and commandments—compelled the attention of kings and commoners alike. Prophets, in short, were an intermediary link in communications between God and humanity. But then, in the period following the return from exile, prophecy began to fall into disrepute. Although we possess the words of prophets who existed at the time of the return itself, in the centuries that followed there is a void: apparently, prophecy was no longer regarded as it had been previously.[8] Perhaps the institution itself had fallen, or was falling, into disrepute:

> And if anyone again appears as a prophet, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, "You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord"; and his father and his mother shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day, every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; he will not put on the hairy mantle in order to deceive, but he will say, "I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil." —Zech. 13:3–5

Later prophets sometimes alluded to, or interpreted, the words of earlier prophets, and these references in themselves may indicate a change in the air. Were not the words of the great prophets of the past turned to as a source of inspiration, or even information, about the present precisely because these words, now part of Scripture, outweighed anything that might be uttered by the latter-day prophets "in your midst"? God's word was increasingly thought of as a *written* word, given to Israel for all time, and it was therefore those who interpreted sacred texts from the past who were God's present-day messengers and spokesmen.

If the influence of prophets was on the decline, on the rise was that of another figure who had long existed in Israel, the sage or wise man. Sages in ancient Israel—and in the ancient Near East in general—were teachers and advisers, many

8. This is not to say that prophecy itself ceased to exist as a phenomenon in postexilic times, although this was indeed asserted or implied in a number of ancient sources (1 Macc. 4:46, 9:27, 14:41; Prayer of Azariah 15; 2 Bar. 85:3; (perhaps) *Testament of Benjamin* 9:2; Josephus, *AgApion* 1:40–41; as well as in numerous rabbinic sources, e.g., *Seder Olam* 30, T. *Soṭa* 13:2, b. *Baba Batra* 12b, etc.). Elsewhere, however, is evidence of a different opinion: Wisd. 7:27, Philo, *Who Is Heir* 259, (1QH) *Thanksgiving Hymns* 4:16, 1 Cor. 11:4–5, 12:10, 14:4–5, etc., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13:311–13, 20:97, 169, etc. It seems not so much that prophecy ceased as that the prophet's very identity and role came to be redefined and significantly broadened, while at the same the conviction was spreading that the *great* prophets were a thing of the past (and, perhaps, the future). See further Urbach, "When Did Prophecy Cease?" idem, "Halakhah and Prophecy," 1–27; Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 69–82; Blenkinsopp, "Prophecy and Priesthood in Josephus"; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity;* Horsely, "Like One of the Prophets of Old"; Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased"; Kugel, "David the Prophet"; Winston, "Two Types of Mosaic Prophecy"; Feldman, "Prophets and Prophecy in Josephus"; Brin, "Biblical Prophecy in the Dead Sea Scrolls"; and Milikowsky, "The End of Prophecy and the End of the Bible."

or most of them no doubt attached to the royal court. They were often champions of a particular philosophy and way of life called "wisdom." Wisdom is not given to easy summary, but its basic tenet was that all of reality is shaped by a great, underlying pattern. This pattern, referred to in itself as wisdom, was of divine origin. Everything that happens in the world—the ways of nature and of human society, the course of history and of individual human lives—happens in keeping with this divine pattern. While it is not given to humanity to know all the particulars of the divine pattern, parts of it had certainly been grasped over the centuries by those who pursued wisdom, namely, the sages themselves. Their insights into the divine pattern had been "packaged" into little units, the pithy sayings or proverbs that were the sage's stock-in-trade. Such proverbs—whose overall message was one of patient self-control, treading the strait and narrow path—were often cleverly worded and required sustained contemplation to be fully understood. (Three biblical books that abound in such material are Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.) Sages taught this material to their students and sought to live by its teachings in their own lives.

These same sages became interpreters of Scripture. With the passage of time, the texts they contemplated and explained were no longer limited to ancient proverbs and sayings: laws and narratives and prophecies likewise came to be included in their repertoire. Soon enough, the writings they themselves produced encompassed more than old-fashioned proverbs: without quite abandoning these, they added pithily phrased expositions of Scripture to their words of wisdom.

The process by which such teachers of wisdom (in the sense described above) became teachers of Scripture is not hard to document: it happens before our very eyes in books like the Wisdom of Ben Sira (or Sirach, written around 180 B.C.E.) or the Wisdom of Solomon (late first century B.C.E.).[9] The sages who wrote these books are, in a sense, transitional figures. They are, on the one hand, traditional wisdom teachers whose mission it still is to put insights into the ways of God and men in little one-line proverbs, and the proverbs they wrote and included in their books are no different in kind from the proverbs written by earlier sages, the authors of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. On the other hand, Ben Sira or the author of the Wisdom of Solomon did something no sage had done before: they made Scripture part of the *subject* of their inquiry. It is a striking fact that nowhere do earlier wisdom collections—Proverbs, Job, or Ecclesiastes—ever talk about Abraham or Jacob or Moses, the history of the people of Israel or the messages transmitted by Israel's prophets. It is not that these things were unknown to the sages in question; of course they knew them. Rather, the universal nature of wisdom itself seemed to rule out any reference to such particulars, such local details: the great underlying pattern of the universe must, it seemed to them, apply equally to all of humanity and lie beyond any particularity of time or space.

But by the second century B.C.E., all this was changing: for the Jews Scripture

9. An interpreter such as Philo of Alexandria might at first seem altogether free of any connection with the earlier wisdom heritage, yet even in his case has this connection been asserted: Mack, *Logos und Sophia;* Laporte, "Philo in the Tradition of Biblical Wisdom Literature."

itself had become God's great book of instruction—no longer merely the record of events from the distant past of one people, nor prophetic oracles delivered to a specific audience, but words of eternal validity that were relevant, therefore, to anyone in any age. In keeping with this view, Ben Sira devoted some of his wise sayings to the elucidation of biblical laws, since for him these laws embodied timeless principles of God's wisdom. Moreover, he addressed himself at length (chapters 44–49 of his book) to a review of the Bible's major figures, whose very lives and deeds seemed to him less history than moral example, tales told for the edification of readers in any age.

> Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up [to heaven],
> he was an **example of repentance** to all generations.
>
> —(Greek) Sir. 44:16[10]

The biblical Enoch, mentioned in Gen. 5:18–24, appears in a long genealogical list of people who lived before the flood. As a figure from the shadowy past, he was of little historical significance to later generations of Israelites. Yet, by Ben Sira's time, biblical texts were being scrutinized for all their possible implications. In the case of Enoch, the fact that God was said to have "taken" him (Gen. 5:24) suggested to many that Enoch had been bodily taken *up*, transported into heaven while yet alive, very much as Elijah later was (2 Kings 2:11). Indeed, the idea of Enoch's heavenly sojourn found elaborate expression in such ancient writings as *1 Enoch.* (For more details, see below.) Just exactly what Enoch had done to be so "taken" by God the book of Genesis did not openly say. But Ben Sira, or at least the exegetical tradition being quoted above, found an answer to this question in the precise wording of the Enoch passage in Genesis:

> When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. **Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years,** and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.
>
> —Gen. 5:21–24

The passage says that Enoch "walked with God" *after* the birth of Methuselah; the clear implication is that before Methuselah's birth he did *not* walk with God. If so, it would seem that Enoch's great virtue, and the reason for God's taking him, was that he repented. Although he may not have been an exemplary youth, Enoch began to walk with God at age sixty-five and thus became, in the Ben Sira text cited above, "an example of repentance to all generations."

Enoch is only the first biblical figure treated in Ben Sira's category of heroes; after him come Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the others—all of whose lives are

10. This verse is not found at all in the Masada manuscript or the Syriac version of Ben Sira, but it is present (in somewhat different form) in the Hebrew Geniza manuscript B as well as in the Greek. On the place of this verse in the development of the text of Ben Sira, as well as on the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions: Reiterer, *"Urtext" und Übersetzungen,* 84–85; Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira,* 499; Yadin, *Ben Sira Scroll from Masada,* 38.

presented as models, embodiments of this or that divine teaching. It is in this sense that, for Ben Sira, Scripture itself is the great book of wisdom—so that, after having praised the figure of Wisdom very much in the fashion of earlier sages, Ben Sira can quite naturally add:

> All this [Wisdom] is the book of the covenant of the Most High, the Torah which Moses commanded us as an inheritance to the congregation of Jacob.
> —Sir. 24:23 (cf. Deut. 33:4)

In the same fashion, another sage, roughly a century later, could assert about Wisdom:[11]

> He [God] found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant, and to Israel whom he loved . . . She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever. —Bar. 3:36–4:1

For a third sage of this period, the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, Scripture is likewise a great repository of wisdom; and very much in the fashion of Ben Sira, he also presents a catalog of biblical heroes and examples (chapter 10). What is particularly remarkable in this author's catalog is the extent to which it is mediated by interpretive traditions. Thus, for example, in alluding to the exodus from Egypt, this text observes:

> She [Wisdom] gave to holy men the reward of their labors; she guided them along a marvelous path, and became a shelter to them by day and a starry flame through the night. She brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through the deep waters; but she drowned their enemies and cast them up from the depth of the sea. —Wis. 10:17–18

The author is obviously referring to the events recounted in the book of Exodus—yet his account has been touched up a bit to clarify elements that might otherwise be troubling in that narrative. For example, the Israelites there are said to have borrowed silver, gold, and other precious items from the Egyptians before leaving, and so to have "despoiled" the Egyptians (Exod. 12:36). The Wisdom of Solomon is quick to explain that this was not thievery or even deception, but "the reward of their labors"; that is, it was only fair for the Israelites to take these items in recompense for all the years of slavery in which they had served the Egyptians without being paid. As for the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites on their way out of Egypt (Exod. 13:21), the Wisdom of Solomon explains what the book of Exodus somehow had not, that while the nighttime pillar was made of fire in order to guide them in the dark, the purpose of the daytime pillar of cloud was to give *shelter* to the Israelites from the sun—hence two pillars were necessary. (See Chapter 17.) Moreover, this same author specifies that, after drowning Israel's enemies, Wisdom "cast them up from the depth of the sea." This is no gratuitous flourish but an attempt to resolve an apparent contradiction in the

11. Note in the same connection a wisdom text from Qumran that asserts that God has granted wisdom "to Israel, He gives her as a gracious gift," (4Q185) *Sapiential Work* 2:10.

Exodus account, which at one point specifies that the Egyptians "were drowned in the Red Sea, the floods covered them, they went down into the depths like a stone" (Exod. 15:4–5) but elsewhere says that the Israelites "saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore" (Exod. 14:30). Where were they, on the seashore or at the bottom of the sea? This author's answer is that they *at first* sank to the bottom of the sea but then were "cast up" to the shore again to be seen by the Israelites.

In short, it is not that teachers of wisdom began merely to include Scripture among their subjects; rather, the whole nature of their activity was changing. Where wisdom had previously consisted of contemplating the natural world and the social order and deducing from them the general plan by which God conducts the world, it was now more and more Scripture that was consulted to understand God's ways. As the examples from the Wisdom of Solomon show, consulting Scripture did not consist merely of finding the appropriate passage and repeating it, but of looking deeply into its words, for God's teachings were often not obvious. Thus, it happened that the sage, who had previously walked about the world or stood at his window looking out, now sat down at his table and opened the Book. For, the Book, even more than the world, was the place in which God's will and God's ways were expressed—but much thought and contemplation were needed if the sage was to understand fully God's sacred written messages.

In giving expression to these messages, sages—indeed, scriptural interpreters in general—did take over part of the ancient prophet's role. For, if the word of the Lord was no longer reliably spoken by chosen messengers sent directly to Israel, was it not because that word had already been set down in writing, in the great library of divine wisdom that Scripture had become? The interpreter, as mediator of that wisdom, was a bit like the prophet: it was he who could peer deeply into words from the ancient past and explain their present application—how this or that law was to be observed, what the present implications of some ancient narrative were, or even how, in the words of some prophet long dead, there nonetheless lurked a message directed to a later day.

The Four Assumptions

In Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon, we have glimpsed some of the ancient interpreters' *modus operandi.* It might be well, before proceeding, to say something of a more programmatic nature about how interpreters interpreted.

To do so, we must begin with the interpreters' own understanding of Scripture: what was Scripture in their eyes, and *how* did it mean? At first this might seem like a foolish question. After all, why should one assume that so varied a group of interpreters as those treated in this book had any one view of Scripture? Surely what Ben Sira thought about Scripture was not what Philo of Alexandria thought, and their views in any case were hardly identical with those of the author of *Jubilees.*

This is to some extent true. And yet, the more one contemplates the whole corpus of ancient biblical interpretation, the more it becomes clear that, despite the great variety of styles and genres and even interpretive methods involved, underlying it all is a common approach, a common set of assumptions concerning the

biblical text. Some of these have been alluded to in passing above, but it is appropriate here to set them out schematically. There are essentially four fundamental assumptions about Scripture that characterize all ancient biblical interpretation.

The first assumption that all ancient interpreters seem to share is that the Bible is a fundamentally cryptic document. That is, all interpreters are fond of maintaining that although Scripture may appear to be saying X, what it really means is Y, or that while Y is not openly said by Scripture, it is somehow implied or hinted at in X. The chapters that follow abound with instances of this assumption at work. Numerous interpreters seek to maintain, for example, that when Moses casts a tree or stick into the waters of Marah (Exod. 15:25), "the word *tree* here means divine teachings," or that when Dinah's brothers speak deceitfully to the men of Shechem (Gen. 34:13), "*deceitfully* really means 'with wisdom.'" Now it is hardly a natural thing to assume that a particular text is fundamentally cryptic or esoteric. Whether we are reading a history book or a newspaper editorial or a rousing hymn, we generally assume that what the words seem to say is what they mean to say. Yet ancient interpreters, when they read a piece of biblical history, or the urgings of a biblical prophet, or the hymns of an ancient psalmist, again and again tell us that in place of, or beyond, the apparent meaning of the text is some hidden, esoteric message. So, more generally, although the biblical text appears to be talking about a historical figure named Abraham, "Abraham is," according to Philo of Alexandria, "a symbol for the virtue-loving soul" in addition to being that historical figure, while for early Christian interpreters, "Cain's brother Abel is a foreshadowing of Christ."

It would be interesting, in another context, to try to trace the roots of this first assumption, which clearly go back to the Bible itself. To mention but one example cited earlier, the suggestion of the prophet-sage Daniel that the real meaning of the expression "seventy years" is 490 years is a classic case of "X really means Y."[12] The obvious question—If Jeremiah had meant 490 years, why didn't he say so?—is never addressed by Daniel; apparently even at the time of that book's composition it was already a well-known fact that Scripture often speaks indirectly or cryptically.

Whatever the origins of this first assumption, it was universally shared by ancient interpreters. Indeed, it had not a little to do with the interpreter's own standing in the community and with the authority that his interpretations enjoyed. The very fact that the Bible could be demonstrated time and again to contain some meaning other than the apparent one vouchsafed the necessity of specially trained interpreters who could reveal the Bible's secrets, and the interpretations that they put forward—precisely because they arose out of careful exegesis and would not appear to most readers at first blush—acquired an authority of their own.

The second assumption shared by all ancient interpreters was that Scripture constitutes one great Book of Instruction, and as such is a fundamentally *relevant* text. To appreciate the significance of this assumption, contrast it to the approach we normally take to the act of reading. If, for example, we were to open up

12. For some literary connections to this passage, see Grabbe, "The End of the Desolation of Jeremiah." See also Grelot, "Soixante-dix semaines d'années"; Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9."

Gilgamesh or the *Enuma Elish* or some other ancient Near Eastern text, we might find the stories moving, the language stirring, but no one would likely suggest that we ought to behave in keeping with what is written there, or that the characters are represented as acting in the way that they do so that we might emulate their example. Similarly, we might be drawn to read the prophecies of ancient sibyls in Greek, or read the writings of other makers of oracles, but no one would suggest that what these authors were *really* talking about was America in the twenty-first century. An ancient Roman law code might be of interest to a student of legal history; some of its laws might even serve as a model for new legislation in our own day; but scarcely any reader would think that, because such-and-such a law appears in this code, that fact alone is sufficient reason for us to regard it as currently binding upon ourselves. Songs, hymns, prayers, laments culled from centuries past would likewise have no automatic application to our present situation: we might find them moving, but the very fact of their existence would hardly constitute a reason for us to recite them in solemn assembly or obey their calls to celebrate or mourn.

Yet, it should be obvious, precisely these things were said about the Bible by ancient interpreters. As we have seen briefly in the case of Enoch, so Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and other biblical figures were held up as models of conduct, their stories regarded as a guide given to later human beings for the leading of their own lives. (Some interpreters saw the figures themselves as moral exemplars, others as allegorical representations of virtues to be emulated; it matters little, since the point in any case is that these historical figures are not merely historical but instructional.) Biblical prophecies were similarly read as *relevant* to the interpreter and his audience: one obvious effect achieved by Daniel's interpreting 70 years as 490 was to move the relevance of Jeremiah's prophecy four centuries into the future (rather close, in fact, to the time when, according to many scholars, this part of the book of Daniel was probably composed). Similarly, the Dead Sea Scrolls have yielded many examples of ancient *pesharim* ("actualized interpretations") whereby the prophecies of Habakkuk, Nahum, and other biblical prophets are explained as referring to the politics of Roman-occupied Palestine centuries after these prophets themselves had lived. The early Christian interpretation of the prophecies of Isaiah and other Old Testament figures are another well-known instance of making ancient works relevant. And, as will be seen in the following chapters, the same fundamental assumption was held to be true about *all* of the Hebrew Bible, the songs and psalms and prayers and laws and narratives it contained. Everything was held to apply to present-day readers and to contain within it an imperative for adoption and application to the readers' own lives. Paul's observation about the biblical narrative of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert,

> Now these things [that happened to the Israelites in the desert] happened to them as a warning, **but they were written down for our instruction**, upon whom the end of the ages has come —1 Cor. 10:11

is merely one formulation of an assumption that had long characterized ancient biblical interpretation. For Paul, as for all ancient interpreters, the Bible is not *essentially* a record of things that happened or were spoken in the past. That they

happened is of course true; but if they were written down in the Bible, it was not so as to record what has occurred in some distant past, but "for our instruction," so that, by reading the sacred text whose material comes to us from the past, we might learn some vital lesson for our own lives.

The third basic assumption is that Scripture is perfect and perfectly harmonious. By this I mean, first of all, that there is no mistake in the Bible, and anything that might look like a mistake—the fact that, for example, Gen. 15:13 asserts that the Israelites "will be oppressed for four hundred years" in Egypt, while Exod. 12:41 speaks of 430 years, whereas a calculation based on biblical genealogies yielded a figure of 210 years—must therefore be an illusion to be clarified by proper interpretation.

But this third assumption goes well beyond the rejection of apparent mistakes or inconsistencies. It posits a perfect harmony between the Bible's various parts. Again, a comparison with other texts might be illuminating here. In an anthology of texts in English or Latin, for example, written by many authors over a period of more than a thousand years in diverse locales and under different political regimes and cultural norms, we would hardly expect to find absolute uniformity of views. One text would disagree with another not only in fundamental matters of orientation and belief, but even in its presentation of past events, since people's view of history tends to be colored by their own ideologies and, of course, to change radically over time. Yet with regard to Scripture—precisely because it was Scripture, a body of *sacred* writings—ancient interpreters adopted a different approach. They sought to discover the basic harmony underlying apparently discordant words, since all of Scripture, in their view, must speak with one voice. By the same logic, any biblical text might illuminate any other: Josh. 24:2–3 might provide some of the background information necessary for an understanding of God's words to Abraham in Gen. 12:1–3, and Prov. 10:8 might be a reference to Moses' meritorious deed in Exod. 13:19.

Taken to its extreme, this same view of Scripture's perfection ultimately led to the doctrine of "omnisignificance," whereby nothing in Scripture is said in vain or for rhetorical flourish: every detail is important, everything is intended to impart some teaching. While this doctrine finds its fullest expression in rabbinic writings, its traces can be found far earlier. Thus, the fact that Jacob is said to dwell "in tents" (Gen. 25:27) was used to support the notion that he, unlike his brother Esau, had had some sort of schooling—that is, the plural "tents" here is interpreted to imply at least two tents, one for a school and one for home. This understanding of the special significance of "tents" is openly stated in some rabbinic texts, but it probably underlies as well the assertion that Jacob "learned to read" in the book of *Jubilees* (19:14). In the same vein, the fact that Lev. 19:17 uses the emphatically "doubled" form of the word "reproach" suggested to Ben Sira that two different acts of reproaching were being urged, one before the misdeed occurs, and another afterward (Sir. 19:13–14). In similar fashion, all sorts of other, apparently insignificant details in the Bible—an unusual word or grammatical form, any repetition, the juxtaposition of one law to another or one story to another—all were read as potentially significant, a manifestation of Scripture's perfection.

Finally, it should be noted that this perfection of Scripture of course included

the conduct of biblical heroes or the content of Scripture's own teachings. Thus, Abraham, Jacob, and other meritorious figures ought not to behave in unseemly fashion, and if at times they appeared to do so, ancient interpreters frequently saw themselves as obliged to come to the rescue. As just mentioned, when Dinah's brothers speak deceitfully to the men of Shechem (Gen. 34:13), "*deceitfully* really means 'with wisdom.'" This assertion reflects the belief not only that Scripture speaks, or can speak, cryptically, but that Scripture's very nature is such that it would scarcely seek to present Jacob's sons as a bunch of liars. Something else *must* have been meant, for Scripture is, in regard to its teachings as well, perfect. Similarly, although Rachel is said to have stolen her father's household gods (Gen. 31:19), she must not really have *stolen* them so much as taken them to protect her father from sin or for some other worthy purpose. Likewise, if a given interpreter believed (as the author of *Jubilees* did) that the moon has no role in determining the time of festivals or the duration of months, then all scriptural texts, even Gen. 1:14–18, had to be shown to conform to this view. Scripture's perfection, in other words, ultimately included its being in accord with the interpreter's own ideas, standards of conduct, and the like.

The fourth assumption is that all of Scripture is somehow divinely sanctioned, of divine provenance, or divinely inspired. Needless to say, much of Scripture itself asserts that its words come from God: "Thus says the Lord" is the introductory proclamation of many a prophet, and biblical laws in the Pentateuch are frequently introduced with "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying . . ." Yet this very fact might have implied to ancient interpreters that the rest of Scripture was somehow of human fashioning—that, for example, the history of intrigue in David's court, or the corpus of supplications and praises directed *to* God in the book of Psalms, or many other texts within the canon could not have come *from* God in the same manner as divine prophecies or laws.

I have saved this fourth assumption for last because it is the one least frequently in evidence: particularly among the most ancient interpreters, the subject of the divine provenance of Scripture as a whole is hardly even addressed. What is more, the common practice of interpreters writing in Greek to refer to "Moses," "David," "Solomon," and others as the authors of this or that biblical composition—without further reference to them as mere conduits of the divine word—might suggest that, for such interpreters, the biblical compositions in question were fundamentally the product of human authors, however extraordinary the humans in question might be. But this is hardly so for a great many Greek-writing interpreters (as Philo of Alexandria, for example, makes clear), and evidence of the contrary view is occasionally explicit. In particular, a certain explanation of Gen. 34:7 found in the book of Judith (see Chapter 13) gives clear testimony that its author believed the divine authorship of Scripture to extend to the ordinary narrative fabric of biblical books: God was, according to this author, the omniscient narrator of Genesis. The author of *Jubilees* similarly believed all of the Genesis narratives to be of divine provenance—as much so as the laws of Exodus through Deuteronomy that are specifically attributed to God. Indeed, *Jubilees* likewise maintains that later scriptural books (apparently including, among others, Isaiah and Psalms) were inscribed in

the "heavenly tablets" long before the human transmitters of these texts had even been born. A text from among the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11QPs.[a], similarly asserts that David's songs and psalms were "given to him from the Most High," and this belief is reflected as well in Philo of Alexandria and Acts 2:30–31.[13]

If this is so, it would nevertheless be a mistake, in my opinion, to assume that this fourth assumption stands behind the other three—that, in other words, first it was assumed that all of Scripture is of divine provenance or inspiration, and then out of this first assumption developed the others surveyed above, that all of Scripture is perfect, fundamentally relevant, and cryptic in its form of expression. To begin with, these things do not *necessarily* follow from the assumption of divine provenance (although I admit that, with regard to Scripture's perfection, a certain logical connection exists). But, more to the point, I do not believe that the interpretive texts themselves suggest such a sequence of events. As noted, the divine provenance of all of Scripture is a notion specifically addressed only rather late in the history of ancient interpreters, and it even seems to be contradicted here or there by some ancient writers, whereas the first three assumptions are attested across the whole spectrum of ancient interpreters, early and often. This is not the place to elaborate such a hypothesis, but my own belief is that the first three of the assumptions named are evidenced within the Hebrew Bible itself, indeed, they extend back even to parts of the Bible written before the Babylonian exile. If the fourth assumption is plainly stated about *some* parts of Scripture, it apparently did not come to be extended in homogeneous fashion to Scripture as a whole until a relatively late period. Therefore, I must reject the notion that assumptions 1, 2, and 3 developed out of assumption 4.

How Interpreters Interpreted

Bearing in mind these four assumptions will help in understanding why interpreters say what they do about the biblical text. Convinced that Scripture was a fundamentally cryptic document, they scrutinized its every detail in search of hidden meaning. That meaning was to be, by definition, relevant to the situation of the interpreter and his listeners—not some insight into the historical circumstances in which the text was originally written, but a message of immediate value and applicability, either a timeless moral truth or a law to be observed in one particular fashion or something bearing in some other way on the present or the immediate future. In searching for such a message, the interpreter could rest assured that no detail in Scripture's manner of speaking was insignificant, nor would there be any inconsistency between what is said in one place and what is said in another, nor any lesson that contradicted right thinking. For that reason, any apparent contradiction, or unnecessary detail or repetition or even an emphatic turn of phrase, seemed to be an invitation to the interpreter to look deeply into the text's words and so discover its *real* meaning, the hidden, relevant, perfect truth that only befit the word of God.

13. Kugel, "David the Prophet."

Indeed, the examples of interpretation already glimpsed in the Wisdom of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon may serve as a ready illustration of these ideas. Thus, the brief mention of Enoch in Gen. 5:18–24 says nothing about repentance, and a normal reader of the text nowadays would probably assume that Enoch's particular virtue had simply been omitted by the Bible; it says that Enoch "walked with God" without giving any further details. But an interpreter convinced of our first assumption, that Scripture is fundamentally cryptic, would be moved thereby to look more deeply—leading him, as we have seen, to Ben Sira's conclusion that Enoch's virtue was, specifically, repentance. And what greater expression of the second assumption than Ben Sira's own assertion that Enoch is not merely some obscure figure from the distant past but "an example of repentance *to all generations*"? As for the third assumption, we saw how the Wisdom of Solomon sought to resolve the apparent contradiction in Scripture with regard to the drowned Egyptians: first they sank to the bottom of the sea, then they were vomited up again onto the shore. Underlying this piece of exegesis is the conviction that Scripture does not contradict itself or even exaggerate: if the song of Exodus 15 says that the Egyptians sank "like a stone" but the preceding narrative has them "dead upon the shore," then both statements must be shown to be true. With regard to the fourth assumption, Ben Sira's assertion that the "book of the covenant of the Most High" is nought but divine wisdom (Sir. 24:23) is, while not an utterly unambiguous statement of the divine provenance of all Scripture, rather representative of the sort of programmatic formulations of this assumption that survive from our most ancient interpreters.

Clues from the Text

One aspect of the way interpreters interpreted needs to be highlighted. It is frequently said that these ancient writers played fast and loose with the Bible, twisting the plain sense of the text to fit their own ideology or the events of their own day, creating all manner of imaginative additions to what the Bible itself says. This is true, but to say only this is to miss the point about how ancient interpreters worked.

The formal starting point for ancient interpreters is always Scripture itself. An interpreter may be eager to assert that, for example, the Platonic doctrine of ideal forms is found in the Bible, or that Israel's prophets predicted the fall of the Roman empire, or that Jacob did not really deceive his father into giving him a blessing intended for his brother, Esau, or that the crucifixion of Jesus is an event foreshadowed in Hebrew Scripture centuries earlier. Interpreters did claim all these things, and more, but they did not simply claim them: they anchored their claims in some detail, however insignificant, found in the biblical text itself. That is to say, no matter how far-reaching or inventive the assertions of ancient biblical interpretation, they are formally a kind of exegesis. The Platonic doctrine of ideal forms is therefore evidenced in the Bible via a particular feature of the text, the fact that God created a "heavenly man" in Genesis 1 who was somehow different from the earthly one in Genesis 2. Similarly, Rome's fall is amply foretold by the prophet Obadiah, if only one understands—on the basis of Gen. 27:40 and other texts—that the words

addressed to "Edom" in Obad. 1:4 are really meant for Rome. As for Jacob, he certainly would not lie to his father—and he doesn't, so long as his words in Gen. 27:19 and 24 undergo a radical repunctuation. That the crucifixion had been foreshadowed of old was supported through a reading of the Genesis account of the binding of Isaac, wherein even Jesus' crown of thorns was present in the text's reference to a "thicket" at the place of the offering (Gen. 22:13).

The foregoing are all examples of what one might call, broadly speaking, ideologically motivated interpretations—the interpreter clearly wishes to get the text to say something that accords with his own ideology or outlook. Yet it would be wrong to imply that interpreters were *always* motivated by ideology or some outside interest, that they were always seeking to import some extrabiblical doctrine or political stand into the world of the Bible. Very often their primary or sole motivation appears to be making sense out of the biblical text—but making sense out of *all* of it, its little details, chance juxtapositions, everything. For, once the rules of interpretive procedure had been established, the biblical text seemed virtually to invite the interpreter to try his hand at seeking out its fullest possible meaning. In so doing, interpreters were indeed quite free, reconstructing conversations never reported by the biblical narrator, recounting whole incidents somehow omitted in the narrative itself, connecting this with that in the most creative fashion. But if interpreters were, in this sense, free, it was because the text had granted them this freedom by including some unusual turn of phrase or repetition or unexplained ellipsis. By the rules of interpretation implied in the Four Assumptions, such creative turns are simply part of the business of interpreting. They could be used for some ulterior motive, but often they were not.

This point is important because many modern studies of the texts that talk about biblical figures or biblical stories have focused on their "ideological" side. Scholars have tended to assume that if an ancient author deviated from the biblical narrative in his retelling of it, that deviation must somehow have been motivated by the reteller's political allegiance or religious agenda or some other matter of ideology, or it must at least have been an attempt (if only an unconscious one) to retroject the realities of the reteller's own time back to the time of the biblical narrative. Such factors certainly did affect the way biblical stories were retold. But to these factors should be added another extremely significant one, the desire to explain the biblical text, to account for its particulars in one fashion or another.

In general, the attempt to distinguish between "pure" exegesis among ancient interpreters and exegesis that is ideologically or politically motivated is doomed to fail for any large sampling of texts. On the one hand, "pure" exegesis as such does not really exist. The ancient interpreter *always* had an axe to grind, always had a bit of an ulterior motive: at the very least, this interpreter wished to convince listeners or readers that the text means something other than what it might seem to mean at first glance, that his clever way of explaining things reveals the text's true significance. Sometimes that "true" significance does indeed turn out to correspond to something current in the interpreter's own world, some part of the political or religious or intellectual backdrop. Often, however, it does not: the interpretation is just that, an attempt to make sense of the text, albeit in keeping with the freewheel-

ing methods suggested by the Four Assumptions charted above. Moreover, even in the case of blatantly ideological interpretations, it is usually quite difficult to decide whether a given interpreter set out to patrol all of Scripture in search of a place to "plant" an expression of his own ideology, or whether, on the contrary, faced with a particular exegetical stimulus in the biblical text—an unusual word, an apparent incongruity, or the like—the interpreter came up with an explanation that, in one way or another, also reflected his own ideology or the issues of his day.[14] For these reasons, it seems best to leave aside any distinction between "pure" and other forms of exegesis.

The Heritage of Wisdom

I should add that, in everything that has been said thus far about the methods of ancient interpretation, the heritage of wisdom is clearly visible. For, as was mentioned earlier, wise men of old had packaged their insights in clever proverbs that often demanded sustained scrutiny by later sages and students of wisdom in order to be fully understood. Schooled in these techniques, sages quite naturally brought them to bear on Scripture: were not *its* words just as likely to be cryptic, esoteric, in need of sustained contemplation in order to be fully understood? Likewise, the very conception of Scripture as a great corpus of divine instruction whose lessons, therefore, are relevant to every age—is not this also a projection of the sage's assumptions about wisdom literature onto *all* of Israel's variegated corpus of ancient writings? The treatment of various biblical figures as examples, models of proper conduct, is similarly a sagely construct. Indeed, it is certainly significant, in the light of wisdom literature's polarized division of humanity into the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish, that a similar polarization takes place in ancient exegesis: biblical heroes are altogether good, with any fault air-brushed away, whereas figures like Esau or Balaam are altogether demonized—as if their neither-good-nor-evil status in the Bible itself was somehow intolerable. (The most persuasive instances of such polarization occur with figures like Lot or Enosh, simultaneously demonized by one group of interpreters while pronounced altogether righteous by another. Apparently they could go one way or another, but not remain in the intolerable ambiguity of the middle.)[15] On another occasion it might be profitable to explore the "wisdom connection" in ancient interpretation in greater detail.[16]

14. I have tried to illustrate some of the difficulties involved in making such a distinction in *In Potiphar's House,* 248–251.

15. See below, Chapter 10; see also Loader, *Tale of Two Cities;* Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation.*

16. Particularly suggestive in connection with this topic is Otzen, "Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Dualistic Thinking." "Dualistic thinking" in his definition includes not only the polarization of humanity into good and evil or wise and foolish, but as well such dualisms as the "sons of light/sons of darkness" and "two spirits" found at Qumran. See also such texts as Sir. 15:14–20, *Testament of Asher* 1:3–5, Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 82–84, and Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female.*

Where Is Interpretation Found?

In the past, the quantity of surviving ancient biblical interpretations has frequently been understated. This is because of a peculiar feature of the way ancient interpreters presented their material; with a few exceptions (Philo of Alexandria, some Dead Sea Scrolls texts), they did not write commentaries as such, mentioning a biblical verse and then offering their own interpretation of it. Instead, they followed the practice of *substitution:* in place of the element to be explained, X, the interpreter simply substituted his explanation, Y. This practice can operate on the level of a single word, whereby, for example, a difficult term no longer widely understood is replaced by a word in common use, or—as was glimpsed earlier—an ideologically difficult word (like "deceitfully" in Gen. 34:13) is replaced by a more acceptable term ("with wisdom"). But substitution can go well beyond a single word: as will be seen in Chapter 4, interpreters inserted, as the direct object of the verb "say" in Gen. 4:8, a whole conversation between Cain and Abel not found in the Bible itself, and in place of a cryptic reference in Gen. 49:24 they inserted a little story to the effect that Joseph was saved from sinning with Potiphar's wife because of the sudden appearance of his father's face at the critical moment. But the point is that these explanations were simply inserted in a re-presentation of the biblical text: they were not labeled or specifically presented as interpretation or commentary.

Because interpreters tended to substitute for, rather than comment upon, difficulties in the text, there emerged the genre of writing known to modern scholars as "The Rewritten [or "Retold"] Bible."[17] The Rewritten Bible is really the interpreted Bible: an ancient interpreter—the author of *Jubilees* or the Wisdom of Solomon or the *Book of Biblical Antiquities*—retells a biblical story or group of stories *with the interpretations already inserted in the text.* Sometimes, as in the case of *Jubilees,* the retelling is a calculated, highly self- conscious attempt to explain Scripture (and, in this particular case, to explain it in keeping with a definite political and religious program). Other retellers of Scripture seem less self-conscious: sometimes the reteller himself may not even be aware where the biblical text leaves off and the interpretation begins, since he is simply passing along what he has heard or learned as a child is the meaning of a biblical text. In either case, however, the Rewritten Bible (whether one is talking about an extended retelling of whole biblical books, or the "retelling" of a single verse) should be recognized for what it is: the most popular transmitter of biblical interpretation among ancient writers.

This being the case, the first step in studying ancient biblical interpretation is to identify it, to sift carefully any restatement of a biblical law or any retelling of, or allusion to, a biblical narrative or prophecy or song, in order to isolate the interpretive elements. Often, this is not easy. An ordinary reader, unschooled in the ways of ancient interpretation, would probably not recognize as such *any* of the interpretations examined above: "a model of repentance," "reward for their labors," "cast them up from the depth"—these would doubtless strike most readers as simple restatement, not interpretation. It is therefore necessary to scrutinize all potentially

17. This term was apparently first used by Vermes; see his *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies.*

interpretive texts with great care. The best guide in such scrutiny is the Bible itself: any deviation from its words, no matter how slight, may conceal an ancient interpretation of those words. (To be sure, some deviations are quite innocent; this too makes difficult the job of isolating interpretive material.)

The Exegetical Motif

Ancient biblical interpretation is an interpretation of verses, not stories.[18] Precisely because they focused their attention on the little details of the biblical text, interpreters tended to pass on their insights in the form of verse-centered comments: "The word 'water' here means divine learning," "What the brothers told Shechem [in Gen. 34:13] was actually true." It is not that the overall significance of a particular story was neglected: Ben Sira, for example, sums up in a single phrase the whole significance of Abraham's offering up of his son Isaac, "He [Abraham] was found faithful when tested" (Sir. 44:20), and does the same for numerous other biblical narratives in the same catalog of biblical heroes (Sirach 44–49). But such summary treatment could hardly be regarded as *insightful:* any fool could figure such things out! The true insight was to realize that, for example, the opening verse of the story of the offering of Isaac, "And it came to pass, *after these things*" (Gen. 22:1), was actually an allusion to the previous tests that Abraham had undergone or, alternately, to certain "words" that had been spoken against Abraham in heaven (on both, see Chapter 9). And so it was such localized insights as these that tended to circulate, passed from one sage to another or from teacher to pupil. (Again, the heritage of wisdom here is clear.)

Thus, interpreters frequently explained biblical texts by retelling them, explaining in their own words not just what Scripture said but what Scripture meant. In the process, several, or even many, little, verse-centered explanations—either those created by the reteller himself, or someone else's explanations that the reteller had learned—became incorporated into an overall rewording of the text in question. Such retellings are found in a variety of ancient documents: in a brief prayer made by the heroine of the book of Judith; in Josephus' multivolume retelling of all of biblical history; in Abraham's first-person account of his trip to Egypt in the *Genesis Apocryphon;* and so forth.

How does one go about studying the biblical interpretation found in such retellings? Precisely because they tend to incorporate a number of separate, discrete insights into particular verses, the smooth-flowing unity of these retellings is deceptive. All too often in the past, scholars have dealt with things like "Josephus' Version of the Exodus" as if it were all of a piece, the sustained reflection of a single interpreter contemplating a large chunk of the biblical text. This is misleading on two counts. First, Josephus—like all his predecessors—had his eye on individual verses or even single words or phrases within individual verses. When, therefore, in retelling the story of the exodus or any other biblical narrative, he deviates from what the Bible itself seems to be saying, it is usually because he is expanding upon some little particularity in the narrative. True, these insights are strung together into

18. At greater length, see Kugel, "Two Introductions."

a continuous narrative, Josephus' retelling of the exodus. But from the standpoint of biblical interpretation, it is most important not to lose sight of the trees for the forest: Josephus' "interpretation" consists of *interpretations,* little insights—selected, to be sure, molded into a seamless narrative stamped with his own personal seal, but nonetheless capable of being broken down into its constitutive elements and connected with specific verses or even words. For this same reason "Josephus' Version of the Exodus" is misleading on a second count as well: it is not Josephus' alone. Many of the little insights that Josephus passes along are ones attested a century or more earlier in the writings of other people. It is highly unlikely that Josephus and these earlier figures all arrived at their interpretations independently (although this *may* happen every once in a while). After all, Josephus himself recounts how, as a youth, he was educated in traditional religious instruction (*Life* 7–12)—indeed, he was uniquely well acquainted with different schools of interpreters in his day—and he otherwise shows a broad awareness of exegetical traditions and even individual authors (he refers by name on one occasion to Philo of Alexandria, *Jewish Antiquities* 18:259–260). In a great many instances, therefore, Josephus' retellings of biblical stories are most likely an amalgam of things he has learned from different sources—indeed, at times he himself may not always be aware that what he is telling *is* interpretation and not, or not necessarily, a straightforward duplication of the biblical text alone.[19]

When I first began working on this book, I did not appreciate the extent to which the foregoing was true. I began by assembling long passages from different ancient authors relating to a given biblical story, and I dealt with each retelling as a unit, comparing, for instance, Philo's version of Abraham's departure from Ur with that found in the book of *Jubilees.* After a time, however, I realized that this was the wrong way to proceed: even the briefest allusion to a biblical story in an ancient writer may sometimes involve two or three quite distinct bits of traditional interpretation. Take, for example, Augustine's opening sentence in his discussion of the binding of Isaac:

> Among **other things, the sum of which it would take too long a time to mention,** Abraham was tested with regard to the offering up of his beloved son Isaac, in order to prove his obedience to God and **make it known to the world,** not to God. —Augustine, *City of God* 16.32

The indicated phrases actually refer to two quite distinct interpretive traditions about the offering of Isaac, neither of which originated with Augustine. The first is a tradition mentioned earlier, to the effect that Abraham had undergone *other* tests prior to that of the offering of Isaac (which is specifically labeled as a test in Gen. 22:1). The notion that Abraham had undergone a series of tests is found as early as the book of *Jubilees,* six hundred years before Augustine—indeed, *Jubilees* specifies, as do later, rabbinic sources, that the total number of tests undergone by Abraham was ten (see Chapter 9). Augustine does no more than allude to this tradition here,[20]

19. See Feldman, "Use, Authority, and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus," esp. 471–476.

20. Unless his use of the phrase "other things" is intended to invoke the biblical phrase "After these *things*" (Gen. 22:1) to which this tradition was attached.

apparently because he felt it would be known to at least some readers; in any case, he is clearly recycling earlier interpretive material. The other bit of traditional interpretation in this sentence is the idea that God put Abraham to the test not in order to discover whether or not he would pass—for certainly an omniscient deity knew the answer to that question in advance, and besides, according to the first tradition Abraham's faith had already been amply tested on prior occasions—but in order to make Abraham's faith "known to the world." Again this is an ancient tradition—attested in *Jubilees* and, somewhat later, in Pseudo-Philo's *Book of Biblical Antiquities*—which is ultimately based on the reading of the Hebrew phrase "now I know" *(yāda'tî)* in Gen. 22:12 as if it read "now I have made known" *(yidda'tî)*. (Augustine knew the tradition, though he certainly did not know this textual justification, since he did not know Hebrew.)[21]

The composite nature of such retellings or reflections on Scripture is the rule among ancient interpreters, not the exception—and such composites are sometimes found even in our earliest sources, like *Jubilees* or *1 Enoch*. The following representative passage from a slightly later text, *The Testament of Levi*, concerns the revenge taken by Jacob's sons Levi and Simeon in Genesis 34:

> [Levi recalls:] And after this I counseled my father and Reuben my brother **to bid the sons of Hamor not to be circumcised**; for I was zealous because of the abomination which they had wrought on my sister. And **I killed Shechem first, and Simeon [killed] Hamor**. And after that **the brothers came and smote the city** with the edge of the sword. And father heard of it and was angry and distressed, because they had accepted the circumcision and had been killed after that, and in his blessings he did otherwise [that is, he cursed Simeon and Levi instead of blessing them: Gen. 49:7]. And we had sinned in going against his opinion, **and he became sick** on that day. But I saw that **God's verdict upon Shechem was "Guilty"**; for **they had sought to do the same thing** to Sarah and Rebecca as they had [now] done to Dinah our sister, but the Lord had stopped them. And in the same way they had persecuted Abraham our father when he was a stranger, and **they had acted against him to suppress his flocks** when they were big with young; and they had mistreated Ieblae, his homeborn slave. And **in this way they treated all strangers**, taking their wives by force and banishing them. But the anger of the Lord against them had reached its term. So I said to my father: Do not be angry, lord, because through you the Lord will reduce the Canaanites to nothing, and he will give their land to you and your seed after you. For **from this day on Shechem will be called a city of imbeciles**; for as a someone mocks a fool, so we mocked them; because **also they** had wrought folly in Israel in defiling our sister. — *Testament of Levi* 6:3–7:3

Each of the indicated phrases refers to a different interpretive tradition surrounding this biblical story. Some of them, such as the assertion that Jacob became sick as a result of the revenge attack, add details beyond what is explicitly said in the

21. The basis of these traditions was certainly known to Eastern Christianity: see Brock, "Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition."

biblical narrative itself. Others, such as Levi's claim that he had counseled his father and brother *not* to tell the Shechemites to undergo circumcision, or Levi's assertion that he and Simeon had killed only one man apiece and that the other Shechemites had been killed by his other brothers, actually seem to contradict what the Bible says. *All* of these traditions, however, are rooted in some peculiarity in the biblical text, justified, as it were, by a particular turn of phrase in the narrative. More to the point, however, even by the time that the *Testament of Levi* was written, much of this interpretive material was traditional, and a good deal of it is attested in sources still earlier than this testament. Indeed, in one matter the above passage contains (again, not atypically) two quite contradictory traditions. The first maintains that the collective slaughter of the Shechemites was justified since all of them had somehow participated in the rape of Dinah; this tradition is alluded to in the very last clause of the above passage. (The same tradition is found elsewhere—for example, in Jth. 9:2–4.) Another interpretive tradition, however, maintained that the collective punishment was justified because of the city's criminal past, its history of previous outrages. This tradition is set forth in the group of three sentences beginning "But I saw that God's verdict was: 'Guilty.'" Since both traditions arose to solve the same difficulty—the apparent unfairness of a collective punishment for crimes committed by one man alone—a single explanation would have sufficed. Indeed, a careful reader might ask, If the Shechemites were killed because they had all participated in the rape of Dinah, then why had God pronounced them guilty even before the rape occurred? But precisely because this author has heard two traditional explanations each of which he regards as authoritative, he incorporates them both, even when the result is redundancy or internal inconsistency.

Such is the nature of ancient biblical interpretation. Once propounded, interpretations circulated widely, passed on largely by word of mouth. Presented by authoritative teachers as insights into the particulars of the biblical text, these interpretations soon acquired an authority of their own: they were repeated and repeated, often combined with other bits of interpretation, sometimes modified in the process, sometimes misunderstood by later transmitters, and passed on further.

This being the case, it eventually became clear to me that talking about large units of text, "Josephus' Version of the Exodus" and the like, was the wrong way to proceed. The first task was to identify and discuss each and every component of larger units, each of the individual bits of interpretation out of which the larger retellings were made, and to try to identify the same or similar bits of interpretation in the retellings of other ancient authors. So it was that I came to focus this book not on large blocks of texts nor on their authors as such, but on *exegetical motifs*, the individual pieces of interpretation that circulated far and wide and found their way into the writings of different authors of that period.

Simply put, an exegetical motif is an explanation of a biblical verse (or phrase or word therein) that becomes the basis for some ancient writer's expansion or other alteration of what Scripture actually says: in paraphrasing or summarizing Scripture, the ancient writer incorporates the exegetical motif in his retelling and in so doing adds some minor detail or otherwise deviates from mere repetition or restatement of the Bible.

To return to the examples given above: an ancient interpreter, scrutinizing

Gen. 5:21–24, came to the conclusion that Enoch was a penitent sinner. Thus was born the exegetical motif that we might refer to as "Enoch the Penitent." In alluding to the story of Enoch, the book of Ben Sira incorporates this motif: Enoch "was an example of repentance to all generations."[22] Who was the originator of this motif? The fact that it appears for the first time in the book of Ben Sira does not necessarily mean that *that* is where it was first created. After all, the same motif is found not too much later in the writings of Philo, and it may be hinted at as well in the Wisdom of Solomon (4:14). Perhaps, then, even before Ben Sira, "Enoch the Penitent" was a motif that circulated widely. Similarly, an ancient interpreter scrutinizing the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea came to the conclusion that after they sank to the bottom of the sea, the Egyptians were lifted up again and deposited on the shore. Thus was born the exegetical motif that we might call "Ups and Downs of the Egyptians." This motif first appears in the Wisdom of Solomon and subsequently in the writings of Philo, Josephus, and later interpreters. Again, its original author is a matter of speculation.

As these examples imply, exegetical motifs circulated widely and soon acquired an authority of their own. They were the very fabric of ancient biblical interpretation. Individual authors may have put their own stamp on the motifs that they inherited, and even the choice to include or not include a given motif may reflect the tastes, ideology, or other particulars of a specific author. But the motifs themselves constituted the raw material out of which most ancient retellings and commentaries were made. For that reason I present the material in this book motif by motif, seeking to demonstrate in each case how different authors in different periods explained individual verses or episodes in similar fashion.

There are, of course, some things that are lost by focusing on these individual units of interpretation. Identifying common exegetical motifs does not tell us much about the specific authors who pass them along, about the particular "spin" that a certain author may seek to put on a given piece of Scripture, nor about how that spin may be attested elsewhere in his writings. Indeed, the individuality of a given text is somewhat submerged by focusing solely on the traditional motifs found within it. Moreover, merely identifying motifs common to different sources does not tell us anything about the history of their transmission—who borrowed what from whom. (Often it is impossible to piece such things together with any certainty, but sometimes we can do so, or at least make an educated guess.) And if, as may have happened in some cases, two interpreters came to the same conclusion quite independently, there is something misleading about treating both under a single rubric, as if both are attestations of a common tradition.

In recognizing these limitations, I hardly seek to belittle them. (Indeed, I myself have elsewhere spent some effort in, for example, trying to trace the development of specific motifs over the centuries, or charting the relationship between one ancient interpreter and another, or characterizing the overall exegetical approach of a single author.) But given the purpose of this book—to offer a detailed look at how the Bible was interpreted in antiquity, to show what the Bible essentially *was* in that

22. This is one form of the text; see above, n. 10.

period—I found it necessary to focus on motifs in and of themselves, both because such motifs were the actual building blocks of all larger retellings of biblical stories and passages, and because these building blocks are also the only sure guide to common elements found among different ancient authors.

Scripture or Interpretation?

Who were the ancient writers in whose books these exegetical motifs are found? For the most part, we do not know their names or their biographies, and often it is difficult to determine even approximately when or where they lived. Nevertheless, by examining their writings carefully we can determine some basic facts, and sometimes an illuminating detail or two will go far in helping us to understand what motivated these largely anonymous writers to say what they say.

Before discussing any individual authors or works, however, it is necessary to spell out an important truth: one man's interpreter is another's Scripture. For example, we have seen briefly that the biblical books of Chronicles and Daniel sometimes interpret Scripture, say, a verse from the book of Genesis or Jeremiah. From the standpoint of the authors of Chronicles or Daniel, these interpretations must have seemed just that. But to a biblical interpreter of, say, the first or second century C.E., Chronicles and Daniel were, no less than Genesis and Jeremiah, part of Scripture. For such an interpreter, the fact that Chronicles talks about something found in Genesis hardly makes Chronicles an *interpretation* of Genesis: both books were part of the great sacred corpus of Scripture, that seamless body of divine instruction that was held to be perfect and perfectly harmonious. Similarly, Ben Sira may have started out by attempting to (among other things) interpret Scripture, but for those ancient Jews and Christians who subsequently came to view Ben Sira's book as part of the Bible, the things that Ben Sira says about Enoch, Abraham, and other ancient figures simply became part of what *Scripture* has to say about Enoch, Abraham, and the others, that is, they became part of the corpus of things *to be interpreted.* Likewise, while the New Testament frequently interprets (or reflects earlier interpretations of) the Old Testament, for later Christians the New Testament is every bit as authoritative as the Old, and what it says about the heroes of Genesis is thus quite on a par with what Genesis says.

In other words, the corpus of what constitutes "Scripture" and is therefore the object of interpretation changed over time and varied from one group of readers to the next.[23] In compiling this book, I wanted to create a snapshot, or a portrait at least, of the Bible as it was interpreted for a specific period—roughly speaking, from

23. A further complication is presented by such books as *1 Enoch* or *Jubilees,* books that arguably were at one time considered by some readers to be as scriptural as Genesis or Exodus, but that later in the course of their transmission came to be viewed as less authoritative or altogether irrelevant. If so, then—for a time, at least—the interpretations contained within them must not have been viewed as interpretations at all: they were no less scriptural than the interpretations found in Chronicles or Daniel. Did not the books' subsequent change of status mean that these same interpretations reverted back to their original state, that is, turned from Scripture into interpretation (thereby reversing the path traced by the interpretations canonized in Chronicles and Daniel)?

about 200 B.C.E. through the first century or so C.E. This required defining, in somewhat arbitrary fashion, what "Scripture" would or would not include (since even within this period its content varied over time and from group to group).

The dividing line I have decided to adopt for this purpose is that of the so-called Jewish biblical canon (though this name is not particularly accurate, since only *some* Jews in the period covered accepted its boundaries). In other words, books like Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Psalms, and Daniel, even though they all contain here and there what is clearly interpretation of earlier biblical books, are considered for the purpose of this study to be Scripture, since they were all probably complete, or virtually complete, by the start of the period covered by this book, and were already considered by many to be Scripture. By contrast, books like *Jubilees,* Ben Sira, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the New Testament are used herein as witnesses to the state of biblical interpretation during the period covered, since these books were all apparently written within that period rather than before it; while all of them would eventually be treated as Scripture by one group or another, for purposes of this study they are not yet Scripture.[24]

Meet the Sources

The present volume contains ancient biblical interpretations culled from hundreds of different sources—far too many to present individually here. (The Terms and Sources section at the end of this volume contains a brief characterization of each work or author cited herein, along with an approximate dating of the work and related information.) Nevertheless, it might be useful at this point to introduce a few of these sources in order to provide some overview of the sorts of books in which ancient interpretive traditions are to be found. The following, then, are some of the most important ancient texts I used in compiling this book.

1 Enoch: There circulated in antiquity a number of works focusing on or attributed to Enoch—the same Enoch mentioned in Gen. 5:21–24 and discussed above. The very fact that this passage apparently asserted that Enoch had been "taken" by God while he was still alive seemed to imply that he continued to exist in heaven—indeed, that he exists there still. From such a vantage point, Enoch could presumably not only observe all that was happening on earth, but was privy to all the secrets of heaven, including the natural order and God's plans for humanity's future.

A number of anonymous writers who wished to discourse on such subjects attributed their writings to Enoch, and eventually a composite "Book of Enoch"—and then *Books* of Enoch—began to circulate. Our present *1 Enoch* is composed of a number of different works. Most or all were apparently originally written in

24. Having taken care of this matter of definition, I must add that I have been careful to breach it in the honoring whenever I judged it worthwhile. That is, in tracing what "the Bible" has to say about a particular matter, I have been careful to include, in addition to the Pentateuchal material itself, later reflections or elaborations found elsewhere within the Jewish canon. While I have necessarily treated such reflections and elaborations as Scripture, the alert reader will certainly recognize in many of them an earlier stage of biblical interpretation.

Aramaic, and parts of these Aramaic texts have turned up among the Dead Sea Scrolls (on which see below). The most ancient manuscripts found—drawn from the "Book of Luminaries" section (that is, chapters 72–82) of our present *1 Enoch*, and the "Book of the Watchers" (*1 Enoch* 1–36)—have been dated to the late third or early second century B.C.E.[25] Since these manuscripts are apparently only copies of a still earlier work, the date of at least these Enoch writings can be pushed back even earlier. They thus seem to be the oldest Jewish writings that have survived outside the Bible itself. New sections were eventually blended in with the old, and the entire Book of Enoch was subsequently translated into Greek and from Greek into ancient Ethiopic (Ge'ez), in which language alone the book survived in its entirety.

Scriptural interpretation was hardly the major concern of most of *1 Enoch*. The very figure of Enoch in this book may be modeled on that of a Mesopotamian sage, and the astronomical learning and other materials presented likewise bespeak the transmission of ancient, eastern lore.[26] Nevertheless, Enoch, Cain and Abel, Lamech, Methuselah, Noah, and other figures from the Bible, as well as incidents mentioned in biblical history, also appear, and in what is said about some of them it is possible to see the outline of some very ancient interpretation, in particular, a grappling with difficulties associated with the story of Noah and the flood.

Septuagint: Starting in the third century B.C.E., Hebrew Scripture began to be translated into Greek, apparently for the use of Greek-speaking Jews in Hellenistic centers like Alexandria, Egypt. A legend eventually sprang up about this translation to the effect that seventy, or seventy-two, Jewish elders were commissioned to do the translation of the Pentateuch, each in an isolated cell; when the translations were compared, they all agreed in every detail, for the translators had been divinely guided. As a result, this translation came to be known as the *Septuaginta* ("seventy"). (Subsequently, the name "Septuagint" also came to include the old Greek translation of the other books of the Hebrew Bible, a translation made in stages from the third to the first century B.C.E.)

Any translation by nature contains a good bit of interpretation: ambiguities in the original text can rarely be duplicated in translation and, as a result, the translator must take a stand and render the ambiguity one way or another. Moreover, translators aware of this or that traditional interpretation will sometimes incorporate it (consciously or otherwise) into their translation. For both these reasons, the Septuagint, although a fairly close rendering, can frequently provide information about how a particular verse or single word or phrase was understood by Jews as early as the third century B.C.E.

Jubilees: This book purports to contain a revelation given to Moses by the "angel of the Presence," one of the angels closest to God, at the time of the Sinai revelation. It takes the form of a retelling of the book of Genesis and the first part of Exodus:

25. The implications of this dating have been explored by Stone, *Scriptures, Sects, and Visions*, 37–47; idem, "Enoch, Aramaic Levi, and Sectarian Origins."

26. Grelot, "La légende d'Hénoch dans les apocryphes et dans la Bible"; idem,"La géographie mythique d'Hénoch et ses sources orientales"; Neugebauer, "Astronomy of the Book of Enoch."

the angel goes over the same material but fills in many details, sometimes shifting slightly the order of things and occasionally skipping over elements in the narrative. The book was originally written in Hebrew, and fragments of it have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. From Hebrew it was translated into Greek (parts of this translation still survive in quotations from Greek authors) and from Greek into Latin and Ge'ez. The (almost) complete text exists only in Ge'ez, though a substantial section is extant in Latin as well. Many scholars date the book to the middle of the second century B.C.E., while a few (myself included) favor an earlier date, perhaps at the beginning of the second century B.C.E. or even a decade or two before that.

The author of *Jubilees* is one of the heroes of the present study. This writer was a bold, innovative interpreter in his own right—one might say, without exaggeration, something of a genius—and subsequent generations valued highly, even venerated, his book's insights into Scripture. In seeking to retell the book of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, this author had a definite program: he wished to claim that this initial part of the Pentateuch, although it consists mostly of stories and does not contain any law code as such, had nonetheless been designed to impart legal instruction no less binding than the overt law codes found in the rest of the Pentateuch. In other words, by reading the stories of Genesis carefully, one could figure out all kinds of binding commandments that God had, as it were, hidden in the narrative. Reading in this fashion, the author of *Jubilees* was able to find a set of rules strictly defining what is permitted and forbidden on the Sabbath, regulations forbidding marriage between Jews and non-Jews, strictures against various forms of "fornication," and other subjects dear to this writer's heart. One interesting feature of the book is its claim that the true calendar ordained by God consisted of exactly 52 Sabbaths (364 days) per year and that the moon, whose waxing and waning determined the months and festivals for other Jews, ought rightly to have no such role in the true calendar. The author sought to show that this calendar, too, was implied by the stories of Genesis.

Apart from these pet issues, *Jubilees'* author ended up presenting a good deal more in the way of biblical interpretation. Some of these other interpretations may likewise have been of his own creation, but others were certainly widespread traditions at the time of his writing. One way or another, the book is a treasure of ancient thinking about the Bible. The Dead Sea Scrolls sect adopted the same calendar as that prescribed by *Jubilees,* and it is clear that the members of that group held this book in high esteem.

Wisdom of Ben Sira[ch]: Yeshu'a ben El'azar ben Sira is one of the rare Hebrew authors of this period known to us by name. He was a sage who wrote his book toward the beginning of the second century B.C.E., around the year 180 or so. From Hebrew the book was subsequently translated into Greek (by Ben Sira's own grandson) and became part of the Greek Bible of early Christianity; other ancient versions were made into Syriac and Latin (in which language it came to be known as "Ecclesiasticus"). Ben Sira's book was particularly beloved among the founders of rabbinic Judaism, but apparently because his identity was well known and the book was not attributed to some ancient worthy from the biblical past, they felt that

it could not be included in the rabbinic canon of Scripture, and the original Hebrew version of it was therefore eventually lost. The book survived for centuries only in translation. Substantial fragments of the Hebrew text were recovered at the end of the nineteenth century from five medieval manuscripts that had been stored in a Cairo synagogue; subsequently parts of the Hebrew original have turned up in ancient manuscripts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls and at nearby Masada.

Ben Sira was, as we have glimpsed briefly, a traditional sage who, characteristically for his period, saw in Scripture a great corpus of divine wisdom; he therefore made broad use of Scripture in writing his own book, including the lengthy catalog of biblical heroes mentioned earlier. But Ben Sira was a conservative in all things—a "classicist," one might say—and this catalog contains relatively little that is not explicitly stated in Scripture itself. He certainly was aware of many interpretive traditions, which, for one reason or another, he chose not to include in his book. This conservatism notwithstanding, the book does contain a number of interpretations from a relatively early stage of development.

Dead Sea Scrolls: This is the name popularly used for a group of manuscripts found in the general area of Khirbet Qumran, a site along the shores of the Dead Sea, starting in 1947. Justly described as the greatest manuscript find in history, this collection of biblical manuscripts and other writings seems to have belonged to a group of ascetic Jews who retreated to this desert locale perhaps in the second century B.C.E. and who continued to exist there until 68 C.E. The group may be identified with the Essenes, a religious sect described by Philo of Alexandria, Pliny the Elder, and Josephus; these Essenes may in turn be the same sect as the "Boethusians" known from rabbinic literature.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have provided a wealth of information about the history and development of the biblical text itself, about first-century Judaism and the roots of Christianity, and about biblical interpretation as it existed just before and after the start of the common era. The Dead Sea Scrolls texts cited in this book include the *Genesis Apocryphon,* the *Community Rule (Serekh Hayyaḥad),* the *Damascus Document,* the *Temple Scroll,* a *Genesis Pesher* (4Q252), the *Halakhic Letter* (4Q394-399), and others.

Wisdom of Solomon: This book was written in Greek, probably late in the first century B.C.E. or early in the first century C.E. by a Greek-speaking Jew from, most likely, Alexandria. The book presents itself as the wise writings of the biblical king Solomon; it contains a lengthy praise of, and exhortation to follow, the path of wisdom. As already mentioned, it also summarizes a good bit of Scripture in brief, gnomic sentences that reflect many of the interpretive traditions then current. The author may have inhabited Egypt, but he was well versed in interpretive traditions otherwise known to us in Hebrew or Aramaic, traditions that seem to stem, in other words, from the Jewish homeland.

The Wisdom of Solomon, or Book of Wisdom, was part of the Greek Bible of early Christianity and has remained, along with Ben Sira, Judith, and other books, as part of the Old Testament in many churches (although these books are classified by some as biblical Apocrypha or "Deutero-canonical" works).

Writings of Philo of Alexandria: Philo was another Greek-speaking Jew; he lived

in Alexandria from sometime before the start of the common era to around 40 C.E. He is the author of a multivolume series of commentaries on the Pentateuch. Philo inherited an already existing tradition of interpreting the Bible allegorically, a tradition that appears to have flourished in Alexandria. Philo championed this approach; for him, although biblical stories recounted historical events, they likewise had an "under-meaning" *(huponoia)* by which Abraham, Jacob, and other biblical figures were understood to represent abstractions or spiritual realities whose truth applied to all times and places. Philo explained many biblical texts in keeping with then-current Greek philosophical ideas.

Philo's allegorical explanations of Scripture were known to (for example) Josephus and perhaps as well to some rabbinic exegetes; his commentary may even have found a brief echo in the rabbinic work *Genesis Rabba.*[27] Apart from that, however, his works played almost no role in the later history of Jewish biblical interpretation.[28] They were, however, extraordinarily important to Alexandrine Christianity and, through the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and other Christian scholars, gained a place for his ideas and methods in much Christian biblical interpretation.[29]

New Testament: The varied writings that make up the New Testament were not conceived principally as an exposition of Scripture; nevertheless, in numerous places these texts set forth interpretations of Hebrew Scripture that were to prove (or already had proven) critical to the new church. Moreover, New Testament texts everywhere bear witness to exegetical traditions current among Jews in the first century C.E. or earlier and, as well, show just how important was the interpretation of Scripture within the early Christian movement. In addition to the expositions of Scripture found in Paul's letters and the frequent references to the Hebrew Bible scattered throughout the four Gospels, particularly significant for the present study is Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and the Letter to the Hebrews.

Incidentally, the New Testament is only part of the library of early Christians relevant to a consideration of ancient biblical interpretation; along with them, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (particularly *1 Clement,* the *Didache,* and the *Letter of Barnabas*), Justin Martyr, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ephraem Syrus, Aphrahat, and various later writers supply much of the material cited in the present study.

27. See on this Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature,* 74–78.

28. Winston, "Philo's *Nachleben.*"

29. A lively debate continues over the extent of Philo's acquaintance with biblical interpretation as it existed among his Jewish contemporaries in Judaea. See (inter alia): Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria als Ausleger;* Bousset, *Judischchristlicher Schulbetrieb in Alexandria und Rom;* Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung;* idem, *Altjüdische Allegoristik;* Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 5:viii–ix; Stein, *Philo und der Midrasch;* Wolfson, *Philo;* Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law;* idem, *Philo's Midrash;* Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism;* idem, "Parallelomania"; Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Ecriture;* Bamberger, "Philo and the Aggadah"; Rokeach, "Philo of Alexandria, Midrash, and Ancient Halakhah"; Grabbe, "Philo and Aggada." Even the last author, highly skeptical of certain others' claims, is prepared to concede that Philo knew "a modest amount" of aggadic traditions from elsewhere. My own feelings on this question are not given to easy summary, but in the end they are somewhat analogous to Kafka's words to the Jews of Prague: "You know more Yiddish than you think." (On the last, see Brod, *Franz Kafka,* 113.)

[*Flavius*] *Josephus:* Josephus was a Jewish writer who lived from c. 37 C.E. to c. 100 C.E. Born of a priestly family in Jerusalem, he was, by his own account, a gifted student who acquired a broad exposure to the different Jewish schools of thought existent in his own time. He served as a general in the great Jewish revolt against the Romans but was defeated and taken prisoner. (Josephus recounts that he prophesied that the Roman commander, Vespasian, would be made emperor; Vespasian spared Josephus' life and when, two years later, the prophecy came true, freed him.) After the war Josephus moved to Rome and composed, among other books, his multivolume *Jewish Antiquities.* This work, which purports to set forth the history of the Jews, begins by retelling much of the Hebrew Bible. Josephus' account is, as we have briefly seen, an amalgam of the biblical text itself and numerous interpretive traditions that accompanied it. This book is thus a valuable source of information about how Jews interpreted Scripture in the first century C.E.

Targums: Targum is a general name for a translation of the Hebrew Bible, or parts thereof, into Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew and spoken widely throughout the ancient Near East from the eighth century B.C.E. onward. Targums are not only interpretations in the sense already mentioned with regard to the Septuagint; some of them, notably *Targum Neophyti,* the *Fragment Targum,* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (all targums of the Pentateuch), contain frequent exegetical expansions of the biblical text, from a few words to entire paragraphs, not found in the original.

It is difficult to date targums with any certainty. *Targum Neophyti,* frequently cited on the following pages, may go back to the early second century C.E. (or perhaps slightly earlier); it is replete with ancient exegetical traditions. *Targum Onqelos* belongs to roughly the same period; while it sticks more closely to the actual text of the Pentateuch, it nevertheless supplies valuable insights into early biblical interpretation.

Composition and Aims of This Book

These brief sketches may give the uninitiated reader some idea of the sources used in this book, and with them this brief survey of the world of ancient interpreters is complete. Before, however, proceeding to the body of this book, I should perhaps add a final word about my intentions in compiling it, as well as some account of how I hope it may be used.

I did not get far into the present work before I began to worry about its eventual size. There was so much potential material that any one of its twenty-six chapters might in itself be turned into a book-length study. Indeed, some of the overall topics of various chapters—and even, in a few cases, a single exegetical motif therein—had already been the subject of someone else's whole book or monograph. Moreover, I soon began to amass a great deal of material which was altogether new and which, I felt, for that reason alone deserved to be published. All this would mean a book of considerable size, one that might overwhelm the ordinary reader.

From an early stage, therefore, I began to think in terms of two different

editions of the book. The first volume—published as *The Bible As It Was*[30]—presented only the most important, most influential, motifs I had studied, without lengthy discussion of technical matters. It was designed to reach as wide an audience as possible. The present volume, while hardly intended solely for specialists, seeks to offer a fuller and more complex picture of ancient biblical interpretation. It includes not only the well-known and influential motifs, but the sometimes quirky, ad hoc, and evanescent bits of interpretation attested only in one or two sources, as well as discussion of philological and other matters not appropriate for the first volume.

Lest readers of the present work lose sight of the forest for the trees, however, I have thought it wise to present the most important and influential motifs first, and only then to go into a discussion of some of the finer points. Accordingly, I have divided each chapter into two parts, the body of the chapter and the "Other Readings and Additional Notes" section. My hope is that anyone who wishes to have some sense of how the "image" of the most important persons or incidents in the Pentateuch came to be altered by ancient interpreters will find that information in the body of each chapter. The "Other Readings" section then seeks to complete each chapter with (1) additional motifs, (2) further discussion of motifs presented in the body of the chapter (these are identified by repeating exactly the title of the motif as identified in the body of the chapter), and (3) mention of specific scholarly works that might further illuminate the motif studied.

Even this larger edition has required a lot of pruning and judicious selection in order to be kept to publishable size. Such being the case, I should perhaps state from the beginning what this book, in either edition, is *not*. It is not a presentation of the whole of ancient biblical interpretation of the Pentateuch—far from it! Even this larger, annotated version falls considerably short of that goal. Within the time frame established for this book, the available material far exceeded what could be included. This book therefore represents a *selection* of some motifs from among many, and a *further selection* of some attestations of a given motif from among many. In deciding what material to include, I have been guided by three or four different principles.

In general, I have tried to favor the oldest attested motifs within the designated period. In fact, I have tried wherever possible to allow the oldest texts to determine my agenda. That is, I began by surveying the most ancient sources available—*1 Enoch, Jubilees,* the Septuagint, Ben Sira, and so forth—to find out which interpretive motifs are attested there; then I sought to trace the presence of the same motifs in later sources, while at the same time surveying these later sources for new motifs or new wrinkles in the older ones.

This goal of favoring the oldest may seem to run counter to another aspect of the book: here and there I have also tried to include attestations of some of the motifs selected found in sources at the end of, or even well beyond, my stated cutoff time of the late first or early second century. That is, while I tried to choose the

30. Harvard University Press, 1997.

motifs themselves on the basis of the earliest sources, I also sought to show in some cases how these same motifs survived into later Judaism and Christianity, specifically, into rabbinic and patristic writings. Of course, not all motifs did survive, and their survival or nonsurvival was not a factor in my selection of motifs. But where I was aware of a later attestation or echo of an ancient motif in a rabbinic or patristic text, I tried to include it.

In adducing these later, rabbinic or patristic, attestations of earlier traditions, I have made no effort to be inclusive, and even where I have mentioned such later parallels I have usually contented myself with a single reference from either group. These references are generally taken from the most popular or influential parts of those literatures—books like *Genesis Rabba* or the Babylonian Talmud, on the one hand, or references from Augustine or Jerome or (in the Eastern Church) Ephraem, on the other. I have also from time to time cited from two other late sources, the *Cave of Treasures* and the Slavonic *Paleya,* since these works often embody exegesis of a far earlier period and sometimes preserve what appear to be unique, ancient traditions.

In addition to all the above, one final principle has operated in my selection of materials. That principle is what might be called, broadly, "interest." All other things being equal, I have tried to include in this selection some of the most interesting motifs, or interestingly stated attestations of a motif, or some of the material that was to prove particularly influential in later times. I admit that this quality of interest is hard to define—I will not define it beyond what was just said—but I must in candor make mention of it in any explanation of how I went about including what I included.

Another disclaimer: This book is not about *influences.* As mentioned above, I have not set myself the job of tracing relations among the various sources listed or speculating about which text may or may not have been known to which authors. Of course, such things can sometimes be determined with certainty, and even when they cannot, an educated guess can sometimes be offered. But that is decidedly not the purpose of the present volume. What I wish to do here is to show how the Bible was interpreted in ancient times and what conclusions individual interpreters drew about the meaning of individual texts. The fact that two sources present the same or similar interpretations may in some cases be quite coincidental; in others it may represent a direct borrowing from source A on the part of source B; in others, a common source was shared by A and B; and in yet others, A's and B's conclusions, although arrived at quite independently, reflect not so much a coincidental resemblance as the fact that both interpreters had been "programmed" with the same set of instructions about *how* to go about interpreting—including, prominently, the four assumptions listed earlier—and moreover had approached the text in question equipped with a common stock of other interpretations that served as models of proper procedure.

It is sometimes possible to decide among these various alternatives, but that is not the purpose of this book: I have attempted simply to assemble the things that ancient interpreters said about different verses or episodes and, to the extent

possible, try to reconstruct the exegetical thinking that stands behind their assertions.[31] However, I would be less than candid if I failed to say that the material collected on the following pages is such as to persuade me, at least, that there indeed was a great common store of interpretations in antiquity, one that was widely known to interpreters and their audiences.

Having said all that this book does not do, let me now state briefly what it does seek to provide. The main purpose of this book is to present a detailed look at how the Bible was interpreted in the centuries just before and after the start of the common era—to show what the Bible essentially *was* in that period—and to do this by seeking to isolate and identify the principal interpretive traditions of, specifically, the Pentateuch as they are preserved in various ancient writings outside the Hebrew Bible itself. To be sure, any such reconstruction is bound to provide a somewhat distorted and only approximate picture. Community X or Group Y, or individual interpreters, certainly would have differed with this reconstruction on particular points: however much individual interpretations circulated and were held in common by different people, there was no single, universally accepted set of interpretations. But in choosing and organizing the material as I have, I hope that I have been able to provide an overall feeling for what Scripture as a whole meant for most Jews and Christians in the period covered, as well as to present in detail some of the most significant and widespread bits of interpretation known from that period.

I perhaps should make explicit here what some readers will have already understood, namely, my reason for focusing on the particular three centuries or so that I have. It was in these three centuries that Israel's ancient library of sacred texts were becoming *the* Bible. From the standpoint of scriptural interpretation, then, there could hardly have been a more crucial time than this one, and the overall interpretive methods, as well as a great many individual interpretations, that were developed in this period did eventually become "canonized" by Jews and Christians no less than the scriptural texts that they explained. Interpretations of course continued to be developed and elaborated in later times; yet it is certainly no exaggeration to say that the main lines of approach, as well as an enormous body of specific motifs, continued to be transmitted by Jews and Christians from this crucial period on through the Renaissance and beyond. In short, the period covered is the formative period for the interpretation of Scripture.

A second purpose, no less important than the first, is to show in detail the *how* of ancient biblical interpretation. As we have already glimpsed briefly, Scripture itself was the formal starting point for ancient biblical interpretation: the motifs that ancient interpreters created and transmitted addressed specific points in the text. All too often in the past this (broadly speaking) exegetical function has been

31. Despite this disclaimer, I fear that some may fail to understand this book's format (or even to read this introductory chapter) and consequently find me guilty of the sin made famous by Sandmel, "Parallelomania." It may therefore be appropriate here to repeat his definition: "We might for our purposes define parallelomania as that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation *as if implying a literary connection* flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction" (p. 1, emphasis added). It is precisely that possible literary connection that I have not addressed in this book.

neglected; to cite but the most illustrious example, Louis Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews* programmatically submerged the exegetical aspect of these motifs in order to turn them into a kind of folk literature, the *legends* of the Jews. But they are not legends, they are ways of explaining the biblical text.

Of course, the legends approach is not wrong in one respect: originally exegetical creations eventually did become *legendized.* Time and again in the history of the motifs' transmission, their particular connection to the biblical text came to be forgotten. The very genre of the Rewritten Bible encouraged this: one had to know the text and its problems virtually by heart in order to hear their solution in the rewriting. Doubtless many listeners and readers did, but eventually, the precise connection between text and motif sometimes came to be lost. Indeed, even in *pesharim,* commentaries, *quaestiones,* and the like—genres, that is, in which the biblical verse itself is first cited and then commented upon—one often finds that the original biblical site out of which a given motif arose has been lost and the motif attached to another verse.[32] Once they became separated from their original biblical sites, these exegetical motifs did in effect become something like legends, free-floating additions to biblical stories that were asserted to be true even though their textual justification had been lost. For just that reason, trying to figure out the relationship between an individual motif and the precise verse or word in Scripture upon which it depends is often a difficult, challenging task: a good bit of detective work and mental reconstruction are sometimes necessary. But figuring out this relationship is absolutely crucial, since it is the connection between text and motif that is the key to all ancient biblical interpretation. And so, a second purpose of this book has been to reconstruct, to the extent possible, the thinking that lies behind the ancient interpretive motifs collected herein.

Another purpose of this book—connected with its focus on motifs, as explained above—is to show the traditional nature of ancient biblical interpretation. I have set forth the reasons for which it seemed important to focus on motifs rather than on the individual documents in which these motifs are found, or on those documents' authors as individual shapers of the traditions. For the same reasons, I hope that by setting out clearly the way in which motifs are passed on and elaborated from generation to generation, the altogether traditional nature of ancient biblical interpretation will be apparent.

It might be said of Jews and Christians—in line with the well-known witticism about the English and the Americans—that they are divided by a common Scripture. This is certainly true, and in trying to restore the Bible As It Was and so trace interpretive elements common to both religions, I am in no way attempting to paper over the great differences that separate these two faiths, including, prominently, many matters of scriptural interpretation. Yet I must confess that a fourth purpose I have had constantly in mind in preparing the present volume is frankly ecumenical. What I wish to show is that, the history of Jewish-Christian polemics aside (and along with it the sad story of church-supported anti-Semitism), rabbinic Judaism and Christianity emerged out of a common mentality including, promi-

32. Again, I have presented several detailed examples in *In Potiphar's House.*

nently, a common set of beliefs about the Bible. In other words, it is not only Scripture itself, the written word, that Jews and Christians share. Both groups received, along with the written texts that make up the Hebrew Bible, the same set of attitudes about how the Bible ought to be read and explained, what it was meant for and how it was to be used. Moreover (as any reader of this book will see), both carried forward a substantial body of common explanations of individual words, verses, incidents, stories, songs, prayers, laws, and prophecies in Scripture. Of course, none of this is to suggest that the differences between Judaism and Christianity are somehow minor—they are not—nor is it my intention in pointing out communalities to encourage the wrongheaded efforts of those who, even as these lines are being written, have announced their renewed intention to bring about the "conversion of the Jews" by creating some strange hybrid of Christian teaching and traditional Jewish practices. Rather, it is simply my hope that in the present age, when many thoughtful Jews and Christians are trying to turn a dark page of history and seek out what, despite their distinctness, nonetheless unites them, this book may make some small contribution to an awareness of common beginnings.

How Each Motif Is Presented

Ancient interpretations are best broken down into individual interpretive motifs. In the chapters that follow I have therefore presented the material in this fashion, motif by motif. (Sometimes I have grouped together under a single rubric two or more related motifs that are nonetheless distinct; in so doing I have sacrificed a certain technical accuracy to my desire to present things in as straightforward and readable a fashion as possible.)[33] To each motif or group of related motifs I have given a brief title: "The Punishment Was Mortality," "The Garden in Heaven," "Abraham Saved from Fire." The titles appear as subheadings in the body of the chapter.[34]

In presenting each motif, I first seek to reconstruct why and how the motif may have developed; I then illustrate its existence with brief excerpts from ancient writings. I have kept these excerpts short, since all that I wish to show is that a particular way of understanding the biblical text is attested in ancient documents X, Y, and Z. I have generally stayed away from questions like "Did Y's author learn this interpretation from reading X?" or "Did the authors of documents Y and Z arrive at this interpretation independently, or did they have some common source?" As noted earlier, these are interesting, even fascinating questions, and answers to them sometimes can be put forward with reasonable certainty. In some cases, we can state unequivocally that Z's author read the book X; in other cases, we can just as unequivocally state that Z's author would have sooner died than open up X or be

33. In such cases I have generally tried to distinguish the individual subgroups by inserting some commentary—sometimes only the word "similarly"—between citations.

34. Sometimes I have grouped together quite different motifs whose only common element is that they all address the same difficulty within the biblical text. In such cases, I have phrased the title of the section as a question: "Why Did Joseph Put It Off?" "Whose Bad Idea?" "Which Ten Commandments?"

thought to have used it. In quite a few cases, it is reasonable to assume that the authors of X and Y drew on an earlier interpretive tradition known to both; in a few instances, a resemblance between X and Y seems utterly coincidental. As fascinating as this subject may be, however, it is somewhat beside the point here: my main goal is to investigate how these traditions arose and came to be widespread, not to reconstruct the specific steps involved in that transmission.

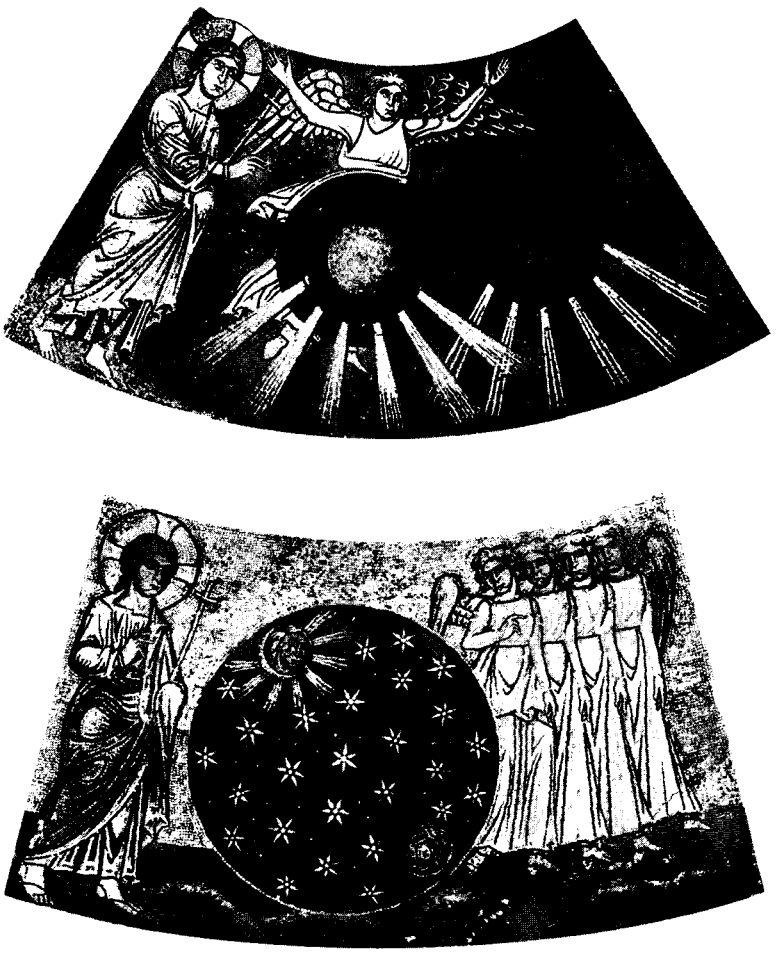
I have generally tried to present attestations of a particular motif in (rough) chronological order. However, when a later source seems to contain an earlier or more complete form of a motif, I do sometimes put the later source first. Likewise, I sometimes violate chronological order when a later source sets forth a particular motif more clearly or understandably than earlier sources. Since sources cited are all described and dated (to the extent possible) in the Terms and Sources section at the back of the book, I trust that this arrangement will not prove to be a source of confusion.

To make perfectly clear the transformative effect of traditional interpretation upon the biblical text, I decided to begin and end the body of each chapter with a brief summary, in italics. The opening italicized summary attempts to restate what an ordinary reader, knowing nothing but the words of the Bible itself, might think about the meaning of the biblical story or section in question. Then, at the end of the chapter—having surveyed some of the most important traditions of ancient interpreters—I summarize the story or section once again, this time with the ancient traditions included. The difference is of course striking: new details, sometimes whole new incidents, and a great deal of new "spin" now accompany the bare narrative. Although these summaries are necessarily somewhat simplified, comparing the one at the beginning of the chapter with the one at the end illustrates vividly how ancient traditions of interpretation changed utterly the meaning of the Bible.

2

The Creation of the World

(GENESIS 1:1–2:3)



God and someone else
(top) divide light from darkness, then (bottom)
create the sun, the moon, and the stars.

The Creation of the World

(GENESIS 1:1–2:3)

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The Bible begins with an account of God's creation of the world in six days: on the first day, light was created and separated from darkness; on the following days the sky and the earth were made, then plant life, heavenly lights, fish and reptiles, the animals and, lastly, humankind. Once the work was completed, God rested on the seventh day—the first Sabbath in the world.

THE BIBLE opens with the words "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But did this mean the *very* beginning? Many interpreters believed that it did not. They arrived at the conclusion that God's work must have begun even before He created heaven and earth. One reason for this belief was the Bible's discussion of the creation in a few places other than Genesis; in one of these, a passage from the book of Proverbs, Wisdom (here personified as a female figure) says the following:

> The Lord made me the **beginning** of his work, the first of his acts of old.
> Ages ago I was formed, before the establishment of the earth . . .
> When He made the heavens, I was already there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep.
>
> —Prov. 8:22–27

These words clearly state that God had created wisdom even before the heavens and the earth were made. (The idea that "wisdom"—that is, the great plan underlying all of reality—was of divine origin was in any case widespread in the ancient world.)[1] There was thus every reason to believe that the creation of wisdom had come at the very beginning of things; this fact was plainly stated in the book of Proverbs.

Wisdom Came First

And so, when ancient interpreters spoke about God's creation of the world, many mentioned specifically that wisdom existed even before the creation itself:

> One of our ancestors, Solomon [the reputed author of the biblical book of Proverbs], said more clearly and better that wisdom existed before heaven and earth, which agrees with what has been said [by Greek philosophers].
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 5 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.11)

1. See Chapter 1.

> [Wisdom says:] From eternity, in the beginning, He created me.
>
> —Sir. 24:9

> Wisdom is older than the creation . . . of the whole universe.
>
> —Philo, *On the Virtues* 62

> Two thousand years before the world was created, [God] created the Torah [that is, divine wisdom]. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 3:24

But if Scripture said that wisdom was created before all things, was this not because wisdom actually was to play some role in the creation of the rest of the world? Such an idea made good sense, and it was also suggested elsewhere in Scripture:

> But the Lord God is true . . . who made the earth with His power, established the world with His **wisdom**, and by His understanding stretched out the heavens. —Jer. 10:10, 12

> Oh Lord, how great are your works, with wisdom You have made them all.
>
> —Ps. 104:24

> The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, establishing the heavens with understanding.
>
> —Prov. 3:19

Many ancient interpreters therefore felt justified in asserting that wisdom was "present at the creation" or even had some part in creating the rest of the world:

> With you [O God] is wisdom, who knows your works and was **present** when you made the world, and who understands what is pleasing in your sight, and what is right according to your commandments. —Wisd. 9:9

> And who is to be considered the daughter of God but Wisdom, who is the firstborn mother of all things. —Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 4:97

> Blessed is He who created the earth with his power, who established the world with His wisdom.
>
> —(11QPs[a]) *Hymn to the Creator*

> God looked into the Torah [that is, the corpus of divine wisdom] and created the world. —*Genesis Rabba* 1:1

For reasons to be seen presently, wisdom was associated in particular with the creation of humanity on the sixth day:

> Having given order by your Wisdom, You created, saying, "Let us make man according our image and likeness."
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.34.6

> And on the sixth day I commanded my wisdom to create man.
>
> —*2 Enoch* 30:8

The "Beginning" Did It

But if wisdom was the first thing that God had created, and if God had in fact used it to create the rest of the world, then biblical interpreters had to wonder: why did the book of Genesis leave out this crucial detail? Why didn't the first verse in the Bible read: "In the beginning God created *wisdom,* and afterwards, the heavens and the earth"?

In looking for an answer, interpreters noticed a striking coincidence. In Prov. 8:22, wisdom says, "The Lord made me the *beginning* of his work," while the Genesis account opens, "In the *beginning* God created the heavens and the earth." Perhaps this was not just a coincidence. Perhaps the word "beginning" in the Genesis verse was in fact a subtle hint, an allusion, to wisdom. For, if wisdom is called the beginning of God's work in Proverbs, then (one might argue) the word "beginning" itself might be used elsewhere in the Bible as a kind of nickname for wisdom, a shorthand reference to the very first thing that God created. If so, then the first verse of Genesis could now be understood as meaning not "At the *start* God created the heavens and the earth" but "In [or "with"] *wisdom* God created the heavens and the earth." This is precisely how that verse was translated in two ancient translations of the Bible:

> With wisdom did God create and perfect the heavens and the earth.
>
> — *Fragment Targum* Gen. 1:1

> In the beginning with wisdom did God create . . .[2]
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 1:1

Similarly:

> By using different names for it, Moses indicates that the exalted, heavenly wisdom has many names: he calls it "**beginning**," "image," and "appearance of God." — Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 1:43

And so, interpreters came to the conclusion that not only was wisdom the first thing God created, but the phrase "In the beginning" in Gen. 1:1 was intended to imply that it was *by means of,* or with the help of, wisdom that God had created the world.

Now of course a modern reader might well object to this kind of interpretation. Was not the fact that the word "beginning" was used in both Gen. 1:1 and Prov. 8:22 really just a coincidence? And doesn't "In the beginning" in Gen. 1:1 mean just that, *at the start of* the creation of the world?

There is no single answer to this type of question, which comes up again and again with ancient biblical interpretation. It often happens that interpreters pass up what seems to us to be the more likely sense of a text in favor of some rather improbable meaning. Sometimes they do so because they *want* to read the text in that fashion—there is some doctrine or idea of their own (or some idea that they have inherited from elsewhere, from ancient Near Eastern tradition or Greek

2. This is an example of a "double translation," in which the original word is translated twice (here, both "in the beginning" and "with wisdom") to fit two different understandings of the text.

philosophy or some other source) for which they would like to find support in the Bible. Sometimes they depart from the straightforward meaning because they feel they *have to:* the text as is appears to them illogical or seems to contradict something found elsewhere in the Bible. And sometimes, they take an apparent pleasure in willful, even playful, distortion—as if the interpreter were saying: "Look, read the text my way and you will see that this or that surprising conclusion can be derived from it."

But behind any of these sorts of interpretations is the fundamental conviction that the Bible's precise wording is both utterly intentional—that is, nothing in the Bible is said by chance or said in vain—and infinitely significant.[3] This meant that almost every aspect of the biblical text *ought* to be looked into, and that almost any sort of interpretive subtlety was justified in explaining it. The slightest unusual feature in its manner of expression—even a coincidence like the appearance of the word "beginning" in both Gen. 1:1 and Prov. 8:22—could not be dismissed as mere accident. Thus, ancient interpreters had a large task before them, but they also had enormous freedom as interpreters. For, once it was understood that Scripture required deep investigation in order for its full sense to be revealed, the groundwork was laid for interpretations that sometimes departed drastically from what the text seemed to be saying. In this way, it became possible to conclude that by the word "beginning" in Gen. 1:1 the Bible had really meant "wisdom."

A Special Light

God says on the first day, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). But the light created on the first day could not have been sunlight or the light of the moon or stars, since these heavenly bodies were not created until the fourth day. Many ancient writers therefore said that it was a special light that enabled God to see as He created the world:

> Then You commanded that a ray of light be brought forth from your treasuries, so that your works might then appear. —*4 Ezra* 6:40

If so, then perhaps it was a light unlike any other, one that illuminated all of creation at once:

> . . . the first [day], the one in which the light was born by which **all things** are seen together.
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 3 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.9)

> God commanded that there should be light. And when this had come about, He considered **all of matter.** —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:27

> [After summoning light, God says:] And I was in the midst of the light. And light out of light is carried thus. And the great age came out, and it revealed **all the creation** which I had thought up to create. And I saw that it was good.
>
> —*2 Enoch* (J) 25:3

3. This fundamental assumption of ancient interpreters is treated at great length above, in Chapter 1.

> God said: Let there be light to illuminate the world, and at once there was light. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 1:3

> Said R. Eli'ezer: With the light that God created on the first day one could see from one end of the world to the other. — b. *Ḥagigah* 12a

Another possibility was that the light that was later to come from heavenly bodies was created, or conceived, on the first day, even though the heavenly bodies themselves were not created until the fourth:

> And [He created] the abysses and darkness—both evening and night—and light—both dawn and daylight—which He prepared in the knowledge of His heart. — *Jubilees* 2:2

> It is said that from this [primal] light, [now] diffused, and from fire—both of which were created on the first day—the sun was fashioned, which was made in the firmament, and likewise the moon and the stars, it is said, were made from that same first light.[4] — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 9:2

Similarly:

> Now that invisible light, perceptible only by mind, was created as an image of God's Word [Logos], who made its creation known. It was a light higher than the stars, the **source** of the starlight that can be seen.
>
> — Philo, *On the Creation* 31 (also 55)

The Angels Were Also Created

The creation account in Genesis purports to tell how everything in the universe came to be. But this account apparently omits a number of details (besides the creation of wisdom). For example, where were the angels? Although all sorts of other biblical texts (and texts from outside the Bible) make mention of angels, nothing is said here about when they were first created.

The Bible contained at least one indication for ancient interpreters that the angels had in fact been created *sometime* during the first six days. For, after the sixth day is completed, the Bible says,

> Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their **hosts**.
>
> — Gen. 2:1

The phrase "*hosts* of heaven" is frequently used in the Bible for angels (see, for example, 1 Kings 22:19). This verse thus seemed to imply that the creation of these "hosts of heaven" had been *finished* by (at least) the end of the sixth day. What is more, the book of Psalms mentioned the angels along with other things created by God in the beginning:

4. Ephraem's overall view is that this first day's primal light was created to serve until the sun and other luminaries could be made and take over.

[God,] who has stretched out the heavens like a curtain, roofed His upper chambers with the waters,
who has made clouds His chariot and walks about on the wind's outskirts,
who makes the winds His **angels** and flaming fire His servants,
He established the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be displaced.

—Ps. 104:2–5

In mentioning the angels in the context of the creation of the heavens, waters, and earth, this psalm seemed to be saying that God had created the angels at the same time as these other things. As a result of such passages (see also Job 38:7), a number of ancient interpreters included the angels among the things that God had created during the first six days—even though the book of Genesis made no mention of them.

When during the six days were the angels created? With no clear hints from the text, there was no unanimity among ancient interpreters. It seemed likely, however, that their creation preceded that of mankind and the other creatures created at the end of the six days:

When God created his created ones [that is, the angels][5] in the beginning, their portions He allotted to them:
He established [their] activities for all time, and their dominions forever:
So that they not hunger nor grow weary, nor cease from their labors,
And so that one not interfere with another, and never might they rebel.
Afterward the Lord looked down at the earth and He filled it with His stores;
He covered its face with the breath of all life, and to it they shall return.

—Sir. 16:26–30

Dividing light from darkness, he established the dawning in His mind's decision;
When all His **angels** saw [it] they exulted, for He showed them what they had not previously known.
He crowned the hills with crops, abundant food for all the living.

—(11QPs[a]) *Hymn to the Creator*

These are the holy angels, who were created first . . .

—*Shepherd of Hermas* Vision 4:1

5. The Hebrew word *ma'ăsim* ("created ones") frequently refers to people rather than things: see Pss. 8:7, 103:22, 104:24; Prov. 31:31; Job 14:15, etc. It seems likely that the "created ones" mentioned here are the angels in heaven. Ben Sira's wording paraphrases Deut. 32:8, which was understood to refer to angels being allotted their "portions"; what is more, the idea that these celestial creatures never need food or rest and do not interfere or overlap with one another in their heavenly missions—all these are elsewhere frequently asserted to be true of angels. A similar usage appears in *Odes of Solomon* 16:13.

Some ancient interpreters pointed specifically to the first day as the time of the angels' creation. Perhaps they did so because of the mention of the "spirit of God" in Gen. 1:2, since "spirit" was one term commonly understood to refer to angels:

> For on the first day He created the heavens which are above and the earth and waters and all the spirits which serve before Him—the angels of the presence, and the angels of holiness, and the angels of the spirits of fire and the angels of the spirits of the winds, and the angels of the spirit of the clouds, and of darkness, and of snow and of hail and of frost, and the angels of the sounds, the thunders and the lightnings, and the angels of the spirits of cold and of heat, and of winter and of spring and of autumn and of summer, and of all the spirits of His creatures which are in the heavens and on the earth. — *Jubilees* 2:2

> When Scripture speaks of the creation of the world, it does not indicate clearly whether, or in what order, the angels were created. But if they are alluded to at all, it is perhaps in the word "heavens" when it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" [Gen. 1:1] or, more likely, in the word "light" [in the phrase, "Let there be light," Gen. 1:3].
>
> —Augustine, *City of God* 11:9

> In the beginning, on the first day . . . God created heaven and earth, the angels, and the archangels and thrones and dominions and principalities and authorities[6] and cherubs and seraphs, all the heavenly hosts of spirits.
>
> — *Cave of Treasures* (W) 1

Other sources saw the second day as the time of the angels' creation (because that was the day when the "firmament"—deemed to be part of heaven, where the angels lived—was created):

> Then evening came, and morning, and it was the second day. And . . . [on the second day] I created the ranks of the bodiless armies—ten myriad angels—and their weapons are fiery and their clothes are burning flames.
>
> — *2 Enoch* (J) 29:3

> And God said to the angels who serve before Him and who had been created on the second day of the Creation . . . — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 1:26

> [On the second day,] after separating off the waters He created the *er'elim* and angels and *ophanim* and *seraphim* and *ḥashmalim* [different classes of angels] and He blew upon the fire and ignited the seven bonfires of Gehenna. — *Midrash Konen*

> On the second day God created the firmament and the angels . . . The angels, who were created on the second day, when they are sent by His word they become winds, but when they serve before Him, they are made of fire,

6. These are different ranks of angels; this list is apparently based on the New Testament, Col. 1:16; cf. Eph. 1:21, *2 Enoch* 20:1, *Testament of Levi* 3:7, *Book of the Bee* ch. 5.

as it is written, "Who makes His messengers the winds, and flaming fire his servants" [Ps. 104:4]. —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 4

There were yet other possibilities:

When were the angels created? R. Yoḥanan said: they were created on the second day . . . R. Ḥanina said: they were created on the **fifth** day, as it is said "[on the fifth day God created] birds to fly about above the earth across the firmament of the heavens" [Gen. 1:20], and it says elsewhere [speaking of an angel], "with two wings it would fly about" [Isa. 6:2]. —*Genesis Rabba* 1:3

God and Someone Else

After the heavens and the earth had been created, and the earth stocked with fish and birds and animals, God finally created mankind. But the precise way in which this event is related in the Bible aroused the curiosity of ancient interpreters:

Then God said, "Let **us** make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. —Gen. 1:26–27

Ancient readers were struck by a number of things in this passage, perhaps most of all by the fact that God starts speaking here in the plural, "Let *us* make man . . . *our* image . . . *our* likeness." What did this mean? (The "royal we" is less common in biblical Hebrew than in English, so such an explanation was not necessarily obvious.)

Many ancient interpreters concluded that God was indeed addressing some other being or beings—though they did not necessarily agree on whom:

O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, You who have made all things by Your word and by Your wisdom have formed man. —Wisd. 9:1–2

Thus it was fitting and right that when man was formed, God should assign a share in the work to His lieutenants, as He does with the words "let *us* make men," so that man's right actions might be attributable to God, but his sins to others. For it seemed to be unfitting to God, the ruler of all, that the road to wickedness within the reasonable soul should be of His making, and therefore He delegated the forming of this part to His inferiors.

—Philo, *Confusion of Tongues* 179

And on the sixth day I commanded my wisdom to create man.

—*2 Enoch* (J) 30:8

Having given order by your Wisdom, You created, saying, "Let us make man according to our image and likeness."

—Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.34.6

> R. Joshua b. Levi said: He consulted with the heavens and the earth . . . R. Ḥanina said: . . . When God set out to create the first human, He consulted with the ministering angels. He said to them: "Let **us** make man."
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 8:3–4

Among Christians, the plural "Let *us*" suggested another interpretation:

> And furthermore, my brothers: . . . He is lord of the whole world, to whom God said at the creation of the world, "Let us make man according to our image and likeness." — *Letter of Barnabas* 5:5 (also 6:12)

> The Father commanded with His voice; it was the Son who carried out the work. — Ephraem, *Hymns of Faith* 6:13 (also *Commentary on Genesis* 1:28, etc.)

Other interpreters vigorously denied the idea that the phrase implied more than one Creator:

> When all His angels saw [it] they exulted, for He showed them what **they had not previously known.** — (11QPs[a]) *Hymn to the Creator*

> O sovereign Lord, did you not speak at the beginning when You created earth—which You did **without help**—and commanded the dust[7] and it gave you Adam. — *4 Ezra* 3:4

> These [the world and its contents] God created not with hands, not with toil, not with assistants, of whom He had no need; He willed it, and so they were made in all their beauty. — Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:192

> R. Samuel b. Naḥman said in the name of R. Yonatan: When Moses was writing down the Torah, he would write down what was created on each day [in the creation account]. When he got to the verse, "And God said, 'Let *us* make man . . .'" he said, "Master of the Universe! Why should you give support to the heretics?" He answered: "Let anyone who wishes to go astray go astray!" — *Genesis Rabba* 8:8

Completed on Friday

The traditional Hebrew text at the end of the creation narrative contains a slight ambiguity:

> And God **ended** on the seventh day His work which He had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.
>
> — Gen. 2:1

The word "ended" here is somewhat enigmatic. Does it mean "finished off," in which case, presumably, at least *some* work was done on the seventh day? Or does it mean "ceased," in which case the last bit of work was presumably done before the

7. Here God's words "Let *us* make man" are deemed to have been spoken to the dust of the earth from which the first human was made (Gen. 2:7).

seventh day actually started? One would certainly think that the latter was the case, but the wording left room for misunderstanding.

Some ancient versions and retellings—perhaps in an attempt to clarify things, or perhaps reflecting a different form of the Hebrew text—specify that God had actually finished His work on the sixth day:

> And on the sixth day God finished His works which He had done. And God ceased [or "rested"] on the seventh day from all of His works which He had done. —Septuagint, Vetus Latina, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Peshitta, Gen. 2:1

> And He finished all His work on the sixth day—everything in heaven and on the earth, and in the seas and in the depths, in the light and in the darkness, and in every place. And He gave us a great sign, the Sabbath day, so that we should perform work for six days, but keep the Sabbath on the seventh day from all work. —*Jubilees* 2:16–17

> Now, when the whole world had been brought to completion in accordance with the properties of **six**, a perfect number, the Father invested with dignity the seventh day which comes next, extolling it and pronouncing it holy.
> —Philo, *On the Creation* 89

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In short: Early interpreters transformed the opening chapter of Genesis in several significant respects. The very first thing that God had created was wisdom. When He said "Let there be light" God was referring to a special light unknown to human eyes. God created the angels, either on the first, the second, or the fifth day. God's words in Gen. 1:26, "Let us make man," were understood to mean that He had received aid or advice in creating man. Finally, some translations and retellings of the creation story differed from the traditional Hebrew wording of Gen. 2:1 by making it clear that the creation was entirely finished by the end of the sixth day.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Creation of the World

Created Long Before: We saw that many interpreters inferred that wisdom was actually created before the physical universe. Some interpreters held that various other things were likewise created before the world. A late rabbinic summary of this tradition reads as follows:

> Seven things were created before the world, and these are they: the Torah, repentance, the garden of Eden, Gehenna [Hell], the Heavenly Throne, the Temple, and the name of the messiah. —b. *Pesaḥim* 54a

The preexistence of the Torah is (as we have seen) simply a later form of the motif "Wisdom Came First," which originated in the interpretation of Prov. 8:22. But the other items mentioned above were also dated to before the creation on the basis of ancient biblical interpretation.

For example, the idea that repentance was created even before the world was comes from a verse in the book of Psalms:

> From the time when the mountains had not yet been brought forth,
> before You had even formed the world itself, from eternity to eternity
> you are God.
> You turn back man to the dust and say, "Turn back, O children of men."
> —Ps. 90:2–3

This text asserts that God is eternal and had thus existed even before the creation of the world. But what does the last sentence mean? At first glance, it seems to be talking about human *mortality:* the fact that God is eternal is being sharply contrasted with the fate of humans, who must return "to the dust." Indeed, it is God who summons them to their death with the words "Turn back, O children of men."

But from early times the "returning" spoken of in this verse was understood in another sense, as if God were, even before the creation of the world, summoning humans to "return" to Him, that is, to repent of their sinfulness. And so, basing themselves on this verse, some early interpreters claimed that here was another thing—"returning," the usual Hebrew term for repentance—that, along with wisdom, was created even before the world itself: for even "from the time when the mountains had not yet been brought forth," God had created repentance for mankind by saying, "Turn back, O children of men."

The Heavenly Throne Preceded: The mention of the heavenly throne among those things created before the world is likewise the fruit of biblical interpretation. Certainly a number of verses in the Bible describe God as a king who sits on a heavenly throne. But, interpreters asked, if this is to be understood as more than merely a figure of speech, then when exactly was this heavenly throne created? A hint of an answer seemed to come in the book of Psalms:

Yea, the world was established unmovable.
Your throne was made firm from of old, You are from everlasting.

—Ps. 93:1–2

The precise wording of this psalm led some interpreters to conclude that God's heavenly throne had likewise been created before the world.[8] For they saw in the order of these three clauses three different time periods: At the moment when "the world was established unmovable," your throne had *already* (understanding the Hebrew "of old" as "previously," before the creation proper) been made firm, and even before *it* existed, You existed, for "You are from everlasting."

A reflection of this interpretive tradition may be found in at least one ancient text:

[God says: After creating light on the first day,] I saw that it was good. And I placed for myself a **throne,** and I sat down on it. —*2 Enoch* (J) 25:3–4

The existence of the heavenly throne before the world's creation may also be indicated elsewhere:

Great and holy is God, the holiest one for all ages.
Splendor goes before Him, and after Him the din of mighty waters [Jer. 10:13].
Steadfast love and faithfulness surround His presence, faithfulness and right and justice are **His throne's** foundation.[9]
Dividing light from darkness, he established the dawning in His mind's decision;
When all His angels saw [it] they exulted, for He showed them what they had not previously known.
He crowned the hills with crops, abundant food for all the living.
Blessed is He who created the earth with his power, who established the world with His wisdom [Jer. 10:12],
Who brought forth [wind] from his tre[asuries]
Who made [lightning for rai]n, and raised up mists from the ends of the earth [Jer. 10:13].

—(11QPs[a]) *Hymn to the Creator*

The events of the creation seem to be presented in this hymn in chronological order: God exists "for all ages" and so, apparently, does His heavenly throne, with (apparently hypostasized) "steadfast love," "faithfulness," and so forth in attendance around Him. The succeeding lines describe or allude to different aspects of the creation, including God's dividing light from darkness (Gen. 1:3) and bringing forth vegetation (Gen. 1:11–12). By its location, then, this mention of God's throne would seem to presuppose its creation prior even to Gen. 1:3.

8. Further proof was cited from Jer. 17:12 (see b. *Pesaḥim* 54a), but the verse in Ps. 93:1–2 seems to represent an older tradition. Cf. also Ps. 103:19.

9. Note that the word "foundation" *(mākôn)* here echoes the "made firm" *(nākôn)* in Ps. 93:3.

Elsewhere, personified Wisdom is notably presented as standing next to, or sitting upon, the divine throne. The idea that wisdom is a heavenly being is certainly an ancient one, and it exists quite apart from the Hebrew Bible (indeed, it is found in some texts that were clearly known to biblical authors and ancient interpreters):

> Out of heaven are peoples favored, Wisdom is of the gods.
> Yea, she is precious to the gods, her kingdom is eternal.
> She has been **established in heaven,** yea, the holy Lord has exalted her.
> — *(Aramaic) Sayings of Ahiqar* 94–95

Founded on this ancient conception, and perhaps mediated through such texts as Prov. 8:30, the notion of wisdom as dwelling on or near the divine throne is in evidence later on:

> For You made, and You rule, everything, and nothing is too hard for You, and no wisdom escapes You; it does not turn away from Your throne, nor from Your presence. — *1 Enoch* 84:3 (also 42:1–2)

> [Solomon prays:] "Give me the wisdom that sits by Your throne, and do not reject me from among Your servants." — Wisd. 9:4

> [Baruch prayed:] For with Your counsel, You reign over all creation which Your right hand has created, and You have established the whole fountain of light with Yourself, and You have prepared **under Your throne** the treasures of wisdom. — *2 Baruch* 54:13

Given wisdom's creation before the world, it may be that this strategic location likewise reflects the idea that God's throne was "made firm from of old" (cf. Sir. 24:4).

Eden and Gehenna Created: The appearance of the Garden of Eden among the things created beforehand seems to owe its existence to another phrase that also might be understood as "of old." For the Bible relates,

> And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east [or "of old"].[10]
> — Gen. 2:8

In keeping with the understanding of "of old" as "previously," the verse was rendered:

> And the Lord God [had] planted a garden in Eden previously.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 2:8

> And the Lord God [had] planted a garden in Eden from before.
> — Peshitta Gen. 2:8

10. The Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, and many modern translations understand *miqqedem* here as "in the east."

Note also:

> . . . from the beginning [or "of old," "from olden times"] . . .
> —Aquila Gen. 2:8
>
> . . . from the first . . . —Symmachus Gen. 2:8
>
> . . . at the first . . . —Theodotion Gen. 2:8
>
> However, the Lord God had planted a garden of delight from the beginning.
> —(Vulgate) Gen. 2:8

Such understandings of the verse implied to some that the garden had in fact been created before the world itself:

> And You led him into the garden which Your right hand had planted **before the earth appeared.** —*4 Ezra* 3:6 (see also 6:2)
>
> Two thousand years before the world was created, He created the Torah, established the Garden of Eden for the righteous, and [established] Gehenna for the wicked. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 3:24
>
> And there was planted, at the command of the Lord God, a garden from Eden for the righteous before the creation of the world.
> —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 2:8

The same interpretation may be implied elsewhere:

> Do you think that this [the earthly Jerusalem] is that city of which I said, "On the palms of My hands I have engraved you" [Isa. 49:16 in Syriac version]? This building now built in your midst is not the one which will be revealed with Me, the one which was prepared here beforehand, from the time when I decided to make Paradise. —*2 Baruch* 4:2–3

This interpretation, however, is specifically rejected elsewhere:

> On that **third day** He created for them . . . all sprouting things and fruit-bearing trees, and trees of the forest, and . . . the garden of Eden in Eden, for enjoyment and for food.[11] —*Jubilees* 2:7
>
> And on the third day . . . I laid out paradise as a garden, and I enclosed it.
> —*2 Enoch* 30:1
>
> "Of old . . ." [Gen. 2:8] Said R. Samuel b. Naḥmani: This does not mean before the creation of the world, but before [the creation of] the first human: Adam was created on the sixth day, the garden of Eden on the third day. —*Genesis Rabba* 15:3

(See also Chapter 3, *OR*, "To the East or the North, Somewhere.")

11. Here, incidentally, is another double translation, the toponym Eden being understood as well as "delight" or "luxuriance" (the apparent root meaning of the name in Hebrew). See Chapter 3, Other Readings (hereafter *OR*), "The Garden of Delight."

The idea that the Garden of Eden's opposite, Gehenna, was created before the world may have been based on another particular biblical verse:

> For a burning place [Tophet] had been prepared **from before** . . . its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, burns within it. —Isa. 30:33

The existence of such a place is scarcely adumbrated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible itself, but it is mentioned in numerous ancient works. In keeping with the above, it is usually described as very hot:

> [A tyrant is told:] Because of this, justice has laid up for you intense and eternal fire and tortures, and these throughout all time will never let you go. —4 Macc. 12:12

Similarly, it is a place "full of fire" in *1 Enoch* 90:24–27 (cf. 10:13, 18:15, 21:7, 27:1–3, etc.); we find references to "the furnace of Gehenna" in *4 Ezra* 7:36 (cf. *Testament of Zebulon* 10:3; *Sibylline Oracles* 4:171–191; *2 Baruch* 30:5, 44:15, 85:13; *Targum Neophyti* 3:24, etc.); and it appears as well in the New Testament (for example, Matt. 5:22, 18:8–9, 25:41) and in rabbinic writings (note the debate in *Genesis Rabba* 26:6 and reference to Isa. 31:9; Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 250). See further Milikowsky, "Which Gehenna?" 238–249. On the character of heaven and hell many biblical passages are relevant; see esp. Isa. 33:5–16.

The Preexistent Temple: Numerous biblical verses—especially in the book of Psalms—seem to suggest not only that the divine throne is in heaven but that there is a great sanctuary or temple there:

> The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven. —Ps. 11:4

While the making of this heavenly sanctuary was not specifically mentioned in the opening chapter of Genesis, it seemed only logical that God had established it sometime at or before the creation of the world. And indeed, such an idea was found to be hinted at elsewhere in the Bible:

> A glorious throne was set up from the start, the place of our sanctuary. —Jer. 17:12

Elsewhere, the correspondence between this heavenly sanctuary and Israel's earthly one is stated outright (see Chapter 21, "A Celestial Sanctuary"). This idea appears frequently among ancient writers. (Sometimes it is presented in terms reminiscent of the Platonic conception of ideal forms.)

> [Wisdom speaks:] From eternity, in the beginning, He created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to be.
> In the holy tabernacle[12] I served before Him, and thus I was [subsequently] established in Zion. —Sir. 24:9–10

12. The "holy tabernacle" is somewhat ambiguous; it may refer to the heavenly sanctuary or simply the desert sanctuary that the temple in Jerusalem ("Zion") ultimately replaced.

> You commanded me [Solomon] to build a temple on Your holy mountain, and an altar in the city of Your habitation, a copy [*mimēma*] of the holy tabernacle which You prepared **from the beginning**. —Wisd. 9:8

> This **building** now built in your midst is not the one which will be revealed with Me, the one which was prepared here beforehand, from the time when I decided to make Paradise. —*2 Baruch* 4:3

> Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the **sanctuary and true tabernacle** which is set up not by man but by the Lord. —Heb. 8:1–2

A heavenly temple—though not specifically one created before the world—appears in other Second Temple texts, including *1 Enoch* 14:16–20 and *Testament of Levi* 3:4–6, as well as in the New Testament book of Revelation (3:12, 7:15, 11:19, 14:15–17, 15:5–6, etc.). The idea is likewise well attested at Qumran; see Strugnell, "Angelic Liturgy," 318–345, and Newsom, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice,* as well as numerous rabbinic texts, e.g., *Genesis Rabba* 1:4 (a version of the "seven things created before the world" midrash), 55:7, 69:7, etc. See (inter alia) Aptowitzer, "The Heavenly Temple"; Attridge, *Hebrews,* 222–224; and Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon,* 203–205.

The existence of a heavenly temple before the creation of the world might seem to imply that the angels who officiate in such a temple were also created before the world. (This conclusion could only be supported by such verses as Job 38:7, wherein the angelic officiants sing at the very start of the process of creation.) Such an idea is presented in the Qumran "Hymn to the Creator" cited above, as well as the following:

> [God] made before all things the cherubim and the seraphim, the aeons and hosts, the powers and authorities, the principalities and thrones, the archangels and angels, and after all of these . . . made the visible world and everything that is in it.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.8

Named before the Sun: Finally, the preexistence of the name of the messiah is an idea that likewise comes from the book of Psalms. Psalm 72 invokes God's blessing upon an unnamed king. An old tradition identified the king as one yet to be born—the messiah.[13] Now in speaking of him, the psalmist says,

> May his name be forever; his name bursts forth **before the sun.**[14]
>
> —Ps. 72:17

13. See Chapters 15 and 24.

14. The word translated "bursts forth," *yinnon,* is otherwise unknown in Hebrew; translations vary. Another Jewish tradition saw in this word not a verb at all, but a proper noun, namely, the future king's own name. Thus "Yinnon" came to be viewed as the name that will be given to the messiah when he comes.

The highlighted phrase, in Hebrew as in English, is ambiguous: "before" can mean both "in front of" and "preceding in time." If the latter, then the words of this psalm might be interpreted as meaning that even before the sun was created, the name of the messiah burst forth. It is interesting that this tradition concerning the creation of the messiah's name, well known in rabbinic Judaism, is to be found as well in a nonrabbinic source:

> At that hour, that Son of Man was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits, the Before-Time, even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits. —*1 Enoch* 48:2–3 (also 48:6, 62:7)

Such an interpretation was of course comforting to any who might have despaired of the messiah's coming: his coming was part of the divine plan for the world—indeed, his very name was selected even before the world had been created.

It should be noted that, while the immediate verse from which this motif originated was indeed Ps. 72:17, the *idea* that the messiah—and Israel's great setting-aright—had been planned by God well in advance is found in many biblical texts. Particularly suggestive with regard to the preparation of the Davidic messiah's coming in advance were passages such as the following:

> But you, O Bethelehem Ephrathah [that is, David's birthplace], who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origins are **from of old,** from ancient days. —Mic. 5:1 (some texts, 5:2)

The idea that the messiah is being "kept" by God until the right time is found as well in *4 Ezra* 12:32 and 13:25–26, 51–52, but here there is no specific assertion that his name was created before the sun. See also Knibb, "Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha," 165–184.

Two Thousand Years Before: At least one tradition specifies *how long* before the world's creation all these other things were made:

> These things, along with the Torah, preceded the [creation of the] world by two thousand years. —*Midrash on Psalms,* Ps. 90:3

The figure of "two thousand years" is no mere rhetorical flourish. It is based on the phrase "day by day" in Prov. 8:30 ("And I [Wisdom, here understood as the Torah] was His delight day by day"): if, according to Psalm 90, one "day" of God's is a thousand years, then "day by day" (in Hebrew, "a day, a day") must mean two thousand years. And so, before the creation of the world per se, God delighted in the Torah (and perhaps in the other things created then as well) for two thousand years.

Creation out of Nothingness: Did God make the universe from matter that was already in existence, or was it fully a *creatio ex nihilo,* a "creation out of nothing"?

This was another question on which there were different opinions in late antiquity; Greek philosophers, for example, took opposing sides of the issue.

The Genesis account itself is somewhat ambiguous on this point. True, the Bible opens with the words "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—but this may not be the only possible translation of these words; what is more, it is not even clear that the first sentence must end after the word "earth." Since the Hebrew Bible had originally been transmitted without punctuation marks, capital letters, fixed vocalization (vowel points), or even division into verses (see Chapter 1), many passages—including the very opening words of Genesis—could be read in more than one way. What we know as the first verse could be read as a complete sentence asserting that "in the beginning" God created everything, the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. Such a reading certainly would be in keeping with, rather than contradictory to, the idea of "creation out of nothing" (though even so, the text would have failed to state unequivocally that the heavens and the earth were not made from some preexisting substance). Alternatively, these same opening words could be taken as merely the first clause of a longer sentence, one that might then be translated, "When God began to create the heavens and the earth,[15] the earth was formless and void," implying that the universe, however "formless and void," already existed as "raw material" at the time when God began the work of creating. The difference may appear slight, but the second reading (which, incidentally, is favored by many contemporary scholars) leaves room for the idea that the universe in some form (or formlessness) had always been there and is eternal.

An important act of biblical interpretation, then, was to decide where to end the Bible's first sentence. In approaching this question, ancient interpreters no doubt looked to other biblical passages for guidance. There exist a number of statements about creation elsewhere in the Bible, and these tend to support the idea that the universe was created by God, as it were, out of nothing. "I am the Lord who made all things," it says in Isa. 44:24, and somewhat earlier, "All that is called by name I created for my glory, I fashioned it, yea, I made it." The piling up of the near-synonyms "created," "fashioned," and "made" seemed to be a particularly emphatic assertion that everything in the universe had indeed been made by God—and made out of nothing rather than merely given its final form—for if "fashion" means to shape something, like a clay pot, from already existing material, then "created" ought to mean something different, creation out of nothing.[16] No doubt this and other verses had helped to tip the scales in favor of understanding the opening words of Genesis as a flat assertion, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—an interpretation witnessed, significantly, in the Septuagint translation of this verse—and this understanding in turn may have furthered the idea of creation out of nothing.

Philo's view is expressed differently in different treatises and has been much

15. Literally, "In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth . . ."

16. Some modern translators render the beginning of this verse "Everyone who is called by my name" and connect it to verse 44:24.

debated. It is clear that he believed that the world was *created* and therefore certainly understood Gen. 1:1 as a direct refutation of the idea of an eternal universe:

> By his account of the creation of the world of which we have spoken, Moses teaches us . . . that the world came into being. [He specifically says] this because of those who think the world is without beginning and eternal, and who thus grant to God no superiority whatever. —*On the Creation* 170–171

But what was it created out of? Was there some sort of preexistent matter—and if so, had God created *that* still earlier?

> God, when He gave birth to all things, not only brought them into sight, but also made that which had not existed before, acting not just merely as an artificer [demiurge], but being Himself its creator. —Philo, *On Dreams* 1:76

On this matter scholars have disagreed. See Wolfson, *Philo;* idem, "Patristics Arguments"; Goldstein, "Origins of the Doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo"; and Winston, "Creatio Ex Nihilo Revisited." Note that a somewhat contemporaneous reference to God's

> all-powerful hand, which created the world out of formless matter . . .
>
> —Wisd. 11:17

seems to reflect the idea that "formless matter" had indeed existed at the time of the creation.

Sometimes silence is eloquent; the fact that relatively few early sources seem to take a position on this question may indicate that it simply did not concern the Bible's most ancient interpreters. Thus, for example, the book of *Jubilees* simply states:

> On the first day God created the upper heavens and the earth.
>
> —*Jubilees* 2:2

The same lack of interest characterizes other early reflections on the biblical creation account.

It is difficult to know what to make of the following well-known passage:

> I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of **things that existed.** —2 Macc. 7:28

This does appear to be an unequivocal assertion of the "creation out of nothing" doctrine. However, some scholars have suggested that this may have been intended more as a declaration of God's great power than as an attempt to take sides in a philosophical debate. Later on, in any case, this verse from Maccabees, along with Gen. 1:1 itself and the other verses cited, all became "proofs" for what was now an important teaching of the Christian Church, the doctrine of creation out of nothing.[17] See again Goldstein, "Origins of the Doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo," and

17. See Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1:2; Augustine, *City of God* 11.4.

Winston, "Creatio Ex Nihilo Revisited," as well as Hanhart, "The Translation of the Septuagint." Note also that Josephus and Aquila both specifically deviate from the Septuagint version of Gen. 1:1 to assert that God "founded" or "created" *(ektisen)* the heaven and the earth, rather than simply "made" *(epoiēsen)* them, since the latter had been interpreted as implying preexistent matter. See also the discussion below of *Shepherd of Hermas* (Vision) 1:6.

God and Wisdom Were Parents: Many interpreters understood that God created the world by means of wisdom. But what exactly was wisdom's role? To some interpreters, it went beyond that of a mere tool or instrument. For if wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs 8 (and elsewhere),[18] while God is frequently represented as a male figure in the Bible, could it not be that their cooperation in the creation of the world was somewhat akin to sexual reproduction, that is, that the two were really the divine parents of the universe? Here was an idea that certainly struck many Jews and Christians as utterly heretical, reminiscent of the pagan myths of other nations. It is all the more interesting, then, to note that Philo of Alexandria at one point suggested something close to this:

> We can properly say that the Creator who made everything was thus the "father" of that which was born, while the "mother" was the knowledge belonging to its maker, with whom God had come together, though not in manner of humans, to engender that which was created.
>
> —Philo, *On Drunkenness* 30

Similarly:

> She [Wisdom] adds glory to her noble birth by cohabiting with God, and the Lord of all loves her. For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in His works. —Wisd. 8:3–4 (also 7:12)

> First Begettress Sophia [Wisdom], mother of the universe . . .
>
> — *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* III, 4.104.17–18

We saw earlier that Philo elsewhere refers to wisdom as the "firstborn mother of all things," and this title is to be understood in the same sense. See further Winston, *Philo,* 338; Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories.* For the figure of "Lady Wisdom," see Lang, *Frau Weisheit;* also, Horsely, "Spiritual Marriage with Sophia."

Plato and Scripture Agree: It is hardly surprising to find traces of Greek philosophical teachings in early interpretations of the Bible; Greek language, ideas, and culture held sway over the Jews' homeland (and the entire ancient Near East) for centuries, starting with Alexander the Great's conquest of the region in 332 B.C.E. Greek thought is thus well attested in both Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation, including interpretations of the creation account at the beginning of Genesis.

Most suggestive to Jews and Christians of Greek culture was the Bible's assertion that God first created wisdom, and then through it (or her) went on to create the

18. Wisdom is a feminine noun in both Greek and Hebrew.

rest of the world. Such a notion in general seemed to fit well with the Platonic doctrine of ideal forms, according to which all the things of this world correspond to ideal types, abstract and eternal models of which the physical universe is only an imperfect realization. If the Bible had thus said that God began by creating wisdom first, or had portrayed God as initiating each day's work by speaking, was Scripture not really maintaining that some sort of preliminary creative act in the realm of ideas or heavenly archetypes had preceded the creation of the actual, physical universe?

> Just so has Moses called the whole creation of the world "words of God" in our Torah. For he continually says in each case, "And God spoke and it came to pass" [Gen. 1:3, 6, etc.]. And it seems to me that Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato with great care follow him [Moses] in all respects.
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 4 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.3–4)

Apart from the connection itself between Hebrew Scripture and Greek philosophy, what apparently struck Aristobulus is the fact that, according to accepted chronology, Moses, Solomon (the traditional author of Prov. 8:22), and other scriptural authors preceded the Greek philosophers in history. This could only mean, as he suggests, that Greek sages had in fact borrowed ideas from the Hebrews.

> It is evident that Plato copied our legislation [that is, the Torah] and that he had investigated thoroughly each of the elements in it.
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 3 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.1)

This theme of Greek borrowings from the ancient Hebrew was later to be taken up by early Christians (like Eusebius, from whose writings these fragments of Aristobulus are known to us). See further Chapter 25, *OR*, "The Supreme Philosopher."

Philo similarly connected Plato and the Bible in his discussion of the creation, sometimes in surprising ways. For example, he argued that Genesis 2:4–5—which, in the Greek Bible (Septuagint) that he used, reads as a single sentence: "And the Lord God made . . . every green thing of the field *before it was created upon the earth*"—refers to the idea that there had been an earlier, nonphysical creation, a creation of ideal forms upon which reality was to be based once the actual physical creation took place:

> In these words He alludes to the incorporeal ideas. For the expression "before it was created" points to the perfection of every green thing and grass, of plants and trees. And as Scripture says that before they grew on the earth He made plants and grass and other things, it is evident that He made incorporeal and intelligible ideas in accordance with the intelligible nature which these sense-perceptible things on earth were meant to imitate.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1:2
>
> (also *On the Creation* 129–130; *Allegorical Interpretations* 1:21–24)

Likewise:

> For God, being God, judged in advance that a beautiful copy would never be produced except from a beautiful pattern, and that no sense object would

> be irreproachable unless it was modeled after an archetypal and intelligible idea. So when He willed to create this visible world, He first formed the intelligible [but invisible] world, so that He might use a completely Godlike and incorporeal pattern for making the corporeal world, a more recent image of one that was older, which was to comprise as many sensible kinds as there were intelligible ones in the other. —Philo, *On the Creation* 16

This idea is present in a number of New Testament reflections on the creation as well; see, for example, Rom. 1:20 and Heb. 8:5, 9:23–24. Also, Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature;* Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:34.

In short, the biblical account of the creation not only came to be interpreted by Hellenistic Judaism (and Christianity) in keeping with Greek philosophical ideas, but sometimes also served as a convincing demonstration of the dependence of those Greek ideas on earlier Hebrew revelation. (Some interpreters stated that Moses anticipated Plato's doctrine of creation from preexistent matter by teaching in Genesis that water, darkness, and chaos existed before the world came into being; see Winston, s.v. "Moses"; idem, *Philo,* 7–13, 99–100.) On Philo and Middle Platonism in general, see the articles collected in *Studia Philonica Annual* 5 (1993).

The Logos Participated: If, according to Plato, creation represented a movement from the world of ideas to the world of real things, one might still ask: how was this movement accomplished? Plato himself, and still more so various later Greek thinkers who were influenced by his writings, came to elaborate the role of some sort of intermediary figure in the work of creation, one they sometimes referred to by the Greek word *logos* (word, reason). The origins of this divine intermediary are unclear: the term Logos seems to have been used in various senses in this regard by different early writers. For Philo, in Winston's wonderful composite description, "the Logos is the Divine Mind, the Idea of Ideas, the first-begotten Son of the Uncreated Father, eldest and chief of the angels, the man or shadow of God, or even the second God, the pattern of all creation and the archetype of human reason" (Winston, *Philo,* 26). (On this subject in general, see Moreno-Martinez, "El Logos y la Creacion"; Borgen, "Logos Was the True Light.")

Obviously, this development of the Platonic tradition might likewise be adapted to fit the biblical material;[19] indeed, Philo explored the role of God's Logos at length in his writings. But the best known, and most significant, statement of this idea is to be found in the opening words of the Gospel of John:

> In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, as of the only Son from the Father. —John 1:1–3, 14

19. The description of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:30 presents her as an *'āmôn.* This word was sometimes understood as meaning "craftsman, artificer" and thus further aided the Platonizing reading of Genesis 1 as implying that Wisdom (or some other entity designated by this name) actually *did the work* in the creation of the universe.

What might not be clear at first glance is that this famous passage is actually a commentary or reflection upon the first words of Genesis—or, more precisely, those first words *as they had long been interpreted.* For here "In the beginning" in Genesis is being explained in two different ways: it means, literally, in the beginning, at the start of the creation of the universe; but it also means (as we saw above) by means of wisdom (the word "beginning" being taken as an allusion to Wisdom in Prov. 8:22, who is there called the "beginning")—save that wisdom has now apparently been transformed into an allusion to the divine "word" or Logos (in John's view, the preexistent Son): by means of this preexistent Logos all other things of this world were created.[20] (On the relation of John's prologue to the targumic tradition, see Anderson, "The Interpretation of Gen. 1:1"; also, Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom.")

Similarly:

> He [God] has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** of all Creation; for in him were all things created, in heaven and on earth.
>
> —Col. 1:13–15

> But in these last days He [God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.
>
> —Heb. 1:2

> Yet another testimony from Scripture will I give you, my friends, namely that God has begotten as a **Beginning,** before all His creatures, a kind of power endowed with reason from Himself. [Elsewhere in Scripture this power] is also called the "glory of God," or "the **Son,**" or "wisdom," or an "angel," and sometimes "God," "lord," or "**word**" [Logos] . . . For he can have all these names, because of the fact that he ministers to his father's purpose, and has been born of the father of his own will.

20. Of course, the notion of God's Logos as a creative agent is likewise connected to, in the Genesis account, God's initiating the creation of various things by *speaking* (Gen. 1:3, 6, etc.); hence also the rabbinic appellation of God, "He who spoke and the world was created," and the tradition that "With ten acts of speech [*ma'ămārôt*] was the world created" (m. *Abot* 5:1). As for the Christian development of this tradition, cf. the view of creation presented in the prologue to Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, *through whom He also created the very world*" (Heb. 1:1–2). That this assertion is likewise connected to the Logos tradition is made clear elsewhere in Hebrews: "By faith we understand that the world was created by the *word of God,* so that *what is seen was made out of things which do not appear*" (Heb. 11:3). It was once believed that the frequent reference to God's word *(memra')* in various targums might be connected to this same tradition, though that is now contested. (See on these various issues Anderson, "The Interpretation of Gen. 1:1 in the Targums," 27–28.) With the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians soon found a reference to it in the Genesis account as well: the Father was represented in the references to God, the Son in the word "beginning" (that is, Wisdom), and the Holy Spirit in the "Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).

> God was speaking of him [Christ] in the same sense when, at the creation of man, He said, "Let *us* make man."
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 61–62

> For Christ is creator as the "beginning," since he is wisdom. It is because of his being wisdom that he is called "beginning" [in Gen. 1:1]. For Wisdom says in Solomon's writings, "God created me the beginning of His ways for His works" [Septuagint Prov. 8:22] so that the Word [Logos] might be [implicit] in the [word] "beginning," [that is], in wisdom.
>
> —Origen, *On John* 1:22

Somewhat later, Jerome rejected the view that the actual words of Gen. 1:1 meant "Through the *son* did God create the heavens and the earth," arguing that the Hebrew for "in the beginning" *(bĕrē'šît)* was very different from "through the son" *(babbēn)*. (See his *Questions in Genesis* 1:1.) Interestingly, *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 1:1 (cited earlier in this chapter) bears witness to one way in which this connection was nonetheless made. For there, what was presumably the original targumic rendering, "In the beginning, with wisdom, [the word of] *God created and perfected . . .*" *(br' YYY wškll)*, might, through a slight emendation, be transformed into ". . . the *son of God* perfected" (*bryh dYYY škll* or [the actual text of Neophyti] *bar YYY škll*). (See Levy, *Targum Neophyti 1*, 85.)

The early Christian elaboration of this first sentence of Genesis went on to have a profound impact on Christian thinking—even though many readers soon lost sight of the fact that it was a development of a still older interpretive tradition surrounding the words "In the beginning God created . . ." It is to be noted, however, that the understanding of "beginning" as wisdom did not disappear from rabbinic literature:

> The word "beginning" means the Torah [equated with divine wisdom], as it says, "God created me, the beginning of His work" [Prov. 8:22].
>
> —*Genesis Rabba* 1:1

See also Schäfer, "Berešit Bara' 'Elohim," 161–166.

The Wicked Demiurge: The idea that the opening chapter of Genesis actually hinted at the existence of a divine intermediary between the supernal, immaterial God and the things of this world came to be developed in other ways as well. One interpretive tradition held that such an intermediary—a *demiurge* or "divine creator" in the language of Platonism—was in fact a being quite distinct from God Himself, indeed, one hostile to humanity. This was how some gnostics viewed the creation account: they believed that the words of Genesis omitted, or only hinted indirectly at, the ghastly truth, which was that in the beginning the great Supreme Being had created the demiurge Ialdabaoth, an arrogant and self-centered craftsman, who then fashioned the physical universe. Ialdabaoth's own personal flaws, and those that he introduced into the material universe, were, according to the gnostics, responsible for the evil and suffering found in the material world.

> This Demiurge began to create a man according to his image.
>
> —*A Valentinian Exposition* 37:32–34

This approach—apparently deriving from still earlier attempts to combine Platonic ideas about the creation with the Genesis account—was carried forward and applied, specifically, to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. See (inter alia) Quispel, "Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge"; Fossum, "Gen. 1,26"; also, Chapter 3.

Built by the Book: From an early period, wisdom was sometimes equated with the Torah, the great book of divine teaching. We find this connection as early as the second century B.C.E., when Ben Sira, having described how wisdom came to dwell in Israel and "was established in Zion" (Sir. 24:10), goes on to assert that "Wisdom" really refers to the Torah:

> All this is the book of the covenant of Most High God, the Torah which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. —Sir. 24:23

Similarly:

> He [God] found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom He loved; afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men.
> She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever.
>
> —Bar. 3:36–4:1

> The wicked man ought not to say boastfully, "She [wisdom] has not been given to me . . ."
> [. . . For God has given her] to Israel, He grants her like a goodly gift.
>
> —(4Q185) *Sapiential Work* col. 2, 9–10

(This notion stands in sharp—polemical, it seems—contrast to another conception, according to which Wisdom can *never* have an earthly home:

> Wisdom found no place where she could dwell, and her dwelling was in heaven. Wisdom went out in order to dwell among the sons of men, but did not find a dwelling; wisdom returned to her place and took her seat in the midst of angels. —*1 Enoch* 42:1–2

See also above, "The Heavenly Throne Preceded.")

As a result, the idea that God created the world *by means of* wisdom came to be understood as meaning that God created the world *by means of the Torah*—as if the Torah existed even before the world was created, and God consulted it in forming the universe:

> The people of Israel is beloved to God, for . . . they were given the precious instrument **by which** the world was created [namely, the Torah], as it is said, "For I have given you good teaching, do not abandon my Torah" [Prov. 4:2].
>
> —m. *Abot* 3:14

> [Wisdom said with regard to the creation:] "Then I was beside him as an artisan . . ." The Torah [equated here with wisdom] is thus saying, "I was the **instrument** of God's workmanship." When a king wishes to build a palace, he usually does not himself design it, but relies on a builder ["artisan"], and even the builder does not simply build it on his own, but he has blueprints and diagrams in order to know how he will make the [tiniest] chambers and little doors. Just so did God look into the Torah and create the world. [In keeping with this] the Torah says, "In the beginning God created . . ." for the word *beginning* means Torah, as it says, "God created me [that is, wisdom, equated with Torah] the beginning of his dominion." — *Genesis Rabba* 1:1

See further Urbach, *The Sages*, 286–287. Many scholars have compared this last passage—and the idea in general—to one in Philo (cited partially above):

> For God, being God, judged in advance that a beautiful copy would never be produced except from a beautiful pattern, and that no sense object would be irreproachable unless it was modeled after an archetypal and intelligible idea. So when He willed to create this visible world, He first formed the intelligible [but invisible] world, so that He might use a completely Godlike and incorporeal pattern for making the corporeal world, a more recent image of one that was older, which was to comprise as many sensible kinds as there were intelligible ones in the other.
>
> To say or so suppose that the world composed of ideas is in some *place* is improper; but how it was put together we shall know if we closely attend to some comparison taken from our own world. When a city is being founded to satisfy the great ambition of some king or ruler who pretends to absolute power, and magnificent in his pride further embellishes his good fortune, there comes forward now and then some trained architect who, after observing the mild climate and convenient location of the site, first maps out in his own mind virtually all the parts of the city that is to be brought to completion—temples, gymnasia, town halls, marketplaces, harbors, docks, lanes, wall constructions, the erection of houses as well as public buildings. Accordingly, after having received in his soul, as in wax, the impression of each of these objects, he carries in his mind the image of an intelligible city. Then, after awakening these images through his innate power of memory, and imprinting their stamp even further, like a good craftsman keeping his eye on the model, he begins to build the city of stones and timber, adapting the corporeal objects to each of the incorporeal ideas.
>
> Similarly . . . when [God] was of a mind to found the Great City, He first conceived the forms of its parts, out of which he put together the intelligible world, and using that as a model, He also brought to completion the

> sensible world. As, then, the city prefigured in the architect's mind held no place externally, but was stamped in the soul of the artisan, so too the intelligible world could have no other location than the Divine Logos, which established the world order. For what other place could there be for his powers sufficient to receive and contain, I say not all, but any of them whatever unmixed. —Philo, *On the Creation* 16–20
>
> (translation slightly modified from Winston, *Philo*, 99–100)

The similarity of the image in this passage to that of *Genesis Rabba* 1:1 was noted by Freudenthal, *Hellenistichen Studien*, 1:73. David Runia, following Heinrich Grätz and Wilhelm Bacher, has argued that since R. [H]osha'ya of Caesaria, whose name is connected (though not irrefutably) with the *Genesis Rabba* passage, lived in Caesaria at the same time as the Church Father Origen, it is certainly conceivable that this is a case of direct influence. The similarity of the images notwithstanding, Philo's argument is nonetheless different from that of *Genesis Rabba.* See further Barthélemy, "Est-ce Hoshaya Rabba"; Winston, *Philo*, 338; Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 14; Urbach, *The Sages*, 175–176. Far more Philonic (in the sense of the passage just cited) is the treatment of the creation in Letter to the Hebrews:

> By faith we understand that world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. —Heb. 11:3

See further Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews;* Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 74–78.

A Day of God's: One problem that struck ancient interpreters was the fact that God is said to have created the world in six "days." The word "day" usually refers to the time from sunrise to sunset, or from one sunrise to the next, yet the sun itself was not created until the fourth "day" (Gen. 1:14–19). How could the Bible speak of days taking place before there was a sun? What is more, a day is in any case a strange unit of time for God's creation of the universe. Why should it have taken an omnipotent God any time at all? And if it did, why six days rather than, say, millions of years?

For these reasons, some interpreters concluded that the "days" spoken of in Genesis 1 were not ordinary days at all. One important source for such a view was found within the Bible itself:

> A thousand years in Your sight are like **yesterday.** —Ps. 90:4

In context, this verse seems to mean that for God, centuries and centuries of past history are no more remote than yesterday; since He is eternal, a thousand years pass as quickly for God as a single day for us. But if so, interpreters reasoned, then perhaps there is an actual unit of time, a "day" of God's, which lasts a thousand years. (This insight ultimately came to be connected to another issue, that of the "day" on which Adam and Eve died; see Chapter 3, "Death in a Day.") Here, then, was one potential answer to the problem of six "days": the world had really been

created in six periods of a thousand years each, each one a "day of God's." (See also *Letter of Barnabas* 15:4, discussed in Chapter 3, and the eschatological "first day and last day" of a thousand years in *Didascalia Apostolorum,* discussed in Chapter 25, *OR,* "Until That Particular Day.")

Created in a Single Act: There was, however, another factor involved in determining the actual length of the first six "days." Some interpreters argued that, six "days" or not, God had actually created all the various components of the world simultaneously, in a single divine act.

> He [Moses, the traditional author of the Pentateuch] says that the world was created in six days—not that the Creator needed any length of time for His work, for it seems only reasonable that God should do everything in one stroke, not only the commanding, but the planning as well. Rather, it is that there was a need for order with regard to the things being created, and order is governed by number. —Philo, *On the Creation* 13

> R. Nehemiah said: . . . On the same day in which [heaven and earth] were created, they likewise brought forth their progeny. —*Genesis Rabba* 12:4

This idea—that all the things of this world were created simultaneously by God—might seem to flagrantly contradict what the Bible itself says about the six days. But the idea of simultaneous creation was also rooted in the Bible, in a verse from the following chapter of Genesis:

> These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, **on the day** that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.
>
> —Gen. 2:4

The phrase "on the day" certainly seems to imply that not only heaven and earth, but also their "generations," the things that grew out of them and inhabited them, such as plants and animals and birds, had all been called into existence in a single day.[21] If so, then this verse does indeed contradict what is said in the first chapter of Genesis. Faced with such a contradiction, some interpreters reasoned that the world was indeed created in a single stroke; the six days (as Philo suggests above) may have just been a way of arranging or ordering the things being created.

Philo's view actually contained a further nuance: he believed that the primal creative act of Gen. 1:1—understood by Philo as taking place in the nonmaterial realm—was succeeded by the simultaneous creation of all things after it; see Belkin, *Philo's Midrash,* 1–2. This notwithstanding, the "six days" mentioned in Genesis 1 were there, as far as Philo was concerned, merely because of the need for orderliness in the creation. This same argument is set out specifically by a man whose thinking

21. Note that some modern translators, faced with this problem, break off Gen. 2:4 in the middle and make its second half the start of a new sentence that runs on into the next verse. Thus, the Revised Standard Version: "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. *In the day* that the Lord made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth . . ."

was shaped by Philo's teachings, the early Christian commentator and theologian Origen. Referring to Gen. 2:4, Origen asks somewhat sarcastically:

> Did Moses forget that he had just said that the created world was completed in six days, and was it because he had forgotten this that he went on to say, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth **on the day** that they were created" (Gen. 2:4)?[22] It is hardly plausible that it was because of some misunderstanding that Moses, having just spoken of six days, should now say "on the day that God created them."
>
> — Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6:50 (also 60)

Origen goes on to make explicit the same argument that underlies Philo's writings, that the expression "on the day" in Gen. 2:4 proves that there was one great act of creation that was accomplished all at once. As was seen above, this same idea of a single act of creation may be reflected in rabbinic sources from a somewhat later period.[23] (On Philo in Origen's *Contra Celsum,* see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature,* 161–163.) This idea of a single creative act is specifically rejected by other interpreters, however, who insisted that "six days" meant six *days* (for example, John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 3:3); see Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:34.

Special Light of Creation: The book of *Jubilees* and some later texts seek to resolve the apparent contradiction between the creation of light on the first day and the creation of the sun and moon on the fourth day by suggesting that the first day's creation of light was more theoretical than actual:

> And [He created] the abysses and darkness—both evening and night—and light—both dawn and daylight—which He *prepared in the knowledge of His heart.*
>
> — *Jubilees* 2:2

This same motif—in quite similar wording—appears as well in a Qumran text:

> Dividing light from darkness, he prepared the dawn in the knowledge of His heart.
>
> — (11QPs[a]) *Hymn to the Creator*

Here too the phrase "knowledge of His heart" (*da'at libbo*) seems intended to suggest that although the light of the sun (*Jubilees'* "dawn and daylight") was not actually created until the fourth day, its creation had already been "prepared" or established as part of the first day's activity. This is merely one of several striking resemblances between the *Hymn to the Creator* and *Jubilees.*

22. Origen actually quotes the verse incorrectly here, conflating Gen. 2:4 with the similar sounding Gen. 5:1.

23. Note in this connection: "R. Yoḥanan said: When a human king builds a palace, someone builds the lower parts, and afterwards he builds the upper parts. But God built the upper and lower parts [of the world] in a single act of creation" (*Genesis Rabba* 12:12). It should be noted that the context of this remark is that of an earlier debate concerning the timing of the creation of "heavenly things" as opposed to "earthly things," a debate attributed to the schools of Hillel and Shammai. See *Genesis Rabba* 1:15, 12:3–5.

Some interpreters further associated this primordial light, and the distinction between day and night that its creation brought about (Gen. 1:5), with a particular passage from the Psalms:

> You bring darkness and it becomes night, when all the beasts of the forest move about . . .
> When the sun rises, they are gathered in, and they lie down in their lairs.
> People go forth to their occupations, and stay at their work until evening.
> —Ps. 104:20–23

The implication was that on the very first day of creation, God distinguished not only light from dark and day from night, but also daytime activities from those of the night:

> And He called the light day and created it for those who dwell in the world to work therein, while He called the darkness night and created it for human beings to rest therein. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 1:5

The creation of this first light thus also served to establish a set order for human beings to follow, that is, to work during the day and to sleep at night. (Cf. Shinan, "Aramaic Targums to the Creation Story," 231.)

The light created on the first day was sometimes connected to another verse from the Psalms, which describes God as

> Covering Himself with light as a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. —Ps. 104:2

From this verse developed the idea that the light spoken of in Gen. 1:3 came from God's own garment of light, a primordial light that preceded creation. See further *Genesis Rabba* 3:4 and other texts listed in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:8. Note also:

> [God told Enoch:] "And I commanded the lowest things: 'Let one of the invisible things descend visibly!' And Adoil descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and behold, in his belly he had a great light. And I said to him, 'Disintegrate yourself, Adoil, and let what is born from you become visible.' And he disintegrated himself, and there came out a very great light. And I was in the midst of the light. And light out of light is carried thus."
> —*2 Enoch* (J) 25:1–3

Philo, however, used the phrase "light through light" with reference to the apprehension of God:

> The seekers for truth are those who envisage God through God, light through light. —Philo, *Rewards and Punishments* 46

See further Winston, *Philo*, 27.

Other interpreters (discussed earlier in this chapter) saw this first day's light as an actual source of illumination that allowed God to see His creation as it progressed. This idea may underlie a Qumran fragment:

]for eternal light and heavens of brillian[ce
ligh]t in place of emptiness and voi[d
]all their created things to the e[nds

—(4Q303) *Meditation of the Creation A*, 4–6

The evocation of "emptiness and void" *(twhwwb[hw])* clearly locates this passage on the first day of creation. The word *m'sym* can mean "deeds," things done, but it likewise can mean more specifically things *created* (or even "creatures"), and such is the apparent sense here: God creates the primordial light "for eternal light and heavens of brilliance," setting this light "in [the] place of emptiness and void," that is, shimmering over the earth and the waters on the first day of creation, to allow God to see "all their [the heaven's and the earth's] created things," to the very ends of the earth.

Incidentally, one passage cited earlier goes on to present the idea that the first day's light was stored away for future time:

> Said R. Eli'ezer: With the light that God created on the first day one could see from one end of the world to the other. But when God considered the Generation of the Flood [that is, the people who were to live at the time of Noah] and the Generation of the Dispersion [those who were to live at the time of the tower of Babel] and saw how wicked their deeds were, He at once hid this light from them, as it is said [of God at the time of the creation], "He shut off their light from the wicked" [Job 38:15]. And for whom did He store it away? For the righteous in the time to come. —b. *Ḥagigah* 12a

The apparent starting point of this motif is Ps. 97:11 (in the traditional Hebrew text), "Light is *sown* for the righteous." Presumably that which is sown now is to be harvested at some later point, that is, "for the righteous in time to come." See further Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:8–9.

The Angels Were Also Created: A hint of the idea that the angels were created on the second day may exist as well in *Fourth Ezra:*

> Again, on the second day, You created the **spirit** of the firmament, and commanded him to separate the waters, so that one part might move upward and the other part remain beneath. —*4 Ezra* 6:41

It is difficult to account for the creation of this "spirit" and its acting on God's behalf—something that has no obvious referent in the Bible itself (see Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 185). In any case, this spirit seems to be some sort of angel, since the Hebrew word *ruaḥ* (wind or spirit) was sometimes used to refer to angels. Perhaps this angel owes his existence to the understanding, mentioned earlier, of "firmament" as the name of one part of the heavens,[24] a part in which, arguably, angels dwelt. If the

24. Rabbinic sources disagree as to which part—see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba*, 45 n. Note also *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 7:9–12, where the firmament is the abode of Sammael and his hosts, just below the first heaven.

firmament was created on the second day by, as it were, draining the primal waters upward and downward, this action presumably was designed to make the firmament habitable by someone. *Fourth Ezra* (or the tradition underlying it here) seems to supply that someone, the "spirit of the firmament," who is created on the second day and then commissioned to drain out his own future dwelling place. Note also that *Shepherd of Hermas* Vision 4:1 may contain a reminiscence of the angels' creation at the start of the hexameron, though the precise time is not stated.

Windy and Fiery Angels: We saw one source that, while ascribing the creation of the angels to the second day, also described them as taking the form of wind and fire:

> The angels, who were created on the second day, when they are sent by His word they become winds, but when they serve before Him, they are made of fire, as it is written, "Who makes the winds His messengers, and flaming fire His servants" [Ps. 104:4]. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 4

This interpretation of Ps. 104:4 cleverly inverts its apparent meaning, taking advantage of its somewhat ambiguous wording in Hebrew to read it as: "Who makes His messengers [that is, the angels] *into* winds, and [presumably on other occasions] turns His servants [that is, the angels] *into* flaming fire." It is interesting that this same interpretation of Ps. 104:4 seems to underlie other ancient texts. Thus, Ezra prays to God:

> O Lord . . . whose throne is beyond measure and whose glory is beyond comprehension, before Whom the hosts of angels stand trembling and at whose command they are changed to **wind and fire.** — *4 Ezra* 8:22

Similarly:

> [Abraham recalls:] And I saw there [on the sixth firmament] a multitude of **spiritual**[25] angels, incorporeal, carrying out the orders of the **fiery** angels who were on the eighth firmament. — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 19:6

> You who gave commandments to the **air** with your sign . . . and who rule with indignation the countless holy being [that is, angels] who are **flame and fire,** whom You created from the beginning, those who stand around your throne.
>
> With signs of fear and threat you command the **flames,** and they change into **winds.** And with the word you bring to life that which does not exist.
>
> — *2 Baruch* 21:6, 48:8

It is noteworthy that the "angels of the spirits [or just "angels"] of the winds" are mentioned alongside those of the "spirits of fire" in the creation account of the book of *Jubilees:*

25. Slavonic *duxovĭnŭ* equals Greek *pneumatikos,* in which the dual meaning of "wind" or "breath" along with "spirit" was certainly still felt; the same was true of Hebrew *ruaḥ.*

> For on the first day He created the heavens which are above and the earth and waters and all the spirits which serve before Him—the angels of the presence, and the angels of holiness, and the angels of the spirits of **fire** and the angels of the spirits of the **winds,** and the angels of the spirit of the clouds, and of darkness, and of snow and of hail and of frost, and the angels of the sounds, the thunders and the lightnings, and the angels of the spirits of cold and of heat, and of winter and of spring and of autumn and of summer, and of all the spirits of His creatures which are in the heavens and on the earth. —*Jubilees* 2:2

Both Jer. 10:13 and Ps. 135:7 speak of God's "taking wind from His storehouses [or "treasuries"]," and these references were also important for the motif in question, since they were generally understood to refer to an act that occurred once, during the six days of creation (perhaps because of the mention of the earth's creation in Jer. 10:12).

> Blessed is He who created the earth with His power, who established the world with His wisdom,
> **Who brought forth [wind] from His tre[asuries]**
> Who made [lightning for rai]n, and raised up mists from the ends of the earth.
>
> —(11QPs^{a}) *Hymn to the Creator*

On the connections between this hymn and the above-cited passage from *Jubilees,* see Skehan, "*Jubilees* and the Qumran Psalter," 343–347. (Given those connections, it seems likely that this hymn, like *Jubilees,* locates the creation of the angels on the first day, since their act of exultation in the hymn corresponds to *Jubilees* 2:3, the conclusion of the first day.) See also (apparently in this sense) Heb. 1:7.

Tireless Angels: One passage cited earlier in this chapter alludes to another aspect of the angels' creation, the notion that, once created, they tirelessly and unremittingly perform their angelic duties:

> When God created his created ones [that is, the angels] in the beginning, their portions He allotted to them:
> He established [their] activities for all time, and their dominions forever:
> So that they not hunger **nor grow weary, nor cease** from their labors,
> And so that one not interfere with another, and never might they rebel.
>
> —Sir. 16:26–28

The origins of this theme are quite ancient, apparently deriving from the identification of the stars with God's heavenly host (and hence the explanation of their regularity or cyclicity as a token of their obedience to their Master):

> When the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God exult.
>
> —Job 38:7

> Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these, bringing forth their hosts by [exact] number, calling all of them by name?
>
> Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel and its Maker: . . . I made the earth and created man upon it; it was My hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded **all their host** [that is, the stars].
>
> —Isa. 40:26, 45:11–12

> [God] reckons the number of stars and calls them all by name.
>
> —Ps. 147:4

> [God said to Job:] Can *you* bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the **rules** of the heavens?
>
> —Job 38:31–33

In keeping with such references, later texts likewise evoke the theme of the obedience and dependability of the heavenly host:

> Contemplate all the events in heaven, how the lights in heaven do not change their courses, and how each rises and sets in order, each at its proper time, and they do not transgress their law. —*1 Enoch* 2:1

> For sun and moon and stars, shining and sent forth for service, are obedient. —Letter of Jeremiah 60

> The stars shone in their watches and were glad; He called them and they said "Here we are," they shone with gladness for Him who made them.
>
> —Bar. 3:34

> Our God is great and glorious, living in the highest [heavens],
> Who arranges the stars into orbit for seasonal changes from year to year,
> And they do not deviate from the path which He commanded for them.
> Their journey each day is [performed] in the fear of the Lord,
> From the time when God first created them until eternity.
> And they have not gone astray from the time of their creation, from ancient days they have not strayed from their path, save when God orders them, at the command of His servants.
>
> —*Psalms of Solomon* 18:10–12

> He [God] set the creation and aroused it, then He rested from His works.
> And created things run according to their courses and work their works, and they are not able to cease and be idle.
>
> —*Odes of Solomon* 16:12–13

Shrink the Moon: On the fourth day God created the "heavenly luminaries":

> And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons

> and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the **two great lights,** the **great** light to rule the day, and the **small** light to rule the night. —Gen. 1:14–16

The "two great lights" are, obviously, the sun and the moon. Yet the Bible's calling both of them great here seems to be immediately contradicted by what is said next, namely, that only one of them was great, while the other was "small."[26] Which was it—were both great, or only one?

It may be that a clever solution stands behind one ancient assertion:

> As for the intensity of its [the sun's] light, it is sevenfold brighter than that of the moon; nevertheless, [they] are equal in regard to their sizes.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 72:37 (also 73:2, 78:4)

In other words, the sun and the moon are both "great" in terms of their size, but only the sun is "great" in terms of its light. (The idea that the proportional intensity is in the ratio of 7:1 is suggested by Isa. 30:26. This notion is found as well in *2 Enoch* 11:2 [J and A], without, however, the further stipulation that the two bodies are of the same size. Certainly the sun and moon sometimes appeared to be the same size to ancient observers, and that may be all that stands behind this assertion in *1 Enoch.* But it may also have been aimed at reconciling the apparent contradiction in Gen. 1:16.)

Another explanation appears elsewhere:

> [An angel tells Baruch:] "Th[e moon] which you see was designed by God to be beautiful without peer. But during the transgression of the first Adam, she gave light to Sammael when he took the serpent as a garment, and did not hide, but on the contrary, grew greater. And God was angered with her, and diminished her and shortened her days." —*3 Baruch* (Greek) 9:6–7

The idea that the moon had been shrunk appears also in a well-known rabbinic explanation of the same apparent contradiction:

> On the fourth day He created the two great lights—neither one was bigger than the other, but the two were equal in their height, their form, and the light that they gave off, as it is written, "And God made the two great lights . . ." But then they began to strive with one another: one would say to the other, "I am greater than you," and the other would say, "No, I am greater than you!" and there was no peace between them. What did God do? He made one great and the other small, as it is written, "the great light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night."[27]
>
> —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 4

26. Some translators sought to avoid this difficulty by rendering "great" and "small" as "greater" and "lesser" (that is, both were "great," but one was great*er* and the other, by necessity, small*er*).

27. A slightly different version of this midrash, familiar from b. *Ḥullin* 60b, is likewise found in *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 51; cf. *Genesis Rabba* 6:3, b. *Shebuot* 9a, *Yalqut Makhiri,* Isa. 60.

Note that according to *Genesis Rabba* 6:4, "the moon diminished herself to have dominion over the night" (Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 43). See further on Isa. 30:26 Talmon, "Calendar Reckoning," 182–183.

The Sun Stands Alone: It is noteworthy that in the Genesis account, God creates "lights in the firmament"—the sun, the moon, and the stars—to mark off various units of time, "for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years" (Gen. 1:14). But in the *Jubilees* retelling of this part of the creation, a slight change is introduced:

> And God appointed the **sun** to be a great sign on the earth for days and for sabbaths and for months and for feasts and for years and for sabbaths of years and for jubilees and for all seasons of the years. —*Jubilees* 2:9

The reason is that the author of *Jubilees* endorsed a calendar based solely on the sun, and opposed the lunar-solar calendar championed by other Jews (and still used in Judaism today for fixing dates). As a result, *Jubilees* attributed to the sun the sole power to determine the units of time listed; months, according to its calendar, had a fixed number of days and were quite independent of the waxing and waning of the moon. (See further VanderKam, "Genesis 1 in Jubilees 2," and sources listed below in Chapter 17, *OR,* "This Very Month.") This approach ran counter, however, to a verse in the Psalms:

> [God] made the moon for appointed times, the sun knows the place of its setting. —Ps. 104:19

If the "appointed times" (a word used also for festivals) are determined by the moon, then the calendar endorsed by *Jubilees* could not be valid.

> "He made the moon for appointed times" [Ps. 104:19]: R. Yoḥanan said: the sun alone was created to illuminate [the earth]; if so, then why was the moon created? For the "appointed times," that is, in order to mark the beginnings of months and years by it. —*Genesis Rabba* 6:1

God and Someone Else: Some interpreters took the plural "Let us make man" in Gen. 1:26 as an indication that God and someone else was responsible for man's creation, while other interpreters vigorously denied the possibility. (On the tradition of the emendation "Let Me make man," see Tov, "The Rabbinic Tradition concerning the 'Alterations,'" 78, 85.) While Philo's answer (as seen earlier in *Confusion of Tongues* 179) seems to belong in the first camp, it is, as usual, somewhat *sui generis,* particularly in its denial of the *necessity* of any co-creators:

> For he [Moses] represents the Father of the universe as speaking thus, "Let *us* make man after our image and likeness . . ." Can it be that when He made the heaven and the earth and the seas He required no one to be His fellow worker, yet was unable, without some cooperation of others, to shape by His own unaided power a creature so puny and perishable as man?! [Rather, this is the reason:] Among existent things some partake neither of virtue or vice, [while] others are connected with virtue alone . . . [and are] incapable of

> any evil. Others are of mixed nature, like man, who is liable to contraries, wisdom and folly, self-mastery and licentiousness, courage and cowardice, justice and injustice . . . To make [such creatures] of mixed natures was in one respect proper to Him, in another not so . . . So we see why it is only in the instance of man's creation that we are told by Moses [author of the Pentateuch] that God said "Let us make," an expression which plainly shows the taking with Him of others as fellow-workers. It is to the end that, when man orders his course properly, when his thoughts and deeds are blameless, God the universal ruler may indeed be ascribed their source, while others from the number of His subordinates are held responsible for thoughts and deeds of a contrary sort; for it could not be that the Father should be the cause of an evil thing to His offspring, and vice and vicious activities are an evil thing. —Philo, *On the Creation* 72–76

Philo's idea of "fellow-workers" (or "other *makers*" [in Greek, *demiourgos*] in *Flight and Finding* 70) seems to have been taken over from Plato, *Timaeus* 41c, 69c. See further Winston, "Theodicy and the Creation of Man"; idem, *Philo*, 359 n. 354; Fossum, "Gen. 1,26."

In the Image of God? Apart from the question of who was being addressed, Gen. 1:26 fascinated early interpreters for what it seemed to imply about humanity's resemblance to God—and vice versa. For what did it mean to say that humanity had been created "in God's image"?

Philo, in keeping with his approach (see above on Plato and the Logos), interpreted the creation of "man" in Gen. 1:27 as an act quite distinct from the creation of Adam, the first physical human, in Gen. 2:7. What was created in the first verse was instead an ideal type, without physical being, an incorporeal idea:

> There is a vast difference between the man thus formed [in Gen. 2:7] and the man that came into existence earlier, "in the image" of God [Gen. 1:27]. For the man formed [in Gen. 2:7] is an object of sense-perception, partaking already of such or such quality, consisting of body and soul, man or woman, by nature mortal; while he that was made "in the image" [of God] was an idea or type or seal, an object of thought [alone], incorporeal, neither male nor female, by nature incorruptible. —Philo, *On the Creation* 134

(See further on Philo below, also his *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:4 and Belkin, *Philo's Midrash*, 11–13; also, Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 84–85.) A similar sort of thinking may be reflected in the New Testament, where Col. 1:15 refers to Jesus as "the *image* of the invisible God, the firstborn of all Creation" (cf. Phil. 2:5–11). It has been suggested that this verse, and others, reflect an earlier Jewish belief in an angelic hypostasis of God, one that was transformed in early Christianity and attributed to the preexistent Son. On the "image of God" in Paul's letters, as well as the central role of Adam in Pauline theology (in particular Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15), see inter alia Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 47–48; Jervell, *Imago*

Dei; Barrett, From First Adam to Last; Scroggs, *The Last Adam;* Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel.*

The idea that man was created in the image of God seemed to suggest to some interpreters that God in heaven indeed has some sort of physical being. Most modern Jews and Christians would of course find such a suggestion disquieting. However, the many biblical references to God's hands, fingers, eyes, mouth, feet, face, and so forth, as well as, in particular, Gen. 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," all seemed to many ancient interpreters to suggest not only that God has a physical existence, but that His body is in fact that of a giant humanlike being—for if we are in His image, then He must be in ours as well. So it was that some ancient Jews and Christians came to interpret this biblical verse as revealing, in rather matter-of-fact fashion, that God is a giant human-shaped Being so immense that His body fills the universe, or is the universe. Although this notion has subsequently disappeared, it was for a time significant for Jewish mystics as well as the gnostics mentioned earlier, and it became the subject of much further speculation and development. (See further Smith, "Image of God"; Stroumsa, "Form[s] of God"; idem, *Another Seed;* and Wilson, "The Early Exegesis of Gen. 1:26," 420–437.)

This is hardly to say that Gen. 1:26 was interpreted primarily as a clue to the nature of God; on the contrary, it was understood largely as a statement about human beings and their Godlike qualities. As described in Chapter 3, some ancient interpreters held that Adam and Eve were originally created to be immortal—so perhaps *this* was the sense in which they were made in God's "image":

> For God created man for incorruption [or "immortality"][28] and made him **in the image** of His own eternity. —Wisd. 2:23

Others explained that humanity was created "in the image of God" in the sense that humans are capable of thought and understanding, or that the human soul partakes of the divine, or that human beings were endowed with such divine virtues as mercy and wisdom.

> The Lord created humanity from the earth, and back to earth He shall return it.
> He gave them few days and [little] time, but granted them authority over all things upon the earth.
> He clothed them with might like [His] own, and made them in His own image.
> He placed the fear of [them] in all flesh, and granted dominion over beast and bird.
> He created tongue and eyes and ears, and a discerning mind he gave to them.
> He filled them with knowledge and understanding, he taught them [to know] good and evil.
>
> —Sir. (reconstructed from Greek, Latin, and Syriac) 17:1–6

28. Note that Philo (*On the Creation* 134, cited earlier) similarly described the first human as "incorporeal, neither male nor female, by nature incorruptible."

The first two lines specifically *deny* the motif just seen, that being created in God's image means being immortal. But if not immortality, then what did God and humans have in common? The third line above makes specific the connection of humanity's "might" with its creation "in His own image," but it seems likely that all the things listed—authority over other creatures on earth (hence humanity's "might" and "dominion"), the capacity for speech and discernment, and the knowledge of right and wrong—are intended to explain what being created in God's image truly meant. This way of explaining God's "image," as well as some of the terms specifically used by Ben Sira here, seem to be connected as well with Ps. 8:

> Yet You made him [Adam] little less than God, and did crown [surround] him with glory and honor,
> You gave him dominion over Your creatures, and put all things beneath his feet.
>
> —Ps. 8:5–6

The above passage in Ben Sira may underlie a later one:

> And after that He created man according to His image, and put in him eyes to see, ears to hear, heart to think, and reason to argue. —*2 Enoch* (A) 65:2

A set of traits similar to those in Ben Sira are likewise found elsewhere:

> By Your wisdom you formed man to have **dominion over the creatures** that You made, and **rule the world** in holiness and **righteousness,** and pronounce judgment in the **uprightness** of soul. —Wisd. 9:2–3 (also 10:2)

> . . . mankind, that highest form of life, which has received **dominion** over everything whatsoever on earth, born to be the **likeness of God's power** and the **image** of His nature, the visible of the Invisible, the created of the Eternal. —Philo, *Moses* 2:65

> After all the rest . . . Moses tells us that man was created after the image of God and after His likeness [Gen. 1:26] . . . Let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form, for neither is God in human form nor is the human body God-like. No, it is in respect of the **mind,** the sovereign element of the soul, that the word "image" is used . . . For the human mind evidently occupies a position in men precisely corresponding to that which the great Ruler occupies in the world. —Philo, *On the Creation* 69

The same sense may have been intended in a Qumran fragment:

> [. . . Adam] our father, You created in the **image of Your glory . . .** [the breath of life] You breathed into his nostrils, and with **understanding and knowledge** [You filled him . . .] —(4Q504) *Words of the Luminaries,* fragment 8

In the same sense see also (4Q303) *Meditation on the Creation A,* lines 7–8, and (4Q304) *Meditation on the Creation C,* col. 2, lines 2–3.

Immense Primordial Adam: A well-known theme in both rabbinic and gnostic writings is that of Adam's great size: some held that he had been created as a

being of immense size whose physical bulk filled the universe. This theme is primarily connected in rabbinic sources with Ps. 139:5, "You beset me behind and before," which—with only a slight stretch of the Hebrew—could be understood as meaning "west and east You have formed me." Thus:

> He created him the size of the whole world, from the east to the west, [as it says,] "West and east You have formed me" [Ps. 139:5]. — *Genesis Rabba* 8:1

(See further Niditch, "Cosmic Man as Mediator," 137–146.) Other elements in the same psalm may have contributed to its connection with the creation of an immense primordial Adam (who was subsequently shrunk down to size). Thus, verses 8–9 seem to suggest that the speaker of the psalm can "ascend to [or "lift up"] heaven" or "stretch out Sheol [as a bed]"—actions befitting an immense being.

Yet what indicated that this psalm was spoken by Adam in the first place? It is noteworthy that the Septuagint and later translators parsed the phrase cited earlier, "behind and before," as the end of verse 4 rather than the beginning of verse 5, understanding it in a temporal sense, "Behold, Lord, You know all things, *the last things and the first.*" The next verse might then be read as an instance of God's knowledge of such "first" things: "You formed me, and You placed Your hand[s] upon me." To ancient readers, this must have seemed like a straightforward allusion to the creation of Adam, the first created human and the only one to have been formed out of clay (Gen. 2:7). Such an impression might certainly be reinforced by verses 15–16, "I was intricately wrought in [or "with"] the depths of the earth, Your eyes beheld my unfinished form." The speaker of the psalm might well seem to be Adam, and the references to his immense size in verses 8–9 and elsewhere then suggest that primordial Adam was, at the time of his creation, immense. Only at a later stage in the development of this motif did the phrase "You placed Your hand[s] upon me" come to be associated with God reducing this enormous being's size:

> What of the phrase "You placed Your hand upon me?" This teaches that at first Adam was created [stretching] from the earth to the firmament. When the ministering angels saw him, they trembled and fled from him. Then they all came before God and said: Master of the Universe! Are there to be two powers in the world, one in heaven and the other on earth? Whereupon what did God do? He placed his hand upon him [Adam] and reduced him in size. — *'Otiyot deR. Aqiba*
>
> (Wertheimer, *Battei Midrašot*, 2:412; see also *Genesis Rabba* 8:9)

Meanwhile, the phrase "behind and before," now attached to the beginning of verse 5, was again interpreted temporally as designating Adam's being formed in two stages, "before and after" (*Genesis Rabba* 8:1).

Yet such a reading of Psalm 139, however ingenious, hardly seems sufficient to have been the *source* of the "Immense Primordial Adam" motif. To begin with, the speaker of this same psalm elsewhere refers to "my mother's womb" (verse 13)—a difficult phrase to account for if the speaker were indeed Adam. What is more, even if he is held to be Adam, the apparent references to his great size are hardly unequivocal; they could be (and were) understood as indicating Adam's angelic status rather than any great physical size. Thus, if this psalm was interpreted as

referring to an immense, primordial Adam, it seems probable that that motif had already been in existence and was simply transferred to this new biblical site.

If there is a scriptural source for this motif, we should seek its origins elsewhere—in Ps. 8:5–6, which says that God had made Adam ("man") "little less than God," and perhaps as well in Gen. 1:26. Quite simply, God created Adam "in His image" in the sense that He initially made Adam a huge celestial humanoid, as immense (or almost) as the Deity Himself as described in, for example, Isa. 40:12–18. This divine size might go hand in hand with Adam's other divine qualities, such as his immortality (seen above in Wisd. 2:23 and below, in Chapter 3, "The Punishment Was Mortality"). Such an understanding is not a particularly clever or inventive reading of Gen. 1:26, but it may, perhaps along with Ps. 8:5–6, nonetheless stand at the very start of what proved to be a most enduring and creative tradition. See also Segal, *Two Powers,* 110–115.

Later on, after the story of Noah and the flood, the Bible repeats the assertion that humanity was created in "God's image" (Gen. 9:6). Because it appears there in a rather different context, this assertion was further interpreted as bearing on such diverse matters as murder and fertility:

> R. Aqiba says: Anyone who commits murder nullifies the likeness of God, for it says, "Who sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in His own image did God make man" [Gen. 9:6]. R. El'azar b. 'Azariah says: Anyone who . . . does not engage in procreation nullifies the image of God, for it says, ". . . in His own image did God make man" [Gen. 9:6], and it says [immediately afterward], "And you, be fruitful and multiply" [Gen. 9:7].
>
> —Tosefta *Yebamot* 8:7

See also Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 9:7 (cited in Chapter 26, *OR,* "Crucified on a Tree").

Androgynous Humanity: Gen. 1:27 likewise states that human beings were made in the image of God, but adds a new element: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; *male and female* He created them." The word "man" *('adam),* in Hebrew as in English, is ambiguous; it can mean a human being of either sex, or it can designate specifically a male human being. To an ordinary reader it might seem that this verse is simply trying to stress the fact that human beings of both sexes were created on this sixth day. But another interpretation was possible:

> Said Rabbi Jeremiah b. Lazar: At the time that God created the first human, He created him as an androgyne [a combination of male and female], as it is written "male *and* female He created them."
>
> —*Genesis Rabba* 8:1

> By means of verbal expression He created an androgyne.
>
> —*On the Origin of the World* (Nag Hammadi) 101.10

One might conclude that the God in whose image this male-female being was created was similarly possessed of the qualities of either sex or else (which is not quite the same) lacking any gender-specific characteristics altogether. Note also that

Philo (*On the Creation* 134, cited above) hit upon the phrase "male and female He created them" as indicating that this was a single being, "neither male nor female." Elsewhere he denounces "mythical stories of the double-bodied men who were originally brought by unifying forces into cohesion with each other and afterwards came asunder" (*Contemplative Life* 63), but this censure apparently did not apply to the original androgyne. See further Winter, "Sadoqite Fragments"; Meeks, "Image of the Androgyne."

One Male with One Female: The same phrase, "male and female," was also seen as scriptural proof that human beings were created for lifelong monogamy, that is, one male with one female:

> [Sinners] are trapped . . . by fornication into marrying two women during their lifetime,[29] whereas the principle of creation was "**male and female** He created them" [Gen. 1:27], and [similarly] those who entered [Noah's] ark "two by two they entered the ark" [Gen. 7:9].
>
> — *Damascus Document* 4:20–5:1

> And the Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that He who made them from the beginning made them **male and female.**"
>
> — Matt. 19:3–4 (compare Mark 10:2–9)

See further Chapter 25, "No Divorce—Except for Indecency."

Adam and His Rib: Gen. 1:27 thus describes the creation of the first human being(s), "male and female He created them." But if that is so, then why does Genesis go on to renarrate the creation of Adam and Eve in the next chapter—and to say this time that Adam was created first (Gen. 2:7), with Eve being subsequently created out of Adam's "side" or "rib" (Gen. 2:22)? Does not this contradict Gen. 1:27?

We have already seen Philo's answer—that the "human being[s]" created in Gen. 1:27 were quite different from Adam and Eve. Other interpreters maintained that the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3 was simply a more detailed recounting of the creation of humanity first mentioned in Gen. 1:27 (in which case, the fact that Adam was created first was understood to have been "telescoped" in the assertion of Gen. 1:27 that both were created together).

Jubilees, however, records a somewhat different, and clever, solution to the same problem. It maintains that the "female" created on the sixth day of creation was in fact Adam's "rib," a female entity that existed inside Adam. Subsequently, in the second week of creation, God removed this rib and shaped her into a woman of form and size corresponding to that of Adam:

> In the first week Adam was created and also the rib, his wife. And in the **second** week [the rib was reshaped into a woman] and He showed her to him.
>
> — *Jubilees* 3:8

29. That is, taking a second wife while the first is still alive.

In this way *Jubilees* is able to maintain the apparent chronological sequence of the Bible: creation of the "male and female" (the female here being Adam's rib), then the first Sabbath, then the shaping of the rib into a woman. Somewhat similarly:

> Then it says, "male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27) to inform that Eve was inside Adam, in the rib that was [later] taken out of him.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1:29

Ephraem, however, also maintains the "flashback" position; see above and Chapter 3, *OR*, "Adam's Ex."

You Must Be Fruitful: After God created mankind He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." In context, this might seem to be a blessing (so it is described, see also Gen. 35:11), but rabbinic sources took it as a divine commandment:

> One may not cease from reproduction [literally, "being fruitful and multiplying"] unless one already has children. The school of Shammai maintains [that this means, at a minimum,] two sons, while the school of Hillel maintains a male and a female, as it is written "Male and female He created them" [Gen. 5:2] . . . The *requirement* to reproduce is incumbent on the man but not on the woman. R. Yoḥanan b. Beroqa says: it is incumbent on both of them, for it says, "And God blessed them and said to *them*, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'"
>
> —m. *Yebamot* 6:6

On the interpretive history of this particular verse, see Cohen, *"Be Fertile and Increase."*

The World for Israel: All the days of creation conclude, in the traditional Hebrew text, "And it was evening and it was morning, a second ["a third," "a fourth," and so on] day," that is, the definite article "the" does not appear before the word "day"—except in the case of the sixth day, where it says, "And it was evening and it was morning, *the* sixth day." Why this distinction?

> Said Resh Laqish: "And it was evening, and it was morning, *the* sixth day [and the heavens and the earth were completed, with all their hosts]" (Gen. 1:31–2:1). Why is the extra word *the* here? It alludes to the fact that God had made a proviso with all the works of Creation. He said to them: If, in time to come, the people of Israel accept the Torah on *the* sixth day [of the month of Sivan, the day when, by rabbinic reckoning, the Torah was given on Mount Sinai], then you will be maintained; but if not, I will return you to chaos.
>
> —b. *Shabbat* 88a

This explanation, by a rabbi of the third century C.E., follows in the general tradition evidenced above ("The 'Beginning' Did It" and "Built by the Book"), according to which the Torah—that is, Wisdom—is not merely a sacred book but a force in the universe, something of cosmic significance. As a result, this exegete proposes to see in the anomalous "the" of "*the* sixth day" a hint to that sixth day par

excellence, the sixth of the month of Sivan when Israel was, according to the rabbinic reckoning,[30] to be offered the Torah. The acceptance of the Torah on that occasion, he implies, was so important that, had Israel acted otherwise and rejected the Torah, God would have seen no purpose to the existence of the universe, and all would have been returned to the way things were before the creation started.[31]

This is reminiscent of an older theme, to the effect that the world itself was created for the sake of Israel. Rooted in Deut. 32:8 and similar verses, this theme is widely attested:

> He created the world for the sake of his people, but He did not make this purpose of Creation known openly from the beginning of the world so that the nations might be put to shame because of it, indeed, that they might accuse themselves by dint of their disputing abjectly with one another.[32]
>
> — *Testament of Moses* 1:12

> [Ezra says:] All this I have spoken before you, O Lord, because You have said that it was **for us** that You created this world. As for the other nations which have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing, and that they are like spittle, and you have compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket [cf. Isa. 40:15]. — 4 *Ezra* 6:55–56 (see also 6:59, 7:11)

In keeping with the typological identification of "Israel" with the church in early Christianity, the theme appeared there in a new form:

> God who dwells in the heavens and created out of nothing the things that are, and increased and multiplied them for the sake of **his holy church** . . .
>
> — *Shepherd of Hermas* Vision 1:6

On this theme, see further Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:67–68; Japhet, *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles,* 116–124, and below, "The First Sabbath." Elsewhere, the world was created for mankind (*2 Baruch* 14:18, note the "righteous" in *2 Baruch* 15:7; *4 Ezra* 8:44, *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 3, Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1:4:74; further Stone, *Fourth Ezra,* 188).

30. Other Jewish groups of the Second Temple period did not so reckon; see above, "The Sun Stands Alone," and Chapter 17, *OR,* "This Very Month."

31. It is to be noted that Resh Laqish's reading seems to depend on running Gen. 1:31 on into the next verse, Gen. 2:1. In that way, the text can be made out to be saying: And it was evening, and it was morning; [if, on] *the* sixth day [Israel accepts the Torah, then] the heavens and the earth will be completed, that is, *left in existence,* with all their hosts. Quite apart from this interpretation and its homiletic purpose, it appears that the later punctuators of the Bible should not in any case have decided to end Gen. 1:31 where they did, but should have included the words of the next verse as well in the same sentence, since the two form a logical unit. They were apparently misled by the refrainlike use of the formula "And it was evening and it was morning" on the previous days.

32. Such is the Latin text, but I believe its *ut* should be a *ne* (the mistake perhaps having originated in the Latin, but more likely at an earlier stage), in other words: God did not make the purpose of the creation known "from the beginning of the world"—that is, in the Genesis account—*lest* the nations be put to shame because of it, lest they fall to disputing among themselves (with each nation claiming the world was instead created for *it*) and so end up accusing one another.

Completed on Friday: The Bible used by the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt—and soon by Greek-speaking Christians—came to be known by the name "Septuagint," from the Latin *septuaginta,* "seventy." This name goes back to an ancient legend known to us from various sources (among them *The Letter of Aristeas* 32, 302 and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12:12–118). According to the legend, Ptolemy, king of Egypt, commissioned a translation of the Torah into Greek. The translation was made by seventy (or seventy-two) scholars, each working independently. When all had finished, it was discovered that their translations agreed with one another in every detail. See further Jellicoe, *Septuagint and Modern Study,* 29–171; Harl et al., *La Bible grecque des septante,* 39–82.

In some versions of this legend, it is further specified that all the translators deviated from the traditional Hebrew text in a number of particulars, to avoid having their words misinterpreted by ordinary Greeks. Strikingly, three of these deliberately introduced changes occur at the very beginning of Genesis and involve some of the same issues seen in our chapter:

> It happened that King Ptolemy assembled seventy-two [Jewish] elders and put each of them into seventy-two separate chambers, and did not reveal to them why he had assembled them. Then he went in to each one of them and said: Write for me [in Greek] the Torah of Moses your teacher. God gave counsel to each of them in his heart, and they were all of one mind [in translating], and so they wrote "God created in the beginning" [lest one understand "in the beginning" to be the name of another creator], "Let **me** make mankind . . ." [lest "Let us make mankind . . ." imply more than one creator], "And God finished on the **sixth** day . . . and God rested on the seventh day . . ." [lest one think that the last bit of work was done on the seventh day]. —b. *Megillah* 9a

See further Tov, "The Rabbinic Tradition concerning the 'Alterations'"; Harl et al., *La Bible grecque des septante,* 121, 209–210; Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Écriture,* 64–65. In connection with both the text of Gen. 2:2 and its interpretation, see also *Letter of Barnabas* 15:1–5.

The First Sabbath (But Not the Last): The Bible says that God rested on the seventh day, but it says nothing about Him ending that Sabbath rest (nor, for that matter, does it mention God resting on any subsequent Sabbath). Interpreters no doubt found this problematic, since it could all too easily lead to the conclusion that God is still "resting"; this is the doctrine of an otiose Creator, that is, He who had made the universe simply ceased activity after the creation.

> And it is plainly said by our legislation [that is, the Torah] that God rested on the seventh day. This does not mean, **as some interpret it,** that God no longer does anything. It means that after He had finished ordering all things, He so orders them for all time. — Aristobulus, Fragment 5 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.11)

But if, as most interpreters maintained, God rested on that first Sabbath and then went back to work, why does the Bible fail to mention any subsequent divine

Sabbaths?[33] For in fact the Sabbath is mentioned again only much later, in the book of Exodus—and there it is being kept not by God, nor even by all of humanity, but by one small people on earth, the people of Israel. What is more, it sometimes rains or snows on the Sabbath, and the wind blows as usual. Does not this very fact imply that God, to whom Scripture specifically attributes responsibility for such things (see, for example, Ps. 147:18), does not regularly rest on the Sabbath? Perhaps indeed God had observed only that first Sabbath after the creation and has been working ever since:

> Do not look askance if we [Christians] drink hot water on the Sabbath [in violation of the Jewish Sabbath laws], since God does not cease directing the operation of the universe on that day, but He continues as on other days.
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 29:3

> [A pagan said to R. Aqiba:] "If, as you say, God honors the Sabbath, then let him not cause the winds to blow on it or make the rain to fall [that is, things that He would not do if He were indeed resting]." — *Genesis Rabba* 11:5

These same questions apparently troubled the author of the book of *Jubilees,* and that book presents its own, unique answer. It asserts that the Sabbath is indeed a heavenly institution and, as such, has doubtless been celebrated every week by God and the two highest classes of angels:

> [An angel explains to Moses:] He gave us a great sign, the Sabbath day, so that we might work six days and observe a Sabbath from all work on the seventh day. And He told us—all the angels of the presence and all the angels of the sanctification, these two kinds—that we should **keep the Sabbath with Him** in heaven . . . Then He said to us: "Behold, I shall separate off for Myself a people from among all the nations, and they also will keep the Sabbath . . . They will become my people and I will be their God. I have chosen the descendants of Jacob among all of those whom I have seen [will be created]. And I have written them down as my firstborn son and have sanctified them for Myself . . . I will tell them about the Sabbath days so that they may keep the Sabbath from all work on them."
>
> — *Jubilees* 2:17–20

The fact that the Sabbath is fundamentally a *heavenly* institution explains why God never imposed it as a universal obligation (even though it was the culminating part of the creation of the universe). Indeed, if the world keeps operating on the Sabbath, it apparently does so only because the *lower* angels in charge of such mundane functions as the winds and rains are not allowed to rest—only God and the two highest classes of angels rest. Indeed, these lower angels are to God what the "Sabbath gentile" was to Jews in later times, performing activities that He could not because of the rest imposed by the Sabbath:

33. See, in this connection, John 5:17, "My Father is working still, and I am working," a statement apparently implying that God rested *only* on the first Sabbath and has kept no others since. Philo maintains that God continues to create on the Sabbath, *Allegorical Interpretation* 1:18.

> For on the first day He created . . . the angels of the presence, and the angels of holiness, and the angels of the spirits of fire and the angels of the spirits of the **winds,** and the angels of the spirit of the **clouds,** and of **darkness,** and of **snow** and of **hail** and of **frost,** and the angels of the **sounds,** the **thunders** and the **lightnings,** and the angels of the spirits of cold and of heat, and of winter and of spring and of autumn and of summer, and of all the spirits of His creatures which are in the heavens and on the earth. —*Jubilees* 2:2

According to *Jubilees,* Israel's observance of the Sabbath bears witness to the special status of that people. Israel is, in this book's view, a quasi-angelic nation (of the highest angels at that!), its observance of the Sabbath constituting but one way in which Israel is connected directly to God and unlike any other nation on earth. See further Kugel, "Holiness of Israel"; idem, "Prayer of Enosh."

God's Firstborn, Israel: In solving this problem, the author of *Jubilees* solved another as well, God's reference to Israel in Exod. 4:22 as "My firstborn." In what sense could Israel, the descendants of a single man, Jacob, himself descended from Isaac and Abraham, and they all from the great family of Shem, Noah's son—in what sense could this little, late branch on the tree of humanity be called God's firstborn? *Jubilees'* answer above is that, at the very time of the creation of the world, God had already planned to create Israel and the proof of this is the Sabbath, an institution dating back to the seventh day of creation but observed on earth (in *Jubilees'* time) by only one people, and this, apparently, was by God's original design. That people, therefore, is undeniably, at least in terms of the divine plan, God's firstborn. See further: Kugel, "Prayer of Enosh."

Note that a similar idea is found in Pseudo-Philo:

> [God said to Eleazar before his death:] "But let me recall that time which was before the world, in the period when there was no man and no wickedness in it, when I said: Let the world be created and let those who are to come into it praise Me. And I shall plant a great vineyard, and I shall choose from it a [certain] plant and I shall arrange it and I shall call it by my name and it shall be mine forever." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 28:4

Here too, Israel's later creation is specifically adumbrated in the time "which was before the world." Elsewhere, the eternity of the Torah might supply the proof that, even at the creation, God was thinking of the future Israel:

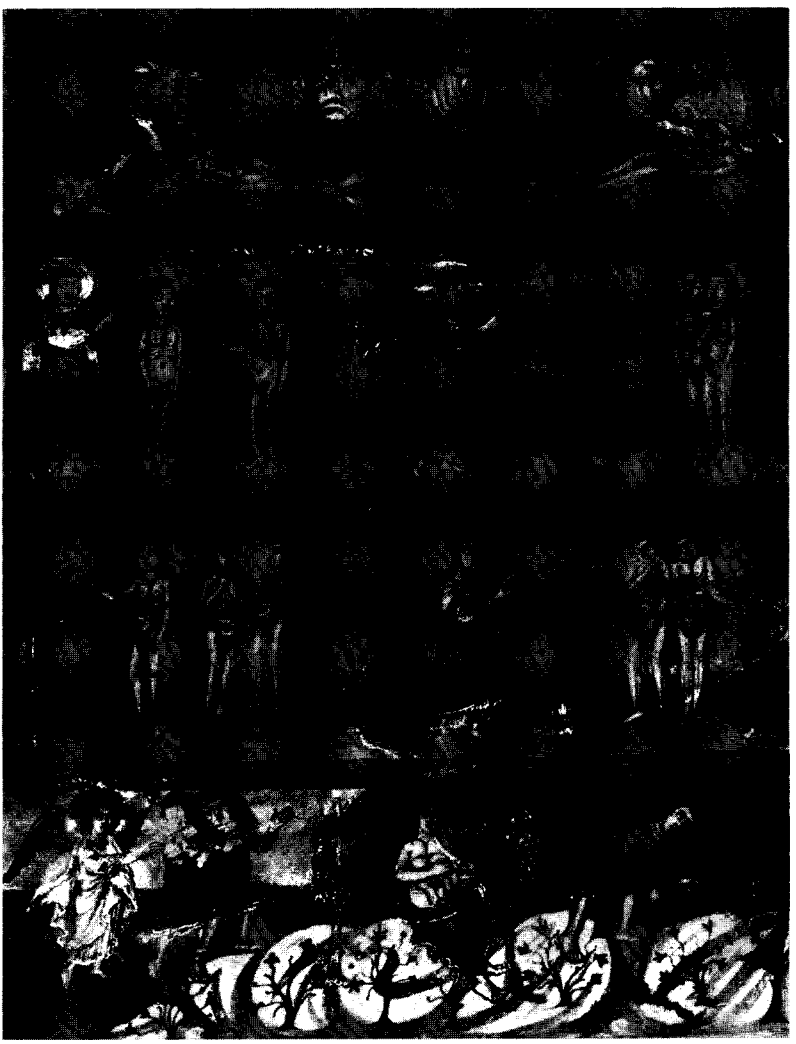
> He who prepared the earth for all time filled it with four-footed creatures; He who sends forth the light and it goes, called it, and it obeyed him in fear. The stars shone in their watches and were glad; He called them, and they said, "Here we are!" They shone with gladness for Him who had made them. This is our God: no other can be compared to him. He found the whole path to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom He loved. Afterward she appeared on earth and lived among men. She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever.
>
> —Bar. 3:32–4:1

The passage is clearly speaking about the creation, although not in precise order: it mentions the creation of animals (sixth day), then that of light (first day) and the stars (fourth day). It seems that God's "finding" the path to the Torah belongs to the same primal period, as well as His allotting her to Jacob and Israel; this happened, apparently, in heaven, since it was only *afterward* that she appeared on earth. (Note that this whole passage may be modeled on Sir. 24:8–10, which, however, is more ambiguous about the timing of wisdom's being established in Israel.) See also "The World for Israel," above; Chapter 20 and *OR*, "Singled Out from the Start."

3

Adam and Eve

(GENESIS 2:4–3:24)



God created humanity with the help of angels, but then the humans went astray: was it the woman's fault?

Adam and Eve

(GENESIS 2:4–3:24)

❖ ❖ ❖

Adam and Eve were the first human beings created by God. They were put in the Garden of Eden and told that they could eat any of the fruit in the garden except that of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." A certain serpent in the garden tempted Eve to disobey and she did, eating the forbidden fruit and giving it to Adam to eat. As a result, Adam and Eve were punished and expelled from the garden forever: henceforth, he was to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, while Eve was condemned to bring forth children in pain.

THE STORY of Adam and Eve and their life in the Garden of Eden fascinated the Bible's earliest interpreters, since it seemed to concern the very nature of the human species. This biblical story was probably written about more than any other. Not coincidentally, readers today are likely to have great difficulty looking at this story "without blinders." For the importance of this episode to the Bible's ancient interpreters has given their interpretations of it a unique staying power. Who nowadays, for example, does not automatically think of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as telling about some fundamental change that took place in the human condition, or what is commonly called the Fall of Man? And who does not think of the "serpent" in the story as the devil, or paradise as the reward of the righteous after death? Yet a careful reading of the Bible itself shows that none of these things is said explicitly by the text—they are all a matter of interpretation.

Death in a Day

No doubt many factors influenced the way ancient interpreters came to understand the Adam and Eve story. But certainly one of the most important was a glaring inconsistency in the story itself. When God first put Adam into the garden, He said to him:

> You may freely eat of every tree in the Garden. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **on the day that you eat of it you shall die.** —Gen. 2:16–17

The trouble is that Adam didn't die, at least not right away. After eating the fruit, he went on to live to the age of 930 (according to Gen. 5:5). Eve presumably had an equally impressive lifespan (we are not told exactly when she died). So what did

God mean by saying, "for *on the day* that you eat of it you shall die"? Was this just an idle threat?

One way of resolving the situation was to claim that the "day" being referred to here was not an ordinary day. And indeed, the Bible itself provided support for this idea. A verse from the book of Psalms asserts:

> A thousand years in your [God's] sight are **like yesterday**. —Ps. 90:4

In context, this verse seems to mean that for God, centuries and centuries of past history are no more remote than yesterday; since He is eternal, a thousand years pass as quickly for God as a single day for us. But if so, interpreters reasoned, then perhaps there is an actual unit of time, a "day" of God's, that lasts a thousand years:

> But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. —2 Pet. 3:8

> . . . for with Him a "day" signifies a thousand years. And He himself bears witness when he says, "Behold, the day of the Lord will be as a thousand years." —*Letter of Barnabas* 15:4

> One day of God's is a thousand years long, as it is said, "A thousand years are in your sight as yesterday" [Ps. 90:4]. —*Genesis Rabba* 8:2

Here then was a possible solution. If Adam lived to the age of 930, then he actually lived less than a single one of "God's days"—and so, from God's standpoint at least, he did die *on the day* that he ate the fruit:

> Adam died, and all his sons buried him in the land of his creation, and he was the first to be buried in the earth. And he lacked seventy years of one thousand years [that is, he died at the age of 930]; for one thousand years are as one day in the testimony of the heavens [that is, according to Psalm 90], and therefore was it written concerning the tree of knowledge: "On the day that you eat thereof, you shall die." —*Jubilees* 4:29–30

> It was said to Adam that on the day in which he ate of the tree, on that day he would die. And indeed, we know that he did not quite fill up a thousand years. We thus understand the expression "a day of the Lord is a thousand years" [as clarifying] this. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 81:3

> He [God] did not specify to Adam if it would be a day of his [own days] or a day of God's, which lasts one thousand years, since "a thousand years in your [God's] sight are like yesterday" [Ps. 90:4].
>
> —*Pesiqta Rabbati, Baḥodesh ha-shebi'i* 40 (similarly *Genesis Rabba* 19:8)

The trouble with this explanation, however, is that it skirts the issue of punishment. After all, Adam and Eve had done what they were specifically warned not to do. Shouldn't the threatened punishment, death, have come right away? Why did God wait?

The Punishment Was Mortality

There was another possible explanation, and it answered the same question in a better way. It understood the Bible's words "you shall die" not as "you shall immediately cease to exist," but "you shall become a person who dies," you shall become mortal. This explanation assumes, in other words, that God had originally created Adam and Eve to be immortal: they would continue to live in the garden forever and ever, so long as they obeyed the rules. But God also warned them from the beginning: If you disobey, I will take away your immortality on the very day of your disobedience, and you will from then on be subject to death, mortal—even though you will, of course, still have a normal (for those days, at least) lifetime of nine hundred years or so.

If this was indeed the meaning of "you shall die," then the sentence was in fact carried out. Adam and Eve lived a long time after their disobedience, but eventually they did die—which was, by this interpretation, exactly the punishment God had intended by the words that He uttered. And so the *real* punishment meted out to Adam and Eve was not the sweat of agriculture or the pains of childbirth but mortality itself.

How early was the story understood in this fashion? We have little way of knowing, but it is witnessed in a number of very early texts:

> From a woman was sin's beginning, and because of her, we all die.
>
> —Sir. 25:24 (also 15:14)

> For God did not make death, nor does He take delight in the destruction of the living.
>
> For God created man for incorruption [immortality], and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world. —Wisd. 1:13, 2:23–24

> Giving up immortality and a blessed life, you [Adam] have gone over to death and unhappiness. —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:45
>
> (also *Creation* 152; *Virtues* 205; etc.)

> For men were created no different from the angels, that they might remain righteous and pure, and death which destroys everything, would not have touched them; but it is through this knowledge of theirs that they are being destroyed. —*1 Enoch* 69:11

> . . . you shall be mortal. —Symmachus Gen. 2:17

> Adam said to Eve, "Why have you brought destruction among us and brought upon us great wrath, which is death gaining rule over all our race?"
>
> —*Apocalypse of Moses* 14:2

> But that man transgressed my ways and was persuaded by his wife; and she was deceived by the serpent. And then death was ordained for the generations of men. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 13:10

But a very horrible
snake craftily deceived them to go to the fate
of death . . .
The Immortal [God] became angry with them and expelled them
from the place of the immortals.

— *Sibylline Oracles* 1:39–41, 50–51

And you set one commandment on him [Adam], but he violated it; as a result you established death for him and his descendants. — *4 Ezra* 3:7

What did it profit Adam that he lived nine hundred and thirty years and transgressed that which he was commanded? Therefore, the multitude of time that he lived did not profit him, but it brought death and cut off the years of those who were born from him.

Adam sinned, and death was decreed against those who were to be born.

— *2 Baruch* 17:2–3, 23:4 (also 48:43, 54:15–19, 56:6)

And while he was sleeping, I took from him a rib. And I created for him a wife, so that death might come [to him] by his wife. — *2 Enoch* (J) 30:17

When God created Adam He created him so that he might live forever like the ministering angels [as it is written] "And God said, Behold man has become like one of us" [Gen. 3:22], just as the ministering angels do not die, so will he not know the taste of death . . . But since he did not abide by His commandments, death was consequently decreed for him.

— *Pesiqta Rabbati* 41:2

Sinfulness Is Hereditary

Thus, Adam and Eve were punished by becoming mortal. But this explanation raised another question: is the rest of humanity also mortal because we are being punished for Adam and Eve's sin? This hardly seemed fair. Why did not Adam and Eve's children get the same chance their parents had had and go back to being immortal as long as they obeyed God?

Some interpreters clearly did believe that Adam and Eve's punishment had been transmitted to all subsequent generations. Others, however, came to the conclusion that it was not their punishment, but their *sinfulness,* that was passed on. Yes, these interpreters said, death was decreed for Adam and Eve. But if we, their descendants, also are mortal, it is because we, in some fundamental way, are just like Adam and Eve. We inherited from them (just as children always inherit traits from their parents) their defective heart, with its predisposition to sinfulness; or they introduced sin, and it has existed ever afterward; or else, the banishment from Eden meant the end of the possibility of a sinless existence. In any case, we, too, are given over to sinning, and it is for that reason that we will die like them.

For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent.

> For a grain of evil seed was sown in Adam's heart from the beginning, and how much fruit of ungodliness it has produced until now, and will produce until the time of threshing comes!
>
> O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants.
>
> —*4 Ezra* 3:21–22, 4:30, 7:118 (also 4:30–32, 7:48)

> And Adam said to Eve, "What have you done? You have brought upon us a great wound, transgression and sin in all our generations."
>
> —(Latin) *Life of Adam and Eve* 44:2

By this interpretation, the narrative of Adam and Eve is indeed the story of the Fall of Man: human beings have ever afterward been condemned to a life of "transgression and sin in all our generations." Although this idea occurs in Jewish texts of (probably) the first century C.E., it came to be championed by Christians, while later Jews by and large abandoned it. Thus, this teaching is found in the New Testament:

> Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **in that all men sinned.** —Rom. 5:12

For Christians, this interpretation of the Adam and Eve story also suggested a certain correspondence between that story and the Resurrection: the latter seemed to answer, and set aright, the Fall of Man. Paul thus saw a relationship between the "first Adam" of the Old Testament and the "second Adam" of the New:

> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.
>
> —1 Cor. 15:21–22

And so, thanks in part to the problem raised by God's threatened punishment, "on the day that you eat of it you shall die," interpreters came to see the true significance of the story as relating to human mortality and, perhaps, a human predisposition to sinfulness. Ultimately, Christianity developed the doctrine of original sin, whereby Adam and Eve's sinfulness was transmitted (in the view of some, through the act of sexual intercourse) to all subsequent generations.

The Serpent Was Satan

The identity of the serpent in the story was certainly tied to the overall meaning of the story. Who was he? In the text itself, the serpent (or snake) appears to be merely a clever animal who leads the humans astray. But this also struck interpreters as strange. To begin with, snakes are *not* particularly clever: they can be dangerous or annoying, but they are hardly distinguished by their intelligence. Why, then, did the Bible flatly assert that the serpent "was cleverer than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made" (Gen. 3:1)? And why was he a *talking* serpent?

A number of ancient interpreters maintained that this snake was simply a snake,

albeit an unusual one. If he talked, it may have been because snakes, or perhaps *all* animals, originally knew how to speak:

> On that day [when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden], the mouth of all the beasts and cattle and birds and whatever walked or moved was stopped from speaking because all of them used to speak with one another with one speech and one language. —*Jubilees* 3:28

> It is said that, in olden times, . . . snakes could speak with a man's voice. —Philo, *On the Creation* 156

> At that time all living things spoke the same language. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:41

Similarly, if the snake was ultimately condemned to slither about on his belly (Gen. 3:14), this merely implied that snakes originally had legs like dogs or horses. None of these details necessarily meant that the snake had any supernatural qualities. After all, did not the Bible plainly say that the serpent was one of the "beasts of the field" (Gen. 3:1)?

Other interpreters, however, saw the snake as Satan (or Satan's agent), or some other devil-like figure in disguise. This identification not only explained why this particular snake talked and was smarter than all other creatures, but also was reinforced by God's words to the snake at the end of the story:

> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he [mankind] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. —Gen. 3:15

It seemed most unlikely that the Bible here was really concerned with future relations between humans and snakes. (Moreover, how was this "enmity" between humans and snakes different from the enmity that exists between humans and lions or bears or tarantulas, none of whom had done anything to Adam and Eve in the garden?) Instead, many interpreters concluded that these words were addressed to the eternal Tempter with whom humanity would forever after be pitted in an unending struggle.

> [The angel Michael explains:] "And the name of the third angel is Gadreel: this is the one who showed all the deadly blows to the sons of men, and he led Eve astray, and he showed the weapons of death to the children of men." —*1 Enoch* 69:6

> The devil said to him [the serpent]: "Do not fear, only become my vessel, and I will speak a word through your mouth by which you will be able to deceive."
>
> [Later, Eve recalls:] "The devil answered me through the mouth of the serpent." —*Apocalypse of Moses* 16:4, 17:4

> [A woman recalls:] . . . nor did the Destroyer, the deceitful serpent, defile the purity of my virginity. —4 Macc. 18:7–8

> The devil is of the lowest places . . . and he became aware of his condemnation and of the sin which he had sinned previously. And that is why he thought up the scheme against Adam. In such form he entered paradise and corrupted Eve. —*2 Enoch* 31:4–6

> And the great dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called Devil and Satan, was cast out, he who deceives the whole world.
>
> And he [an angel] seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. —Rev. 12:9, 20:2

> The tree is sinful desire which Satanel [a wicked angel] spread over Eve and Adam, and because of this God has cursed the vine because Satanel had planted it, and by that he deceived the first-formed Adam and Eve.
> —*3 Baruch* (Slavonic) 4:8

> Satanel, when he took the serpent as a garment . . . —*3 Baruch* (Greek) 9:7

> The devil . . . whom Moses calls the serpent . . .
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 103

> [God says:] However, he [Adam] disobeyed my commandment and, having been deceived by the devil, he ate from the tree. —*Apocalypse of Sedrach* 4:5

> And the woman said, "The serpent is the one who instructed me." And He cursed the serpent and called him "devil." —*Testimony of Truth* 47:3–6

> And the woman saw Sammael [a wicked angel] the angel of death and was afraid. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 3:6

Perhaps also:

> Through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who are on his side suffer it.[1] —Wisd. 2:24

God's announcement of the serpent's punishment ("I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed") thus came to have a new meaning. It now appeared really to be a statement about the fight against the devil that all subsequent human beings would have to wage. And this view in turn strengthened the conclusion that the true subject of the story was the Fall of Man, how humanity gained its susceptibility to sinfulness. That susceptibility meant that the devil would henceforth be humanity's eternal enemy, always playing on people's weakness in the face of temptation.

Blame It on the Woman

Another question occurred to interpreters: whose fault was it? A great deal hung on the answer. If Eve was mostly to blame, then this first female was responsible

1. Some have suggested that this verse refers to the incident of Cain and Abel (see below, Chapter 4), but it may actually refer to the sin of Adam and Eve.

(according to the line of reasoning we have been following) for nothing less than sin and death, and women ever after could be blamed for these human ills. But if it was primarily Adam's fault, then the opposite was true.

What does the Bible itself say? It is Eve who is persuaded by the serpent to try the fruit, and she in turn gives it to Adam—so the evidence does seem to support blaming Eve somewhat more than Adam. What is more, when God details the punishments to be given out to the various principals (Gen. 3:14–19), He first announces the serpent's punishment, then Eve's, then Adam's. To interpreters this seemed to suggest a descending order of guilt: the serpent was certainly the most guilty, since he instigated the crime. If Eve came next and only after her Adam, did this not imply that she was more guilty than Adam but less guilty than the serpent? For both these reasons, many of the sources mentioned earlier specify that Eve bore the primary responsibility:

> From a woman was sin's beginning, and because of her, we all die.
>
> —Sir. 25:24

> Woman becomes for him [Adam] the beginning of blameworthy life. For so long as he was by himself, as accorded with such solitude, he went on growing like to the world and like God . . . But when woman too had been made . . . love [*erōs*] enters in . . . and this desire [*pothos*] likewise engendered bodily pleasure, that pleasure which is the beginning of wrongs and violation of law, the pleasure for the sake of which men bring on themselves the life of mortality and wretchedness in lieu of that of immortality and bliss. —Philo, *On the Creation* 151–152 (also 165–166)

> But the woman first became a betrayer to him [Adam].
> She gave, and persuaded him to sin in his ignorance.
>
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 1:42–43

> Adam said to Eve, "Why have you brought destruction among us and brought upon us great wrath, which is death gaining rule over all our race?"
>
> "Oh evil woman! Why have you wrought destruction among us?"
>
> —*Apocalypse of Moses* 14:2, 21:6

> But that man transgressed my ways and was persuaded by his wife . . . And then death was ordained for the generations of men.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 13:10

> Thereupon God imposed punishment on Adam for having yielded to a woman's counsel . . . Eve He punished by childbirth and its attendant pains, because she had deluded Adam, just as the serpent had beguiled her.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:49

> I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. —1 Tim. 2:13–14

> I [God] created for him a wife, so that death might come [to him] by his wife.
>
> In such a form he [the devil] entered paradise and corrupted Eve. But he did not contact Adam. —*2 Enoch* (J) 30:17, 31:6

An Extra Proviso

There was, however, one detail in the text that supported Eve's side in the debate. It might at first appear to be a minor discrepancy. When God first told Adam the rules of the garden, He did so in these terms:

> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die."
>
> —Gen. 2:16–17

But when the serpent asked Eve about the same rules, she had a slightly different answer:

> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but God said, 'You may not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, **neither shall you touch it**, lest you die.'"
>
> —Gen. 3:2–3

Why should this additional proviso, "neither shall you touch it," have been added? It could hardly have been an accident. Here, then, was another question interpreters *had* to answer:

> Why, when the command was given not to eat of one particular tree, did the woman include even approaching it closely . . . ? First, because taste—and every sense—functions by means of contact. Second, [because] if even touching [the tree] was forbidden, how much greater a crime would those have done who, in addition to touching it, then ate of it and enjoyed it? Would they not therefore have condemned and brought punishment down upon themselves? —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:35

Later interpreters, however, saw in the extra words "neither shall you touch it" a very subtle hint in the text—a hint, first of all, about how the serpent managed to trick Eve into eating the forbidden fruit and, as well, a clue as to who was ultimately responsible:

> The text says, "And God commanded Adam, saying, 'Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die' [Gen. 2:17]." But Adam did not choose to tell God's words to Eve exactly as they had been spoken. Instead he said to her, "God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die' [as per Gen. 3:3]." Whereupon the

> wicked serpent said to himself, "Since I seem to be unable to trip up Adam, let me go and try to trip up Eve." He went and sat down next to her and started talking with her. He said: "Now you say that God has forbidden us to touch the tree. Well, I can touch the tree and not die, and so can you." What did the wicked serpent then do? He touched the tree with his hands and feet and shook it so hard that some of its fruit fell to the ground . . . Then he said to her, "[You see? So likewise] you say that God has forbidden us to eat from the tree. But I can eat from it and not die, and so can you." What did Eve think to herself? "All the things that my husband has told me are lies" . . . Whereupon she took the fruit and ate it and gave to Adam and he ate, as it is written, "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat from and a delight to the eyes" [Gen. 3:6]. —*Abot deR. Natan* (A) ch. 1

The extra proviso, according to this interpretation, did not come from Eve. She did not change God's words *because she did not hear them in the first place.* When God spoke to Adam about the tree in chapter 2 of Genesis, Eve had not even been created yet. (God's words appear in Gen. 2:16–17; Eve is not created until Gen. 2:22.) So it must have been Adam who, in telling Eve about God's prohibition after she was created, added the words "neither shall you touch it." Perhaps he did so to make sure that she would not even come close to eating the fruit. But if so, the plan backfired. The serpent came to her and first touched the tree himself. Then he invited Eve to touch it as well and so see for herself that nothing bad would happen. Then the serpent actually took a piece of fruit and ate it, and urged her to do the same thing. At this point she began to doubt the truth of everything that Adam had told her: "All the things that my husband has told me are lies." And so she decided to take a bite.

The Earthly Paradise

After their sin, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, and God placed cherubim and a flaming sword at its entrance "to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24)—presumably, to prevent Adam and Eve, or later human beings, from reentering the garden. This very fact seemed to indicate that the garden had been located somewhere on earth. And the Bible had elsewhere said as much: God had planted the garden "in the east" (Gen. 2:8), and at least two well-known rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are said to originate from a river that flowed from inside it (Gen. 2:14).[2] So the garden was indeed an earthly one. Those writing in Greek might refer to the garden as "paradise," but this word was, at first, only the regular term for an enclosed garden or orchard.[3]

But why had God, after expelling Adam and Eve, placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the entrance to this elegant garden, rather than simply destroying the

2. Eden is also found as an apparent place-name elsewhere: 2 Kings 19:12 (=Isa. 37:12), Ezek. 27:23, Amos 1:5.

3. "Paradise" had been used by the Septuagint translation for "garden" in Gen. 2:8–10, 16.

whole thing or letting it revert to wilderness? Some interpreters doubtless concluded that God must have had some further plans for the garden after Adam and Eve's stay there.[4]

Ideas about the garden at a very early point joined speculation on other, broader issues—life after death, and the reward to be given to the righteous. For centuries, different religions and civilizations had taught that people continue to exist in some fashion after their death, or that at some time following death a dead person's bones might be joined together and reshaped into a living being again. This life after death was sometimes thought to be God's reward to the righteous for having lived a good life. The Bible here and there seems to suggest as much.

It certainly must have struck some ancient readers that God's closing off of the garden was a clear indication that it was the intended dwelling place for the righteous after their death. After all, this garden did contain a tree called the "tree of life" whose fruit would allow people to "live forever" (Gen. 3:22)—might this not be precisely what the righteous would eat after their first existence? No wonder the Bible had said that the cherubim and flaming sword were there specifically to guard the way to the *tree* (Gen. 3:24).

And so, many ancient readers assumed that the Garden of Eden still existed somewhere on earth as the intended resting place for the righteous after their death. "Paradise" now came to mean more than an ordinary garden—it was the garden of the righteous (or of "righteousness" or "truth"), the place of their final reward:

> And from there I [Enoch] went over . . . far away to the east, and I went over the Red Sea and I was far from it, and . . . I came to the Garden of Righteousness, and I saw . . . many large trees growing there, sweet-smelling, large, very beautiful, and glorious, and the tree of wisdom from which they eat and know great wisdom.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 32:2–4 (=[4Q206] *Enoch*^{e} fragments 2 and 3)

> [Noah says:] . . . the garden where the chosen and the righteous dwell, where my great grandfather [Enoch] was received, who was the seventh from Adam . . . All these things I saw toward the Garden of Righteousness.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 60:8, 23 (also 61:12, 70:4, etc.)

> But those who honor the true eternal God
> inherit life, dwelling in the luxuriant garden
> of Paradise for the time of eternity,
> feasting on sweet bread from starry heaven.[5]
>
> —Fragment 3 from *Sibylline Oracles*
> (cited in Theophylus, *To Autolycus* 2.36)

4. Note the references to the "garden of God" and the like in Gen. 13:10; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13, 31:9, etc.; and Joel 2:3. Though all these places might refer to a garden that *had* existed but was no more, this was hardly the only possible reading, and thus the very profusion of such references might be taken as an indication that the garden was still in existence and still of importance.

5. That is, manna; see Chapter 19. The description "*from* starry heaven" may imply that this author felt the garden to be an earthly one.

> [God says to Adam:] But when you come out of Paradise, if you guard yourself from all evil, preferring death to it, at the time of the resurrection I will raise you again, and then there shall be given to you from the **tree of life**, and you shall be immortal forever.
>
> And both [Adam and Eve] were **buried** according to the command of God **in the regions of Paradise,** in the place from which God had found the dust [from which Adam was formed, Gen. 2:7].
>
> — *Apocalypse of Moses* 28:4, 40:6 (also 6:2, 9:3, 13:1–4)

> And I saw there the earth and its fruit . . . and the garden of Eden and its fruits, and the source and the river flowing from it, and its trees and their flowering, making fruits, and I saw righteous men therein, their food and their rest. — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 21:3, 6

> [An angel tells Baruch:] "When God caused the flood over the earth . . . and the water rose over the heights 15 cubits, the water entered Paradise and killed every flower." — *3 Baruch* 4:10

The Garden in Heaven

Other interpreters, however, were troubled by the idea that the garden might be anywhere on the earth. Was not heaven the abode of God and the angels, that is, of beings who live forever? Indeed, did not the righteous Enoch and Elijah ascend *into heaven* (Gen. 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11)? So the prophet Isaiah had alluded to the reward of the righteous in these terms:

> He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil—he will **dwell on high,** his refuge will be craggy fortresses; his food will be given him, his water will be sure. Your eyes will behold the **King** in His splendor, they will see the **earth from afar.** — Isa. 33:15–17

Considering such evidence, some interpreters found it only reasonable to suppose that the true garden was in heaven, perhaps presided over by God Himself:

> Michael turned the chariot and brought Abraham toward the east, to the first gate of heaven.[6] And Abraham saw two paths. The first was strait and narrow . . . [and] this strait gate is the gate of the righteous, which leads to life, and those who enter through it come into paradise.
>
> — *Testament of Abraham* (A) 11:1,10

> If I had asked you how many dwellings are in the heart of the sea . . . or which are the exits out of hell, or which are the entrances of Paradise,

6. The phrase "toward the east" betrays this author's desire to reconcile his own idea of a heavenly paradise with the biblical tradition that Eden was an (apparently) earthly garden planted "in the east."

perhaps you would have said, "I never went down into the deep, nor as yet into hell, neither did I ever **ascend into heaven**."

— *4 Ezra* 4:7–8 (also 7:36, 8:52)

[God says:] It [the likeness of the temple] is preserved **with Me, as also paradise.** — *2 Baruch* 4:6 (also 51:7–11)

And I saw a chariot like the wind and its wheels were fiery. I was carried off into the paradise of righteousness, and I saw the Lord sitting and His appearance was unbearable flaming fire.

— *Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 25:3 (also 42:4)

Take him up to paradise, to the third heaven.

— *Apocalypse of Moses* (also Georgian and Slavonic) 37:5 (see also 29:6, 40:1)

Fourteen years ago [I] was caught up to the third heaven . . . caught up into paradise, whether in the body or out of the body I do not know.

— 2 Cor. 12:2–3

And those men took me from there, and they brought me up to the third heaven. And they placed me in the midst of paradise . . . And I said, "How very pleasant is this place!" The men answered me: "This place has been prepared for the righteous, who suffer every kind of tribulation in this life and who afflict their souls, and who turn their eyes from [looking upon] injustice [Isa. 33:15], and who carry out righteous judgment to give bread to the hungry, and to cover the naked with clothing, and to lift up the fallen, and to help the injured, who walk before the face of the Lord, and who worship Him alone—for them this has been prepared as an eternal inheritance." — *2 Enoch* (A) 8:1–9:1

Other references to this garden do not specify exactly where it was, but it was, in any case, the place where the righteous were to find their eternal repose:

And He shall open the gates of paradise; he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and he will grant to the righteous to eat of the tree of life. — *Testament of Levi* 18:10

[In the coming time] the saints will refresh themselves in Eden.

— *Testament of Dan* 5:12

And he [Jesus] said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." — Luke 23:43

To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. — Rev. 2:7 (also 22:2, 14, 18)

And God took him [Sedrach] and put him within Paradise with all the saints. — *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 16:6 (also 12:2)

> Enoch pleased God and was transferred **into paradise,**
> so that he might give repentance to the nations.
>
> —(Vulgate) Ecclus. (Sir.) 44:16

And so, the garden of delights in which, the Bible said, God had placed the first man and woman was understood by interpreters to have had a further purpose. It was the reward and final resting place of the righteous after death, located either in some obscure corner of earth or, perhaps, in heaven.

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: Although the Bible spelled out the punishments that Adam and Eve would suffer for their transgression—the toils of agriculture and pains of childbirth—ancient interpreters found a different meaning implied by the story. The real punishment of Adam and Eve, many thought, was the mortality implied in God's words, "for on the day that you eat of it you shall die." This same punishment was passed on to all later human beings, either because mortality is hereditary, or because sinfulness has been transmitted to each successive generation of humans. The serpent, who brought about this catastrophe, was identified with Satan or some other wicked angel. As for the question of guilt, most interpreters seem to have blamed Eve, but there were also good grounds for saying that what happened was ultimately Adam's fault. The garden that God had planted still exists, either on earth or in heaven; it is to be the final reward of the righteous.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Adam and Eve

The Earthly Adam: The story of the creation of the world in the first chapter of Genesis concludes with the creation of humans, "male and female" (Gen. 1:26–27). The next chapter of Genesis tells how God first created Adam, then Eve. The question this chapter raised for many ancient interpreters was, are these two different creations, or only one? Most theorized that there was only one creation, and that after giving a generalized overview in chapter 1, the Bible detailed how humanity was created—first Adam, then Eve—in chapter 2.

> He [Moses] thus wrote about the six days of creation . . . Then he said, "This is the book of the generations of heaven and earth" [Gen. 2:4] and went back to recount those things which he had omitted and not written in the first account. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* (Introduction)

Some interpreters, however, believed that these two accounts in fact reflected two different creations. This was the view of Philo of Alexandria (see Chapter 2, *OR,* "In the Image of God?"). He maintained that the "man" created in Gen. 1:27 was a "heavenly" man, an ideal human being existing beyond the world of the senses; only such a human being could be said to be in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:26). The second man was a flesh-and-blood human, Adam, from whom all subsequent humans are descended. (See further Kannengiesser, "Philon et les Pères sur la double création"; Tobin, *The Creation of Man;* Levison, *Portrait of Adam,* esp. 69–75.) Curiously, some of the elements of this view are paralleled in *Genesis Rabba* 8:11, which understands Gen. 1:27 as referring to the creation of two sets of beings, one heavenly, the other earth-bound. See also Chapter 2, *OR,* "Adam and His Rib."

Purified before Eden: The author of *Jubilees* considered Eden to be a sanctuary, a holy site comparable to the Temple in Jerusalem (4:26, 8:19). One proof of this was the fact that the Bible states that God first created Adam (Gen. 2:7) and only *afterward* "put him" in Eden (Gen. 2:8). Why was not Adam created inside Eden itself rather than being brought there from somewhere else? The reason, in the opinion of *Jubilees'* author, lay in a law set forth in Lev. 12:1–6, which held that childbirth imparts impurity (in his understanding, to the child as well as the mother). Since Adam and Eve must thus have been impure when they were "born," their delayed transfer to Eden, only after the purification period, proved that Eden was indeed a sanctuary.

In fact, the law in Lev. 12:1–6 concerning childbirth purification is one of the many legal teachings that, *Jubilees* maintains, was actually set forth in cryptic form in the book of Genesis:

> After 40 days had come to an end for Adam in the land where he had been created, we [angels] brought him into the Garden of Eden to work and keep

> it. His wife was brought [there] on the eightieth day. After this she entered the Garden of Eden. For this reason a commandment was written in the heavenly tablets [in order that it later be included in the book of Leviticus] for the one who gives birth to a child: if she gives birth to a male, she is to remain in her impurity for seven days like the first seven days [following Adam's birth]; then for 33 days she is to remain in the blood of purification. She is not to touch any sacred thing nor to enter the sanctuary until she completes these days for a male. As for a female, she is to remain in her impurity for two weeks of days like the first two weeks [after Eve's birth], and 66 days in the blood of purification. Their total is 80 days. After she had completed these 80 days, we brought her into the Garden of Eden because it is the holiest in the entire earth. —*Jubilees* 3:9–12

A recently published text from Qumran, 4Q265, presents a similar picture: see Baumgarten, "Purification and the Garden"; idem, "A Fragment on Fetal Life and Pregnancy." In both *Jubilees* and 4Q265, there are two stages to Eve's impurity after her birth. In the first stage, Eve is separated from contact even with Adam, since he, as a newborn male, is in the (more severe) stage of impurity for only a week, while Eve is in this stage for two weeks. In the second, less severe stage, their impurity is diminished, but they are nonetheless prevented from contact with sancta or from entering the sacred precinct (here, Eden). Hence, the two must wait before entering Eden—Adam until forty days after his "birth" and Eve until eighty days after. (Note that, while Philo does not assert that Adam and Eve were impure following their creation, he does allude to the law of Lev. 12:1–6 in connection with their creation, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:25.)

The consequences of this interpretation are worth considering. For, if Adam and Eve became impure by dint of having been created, then that impurity was quite independent of the impurity contracted by the mother as described in Lev. 12:1–6, since Adam and Eve had no mother. In other words, if they became impure, it was because the birthing process itself imparts impurity. But to say this is virtually to assert that the child has the status of an independent person even as it is coming into being: it does not really start life afresh *after* its creation (for in that case it would presumably be in a state of purity, having started off life "with a clean slate" after its emergence from the womb) but retains the impurity it contracted in the process of being born. Strikingly, this is the view of the fetus found elsewhere among such Dead Sea Scrolls as the *Temple Scroll* and the *Halakhic Letter:* the fetus is an independent entity even before it is born; in the rabbinic view, by contrast, the fetus is viewed as a "limb of the mother" until it emerges from the womb (see Chapter 20, *OR*, "A Limb of the Mother"). If so, it acquires its independent status—including its ability to contract impurity—only after it is born, and for that reason is apparently pure upon birth even though its mother has become impure.

A further question arose: if Adam and Eve both existed for a time outside Eden, what happened in the time between Eve's passing out of the first stage of her impurity until the time when Adam went off to enter Eden? Presumably, *Jubilees* and 4Q265 agreed that sexual relations between the two could not have taken place

later on—they must have been strictly forbidden within the sanctuary of Eden itself. (On this point, see Anderson, "Celibacy or Consummation.") Both texts, however, seem to maintain that the pair had normal relations during the twenty-six days when they were together before Adam's departure to Eden.

Eden the Sanctuary: Although, as just seen, the author of *Jubilees* espouses the idea that Eden was a sanctuary comparable to the Jerusalem Temple (4:26, 8:19), I believe that he inherited this notion from elsewhere[7] and was, in fact, somewhat uncomfortable with it. Thus, in *Jubilees* Adam waits until the very day of his expulsion from Eden before offering his first sacrifice:

> On that day, as he was **leaving** the garden of Eden, he burned incense as a pleasing fragrance—frankincense, galbanum, stacte, and aromatic spices—in the early morning when the sun rose at the time when he covered his shame. —*Jubilees* 3:27

If Eden was indeed a sanctuary, why should Adam have waited until he was leaving that sanctuary in order to offer a sacrifice? The answer, clearly, is that it was only at the time of Adam's expulsion that he "covered his shame," and only in such a state might a priest rightly offer any sacrifice (Exod. 20:23 [some texts 26], 28:42, and so on). It thus seems that the author of *Jubilees* sensed a contradiction between "Eden the Sanctuary" and Adam's nakedness, and apparently adopted the former only because it had acquired a certain authority.

If *Jubilees* did not originate the idea of Eden as a sanctuary, how did this notion start? It may be that its origins are to be found in the Bible's assertion that Adam was placed in Eden "to work it and guard it" (Gen. 2:15). This could equally well be construed as a pair of nouns, "for service and guarding," the former being the usual term for priestly service in the Temple.[8] Such a connection is made explicitly later on; see *Genesis Rabba* 16:5 and Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 149 n; below, "Working and Guarding the Torah." Note also:

> Eden is the Holy Church . . . Because Adam was king, priest, and prophet, God set him in paradise so that he might serve in Eden, the Holy Church, as indeed the blessed Moses testifies in this regard: "to work it" [Gen. 2:15], that is, by the priestly service in prayer, "and to guard" the commandment, the one which had been given to him [Adam] in his mercy.
>
> —*Cave of Treasures* (W) 3–4

The Garden of Delight: The name Eden seemed to some ancient readers to derive from the Hebrew root *'dn,* "delight." At the same time, Eden clearly is the name of a place in Gen. 2:8 ("a garden *in* Eden"), and apparently also in 2 Kings 19:12 (=Isa. 37:12), Ezek. 27:23, Amos 1:5, and other verses. This circumstance some-

7. The Eden sanctuary certainly seems to resonate with the mountaintop place of holiness that is Eden in *1 Enoch;* see below.

8. Indeed, since "garden" *(gan)* is a masculine noun in Hebrew, while the pronominal suffixes of "work *it* and guard *it*" are feminine, construing this phrase as "for serving and guarding" made great grammatical sense (thanks to Professor Gary Anderson for pointing this out).

times led to a somewhat schizophrenic attitude toward the word, an attitude witnessed in, for example, the Septuagint: although Eden is treated there as a proper name in Gen. 2:8, 10 and 4:16, in Gen. 3:23–24 it is translated as "delight" *(truphē)*. The Vulgate went further, translating "Garden of Eden" as "paradise [or "place"] of luxuriance" *(paradisus/locus voluptatis)* in Gen. 2:8, 10, 23–24 (but "Eden" in 4:16). This same approach is reflected elsewhere:

> On that [third] day He created . . . the garden of Eden in Eden, for enjoyment and for food. —*Jubilees* 2:7

This sentence is cited as it reads in VanderKam's translation from the Ethiopic text, but certainly the Hebrew original, partially preserved in a Qumran fragment, read: *gan ʿēden bĕʿēden* in the sense of "a garden of delight in Eden." The concluding phrase, "for enjoyment and for food," glosses each of the words, that is, the *ʿēden* aspect was for their enjoyment while the *gan* aspect was for their food. (This fragment was published in VanderKam and Milik, "First Jubilees Manuscript from Qumran Cave 4.") Note further that Philo explicitly connects the name Eden with "delight":

> Virtue is figuratively called an enclosed park [that is, *paradeisos*] and the place specially suited to th[is] park [is called] Eden, which means "delight." —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 1:45

> The name Eden, when translated, is certainly a symbol of delicacies, joy and mirth. —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:7

> So, having brought him into the paradise of luxury . . . —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.19

See also Belkin, *Philo's Midrash,* 19; Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 7–8; Millard, "Etymology of Eden"; Greenfield, "A Touch of Eden."

Eden Was Wisdom: While the above texts (and others) presented Eden as an actual sanctuary, Philo interpreted Eden as (among other things) a symbol of divine wisdom:

> "Eden" is a symbolic name for right and divine reason, and so it is literally rendered "delight." —Philo, *The Posterity and Exile of Cain* 32

> "A river," [Scripture] says, "issues forth from Eden to water the garden" . . . This [river] issues forth out of Eden, the wisdom of God. —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 1:65

Such an interpretation was certainly to be expected in an allegorist like Philo, all the more so because Eden's most famous plant was, after all, the tree of knowledge. Interestingly, however, the same allegorical conception of Eden seems to underlie Ben Sira's famous passage in praise of wisdom:

> It [Torah] brims with wisdom, like the **Pishon**, and like the **Tigris** at the time of the first fruits.

> It overflows, like the **Euphrates**, with understanding, like the Jordan in harvest time. It floods with knowledge like the Nile,[9] like the **Gihon** at the time of vintage.
> The first [man] did not fully know it [that is, wisdom], nor shall the last quite fathom it.
>
> —Sir. 24:26–27

If Ben Sira here compares the Torah to the four rivers that flow from Eden, then it follows that their source, Eden itself, is being equated with divine wisdom.

Such an approach might seem somewhat surprising in Ben Sira, who elsewhere does not generally allegorize biblical narrative. However, the four rivers of Eden posed an obvious problem to an otherwise down-to-earth interpreter: it didn't seem to make any geographic sense! The Tigris and the Euphrates were rivers in Mesopotamia, whereas the Gihon, even if it wasn't the well-known spring by that name in Jerusalem, was said to "flow around the whole land of Cush," that is (apparently), Ethiopia; how could these three originate from a single source? As for the Pishon, this river was, and still is, a complete mystery, its identity quite unknown.[10]

If, however, Eden was really the garden of Torah, then its "rivers" might indeed flow mightily, like any of the great rivers of the ancient Near East. In other words, the Bible, according to this view, only mentioned the four rivers by way of analogy. No harm, then, in Ben Sira's expanding the analogy by including the Jordan River, which watered biblical Israel and whose absence would otherwise disturb the allegory of Eden and wisdom (since Israel was, in his view, the homeland of wisdom), as well as, for that matter, the mighty Nile, another great waterway of the region. As for the "first [man]" mentioned in this passage, he is certainly Adam: although he dwelt for a time inside Eden, says Ben Sira, he nevertheless did not fully explore its contents.

In keeping with this same "allegorical" approach, Ben Sira elsewhere alludes to the two trees of Eden in similar fashion:

> He placed before them **knowledge**, and the Torah of **life** he gave as their inheritance.
>
> —Sir. 17:11

Here again, the story of Adam and Eve gains an allegorical quality. The first humans, dwelling in the Garden of Wisdom, are quite naturally said to have been furnished with knowledge—that which the Bible, only metaphorically, called a "tree" in the garden—while that garden's other plant, the "tree of life," is likewise turned into a figure of supreme wisdom, "the Torah of life" (perhaps via Prov. 3:18).

9. The Hebrew of this section is missing; the Greek text has "like light," presupposing a Hebrew text that read *kĕ'ôr*. In context, however, it seems likely that the original text form was *kay'ôr*, "like the Nile," as appears in the Syriac text. See further Segal, *Ben Sira*, 150.

10. While the geography of Eden's rivers did pose a problem to some interpreters, others identified them with existing rivers, perhaps supposing that an underground stream connected all four to the site of Eden. Josephus thus asserted that Eden's "stream encircles the whole earth" (*Jewish Antiquities* 1:38); he identified the Pishon with the Ganges and the Gihon with the (lower?) Nile.

Eve and the Animals: In the biblical account, God asserts that "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). The next verse, however, recounts not the creation of Eve, but that of the animals: God creates the beasts of the field and the birds and brings each to Adam, "but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:20).

This sequence of events certainly seemed to imply that Adam's future mate was first sought out from among the animals—a repugnant idea, to say the least. But how else could the sequence be explained? Some interpreters boldly reversed the order of things: first Adam sees the other animals, each with his mate, then God resolves to create a mate for him:

> And during these five days [of the second week of creation], Adam observed all of these [other animals], male and female according to every kind which was on the earth, but he was alone and there was none whom he found for himself who was like himself [and] who would help him. And the Lord said to us [angels], "It is not good that the man should be alone."
>
> —*Jubilees* 3:3–4

> Then, seeing Adam to be without female partner and consort (for indeed there was none), and looking with astonishment at the other creatures who had their mates, He extracted one of his ribs while he slept.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:35

Philo was troubled by the same question but provided a different answer:

> Why, after saying "Let us make a helper for man . . ." does He create wild animals and cattle? Intemperate and gluttonous people might say that wild animals and fowl, being necessary food, are indeed a help for man . . . But I believe that . . . to the first man, who was altogether adorned with virtue, they [the animals] were indeed rather like military forces and allies [and in that sense a "help"]. —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:18

Similarly:

> [Scripture] called Eve a helper because, although Adam had helpers among the beasts and animals, he still needed someone like himself, of his own kind. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:11

Finally, it is to be noted that in Josephus' version of the events, it is God who names the animals (*Jewish Antiquities* 1:35). See also Teshima, "Order of Things."

Adam's Ex: Why had not God created Eve at the same time that He created Adam? Moreover, when Eve finally was created, why did Adam say, "*This* time [in some translations, "This *at last*"] bone of bones and flesh of my flesh . . ." (Gen. 2:23). To ancient interpreters, both questions seemed to suggest that Eve was not Adam's first mate:

> At first He created her for him and he saw her full of blood and fluids and he fled from her [in disgust]. Then [having put Adam to sleep] He created

> her again; she [this second woman] is the one about whom [Adam] says, "This time . . ." — *Genesis Rabba* 18:4

This tradition has Adam shrink from his first mate because he has seen her in the process of being born. But other traditions held that Adam's first wife was Lilith (a demoness—see Isa. 34:14) and that Adam sought another wife because of her conduct with him. See Ginzberg, *Haggadah bei den Kirchenvätern,* 60, n. 3. Bacher suggested possible Persian influence in this tradition: see his "Lilith, Königen von Smargad"; see also Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess,* 221–225. Liliths (in the plural) appear in *2 Baruch* 10:8, apparently in keeping with the plural form that appears in the Septuagint text form of Isa. 34:14 as well as in 1QIsa.[a]. Similarly:

> . . . and the bastard spirits, demons, Liliths, owls and [jackals . . .]. — (4Q510) *Songs of the Sage* 1:5

> . . . to free him from every affliction of the sp]irits, of the devils, [Lilith, owls and jackals . . .]. — (11Q11) *Apocryphal Psalm*[a], col. 1, 4–5

It was seen earlier (Chapter 2, *OR,* "Adam and His Rib") that *Jubilees* had its own resolution of the difficulties of Eve's creation: she was indeed the female created on the sixth day of the first week, but at that point she was in the form of Adam's "rib," a female, human entity inside Adam's body. Subsequently, in the second week of creation, this rib was shaped into a woman and brought to Adam.

> Then He awakened Adam from his sleep. When he awoke, he got up **on the sixth day.** Then He brought h[er] to h[im]. He knew [that is, recognized] her and he said about her, "This is now bone from my bone[s] and flesh from my flesh. This one will be called my wife, for she was taken from her husband . . ." [Thus,] in the first week Adam was created and also the rib, his wife. And in the second week [the rib was reshaped into a woman] and He showed her to him. — *Jubilees* 3:6, 8

It is interesting that *Jubilees* makes a point of saying that all this happened on the same day of the week as Eve's initial creation, Friday. The author seems to have wished to explain the words "this time" as a phrase intended to highlight the contrast with the previous Friday: this time, that is, *this* Friday, You have indeed created her fully, removing the bone from out of my bones and (her) flesh from out of my flesh. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in the above passage *Jubilees* seems to break the Hebrew *zō't happa'ăm* ("this time") into two: "This [female being, that is, *zō't*] is now [a "translation" of *happa'ăm*] bone from my bone." Both strategies seem designed to remove from the biblical text the implication that Adam had, on a previous occasion (the *other* time), tried out some other candidate for his spouse. Such a candidate would—given the Bible's previous mention of God bringing the animals to Adam—logically have come from the ranks of the animal kingdom, a prospect particularly horrific in the eyes of *Jubilees'* author.

Glorious Clothing: Adam and Eve were sometimes said to have worn "clothes of glory" or "glorious garments." This idea eventually came to be connected with the

"garments of skin" made for the couple by God (Gen. 3:21), on which see below, but I believe that its origins are to be sought not in this or any other particular verse, but simply in the discomfort some ancient readers felt with Adam and Eve's nakedness in Eden. The idea that humanity's first parents were somehow clothed, albeit only by "glory," seems to reflect Jewish modesty and, as well, opposition to Hellenistic culture's celebration of the naked body.[11] (The use of "glory" in this sense—as a kind of insubstantial, perhaps invisible, protection—has biblical roots, and exists as well in another ancient motif, the "clouds of glory" that protected the Israelites in their wanderings: see Chapter 18, *OR,* "Clouds of Glory.") This glorious covering may be a development of a still earlier motif that attributed glory to Adam's appearance in Eden (see below).

Although it is certainly a much later text, the *History of the Rechabites* invoked the "glorious clothing" in terms that may reflect the very considerations that gave rise to this motif in the first place:

> [The Blessed Ones say:] "We are naked, **but not as you suppose**, for we are covered with a covering of glory, but [meaning "so that"?] we do not show each other the private parts of our bodies. We are covered with a stole of glory [similar to that] which clothed Adam and Eve before they sinned."
>
> — *History of the Rechabites* (Greek text) 12:3

(See further on this text Charlesworth, "A Study of the History of the Rechabites.")

Another contributing factor in the development of this motif was a verse in the Psalms:

> What is man, that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You care for him?
> Yet You have made him a little less than God, and crowned [or "surrounded"][12] him with glory and honor.
>
> —Ps. 8:4–5

The reference to making man someone "a little less than God" sounded very much like what God had said in Gen. 3:22 about, specifically, Adam: "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil." (What is more, Ps. 8:4 was quite similar to—and was therefore confused with—Ps. 144:3; the latter verse spoke specifically of "Adam.") If so, then perhaps the whole of Ps. 8:4–5 was a reference to God's dealings with this first man in the Garden of Eden. If it thus said that God had surrounded or crowned Adam with "glory and honor," might not these have been some kind of substitute for ordinary clothing in the garden?

11. In the context of the Jewish-Greek Kulturkampf preceding the Maccabbean revolt, the possibility that the Bible reported that Adam had run about Eden like a naked athlete in a gymnasium would certainly have troubled some Jews. Some sort of clothing must have existed.

12. The verb used here often means to "crown," that is, to surround the head, and so the verse is rendered in the Septuagint and targums. However, the Syriac tradition preserves the sense of clothing: "In honor and glory did You *clothe* him" (Peshitta, Psalm 8:6). What is more, the similar-sounding Hebrew and Aramaic root *'tp* means specifically to drape or cover and is used in particular in the sense of "to clothe." On Ps. 8:6 in Syriac, see Brock, *Jewish Traditions,* 212–232.

Moreover, if Adam and Eve were indeed clothed "in glory" before their disobedience, would this not well account for the Bible's saying that, after eating of the fruit, "the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7)? The realization that they were naked, by this rationale, did not come from any new knowledge acquired by eating the fruit: rather, when they disobeyed God's commandment, the pair instantly lost their glorious clothing and were indeed, for the first time, utterly naked. A later writer makes this connection explicit:

> It was because of the glory with which they were clothed that they were not ashamed. When it was taken away from them—after they had violated the commandment—they were indeed ashamed, because they were [now] naked. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:14[13]

In any event, all these considerations ultimately came to play a role in the development of this motif. The idea of the first pair's glorious, preexpulsion clothing is found in numerous sources:

> And I [Adam] wept and said, "Why have you done this to me, that I have been estranged from my glory with which I was clothed."
>
> —*Apocalypse of Moses* 20:2

> Then know, Baruch, that just as Adam through this tree was condemned and was stripped of the glory of God . . . —*3 Baruch* (Greek) 4:16

> At the end of the Sabbath He took his splendor away from him and exiled him from the Garden of Eden. —*Genesis Rabba* 11:2

> God then established him as master over Paradise and over all that was outside of Paradise and God clothed Adam in glory.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:4

> Then He beautified the place of those whom He had brought forth in glory.
>
> —*Tripartite Tractate* (Nag Hammadi) 96:26–31

> And Adam and Eve were in Paradise, clothed in glory and resplendant in praise. —*Cave of Treasures* (W) 1

The above are all relatively late sources, and it is far from clear how much earlier the motif of glorious clothing as such may have existed. It is noteworthy, however, that numerous early sources speak of Adam's (or "man's") glory without mention-

13. Ephraem here is trying to account for a verse that might otherwise seem to contradict the "glorious clothing" motif, namely, Gen. 2:25, "And they were both naked and were not ashamed." (If Adam and Eve were truly naked at *that* time, then why should they only later be able to see that they were naked? His answer is that "naked" in Gen. 2:25 refers not to utter nakedness but to being clothed with glory.) Another solution might be to pronounce the first word of Gen. 2:25 not *wayyihyû* but *wĕyihyû*—yielding, instead of the foregoing, "And they *will be* both naked." This in turn would allow the apparent subject of this sentence to be not Adam and Eve but *all* human beings, that is, it would make Gen. 2:25 into a continuation of what was said in Gen. 2:24.

ing clothing: see *Damascus Document* 3:20; (1QS) *Community Rule* 4:23; (1QH) *Thanksgiving Hymns* 4:23, 17:15; (4Q504) *Words of the Luminaries; 2 Enoch* (J) 30:11; *Apocalypse of Moses* 21:2, 6; *Apocalypse of Adam* 1:2, 5–6. Note also Satan's lost glory in *Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 16:1–3.

Ben Sira, in common with these sources, also alludes to Adam's glory:

> Shem and Seth and Enosh were glorified, but above all living beings' was **Adam's splendor.** —Sir. 49:16

Apparently, having already used the word "glorified" in the first half of the verse, Ben Sira speaks here of Adam's splendor instead (this near-synonym is paired with "glory" in Exod. 28:2 and 40). The verse seems nonetheless intended to evoke Adam's glory in Eden. The idea of "glory" as a protection or covering in Eden—one step closer to clothing—may be reflected in another verse:

> The fear of God is like an **Eden of blessing,** and covers better than any **glory.** —Sir. 40:27

Though it has not always been recognized, the second half of this verse is borrowed from Isaiah:

> Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mt. Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of flaming fire by night; for over all the **glory there will be a covering.** —Isa. 4:5

The highlighted phrase in this verse is translated above in keeping with the traditional Hebrew vocalization, but Ben Sira may have parsed it slightly differently, "for He covers over [or "covered over," that is, "protected"] all glory." In either case, the Hebrew text of Sir. 40:27 might, in the light of Isa. 4:5, be rendered more literally as:

> The fear of the Lord is like an Eden of blessing, and it covered over all glory [or "its shelter was over all glory"]. —Sir. 40:27

Why did Ben Sira reuse this phrase from Isaiah, especially in combination with the unusual "Eden of blessing"? This verse is the last in a series of proverbs (Sir. 40:19–27) in which Ben Sira contrasts the power of less obvious, often abstract things—love, wisdom, eloquence—to the more usual and concrete sources of satisfaction or strength. In keeping with this series, he suggests in the preceding verse that "power and strength lift up the heart, but the fear of the Lord is better than both; with the fear of the Lord there is no material want, and with it no search for support" (Sir. 40:26). Then, moving on to the idea that the fear of the Lord also protects and shelters, Ben Sira suddenly thinks of the phrase from Isaiah, "*covered over* all glory." But if, in adopting this phrase, he decided to connect it with, specifically, an allusion to Adam and Eve being protected by an "Eden of blessing," was it not because Isaiah's "glory" resonated in his mind with a tradition that Ben Sira knew from elsewhere, a tradition which held that Adam and Eve were covered with glory in Eden? For this reason he asserts, in the first half of the proverb, that the fear of the Lord is an "Eden of blessing," and this unusual phrase finds its justification, so to speak, in the Isaiah allusion in the proverb's second half. The fear

of the Lord is indeed like Eden itself, which was all the covering that the first couple ever needed (until they disobeyed—at which point they were clothed and expelled); it "covered over *all glory,*" namely, the immaterial haberdashery of humanity's first parents. (It is further to be noted that Isa. 4:5 was interpreted elsewhere as referring to Adam's "covering" in the garden: b. *Baba Batra* 75a and b.)

A passage seen above (Chapter 2, *OR,* "In the Image of God?") may also be relevant to this motif's development:

> The Lord created humanity from the earth, and back to earth He shall return it.
> He gave them few days and [little] time, but granted them authority over all things upon the earth.
> He **clothed them with might** like [His] own, and made them in His own image.
> He placed the fear of [them] in all flesh, and granted dominion over beast and bird.
> He created tongue and eyes and ears, and a discerning mind he gave to them.
> He filled them with knowledge and understanding, he taught them [to know] good and evil.
>
> —Sir. (reconstructed from Greek, Latin, and Syriac) 17:1–6

The overall point seems to be that humanity is in God's "image" in the sense that it has dominion over animals and has Godlike faculties of discernment. But perhaps, in saying that God had so clothed humanity with something like His own might, Ben Sira is suggesting that it was with such "might" that Adam and Eve were clothed in the garden of Eden, a somewhat metaphorical version of the tradition not terribly different from that of other interpreters (see below).

Finally (and in keeping with Ben Sira's connection of Eden with divine wisdom, as seen earlier), it is noteworthy that "glorious clothes" figure in his praise of wisdom as well. Once you have come to accept the burden and discipline of wisdom's ways, says Ben Sira,

> Its [that is, wisdom's] net will become a mighty refuge for you, and its ropes clothes of fine gold;
> Its yoke will be like golden jewelry, and its restraints a lace of blue [Exod. 28:37, etc.].
> You shall wear it like **glorious clothing,** and don it as a splendid crown.
>
> —Sir. 6:29–31

Ben Sira seems to be invoking the glorious clothing of the priesthood. However, given his conception of Eden as the very place of divine wisdom, it may not be irrelevant to observe that Adam, serving (or "working" Gen. 2:15, see below) as a priest in that place, might have been similarly clothed in glory in Ben Sira's mind. Note that the idea of Adam as a priest was reinforced by the mention of some of the precious stones of the priestly breastplate in Ezek. 28:13 (and still more in the Septuagint text of this verse); this same verse speaks of "Eden, the garden of God"

and was consequently associated with the Genesis narrative of Adam's sin and expulsion.

In a passage cited earlier, Philo asserted that Adam was clothed in "virtue":

> But I believe that . . . to the first man, who was **altogether adorned with virtue**, they [the animals] were indeed rather like military forces and allies [and in that sense a "help"].
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:18 (cf. 1:30, 40)

For Philo, "adorned with virtue" meant clothed *only* with virtue: the first couple's nakedness, he says elsewhere, is an expression of their "kinship with the world," since they "suffered no harm from any of its parts, it being closely related to them" (*Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:30). For this same reason Philo mentions Adam's being so "adorned" in connection with the presentation of the animals to him: since his nakedness signified his "kinship with the world," it was indeed appropriate that the animals be put forward to him as helpers. Note, however, that elsewhere Philo explains the couple's nakedness as an expression of their not yet being clothed in virtue or vice, a neutral state:

> "And the two were naked, Adam and his wife . . ." The mind that is clothed neither in vice nor in virtue, but absolutely stripped of either, is naked, just as the soul of an infant. —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 2:53 (also 2:64)

Similarly:

> [Eve recalls:] And at that very moment my eyes were opened and I knew that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed. And I wept, saying, "Why have you done this to me, that I have been estranged from my glory with which I was clothed?" —*Apocalypse of Moses* 20:1–2

(See further below, "Stripped of Their Former Virtues.") One strange tradition has Adam and Eve clothed in Eden in garments made out of "nail," though the reading has been disputed: see *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 3:7, 21; *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 14; and Bowker, *Targums and Rabbinic Literature,* 121. For more on Edenic garments, see below, "Adam's Restored Glory"; also, Brock, "Clothing Metaphors"; idem, *The Luminous Eye,* 65–76; Lambden, "From Fig Leaves to Fingernails"; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:103; Kronholm, *Motifs,* 64 n.

Finally, it is to be noted that Enoch (identified with the heavenly Metatron—see Chapter 5, OR, "Enoch the Angel") was also clothed in glory in some sources:

> And the Lord said to Michael, "Go and extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing. And anoint him with delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of My glory." —*2 Enoch* (J) 22:8

> R. Ishmael said: Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me: Out of the love which He had for me, more than for all those who dwell on high, God made for me a majestic robe in which all kinds of luminaries were set, and He clothed me in it. —*3 Enoch* 12:1

It may be that such assertions represent the belief that "glory" is simply the stuff of heavenly clothing, or they may more closely reflect the theme of Enoch's "atonement" for Adam. (On the latter, see Idel, "Enoch Is Metatron"; also, Chapter 5.) That the former is more likely is suggested by the theme of the restoration of Adam's glory (see below), as well as by the following:

> And the reward of all who walk in this [the Good Spirit] consists of healing and abundant happiness, long life and fruitfulness [that is, descendants], and all blessings without end, eternal joy in life unending, and the glorious crown and glorious clothing in everlasting light.
>
> —(1QS) *Community Rule* 4:6–8

It seems that the first part of the "reward" consists of things of this world, whereas starting with "eternal joy" the text speaks of the reward of the righteous, to which the "glorious clothing" belongs.

Working and Guarding the Torah: God puts Adam in the garden "to work it and to guard it" (Gen. 2:15). But this statement puzzled interpreters: what work was there to be done in Eden, and from whom, exactly, was the garden to be guarded? To some it seemed likely that the two verbs were being used conjointly, that is, that the only work involved was guarding. Perhaps the abundant food needed nevertheless to be guarded from the animals:

> Adam and his wife spent the [first] seven years in the garden of Eden working and guarding it. We [angels] gave him work and were teaching him how to do everything that was appropriate for working [it] . . . He would guard the garden against birds, animals, and cattle. He would gather its fruit and eat and would store its surplus for himself and his wife. He would store what was being kept.
>
> —*Jubilees* 3:15–16

Alternately, perhaps it was Eden that needed to be guarded (from the devil, who eventually infiltrated it), or the animals within the garden that needed to be guarded and kept apart:

> Then Eve said to them: "Listen, all my children and my children's children, and I will tell you how our enemy deceived us. It happened while we were guarding Paradise, each his portion allotted from God. Now I was watching my share, the South and West, and the devil came into Adam's portion, where the male animals were, since God divided the animals among us, the males He gave to your father, and all the females to me, and each of us kept his own."
>
> —*Apocalypse of Moses* 15:1–3 (also 17:3)

To other interpreters, however, it seemed that the "working" and "guarding" mentioned must have had some other sense entirely. After all, the Bible itself frequently spoke of "work" in the sense of serving God, while "guard" (the same verb as "keep" in Hebrew) was frequently used of the Torah or divine commandments. Perhaps, then, God had put Adam into Eden to busy himself with divine service and study:

> And I created a garden in Edem [*sic*], in the east, so that he [Adam] might keep the agreement [covenant?] and preserve the commandment.
>
> —*2 Enoch* 31:1

> And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to labor in the Torah and to keep its commandments. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 2:15

> But with what did Adam plow the garden, since he had no tools for plowing? . . . And from what did he guard it, since there were no robbbers to go into it? There was nothing for Adam to guard [keep] then except the law that had been given to him, nor was there any plowing [that is, working, serving] other than to perform the commandment that had been commanded to him. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:7

> And what sort of work was there in the garden for it to say "to work it and to keep it"? . . . Should he prune vineyards and plow and harrow the ground, or harvest and tie up the sheaves? Do not all the trees bring forth fruit on their own? . . . What then is it "to work and to guard" if not to busy oneself with Torah and to "guard the way to the tree of life," for the tree of life is the Torah, as it says, "A tree of life it is to those who hold fast to it" [Prov. 3:18]. —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 12

The connection of Adam with the priesthood via the allusive words of Ezek. 28:11–13 (see above, "Glorious Clothing") obviously suited well the idea that the garden was given to Adam for divine service and study.

The Devil's Envy: If the serpent was indeed the devil himself (or even directed by the devil), that still did not explain why he set out to trick the first human beings. After all, when God subsequently punishes the serpent, He states that He will *now* put enmity between humanity and the serpent (Gen. 3:15). That certainly implies that previously there had been no enmity. Why then did the serpent set out to bring about the humans' downfall?

One tradition, glimpsed briefly, held that the serpent-devil was jealous of Adam:

> Through the devil's **envy** death entered the world, and those who are on his side suffer it. —Wisd. 2:24

This text does not specify what the source of the devil's envy was, but others did:

> But one from the order of archangels [that is, Satan] deviated, together with the division that was under his authority. He thought up the impossible idea that he might place his throne higher than the clouds which are above the earth, and that he might become equal to My power. —*2 Enoch* (J) 29:4

> And I said, "I pray you, show me which is the tree which caused Adam to stray." And the angel said, "It is a vine which the angel Sammael planted; the Lord God became angered by it, and He cursed him and his plant. For this

> reason He did not permit Adam to touch it. And because of this the **devil became envious**, and tricked him by means of the vine." —*3 Baruch* 4:8

The first idea above, that the devil had tried to place his throne higher than God's, apparently comes from Isa. 14:12–17, the *locus classicus* for the idea that Satan is in reality a fallen angel. (Note that 14:12 is translated in the Septuagint, "How has *Heōsforos* [that is, Lucifer, the morning star] who rose up in the morning, fallen from heaven . . .") The second passage is not based on any particular verse but seeks simultaneously to explain Satan's jealousy and the reason for God's prohibition of eating from the tree: the tree had been planted by Satan and was hence off-limits to Adam, but Satan, jealous of Adam because of God's treatment of him, set out to use his tree to harm Adam. Other traditions focused on Satan's putative jealousy of Adam because of his mate, Eve:

> And so we find in the case of the serpent who sought to kill Adam and marry Eve. God said to him: "You thought: I will kill Adam and marry Eve—now 'I will put enmity between you and the woman' [Gen. 3:15]."[14]
>
> —Tosefta *Soṭah* 4:17–18

> When Satan saw that Adam and his wife not only were alive but had produced offspring, he was overcome by envy.
>
> —Theophylus, *To Autolycus* 2:29

There was, however, another tradition that held Satan's jealousy came about because he and all the angels had been commanded to *worship* Adam:

> [The devil tells Adam:] "Oh Adam, all my enmity and envy and sorrow concern you, since because of you I am expelled and deprived of my glory which I had in the heavens in the midst of the angels . . . When you were created, I was cast out from the presence of God and was sent out from the fellowship of the angels. When God blew into you the breath of life and your countenance and likeness were made in the image of God . . . Michael brought you and made us worship you in the presence of God . . . And Michael went out and called all the angels, saying, 'Worship the image of the Lord God, as the Lord God has instructed' . . . and I [the devil] answered, I do not have to worship Adam . . . I will not worship someone inferior and subsequent to me. I am prior to him in creation: before he was made, I was already made. He ought to worship me."
>
> —*Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 12:1, 13:2–3, 14:1–3

> It was by Your will that Adam was deceived, my Master. You commanded Your angels to worship Adam, but he who was first among the angels disobeyed Your order and did not worship him; and so You banished him.
>
> —*Apocalypse of Sedrach* 5:1

14. That is, the very fact that God punishes the serpent by saying to him, "I will put enmity between you and the woman" (Gen. 3:15), seemed to imply that the serpent would have had it otherwise, that his original design was to put love between himself and the woman once Adam was out of the way.

> God gave him [Adam] dominion over all the [other] creatures [Gen. 1:26] . . . and they worshiped him and they were subservient to him. The angels [also] heard the voice of God saying to him, "Let all beings and creatures be subject to you and let them be for you alone; to you have I given authority over everything that is under the heaven." But when [Satan and his allies] saw the splendor that God had given to Adam, they were jealous of him from that day forward and said to one another, "We do not want this [bowing down], for we are made of fire, and we cannot worship one made of dust, one who has been fashioned out of mere dust."
>
> — *Cave of Treasures* (E) 2:22–3:2

> And We created you [humanity], then fashioned you, then told the angels: Fall down prostrate before Adam! And they fell down prostrate—all except Iblis, who was not of those who make prostrations. He said: What prevented you from falling down prostrate when I ordered you? [Iblis] said: I am better than him [Adam]. You created me out of fire, while him You created out of mud.
>
> — *Qur'an* 7:11

Certainly one contributing factor to this explanation is Ps. 8:5–6, which says that God had made Adam ("man") "little less than God, and You crown him with glory and honor." (Gen. 3:22, "Behold, Adam has become like one of us," also had a role; cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on this verse—"And the Lord God said to the angels that serve before him, 'Behold, Adam is unique on earth as I am unique in the heavens above,'" likewise *Genesis Rabba* 21:5.) The motif "Immense Primordial Adam" in one form has the angels complain to God about Adam's size: see Chapter 2, *OR.* (See further Quispel, "Der gnostische Anthropos"; van der Osten-Sacken, *Gott und Belial;* Schäfer, *Rivalität,* esp. 75–107. (Note also the "envying" mentioned in *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 7:9–12, although this does not seem to reflect the same motif, since here Sammael and his hosts seem to be envying each other.) According to Ephraem, Satan envies Adam because of his "glory" and the promise of eternal life (*Commentary on Genesis* 2:22). In general, the theme of Satan's jealousy may be connected to Satan as the progenitor of the jealous Cain, whose name was sometimes etymologized as the "jealous one." See Chapter 4. It was jealousy as well that brought about the binding of Isaac; see Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:1, as well as the less explicit sources cited in Chapter 9. (See further Schäfer, *Rivalität;* Gaylord, "How Satanael Lost His '-el'," who likewise cites *Bereshit Rabbati* (Albeck ed., p. 24) and the Armenian *Penitence of Adam* in this connection; Anderson, "Exaltation of Adam."

A reference in the New Testament was apparently influenced by the same tradition:

> And again, when He [God] brings the firstborn [Christ] into the world, He says, "Let all God's angels worship him." — Heb. 1:6

Note, finally, that a somewhat similar explanation may underlie this obscure passage:

> [God recalls to Enoch:] And the devil understood how I wished to create another world, so that everything could be subjected to Adam on the earth, to rule and reign over it. The devil is of the lowest places. And he will become a demon, because he fled from heaven; Sotona, because his name was Satanail. In this way he became different from the angels. His nature did not change, [but] his thought did, since his consciousness of righteous and sinful things changed. And he became aware of his condemnation and of the sin which he sinned previously. And that is why he thought up the scheme against Adam. In such a form he entered paradise and corrupted Eve. But Adam he did not contact. —*2 Enoch* (J) 31:3–6

Apparently, Satan realized that, in the world about to be created, he will occupy a lower niche than Adam because of his past sinfulness. As a result, he resolved to trick Adam (and succeeded with Eve). For more on this passage, see Andersen in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:154–155.

Diabolical Ventriloquism: Some interpreters explained the serpent's ability to speak as a feature of life in primordial times: all serpents, or all animals, knew how to speak then. Alternately, some concluded that by "serpent" the Bible really meant the devil, so that from this chapter in Genesis one might learn that "serpent" is indeed another name for the devil, or that the devil is in fact a serpentlike creature.

But another possibility existed: snakes always were mute animals, that was the whole point! For that reason, the devil entered into a snake's body and spoke through him (without fear of interruption or contradiction). This not only solved the problem of the devil never having been specifically mentioned in the narrative—he was present but *hidden*, concealed inside the snake—it also explained why the snake in question could talk. His speaking abilities were really the result of a bit of diabolical ventriloquism:

> The devil said to him [the serpent]: "Do not fear, only become my vessel, and I will speak a word **through your mouth** by which you will be able to deceive."
>
> [Later, Eve recalls:] "The devil answered me through the mouth of the serpent." —*Apocalypse of Moses* 16:4, 17:4
>
> Satanel, when he took the serpent as a garment . . . —*3 Baruch* (Greek) 9:7
>
> Satan was not permitted to send any of the angels . . . nor to come himself to Adam in the garden, neither in human appearance nor in a divine vision . . . Rather, a serpent was allowed to come to them which, although clever, was utterly despicable and hideous . . . [Then] the one who was **in the serpent** spoke to the woman through the serpent, saying, "Did God truly say . . ." —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:18

In the same vein, Origen says that the *Ascension of Moses* (apparently, a reference to the [now lost] conclusion of the *Assumption* or *Testament of Moses*) had attributed the serpent's speech to the devil's "inspiration":

> In the *Ascension of Moses,* a book which the apostle Jude mentions in his epistle [Jude 9], the archangel Michael, disputing with the devil over the body of Moses, says that the serpent **was inspired by the devil** and so became the cause of the transgression of Adam and Eve.
>
> —Origen, *On First Principles* 3.2.1

What Kind of Tree? Many modern readers fail to realize that the Bible nowhere says what kind of fruit was forbidden in the Garden of Eden. People today often assume that the tree from which Adam and Eve ate was an apple tree, but this is not in the Bible. Indeed, ancient interpreters generally did not specify what sort of fruit was involved. Those who did, however, frequently asserted that it was a fig tree, since later on, the Bible specifies that the two covered themselves with fig leaves (Gen. 3:7). This idea may be implied in *Apocalypse of Moses* 20:4–5; it is found in the *Testament of Adam* recension 2 at 3:4; see also *Genesis Rabba* 15:7 (Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 139–140). Other interpreters held that the "tree" was actually a date palm (1 Enoch 24:4, see below), while yet others claimed it was a grapevine (whose ability to cause sin was again demonstrated by Noah—see *3 Baruch* 4:8–17; see also *Apocalypse of Abraham* 23:7) or even a stalk of wheat; see also b. *Berakhot* 40a. According to *1 Enoch* 32:4, it "is like a carob-tree and its fruit is bunches of grapes on a vine." On the use of "paradise" for orchards in Ptolemeian Egypt, see Lee, *Lexical Study,* 53–56; Husson, *Le paradis des délices,* 64–73.

The Tree of Life and Wisdom: Eden in fact contained two special trees, the "tree of life" and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9). It is from the latter that Adam and Eve ate, not the former (see Gen. 3:22). The narrative of *1 Enoch* 24:4, 25:4–5 locates the life-giving tree on the "seventh mountain," which is God's earthly throne; later, however, Enoch journeys farther to the east to another group of seven mountains and, ultimately, to the "Garden of Righteousness," where he sees

> the tree of wisdom from which your old father and aged mother . . . ate and learned wisdom, and their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked and they were driven from the garden.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 32:6 (also preserved partially in 4Q206 Enoch^{e} fragment 3)

The overlap in these passages may reflect a tendency among some ancient interpreters to identify the Edenic tree of life with divine wisdom or the Torah; this identification is based on Prov. 3:10, "It [wisdom] is a tree of life for those who hold on to it." See *Midrash ha-Gadol* Genesis 3, end; also above, "Eden Was Wisdom." (Note that Philo also asserts that Adam "took care of the cultivation of wisdom as if of trees" [*Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:56], but this is quite independent of Prov. 3:10.) Sometimes, the two trees were thus apparently fused, or simply confused:

> God said to him [Sedrach]: "I created the first man, Adam, and placed him in Paradise in the midst of [which is] the tree of life, and I said to him, 'Eat

> of all the fruit, only beware of the tree of life, for if you eat from it you will surely die.'" — *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 4:4

Perhaps aided by this connection, interpreters identified the "tree" mentioned in Exod. 15:25 as the same "tree of life."

> And there he commanded him many things and showed him the tree of life, from which he cut off and took and threw into Marah, and the water of Marah became sweet. — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:15

See further above, "Eden Was Wisdom," and below, Chapter 19, "A Symbolic Tree"; also, Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:105, 109. For Christians, the tree came to be identified typologically with the true cross and its fruit with the blood of Christ; see thus *3 Baruch* (Greek) 4:15; *Cave of Treasures* (Bezold, *Schatzhöhle,* 6). Other Christians identified the tree with Christ; see Danielou, *Symboles,* 33–48; also, *The Teaching of Silvanus* (Nag Hammadi), 106:21–23.

Good to Eat and See: One passage implied that the serpent himself had actually eaten from the tree before Eve to prove to her that the fruit would not cause death:

> Then he [the serpent] said to her, "[You see? So likewise] you say that God has forbidden us to eat from the tree. But **I can eat from it** and not die, and so can you." What did Eve think to herself? "All the things that my husband has told me are lies" . . . Whereupon she took the fruit and ate it and gave it to Adam and he ate, as it is written, "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat from and a delight to the eyes" [Gen. 3:6]. — *Abot deR. Natan* (A) ch. 1

This text does not explain why it has added to the story the new element of the serpent's boast ("I can eat from it and not die"). It seems likely, however, that this new element is the result not of poetic invention but of biblical interpretation, specifically, an interpretation of the words later cited from Gen. 3:6, "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat from and a delight to the eyes." For (our interpreter reasons) how can one tell by looking at a fruit that it will be good to eat? A lemon might look delicious at first glance! Furthermore, why would the Bible first say "good to eat from" and only afterward "a delight to the eyes"—the order ought to be reversed, since one first looks at a fruit before tasting it (and biting into it in any case destroys its beautiful form). And so, considering deeply the Bible's words, our interpreter has apparently concluded that Eve's "seeing" that the fruit was good to eat refers to her seeing the serpent eat and enjoy it. After seeing that he seemed to be enjoying it, she then looked at the remaining fruit in the tree and saw that it was indeed a "delight to the eyes"—and only then did she decide to try it herself.

The author of *Jubilees* was likewise troubled by the order of the adjectives in Gen. 3:6 but opted for a different solution. He simply changed the order:

> And the woman saw the tree that it was pleasant and it was **pleasing to the eye and its fruit was good to eat** and she took some of it and she ate. — *Jubilees* 3:20

Perhaps similarly:

> She gazed at the tree and saw that it was beautiful and appetizing.
>
> — *On the Origin of the World* (Nag Hammadi) 119.7–9

The Punishment Was Mortality: We have seen that Philo mentioned this motif in his *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:45 etc. Elsewhere, however, he also explains the "death" spoken of by God in Gen. 2:17 as a spiritual death that would overtake Adam even though his physical existence might continue; see *Allegorical Interpretations* 1:105–106; *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:16. Note that, in addition to the passages cited, the idea that death was the punishment for Adam and Eve's sin is widespread in rabbinic sources; see *Genesis Rabba* 17:2; j. *Sanhedrin* 72; b. *Sanhedrin* 20a; etc. However, the idea of "original sin" is virtually nonexistent there. See Urbach, *The Sages,* 421–436.

It is noteworthy, against the background of this motif, to consider one of Ben Sira's references to Adam and Eve:

> God created man [or, Adam] from the earth, and back to it He returned him.
> Numbered days and time he allotted to them [humanity], and he gave them sway over everything upon it.
>
> — Sir. 17:1–2

At first glance this might seem like a general pronouncement concerning human life, but in context, it is part of Ben Sira's recapitulation of the creation of the world (which begins in Sir. 16:24). He may therefore be implying here that—contrary to the "Punishment Was Mortality" motif to which he himself alludes in Sir. 25:24—Adam had always been intended for mortality, his very creation from the earth embodying his intended end after the "numbered days and time" allotted to him had been exhausted.

How Are You Now, Really? After their sin, Adam and Eve hid themselves from God in the trees of the garden, until God called out to Adam, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). To interpreters who believed that God in any case knows all things, this question made no sense and still less did Adam's answer, "I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10), implying that without such an answer God might still not have known where Adam was.

> Why does He who knows all things ask Adam, "Where are you?" . . . The thing said appears to be not a question but a kind of threat and reproach: where are you *now,* from what good have you removed yourself, O man?
>
> — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:45

> And the Lord came into Paradise and called with a frightful voice, saying "Adam, where are you? And why do you hide from my face? Can the house hide from the builder?" — *Apocalypse of Moses* 8:1 (also 23:1)

> But, when God entered the garden, Adam, who previously had been accustomed to seek out His company, now withdrew because he was aware that he had trespassed. God, met by so strange an action, asked **for what reason** someone who previously had taken pleasure in His company now fled and avoided it. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:45

> It was not for lack of understanding on God's part that He asked Adam where he was, or Cain where Abel was, but to convince each what kind of a person he was, and so that the knowledge of all things should come to us through the [sacred] Scripture. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 99:3

> And the Lord God called out to the man and said to him: "Behold, the whole world that I have created is visible before Me, light and darkness are [equally] visible to Me—yet you suppose that the place where you are is *not* visible? **Where is the commandment** which I ordered you [to obey]?" —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 3:9

> Where are you, Adam? In the state of godliness that the serpent promised you, or given over to the mortality to which I sentenced you if you should partake of the fruit? —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2:26

It so happens that, because of the vagaries of the consonantal text in Hebrew, the word translated as "Where are you" could also be read as, simply, "How . . ." (or even, "Alas . . ."). This fact provided some interpreters with the opportunity to supply the rest of the question themselves:

> "**How is it** that earlier you were of my counsel and now you have gone over to the serpent's side?" —*Genesis Rabba* 19:9

> "**How** could you imagine it possible to hide from Me?" —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 3:9

Among gnostics, by contrast, God's question was used as proof that the God of the story was not the Supreme Being but some lesser figure:

> Then He said, "Let us cast him out of Paradise lest he take from the tree of life and eat and live forever." But what sort is this God? First He envied Adam that he should eat from the tree of knowledge. And secondly He said, "Adam, where are you?" And [this] God does not have foreknowledge . . . since He did not know this from the beginning. Afterwards He said, "Let us cast him out of this place, lest he eat of the tree of life and live forever." Surely He has shown himself to be a malicious envier. And what type of God is this? —*Testimony of Truth* 47:10–48:1

See also Alexander, "The Fall into Knowledge."

Blame It on the Woman: We saw that opinions were somewhat divided on whether Eve bore sole, or even principal, responsibility for the events in Eden. One recent article has suggested that in fact a single source, the *Apocalypse of Moses,* is so

divided, arguing that chapters 15–30 of that work constitute a pro-Eve insertion into an already existing work: Levison, "The Exoneration of Eve." The case for a pro-Eve apologetic is, however, less than persuasive. Note that the strongest piece of evidence, Adam's assertion in the theoretical insert that "I alone have sinned" (*Apocalypse of Moses* 27:2), makes little sense no matter how much one seeks to exonerate Eve; she certainly did eat from the forbidden tree and thereby sinned! If not merely reflective of Adam's piety (and unconnected to Eve's actual innocence), these words may actually be a garbled version of Ps. 51:6, "Against You alone have I sinned," a verse perhaps incorporated as well in 27:3 in the Armenian version (Anderson and Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve,* 55).

An Extra Proviso: The interpretation of the additional verse "neither shall you touch it" (Gen. 3:3) set forth in *Abot deR. Natan* (and cited above) is presented, with a somewhat different slant, by the Church Father Ambrose of Milan:

> The error lay in [Eve's] report of the commandment . . . We ought not to make any addition to a commandment even for the purpose of instruction, for any addition or qualification of a commandment is in the nature of a falsification . . . What is objectionable, therefore, is the addition made by the woman, ". . . neither shall you touch it." God had not said this, but rather, "You shall not eat of it" . . . Now many believe that all this was really Adam's fault, not the woman's. They reason that Adam, in his desire to make her more cautious, had said to the woman that God had given this additional instruction, "Neither shall you touch it." For we know that it was not Eve, but Adam, who had initially received the commandment from God, because Eve had not yet been created. Of course, Scripture does not reveal the exact words that Adam used when he disclosed to her the nature and content of the commandment . . . What opinions others have offered should be taken into consideration, but it seems to me that the initial violation and deceit were due to this woman. —Ambrose of Milan, *On Paradise*

Ephraem, to the contrary, maintained that the extra proviso (not to "come near" the tree) was indeed part of God's original charge, intended to prevent Adam and Eve from being led astray by the tree's seductiveness (*Commentary on Genesis* 2:20; see also Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11,* 97–98).

Stripped of Their Former Virtues: After Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, the Bible says that they suddenly "knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7). But can a person *not* know that he is naked? Here was a relatively minor question, but one that nonetheless bothered interpreters, especially since, as mentioned, physical nudity was abhorred by most Jews. One answer, seen above, derived from the motif that maintained that Adam and Eve were clothed "in glory"; to be suddenly naked, then, was to have had this "glory" removed following their transgression.

Other interpreters suggested that "naked" was to be understood in some way other than the usual:

> [Eve retells her story:] "And I bent the branch toward earth, took of the fruit, and ate. And at that very moment, my eyes were opened and I knew that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed."
>
> —*Apocalypse of Moses* 19:3–20:1

> "And the two were naked, Adam and his wife . . ." The mind that is clothed neither in vice nor in virtue, but absolutely stripped of either, is naked, just as the soul of an infant. —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 2:53 (also 2:64)

> They were stripped bare even of the one commandment which had been given to them. —*Genesis Rabba* 19:6

> And their imperfection became apparent in their lack of acquaintance; and they recognized that they were naked of the spiritual element.
>
> —*Hypostasis of the Archons* 90:13–18

> But when, at the urging of the serpent, [Adam] abandoned his thinking of God and began to consider himself, then they [both Adam and Eve] fell into fleshly desires and realized that they were naked, and knowing it were ashamed. They realized that they were not so much stripped of clothing as stripped of the contemplation of divine things. —Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*

The matter of nakedness apparently also bothered Josephus. In his account he omitted entirely the exchange in Gen. 3:9–12. See further Harl, "La prise de conscience de la 'nudité' d'Adam."

Sinfulness Is Hereditary: A passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans was seen in connection with this motif:

> Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **in that all men sinned.** —Rom. 5:12

The relationship of these clauses has been the subject of much debate; see the discussion in Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 405–416. Fitzmyer himself proposes translating the last part of the verse, "and so death spread to all human beings, *with the result that* all have sinned," rejecting the much more common renderings of *eph' hō* as "inasmuch as" or "in view of the fact that" on the grounds that such translations "seem to make Paul say in 5:12d something contradictory to what he says in 5:12abc" (p. 416). It is difficult to see how such a conclusion can be justified; on the contrary, it is Fitzmyer's proposed translation that works badly with the beginning of the verse. Particularly in consideration of the other attestations of this motif, the meaning of the latter part of this verse is clear: Just as Adam's sin led to his mortality, so "death spread to all men" since Adam's own sinfulness was transmitted to all subsequent generations, that is, "*in that* [precisely in the sense of "inasmuch as" or "in view of the fact that"] all men sinned."

Free Will Nevertheless: If, because of Adam and Eve, sinfulness will always be part of human nature, then later human beings will, in a sense, forever be paying

the price for the sinfulness of the first pair. This lesson was hardly lost on ancient interpreters:

> Adam said to Eve, "What have you done? You have brought upon us a great wound, transgression and sin in all our generations . . ." When Eve heard this she began to weep and groan. —*Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 44:2–5

> For a grain of evil seed was sown in Adam's heart from the beginning, and how much fruit of ungodliness it has produced until now, and will produce until the time of threshing comes! —*4 Ezra* 4:30

But many interpreters were troubled by this assumption. For if human beings are condemned to sinfulness as a result of Adam and Eve, can they truly be said to have the choice not to sin? If not, is it right or fair that they be punished for sinning?

> In the beginning God created man, but He put him in a despoiler's hands,
> He gave him over to his own inclination.
> If you so wish, you may keep the commandment[s], and [be faithful] to do God's will . . .
> Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him.
>
> —Sir. 15:14–17

Some interpreters went out of their way to maintain, with Ben Sira, that humans nonetheless can triumph over sin. Indeed, some specify that those who are victorious will be rewarded after death. Thus, one passage partially cited earlier does indeed begin by implying that humans had been virtually condemned to be punished no matter what they did.

> [Ezra asks:] "For what good is it to all [humans] that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants." —*4 Ezra* 7:117–118

But the angel to whom he is speaking goes on to present another view.

> He answered and said to me, "This is the meaning of the contest which every man who is born on earth shall wage: for if he is defeated he shall suffer what you have said, but if he is victorious he shall receive what I have said. And this [choice of one's] path is what Moses, while he was alive, spoke to the people about when he said, 'Choose for yourself life, that you may live' [Deut. 30:19]." —*4 Ezra* 7:127–128

Similarly:

> O Adam, what did you do to all who were born after you? And what will be said of the first Eve who obeyed the serpent, so that this whole multitude [of humanity] is bound for corruption, and countless are those whom the fire destroys? —*2 Baruch* 48:42–43

Yet later:

> Although Adam sinned first and has brought death upon all who were not in his own time, yet each of them who has been born from him has prepared for himself the coming torment. And further, each of them has chosen for himself the coming glory.[15] For truly, the one who believes will receive reward . . . Adam is therefore not the cause, except for himself; but each of us has become his own Adam. —*2 Baruch* 54:15–19

Note also:

> [God says:] And I gave him [Adam] **his free will** and I pointed out to him the two ways, light and darkness. And I said to him, "This is good for you, but that is bad," so that I might come to know whether he has love toward me or abhorrence, and so that it might become plain who among his race loves me. —*2 Enoch* (J) 30:15

The issue of free will continued to occupy generations of interpreters, and was, as we have glimpsed briefly, a crucial one in the development of Christian doctrine. For a discussion of some of the texts cited above, see Stone, *Fourth Ezra,* 63–66, 233, 257–259; see also Winston, "Philo's Doctrine of Free Will." A later midrashist saw a contradiction between the idea that Adam was free *not* to sin and the rabbinic teaching that the Torah had been created before the world (see Chapter 2, *OR,* "Created Long Before"). For that Torah included not only the anticipatory account of Adam's sin but also laws like that of Num. 19:14, which begins, "When a man dies inside a tent," and such a law presumes that human beings will indeed be mortal, yet it was presumably written before Adam's sin:

> Adam said: "Master of the world! Two thousand years before You made your world, the Torah was already with You . . . If you had not already decreed that all creatures would die, would you have written what You wrote? Yet you still come to blame it all on me!"
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyesheb* 4

(For more on this subject, see Chapter 25, "Moses Did Not Want to Die," and Urbach, *The Sages,* 255–285.)

Garments of Light: After announcing to Adam and Eve their punishment, God made "garments of skin" for them and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). These divinely made clothes were the subject of particular speculation. What was their nature?

The phrase "garments of skin" *(kotnôt 'ôr)* was pronounced almost exactly as another phrase, "garments of light" *(kotnôt 'ôr).* Since many interpreters were disturbed by the idea that *God* had made garments "of skin"—an action more befitting a human being, especially since it seemed to imply the slaughter of an

15. The point of these two passages seems to be that although Adam is indeed responsible for human *mortality,* human beings are nonetheless free to obey God and so merit the "coming glory" or to disobey and so bring on the "coming torment."

animal and subsequent tanning of its hide—a tradition developed (influenced by the "Glorious Clothing" motif discussed above) that the clothes in question were really made "of light" and hence were the "glorious clothes":

> And the Lord God made clothes of glory for Adam and his wife for [or "on"] the skin of their flesh.[16] — *Targum Onqelos, Neophyti* Gen. 3:21

> "And the Lord made for Adam and his wife clothes of skin . . ." [Gen. 3:21]: It was to be written in the Torah of R. Meir, "clothes of light."
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 20:12

However, if these were indeed "garments of light," then they ought to have been made for Adam and Eve before their expulsion, not afterward. If so, then Gen. 3:21 would have to be construed as a pluperfect—God *had made* garments of light for Adam and Eve for their life within the garden, but now these garments were taken away. Indeed, here was a certain symmetry: "garments of light" before their expulsion, and "garments of skin" after the expulsion. Somewhat similarly for a Christian gnostic, if Adam was clothed "in glory" inside Eden, then it followed that his post-expulsion clothing was the opposite:

> And He cast them out of paradise and **clothed them in gloomy darkness.**
>
> — *Apocryphon of John* 24:6–8

A further refinement was to understand the "garments of skin" to be *human* skin, which clothes the physical body; if so, then Adam and Eve must previously have been wholly spiritual creatures, clothed in light. It was only after their "fall" that they became skin-enclosed, mortal beings (an idea that obviously fit with the overall understanding of Adam and Eve's punishment as that of mortality). God's making of these "garments of [human] skin" for Adam and Eve must therefore have preceded the pair's perception of their own nakedness in Gen. 3:7, and for such an interpretation Gen. 3:21 had likewise to be construed as a pluperfect "flashback" to the time before Gen. 3:7.

> And the statement that the man who was cast out of the garden with the woman was clothed with "coats of skin" which God made for those who had sinned on account of the transgression of mankind, has a certain secret and mysterious meaning, superior to the Platonic doctrine of the descent of the soul. — Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:40

> Adam and Eve received their sentence: He [God] made garments of skin for them and they put them on, that is, the skin which is stretched over the [human] body, causing the pain [that humans feel].
>
> — *Cave of Treasures* (W) 4

See further Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 14; Chadwick, *Contra Celsum,* 216 n; *Genesis Rabba* 20:12; also, Jervell, *Imago Dei,* 100–103; Kronholm, *Motifs from*

16. Here is a double translation, the Hebrew *'ôr* being rendered as *'ôr* ("light") and also *'ôr* ("the *skin* of their flesh").

Genesis 1–11, 62–64. The opposition between such "garments of [human] skin" and garments of light is known elsewhere:

> And I was covered with the covering of Your spirit, and I removed from me my garments of skin. — *Odes of Solomon* 25:8

> [Isaiah relates:] There [in heaven] I saw Enoch and all who were with him, stripped of the **garment of the flesh**, and I saw them in their **higher garments**, and they were like the angels who stand there in **great glory.** — *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 9:9

Perhaps similarly:

> Then I [Ezra] asked an angel, "Who are these, my lord?" He answered and said to me, "These are they who have put off **mortal clothing** and put on the immortal." — (later preface of) *4 Ezra* 2:45

See also 2 Cor. 5:1–4. As implied earlier, the "Glorious Clothing" motif preceded, in my opinion, that of "Garments of Light" and was originally quite independent of Gen. 3:21. If it were otherwise, one would expect these clothes to be referred to by the phrase derived from Gen. 3:21, *kotnôt 'ôr.* Yet in the attestations of this motif cited earlier, *kotnôt 'ôr* is entirely lacking: Ben Sira, *Apocalypse of Moses,* and other texts speak of "glory," not "light," and there is no mention of *kotnôt.*[17]

Adam's Restored Glory: But all was not lost! Perhaps a great setting-aright or an eventual return to Eden will bring about the restoration of "Adam's glory"[18] (which might mean, specifically, the glorious clothing):

> Those who cling to it are bound for eternal life, and **all of Adam's glory** will be theirs. — *Damascus Document* 3:20

> [In the time of the last judgment, God will] cause the upright to understand the mind of the Almighty, and to [bring] the wisdom of the heavenly ones to those who walk in purity [Ps. 119:1], for it is they whom God has chosen for his eternal covenant and theirs will be **all of Adam's glory.** — *Community Rule* 4:22–23

> And the Lord God said, "Adam, why did you do this? If you had kept my commandment, those who brought you down to this place would not have rejoiced. Yet now I tell you that their joy shall be turned into sorrow, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy; and when that happens, I will establish you in your dominion on the throne of your seducer . . . and they shall see you sitting on his throne of glory." — *Apocalypse of Moses* 39:1–3

17. For this reason I must disagree with Brock, who sees Gen. 3:21 as the "exact place" from which this motif derives ("Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," 223).

18. Since the same word in Hebrew means both "Adam," the first man, and "mankind" or "humanity," this expression is inherently ambiguous.

> [During his heavenly journey,] Abraham asked the Commander-in-chief [the angel Michael], "My lord . . . who is this most wondrous man who is adorned in such **glory** . . .?" The incorporeal one said, "This is the first-formed Adam who is in such glory." — *Testament of Abraham* (A) 11:8–9

> But [God] honored Adam in many things . . . He clothed him in glory . . . And **in garment of light** to return him [Adam] to Eden.
> — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3:6

> And in the **garment of light** they return him [Adam] to Eden.
> — Ephraem, *Hymns of Virginity* 16:9

Early Christian interpreters saw the Fall of Man as a temporary state of affairs ultimately set aright by the Resurrection. But it should be noted that all the above sources had in some fashion envisaged a restoration of Adam's lost glory; this idea is thus pre-Christian. (The *Apocalypse of Moses,* in particular, may have been known to Paul and influenced his views. See Sharpe, "The Second Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians.")

Curses Reversed: The restoration of Adam's glory is, as noted, only one aspect of the great setting-aright. Indeed, the coming age will usher in a reversal of the whole evil state of affairs brought about because of Adam and Eve's sin:

> And the wild beasts will come from the wood and serve men, and the **asps** and dragons will come out of their holes to subject themselves to a child. And **women will no longer have pain when they bear**, nor will they be tormented when they yield the fruits of their womb. And it will happen in those that the **reapers will not become tired, and the farmers will not wear themselves out** . . . For that time is the end of that which is corruptible and the beginning of that which is **incorruptible**, Therefore, the things which were said before will happen in it. Therefore, it is far away from the evil things and near to those which **do not die.** — *2 Baruch* 73:6–74:3

Scholars have pointed to the biblical prophecies alluded to here (Isa. 11:8, 65:20–25, and others), but it is important to see that these are being understood as a reversal of the divine curses in Gen. 3:14–19. Thus enmity will no longer exist between serpents and humans (Gen. 3:15), women will no longer have pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16), and men will no longer have to toil for their food (Gen. 3:17–19). Indeed, the human mortality brought on by this unfortunate episode will itself come close to disappearing. (See a comparable catalog in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:46; also, *Testament of Levi* 18:10–11. For a similar theme in *Jubilees,* see Kugel, "*Jubilees* Apocalypse.")

In such circumstances, the garments "of light" or "of glory" once worn by Adam and Eve were simply what one could expect to be worn in the future by the immortal righteous:

> The righteous and elect ones . . . shall wear garments of glory.
>
> — *1 Enoch* 62:15–16 (also 50:1)

Garments Saved: What was the fate of the garments "of skin" (or, indeed, "of light") given to the pair by God in Gen. 3:12? After all, clothes made for human beings by God were certainly precious and would not simply have been discarded. According to some sources, the clothes in question were actually priestly garments, since Adam himself was deemed by many interpreters to have been the first priest (and the priests in the Jerusalem Temple were later to have extremely elaborate garments made according to God's prescriptions, Ex. 28:3–43).[19] The clothes themselves may have been made from the bark of the tree of paradise, which was as soft as royal silk (see *Cave of Treasures* 6–7). In one version, these garments were passed on by Adam to his son Seth, and from Seth to Methuselah, from Methuselah to Noah, from Noah to Shem (that is, Melchizedek), and from Shem to Abraham (see *Numbers Rabba* 4:8; a somewhat different chain of transmission is found elsewhere—see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:199, 276; Kugel, "Levi's Elevation"). Another tradition, however, held that the first priest was not Adam (who is nowhere represented as having offered a sacrifice) but Abel, with whom began a chain of priests:

> [You are] the One who marked out beforehand, from the beginning, priests for dominion over Your people: **Abel at the first**, Seth and Enosh and Enoch and Noah and Melchizedek and Job; the One who designated Abraham and the other patriarchs together with your faithful servants Moses and Aaron and Eleazar and Phinehas.
>
> — Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.5.4

The Tree Is the Reward: We saw that the tree of life had a role in ancient interpreters' conclusion that the Garden of Eden was intended by God to serve as the final resting place of the righteous after their death. The very name "tree of life" suggested that its fruits provided the means by which the righteous would live forever. Not surprisingly, therefore, a number of ancient interpreters spoke specifically of enjoying the tree of life—smelling its fragrance[20] or eating its fruits—as the essence of the reward of the righteous:

> [Enoch relates:] And there was among them a tree such as I have never smelled, and none of the other [trees] was like it. It smells more fragrant than any fragrance, and its leaves and its flowers and its wood never wither; its fruit [is] good, and its fruit [is] like the bunches of dates on a palm.
>
> [The angel Michael explains to Enoch:] "And as for this fragrant tree, no creature has the authority to touch it until the great judgment . . . This

19. Indeed, the same Hebrew word, *kuttōnet*, is used both for these "garments of skin" and for the priestly garments prescribed by God (Exod. 28:4, 40, 29:5, etc.; Lev. 8:13, 16:4, etc.).

20. Preference for the fragrance motif may reflect a reluctance among some interpreters to attribute the function of eating to the resurrected righteous.

[fruit] will be given to the righteous and the humble. From its fruit life will be given to the chosen." —*1 Enoch* 24:4, 25:4–5 (also 32:3–6)

[God says to Adam:] But when you come out of Paradise, if you guard yourself from all evil, preferring death to it, at the time of the resurrection I will raise you again, and then there shall be given to you from the **tree of life**, and you shall be immortal forever. —*Apocalypse of Moses* 28:4

The tree of life will give them [God's new people] fragrant **perfume**, and they shall neither toil nor become weary.

Paradise . . . whose fruit does not spoil and in which are abundance and **healing** . . .[21]

Paradise is opened, the **tree of life** is planted, the world to come is prepared, delight [in Hebrew, *'ēden*] is prepared. —*4 Ezra* 2:12, 7:123, 8:52

And he showed the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the **tree of life** with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.[22]

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

If any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. —Rev. 22:1–2, 14, 19 (also 2:7)

And I saw there the earth and its fruit . . . and the garden of Eden and its fruits, and the source and the river flowing from it, and its trees and their flowering, making fruits, and I saw righteous men therein, their food and their rest. —*Apocalypse of Abraham* 21:3, 6

And He shall open the gates of paradise; He shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and he will grant to the righteous to eat of the tree of life. —*Testament of Levi* 18:10

[In a vision of paradise:] And in the midst was the tree of life, at that place where the Lord rests when He goes into paradise. And that tree is indescribable for pleasantness and fine **fragrance**, and more beautiful than any other. —*2 Enoch* 8:3

Then Gabriel and Uriel will become a pillar of light leading [the righteous] into the holy land. It will be granted to them to eat from the tree of life. —*Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:5–6

21. Perhaps an alternate explanation for the name "tree of life."

22. Cf. Ezek. 47:12.

For later elaborations, see Adler, "Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha," 190–191.

The Righteous Are the Trees: In searching out the identity of the garden and the tree of life, some interpreters concluded that the entire idea was metaphorical. After all, the righteous are elsewhere in the Bible compared to trees:

> The righteous flourish like a palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
> Planted in the house of the Lord, they bring forth fruit in the courts of our God.
> In old age they still produce, fresh and full of vigor.
>
> —Ps. 92:12–14

The same metaphor, though stated less explicitly, appears elsewhere:[23]

> And your people [Israel] are altogether **righteous** . . ., the **shoot of my planted garden.**
>
> That they [Israel] may be called **oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord** . . .
>
> For like the **days of a tree** shall the days of my people be.
>
> —Isa. 60:21, 61:3, 65:22
>
> I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will **plant them** in this land in faithfulness. —Jer. 32:41
>
> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked . . .
> He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
> that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.
>
> —Ps. 1:1–3 (see also Jer. 17:8)

Picking up on such biblical hints, a number of interpreters suggested that the trees themselves in the Garden of Righteousness are none other than the righteous ones granted eternal life:

> The Lord's devout shall live by it [the Torah] forever; the Lord's paradise, the trees of life, are His devout ones. —*Psalms of Solomon* 14:3–4
>
> And I said: Blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in your land, and who have a place in your paradise, and who grow in the growth of your trees, and have passed from darkness into light. —*Odes of Solomon* 11:18–19

Jacob Licht suggested a connection between these passages and the Edenic trees in the Qumran *Thanksgiving Hymns* scroll (1QH, col. 8:6–14), which, he proposed, represented the members of the Qumran community. See Licht, *The Thanksgiving Scroll,* 131–132. Although, as mentioned above, the very name "tree of life" indicated

23. Note that other biblical books speak specifically of the trees in Eden, but not as emblematic of the righteous. See thus Ezek. 31:8–9, 36:35.

to many interpreters that *it* would be the means by which the righteous would live forever, such an idea would hardly work if the trees themselves were the righteous. It is interesting, therefore, that at one point the *Thanksgiving Hymn* in question suggests that the true source of immortality in Eden is the water:

> And you, God, have hedged its fruit roundabout with a company of mighty angels and holy spirits and the fiery, turning sword,
> Lest a[ny stranger penetrate t]o **the spring of life**, there to drink, alongside the ancient trees, from the holy waters—
> Lest he bring forth his own fruit alongside [that of] the heavenly orchard.
> —(1QH) *Thanksgiving Hymns* 8:11–13

Such an interpretation would, of course, fit well with the "fountain of life" mentioned in Ps. 36:10, Prov. 10:11, 13:14, 14:27, and elsewhere.

To the East, or North, or Somewhere: If, as many ancient interpreters believed, the Garden of Eden was an earthly garden, why was its precise location not known? Perhaps the roads leading to it had been lost or forgotten—if so, no doubt in keeping with God's design:

> And the Lord continued to show him [Moses] the roads to paradise and said to him: "These are the roads that men have lost by not walking in them, because they have sinned against me."
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 13:10

But if its precise location was unknown, did not Scripture provide some clue as to the proper direction in which to look for it? The problem was rather that Scripture provided too many, contradictory, clues. Since the garden was originally said to have been planted in the east (Gen. 2:8; for another reading, see Chapter 1 *OR*, "Eden and Gehenna Created"), many interpreters supposed in any case that the garden must be far to the east (on a flat earth) and for that reason inaccessible to ordinary travelers:

> And from there I [Enoch] went over . . . **far away to the east** . . . I came to the Garden of Righteousness. —*1 Enoch* 32:2–3

> And [Shem's land] goes on toward the **east** until it draws near to the Garden of Eden. —*Jubilees* 8:16

> And I ascended to the **east**, into the paradise of Edem [*sic*], where rest is prepared for the righteous. —*2 Enoch* (J) 42:3 (also 65:10)

Others apparently disagreed. Perhaps the fact that the guarding cherubim were placed to the east of the garden (Gen. 3:24 in the traditional Hebrew text) indicated that the garden itself was to the west—or at least not to the east.

> [The Essenes] maintain that for virtuous souls there is reserved an abode **beyond the ocean** [that is, westward], a place which is not oppressed by rain

> or snow or heat but is refreshed by the gentle breath of the **west** wind coming in off the ocean. —Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2:155

A northern location seemed to be suggested by Ezekiel 28, in which an oracle against the king of Tyre (located just to the north of biblical Israel) says to him, "You were in Eden, the garden of God" (Ezek. 28:13).

> And the fourth quarter, named the **north**, is divided into three parts. And the first of them [is] the dwelling place of men, and the second [contains] the seas of water, and the deeps, and the forests, and rivers, and darkness, and mist; and the third part [contains] the Garden of Righteousness.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 77:4

Note that elsewhere *1 Enoch* states that Enoch was placed

> between two winds [that is, directions], between the north and the west, where the angels took the cords to measure me for the place of the chosen and the righteous. —*1 Enoch* 70:3

The whole question of Enoch's journey to Eden was studied in Pierre Grelot's seminal article "La géographie mythique d'Hénoch." Grelot pointed out that according to parts of *1 Enoch,* there seem to be two separate gardens: Eden, located on an island to the northeast of the world, and the "garden of truth [or "justice"]," on the island to the northwest. The latter is the paradise of God to which, according to Grelot, the tree of life was brought after Adam and Eve's transgression. (These two paradises originated, he asserted, in an attempt to harmonize Genesis 2 with the "northern mountain" mentioned in Isa. 14:13 and elsewhere, as well as the northern location of Ezek. 28.)[24] Underlying Enoch's journey itself seems to be another, that of Gilgamesh in the ancient Mesopotamian epic of the same name: Gilgamesh voyages to find his Utnapishtim, sole survivor of the flood, in order to gain the secret of immortality. Grelot likewise found the geography of Enoch's journey somewhat similar to Babylonian conceptions known from a Babylonian map of the world that survives on a late tablet (see further Horowitz, "The Babylonian Map of the World"). While the various accounts of the garden's location in *1 Enoch* are incompatible with one another, they may correspond to an underlying, common schema that different authors elaborated differently; in any case, "we cannot exclude the possibility of Phoenecian or Syrian intermediaries between the Mesopotamian source and the Jewish apocryphon [that is, Enoch]" (Grelot, p. 68).

Despite the wide-ranging erudition of Grelot's article, its assertion of a connection between *1 Enoch* and this (late) Babylonian map has been seriously questioned. See VanderKam, "I Enoch 77:3 and a Babylonian Map of the World." See this same article concerning Milik, "Hénoch au pays des Aromates," as well as the response to Milik by Moshe Gil, "Enoch in the Land of Eternal Life"; also, Alexander, "Notes on the 'Imago Mundi' of the Book of Jubilees."

In connection with the western location of Eden as a consequence of the eastern

24. The evidence for two paradises is not unambiguous; see VanderKam, *Enoch,* 139.

position of the guarding cherubim and sword, it is to be noted that the Septuagint had a different version of the crucial verse:

> . . . and He expelled Adam and **caused him to dwell across from** the garden of delight, and He placed the cherubim and the flaming, rotating sword to guard the path to the tree of life. —Septuagint Gen. 3:24

The indicated phrase has no correspondent in the traditional Hebrew text, and the word "across from" (or "opposite" [*apenanti*]) does not carry the possible meaning of "eastward" present in the Hebrew text. See further Alexandre, "L'épée de flamme (Gen. 3, 24)," esp. 404–409. The belief in an earthly paradise persisted. Note that b. *Tamid* 32b apparently locates Eden in the African continent.

Neither Heaven Nor Earth: It was also noted that while some interpreters located Eden on earth, a number of ancient interpreters concluded that the garden was located in heaven (Stone, "Paradise in 4 Ezra," 85–88; idem, *4 Ezra,* 68–69, 221, 286–287). Yet others simply did not specify whether the garden was heavenly or earthly. It may be that to some of those writers in this last group, the location seemed obviously to be in heaven. To others, however, the arguments for an earthly Eden must have seemed as strong as those for the heavenly: the *Apocalypse of Moses* apparently envisaged two paradises, one on earth (38:5) and the other in heaven (40:2).

A final element in this exegetical puzzle was the prophet Ezekiel's implication, in a verse already mentioned, that Eden was located atop a certain mountain:

> You were in Eden, the garden of God . . . you were on the holy mountain of God. —Ezek. 28:13–14

This verse (along with Isa. 14:13 and others) may be responsible for the particular notion of a mountain, halfway between heaven and earth, where the righteous will receive their reward:

> And [there was] a seventh mountain in the middle of these, and in their height they were all like the seat of a throne, and fragrant trees surrounded it. And there was among them a tree such as I have never smelled.
>
> [The angel Michael explains:] "And as for this fragrant tree, no creature has the authority to touch it until the great judgment . . . This [fruit] will be given to the righteous and the humble. From its fruit life will be given to the chosen." —*1 Enoch* 24:3–4, 25:4–5 (cf. *Jubilees* 4:26)
>
> And I ascended to the east, into the paradise of Edem [*sic*], where rest is prepared for the righteous. And it is open as far as the third heaven; but it is closed off from this world. —*2 Enoch* (J) 42:3
>
> The height of all [other] mountains falls below its [Eden's] height. —Ephraem, *Hymns of Paradise* 1

Jubilees does not assert that the Eden sanctuary is on a mountain, but this text groups Eden alongside three mountains in 4:26 and two mountains in 8:19. See

further Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 306–310; Anderson, "The Cosmic Mountain." On the curious reference to paradise's location "between the corruptible and incorruptible" in *2 Enoch* (J) 8:5, see Andersen's translation in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:116 n.

Penitent Adam and Eve: After their sin, Adam and Eve were rebuked by God and expelled from the garden. Yet they never expressed any remorse over having violated God's commandment and never sought divine forgiveness. Since repentance was a central concept in ancient Judaism, interpreters naturally sought to amend this apparent oversight in the text. One verse did perhaps contain just a hint of penitence on Adam's part:

> [God said to Adam]: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." —Gen. 3:17–19

God's words seemed to contain a slight contradiction: the text speaks first of Adam eating "the grass of the field," but then in the next sentence says that Adam will eat bread. Which was it? Between the two assertions comes the phrase "the sweat of your brow." But the word for "sweat" might also be understood as coming from a root meaning to tremble or quiver. This potential ambiguity led some interpreters to conclude that God first sentenced Adam to eat grass like an animal,[25] but when Adam repented and began to quiver or weep, the sentence was lifted:

> "And you shall eat the grass of the field" [Gen. 3:18]. When Adam heard this his face began to drip [or "shake"]. "Shall I be tied up to a trough like a [domestic] animal?" God said to him: "Since your face has dripped [or "shaken"] you shall eat bread" [Gen. 3:18]. —*Genesis Rabba* 20:10

So Adam did, in the end, regret what he had done—but what about Eve? Here, an alternative to the traditional understanding of the Hebrew text supplied a possible answer. For, in place of "your desire" in that text's version of Gen. 3:16,

> To the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your pain and pregnancy; in pain will you bear children, and to your husband shall be your **desire**, and he will rule over you. —Gen. 3:16

other versions read "your turning":

> [God said to Eve:] And toward your husband shall be your **turning**, and he will rule over you. —Septuagint, Peshitta, *Samaritan Targum* Gen. 3:16

It has generally been assumed that these versions represent an actual variant reading, "your turning" *(tĕšûbātēk)* in place of "your desire" *(tĕšûqātēk).* Recently,

25. As Anderson has pointed out, the "grass" here is quite different from the "grass" with which Adam was blessed in Gen. 1:29. There God spoke of seed-bearing grass, that is, grains, whereas here Adam is sentenced to eat the undigestible "grass of the field" consumed by flocks and herds of animals. See Anderson, "The Penitence Narrative."

Menahem Kister has argued that the word *tĕšûqāh,* a rare word that occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible, was in fact *understood* as meaning "return"—a meaning not too distant from, for example, its Arabic cognate *sāqa,* "carry forward, drive"—since it is translated as "return" quite consistently in the above sources; the parallel between *Community Rule* 11:22 and *Thanksgiving Hymns* 10:3–4 supports this conclusion: Kister, "Different Versions of Aggadot."

Such an understanding, incidentally, may have been known to Ben Sira, since he seems to play on the wording of Gen. 3:16 in his description of the creation:

> Afterward the Lord looked down at the earth and He filled it with His stores;
> He covered its face with the breath of all life, **and to it is their return.**
>
> —Sir. 16:29–30

The highlighted phrase seems to allude to human mortality, namely, all humans are fated to return "to dust" (Gen. 3:19); still, the precise wording here may reflect Gen. 3:16 or 4:7 as it was understood by Ben Sira. Likewise:

> [God said to Eve:] Your **place of return** will be with your husband; he will rule over you. —*Jubilees* 3:24

> [God said to Eve:] And toward your husband will be your **turning,** and he will have dominion over you, whether to acquit or find fault.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* (some mss.), perhaps also *Neophyti* Gen. 3:16

(On this see also Maori, "Methodological Criteria for Distinguishing between Variant *Vorlage,*" 114–115.)

Now, "turning" was the ordinary Hebrew word for repentance. So it must have seemed that the whole point of this verse (if understood as "turning") was that Eve had been *unrepentant* when she was reproached by God in the opening words of Gen. 3:16 ("I will greatly multiply your pain and pregnancy"). Unlike her husband, she showed no remorse. As a result, she was then *further* sentenced to the pains of childbirth, with the additional stipulation that, having failed to show repentance to God, her "turning" would now be mediated through her husband. Gary Anderson has argued that such an interpretation underlies the "penitence narrative" in various versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve* (Anderson, "The Penitence Narrative").

Seth's Snakebite: After the first couple's sin, God said to the serpent:

> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
>
> —Gen. 3:15

From a certain standpoint, this verse was problematic. Was it, as it might first seem, a decree about future relations between humans and snakes? If so, then what was the nature of this special "enmity"? As noted earlier, there also exists a certain enmity between humans and lions or bears or other animals, none of whom had done anything to Adam and Eve in the garden. (As we have seen, it was in part

because of such considerations that the serpent came to be identified with the devil.)

But there was another way to understand this same verse. Perhaps God's words were referring not to human-snake relations in general, but to some one-time incident that would take place in the immediate future, after Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. That is, "her seed" in this verse referred to Eve's own child, Seth, whose heel would be bruised in an imminent attack:

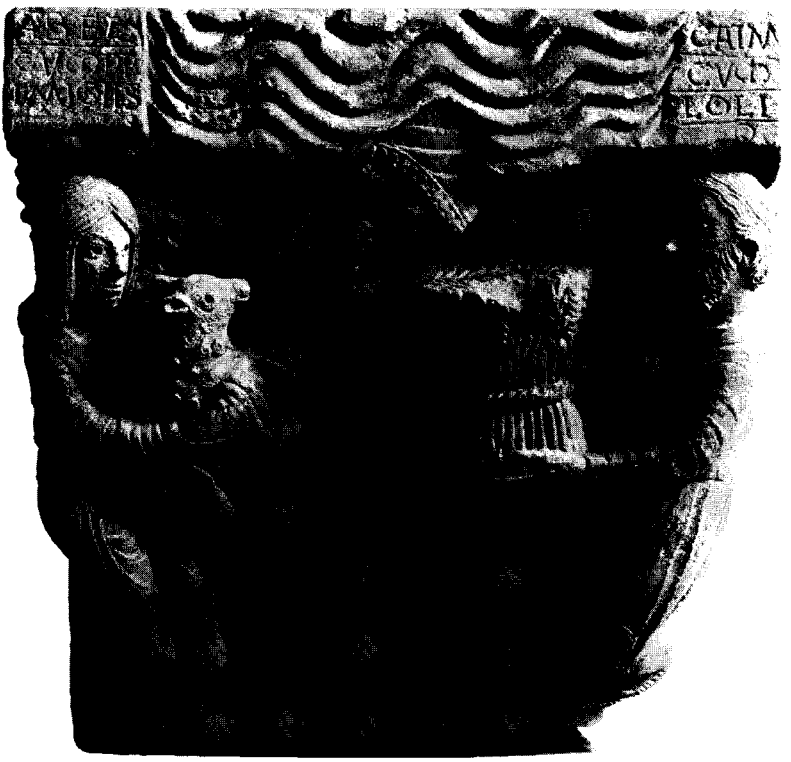
> And Seth and his mother were going along across from the gates of Paradise; and while they were walking, behold suddenly there came a serpent, a beast, and it attacked and bit Seth. And when Eve saw it, she cried out and said, "Woe is me, for I was cursed [by God according to Gen. 3:15], since I did not keep the Lord's commandment [not to eat the fruit]." And Eve said to the serpent in a loud voice, "Cursed beast! How was it that you were not afraid to set yourself against the image of God, but have dared to attack it?" The beast answered in a human voice: "O Eve, is not our **enmity** against you?"
>
> — *Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 37:1–3 (also 44:1–5)

In keeping with (and perhaps based on) this exegetical motif, other elements of the punishments meted out to Adam and Eve likewise were said to have come to pass immediately after the couple's expulsion from Eden; on these see Anderson, "The Penitence Narrative."

4

Cain and Abel

(GENESIS 4:1–16)



Why did God favor Abel's sacrifice?

Cain and Abel

(GENESIS 4:1–16)

❖ ❖ ❖

After they were expelled from the garden, Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel; Cain was a farmer and Abel a herdsman. The two sons decided to bring sacrifices to God—Cain from his agricultural produce and Abel from his herds. God received Abel's sacrifice with favor, but not Cain's. For this reason, Cain became angry at his brother and killed him. He thus was the world's first murderer, and God banished him from the settled land and condemned him to a life of wandering.

CAIN'S MURDER of his brother Abel raised many questions: Why had one brother's sacrifice been favored by God and the other's not—are not all offerings acceptable to God? And what was it that led Cain to murder Abel—should not his anger have been directed against God rather than his innocent sibling? How was the murder accomplished, and with what weapon? And what was the real nature of Cain's punishment?

Interpreters searching for answers to these major questions were ultimately led back to the story's very beginning, the one-sentence account of Cain's birth. Here was a rather minor question about the text, but one that had potentially great consequences for the other, larger questions:

> Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the Lord." —Gen. 4:1

The minor question was this: why did Eve, as she contemplated her just-born son, refer to him as a "man"? The word "man" in Hebrew does not simply mean "male person," and certainly does not mean "male child"—there are other words for that. Man means man, a grown-up male. But what could Eve have meant by calling her baby that?

Some interpreters apparently understood that the baby Cain was born with abilities well beyond his years:

> And she bore a son and he was lustrous. And at once the infant rose, ran, and brought in his hands a reed [in Hebrew, *qaneh*] and gave it to his mother. And his name was called Cain [*qayin*].
>
> —*Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 21:3

If the newborn baby could walk, nay, run and carry something, here was a good reason for Eve to say, with only a little exaggeration, that he was a "man." And as for him being born "with the Lord," the apparent meaning was that he was born

through God's direct intervention, "with the help of the Lord," since such an unusual child could not have been produced in the usual way.

Son of the Devil

But another explanation existed. In view of the wicked turn that his life was to take, some interpreters thought Cain might have been *evil from birth,* in fact, an offspring of the devil or some wicked angel. Indeed, this might be the cryptic point of the very beginning of Gen. 4:1, "And Adam knew his wife Eve"—Adam did not "know" his wife in the biblical sense, he knew something *about* her:

> By this it may be seen who are the children of God and who are the **children of the devil;** whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning [that is, the book of Genesis]: that we should love one another and not be like Cain, who **was of the Evil One** [that is, the devil] and murdered his brother. —1 John 3:10–12

> Having been made pregnant by the seed of the devil . . . she brought forth a son. —Tertullian, *On Patience* 5:15

> First adultery came into being, afterward murder. And he [Cain] was begotten in adultery, for he was the child of the serpent. So he became a murderer, just like his father, and he killed his brother.
>
> —(Gnostic) *Gospel of Philip* 61:5–10

> And Adam knew about his wife Eve that she had conceived by Sammael the [wicked] angel of the Lord, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. He resembled the upper ones [angels] and not the lower ones, and she [therefore] said, "I have acquired a man, indeed, an angel of the Lord."
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 4:1

> The serpent came into her and she became pregnant with Cain, as it says, "And the man knew his wife Eve." What did he know? That she was already pregnant [from someone else]. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 21

The idea that Cain was the offspring of Eve and the devil may also be reflected elsewhere:

> [A heroic mother recalls:] I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house; I guarded the rib that [Eve] was built [from] . . . nor did the Destroyer, the deceitful serpent, defile the purity of my virginity.
>
> —4 Macc. 18:7–8

If Cain's true father was the devil, this would provide another explanation for Eve's cryptic words at the baby's birth, "I have gotten a man with the Lord." For, if Cain had in fact been engendered by one of God's angels—however wicked that particular angel might have been—then "with the Lord" could be a shorthand way of saying "with *an angel of* the Lord." Likewise, this divinely begotten child could

appropriately be called a *man* (rather than a "baby") because angels are frequently called "man" in the Bible (see Gen. 18:2, 32:24, and elsewhere). Thus, some ancient interpreters concluded that Cain had in fact been a half-human, half-angelic creature begotten by the devil.

Cain's Sisters

We know that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel, but the Bible tells us nothing about any daughters. If no daughters were born, how did the human race ever continue to propagate? Faced with this dilemma, some ancient interpreters simply supplied the missing female(s):

> And in the third "week" [that is, period of seven years] in the second jubilee, she bore Cain. And in the fourth she bore Abel. And in the fifth she bore Awan, her daughter. — *Jubilees* 4:1

> In the beginning of the world Adam became the father of three sons and one daughter: Cain, Noaba, Abel, and Seth [born in Gen. 4:25].
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 1:1

> Two male children were born to them; the first was called Cain, whose name may be translated "Acquisition," and the second Abel, meaning "Nothingness." They also had daughters. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:54

> And she additionally bore from Adam her husband his [Cain's] twin sister and Abel. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 4:2

> "And additionally, she bore his brother Abel . . ." (Gen. 4:2). This word *additionally* supports [the idea that daughters were born; it means] *in addition* to the birth [of Abel] were other births in the same pregnancy.
> — *Genesis Rabba* 22:3

If Adam and Eve had had two daughters, that would have provided a wife for both Cain and Abel. But what if only one daughter had been born (as some of the above sources suggest)? It occurred to some interpreters that this might have been the real reason for Cain's killing his brother:

> [Adam says to Seth:] . . . A flood is coming and will wash the whole earth because of the daughters of Cain, your brother, who killed your brother Abel out of passion for your sister Lebuda. — *Testament of Adam* 3:5

> Said R. Huna: An extra twin was born with Abel. [Cain] said, "I shall take her [as my wife]," [Abel] said "No, I shall take her." The former said, "I should get her, since I am the firstborn," while the latter said, "I should get her, since she was born with me." — *Genesis Rabba* 22:7

> And she [Eve] became pregnant and bore Cain and Lebuda along with him; [some texts: "then she became pregnant again and bore Abel and his sister

Qelima"]. And when the children had grown Adam said to Eve: "Let Cain take Qelima [as a wife], since she was born with Abel, and let Abel take Lebuda, who was born with Cain." Then said Cain to his mother Eve: "I will take my own sister, and let Abel take his own," for Lebuda was very beautiful. — *Cave of Treasures* (W) 5:20–22

Professions Decided

Cain's devilish ancestry might indeed explain why he ended up as a murderer. But it hardly explained why God did not accept his sacrifice at the beginning of the story. Presumably both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices in good faith. Surely it was not the case that God preferred meat offerings to vegetable ones. So why did He accept Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's?

One line of interpretation suggested that the brothers' two professions, farmer and shepherd, determined the fate of their sacrifices. God's apparent preference for the shepherd's offering over the farmer's may really have reflected something of the differences involved in the two professions:

One of them labors and takes care of living beings . . . gladly undertaking the pastoral work which is preparatory to rulership and kingship. But the other occupies himself with earthly and inanimate things.

— Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:59
(also *The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* 14, 51)

Now the brothers enjoyed different pursuits. Abel, the younger one, was concerned with justice, and, believing that God was present at every action that he himself undertook, he made a practice of virtue: he was a shepherd. Cain, however, was altogether wicked, and on the lookout only for his own profit: he was the first person to think of plowing the earth.

Now he killed his brother under these circumstances: They had decided to offer sacrifices to God. Cain brought the produce of the tilled earth and plants, while Abel brought the milk and the firstborn of the flocks. This latter was the sacrifice that God preferred, who is paid homage by whatever grows on its own and in keeping with nature, but not by things brought forth by force and the scheming of greedy man.

— Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:53–54

Plowing the earth . . . is inferior to pasturing sheep . . . Quite rightly, then, when the brothers are born, the chronological order [of their birth] is preserved in Scripture [that is, Cain is mentioned before Abel, Gen. 4:1–2]. When, however, their way of life is mentioned, [that of] the younger comes before the older [that is, shepherding comes first, showing its superiority; Gen. 4:2]. — Ambrose of Milan, *Cain and Abel* 1.3.10

Defective Sacrifices

Another line of interpretation held that there was some problem with Cain's sacrifice. For example, the Bible states that Abel brought the *firstborn* of his flocks—the first part is indeed normally reserved for God—whereas Cain's sacrifice seems pointedly *not* the first part of his harvest. Moreover, Cain is said to have offered his sacrifice "in the course of time" (Gen. 4:3). Did not both specifications imply that Cain's offering was in itself flawed?

> "And it came to pass after some days that Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3). There are here two indictments of this self-lover [Cain]. One is that he made an offering to God "after some days" and not right away; the other that it was "of the fruit" but not "of the first fruit." —Philo, *The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* 52

> Abel chose and brought for sacrifice from the firstborn and the fattest, but Cain brought [merely] the fruits he found at the time . . . He [God] chose not to accept his sacrifice from him in order to teach him how it was to be offered up. For Cain had bulls and calves, nor did he lack other animals and fowl that he might sacrifice. But these he did not bring on the day of the first fruit offering, but brought the fruit of his land.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3:2

> "And Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3)—from the leftovers. — *Genesis Rabba* 22:5

> "And Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3)—what does this imply? The ordinary fruit [rather than the first fruits reserved for God]. — *Midrash Tanḥuma* 9

The Problem Was the Sacrificer

There was yet a third, slightly different, explanation for God's preference. Could it not have been the *past history* of the two sacrificers that caused God to accept Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's? That is, if Cain had a long history of sins and evil deeds while Abel had always been an exemplary human being, perhaps that would have given God a reason for accepting only Abel's sacrifice:

> And while indeed from Abel, as from a **righteous man**, you received a sacrifice with favor, from the brother-murderer Cain you turned aside the offering as from an **accursed person**.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.21

> [After the incident of the sacrifices] Cain said to his brother Abel, "Come, let us both go out into the field," and it came to pass that when the two had gone into the field Cain cried out to Abel, "It is my view that the world was not created with divine love and is not arranged in keeping with people's

good deeds, but justice is corrupted—for why else would your sacrifice have been accepted with favor and mine not?"

Abel said to Cain: "No, it is my view that the world was indeed created with divine love and is altogether arranged in keeping with people's good deeds. But it was because **my deeds** have been better than yours that my sacrifice was accepted with favor and your sacrifice was not."

— *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 4:8

Having Abel contrast his own past deeds to those of Cain not only explained why one sacrifice was accepted and the other not. It also gave a good reason for Cain's killing of his brother. Now jealousy was not the only thing that pushed Cain to murder Abel: there was also the fact that Abel had so matter-of-factly pointed out that his own past deeds were much better than Cain's. This may have been true, but Abel's saying it so bluntly might well have caused Cain to fly into a blind rage.

The Good and the Bad

Thanks in part to such explanations as these, the whole character of the story was altered by ancient interpreters. In Genesis, Abel is neither good nor bad—in fact, we really know nothing about him. He seems to be little more than a prop, the victim of his brother's rage. As for Cain, if he ends up being bad, he certainly did not start out that way; it was only the incident of the sacrifices that drove him to murder.

But ancient interpreters subtly turned the story into an elemental conflict between good and evil. As we have already seen, Cain was now believed to have been wicked from birth (according to some, the offspring of the devil), while Abel, despite the lack of biblical evidence, came to be thought of as fundamentally good, *righteous,* Cain's diametrical opposite:

Even though the righteous man [Abel] was younger in time than the wicked one . . .

— Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 1:59

And while indeed from Abel, as from a righteous man, you received a sacrifice with favor. . . .

— Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.21

And in his nine hundredth year he [Cain] was destroyed in the Flood on account of his righteous brother Abel.

— *Testament of Benjamin* 7:4

Thus the Lord will bless you with the first fruits, as he has blessed all the saints, from Abel until the present.

— *Testament of Issachar* 5:4

Abel, the younger one . . . made a practice of virtue . . . Cain, however, was altogether wicked.

— Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:53

. . . so that upon you may come all the **righteous** blood on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah.

— Matt. 23:35

> By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking.
>
> —Heb. 11:4 (also 12:24)

> And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. —1 John 3:12

> This is the son of Adam, the first-formed, who is called Abel, whom Cain the wicked killed. He sits here to judge the entire creation, examining both righteous and sinners. — *Testament of Abraham* 13:2

> And there I saw the holy Abel and all the righteous . . . And Adam and Abel and Seth and all the righteous approached.
>
> — *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 9:8, 28

> God had made a distinction between the two men's sacrifices, having respect for the one but not for the other . . . because the works of the one were bad, while those of his brother were good. —Augustine, *City of God* 15.7

Since Abel was a righteous man, his death took on a new coloring as well. In an age when many Jews were called upon to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs, Abel became one more biblical example of the martyr who willingly submits to suffering and even death:

> He read to you about Abel slain by Cain, and Isaac who was offered as a burnt offering, and of Joseph in prison. —4 Macc. 18:11

Meanwhile, Cain became more than one bad individual. He became the very symbol of evil, and his progeny (though technically all his offspring were thought to have perished in the flood at the time of Noah) were considered responsible for human wickedness in subsequent generations:

> This is the spirit which had left Abel, whom Cain, his brother, had killed; it [continues to] pursue him until all of [Cain's] seed is exterminated from the face of the earth. — *1 Enoch* 22:7

> But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain. —Jude 1:10–11

> From Cain sprang all the generations of the wicked.
>
> — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 22

Killed with a Stone

How did Cain kill Abel? The Bible doesn't say. But since it does say that the murder occurred "when they were in the field" (Gen. 4:8), some interpreters saw in this detail a hint concerning the weapon: it must have been something likely to be found in a field, namely, a stone:

He [Cain] killed Abel with a stone. —*Jubilees* 4:31

He took a stone and drove it into his forehead and killed him.
—*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 21

How did he kill him? He made many wounds and bruises with a stone on his arms and legs, because he did not know whence his soul would go forth, until he got to his neck. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Bereshit* 9

God Knew Where Abel Was

After he killed Abel, Cain buried him in the earth, but God soon arrived on the scene:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now, you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." —Gen. 4:9–11

This passage was likewise troubling to interpreters, since God's question—"Where is Abel your brother?"—seemed to imply that He did not know. Still worse, God's further assertion that "your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" seemed to imply that, were it not for hearing this sound, God indeed would never have known where Abel was. But if God does not know everything that happens on earth, then how can He be a just judge?

For that reason, many interpreters stressed that God in fact knew all along what had occurred; His question to Cain was merely a way of proving the murderer's evil intentions:

Why does He who knows everything ask of the fratricide [Cain], "Where is Abel your brother?" He wishes that man himself shall confess of his own free will . . . for he who killed through necessity would confess . . . but he who sins of his own free will denies it. —Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 1:68

Abel, the younger one, was concerned with justice, and, believing that **God was present** at every action that he himself undertook, he made a practice of virtue . . .

[After the sacrifices:] Thereupon Cain, incensed at God's preference for Abel, slew his brother and hid his corpse, since he thought that the matter might thus remain a secret. But God, **aware of the deed**, came to Cain and asked him where his brother had gone, since He had not seen him for many days, although previously He had always seen him together with Cain. Cain was thus cast into difficulty and, having nothing to reply to God, at first said that he was likewise surprised at not seeing his brother. But then, exasperated by God's persistent, inquisitive meddling, he finally said that he was not

his brother's baby-sitter or body-guard responsible for whatever happened to him. At this, God accused Cain of being his brother's murderer.[1]

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:55–56

It was not for lack of understanding on God's part that He asked Adam where he was, or Cain where Abel was, but to convince each what kind of a person he was, and so that the knowledge of all things should come to us through the [sacred] Scripture. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 99:3

God **tested** three and found them all [deficient, namely, Cain, Hezekiah, and Balaam]: Cain, when God said to him, "Where is your brother Abel?" sought, as it were, to lead God astray. He ought to have said, "Master of the Universe! Things both hidden and revealed are known to You, yet You are asking *me* about my brother?!" Instead, however, he said, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" God said to him: "Such is your answer [when] your brother's blood is crying out to Me?" —*Numbers Rabba* 20:6

Cain's Sevenfold Punishment

For his crime, Cain was punished with exile and a life of wandering. When Cain protested that his punishment was too severe, since anyone who happened upon him in his wanderings might kill him, God said, "Not so![2] Anyone who slays Cain will suffer vengeance sevenfold" (Gen. 4:15).

The idea of God threatening a sevenfold revenge on Cain's murderer bothered a number of interpreters. They therefore sought to find in God's words some further elaboration of *Cain's* punishment (although they disagreed on the particulars):

Because sevenfold has it been avenged from Cain . . .

—Septuagint Gen. 4:24

For according to the law, a sevenfold punishment was given [to Cain]. First, upon the eyes, because they saw what was not fitting; second, upon the ears, because they heard what was not proper; third, upon the nose, which was deceived by smoke and steam; fourth, upon the [organ of] taste, which was a servant of the belly's pleasure; fifth, upon the [organs of] touch, to which by the collaboration of the former senses in overcoming the soul are also brought in addition other separate acts, such as the seizure of cities and the capture of men and the demolition of the citadel of the city where the council resides; sixth, upon the tongue and the organs of speech, for being

1. In the Bible, Cain answers God's question "Where is Abel?" with the words "I do not know—am I my brother's keeper?" To Josephus, this looks like *two* answers. He therefore supposes that some time gap separated them. Thus, at first Cain simply said, "I do not know." But later (and the very fact that Cain ends up giving a second answer implied for Josephus that God had kept asking the same question again and again) Cain became exasperated and blurted out, "Am I my brother's keeper?" thus showing his true colors.

2. Or, "Therefore . . ."

silent about things that should be said and for saying things that should be kept silent; seventh, upon the lower belly, which with lawless licentiousness sets the senses on fire. This is what is said [in Scripture], that a sevenfold vengeance is taken on Cain. —Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 1:77

It is for this reason that Cain was handed over by God for seven punishments, for in every hundredth year the Lord brought upon him one plague. When he was two hundred his suffering began and in his nine hundredeth year he was deprived of life. For he was condemned on account of Abel his brother as a result of all his evil deeds, but Lamech was condemned seventy times seven. —*Testament of Benjamin* 7:3–5

Other interpreters believed that Cain's just punishment—death—was somehow suspended by God for seven generations:[3]

He [God] made him [Cain] accursed and threatened to punish his posterity in the seventh generation. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:58

For seven generations punishment was suspended for Cain.
—*Targums Onqelos, Neophyti, Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 4:24

[Cain's punishment] was delayed by the most merciful God for seven generations. —Jerome, *Epistle 36 to Damasus* 164

Cain's Repentance

Strange to tell, Cain's protest to God, "My punishment is too great to bear" (Gen. 4:13), might also be translated "My sin is too great to forgive." Now, this is clearly *not* what Cain was saying. But ancient interpreters, who were fond of preaching the virtues of repentance, seized on this opportunity to claim that the world's first murderer was overcome with his own guilt after the deed was done. Even after God had pronounced a severe sentence upon him, Cain still cried out: "My sin is too great [for You] to forgive." (If, as just seen, Cain's sentence was suspended for seven generations, was it not in consideration of these heartfelt words?)

And Cain said to the Lord God: My guilt is too great for me to be forgiven.
—Septuagint Gen. 4:13

My sins are too great to bear . . . —*Targum Neophyti* 4:13

My iniquity is too great for me to merit forgiveness. —(Vulgate) Gen. 4:13

Whence do we know that he [Cain] repented? "And Cain said to the Lord, 'My sin is too great to forgive.'" —*Pesiqta deR. Kahana Shubah* 11

3. Indeed, the same idea underlies the passage just cited from the *Testament of Benjamin* 7:3–5, for if Cain is punished with seven punishments spaced at one hundred year intervals, until he is finally killed off in his nine-hundredth year, then the death penalty will have been suspended for seven centuries or (by a certain understanding) "generations."

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: Cain was not really Adam's son but the offspring of Eve and the devil or some other demonic angel. His hatred for Abel was in part inspired by their long-standing rivalry over their sister. As for God's preference for Abel's sacrifice, this was caused by the moral differences reflected in the sacrifices the two brought, or by the past history of the two sacrificers. For Cain had always been altogether sinful and wicked, while Abel was just the opposite, righteous in all his deeds. Cain murdered Abel in the field by striking him with a stone. When God later asked him where Abel was, the question was intended to trip Cain up and so reveal his true character. Despite his wicked reply, there is some evidence that Cain was later sorry, since he said to God, "My sin is too great to forgive."

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Cain and Abel

Son of the Devil: Some have suggested that the motif of Cain's diabolical origins may be hinted at here:

> They [the Jews] answered him [Jesus]: "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. You are doing what your [real] father did." They said, "We were not born of fornication . . ." Jesus said to them . . . "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." — John 8:39–44

The phrase "evil seed" in *4 Ezra* 4:30 has also been connected with this motif, but the link is unlikely; cf. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 3:242, and Stone, *Fourth Ezra,* 63–64, 95. Hayward, "Pirqei de R. Eliezer," 215–246, asserts a distinction between traditions connecting Cain's birth with the devil and others that merely speak of an "angel" who engendered him; he theorizes that the original text of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* did not mention Sammael but had merely an "angel." See also Dahl, "Die Erstgeborene Satans"; Goldberg, "Kain: Sohn des Menschen oder Sohn der Schlange?"; Reim, "Joh. 8:44."

Cain's Lustrous Face: We saw in passing one account of Cain's birth that specifically states that he was born with a shining appearance: "And she bore a son, and he was lustrous" (*Life of Adam and Eve [Vita]* 21:3). This same idea may be present elsewhere:

> And she saw **by his appearance** that he was not from the lower beings but from the upper ones and staring at him she said, "I have acquired a man with the Lord." — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 21

> He **resembled** the upper ones [angels] and not the lower ones, and she [therefore] said, "I have acquired a man, indeed, an angel of the Lord." — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 4:1

These two sources (which frequently concur) may preserve here a rather subtle reading of the biblical account. Eve's words in Gen. 4:1 do not mean "I have acquired a male child with the help of the Lord"—not at all! Instead, having just given birth, she notices that the newborn has an unworldly appearance, perhaps indeed some sort of heavenly aura or glow around him. It is this spectacle that causes her to opine, I guess I have acquired a "man" (that is, an angelic being) from some *angel of* the Lord. According to this reading, Eve did not know before looking at Cain that he was the offspring of an angel—she may not even have been aware of the act that

engendered him nine months earlier. For a similar motif with regard to the newborn Noah, see Chapter 5, *OR,* "Noah's Miraculous Appearance."

Cain's Sisters: This motif circulated widely. See also *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 3:25; Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies* 1:6; Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3:3; Epiphanius, *Refutation of All the Heresies* 40:5; Theodoret, *Against the Heresies* 1:11; *Book of Adam* 76; Budge, *Book of the Bee,* 24–26; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:138.

Different Professions on Purpose: We saw that Josephus and other interpreters made much of the fact that Cain and Abel had different professions, seeing in this fact a hint as to differences in the two sons' characters. Still, one might ask: how did they come to exercise these two different professions? Normally, a father trained his sons in his own trade. Since Adam had been "condemned" by God to be a farmer (Gen. 3:17–19), it would seem only natural that he train both Cain and Abel to be farmers as well. Why then did Abel become a herdsman? One ancient text provides an answer:

> Eve later conceived and bore a son, whose name was Abel. And Cain and Abel used to stay together. And Eve said to Adam, "My lord, while I was sleeping I saw a vision, as if the blood of our son Abel was on the hands of Cain [who was] gulping it down in his mouth. This is why I am sad." And Adam said, "God forbid that Cain should kill Abel! Let us separate them from each other and make separate places for them." And they made Cain a farmer and Abel a shepherd, that in this way they **might be separated** from each other. — *Life of Adam and Eve (Vita)* 23:1–4

Improper Division: The idea seen above that Cain's sacrifice was in itself flawed or inferior to Abel's—since it was offered "after some days" and was apparently *not* of the first fruits—came to be connected in some sources with God's words just after the incident. For there, in the Septuagint text, God says to Cain:

> If you have properly brought [it, that is, your sacrifice] but have **not properly divided** [it], have you not sinned? — Septuagint Gen. 4:7

These words seemed to supply the reason for God's rejection of the sacrifice: it was not properly "divided." While it was far from clear what an improperly divided sacrifice might be, some interpreters, heirs to the Septuagint tradition, sought to establish a connection between this verse and the other defects mentioned:

> To give thanks to God is right in itself specifically,[4] but it is blameworthy that He should not receive them first [that is, right away] nor receive the first of the new produce. For it is not proper to offer the best things to that which is created, namely, oneself, and the second best to the All-knowing.
>
> — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:64

4. Philo is alluding to the first part of the verse, "If you have properly brought . . ." Cain was right, Philo asserts, to "give thanks to God" by bringing his sacrifice.

> Where then is the crime? Where is the fault? Not in the offering of the gift, but in the disposition [that is, "division"] of the mind with which the offering is made. For there are some who rightly think that one [of the brothers] had *selected* what he should offer, while the other offered the cheaper things that he had.
>
> —Ambrose of Milan, *Sacrament of the Incarnation* 1.3

> A sacrifice is proper when it is offered up to the true God, to whom alone it is due.[5] But the division is improper when . . . it is offered in the wrong place [etc.] . . . or when, among the things offered, he keeps for himself the best of the things being offered to God. —Augustine, *City of God* 15.7.1

Fire from Heaven: The Bible does not say how Cain knew that his sacrifice was not received with favor. Some interpreters (perhaps influenced by the story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, 1 Kings 18:38, or the tabernacle offering in Lev. 9:24) suggested that a fire came down from heaven and consumed Abel's sacrifice, while Cain's simply remained on the altar. This explanation is attested in Theodotion's Greek translation of the verb "had regard for" in Gen. 4:4 *(wayyiša')* as "burned." The same tradition is witnessed in Jerome (who cites Theodotion), Ephraem, and various rabbinic sources; see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 209 n; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:135–136. Thus:

> How did Cain know that God had not accepted his sacrifice? . . . in the *Book of the Testament* [possibly, a reference to *Jubilees*] it is written that a fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice [of Abel] that had been offered correctly. —Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis* 4:5

> When Cain and Abel together brought their sacrifices, the living fire that served before God went down and consumed Abel's pure sacrifice, but to Cain's sacrifice, which was impure, it did not come near; from this did Abel know that his sacrifice had been accepted and Cain knew that his was rejected. —Aphrahat the Persian (in Funk, *Haggadische Elemente,* 61)

Some sources explain that it was the smoke—rising from Abel's sacrifice, falling from Cain's—that indicated God's preference. See further Scheiber, "La fumée des offrandes de Caïn et d'Abel."

Abel's "Bloods": In the traditional Hebrew text, God's words to Cain contain a slight irregularity:

> And He said: What have you done? Listen, your brother's **bloods** are crying out to me from the ground. —Gen. 4:10

The word "bloods" seemed strange to early Jewish interpreters: why use the plural when the singular certainly would have done better? That this was a question

5. Augustine is explaining the first half of the verse: Cain, he says, did "properly offer," that is, he made the offering to the one true God, but he did not "properly divide."

being asked is apparent from a passage in the Mishnah that sets forth the sort of speech a judge should make in warning witnesses of the gravity of perjury.

> How were witnesses admonished in capital cases? . . . [They were told:] Keep in mind that capital cases are not like property cases. In property cases, a person [who testifies falsely] can make repayment and atone, but in capital cases, the accused's blood and that of all his potential descendants to the end of time are his [the witness's] responsibility. And so Scripture implies in the case of Cain, who killed his brother; for the text says, "your brother's **bloods** are crying out to me . . ."—not "blood," but "bloods," that is, his blood and that of his potential descendants. Another explanation: "your brother's bloods" because his blood had been spattered over tree and stone.
>
> —m. *Sanhedrin* 4:5

The Mishnah here presents two different explanations for the plural form, explanations that must have been current at the time of its codification. The first is somewhat moralistic: it maintains that the Bible uses the word "bloods" to teach that someone who takes another person's life is guilty not only of snuffing out that particular individual, but of destroying all the potential children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so forth that might have been born to the victim had the murder not taken place. "Bloods," in other words, was understood as indicating that there is never simply one victim, but that (as the Mishnah says elsewhere) "a whole world-full" of people hangs on each and every human life. (For, had he not been killed, Abel and his descendants would have presumably gone on to make up 50 percent of the human race! For echoes of this understanding in Ephraem Syrus, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 147–148, 220.)

Along with this explanation, however, the Mishnah lists another, somewhat more naturalistic one: the plural "bloods" was a sign of Cain's brutality—he slew his brother in so violent a fashion that there was not merely one pool of blood, but "bloods" spattered over the whole area of the murder. A reflection of this same understanding is found in a passage cited earlier in this chapter:

> How did he kill him? He made many wounds and bruises with a stone on his arms and legs, because he did not know whence his soul would go forth, until he got to his neck. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Bereshit* 9

The "many wounds" here are intended to account for the plural "bloods" in the biblical narrative.

What You Say? In the traditional Hebrew text, there is a striking lacuna:

> And Cain **said to his brother** Abel, and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.
>
> —Gen. 4:8

What did Cain say to his brother? Perhaps the above text came about because some words were inadvertently omitted from the original version. Alternately, it may have been the original version—apparently incomplete for some reason. If so,

ancient translators, assuming that something was missing, supplied Cain's words on their own:

> And Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go to the field."
>
> —Septuagint, *Samaritan Pentateuch, Targum Neophyti,* etc. Gen. 4:8

Certainly it would have seemed logical that the missing words might be "Let us go to the field" since the verse continues, "and it came to pass, when they were in the field."

It is to be noted that the long conversation attributed to Cain and Abel in *Targum Neophyti* (partially cited in this chapter) concerning the nature of divine justice is likewise predicated on the same lacuna. For, if the biblical text said that Cain "said to his brother," but did not say *what* he said, this seemed to be an invitation to the commentator or translator to try to supply what was said: perhaps the missing words were not merely a short sentence like "Let us go to the field," but a much longer exchange, one whose very nature might have angered Cain to the point of killing Abel. Thus developed the idea that Cain and Abel disputed about the nature of divine justice.

Targum Neophyti actually embodies both answers to the question, What did Cain say?

> [After the incident of the sacrifices] **Cain said** to his brother Abel, "Come, let us both go out into the field," and it came to pass that when they two had gone into the field **Cain cried out to Abel,** "It is my view that the world was not created with divine love and is not arranged in keeping with people's good deeds, but justice is corrupted—for why else was your sacrifice accepted with favor and mine not?"
>
> Abel said to Cain: "No, it is my view that the world was indeed created with divine love and is altogether arranged in keeping with people's good deeds. But it was because my deeds have been better than yours that my sacrifice was accepted with favor and your sacrifice was not."
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 4:8

To be sure, the subject of this eventually fatal debate was not chosen by chance. In having Cain say what he says, *Targum Neophyti* not only introduces the idea that Cain's previous deeds were not as good as Abel's—thereby justifying God's preference for Abel's sacrifice—but also presents him as someone who denied divine justice ("the world . . . is not arranged in keeping with people's good deeds") and even God's sovereignty over the world (he later says: "There is no judgment and there is no Judge"). He thus appears as a forerunner of philosophical deniers of a later day. On other targumic versions of this debate, see Grelot, "Les Targums du Pentateuque," 59–88; Vermes, *Post-Biblical,* 92–126; Kuiper, "Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: A Study of Gen. 4:7–10, 16"; see also Chilton, "A Comparative Study of Synoptic Development"; Isenberg, "Anti-Sadducee Polemic"; Bassler, "Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums"; Kugel, "Cain and Abel in Fact and Fable."

The same tradition—showing that Cain and Abel fell to arguing about divine

justice—may be echoed in Philo, where Cain invites Abel "to the field" in order to challenge him to a debate:

> What Cain is aiming at is by means of a challenge to **draw Abel into a dispute,** and to gain the mastery over him by plausible sophistries that have the appearance of truth.
>
> For Abel, referring all things to God, is a God-loving creed; but Cain, referring all to himself—his name means "acquisition"—is a self-loving creed. —Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 1, 32

(See on this Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:138.) Finally, it is to be noted that in the Peshitta version, Cain says, "Let us go to the valley," apparently because Eden (and their nearby home) was thought to be on a mountaintop; see above, Chapter 3, *OR,* "Neither Heaven Nor Earth." See Brock, "Jewish Traditions," 212–232.

God Knew Where Abel Was: A just-published ancient liturgical poem contains a number of the motifs surveyed above. *Az Be'en Kol* ("Of Old, When Nothing Was"), an *'Abodah* for the Day of Atonement, retells much of biblical history starting from the creation. This text is rich in interpretive material, and while it is relatively late, dating from perhaps the fifth century C.E., it preserves many motifs that are otherwise unattested in Talmud and midrash. (Indeed, liturgical poetry, precisely because it had a somewhat less "official" standing in the community, may have served as the means by which some ancient ideas and explanations survived even though they had been rejected or simply omitted from the rabbinic corpus.)

About Cain it observes:

> He watched for a time when no eye might see him,
> Paying no heed to "the hidden things are God's."
>
> —*Az Be'en Kol* 347–348

Here, as in the account of Josephus and other ancient retellers, the murder of Abel came about because Cain had failed to understand that God observes all things, whether humans are aware of Him or not. Rephrasing this idea, the poet asserts that Cain did not grasp the lesson of Deut. 29:29, "The hidden things belong to the Lord our God." Later on, when God asks Cain where Abel is, Cain replies in this poetic retelling, "Am I indeed a *hireling* to watch over my brother?" This expansion of the Bible's words is likewise reminiscent of Josephus' account, where Cain asserts that he is not his brother's "baby-sitter or body-guard" hired to watch over him. For additional connections of this poem with ancient interpretive traditions, see Chapter 22, *OR,* "Reproach Prevents Hatred."

Earth Cursed: God announces the first part of Cain's punishment in Gen. 4:11, "And now, you are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." This sentence was troubling for two reasons: First, being cursed *from* something seems as odd in Hebrew as in English—either you yourself are cursed, or something should be cursed *for* (or *with regard to*) you, as indeed the earth is cursed *for* Adam in Gen. 3:17. Second, the rest of God's words

here seem more concerned with the earth ("which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand") than with Cain's role in the misdeed. Should not God have been speaking about Cain's *shedding* of the blood rather than the earth's receiving it?

To this dual problem interpreters found a single solution. The word for "from" in Hebrew also means "than" in comparisons, so that God's words could equally well be interpreted as meaning: "And now, you [Cain] are *more* accursed *than* the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." If this is the proper meaning of the verse, then it would seem that God is actually announcing two separate punishments, one for Cain and the other for the earth for having tried to hide Cain's deed:

> [God said to Korah:] "I commanded the earth and it gave me Adam, and two sons were born to him, and the older rose up and killed the younger, and the earth hastened to drink up his blood. And I expelled Cain and **cursed the earth** and spoke to Zion, saying 'You shall no more drink up blood.'"[6] —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:2

> And now, more cursed are you than the earth which opened its mouth and accepted the blood of your brother from your hand.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 4:11

Contrary to this tradition is another which holds that the earth refused to allow Cain to try to hide his brother's body:

> For the evil Cain took much care to hide [Abel's body] but could not, for the earth did not receive the body. —*Apocalypse of Moses* 40:4

> He wanted to bury him in the earth but he could not, because his body kept coming out of the earth.
> — (Georgian) *Life of Adam and Eve* 48:4 (Greek and other texts, 40:4)

Land of Trembling: God condemned Cain to be a wanderer: "You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Gen. 4:12). But the Hebrew words used here, *nā'wānād,* both seem to derive from roots meaning to tremble or shake.

> Groaning and trembling shall you be upon the earth.[7]
> —Septuagint Gen. 4:12

> Shaking and trembling . . . —Peshitta Gen. 4:12

(See further Salveson, *Symmachus,* 22–23.) From this interpretation developed a tradition that Cain was condemned to shake for the rest of his days.

6. It may be that "Zion" *(ṣiyyon)* is a mistake for "parched earth" (*ṣiyyah* or even *ṣāyyôn,* as in Isa. 32:2); see Ginzberg, *Legends,* 6:102.

7. At the same time, the Septuagint and later sources took the reference in Gen. 4:16 to the "land of wandering" as a proper noun, that is, "the land of Naid." Jerome sought to correct this error in *Questions in Genesis* 4:16.

> Now Cain dwelt in the land trembling, in keeping with what God had ordained for him after he had killed Abel his brother.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 2:1

> The land is called *Nud* because the land was the land in which Cain was fearful and trembling. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3:11

> He was troubled and he trembled all the days of his life.
>
> — *Cave of Treasures* (E) 5:31

In one version of things, it was apparently this trembling that ultimately led to Cain's death:

> And he [Lamech's guide] saw the reeds and grass **quivering** and he said to Lamech, "I see something unknown, an animal or a bird there."
>
> — *Historical Paleya* (Tikhonravov, p. 24)

(For the rest of the story, see below, "Cain Killed by Lamech.")

Cain's trembling also came to be associated with the theme of his repentance (discussed above), in part because another penitent, Adam, was said to tremble according to some understandings of Gen. 3:19 ("By the trembling of your brow . . ."; see Chapter 3, *OR*, "Penitent Adam and Eve"). See further Bowker, *Targums*, 128.

Cain's Sevenfold Punishment: The tradition of Cain suffering seven punishments may have been influenced by other ambiguities in the Hebrew text as well as the translation tradition. See further Salveson, *Symmachus*, 23–27.

As described earlier, one tradition held that the significance of Gen. 4:15 (and 4:24 as well) was that God deferred Cain's punishment for seven generations. In this connection, the text of *Targum Onqelos* is somewhat difficult in its present form:

> And the Lord said to him, "Therefore, any who kill Cain . . . punishment will be exacted from him in seven generations." — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 4:15

The latter part of the verse does not seem to fit with the former; it seems to belong to the midrashic tradition that *Cain's* punishment was somehow suspended, while the first part talks about "any who *kill* Cain." It is of course possible to divide the sentence in two after the word "Cain," seeing in the first an incomplete threat about the fate of Cain's potential killers and in the second part a decree about Cain's punishment. (So Rashi explains it.) But perhaps this text actually represents a slightly different tradition, one that divided God's response into two parts not after the word "Cain" but just before it:

> And the Lord said to him, "It will not be thus [that is, *lō' kēn*] with any [other] killer.[8] [But as for] Cain, punishment will be exacted from him in seven generations."

8. That is, if we read *lō' kēn* ("not thus"). Even the reading of *lākēn* ("therefore") might work here, if one understands the verse as stating, "Therefore, anyone who kills [will be punished.] As for Cain, punishment will be exacted from him in seven generations."

Such an understanding is found in the Peshitta and consequently in Ephraem's explanation "It will not be as you say concerning the killers who come after you" *(Commentary on Genesis).* A similar explanation is found even without the "Not so!":

> "And the Lord said to him: '**Therefore,** anyone who kills . . .'": R. Nehemiah said: Cain's case was different from that of [other] murderers. Cain killed and had no one to learn from: henceforth, anyone who kills will be killed.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 22:12

See on these Maori, *The Peshitta Version,* 249–250.

That Cain's punishment was deferred seemed to support the idea that God had somehow forgiven him. This motif emerged most directly from Gen. 4:15. For, as was seen earlier, Cain's words could be taken as meaning "My sin is too great to forgive," in which case God's response (whether the "Not so!" [*lō' kēn*] of the Septuagint, Theodotion, Symmachus, Peshitta, and Vulgate, or even the "Therefore" of the traditional Hebrew text, *Samaritan Pentateuch,* Aquila, Onqelos, and so on) seemed to be intended to gainsay Cain's assertion: your sin is *indeed* forgivable! The motif of Cain's pardon is present even in Philo's writings, where Cain is otherwise altogether blameworthy and shows no sign of penitence:

> [God] offers him [Cain] an **amnesty,** imposing a benevolent and kindly law concerning the first [crime?] on all judges—not that they may not destroy evil men, but that by hesitating a little and showing patience, they may cleave to mercy rather than cruelty . . . Not very long after the **forgiving of Cain, it** [Scripture] introduces the fact that Enoch repented, informing us that forgiveness is wont to produce repentance.
>
> — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:76, 82

The Sign Was a Letter: God gave Cain some sort of sign in Gen. 4:15. But what was it? The word for "sign" came to mean, in later Hebrew, a letter of the alphabet; not surprisingly, a number of interpreters concluded that God had put some letter or letters in Cain's body (sometimes, specifically, his forehead). Others explained that a supernatural sign was given to proclaim Cain's repentance to all, or that Cain was given a fearsome mark on his body—often, a pair of horns—to ward off potential attackers or given a dog to *signal* their arrival. See *Genesis Rabba* 22:12; also, Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada;* Melinkoff, *The Sign of Cain;* Shinan, "On Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Gen. 4:15," 148–150; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 159–172. Note that another text speaks of a "mark" (on the forehead) for the wicked, as well as a contrary mark for the righteous:

> For God's mark is on the righteous for salvation . . . [but] those who act lawlessly shall not escape the Lord's judgment.
> They shall be overtaken by those experienced in war, for on their forehead is the mark of destruction.
>
> — *Psalms of Solomon* 15:6–9

Cain Died in the Flood: How did Cain die? We are not told. Many sources incorporate the tradition that Cain perished in the great flood at the time of Noah. It may be that this tradition is reflected in the Wisdom of Solomon:

> But when an unrighteous man departed from her [wisdom] in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother. When the earth was flooded **because of him** . . . —Wisd. 10:3–4

If this text holds that the earth was flooded *because of* Cain, then perhaps behind it lies the notion that the flood came along principally in order to finish him off. In any case, the idea that Cain perished in the flood abounds among early sources. (See *Genesis Rabba* 22:12; Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3:9; it may be implied as well in *1 Enoch* 22:7.)

The House Fell In: But the flood was not the only potential circumstance under which Cain might have been killed:

> At the end of that jubilee Cain was killed one year after him. And his house fell upon him, and he died in the midst of his house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and with a stone he was killed by the righteous justice. For so it is ordained in the heavenly tablets: "With the weapons with which a man kills his fellow he shall be killed; just as he wounded him, thus shall they do to him." —*Jubilees* 4:31–32

(For more on this passage, see Charles, *Jubilees,* 41; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:147.) Commentators have failed to appreciate that this remark in *Jubilees* may actually reflect (as so often in that book) an attempt to root some later law or legal teaching in the Genesis narrative. In this case the later law comes from the book of Leviticus:

> A man who kills another human being shall surely die . . . And [likewise] a man who **disfigures his fellow; just as he has done, so shall it be done to him.** Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, **just as he disfigures a man, so shall it be done to him.** —Lev. 24:17–20

The second and third sentences appear to be somewhat repetitive in the highlighted phrases. Rather than maintain that they are repetitive, *Jubilees* here seems to be suggesting that the second sentence's "*just as* he has done, so shall it be done to him" specifically refers to the *manner* in which the harm is done, and this principle applies as well to the first sentence, the case of murder. Thus, if a certain instrument was used to inflict a wound or even to kill, that same instrument should be used for the punishment. The third sentence, "Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, just as he disfigures a man, so shall it be done to him," may then be understood to be imparting an entirely different message, namely, that the *nature of the wound* inflicted by said instrument should correspond to the original wound.

Of course the principle of "measure for measure" was a popular one, particularly in rabbinic writings (see Chapter 17), but *Jubilees* goes beyond merely asserting such a principle: it establishes a law (Lev. 24:17–20) that will only later be "officially"

promulgated in Israel. (That is the significance of the "heavenly tablets"; see further Kugel, "Reuben's Sin," 541 n. 21.) Note also in this connection:

> "He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will roll back upon the one who rolled it" (Prov. 26:27). Anyone who killed his fellow, by the same thing will he himself be stricken . . . So Cain was killed with a stone, as it says, "So Cain went out from the Lord's presence" [Gen. 4:16].
>
> —*Aggadat Bereshit* 53–54

Here, as in *Jubilees* (and in some versions of the Lamech story, see below), Cain is said to have been killed by a stone, the same instrument he used in killing Abel.[9]

The tradition attested in *Jubilees* (or something like it) survived through Didymus in patristic writings:

> It is said in the *Book of the Testament* [possibly, a reference to *Jubilees*] that Cain was killed by Lamech by accident: Lamech was building a wall and upset the wall when Cain was [standing] behind it.
>
> —Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis* 4:25

Cain Killed by Lamech: Cain is said to have a descendant by the name of Lamech (Gen. 4:18–24). At one point Lamech says to his wives:

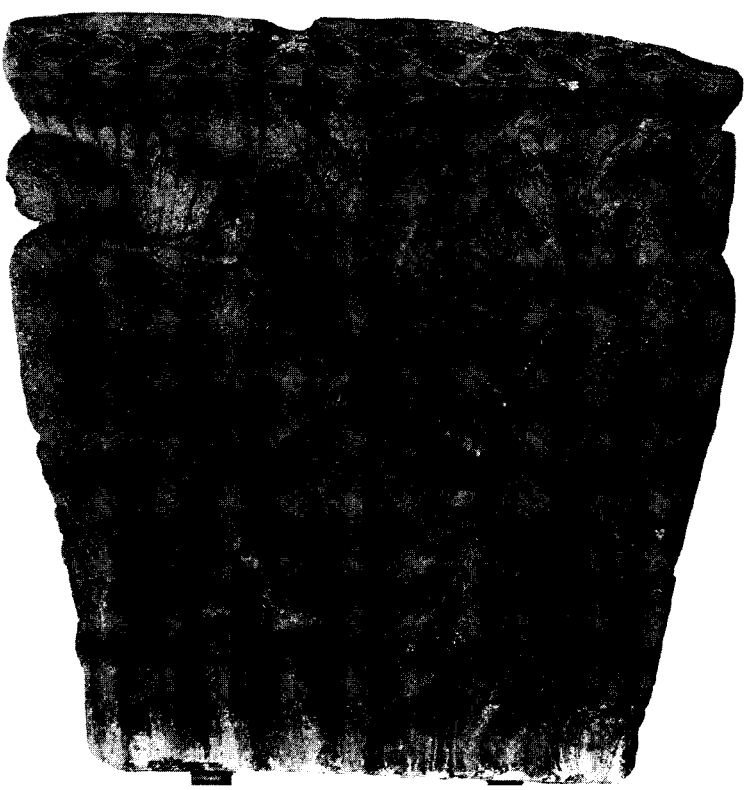
> Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, and a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.
>
> —Gen. 4:23–24

These words are difficult to explain: who was the "man" whom Lamech claims to have killed? The Bible says nothing about such a murder. Ancient interpreters came to the conclusion that the "man" here was the same "man" referred to in Gen. 4:1, namely, Cain; he thus died at the hand of his own offspring, indeed, seven generations after the death of Abel (as the "sevenfold" of Gen. 4:15 and 23 had been interpreted by some). This basic interpretation came to be elaborated: Lamech was a giant hunter who killed Cain by accident after Cain's horns (his "sign") had been mistaken for those of a wild animal. See Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 159–172. Note also that the passage just cited from Didymus the Blind (*On Genesis* 4:25) also presents Lamech as the author of Cain's death, not through a hunting accident but during the building of a wall.

9. As Buber notes in his edition of *Aggadat Bereshit*, "This verse [Gen. 4:16] in no way proves that Cain was killed with a stone" (p. 54 n). I have no solution to this difficulty, but it should be noted that the continuation of the passage in *Aggadat Bereshit* in any case appears corrupt. I would suggest reading it as follows: "So Cain was killed with a stone, as it says, 'So Cain went out from the Lord's presence' [Gen. 4:16], that is he died: a stone fell on him and he died. And why? 'A stone will roll back upon the one who rolled it' [Prov. 26:27]." In other words, the first part of Gen. 4:16 is being taken as a euphemism for death, "going out from the Lord's presence," while the second part of the verse is perhaps being taken as a reference to a place of torment after death.

Cain and the Jews: As with many stories in the Hebrew Bible, that of Cain and Abel was also interpreted by Christians *typologically,* as a foreshadowing of later things, specifically the events recounted in the Gospels. The killing of Abel, who by now was long since held to be the "righteous" brother and a paragon of virtue, could not but suggest to early Christians a parallel to the crucifixion—indeed, the specific mention of Abel's "blood(s)" implied a typological connection to "the sprinkled blood" of Jesus, blood that, to the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, "speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24). This sort of connection continued to fascinate Christians long after the close of the New Testament. In particular, as the Jews came to be stigmatized for the death of Jesus, Christians also sought to identify Cain typologically with them. Augustine adopted such an approach:

> But Cain took God's commandment [to avoid envy] heedlessly; indeed, as the sin of envy grew overpowering within him, he murdered his brother with malice aforethought. Such was the one who founded the earthly city. However, he also symbolized the Jews, by whom Christ, shepherd of the flocks of men, was killed. [It is Christ] whom Abel, shepherd of the flocks of



Cain killed by Lamech, the blind hunter. (Note Tubal-Cain, the boy in the foreground, guiding Lamech's shot.)

> sheep, prefigures. But since this matter is in a prophetic allegory, I shall not speak of it more here. —Augustine, *City of God* 15.7

For Augustine, Cain's primary significance is as the founder of the "earthly city" (see Gen. 4:17). But he is also, by a "prophetic allegory" (that is, a typology, prefiguration), a foreshadowing of the Jews. Augustine seeks to bolster this identification with another element. It is not only that Abel was murdered and Jesus crucified, but that Abel's profession is specifically said to be shepherding, caring for flocks. To Augustine and other Christians, this could only suggest a foreshadowing of Jesus, who said "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

Christian polemic against the Jews, which continued throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, often worked in tandem with this typological identification of the Jews with Cain. For the mysterious "sign" (or "mark" or "brand") given to Cain in Gen. 4:15 had been variously interpreted (see above). But the tradition that identified Cain with the devil sometimes understood the sign to be a set of horns or the like, and these in turn came to figure in the iconographic representation of Jews in medieval Christian art. See again Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada;* Melinkoff, *The Sign of Cain.*

The Gnostic Cain: Cain, like Adam, Eve, and the snake, was an important figure for early gnostics, but (as with these others) no single unified view of him emerges from surviving gnostic texts. The tradition of the half-angelic Cain reappears in some gnostic writings, where Cain is the unjust son of Eve and the heavenly Ialdabaoth; elsewhere he and Abel are both angels, or Cain is another name for the sun. See Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures,* esp. 25, 41, 181, 197; Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis,* 125, 128, 170. Most interesting is the following:

> And the first ruler [Ialdabaoth] defiled her [Eve] and begot on her two sons, the first and the second, Elōim and Iaue. Elōim has the face of a bear and Iaue has the face of a cat. One is just and the other is unjust: Iaue is just and Elōim is unjust. It established Iaue in charge of fire and wind, and established Elōim in charge of water and earth. And it called them by the names of Cain and Abel, with trickery in mind.
>
> —*Apocryphon of John* 24:15–24 (Layton p. 47)

Here the good deity, Iaue (that is, the proper name of God in Hebrew, YHWH, usually translated as "Lord") is said to have been called Cain "with trickery in mind," that is, in order to mislead the ordinary reader of the Bible. One element that supported this claim were the very words of Gen. 4:1, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the Lord.'" The word "with" here (Hebrew *'et*) can also simply be the sign that the next word in the sentence is the direct object of the verb; thus, Eve could really be saying, "I have gotten a man, the Lord [YHWH]." It appears that this is precisely how the above passage seeks to understand Gen. 4:1: the divine Iaue was begotten by Eve and the first ruler Ialdabaoth.

5

Noah and the Flood

(GENESIS 6–8)

The fallen angels: a bad match.

Noah and the Flood

(GENESIS 6–8)

❖ ❖ ❖

After the death of Abel, Adam and Eve had another son, Seth, and the human race continued to grow. But as the generations multiplied, God came to be displeased with how humanity had turned out. At length He resolved to destroy it once and for all. "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). He therefore ordered Noah to build an ark big enough to hold himself and his family as well as a large number of animals, so that this remnant might survive the destruction. Then He brought a flood upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. After it was over, the waters began to recede, until finally Noah was able to leave the ark and settle on the dry land.

EARLY READERS of the Bible wondered why there had been a flood at all. The Bible says that it was humanity's "wickedness" (Gen. 6:5) that made God resolve to annihilate life on earth. But really, what had human beings done that was so bad?

Cain Was the Worst

The one truly wicked deed recorded from the era preceding the flood was Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Some interpreters therefore singled out Cain as a crucial factor in God's decision:

> When an unrighteous man [Cain] departed from her [that is, from Wisdom] in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother. When the earth was flooded **because of him**, Wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood. —Wisd. 10:3–4

> [Seth is told:] A flood is coming and will wash the whole earth because of the daughters of Cain, your brother, who killed your brother Abel.
>
> — *Testament of Adam* 3:5

Here, apparently, Cain's crime is specially mentioned because his wickedness, passed on to his descendants, was thought to have been an important cause of the flood.[1] Were it not for the "righteous man" (Noah), the world would indeed have perished.

But to most interpreters it seemed that even if Cain had something to do with bringing about the flood, his crime could not have been the *only* thing involved—

1. That is not to say that Cain's sin was all that was involved, even for the author of the Wisdom of Solomon. See below.

for otherwise, why had God waited so long after the murder before destroying humanity? There must have been another reason.

The Immortal Enoch

Some supposed that the human beings who came after Cain had been almost as bad as Cain himself, and that the flood was thus the result of *all* the evil that had piled up from the time of Adam and Eve to that of Noah. Accordingly, this period, the ten generations from Adam to Noah, eventually came to be regarded as a time of increasing corruption.

> There were ten generations from Adam to Noah. This demonstrates how patient God was, for all these generations brought God to anger, until He brought upon them the waters of the flood. —m. *Abot* 5:2

In other words, it was only after God had patiently delayed punishment over these ten evil generations—waiting for some sign of goodness—that He finally visited on Noah's generation the deserved punishment.

But such an explanation was difficult to accept. Certainly *some* of the people who lived during the ten generations were thought to have been good, notably Adam's son Seth, or later, Enosh and Enoch. Enoch in particular struck most ancient interpreters as the very model of virtue and piety.

Enoch is mentioned among the descendants of Seth in Gen. 5:18–24. In spite of this brief "cameo appearance" in Genesis, a great deal of speculation surrounded Enoch—in particular because of a few peculiarities in the biblical description of him:

> And Enoch lived sixty-five years and he became the father of Methuselah. And Enoch **walked with God** after he became the father of Methuselah for three hundred years; and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch **walked with God**; and he was not, for **God had taken him.** —Gen. 5:21–24

One thing interpreters concluded from this passage was that Enoch must have been especially righteous, since he is twice said to have "walked with God," whereas the same phrase is only used once of the righteous Noah (Gen. 6:9). (The Septuagint version rendered "walked with God" as "was pleasing to God," and this may have seemed to underline Enoch's virtue to readers of the Greek text.) As for the cryptic phrase "he was not, for God had taken him," this was interpreted to mean that Enoch had *not died*—his death is, after all, not mentioned—but that he had instead ascended bodily into heaven while still alive, a notion detailed by such texts as *1 Enoch,* which recounted at length Enoch's heavenly journey:

> And Enoch was pleasing to God; and he was not, for God had **transferred** him. —Septuagint Gen. 5:24

> And the vision appeared to me as follows . . . : winds caused me [Enoch] to fly and hastened me and **lifted me up into heaven.**
>
> —*1 Enoch* 14:8 (also [4Q204] *1 Enoch* col. 6:21)

> Few on earth were created like Enoch, and he was likewise **taken within.**[2]
>
> —Sir. 49:14

> And the Lord said to [the angel] Michael: Go and extract Enoch from his earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of My glory. —*2 Enoch* (J) 22:8

> [Noah] lived longer on the earth than [other] people, **except Enoch** because of his righteousness in which he was perfect; for Enoch's work was something created as a warning to the generations of the world, so that he should report all deeds of each generation on the day of judgment.
>
> —*Jubilees* 10:17

> He [Enoch] was "transferred," that is, he changed his abode and journeyed as an emigrant from the mortal life to the immortal.
>
> —Philo, *Change of Names* 38

> He [Enoch] lived three hundred and sixty-five years and then returned to the divinity, which is why nothing is recorded concerning his death.
>
> However, concerning Elijah and Enoch, who lived before the Flood, it is written in the sacred books that they became invisible, and no one knows of their death. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities,* 1:85, 9:28

> By faith was Enoch taken up **so that he should not see death**; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God.[3] —Heb. 11:5

Enoch was thus held to be similar to the prophet Elijah, who, the Bible later implies, likewise entered heaven alive. Indeed, Scripture uses the same word in both cases: God "took" Enoch and Elijah (Gen. 5:24, 2 Kings 2:1). However, in some later texts Enoch was presented as less than righteous and his immortality was sometimes denied:

> And Enoch walked in the fear of the Lord, and he was not, for the Lord **had killed him.** —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 5:24

The Heavenly Scribe

Having—according to many interpreters—entered heaven alive, Enoch was naturally assumed to have continued living there, and, in the process, to have acquired a unique knowledge of "heavenly things"—not only the ways of God and the angels, but also of natural phenomena on earth as observed from above. It is in part upon this (very old) assumption that there arose an early body of writings attributed to Enoch: several ancient authors, speaking through the figure of Enoch, set

2. "Taken within"—a somewhat obscure phrase—seems to mean taken bodily inside heaven. Ben Sira says "likewise"; he had earlier mentioned Elijah's ascent into Heaven (Sir. 48:9–10).

3. This last part may reflect the Septuagint translation of "Enoch walked with God" (Gen. 5:22), namely, "Enoch *was pleasing* to God."

forth their own ideas as well as ancient traditions about the world and future history.

In so doing, these writers—and other ancient interpreters who followed them—frequently referred to "Enoch the [Heavenly] Scribe": he had to be a scribe in order for his esoteric knowledge to have been transmitted back to human beings in written form. Some ancient writers therefore also stressed Enoch's connection with the art of writing, specifying as well that his information had come to him from the angels he encountered in heaven:

> And I, Enoch, was blessing the Great Lord and King of Eternity, and behold the Watchers called to me, Enoch the **scribe**, and said to me: "Enoch, scribe of righteousness, go inform the Watchers of heaven who have left the high heaven and holy eternal place, and have corrupted themselves with the women."
>
> And the Lord called me with His own mouth and said to me, . . ."Hear! Do not be afraid, Enoch, scribe of righteousness. Come here and hear my voice." —*1 Enoch* 12:3–4; 14:24–15:1
>
> And he [the angel] said to me: O Enoch, look at the book of the tablets of heaven and **read what is written** upon them and note every individual fact. And I looked at everything in the tablets of heaven and I read everything which was written and I noted everything. —*1 Enoch* 81:1–2
>
> And he called him Enoch. He was the first of mankind born on earth who **learned writing** and instruction and wisdom from [among] the sons of men the signs of the sky in accord with the fixed pattern of their months, so that mankind would know the seasons of the years according to the fixed pattern of each of their months. He was the **first to write** a testimony. He testified to [that is, warned] mankind in the generations of the earth: the weeks of the jubilees he related, and made known the days of the years; the months he arranged, and related the sabbaths of the years, as **we** [angels] **had told** him.
>
> And he was therefore with the angels of God six jubilees of years, and they showed him everything which is on earth and in the heavens, and the rule of the sun, and he **wrote down everything**.
>
> For the work of Enoch had been created as a witness to the generations of the world, so that he might report every deed of each generation in the day of judgment. —*Jubilees* 4:17–18, 21; 10:17
>
> . . .E]noch, after **we** [angels?] **taught him**[. . .
> . . .]six jubilees of years[. . .
> . . .ea]rth, to among the sons of men, and he testified against [that is, warned] them about all things[. . .
> . . .]and also about the Watchers, and he **wrote everything down**[. . .
> . . .]the heavens and the ways of their hosts, and the mo[nths. . .
> . . .S]o that the ri[ghteous?] not go astray[. . . —(4Q227) *Pseudo-Jubilees*

. . . in the writing of Enoch, the excellent **scribe** . . .

— (4Q203) *Book of Giants*[a], fragment 8

[God says:] "Apply your mind, Enoch, and acknowledge the One who is speaking. And take the **books** which you yourself have written . . . and go down to earth and tell your sons all that I have told you . . . and give them the books in your handwriting . . . and let them distribute the books in your handwriting, children to children and family to family and kinfolk to kinfolk."

And he remained in heaven for sixty days, writing down all [those] notes about all the creatures which the Lord had created. And he wrote **three hundred sixty-six books** and he handed them over to his sons.

— *2 Enoch* (J) 33:5–9; 68:1–2

[In the heavenly court] the one who produces the evidence is the teacher of heaven and earth and the **scribe of righteousness**, Enoch.

— *Testament of Abraham* 11:3

And Enoch served faithfully before God and behold he was not with the inhabitants of the earth, for he had perished and ascended to heaven and He called his name Metatron **the great scribe**.

— *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 5:24

In line with his scribal functions as presented in some of the passages cited above, Enoch was also held to have written things down as a legal scribe or officer of the court:

And they asked me [Enoch] to **write out** for them the record of a **petition** that they might receive forgiveness, and to take the record of their petition up to the Lord in heaven . . .

And behold a dream came to me . . . and I saw a vision of wrath, that I should speak to the sons of heaven and **reprove** them.

The book of the words of righteousness and **reproof** of the Watchers . . . As He has created and appointed men to understand the word of knowledge, so He created and appointed me to **reprove** the Watchers, the sons of heaven. — *1 Enoch* 13:4, 8; 14:1, 4 [≡ 4Q204 *Enoch*[c] col. 6]

He was the first to write a **testimony**. He testified to [that is, warned] mankind in the generations of the earth . . . And behold he [Enoch] is there [in heaven] writing down the condemnation and judgment of the world, and all the wickedness of the children of men. — *Jubilees* 4:18, 23

Words of "reproof" or "reproach," as well as words of "testimony" or "witness," were warnings that the law required to be administered before sentence could be imposed (see Chapter 22). Other Qumran fragments seem to refer to the same motif:

> And he [Enoch] **testified against** [that is, warned] them about all things[. . .
> —(4Q227) *Pseudo-Jubilees*

> *Did not Enoch* **accuse**[. . .
> . . .]and who will bear the guilt[. . .
> [if] not I and you, my children. Then you will know[. . .
> —(4Q213) *Aramaic Levi*[a] fragment 5, col. 3.6–7

Enoch the Sage

Of a piece with "Enoch the Heavenly Scribe" are the still more numerous references to him as a wise man and, in particular, an astronomer. After all, any Jewish scribe of late antiquity was almost by definition also a sage. Moreover, the fact that "Enoch's" writings came to include an entire treatise on astronomy and related phenomena (*1 Enoch* 72–82) caused him to be thought of as a master of astral sciences and to be presented in terms redolent of ancient scholarship:

> And in those days [the angel] Uriel answered me and said to me: "Behold I have shown you everything, O Enoch, and have revealed everything to you, that you may see this sun, and this moon, and those who lead the stars of heaven, and all those who turn them, their tasks, and their times, and their rising." —*1 Enoch* 80:1

> And he [Enoch] wrote in a book the signs of the heaven according to the order of their months, so that the sons of man might know the [appointed] times of the years according to their order. —*Jubilees* 4:17

> Abraham . . . explained astrology and the other sciences to them [the Egyptian priests], saying that the Babylonians and he himself had obtained this knowledge. However, he attributed the discovery of them to Enoch. Enoch first discovered astrology, not the Egyptians.
> —[Pseudo-]Eupolemus (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17.8)

> [Enoch was] a sign of **knowledge** forever and ever. —Sir. (Hebrew) 44:16

> . . . since he [Enoch] is beloved and since [with the holy ones] is his lot apportioned and **they inform him of everything**.
> —*Genesis Apocryphon* 2:20–21

> It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold the Lord came with his holy myriads to execute judgment . . ." [a quotation from *1 Enoch* 1.9]. —Jude 14–15

This accumulated learning Enoch passed on to later generations through his son Methuselah:

> And now, my son Methuselah, all these things I recount to you and write down for you; I have revealed everything to you and have given you books

> about all these things. Keep, my son Methuselah, the books from the hand of your father, that you may pass [them] on to the generations of eternity.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 82:1

> The Greeks say that Atlas discovered astrology. However, Atlas is the same as Enoch. The son of Enoch was Methuselah. He learned everything through the angels of God, and so knowledge came to us.
>
> —[Pseudo-]Eupolemus (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17.9)

> and now I [Enoch] say to you. . .and to you I make known [. . .
> Go, say to Lamech, your son [. . .
> And when Methuselah heard [. . . —*Genesis Apocryphon* 5:9–10, 24

Enoch the Penitent

Another important aspect of Enoch's image also emerged from the brief biblical passage cited above:

> And Enoch lived sixty-five years and he became the father of Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God **after he became the father of Methuselah** for three hundred years; and he fathered sons and daughters. —Gen. 5:21–22

The text says that Enoch walked with God (Septuagint: "was pleasing to God"—see above) *after* Methuselah's birth. The clear implication is that before Methuselah's birth he did not walk with God (or was not pleasing to Him). From this interpreters concluded that Enoch had repented—he may have done evil at the beginning of his life, but after his son's birth he changed his ways:

> Enoch pleased the Lord, and was taken up; he was an example of repentance to all generations. —Sir. (Greek) 44:16

> There was one [Enoch] who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding, or guile deceive his soul . . . Being **perfected in a short time**,[4] he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. —Wisd. 4:10–14

> What is the meaning of the words, "Enoch was pleasing to God after he begot Methuselah . . ."? [Scripture] legislates about the sources of all good things at the beginning of Genesis . . . For not very long after the forgiving of Cain it introduces the fact that **Enoch repented**, informing us that forgiveness is wont to produce repentance.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis*, 1:82

4. If Enoch was sixty-five when Methuselah was born, and *after that* he "walked with God," then it must be that he became "perfected" at the age of sixty-five, a relatively short time in the view of the author of the Wisdom of Solomon. Incidentally, where the traditional Hebrew text puts Enoch's age at sixty-five here, the Septuagint says that he was *one hundred* and sixty-five.

> Moses next mentions [Enoch], who changed from the worse life to the better; he is called in Hebrew "Enoch," which in Greek means "recipient of grace." —Philo, "On Abraham," 17

> And Enoch lived after he became the father of Methuselah for 200 years, and he was the father of five sons and three daughters. However, Enoch pleased God **at that time** and he was not found, for God had transferred him.[5]
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 1:15–16

In short, Enoch was a righteous man, or at least a righteous penitent. It seemed unlikely to most interpreters that, after such a person, God would nonetheless punish the world for a sin that Cain had committed generations before Enoch. Instead, they looked to the events immediately preceding the flood.

A Bad Match

The Bible says little openly. One rather cryptic passage, however, seemed to interpreters to imply that one truly evil thing had occurred just before the flood episode:

> When people began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and **they married such of them as they chose**. Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the **sons of God came in to the daughters of men**, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth. —Gen. 6:1–5

It is hard to know what to make of this strange passage even today. In any case, ancient readers saw in these words a hint that the immediate cause of the flood (and perhaps of other ills) had been the mating of the "sons of God" (generally interpreted to mean some sort of angel or heavenly creature)[6] with the "daughters of men." The flood must have come about, directly or indirectly, as a result of this union. Perhaps it was because of some sort of sexual profligacy implied in this passage, or because the mating of these two groups brought about a new race of beings who were given over to sinfulness, or because, through their contact with the humans, the angels had passed along a knowledge of secret things that led to the humans' corruption. All three traditions are found intermingled even in the most ancient writings of the period.

5. The phrase "at that time" is not found in Gen. 5:24; its addition appears designed to reflect the motif "Enoch the Penitent." Note also that both the "200 years" and "transferred" here agree with the Septuagint against the traditional Hebrew text.

6. Some ancient writers refer to these as the "Watchers." This term (the Aramaic *'irin*) is used of a type of angel in Dan. 4:11, 20 (some versions, 4:13, 23) and was employed specifically with regard to Gen. 6:1–4 in 1 and 2 *Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and other writings.

> And the angels, the sons of heaven,[7] saw them and desired them. And they said to one another: Come, let us choose for ourselves wives from the children of men, and let us beget for ourselves children.
>
> And they took wives for themselves and everyone chose for himself one each. And they began to go in to them and were promiscuous with them. And they taught them charms and spells, and showed to them the cutting of roots and trees. And they became pregnant and bore great giants, whose height was three thousand cubits. These devoured all the [products of the] toil of men, until men were unable to sustain them. Then the giants turned against them in order to devour men. And they began to sin against birds, and against animals, and against reptiles, and against fish, and they devoured one another's flesh and drank the blood from it.
>
> And the women bore giants, and thereby the whole earth has been filled with blood and iniquity.[8] —*1 Enoch* 6:2–7:5, 9:9 (≅ [4Q201] *1 Enoch* col. 3)

> And it came to pass that when the children of men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them, that the angels of God saw . . . that they were beautiful to look upon. So they [the angels] married of them [the human females] whomever they chose. They gave birth to children for them and the[se] were giants. Wickedness increased on the earth. All flesh corrupted its way—from people to cattle, animals, birds, and everything that moves about on the ground. All of them corrupted their way and their prescribed course. They began to devour each other, and wickedness increased on the earth. Every thought of all mankind's knowledge was in this way continually evil. The Lord saw the earth, and behold it was corrupted, and all flesh had corrupted its prescribed course, and all that were upon the earth had acted wickedly before His eyes. And He said that He would destroy man and all flesh upon the earth which He had created. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. —*Jubilees* 5:1–5 (also 7:21–25)

In examining these and other ancient traditions about the flood, it is difficult to judge how much of their contents arose exclusively out of a contemplation of the biblical material and how much may have been influenced by outside factors. (This is particularly so in the case of *1 Enoch,* which, because of its great antiquity and its overall connection to Mesopotamian lore—which had itself preserved the memory of a great flood—may well have passed on traditions originally unrelated to the biblical text.) Whatever their origins, however, these traditions, transmitted to later

7. That is, the "sons of God" spoken of in Gen. 6:1.

8. In this part of *1 Enoch,* the act of the "sons of God" in mating with the "daughters of men" is interpreted as a rebellion against God, a "great sin" (*1 Enoch* 6:3). The "giants" (see below) apparently result from this forbidden union. Even though the Bible seems to praise them as "men of renown," our text presents them as a race of tyrannical and oppressive creatures who terrorize humanity, deplete the earth's resources, and spread violence and death everywhere.

readers, suggested that the flood narrated in Genesis had, in one of the three ways mentioned, resulted from the disastrous union of human females with the angels.[9]

The Wicked Giants

In particular, attention came to be focused on the offspring of the angels ("sons of God") and the humans. On the one hand, the Bible describes these hybrid offspring as "mighty men of old, men of renown" (Gen. 6:4)—which certainly makes them sound good. On the other hand, since the very next verse speaks of the "wickedness" of humanity, most interpreters were inclined to see these divine-human creatures in a less than positive light.

One clue as to their true nature lay in the sentence cited earlier, "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them" (Gen. 6:4). It was not clear to interpreters if these Nephilim *were* the divine-human hybrids, or if they merely were around at the time when this mating took place. Nor was the meaning of the word "Nephilim" crystal clear to them. However, this word does occur in one other place in the Bible, in the report of the Israelite spies whom Moses sent to scout out the land of Canaan:

> [The returning spies said:] The land through which we have gone to spy it out is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are men of **great stature**. And there we saw the **Nephilim** (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them. —Num. 13:32–33

This passage implies that Nephilim were giants, "men of great stature," in comparison to whom the spies "seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." Here, then, was an indication from elsewhere that the word "Nephilim" meant "giants." This identification of the Nephilim in Gen. 6:4 is attested early:

> The **giants** were on the earth in those days, and after that, when the sons of God went into the daughters of men. —Septuagint Gen. 6:4

If the Nephilim were giants, then it did make sense that *they* were the offspring of the "sons of God" and human females—where else would giants come from but such a divine-human union? And if they were described as "mighty men of old, the men of renown," this was probably just a reflection of their great physical size, not of their moral standing.[10] Indeed, they must have been bad if the Bible mentions them just before God resolves to bring the flood. Thus it seemed that these giants

9. *1 Enoch* was itself undoubtedly considered by many to be sacred Scripture—it is cited, for example, in the New Testament, Jude 14—and its contents were themselves interpreted and passed on as authoritative teachings supplementing the Genesis narrative.

10. In keeping with this view, the Septuagint version has for the Hebrew phrase "mighty men of old" the Greek "*giants* of old," using the same word for "giants" as it had for the Nephilim mentioned at the beginning of this verse.

were fundamentally wicked. Did not the very fact that they were described as "mighty" imply that they were arrogant rebels whose great size led them to challenge God's authority?

> He [God] did not forgive the princes of yore, who in their might **rebelled** of old.[11]
>
> —Sir. 16:7

> The giants were born there, who were famous of old, great in stature, expert in war.
> God did not choose them, nor give them the way to knowledge,
> so they perished, because they had no wisdom, they perished through their folly.
>
> —Bar. 3:26–28

> Abraham traced his ancestry to the giants. These dwelt in the land of Babylonia. Because of their impiety, they were destroyed by the gods.
>
> —Anonymous tradition cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.18.2

> The interpretation [*pesher*] concerning Azazel and the angels wh[o went in to the daughters of men and b]ore them giants, and concerning Azazel [who turned them astray to deceit, to the love of] evil and to pass along wickedness . . .
>
> —(4Q180) *Pesher of the Periods* 7–9

> For even in the beginning, when **arrogant** giants were perishing, the hope of the world took refuge on a raft.
>
> —Wisd. 14:6

> You did destroy long ago those who did injustice, among whom were the giants trusting in their strength and **arrogance**, bringing upon them a boundless flood of water.
>
> —3 Macc. 2:4

> [Hear me] so that you are not taken in by the designs of the inclination to evil and by lustful eyes . . .
>
> The Watchers of Heaven [that is, the "sons of God"] fell because of this; they were taken because they did not keep the commandments of God. And their sons—as tall as cedar trees and whose bodies were like mountains—[likewise] fell. All flesh on dry land perished, they were as though they had not been, because they **did their own will** and did not keep the commandments of their Maker, so that his anger was kindled against them.
>
> —*Damascus Document* 2:16–21

> For many angels of God had consorted with women and brought forth wanton children, children who were disdainful of all good because of their **overweening** trust in brute strength.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:73

11. The Hebrew text of Sirach makes it clear that this is a reference to the Nephilim, the "mighty men that were of old," both by its use of the word "might" and, in one surviving manuscript, the same expression "of old" that appears in Gen. 6:4.

> From them were born the giants who walked about **haughtily** and indulged themselves in all manner of theft and corruption and bloodshed.
>
> — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 22

In short, the union of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men" had, either by itself or because of the hybrid giants who resulted from this union, caused God to bring about the flood.

But then another question occurred to interpreters: Why did God decide to spare Noah and his family? What had Noah done to be so singled out? There is not a *single* good deed of Noah's that is told about before the flood. Why then should Scripture have said that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8)? Interpreters were also anxious to know why God had not at least warned the other human beings of impending doom before the flood actually occurred. Certainly it was not in the nature of divine justice to impose a penalty without prior warning. Should not God have given them some opportunity to repent?

One Hundred and Twenty until Punishment

A possible answer to this second question (and, eventually, to the first as well) was spotted by interpreters in the biblical passage already seen above. For there, it will be recalled, God had reacted to the deeds of His "sons" with a particular pronouncement:

> When people began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they married such of them as they chose. Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but **his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.**" — Gen. 6:1–3

These words spoken by God were not taken by most interpreters at face value, that is, as if God were now decreeing that humans could not live more than a hundred and twenty years each. How could such an interpretation be correct, when so many later biblical figures lived considerably longer? (Noah himself lived to the age 950, while his son Shem lived to 600, his grandson Arpachshad to 438, his great-grandson Shelah to 433, his great-great-grandson Eber to 464, and so forth.)

And so, these words were instead interpreted as a warning: if human beings don't improve, I will destroy them *a hundred and twenty years from now.* Alternately, what God might have meant was, I will destroy the wicked people of this generation at an early age (for those days, at least), namely, when they are one hundred and twenty years old. In either case, God's words did not announce a fundamental change in human longevity but warned of an impending punishment of the *flood generation alone.* Such an understanding is attested as early as the Septuagint translation of the Bible:

> And the Lord God said: "My spirit will not abide **with these men** forever, because they are flesh, but their days shall be one hundred and twenty years." — Septuagint Gen. 6:3 (also Symmachus Gen. 6:3)

Where the traditional Hebrew text reads, "My spirit shall not abide *in man*"—apparently a general pronouncement about all of humanity—the Septuagint specifies that God was talking only about a particular group of humans, the generation of the flood. The same idea was stated or implied by other interpreters:

> In the four hundred and eightieth year of Noah's life, their end-time was made known to Noah, for God said: My spirit will not abide in man forever. Let their days be cut short, one hundred and twenty years, until the time of the flood.[12] —(4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* col. 1:1–3

> And God said, "This evil generation shall not endure before me forever; for they are flesh and their deeds are evil. I will grant them an extension of one hundred and twenty years, [to see] if they repent.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 6:3

> And the Lord said: None of the generations that is to arise will be judged according to the judgment of the generation of the flood. In truth, the judgment of the generation of the flood is sealed before Me, to have it destroyed and blotted out from the midst of the world. Behold, I have given my spirit to the sons of man because they are flesh and their works are evil. Behold, I have given you the space of a hundred and twenty years [hoping that] they might repent, but they have not done so.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 6:3

> For you gave an extension to the generation of the flood in order to repent, and they did not repent; as it is said, "My spirit shall not abide in man."
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Beshallaḥ* 5

> God established for them a time after one hundred and twenty years in case they should repent, but they did not. — *Abot deR. Nathan* (A) 32

> In the time of Noah, He also gave the wicked a period of one hundred and twenty years, but they were unwilling to repent.
>
> —Aphrahat the Persian (cited in Funk, *Die Haggadische Elemente*, 27)

> They had one hundred and twenty years [in which] to repent. This does not mean, as many erroneously believe, that human life was to be shrunk down to one hundred and twenty years. But to that particular generation, one hundred and twenty years were given until the punishment.
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 6:3

> When God said "Their days will be one hundred and twenty years," this certainly is not to be understood as if it were foretelling that henceforth human beings would not live more than one hundred and twenty years, since even after the flood we find that [some] exceeded five hundred . . . But the one hundred and twenty years predicted here are [what remain of] the

12. Here, the 120 years are clearly the time until the flood, since Noah's age at the time of this supposed warning, 480, plus 120 equals his stated age at the onset of the flood, 600 (Gen. 7:6).

> lives of the peoples who were to perish: after these [years] had passed, they were destroyed in the flood. —Augustine, *City of God* 15.24

Here, then, was proof that humanity had been given an opportunity to repent and stave off disaster.

Noah Warned of the Flood

As for Noah's (unspoken) good deeds before the flood, they came to be connected to this idea of a warning prior to the flood. For if Noah had "found favor in the eyes of the Lord," was it not merely logical that he himself—by his example, or perhaps by actual exhortation—had tried to turn his fellow human beings away from sin and so save them from destruction? Support for this idea was found, once again, in the passage cited above:

> Then the Lord **said**, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." —Gen. 6:3

Said to whom? If the reference to one hundred and twenty years was indeed a warning, then this warning must have been spoken to some human being(s) in the hope of being heeded. Since Noah is later singled out as *the* righteous man of his time, it seemed only natural to interpreters that the divine warning was spoken to him—and that he must have immediately passed it along to his contemporaries, perhaps trying to get them to mend their ways and so be saved. Thus emerged the figure of Noah the preacher:

> To him God Himself spoke as follows from heaven:
> "Noah, embolden yourself, and proclaim repentance
> to all the peoples, so that all may be saved.
> But if they do not heed, since they have a shameless spirit,
> I will destroy the entire race with great floods of water . . ."
> [Then Noah] **entreated the peoples** and began to speak such words:
> "Men, sated with faithlessness, smitten with great madness,
> what you did will not escape the notice of God."
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 1:127–131, 149–151

> But Noah, displeased with the deeds [of his contemporaries] and finding their intentions to be odious, sought to persuade them to [adopt] a better way of thinking and to change their ways. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:73

> [God] preserved Noah, a **herald** of righteousness.
> —2 Pet. 2:5 (see also 1 Pet. 3:19–20)

> Noah preached repentance, and those who obeyed were saved.
> —*1 Clement* 7:6 (also 9:1)

> [Noah recalls:] "And I did not cease proclaiming to men, 'Repent, for behold, a deluge is coming.' But no one heeded." —*Revelation of Paul* 50

Noah preached repentance. —Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1, 21

The righteous Noah used to warn them [his contemporaries] and say to them: Repent, for if you do not, God will bring a flood upon you.
—b. *Sanhedrin* 108a

But the greatness of the light of the foreknowledge informed Noah, and he proclaimed [it] to all the offspring which are the sons of men. But those who were strangers to him did not listen. —*Apocryphon of John* 29:1–5

And he [Noah] preached piety for one hundred and twenty years. And no one listened to him. —*Concept of Our Great Power* 38:25–28 (also 43.17–20)

Noah the Righteous

This tradition of Noah the preacher helped to explain why God had saved him. Noah had gone about trying to get others to repent—certainly this was one good deed to his credit. Perhaps this was why Scripture had called him "righteous" (Gen. 6:9, 7:1; see also Ezek. 14:14). In any case, Noah's righteousness was elaborated by many interpreters:

And in those days the word of the Lord came to me [Noah], and He said to me: Noah, behold your lot has come up before me, a lot without reproach, a lot of love and of uprightness. —*1 Enoch* 67:1

On account of his righteousness, in which he [Noah] was perfected, his life on earth was more excellent than [any of] the sons of men except Enoch.
—*Jubilees* 10:17

The righteous Noah was found to be perfect, in time of
destruction he was a ransom [for humanity].
Because of him a remnant was left, and by his covenant floods ceased.
—Sir. 44:17

When the earth was flooded . . . wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood. —Wisd. 10:4

[The name] "Noah" means "righteousness."
—Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 121 (also *On Abraham* 27; *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:87)

Noah alone among all was most upright and true,
a most trustworthy man, concerned for noble deeds.
—*Sibylline Oracles* 1:125

God loved him [Noah] for his righteousness.
—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:75

> God used a most righteous man to be the father of all born after the flood.
> —Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:41

Only in His Generation

This opinion was not unanimous, however. Some interpreters felt that Noah was hardly a model of righteousness: apart from his heeding (and perhaps passing on) God's warning, he does not seem to have done anything remarkable before the flood—and even afterward, his conduct seemed hardly exemplary. In particular, the incident of Noah's drunkenness (Gen. 9:20–27) did not seem to speak well of him. Perhaps he was not so righteous after all.

For this opinion as well Scripture seemed to offer some support. When Noah is first introduced, the text says, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless *in his generation*" (Gen. 6:9). The last words seem to be some sort of qualification or reservation. And in the next chapter, God says to Noah,

> Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before Me **in this generation.** —Gen. 7:1

Here again is the same qualification. No wonder, then, that some interpreters expressed doubt about Noah's righteousness:

> However, having praised that man [Noah] with regard to these virtues, [the text] adds that he was "perfect in his generation," indicating that he was good not in absolute terms, but in comparison with the people who were living at that time. —Philo, *Abraham* 36

> "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation" [Gen. 6:9]. R. Judah and R. Nehemiah disagreed on this verse. R. Judah said: In *his generation* he was righteous; had he lived in the generation of Moses or the generation of Samuel, he would not have been considered righteous . . . R. Nehemiah said: if even *in his generation* he was a righteous man, had he lived in the generation of Moses or Samuel, how much more of a righteous man would he have been! —*Genesis Rabba* 30:9

> It says specifically "in his generation," so as to show that he was not just according to perfect justice, but that by the standards of justice of his generation was he just. —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 6:9

In other words, Noah's somewhat shaky credentials as a righteous man are to be understood in the context of his times. If his virtues were not always conspicuous, the fact is that those around him were so depraved as to make his conduct look exemplary by comparison.

The Animals Also Sinned

Many interpreters were troubled by the fact that the flood killed animal life as well as people. That people were somehow guilty might be figured out from the mention

of the "daughters of men" as well as the crimes with which the earth was filled. But what did the animals do wrong? Perhaps they were merely guilty by association:

> In the first place, just as when a king is killed in battle, his military forces are also struck down together with him, so [God] decided now that when the human race was to be destroyed like a king, other beasts should be destroyed together with it . . . Second, just as when the head is cut off, no one blames nature if the various other parts of the body also die together with it, so also no one will now condemn [this] . . . Third, the beasts were made not for their own sake, but for the service and needs and honor of man. It is right that when those are taken away for whose sake they [the beasts] were made, they too should be deprived of life.
>
> — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 2:9 (also 1:94)

Some, however, felt that the destruction of the animals in the flood must have been deserved. It seemed only reasonable to suppose that they had somehow participated in the corruption that had previously filled the earth.

> And they began to sin with[13] birds, and with animals, and with reptiles, and with fish . . . — *1 Enoch* 7:5 ([4Q201] *1 Enoch* col. 319–320)

> And lawlessness increased on the earth and all flesh corrupted its way, alike men and cattle and beasts and birds and everything that walks the earth—all of them corrupted their ways and their orders.
>
> And afterwards they sinned against beasts and birds and everything that moves or walks upon the earth. — *Jubilees* 5:2, 7:24

> The generation of Noah was plunged in wantonness and used to have sexual relations with those who were not of their kind. For it is written about them, "And the sons of God beheld the daughters of men . . ." [Gen. 6:2] and for that reason they were destroyed. And even animals were so corrupted with those not of their species, horse with donkey and donkey with horse and snake with bird, as it says, "For all flesh had gone astray . . ." [Gen. 6:12]. It does not say "all humans" but "all flesh," therefore, "And He destroyed all of creation which was on the face of the earth, from man to beast . . ." [Gen. 7:23]. — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Noaḥ* 12

The Purifying Flood

God could have destroyed humanity in any manner He desired. Why did He bring a flood, first drenching all of creation and then waiting for the world slowly to dry out? The process suggested to interpreters a sort of enormous, purifying bath. And since such baths played a crucial role in everyday life, having been prescribed in the Bible as the means for cleansing priests and ordinary citizens from physical impurity, it was only natural to suppose that God had chosen the flood as a means not

13. The Aramaic text reads *mn qwbl*, that is, "with regard to" or, in this context, "by means of."

only of destroying life on earth but of purifying the very land of the abominations that had been committed upon it.

> [God says to the angel Michael:] Destroy all wrong from the face of earth . . . and **cleanse** the earth from all wrong, and from all iniquity, and from all sin, and from all impiety, and from all uncleanness which is brought about on the earth; **remove them** from the earth. —*1 Enoch* 10:20

> When the Creator took it to mind to cleanse the earth by means of water and decided that the soul [symbolized by the earth] should be purged of its unmentionable ill deeds and have its uncleanness washed away in the manner of a sacred purification . . . —Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 170

> You have heard, my son Seth, that a flood is come and will wash the whole earth. —*Testament of Adam* 3:5

> For this reason, [God,] having forewarned a certain righteous man [Noah] along with his three [sons] and their wives and remaining [family] to find refuge in an ark, sent a deluge of water, so that, after all had been destroyed, the world, having been **purified**, might be given over clean for a second beginning of life to that same person who had been saved in the ark.
> —*Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 8.17.4

> For some unknown reason he [Celsus] thinks that the overthrow of the tower [of Babel] had a similar purpose to that of the flood, which, according to the doctrine of Jews and Christians, **purified** the earth.
> —Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.21

The idea of the cleansing flood was adapted by some early Christians, who saw in it a typological foreshadowing of the sacrament of baptism:

> God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience. —1 Pet. 3:20–21

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the story of the flood was presented as a model or prefiguring of the end of days:

> As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. —Matt. 24:37–39

> [Scoffers] deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist

have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. —2 Pet. 3:5–7

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: The flood came about at least in part because of the mating of the "sons of God" (generally understood to be angels) with the daughters of humans, which produced a race of violent and corrupt giants. God gave people warning one hundred and twenty years in advance of the flood, but it did no good. God's decision to spare Noah in the flood came about in part because of Noah's zeal in trying to persuade others to repent of their sinful ways. Noah himself was outstanding against the background of his own time's iniquity, "righteous in his generation." Even the animals in Noah's time were sinful. The flood not only killed the wicked but purged the earth like a purifying bath.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Noah and the Flood

The Immortal Enoch: On other aspects of this motif, see Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:156–157; Dimant, "The Biography of Enoch"; Rosso Ubigli, "La Fortuna di Enoc"; Zimmern, "Urkönige und Uroffenbarung"; Jansen, *Die Henochgestalt;* Hartman, "Sumerian King List and Genesis 5"; Grelot, "La légende d'Hénoch"; VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition;* Himmelfarb, "A Report on Enoch in Rabbinic Literature," 262; and works cited below.

Enoch the Heavenly Scribe: For most of the last century, scholars have stressed the connection of Enoch's "image" in texts such as *1 Enoch* with Mesopotamian sources. The primary basis for this connection has been the suggestion that the genealogy of Genesis 5 bears some resemblance to a Mesopotamian list of kings who lived before the flood, the "Sumerian King List." Now, Enoch appears as the seventh generation from Adam in the genealogy of Genesis 5, whereas the Mesopotamian tradition identifies the seventh king as a certain Enmeduranki ("Euedoranchos" in a late Greek source, Berossus' *Babyloniaca,* on which see Burstein, *The "Babyloniaca" of Berossus*), a figure associated with heavenly wisdom. Moreover, Enmeduranki's city, Sippar, was connected with the sun god Shamash, whereas Enoch is said to live 365 years, a number with its own solar implications.

Without gainsaying the existence of some Mesopotamian material in, for example, *1 Enoch,* I must agree with those who find problems with this equation (see Hartman, "Sumerian King List and Genesis 5"; VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition,* 28, 34). Enoch's seventh position and the solar associations of his 365 years provide a frail basis for the assertion that Enoch's scribal and wisdom connections derive from Mesopotamia.[14] It seems to me far more likely that the motif "Enoch the Heavenly Scribe" is, broadly speaking, exegetical and that it originated in the way suggested earlier in this chapter. That is, the text in Genesis had stated, for its own reasons, that Enoch lived exactly 365 years, the solar number; then—as if seeking to explain why Enoch had had, in the context of his times, such a short life span—the Bible went on to stress that Enoch was nonetheless a righteous figure (he "walked with God") and to describe his death in the unusual terms of Gen. 5:24. Certain anonymous readers of this passage were subsequently only too happy to find in this same wording the suggestion that Enoch had in fact ascended bodily into heaven à la Elijah, since this would allow them to assert further that, once in heaven, Enoch had communed with the angels and amassed a store of heavenly knowledge. It was this knowledge (containing, to be sure, Babylonian astronomy and other lore) that they themselves were now busily writing down in

14. Similarly, the idea that the biblical mention of Enoch's "walking with God" is somehow "clarified" by the tradition of Enmeduranki's enjoying the fellowship of the god Shamash (VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition,* 44) is hardly convincing. Is God's similarly worded instruction to Abraham (Gen. 17:1) proof that Abraham is likewise modeled on this same Mesopotamian sage?

books and ascribing to Enoch. After all, a knowledge of astronomy and heavenly things could *only* have been transmitted by some such heavenly voyager; attributing this knowledge to Enoch provided an acceptable framework for Jewish writers to pass it on to their countrymen. In other words, the motif "Enoch the Heavenly Scribe" began as a way of asserting that astronomical teachings had not come to Israel from the sages of other peoples and were not connected with the worship of other gods, but had originated with someone whom Genesis listed among Israel's ancestors (albeit a remote one) and someone who was a devotee of the one true God. To be sure, "Enoch the Heavenly Scribe" is an ancient notion and one that engendered additional motifs (see below). But it in itself began as a way of taking advantage of the helpful wording of Gen. 5:24, not as a projection of Enmeduranki or any other specific figure onto Enoch; still less likely is the suggestion that Gen. 5:24 is itself an apocopated allusion to such Babylonian figures.

The same worry about the Mesopotamian origins of the knowledge of astronomy continued to plague later writers. It is therefore most interesting to observe that Ephraem, for example, went out of his way to specify that Adam—and no Babylonian—was the one to figure out that the lunar year falls short of the solar one by eleven days:

> From that [first] year Adam and his descendants learned to add eleven days to each [lunar] year. The Chaldeans [Babylonians] thus were clearly not the ones to put the seasons and the years in order. These things had been put into order before [by] Adam.
>
> Noah and those with him were in the ark three hundred and sixty-five days. Observe, therefore, that the generation of Noah had used this calculation of three hundred and sixty-five days [in a solar year]. Why then should you say that the Chaldeans and the Egyptians discovered its arrangement?
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1:25, 6:12

The motif "Enoch the Heavenly Scribe" proved to be particularly important in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* which frequently refers to the "writings of Enoch." These writings seem to play a role in that book similar to that of the "heavenly tablets" in *Jubilees*—a source of knowledge of the future, including future Scripture (that is, laws, prophecies, and other things found in the Bible that were not deemed to have been written down at the time of the patriarchs):

> [Benjamin warns his sons:] From the words of Enoch the Righteous I tell you that you shall commit fornication with the fornication of Sodom, and shall perish, all save a few, and shall renew wanton deeds with women.
>
> — *Testament of Benjamin* 9:1

Enoch the Angel: With all his heavenly connections, Enoch himself became a quasi-angelic figure; in later times he was sometimes identified with the angel Metatron.

> And Enoch served faithfully before God and behold he was not with the inhabitants of the earth, for he had perished and ascended to heaven and He called his name Metatron the great scribe.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 5:24

In *1 Enoch* he enters into God's presence, a privilege reserved for only the highest class of angels. See VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition,* 89, 131; Alexander's preface to *3 Enoch* in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:223–254 (esp. p. 244) and the works cited there; also, Idel, "Enoch Is Metatron." Saul Lieberman ("Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Function," an appendix to Grünwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah,* 235–241) shows that Metatron was not a name but a title, comparable to *sunthronos.* The identification of Enoch as *the* (or possibly a) Metatron should be understood in the light of this. Note that (divine) wisdom—another *sunthronos*—is presented as either sharing the divine throne or having her own seat in heaven next to the divine throne:

> [Solomon prays:] O God of my fathers . . . give me the wisdom that sits next to your throne . . . Send her forth from the holy heavens, from the **throne** of thy glory. —Wisd. 9:1, 4, 10

The same is maintained in the "Parables" or "Similitudes" section of *1 Enoch* (chapters 37–71): see *1 Enoch* 45:3, 51:3, 55:4, 61:8, 69:27–29; van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision," 27. Elsewhere, divine wisdom appears to be stashed somewhere underneath the glorious throne:

> For with your counsel, You reign over all creation which your right hand has created . . . and you have prepared **under your throne** the treasures of wisdom. —*2 Baruch* 54:13

Enoch the Penitent: It is interesting that, save for Pseudo-Philo (whose precise provenance is unknown), all the attestations of the motif "Enoch the Penitent" are apparently from Alexandrian sources (the Greek version of Ben Sira, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo). Indeed, the Hebrew version of Ben Sira here describes Enoch as a "sign of *knowledge.*" All this might suggest that the idea of Enoch's penitence was particularly well known—and felt to be one of the most important aspects of his "story"—in Alexandria at the time when Ben Sira's grandson translated his grandfather's text. For, if so, it is easy to understand why the grandson should have rendered his grandfather's "sign of knowledge" (apparently, an allusion to Enoch's acquisition of heavenly knowledge) as "example of repentance." In this connection, it is noteworthy that the Septuagint text of Gen. 5:24 is *metethēken auton ho theos* ("God transferred him"). This wording may have reinforced the tradition of "Enoch the Penitent," since the word "transfer" in Greek is somewhat similar to that for "repentance," so that the Greek Sirach says that Enoch "was taken up" *(metetethē)* as an example of "repentance" *(metanoia).* Similarly, Philo elsewhere asserts that Enoch was said "to be pleasing to God and was not found because God transferred him, for *transference implies turning and changing*" (*Of Abra-*

ham 18). There is no reason to suggest that the motif of "Enoch the Penitent" represents an attempt of later Judaism to cut Enoch down to size (there scarcely was a greater virtue in Second Temple Judaism than penitence!), a claim that in any case arose out of a failure to understand the exegetical basis of this motif. (For a truly negative view of Enoch, see *Genesis Rabba* 25:1.)

Antediluvian Saints and Sinners: Ancient interpreters frequently presented Enoch, along with Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Methusaleh, and Noah, as righteous figures. *Others* in their generations may have been sinners, but these figures were often held up for admiration.

> Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in creation. —Sir. 49:16

> [Abraham says:] And in [Jacob's] seed my name will be blessed, and the names of my fathers Shem and Noah, and Enoch, Mahalalel, and Enosh, and Seth, and Adam. —*Jubilees* 19:24

> Many other children were born to him [Adam], and among them Seth . . . He, after being brought up and attaining to years of discretion, cultivated virtue, excelled in it himself, and left descendants who imitated his ways. These, being all of virtuous character . . . [met] with no untoward incident to the day of their death . . . For seven generations these people continued to believe in God as lord of the universe and to take virtue for their guide in all things. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:68–69, 72

This same approach is attested as well among early Christian sources. However, as we have glimpsed briefly, rabbinic sources take a different tack, asserting that the ten generations between Adam and Noah were a period of corruption and decline. There was a tendency, as a result, to accentuate the negative among all the various antediluvian figures. Lamech, for example, is said in the Bible to have had two wives (Gen. 4:19). Although polygamy was an accepted practice in biblical times and such virtuous figures as Abraham and Jacob had more than one wife, this detail in Lamech's brief story provided the grounds for condemning him. Basing themselves on the apparent meaning of the names of Lamech's wives, Adah and Zillah, some sources suggested that he had married Adah for purposes of procreation (Aramaic *'dy,* "be pregnant") and Zillah for mere lust and self-indulgence, that she should "sit in his shadow" (Zillah as if from the Hebrew *ṣl,* "shadow"; for the erotic associations of this phrase, see Song of Songs 2:3); see *Genesis Rabba* 23:2. Similarly, in connection with the birth of Enosh, Scripture notes, "At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord." While this somewhat cryptic remark was taken in a positive sense by many earlier Jewish interpreters as well as by Christians, it was the basis for condemning Enosh in numerous rabbinic texts. See Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Literature;* Stroumsa, *Another Seed;* Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation.*

The Flood Had Many Causes: A great deal has been written in recent years about the overall topic of the "sons of God" and their relationship to the flood story.

See, in particular: Dimant, "The Fallen Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Related Writings"; Delcor, "Le mythe de la chute des anges"; also, Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes"; Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11"; Newsom, "The Development of 1 Enoch 6–19." For an extended bibliography, see Knibb, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch,* 48–52; Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha in Modern Research,* 98–103, 278–283; Schürer, *History,* 264–268; Stone, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period,* 152. As a number of these articles make clear, at least *some* ancient texts touching on the flood story, and in particular *1 Enoch,* are not necessarily exegetical in the usual sense, that is, they did not arise solely as explanations or elaborations of the biblical material. Instead, *1 Enoch* (at least) arguably contains elements from other ancient sources and traditions that had nothing to do with the biblical account. Even to the extent that *1 Enoch* seeks to *explain* the flood, some of its explanations may ultimately have their roots in the contemplation of an ancient Near Eastern flood narrative or tradition, but not necessarily the biblical narrative per se.[15]

This notwithstanding, it is extremely important for the exegetical history of the Genesis narrative to identify the different themes and ideas that coexist within *1 Enoch* and other ancient texts in order to understand how they came to be applied to the Genesis account. For applied they were. Thus, it was said earlier that ancient readers of the Bible felt called upon to establish some causal connection between the actions of the "sons of God" and God's decision to bring a flood, a connection that is left unspecified in Genesis. Traces of three broad approaches to this question were mentioned. The first held that it was the mating itself between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" that had caused God to bring the flood. The second put the blame on the wicked giants who were said to issue from this union: it was their immoral and violent behavior that caused the flood. The third put the blame on humanity: having somehow been corrupted by the angels or their contact with the giants, human beings finally brought down the divine wrath. These three explanations were not necessarily mutually exclusive, and our sources mingle and sometimes confuse them. They were nonetheless separable:

> For it was on account of **these three things** [that is, fornication, uncleanness, and injustice] that the flood came upon the earth; namely, [1] because of the fornication by which the **Watchers** [the angels described in the text as "sons of God"] went against the law of their ordinances and went whoring after the daughters of men and took themselves wives of all which they chose; and they committed the first [acts of] uncleanness. And [2] they fathered **sons, the Nephilim.** They were all different [one from another] and they devoured one another: the giant[s] killed the Naphil, and the Naphil killed the Elyo, the Elyo mankind, and **one man another.** When [3] **everyone** [that is, all humans, thus] sold himself to commit injustice and to shed much blood, the earth became filled with injustice—and after them

15. In this connection, J. T. Milik noted that the only mention of Gilgamesh, hero of the Mesopotamian epic by the same name, outside cuneiform sources is to be found in a text from Qumran, 4QEnGiants, where it appears as *glgmys* and [*g*]*lgmyš:* Milik, *Books of Enoch,* 313.

> [that is, the humans, then] all the animals and birds, and all that moves and walks on the earth. Much blood was shed on the earth, and all the thoughts and desires of mankind were [devoted to] thinking up continually what was vain and wicked. So the Lord destroyed everything from the face of the earth. — *Jubilees* 7:21–24

Each of these themes may ultimately have its connection to ancient Mesopotamian lore. But each in turn had a role in creating different interpretations of the Genesis narrative—they all *became* exegetical and went on to suggest a number of new and distinct motifs. In what follows, I will try to survey briefly some of the specific—and quite contradictory—explanations that interpreters gave for God's bringing the flood.

Fornication or Uncleanness Caused the Flood: As we have seen, the fact that the union of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men" came just before the flood suggested to many that *it* was the cause. But what was so bad about this union? Some writers asserted something not at all implied in the Bible itself: this act of mating was a form of "fornication" or adultery, or otherwise involved some form of impurity sufficient to arouse God's wrath.

> And the Lord said to Michael, "Go inform Semyaza [one of the "sons of God"] and the others with him who have associated with the women to **corrupt themselves** with them in all their uncleanness." — *1 Enoch* 10:11

> And I, Enoch, answered and said to him: ". . . In the generation of my father Jared some from the height of heaven transgressed the word of the Lord. And behold, they commit sin and transgress the law, and have been **promiscuous** with women and commit sin with them, and have married some of them, and have begotten children by them. And there will be great destruction over the whole earth, and there will be a deluge, and there will be great destruction for one year."
>
> — *1 Enoch* 106:13–15 (see also [4Q204] *1 Enoch*^{c} frag. 5, col. 2)

Note that some sources present Lamech as initially worried that the Watchers may have been responsible for his wife's pregnancy with Noah, which would be a clear case of fornication:

> [Lamech recalls:] Whereupon I thought to myself that the pregnancy [came about] from the Watchers or that it was from the Holy Ones [that is, other angels], or that to the Nephi[lim] . . . But my wife Bitenosh [said:] "I swear to you by the great Holy One, the king of h[eaven] that from you is this seed!" — *Genesis Apocryphon* 2:1, 12–14

See further below, "Doubts about Paternity"; also, Ubigli, "Alcuni aspetti della concezione della 'porneia' nel tardo-giudaismo."

Violations of the Natural Order: Others felt, however, that mere immorality of that sort could not have been enough to justify a cataclysm. Instead, it must have

been that the act of mating humans with angels was in itself a monstrous crime against nature, one otherwise unprecedented in history. In other words, it was not the angels' lust that was to blame, nor any accompanying impurity or sin, but their violation of the proper order of the universe:

> [God says:] "Enoch, scribe of righteousness, go inform the Watchers of heaven who **have left the high heaven** and the holy eternal place and have corrupted themselves with women, and **have done as the sons of men do,** and have taken wives for themselves, and have become completely corrupt on earth." —*1 Enoch* 12:4

> "And go, say to the Watchers of heaven . . .'Why have you left the high, holy and eternal heaven, and lain with the women and become unclean with the daughters of men, and taken wives for yourselves, and done as the sons of the earth and begotten giant sons? And you [were] spiritual, holy, living an eternal life.'" —*1 Enoch* 15:2–4

> In like manner the Watchers also changed the **order of their nature,** whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account He made the earth without inhabitants and fruitless. —*Testament of Naphtali* 3:5

> And the angels that did not keep **their own position** but left their **proper dwelling** have been kept by [God] in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day. —Jude 6

Corruption Spread: All the above suggested that the flood had come as a punishment for this misdeed on the part of the "sons of God." However, a few problems arose from this approach. First, if the "sons of God" and a few human females were guilty, then *they* should have been punished, but the rest of humanity, as well as the animals and the other terrestrial life, should have been spared. But this was not what happened—everyone was killed by the flood (except Noah and company). What is more, the Bible singles out "wickedness," "corruption," and "violence" as having caused the flood (Gen. 6:5, 11–13)—it does not mention the union of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men" as a factor. Finally, if this union was to blame and the "sons of God" were ultimately guilty, was a *flood* the best way to punish them? Could they not simply fly away from the rising tide? (By the same token, did not the offspring of this wicked union, the hybrid giants, stand a good chance—by dint of their great height—of keeping their heads above water during the cataclysm?)

It was apparently such considerations as these that caused some ancient writers to elaborate another connection to the flood story. The sin may have originated with the mating of the "sons of God" with the humans, but it soon spread outward, and it was this spreading corruption that ultimately brought about the flood.

Wicked Giants Spread Violence: Perhaps the most obvious means by which corruption might have spread over all the earth was the hybrid generation born of this union of angels and humans. As seen earlier in this chapter, these hybrids were

generally held to be wicked and arrogant giants. It seemed natural that the wickedness of these abnormal creatures might have brought down the flood. For ancient interpreters, the idea that they were giants, along with the fact that the Bible described them as "mighty," virtually guaranteed that they were violent, since both these things were elsewhere associated with violence.[16] (In retrospect, this link might also explain why the Bible mentions specifically the earth's "corruption" and "violence" in Gen. 6:11–13—it was referring to the actions of these giants.)

Ancient texts relate how these hybrid giants had spread a trail of blood and corruption over all the earth:

> These [giants] devoured all the toil of men, until men were unable to sustain them. And the giants turned against them in order to **devour men.** And they began to sin against birds, and against animals, and against reptiles, and against fish, and they devoured one another's flesh and drank the blood from it. Then the earth complained about the lawless ones.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 7:3–6 ([4Q201] *1 Enoch*[a] col. 3)

> And the women bore giants, and thereby the whole earth has been filled with **blood and iniquity.** And now, behold **the [human] souls which have died cry out and complain** until the gate of heaven, and their lament has ascended, and they cannot go out in the face of the iniquity which is being committed on earth. —*1 Enoch* 9:9–10

Note that here human beings are among the prime *victims* of the giants' violence. Presumably, then, the flood did not come to destroy the human beings—they, or at least many of them, *had already been murdered and eaten by the giants.* And this violence was, in the eyes of ancient interpreters, entirely in keeping with God's wishes. Let us look again at what the Bible says after the giants' birth:

> These [giants] were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. —Gen. 6:4–8

What was the connection between the birth of these wicked giants and God's regret over having created man? Read in a certain way, what these verse might seem to imply is that when God decided to "blot out" life on earth, He resolved to do so not with a flood—the flood is not even mentioned until nine verses later—but by

16. Num. 13:32–33 specifically associates the Nephilim with the assertion that their homeland "devours its inhabitants." A natural conclusion was that these giants eat people. Elsewhere, too, giants are presented as opponents in warfare (see Deut. 2:21, 3:11, 9:2, etc.). As for "mighty," the wickedness of the "mighty" Nimrod was evident even in his very name. See Chapter 6, "Nimrod Built It."

means of the giants. And so, according to the above sources, it did indeed happen: the giants came and killed off most of humanity and animal life. God decided that only Noah and those with him should be saved from this wanton destruction.

A Purifying Bath: What then was the purpose of the flood? As we have already glimpsed, some understood it as a purifying bath for the earth, a way of cleansing the bloodshed and corruption that had accompanied the giants' reign of terror.[17]

The idea that the flood was essentially a purifying bath derives, as mentioned, from the very essence of the thing: bathing was, in ancient Israel, seen as a means of cleansing not only from actual dirt but from "impurity" as well—a concept in which the physical and metaphysical met. Thus, a great flood might on its own imply an act of purification. Moreover, since a flood did not strike ancient interpreters as the best means for getting rid of either angels or giants (who might both be able to escape its waters), it seemed unlikely that the flood was a punishment for *them.* Finally, the biblical text itself seemed to imply that the purpose of the flood was purification of the earth, an earth that had become corrupted by blood and violence:

> Now the **earth** had been corrupted in God's sight, and the **earth** was filled up with violence. And God saw the **earth,** and behold, it had been corrupted; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the **earth.** And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the **earth** has been filled with violence because of them; behold I will destroy them with the **earth.**" —Gen. 6:11–13

The extraordinary insistence on the word "earth" here—six times in three verses—signaled to some interpreters that the earth itself had in fact been the principal injured party. Some theorized that the earth now, as previously in the case of the murdered Abel (Gen. 4:10), had become so sopped with blood that it cried out to heaven. Interestingly, the idea of the earth as an injured party, crying out for relief, is attested early:

> And they [the giants] began to sin against birds, and against animals, and against reptiles, and against fish, and they devoured one another's flesh and

17. In keeping with this interpretation, one relatively late text reflects the confusion to which the different motifs might lead: "Then Andrew began rebuking Satan, saying to him, 'Woe to you, Devil, enemy of God and his angels . . . [For] you entered into the mind of the angels, made them to be defiled with women, and made their unruly sons giants, so that they devoured the people of the earth, until the Lord raged against them and brought a flood on them in order to obliterate every structure the Lord had made on earth'" (*Acts of Andrew* 20). Here surely is an amalgem of different motifs: The "sons of God" were angels, presumably dwelling on high, but then they were corrupted by Satan and turned bad; they became defiled with the women, which must in itself have been reprehensible, but it was their unruly sons' appetite that aroused the divine wrath. While the giants had "devoured the people of the earth" a flood was nonetheless necessary—why? "To obliterate every structure the Lord had made on earth" hardly clarifies the matter.

drank the blood from it. **Then the earth complained about the lawless ones.**

And then [the good angels] Michael, Gabriel, Suriel, and Uriel looked down from heaven and saw the mass of blood that was being shed on the **earth** and all the iniquity that was being done on the earth. And they said to one another: "**Let the devastated earth cry out** with the sound of their cries until the gate of heaven."

— *1 Enoch* 7:5–6, 9:1–2 (see also [4Q201] *1 Enoch*[a] col. 3–4; [4Q202] *1 Enoch*[b] col. 3)[18]

The purpose of the flood, by this rationale, was thus to restore the earth to a state of purity after all the violence wreaked upon it by the giants' murdering and devouring of mankind:

[God said to the angel Raphael:] Restore the earth which the angels have ruined, and announce the **restoration of the earth** [in advance, that is, to Noah], for I shall **restore the earth,** so that not all the sons of men shall be destroyed . . .[19]

[God tells the good angel Michael:] And you, **cleanse the earth** from all wrong, and from all iniquity and from all sin and from all impiety and from all the uncleanness which is brought about on the earth; remove them from the earth . . . And **the earth will be cleansed** from all corruption, and from all sin, and from all wrath, and from all torment, and **I will not again send a flood** upon it for all generations forever. — *1 Enoch* 10:7–8, 20–22

[Enoch predicts:] They [the angels] will beget on the earth giants, not of the spirit, but of the flesh, and there will be great wrath on the earth, and the **earth will be cleansed from all corruption.**

— *1 Enoch* 106:17 (see also [4Q204] *1 Enoch*[c] fragment 5, col. 2)

Thus, the flood was not in itself a punishment; it was essentially a way of purifying the victimized earth that had become sullied earth from the stains of the wrongdoers.

Humanity Had Been Corrupted: Nevertheless, some interpreters could not help thinking that the flood was indeed intended as a way of eliminating all of human life (except for Noah and the others) from the face of the earth. After all, God had said:

"For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, **to destroy all flesh** in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on earth shall die." — Gen. 6:17

18. Milik's restoration of the last sentence cited is "and they said to themselves that the voice and cry, [as the sons of earth perish, reach up to] the gates of heaven"; see also his note, *Books of Enoch* 160–161. The matter requires further study; see also *1 Enoch* 8:4.

19. In this first passage, the flood itself is not mentioned, but presumably *it* would be the means of restoring the earth from its iniquity. For the angels as those who brought the flood, see also *1 Enoch* 66.

These words certainly seemed to say that the *whole purpose* of the flood was to destroy life on earth, not to cleanse it after the destruction had taken place.[20] What is more, when earlier God had said that He would "blot out" humanity (Gen. 6:7), it seemed that this was a reference to the flood (and not to the wicked giants eating human beings), since "blot out" in Hebrew frequently means to erase or wipe away by means of water.[21]

But if so, then the fundamental question "Why the flood?" had to be answered in a different way. The flood could not have been designed principally as a way of killing the wicked angels or their giant offspring; it must have been that humanity itself—*all* of humanity and not just the women who had consorted with the angels—was somehow deserving of destruction. To explain this, the "Corruption Spread" approach had to take a somewhat different form. It was not that the angels' initial act of mating led to the spread of corruption on earth through the agency of their violent hybrid offspring, but that corruption spread *directly* from the angels to the humans. Perhaps, as some had said, it was simply the act of mating itself that led to this corruption of the humans:

> So they [the angels] married of them [the human females] whomever they chose. They gave birth to children for them and the[se] were giants. Wickedness increased on the earth. **All flesh corrupted its way** [Gen. 6:12]—from people to cattle, animals, birds, and everything that moves about on the ground. All of them corrupted their way and their prescribed course.
>
> —*Jubilees* 5:1–2

Here, somehow, wickedness and corruption just pass on to humans, indeed, to "all flesh." Perhaps the angels set a bad example, perhaps there was something corrupting about their very contact; whatever the case, mankind and the animal kingdom seem to have been directly infected.

Angels Passed On Forbidden Knowledge: A refinement of this broad tendency was to see knowledge as the means by which the "sons of God" spread corruption. After all, God singles out human thoughts as having turned bad:

> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and **that every imagination of the thoughts[22] of his heart** was only evil continually.
>
> —Gen. 6:5

Interpreters certainly took this statement seriously, connecting these evil thoughts or plans of the humans with their later corrupt deeds:

20. Against this claim, proponents of the previous view might of course argue that the flood was not only a purifying bath, but was also designed to destroy "*all* flesh" (presumably, the remaining animals and humans, now that most had been consumed by the voracious giants) as a necessary step before the purification proper.

21. Exod. 32:32, Num. 5:23, 2 Kings 21:13, etc. It can of course be used metaphorically: Judg. 21:17, Prov. 6:33, Neh. 13:14.

22. This is the Revised Standard Version; it could be translated somewhat more accurately as "the *plans* of his heart."

> All the **thoughts and wishes** of mankind were devoted to thinking up what was useless and wicked all the time. Then the Lord obliterated all from the surface of the earth because of their actions and because of the blood which they had shed on the earth. — *Jubilees* 7:24–25

But if it was human *thinking* that had become corrupt, then it seemed likely that the "sons of God" had spread their wickedness to humans not merely by mating with them but by *teaching* them things that they ought not to have known, forbidden knowledge that led to evil. This theme had appeared in various forms within *1 Enoch:*

> And they [the angels] took wives for themselves, and everyone chose for himself one each. And they began to go in to them and were promiscuous with them. And they taught them charms and spells, and showed to them the cutting of roots and trees. — *1 Enoch* 7:1

> And [the angel] Azazel [or 'Asa'el] taught men to make swords, and daggers, and shields, and breastplates. And he showed them the things after these, and the art of making them: bracelets and ornaments, and the art of making up the eyes and of beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice stones, and all [kinds of] colored dyes . . . And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt. — *1 Enoch* 8:1–2

> [The angel] Shemi-ḥazah taught incantations [and the cutting of roots. Ḥermoni] taught sorcery for the undoing of magic, and wizardry, and tri[cks; Baraq'el] taught [charms of flashes. Kokhab'el] taught charms for stars. Zeq'e[l taught charms of lightning].
>
> [Ar'a]taqof taught charms of the earth. [Sham]shi'el taught charms for the su[n. Shahari'el taught charms of] the moo[n.] And all of them began to reveal secrets to their wives.
>
> — (4Q201) *1 Enoch*^{a} col. 4, (4Q202) *1 Enoch*^{b} col. 3 (≅ *1 Enoch* 8:3–4)

> [The good angels tell God:] "See then what Azazel has done, how he has taught all iniquity on the earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were made in heaven. And Semyaza has made known spells, to whom you gave authority to rule over those who are with him." — *1 Enoch* 9:6–7 (see also [4Q201] *1 Enoch*^{a} col. 4)

> [God tells Enoch to tell the Watchers:] "You were in heaven, but [its true] secrets had not yet been revealed to you, [only] a worthless mystery you knew. This you made known to the women in the hardness of your hearts, and through this mystery the women and the men caused evil to increase on earth." — *1 Enoch* 16:3

> [The angel Michael explains:] "And the name of the third angel is Gadreel: this is the one who **showed all the deadly blows** to the sons of men, and he

> led Eve astray, and he **showed the weapons of death** to the children of men." —*1 Enoch* 69:6

In these passages, the knowledge passed on to the human beings was of the sort that might lead directly to sin. For example, in the second passage cited, the making of "swords, and daggers, and shields, and breastplates" would allow the humans to commit murder and perhaps robbery (the same is true of the last passage above); the ability to make "bracelets and ornaments, and the art of making up the eyes and of beautifying the eyelids" would obviously lead to sexual promiscuity and all its ills; while a knowledge of "the most precious and choice stones" was connected to the fashioning of statues and, hence, the worship of idols.[23] Similarly:

> "For the earth has become filled with violence [*ḥamas*] through them ["all flesh"]" [Gen. 6:13]: Said R. Levi: *ḥamas* refers to **idolatry, sexual impropriety, and murder.** —*Genesis Rabba* 31:5

Perhaps also:

> [God says:] All the world will sin by injustices and **crimes** and **adulteries** and **idolatries.** Then I shall bring down the flood onto the earth, and the earth itself will be overwhelmed by a great quantity of mud. —*2 Enoch* (A) 34:1–3

In the continuation of one of the above passages, the text specifies that "Asradel[24] taught [the human beings] the path of the moon" (*1 Enoch* 8:3). Presumably such knowledge could also cause humans to sin, since it could lead them to base their calendrical calculations on lunar months instead of arranging the year and its sacred festivals exclusively on the basis of the sun. As discussed elsewhere (Chapter 2, *OR*, "The Sun Stands Alone," and Chapter 17, *OR*, "This Very Month"), this calendrical matter was a major item of dispute among different Jewish groups in Second Temple times. (See further Talmon, "Calendar Reckoning," 165.)

In short, human beings had become corrupted directly by the "sons of God," and the flood was sent to wipe out these human beings—and the whole animal kingdom—from the earth. (Note that the Watchers are rather uniquely depicted as good in *Sibylline Oracles* 1:89–103, and the knowledge that they disseminate is altogether beneficial.)

Separate Punishment for Angels: However, there was a fundamental problem with seeing the flood as a punishment for human wickedness. Even if the humans

23. The "charms and spells" mentioned in the first passage may likewise be connected with idolatry, but it seems more likely that these, along with the "cutting of roots and trees," are connected to contraception and abortion; see, for example, *Didache* 2:1; *Genesis Rabba* 23:2, "he used to have her drink a potion of roots [cf. m. *Shabbat* 14:3] so that she would not give birth"; Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 222–223 n.

24. Referring to one of the "sons of heaven" who go down to earth, this name is apparently a corruption in the Ethiopic text for "Sahariel," which appears in the Greek as "Sariel"—see Knibb, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch,* 83 n.

were guilty—having been corrupted by the angels' wickedness—the flood that God sent as a punishment would seem to let the angels off scot-free. For, as previously remarked, an angel, no matter how encumbered by sin or wickedness, would probably be able to wing it in the face of the rising waters, and even the wicked giants, by dint of their great height, stood a good chance of keeping their heads above the tide.[25] Would God punish the humans, who were only secondarily wicked, without also punishing those whose sinfulness was at the origin of the humans' crimes?

Angels Fell: Perhaps one answer to this question lay in the very fact that the angels in question had *fallen to earth* and had thus apparently lost their powers of flight. For they are described as *fallen* angels and not merely angels who descended to earth on this occasion. Here, as elsewhere, it is difficult to determine where independent myth leaves off and exegesis begins. However, one exegetical consideration that may have influenced thinking at an early period was the word "Nephilim" in Gen. 6:4. The apparent Hebrew root of this word means "fall," and while it is far from clear who the Nephilim were, even relatively late interpreters clearly associated their name with falling:

> [Enoch tells the wicked angels:] "From now on **you will not ascend into heaven for all eternity,** and it has been decreed that you are to be bound in the earth for all the days of eternity."
>
> — *1 Enoch* 14:5 (see also [4Q202] *1 Enoch*^{b} col. 6, [4Q204] *1 Enoch*^{c} col. 6)

> The [angels] of Heaven [the "sons of God"] **fell** because of this; they were taken because they did not keep the commandments of God. And their sons—as tall as cedar trees and whose bodies were like mountains—[likewise] **fell.** — *Damascus Document* 2:18–19

> They [the angels], encumbered by the bonds of flesh, were held back and mightily restrained, so that they were no longer capable of ascending back into heaven. — *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 8.13.3

> Shemhazzai and Uzziel were the ones who had **fallen** from heaven.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 6:4

> They [the Nephilim] caused the world to fall, and they themselves **fell** from the world. — *Genesis Rabba* 26:7

The idea of fallen angels certainly did not originate with the problems associated with Gen. 6:1–4. It was doubtless a topos from the most ancient times, reflected elsewhere in such verses as Isa. 14:12 and Ps. 82:7, and ultimately originating in the

25. Deut. 3:11 describes the gigantic Og as "left of the remnant of the Rephaim," the word "Rephaim" being itself, according to Deut. 2:11, another word for "giants" *(anaqim)*. Thus Og was held to be a giant who was "left" in the sense that he had survived the flood of Noah's time. Here was a clear indication that a giant could survive even a great flood. For various reasons, some interpreters believed that the tower of Babel had been built by giants. If so, perhaps these builders were survivors of the flood, as was specifically maintained by at least one ancient author (see Chapter 6).

celestial phenomenon of falling stars to which these latter two verses certainly refer. Beyond such references, a few specific verses in the book of Ezekiel seem to refer more specifically to an ancient tradition of the "fall" of angels or mighty heroes of old (Ezek. 26:20, 32:27; see also 28:11–19). But the idea that angels sometimes did fall, irretrievably, to earth was a useful one in understanding Gen. 6:1–4: it would explain not only how these angels came to earth, but how they were punished (that is, they were prevented from returning to heaven as angels), and even, how a flood might have been an effective punishment for creatures otherwise thought to be heavenly and, hence, able to fly.

Incidentally, the theme of fallen angels as narrated in detail in *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* was retold or alluded to in many subsequent works of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. It also has a number of important echoes in the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation; see in particular Rev. 9:1 ("I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth") and 12:9 ("And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him"). Note also Luke 10:18 ("I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven").

Menahem Kister, in "A Contribution to the Interpretation of Ben Sira" (p. 328), proposed to vocalize *hammûrādîm* in the Cairo Genizah manuscript B version of Sir. 16:7 (a verse cited in the body of this chapter). Such a vocalization would yield:

> He [God] did not forgive the princes of yore, who in their might **were brought down.** —Sir. 16:7

If correct, this reading contains a more specific allusion to the angels' fall.

Angels Imprisoned: If the angels' fall prevented them from returning to heaven, this still did not explain what happened to them on earth during the flood. Some ancient sources suggested an answer: the angels (perhaps because they were nonetheless immortal beings) were not actually killed by drowning but tied up in special restraints and hidden underneath the earth. A hint of this idea was perhaps to be found in the Bible itself:

> On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and the kings of the earth on the earth: They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. —Isa. 24:21–22

In any case, a similar act of binding and deferred judgment was to be visited on those of the "host of heaven" who had participated in the wickedness:

> [God orders the good angel Michael]: "**Bind** them [the angels] under the hills of the earth until the day of the judgment and of their consummation, until the judgment which is for all eternity is accomplished."
>
> —*1 Enoch* 10:12 (see also [4Q202] *1 Enoch*^{b} col. 4)

> [Enoch says to a wicked angel:] "A severe sentence has come out against you that you should be **bound.** And you will have neither rest, nor mercy, nor

> petition, because of the wrong which you have taught, and because of all the works of blasphemy and wrong and sin which you have shown to the sons of men." —*1 Enoch* 13:1–2

> [Uriel tells Enoch:] "These are some of the stars which transgressed the command of the Lord Most High, and they have been **bound** here until ten thousand ages are completed." —*1 Enoch* 21:6

> He [God] told us [good angels] to tie them [the "sons of God"] up in the depths of the earth; now they are **tied** there and are alone. —*Jubilees* 5:6

> . . . sons of] the Watchers, the giants, and all the [. . .] were not forgiven: [. . .] He has imprisoned us and overpowered you.
> —(4Q203) *Book of Giants*[a] fragment 7

> And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their dwelling have been kept by [God] in eternal **chains** in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day. —Jude 6

It has long been noticed that the picture of Satan in Rev. 20:1–3 seems to owe something to the "Angels Imprisoned" motif:

> And he [an angel] seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and **bound** him for a thousand years and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while . . . And the devil who had deceived them was **thrown into the lake of fire** and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be **tormented** day and night for ever and ever. —Rev. 20:2–3, 10

Note that God similarly orders that the diabolical Azazel be bound:

> Bind Azazel by his hands and feet, and throw him into the darkness . . . and **cover him** with darkness; and let him stay there forever, and cover his face, that he may not see light, and that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the **fire.** —*1 Enoch* 10:4–6

Giants Killed Off: As for the angels' offspring, the wicked giants, these had been condemned to be killed off by one another even before the flood got started. The tradition of the giants' killing off one another could well explain the Bible's references to the "violence" that corrupted the earth before the flood (Gen. 6:11, 13): this violence was not part of the crimes that caused the flood but part of the punishment of the guilty:

> [God says to the good angel Gabriel:] "Proceed against the bastards [the hybrid giants] and the reprobates and the sons of the fornicators, and destroy the sons of the fornicators and the sons of the Watchers from

among men. And send them out, and send them against one another, and let them **destroy themselves** in battle, for they will not have length of days."

— *1 Enoch* 10:9 (see also [4Q202] *1 Enoch*^{b} col. 4)

[God says to the good angel Michael:] When all their [the wicked angels'] sons [the giants] **kill each other off,** and when they [the angels] see the destruction of their beloved ones, **bind them** for seventy generations under the hills of the earth, until the day of their judgment.

— *1 Enoch* 10:12 (see also [4Q202] *1 Enoch*^{b} col. 6; *1 Enoch* 88:2)

Regarding their [those of the "sons of God"] children [the giants] there went out from His presence an order to strike them with the sword and to remove them from before the heaven . . . He [God] **sent His sword** among them so that they would **kill one another.** They began to kill one another until all of them fell by the sword and were obliterated from the earth . . . He obliterated all from their places; there remained no one of them whom He did not judge for all their wickedness. — *Jubilees* 5:7–11

Something similar may underlie the Sibyl's description of the generation just before that of the flood:

Wars and slaughters and battles
cast some to the netherworld, though they were miserable
impious men. Others the heavenly God himself
later removed from His world in wrath,
draping them around with great Tartarus, under the base of the earth.

— *Sibylline Oracles* 1:115–119

Other writers, while not specifying the circumstances, nevertheless stressed what Genesis somehow had not, that the "giants" of Gen. 6:4 had indeed been killed off:

[God] did not forgive the ancient giants[26]
who rebelled of old in their might.

— Sir. 16:7

For even in the beginning, when the arrogant giants were perishing . . .

— Wisd. 14:6

Titans and giants and such as the flood destroyed . . .

— *Sibylline Oracles* 2:232

Therefore, all [that were on] dry land were bl[otted out], and man and [beasts and all] birds, every winged thing, d[ie]d. **And the gi[an]ts, too, did not escape.** — (4Q370) *An Admonition on the Flood* 6

26. The Hebrew mss. here read *nĕsîkê qedem* ("ancient princes"), but the Greek properly understands this as "giants"; the word *gibbôrîm* was apparently avoided because the same root appears in "might" in this same verse. As for God "not forgiving" the giants, this is strikingly similar to the passage from (4Q203) *Book of Giants*^{a} fragment 7 cited above, "[sons of] the Watchers, the giants, and all the [. . .] were not forgiven."

No Divine Spirit in Flesh: In *Jubilees,* the idea that the giant hybrids were killed off separately was explicitly connected to a particularly clever exegesis of God's words in Gen. 6:3.

> Regarding their [those of the "sons of God"] children, there went out from His presence an order to strike them with the sword and to remove them from beneath the heavens. He said: "My spirit will not remain in man forever, for they are flesh. Their days will be one hundred and twenty years" [Gen. 6:3]. He sent his sword among them so that they would kill one another. They began to kill one another until all of them fell by the sword and were obliterated from the earth . . . He obliterated all from their places; there remained no one of them whom He did not judge for all their wickedness. He [then] made a new and righteous nature for all His creatures so that they would not sin with their whole nature, forever.
>
> — *Jubilees* 5:7–12

Here, the sentence concerning the one hundred and twenty years is understood to apply only to the hybrid giants, because it was only these hybrids who were being alluded to in the words, "My spirit will not abide in man forever, for he is flesh" (Gen. 6:3). That is, this was not a reference to mankind—the divine spark in humanity or anything similar—but to a certain kind of creature that was a combination of angelic ("My spirit") and human ("in man") parts. For the author of *Jubilees,* it was specifically *these* divine-human hybrids that had to be destroyed because the divine and the human cannot coexist in one body. He would thus translate this verse: "My spirit will not abide in man *ever again,* for they [these hybrids] are flesh [and it is certainly not right that the divine spirit reside in flesh. As for these hybrids,] their days will be one hundred and twenty years."

The hybrids were thus to be destroyed separately, "by the sword," whereas the rest of the world, having itself become corrupted, was later destroyed by the flood. (The hybrids had to be destroyed "by the sword" because, as we have seen, their great height might have allowed them to escape destruction by water.) It is interesting, however, that *Jubilees* switches the order of God's two sentences of destruction. First God sees human wickedness and resolves to destroy humanity (*Jubilees* 5:4 = Gen. 6:7). Before carrying out the sentence, however, he punishes those responsible for human wickedness, the angels and their hybrid children, justifying His action against the latter with the famous words "My spirit will not abide . . ." (*Jubilees* 5:8 = Gen. 6:3). Then He carries out the sentence previously pronounced on humanity by bringing the flood. This may represent a blending of the two approaches charted above: on the one hand, God's sentence is for the hybrid giants to destroy humanity; on the other hand, humanity is (at least) finished off by the flood.[27]

27. Note, by the way, that this explanation of Gen. 6:3 in *Jubilees* is likewise implied by the whole "Violations of the Natural Order" motif, and in particular God's words to the "sons of God" in *1 Enoch:* "Why have you left the high, holy, and eternal heaven and lain with women . . .? You [are] spiritual, holy, living an eternal life, [yet] you became unclean upon the women and begat through the blood of flesh . . . But you formerly were spiritual, living an eternal, immortal life for all the generations of the world. For this reason I did not arrange wives for you, because the dwelling of the spiritual ones is in heaven" (*1 Enoch* 15:3–7).

In sum, each of the three approaches to understanding the cause of the flood has survived in various interpretive texts. Quite apart from the motifs directly connected with these three approaches, a number of other motifs, some of them conflicting with the foregoing, have likewise survived.

The "Sons of God" Were Human: As was seen above, most ancient interpreters understood the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 to have been angels of some sort.[28]

> And it came to pass, when the sons of men had increased, that in those days there were born to them fair and beautiful daughters. And the **angels,** the sons of heaven, saw them and desired them. — *1 Enoch* 6:1–2

> The **angels of the Lord** saw in a certain year of that jubilee that they [the daughters of men] were good to look at, and they took wives for themselves from all of those whom they chose. — *Jubilees* 5:1

> [Hear me] so that you are not taken in by the designs of the inclination to evil and by lustful eyes . . .
>
> The **Watchers from Heaven** [that is, the "sons of God"] fell because of this; they were taken because they did not keep the commandments of God. — *Damascus Document* 2:16–18

> [Lamech recalls:] Whereupon I thought to myself that the pregnancy [came about] from the **Watchers** or that it was from the **Holy Ones** [that is, other angels]. — *Genesis Apocryphon* 2:1

> For it was thus they [the daughters of men] charmed the **Watchers** who were before the flood. — *Testament of Reuben* 5:6 (also *Testament of Naphtali* 3:5)

> For many **angels of God** now consorted with women and begat sons. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:73

> And some of them [the angels] came down and mingled themselves with the women . . . but the rest of the multitude of angels, who have no number, restrained themselves. — *2 Baruch* 56:12–14

> For if God did not spare the **angels** when they sinned . . . — 2 Pet. 2:4

> And the **angels** that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling . . . — Jude 6

Others, however, seemed to recoil from such a conclusion:

> "And when the angels of God saw the daughters of men . . ." It is Moses' custom to give the name of angels to those whom other philosophers call demons [or "spirits"] that is, souls which fly about in the air. — Philo, *On the Giants* 4

28. The case of the Septuagint is somewhat complicated. True, one ancient manuscript contains the "angel" tradition: "The *angels of God* saw that the daughters of men were beautiful" (Septuagint [Codex Alexandrinus] Gen. 6:2). However, as Alexander, "'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," 63, has shown

> The **sons of the mighty** [or "the rulers"] saw the daughters of men, that were fair . . . — *Targum Onqelos,* Symmachus, *Samaritan Targum* Gen. 6:2

> The **sons of the judges** [marginal gloss, "the angels"] saw the daughters of men, that were fair . . . — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 6:2

> R. Simeon b. Yoḥai called them "the sons of judges" [and] cursed any who called them "sons of God." — *Genesis Rabba* 26:5

> He called the sons of Seth "sons of God," who, being indeed sons of the righteous Seth, might be called [that is, considered] "people of God." The beautiful daughters of men, whom they saw [to be] beautiful, were the daughters of Cain who adorned themselves and became a snare to the eyes of the sons of Seth. — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 6:3

> However, I cannot believe that the holy angels of God might in any way have *fallen* at that time . . . Rather, [it is the case that] men of God were also called by the name of "angels," as Scripture itself bears ample witness . . . [Thus,] these were not really angels but human beings. — Augustine, *City of God* 15.23

See on this Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of the 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6"; Brock, "To Revise or Not to Revise." On the "sons of Seth" in Syriac tradition, see Brock, "Jewish Traditions," 212–232. Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 3:1–3 may also imply that the "sons of God" were human. The "sons of the judges" tradition is also attested in a single Peshitta manuscript: Maori, *The Peshitta Version,* 250–251. Note further that Philo elsewhere seems to encompass both the "divine hybrid" and "strictly human" positions in a single paragraph:

> And he [Moses] relates that their [the giants'] creation was a mixture of two things, of angels and mortal women . . . But sometimes he calls the angels "sons of God" because they are made incorporeal, through no mortal man but are spirits without body. But rather does that exhorter, Moses, give to **good and excellent men** the name of "sons of God," while wicked and evil men [he calls] "bodies." — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:92

See further on Philo's interpretation Bamberger, "Philo and the Aggadah," 163; Nikiprowetzky, "Sur une lecture démonologique"; Grabbe, "Philo and Aggada."

A similar motif maintained that the "sons of God" were in fact the (human) descendants of the virtuous Seth, who for a time maintained a separate line of humanity distinct from the wicked descendants of Cain. It was thus the inbreeding of these two lines that ultimately caused God to despair of humanity and bring the flood. See on this Sir. 49:16, Wisd. 2:18, and Alexander, "'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," 63–64; also, Ginzberg, *Haggadah bei den Kirchenvätern,* 75–76, and *Legends of the Jews,* 5:172 n. 14.

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this is probably a revision of an earlier "sons of God" rendering, found in any case in Gen. 6:4 in the same manuscript. See further Brock, "To Revise or Not to Revise," 301–338; cf. Bamberger, "Philo and Aggadah," 163.

The Women Allured: Why should angels—the "sons of God"—have wished to mate with human females in the first place? Some of the sources seen earlier blamed the angels for this behavior: they were "promiscuous" or "lascivious." Others suggested that it was simply their desire to engender progeny.[29] Still other interpreters, however, were not prepared to let the "daughters of men" off so easily:

> For evil are women, my children; and since they have no power or strength over man, they use wiles by outward attraction, that they may draw him to themselves . . . For thus they allured the Watchers before the flood; for as these [Watchers] continually beheld them, they lusted after them, and they conceived the act in their mind. — *Testament of Reuben* 5:1–6

> The beautiful daughters of men, whom they saw [to be] beautiful, were the daughters of Cain who **adorned themselves and became a snare . . .**
>
> — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 6:3

> The sons of the mighty ones saw the daughters of men, how they were beautiful and painted their eyes and put on makeup and walked about with their flesh uncovered. Then they thought of fornication and took wives for themselves. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 6:2

> The fallen angels . . . saw Cain's daughters walking about with their private parts exposed and their eyes adorned with makeup, like prostitutes, and they went astray after them and chose from among them for their wives.
>
> — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 22

These texts all seem to blame the "daughters of men" for having seduced the "sons of God." Such an interpretation is apparently directed at Gen. 6:2, "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair." For, what could Scripture mean to imply by saying that the sons of God *saw* that the women were fair? If they were fair, why not simply say that? And so, this line of reasoning held that Scripture had focused on the element of seeing because it was in itself somehow central. The daughters of men must have set out to attract the attention of these heavenly beings, using cosmetics and their "wiles" in order to *make* them see and so arouse their interest—until they "continually beheld them."[30]

This tradition of women using makeup did not arise in a vacuum, however. It apparently evolved from the far older motif (mentioned above), according to which the "sons of God" had passed on to humanity forbidden knowledge that had led to its corruption, knowledge that, as we saw, included cosmetics and jewelry making:

> And [the angel] Azazel [or 'Asa'el] . . . showed them the things after these, and the art of making them: bracelets and ornaments, and the art of making up the eyes and of beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice

29. Such an interpretation was aided by the ambiguity of Gen. 6:4, "and they bore children to them." The apparent subject of the verb here is the "daughters of men," but—precisely because of the ambiguity of the pronouns and the unpointed Hebrew text—this could likewise be understood as "and they [the angels] engendered children for themselves." Such is the explicit understanding of the Septuagint translators. It might therefore appear that the angels' motive was not lust but procreation.

30. See also *1 Enoch* 19:2.

> stones, and all [kinds of] colored dyes . . . And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt.
> — *1 Enoch* 8:1–2

> . . . and to the women he showe]d about eye-makeup and eye-shado[w . . .
> — (4Q202) *1 Enoch*^{b} col. 2

Logically, of course, the angels could have taught the women about cosmetics only after their attention had first been drawn to the women, whereas the motif "The Women Allured" held that the women used makeup to draw their attention in the first place. It seems, therefore, that this motif first developed out of a close reading of Gen. 6:2 and held only that the women had set out to attract the angels; the element of makeup may have entered at a later stage, under the influence of the motif "Angels Passed On Forbidden Knowledge."

The evils of cosmetics is a theme beloved by the author of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (see also *Testament of Judah* 12:3, 13:5; *Testament of Issachar* 14:2–6), but he is not alone, as the following poem attests:

> Behold, the Lord is our mirror: open your eyes and see them in Him.
> And learn the manner of your face, then announce praises to His spirit.
> And wipe the paint from your face, and love His holiness and put it on.
> Then you will be unblemished at all times with Him. Hallelujah.
> — *Odes of Solomon* 13

One Hundred and Twenty Years until Punishment: As cited earlier, Gen. 6:3 was understood by many interpreters as meaning that God would bring the flood in one hundred and twenty years. One factor contributing to this interpretation was the word *yādôn* in the traditional Hebrew text, often translated as "abide" ("My spirit shall not *abide* in man forever"). This Hebrew word could be taken in the sense of "judge" (*yādôn* or *yādîn*). If so, then the sense of the verse might be something like, "Let my spirit not forever *be judging* man, for he is flesh, but let his days [of judgment] be one hundred and twenty years," after which time the sentence will be carried out. Some ancient sources explicitly reflect this understanding of the word as "judgment":

> He obliterated all from their places; there remained no one of them whom he did not **judge** for all their wickedness.[31] — *Jubilees* 5:11

> And God said, "My spirit shall not **judge** these men forever."
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 3:2

> The Lord said: none of the generations that are to arise in the future will be **judged** according to the standard of judgment [used] for the generation of the flood. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 6:3

31. This mention of God "judging" in *Jubilees* thus seems to be another case of double translation: *yādôn* was explained in *Jubilees* 5:8 (as seen earlier) in the sense of "abide" or "remain," whereas *Jubilees* 5:11 preserves that other tradition that saw its meaning as "judge."

> Said R. Yudah b. Beterah: [God said:] I will never again **judge** [mankind] in this fashion. — *Genesis Rabba* 26:6

> In the Hebrew it is written: "My spirit shall not **judge** these men forever, since they are flesh." — Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 6:3

For a possibly similar interpretation in *1 Enoch*, see VanderKam, "Righteousness of Noah," 18.

The understanding "my spirit will not *abide*" may, in some texts, represent a variant reading in the original, not *yādôn* but *yādûr* or *yādôr* ("dwell"). Such a text is apparently attested at Qumran; see further Lim, "The Chronology of the Flood Story"; Bernstein, "4Q252: From Rewritten Bible to Biblical Commentary"; idem, "4Q252 i 2 . . . Biblical Text or Biblical Interpretation?" On the Septuagint version, see Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, 77–78.

The Mishnah also connected the word *yādôn* in Gen. 6:3 to the idea of judgment, but in a slightly different fashion:

> The generation of the flood has no portion in the world to come and will not be judged, as it is said, "My spirit will not abide [*yādôn*] in man forever [*lĕʿôlām*]"—no judgment and no spirit. — m. *Sanhedrin* 10:3

Here, the word "forever" *(lĕʿôlām)* is reinterpreted as a shorthand reference for *lĕʿôlām habbā'*, "for the world to come." The meaning of the verse would thus be that this wicked generation will attain neither judgment nor the spiritual rewards of the world to come.

A Lifespan of One Hundred and Twenty Years: The above notwithstanding, a number of interpreters endorsed the apparent meaning of the Gen. 6:3, namely, that the human lifespan is to shrink to one hundred and twenty years:

> By this number [one hundred and twenty] it [Scripture] seems to set the limit of human life. — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:91

> [God] condemned not them alone for their wickedness, but resolved to destroy all mankind then existing and to create another race pure of vice, abridging their term of life from its former longevity to one hundred and twenty years. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:75

> [God said:] "Behold, I am bringing upon them a limitation of years that I have allotted to them [to live] in this world." — *Genesis Rabba* 26:6

(This position may also have been that of Pseudo-Philo—despite his reading of *yādôn* as "judge"—in *Biblical Antiquities* 3:2, but see below.)

However, we must consider the nuances of this motif, since (as seen earlier) it is far from clear in many interpretations whether this reduction was to be a permanent arrangement or a punishment inflicted on, specifically, the one sinful generation of the flood. Thus, for example, Philo suggests in the continuation of the passage just cited that the one hundred and twenty years may have been the lifetime limit of not all of humanity but merely that of the generation of the flood alone.

> But perhaps a hundred and twenty years are not the universal limit of human life, but that of only the men living at that time, who were later to perish in the flood after so great a number of years, which a benevolent benefactor prolonged, allowing repentance for sins. However, after this limit they lived a more abundant life in later generations.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:91

(Note that he also evokes here the theme of a "prolongation for repentance" seen earlier in *Targum Onqelos* and other sources.) Strikingly similar:

> [God said:] This generation will not live [up to] nine hundred years, as the earlier generations did, "for it is flesh" [Gen. 6:3] and it fills its days with fleshly deeds, and "*its* days will be one hundred and twenty years" [Gen. 6:3]. If, however, they repent within them [the one hundred twenty years], they will be saved from the [divine] anger that is about to befall them.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 6:4

The Human Lifespan Shrank Twice: We saw above that *Jubilees* and other early sources take God's words in Gen. 6:3 ("My spirit will not abide . . .") as referring, specifically, to the horrible divine-human hybrids: *they* would be finished off in one hundred and twenty years (or, perhaps, would live only to the age of one hundred and twenty). In either case, this sentence had nothing to do with human beings.

As for human beings, it is true that most of them were to be destroyed in the flood. But *Jubilees* relates that before the flood actually takes place, God also decided to change human nature, so that the sort of flood that He was about to bring would never again be necessary. He therefore created a "new and righteous nature" for humanity, so that total wickedness would no longer be a problem and, consequently, humanity as a whole would, after this flood, no longer suffer global extermination. Thanks to this new human nature, each person could and would henceforth be judged on an individual basis, in keeping with each person's good and bad deeds:

> He will exercise judgment regarding each person—the great one according to his greatness, and the small one according to his smallness—each one in accord with his way. —*Jubilees* 5:15

The flood, necessary as it was because of the defective nature of the antediluvians, would never have to be repeated: the change in the human character made future floods unnecessary.

And yet, no one could help noticing that the human lifespan *does* seem to decrease from the time of the flood onward. True, it did not happen all at once, but gradually human beings dropped from the nine-hundred-plus years of some early figures down to the six hundreds and five hundreds, and eventually to less than two hundred years. Thus Abraham, an altogether righteous man, lived only one hundred and seventy-five years. How could this be explained?

Jubilees' answer is that this gradual reduction was indeed a further punishment. Although later human beings had not proved to be altogether depraved, like the

generation of the flood, they had nonetheless gone astray, falling into the ills of impurity and fornication and failing to observe other divine precepts. As a result, human lives became shorter and shorter:

> [The angel tells Moses:] For the times of the ancients were nineteen jubilees [= 931 years] for their lifetimes. After the flood they [human beings] started to decrease from nineteen jubilees, to be fewer with respect to jubilees, to age quickly, and to have their lifetimes completed because of the numerous difficulties and through the wickedness of their ways—with the exception of Abraham. For Abraham was perfect with the Lord[32] in everything that he did—being properly pleasing throughout all his lifetime. And yet even he had not completed four jubilees during his lifetime when he became old—because of wickedness—and reached the end of his time. All of the generations that will come into being from now [that is, from the time of Moses] until the great day of judgment will grow old quickly, before they have completed two jubilees, and their knowledge will forsake them, because of their old age. —*Jubilees* 23:9–11

A careful reading of these sentences reveals that they actually set out two different stages in the reduction of human longevity. The first decrease came shortly after the flood: the human lifespan began to diminish because of "the wickedness of their ways," so that even the righteous Abraham could not fill out four jubilees. If that were not bad enough, Moses is now told that, from his time onward, human life will become even shorter, not even filling two jubilees. (This was the human condition in the days of *Jubilees*' author, as in our own.) This two-stage punishment was an extremely useful idea to the author of *Jubilees,* since it allowed him to claim that his own contemporaries were actually being punished—without their knowing it!—for the sins against which this book intoned: fornication, impurity, and the use of the wrong cultic calendar. (See further Kugel, "The *Jubilees* Apocalypse.")

It is interesting that a somewhat similar notion is alluded to in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities.* In retelling the flood story, Pseudo-Philo cites Gen. 6:3 and comments about the hybrid generation, "For them He set limits of life, but the crimes done by their hands did not cease" (3:2). This again seems to apply only to the hybrids. It is not clear, by the way, whether the one hundred and twenty years constitute a warning period, after which the hybrids' lives would be cut off, or whether it means that the lives of these wicked creatures will end at the age of one hundred and twenty. In either case, however, this was not a diminution of the human lifespan *in general:* the text says, "For *them* He set limits of life." (I must disagree with the otherwise illuminating discussion of this issue in Bernstein, "4Q252: From Rewritten Bible to Biblical Commentary.") God warned the culprits but it did not help; they continued to sin.

Later in his book, Pseudo-Philo goes on to explain that God's words about the one hundred and twenty years did eventually come to be applied as an overall limit for the life of human beings. This did not happen, however, until the time of Moses.

32. This is a blend of Gen. 17:1 and Deut. 18:13.

> Then [after the Sinai revelation] He informed him [Moses] concerning the year[s] of the lifetime of Noah, and He said to him, "These are the years that I have ordained in keeping with the oath [Latin, "after the weeks"] by which I afflicted the Watchers ['*îrîm*] and the men [Latin, "the city of men"]."[33]
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 13:8

In other words, the original sentence setting one hundred and twenty years as the maximum lifespan came to be applied to mankind in general only at the time of Moses. This interpretation made great sense, since otherwise it would be difficult to explain why the altogether exemplary Moses should have lived only one hundred and twenty years (Deut. 34:7), whereas previously all manner of lesser figures and even villains had lived longer. (See also Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:8.)

Finally, another parallel should be noted in the passage from Josephus cited earlier:

> [God] condemned **not them alone** [that is, the "sons of God"] for their wickedness, **but** resolved to destroy **all mankind** then existing and to create **another race pure of vice,** abridging their term of life from its former longevity to one hundred and twenty years.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:75

Although Josephus does not narrate, as *Jubilees* does, two separate acts of punishment, he apparently sees the destruction of "all mankind" as something undertaken in addition to that of the "sons of God." What is more, the flood is followed, as in *Jubilees,* by the creation of a new human nature, "pure of vice."

Noah's Name Meant What? The origins of the motif seen earlier, "Noah Warned of the Flood," probably extend beyond the matter of the one hundred and twenty years in Gen. 6:3. The very idea that Noah was commanded to build an ark—presumably in plain view of his neighbors—must have suggested from earliest times that Noah's contemporaries engaged him in some discussion of the ark's purpose during the building. It was no doubt a short step from imagining such a discussion to positing that the righteous Noah used the occasion to preach righteousness to his sinful contemporaries. (Such a conversation is reconstructed in b. *Sanhedrin* 108b.)

But connected to the rise of this same motif is another factor, that of the name given by Lamech to his newborn son:

33. Harrington's notes in *OTP* and his *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* remark on some textual difficulty here. I have suggested these emendations because the consonantal Hebrew word for "weeks" *(šb'wt)* is indistinguishable from that for "oaths," while "city of men" *('yr 'nšym)* is rather similar to "Watchers and the men" *('rym w'nšyŵ).* (Incidentally, I also suspect that the next sentence is somewhat garbled. It should read: "Then *He* showed him [Moses, whereas Harrington has "I showed them"] the place of creation and the snake.") If the reading "the Watchers and the men" is correct, then Pseudo-Philo may likewise reflect the tradition of two separate acts of destruction, one of the "sons of God" and the other of mankind. As for the "oaths" as an agent of divine action, see *1 Enoch* 69:15–25. Here, however, Pseudo-Philo probably speaks of "oaths" to explain why it was that even Moses had to die at so young an age: God was bound by His earlier oath.

> When Lamech had lived a hundred and eighty-two years, he became the father of a son, and called his name Noah, saying, "This one shall comfort us from our deeds and from the toil of our hands from the soil which the Lord has cursed." —Gen. 5:28–29

The passage (given above according to the traditional Hebrew text) was altogether difficult. To begin with, what was true about this prediction? Noah did not *comfort* his father for his hard labor—there is no comforting at all involved in the story. What is more, Noah's father seems to have perished with the others in the flood—so why should he have been implying that, in some sense or other, his son would have a positive effect with respect to "our deeds" and so forth? And then there is the matter of the name itself. For this sentence, like so many spoken at the birth of a child in the Bible, seems intended to explain why a particular name was given to the child. In this case, however, the name and the explanation do not appear to match. The name Noah seems to come from the Hebrew word for "rest," *nwḥ*, whereas the word "comfort" comes from a root that, while sounding similar, is entirely distinct, *nḥm*. Indeed, the Septuagint text seems to presuppose the first verb:

> When Lamech had lived a hundred and eighty-two years, he became the father of a son, and called his name Noah, saying, "This one shall **cause us to rest** from our deeds and from the toils of our hands and[34] from the earth which the Lord God has cursed." —Septuagint Gen. 5:29

Now, if this was indeed the true sense of the biblical verse, then it could indeed be a subtle hint regarding Noah's activities as a preacher. For, if such a statement about Noah's future had been included in Scripture, was it not intended to imply (however cryptically) that Noah had at least *tried* to cause his father and that whole generation "to rest [that is, cease] from our deeds"—that he went about preaching repentance for years before the actual flood arrived? And, presumably, it was for having demonstrated such zeal that Noah in particular was chosen by God to be spared in the coming destruction and was ordered to build the ark.

Others interpreted the "rest" as a reference to the flood itself:

> And he called him Noah, saying, "This one will give rest to us and to the earth from those who are upon in that it will be called to account for[35] the wickedness of their bad deeds." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 1:20

Note that this author has specifically included the earth among the "us" to whom rest will be given because, in the flood story itself, the "purification" of the earth from human wickedness is a repeated theme. For the earth *resting* from human wickedness, compare Lev. 26:34–35.

Jerome, while translating the verb of Gen. 5:29 as "will comfort" in the Vulgate, was acquainted with the "will give rest" tradition, explaining it likewise as an allusion to the coming flood:

34. Note that the Septuagint text has an "and" where the traditional Hebrew text does not.

35. The Latin, *in quibus visitabitur,* presumably represents something like the Hebrew *ba'ašer tippaqed.*

> Noah is translated as "rest." He was called "rest" because in his time all works were put to rest because of the flood.
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 5:29

A number of other suggestions were offered to account for Noah's name. *1 Enoch* 106 seems to connect the name not only with the idea of a surviving "remnant" but with "pleasant" as well. See the discussion of 4Q En^{c} 5ii in Milik, *The Books of Enoch,* 213–216. The next chapter of *1 Enoch* notes: "And he called the name of that son Noah, for he will comfort the earth after all the destruction" (*1 Enoch* 107:3), paralleling the biblical etymology of Gen. 5:29. The problem of Noah's name continued to puzzle later exegetes.

> R. Yoḥanan said: The name does not correspond to the explanation and the explanation does not correspond to the name. For Scripture should have said, "This one shall cause us to rest [*yaniḥenu*]" or else "This *Naḥman* will comfort us." —*Genesis Rabba* 25:2

Noah's Miraculous Appearance: This same passage in Gen. 5:28–29 raised another question: how did Lamech know that the child just born to him was to have such a special destiny? What was it about the child that led Lamech to exclaim, "This one shall comfort us from our deeds and from the toil of our hands from the soil which the Lord has cursed"?

Out of this question developed the motif of Noah's miraculous appearance at birth:

> His body was white like snow and red like the flower of the rose, and the hair of his head [was] white like wool . . . And his father Lamech was afraid of him and fled and went to his father Methuselah. And he said to him: "I have begotten a strange son; he is not like a man, but is like the children of the angels of heaven . . . and I am afraid lest something extraordinary should be done on the earth in his days . . ." And I, Enoch, answered and said to him [Methuselah]: . . . "There will be great destruction over the whole earth, and there will be a flood, and there will be great destruction for one year. But this child who has been born to you [Methuselah and Lamech] will be left on earth, and his three sons will be saved with him." —*1 Enoch* 106:2–16

According to this interpretation, it was the fact that Lamech's newborn son looked more like an angel than a human being that led him to suspect that the boy had some special fate in store. Perhaps, in a more primitive form of this motif, that was all there was to it: Lamech, seeing the child, exclaims, "This one shall comfort us from our deeds and from the toil of our hands from the soil which the Lord has cursed" (Gen. 5:29). But in the above version, Noah's miraculous appearance then leads his father to seek advice from Methuselah and Methuselah from Enoch, whose connections with heaven (see above) might vouchsafe true information about the boy's future. See also VanderKam, "The Birth of Noah," 213–237. The newly improved readings of the *Genesis Apocryphon* contain, not surprisingly, evidence of the same motif:

> and he [Noah] did not resemble[
> Rather[
> he saw him [?], your son Lamech took fright
>
> —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 5, 5–7

the passage continues:

> his face he[?] lifted up to me and his eyes shone like the sun[
> this youth is a fire, and he[—(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 5, 12–13

Here, as in *1 Enoch,* Noah does not resemble earthly beings but has an altogether angelic aspect, one that makes his father afraid. Note finally that a rabbinic version of the motif of Noah's miraculous appearance held that he was born already circumcised: *Midrash ha-Gadol,* Gen. 5:29.

Doubts about Paternity: Lamech's attempts to verify that Noah is indeed his own son are reminiscent of the motif of *Cain's* miraculous appearance at birth (Chapter 4, *OR,* "Cain's Lustrous Face"); perhaps the latter developed in imitation of this interpretation of Noah's birth. In the case of Cain, his strange appearance was due to his angelic parentage—he was *not* Adam's son. In the case of Noah, the boy's father suspects that this may not be his son, and that is what leads Lamech to seek advice. Enoch tells Methuselah:

> And now make known to your son Lamech that the one who had been born is truly his son. And call his name Noah, for he will be a remnant for you.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 106:8

This tale of Lamech's doubts underlies the somewhat damaged account of the *Genesis Apocryphon* column 2 (see above, "Fornication or Uncleanness Caused the Flood").

Only in His Generation: A curious passage in *Jubilees* is related to this motif:

> To all who corrupted their ways and their plan [their "thought" à la Gen. 6:5] before the flood no favor was shown except to Noah alone, because favor was shown to him **for the sake of his children** whom he saved from the flood waters **for his sake** because his mind was righteous in all his ways, as it had been commanded concerning him. He did not transgress from anything that had been ordained for him. —*Jubilees* 5:19

In the above form, this passage seems to say two contradictory things: Noah was saved only so as to allow his children to survive (and, presumably, populate the earth after the flood), but Noah was saved for his own sake, because he was righteous. It may be that this sentence in fact represents an awkward combination of the two contrary motifs surveyed earlier, "Noah the Righteous" and "Only in His Generation." Incidentally, the end of this passage should apparently be understood as follows: Noah's "heart" (rendered here as "mind") was "righteous in all its ways with regard to what had been commanded to him. He did not deviate from

anything that had been ordained for him." Perhaps this formulation in itself seeks to soften "Noah the Righteous" and so the contradiction between it and the other motif, for Noah's righteousness is thus being defined as, merely, not violating the commandments given to him.

The *Genesis Apocryphon,* a text notably dependent in other respects on *Jubilees,* apparently presents the image of an altogether righteous and unblemished Noah. Column 6 of that text had, until recently, been quite illegible, but new technology has allowed the restoration of a good part of it; see Morgenstern et al., "The Hitherto Unpublished Columns." In the restored portion, Noah's great righteousness is stressed; his role as a prophet and preacher of righteousness is also adumbrated.

Noah Was Younger: A text from the Dead Sea Scrolls cited earlier asserts:

> In the four hundred and eightieth year of Noah's life, their end-time was made known to Noah, for God said: My spirit will not abide in mankind forever. Let their days be cut short—one hundred and twenty years until the time of the flood. —(4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* col. 1:1–3

Here again, the 120 years are the time between God's warning about the flood and its actual arrival. But where did this author get the idea that Noah was exactly 480? This figure seems to contradict the Bible itself, which mentions Noah's age as 500 in Gen. 5:32, apparently some time *before* God's warning about the 120 years, which occurs in Gen. 6:3. He should have been older than 500 when God gave his warning. However, this author was apparently obliged to conclude that the events of Gen. 5:32 came *after* Gen. 6:3. The reason is simple. The Bible says elsewhere that Noah was 600 years old at the time of the flood (Gen. 7:6). If God's warning came 120 years in advance of that, Noah must have been 480 at the time. Here then was one striking demonstration (among others) that the Bible did not always present events in chronological order.

Shem Was Noah's Oldest Son—or Was It Japhet? The biblical evidence is somewhat equivocal. Noah's three sons are always listed as "Shem, Ham, and Japhet." Normally, this would indicate that Shem was the oldest. However, in the genealogies of Genesis 10, the descendants of Japhet appear first, then those of Ham, and only after these the descendants of Shem. (The same is true in 1 Chron. 1:5–17.) So perhaps Japhet is the oldest. In Gen. 10:21, Shem is referred to as *ăḥi yepet haggādôl.* Once again, the Hebrew is ambiguous; this phrase could mean either "the older brother of Japhet" or "the brother of Japhet, the oldest." The ambiguity had to be resolved by the translators of this verse into Greek, and in the Septuagint Japhet is thus unequivocally the older brother. (The Greek translation of Symmachus likewise holds Japhet to be the oldest brother.) *Genesis Rabba* 37:7 also says that Japhet was the oldest son on the basis of Gen. 11:10; compare b. Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 69a. In contrast, *Jubilees* 4:33 expressly states that Shem was born before Ham and Ham before Japhet, and that Shem is the firstborn is likewise the opinion of *Pirqei R. Eliezer* 8:14 and *Aggadat Bereshit* 42, as well as of Jerome's Vulgate. A section of the *Genesis Apocryphon* recently read by Jonas Greenfield with enhanced

lighting has yielded the phrase *lĕšēm bĕrî rabba'*, "to Shem my oldest son" (see Beyer, *Aramäichen Texte,* 68). The *Apocalypse of Adam* 4:1 suggests the birth order Ham, Japhet, and Shem. Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 1:108–111) has the order Shem, Japhet, and Ham, apparently because of the reference to Ham as "his youngest son" (Gen. 9:24; see Ephraem below). The same reference was understood by other exegetes as "small in merit." See Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 74; *Genesis Rabba,* 36:7. See also Ginzberg, *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern,* 89; Aptowitzer, "Malkizedek," 96 n. 1.

How Long a Flood? There were different traditions concerning the duration of the flood. According to the Septuagint, the flood lasted exactly one year; similarly, *1 Enoch* 106:15 asserts that "there will be a deluge and there will be great destruction *for one year.*" However, the traditional Hebrew text asserts that the flood lasted one year and 10 (or 11) days. (This would apparently reflect the difference between twelve lunar months—which make for a lunar year of 354 days—and a solar year of 365 days, or a *Jubilees*/Qumran year of 364 days.) The Qumran text (4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* states that Noah left the ark "after a full year, three hundred and sixty four days." *Seder Olam* declares that the flood lasted exactly "twelve full months and eleven days" (*Seder Olam* 4). On this see Lim, "The Chronology of the Flood Story," and Bernstein, "4Q252: From Rewritten Bible to Biblical Commentary"; note also Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 2:45.

They Saw the Rainbow: After the flood ended, God reassured Noah and his descendants about the future:

> And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Myself and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations. I am setting my [rain]bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. And it shall be, when I bring clouds over the earth, the bow will be seen in the clouds. And I will remember my covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters will no longer cause a flood to destroy all flesh."
>
> —Gen. 9:12–15

To the ordinary reader, this looks like a general pronouncement about future rainstorms: from now on, God was saying, whenever it rains there will be a rainbow to remind Me of My covenant not to destroy all flesh. To at least one ancient reader, however, the passage was troubling. After all, rainbows do not appear every time it rains! For that reason, Pseudo-Philo preferred to think that God's words were not a general pronouncement but a specific prediction: I am setting my (rain)bow in the cloud, and sometime soon hereafter, I plan on bringing clouds over the earth. On that occasion, the bow will be seen in the clouds, and ever afterward, I will remember my covenant. And so it was:

> [After the flood, the sons of Japhet] began to work the land and to sow upon it. But since the earth was dry, its inhabitants cried out to God and He heard

> them and gave plentious rain. And it came to pass, when the rain fell upon the earth, that the bow appeared in a cloud. And the inhabitants of the earth saw the memorial [that is, sign] of the covenant and they fell on their faces and offered whole burnt offerings to the Lord.
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 4:5

Ham Was Guilty of More: After the flood, Noah and his sons left the ark and Noah became a farmer.

> He planted a vineyard, and he drank of the wine and became drunk; and he lay uncovered in his tent. Then Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside . . . When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan [Ham's son], a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."
>
> — Gen. 9:20–25

This incident was highly puzzling to ancient readers. What had Ham done that was so bad? If he saw Noah's nakedness, was that not Noah's fault for having become drunk and lain uncovered? Moreover, why did Noah subsequently curse Ham's son instead of cursing Ham himself?

Many ancient interpreters suggested that Ham was in fact guilty of more than the Bible had said openly. At a minimum, he was indiscrete in saying what he said:

> Then Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers **in the street.**[36]
>
> — *Targum Onqelos, Neophyti,* Peshitta, *Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 9:22

Perhaps being held up to public mockery was what angered Noah so much. Similarly:

> And while he [Noah] was asleep, his shame was uncovered. Ham laughed at his father's shame and **did not cover it,** but laughed about it and mocked.
>
> — *Cave of Treasures* (E) 21:3

But the Bible itself seems to suggest that Ham had done something *to* his father: "When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done *to him* . . ." What is more, if Noah could tell as soon as he awoke that something had been done to him, it only seemed reasonable to suppose that the thing in question had left some physical mark. Some sources seem to have understood that Ham committed a homosexual act: three later translations of the Bible into Greek (those of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion) all replace the word "see" in Gen. 9:22 with a Greek word sometimes used to denote homosexual relations (*askhēmosunē,* "shameful behavior"). From the second century C.E. on, however, another motif appears, according to which Ham castrasted his father (to which various mythological parallels have been adduced). This motif is found in Theophilus of Antioch

36. In truth, biblical *ḥûṣ* in the plural does indeed sometimes mean "streets" or "marketplace," so that these two meanings are not distant in any case; see also *Genesis Rabba* 44:12.

as well as in b. *Sanhedrin* 70a, *Genesis Rabba* 36:7, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 9:24. On all this see Baumgarten, "Myth and Midrash: Gen. 9:20–29." Note also the clever defense of Noah's drunkenness in Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 7:1–2, discussed in Brock, "Jewish Traditions," 219.

But why should Canaan have been punished instead of Ham? Some thought Canaan must also have been guilty of something:

> Why did [the Bible] not say straightforwardly: "Ham saw his father's nakedness" instead of "Ham the father of Canaan saw his father's nakedness"? [The text] here accused the son by means of the father and the father by means of the son, for the two of them together had acted foolishly and wrongly and committed other sins.
>
> — Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 2:70 (see also 2:65, 77)

> And he lay uncovered in his tent, and **Canaan** entered and saw and went out and told his father. Then Ham went in and and discovered his father's nakedness and did not take to mind the commandment to honor one's father, but went out and told his two brothers in the street as one who mocks his father. — *Pirqei R. Eliezer* 23

> And why was Canaan punished for Ham's misdeed? When he grew bigger in size, Satan entered into him and became his teacher in sin.
>
> — *Cave of Treasures* (E) 21

Another possibility was that Ham could not be cursed because he had already been blessed: the Bible reports that God "blessed Noah *and his sons*" (Gen. 9:1).

> He did not curse Ham, but [cursed] his son instead, since God had blessed the sons of Noah. — (4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* 2:6–7

> R. Judah said: Since it is written "And God blessed Noah and his sons" (Gen. 9:1) and a curse cannot be in the same place as a blessing, therefore "And he said, 'Cursed is Canaan.'" — *Genesis Rabba* 36:7

> There are those who say that since Ham was blessed with those who had gone into the ark and with those who had then gone out, therefore Noah did not curse him . . . Others say that since the text says, "Noah knew what his youngest son had done to him" (Gen. 9:25), it is clear that this was not Ham, for Ham was the middle, not the youngest son. For that reason they say that this "youngest" son was in fact Canaan.
>
> — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 7:3

Somewhat similarly:

> Noah, on learning what had passed, invoked a blessing on his other sons, but cursed—not Ham himself, because of his nearness of kin, but his posterity. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:142

See in this connection Bernstein, "4Q252: From Rewritten Bible to Biblical Commentary."

Noah's Granddaughters: Recently published improved readings of column 12 of the *Genesis Apocryphon* have indicated that this text devoted attention to a topic neglected in the Bible, Noah's granddaughters. According to this text, Noah's son Shem had five daughters to match the five sons mentioned in Gen.10:22, while Ham had seven daughters in addition to his four sons (the latter mentioned in Gen. 10:6) and Japhet four daughters in addition to his seven sons (Gen. 10:2). In other words, after the earth's "fresh start" following the flood, the next generation of Noah's descendants consisted of exactly sixteen males and sixteen females. The significance of this specification is not difficult to guess: not only did the author of the *Genesis Apocryphon* seek to account for the existence of females to whom Noah's grandsons could be married, but he wished to make it plain that the individuals involved were all monogamous and did not indulge in the polygamy practiced by Lamech (Gen. 4:19) before the flood. VanderKam, "The Granddaughters and Grandsons of Noah," has suggested that the numbers are meant to indicate that Shem's sons married Shem's daughters, thus maintaining the purity of that superior line, while the daughters and sons of Ham and Japhet intermarried among themselves. However, this seems most unlikely: surely the author of this text (an appreciative reader of *Jubilees*) would not have gone out of his way to create incestuous unions where the Bible implied nothing of the kind. (See also the improved reading of *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 6, 8–9.)

The Laws of Noah's Sons (Noahide Laws): For Jews, the most important event in their history was the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, which granted to them the sacred laws by which life was to be lived. But that event did not take place until after the Exodus from Egypt. It seemed only reasonable that all the human beings who lived during the centuries that preceded the giving of the Torah must have had some sort of rudimentary set of do's and don'ts; for would God have left humanity without such a guide? And there certainly was ample evidence that some such guide had been given. Many biblical heroes who lived before the giving of the Torah allude to certain divine laws. Joseph, for example, refuses his mistress's adulterous advances by telling her that adultery is a sin against God (Gen. 39:9); how did he know? Similarly, God praises Abraham for having kept "my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my teachings" (Gen. 26:5); does not this list suggest that all different sorts of divine laws were known to Abraham? And apart from biblical heroes like Joseph or Abraham, there were the other nations of the earth to whom the Torah had *not* been given. Did that mean that God did not care about the rest of humanity, that He had not given them even some minimal set of divine laws?

Those who supposed that there must have been some such minimal law code might naturally look for hints of it elsewhere in the Bible, particularly in the story of Noah, since the survivors of the flood—Noah and his family—were then the only human beings alive. A set of laws promulgated by God to them would, in effect, be binding on *all* of humanity. Unfortunately, the biblical text contained no such legal code in the story of Noah. But there is a passage that did seem to contain at least one

or two fundamental laws in it. After the waters have receded, God blesses Noah and his sons and grants them dominion over all living creatures. But then He adds this condition:

> Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, its blood. And likewise I will demand blood in payment for human lives. I will demand it from any animal and from any human being; I will demand human life from one man for another's. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in God's very likeness did He make man. —Gen. 9:4–6

Here there seemed to be, most prominently, a prohibition against murder, "I will demand blood in payment for human lives." It was certainly a universal prohibition, since it was given to Noah and his sons. But why was the passage so wordy? It seemed to be saying the same thing two or three times, while Israel's ancient practice in interpreting laws was to give special weight to each word.

So it came about that many interpreters sought to read *other* laws by implication into this solemn charge to Noah and his sons. For example, the traditional Hebrew text says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, *by man* shall his blood be shed." Does this not imply that human beings are to administer capital punishment for murder? If so, not only is murder being prohibited; human beings are also being ordered to *punish* murder themselves, that is, to set up some sort of court system to determine guilt and mete out the required punishment. Thus this law also contains a hidden requirement for all human beings to establish courts of law. But there are other ways of interpreting it. For the same words could also be rendered, "Whoever sheds man's blood *in a man* . . ." This reading might be interpreted as referring specifically to strangulation, a form of murder in which the blood is shed "internally," without the outward signs of murder. Or the same phrase could be taken as outlawing abortion, shedding the blood of a person-within-a-person (since the Hebrew "man" here may be generic, either male or female). And then, of course, the first sentence of the passage, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, its blood," was likewise scrutinized: did it not imply that animals could only be eaten if they are properly slaughtered and their blood drained, rather than being killed any old way? But the same words could also be read as prohibiting the taking of a limb from a living animal, "flesh with its life, its blood [still in it]." Still other laws, with no evident connection to the text, came to be associated with this passage.

Thus it happened that this passage came to be understood as setting forth some set of basic laws, the "laws of Noah's sons" (or "Noahide laws") given to all mankind. The exact list of laws given varies among ancient sources.

> [After the flood] Noah began to prescribe for his grandsons the ordinances and the commandments, every statute which he knew. He testified to [that is, solemnly warned] his sons to do justice, and cover the shame of their bodies, bless their Creator, honor father and mother, and love one another, and keep themselves from fornication and uncleanness and all injustice.
>
> —*Jubilees* 7:20–21

> The descendants of Noah were commanded [to keep] seven commandments, [those] concerning [the establishment of a set of] laws and [forbidding] idolatry and cursing with the name [of God] and forbidden unions and murder and theft and eating a limb from a living animal.
>
> —Tosefta *Abodah Zarah* 8:4 (also b. *Sanhedrin* 56a)

Consider in this connection:

> He [God] concluded three covenants with Noah: First, that they [his descendants] not eat blood, another of retaliation, that He would seek out [avenge] their blood from animals; and another, that a murderer be killed.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary in Genesis* 6:14

It has been suggested (see Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity,* 508) that the *Didache* contains a reminiscence of five of the Noahide laws:

> My children, flee from every evil thing and what resembles it. Be not prone to anger, for anger leads to **murder.** Be not lustful, for lust leads to **adultery.** Be not a diviner of omens, since it leads to **idolatry.** Be not a liar, for lying leads to **theft.** Be not one who complains, since this leads to **blasphemy.**
>
> —*Didache* 3:1–6

This passage is reminiscent of another rabbinic catalog of "natural law":

> Our Rabbis taught: "And you shall perform my statutes . . ." [Lev. 18:4]. [These are] commandments which, even if they were not written down [in the Torah], should by right have been written, and these are they: **idolatry, fornication, murder, theft, and blessing [cursing] the name of God.**
>
> —*Sifra, Aḥarei Mot,* b. *Yoma* 67b

It may be that this same tradition had a role in the laws to be required of the first non-Jews who wished to join the Jewish sect that was later to become Christianity:

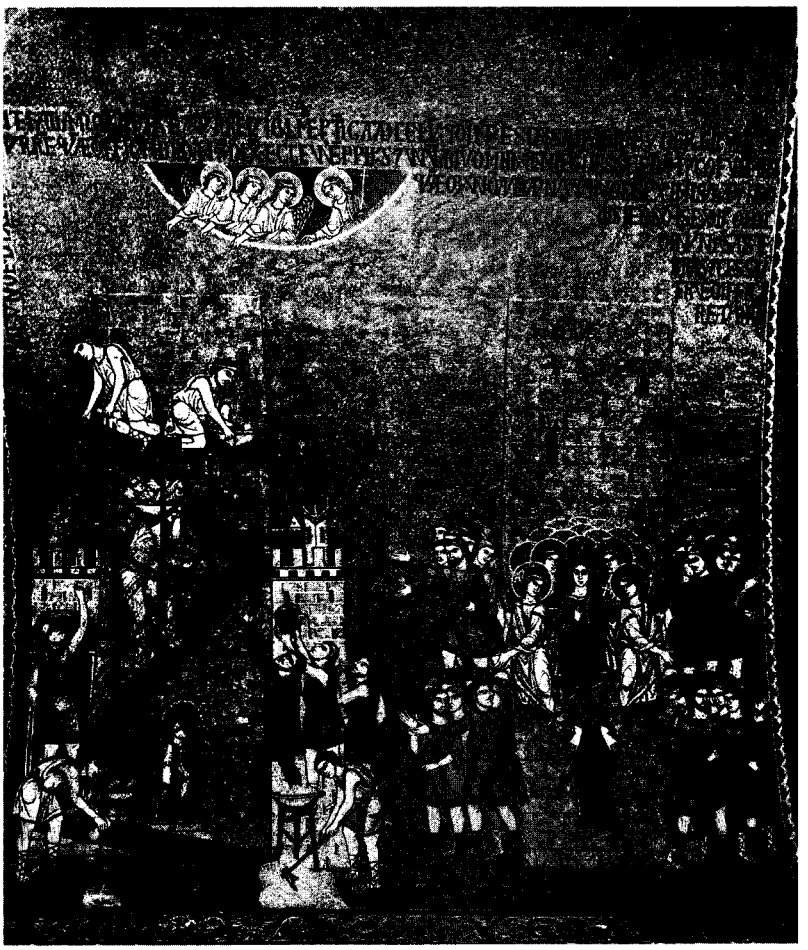
> Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.
>
> —Acts 15:19 (cf. 15:29 and 21:25)

See also Flusser and Safrai, "Das Aposteldekret und die Noachitischen Gebote"; Van de Sandt, "Didache 3:1–6"; Derrett, *"Beḥuqei hagoyim."* Another tradition associates the promulgation of basic laws back to the time of Adam; *Seder Olam* chapter 4 seems to represent a fusion of these two traditions, asserting that of the ten specific commandments referred to by Exod. 15:25, "seven had been commanded to the sons of Noah," basing this assertion, however, not on Gen. 9:4–6 but on Gen. 2:16, the instructions given to Adam in Eden. See also Novack, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism.*

6

The Tower of Babel

(GENESIS 11:1–9)



God and angels (right) went down to thwart the builders.

The Tower of Babel

(GENESIS 11:1–9)

❖ ❖ ❖

After the flood, Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet, all had children, and humanity increased and prospered. At this time "the whole earth was of one speech and one language" (Gen. 11:1). The people came to the land of Shinar and there they set out to build a great city with a high tower in it. God, however, was displeased with the idea and came down to frustrate their plans. He confused their speech, so that they could no longer understand one another, and they left off building the city and were scattered across the earth. The city was called Babel.

THE BRIEF STORY of the tower of Babel raised a number of questions in the mind of interpreters, but perhaps the most troubling was that of God's reaction to the project. After all, what was wrong about what the builders had tried to do? Their plans did not seem to have anything particularly wicked about them:

> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." —Gen. 11:4

Ancient interpreters felt obliged to find something in these words that might justify the divine punishment that followed.

They Tried to Storm Heaven

Building a city certainly was not objectionable in itself. The only suspicious detail seemed to be the mention of the proposed tower, especially one so tall that its top would reach the heavens. And so the "city" part of this building project receded into the background: for interpreters, the tower seemed to be the whole point (that is why we still refer to the whole story as "the *tower* of Babel"), and its very height was assumed to be its offensive feature. The purpose of the tower came to be understood (although this is nowhere stated in the Bible itself) as the storming of heaven, an attempt by human beings to build a structure so tall that they could use it to climb up to the sky. A number of early sources reflect this tradition:

> For they [the descendants of Noah] had emigrated from the land of Ararat [where the ark had landed] toward the east, to Shinar, and . . . they built the city and the tower, saying, "**Let us ascend on it into heaven.**"
>
> —*Jubilees* 10:19

They were all of one language
and they **wanted to go up to starry heaven.**

— *Sibylline Oracles* 3:99–100

[Later, the angel says:] "And they [these builders of the tower] had taken an auger, and **sought to pierce the heaven**, saying, 'Let us see whether the heaven is made of clay, or of brass, or of iron.' When God saw this He did not permit them, but smote them with blindness and confusion of speech."

— *3 Baruch* 3:7–8

They said: Let us build a tower and climb to the firmament and **strike it with hatchets** until its waters flow forth. — b. *Sanhedrin* 109a

A War against God

Some saw the purpose as, more specifically, the storming of heaven as part of a war against God:

He who is zealous for earthly and corruptible things always fights against and makes **war** on heavenly things and praiseworthy and wonderful natures, and builds walls and towers on earth **against heaven.**

— Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 2:82

[An angel said to Baruch:] "These are the ones who built the tower of the **war against God**, and the Lord removed them." — *3 Baruch* (Greek) 2:7

And they said: Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach to the heavens, and let us make for ourselves at its top an idol and we will put a sword in its hand, and it will **make war** against Him.

— *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 11:4

If they [the builders] **waged war** with the Height, how much more shall they conquer him whose warfare is on earth? — Ephraem, *Nisibene Hymns* 41.2

They built a tower and said, "Come, let us split the firmament to make **war** against it." — (Anonymous) Day of Atonement *'Abodah*

Nimrod Built It

Of course, it is no mean feat to build a tower that reaches all the way to heaven. If God even took their plan to reach heaven seriously, the builders themselves must have been extraordinary people. Unfortunately, the Bible does not say who these builders were. But it contained one clue for ancient interpreters: it said *where* the tower was built, "in the land of Shinar," and that the particular place of the tower was later called Babel because there "the Lord confused [*bālal*] the language of all the earth." Now the names of both Shinar and Babel are in fact mentioned in the previous chapter, just in passing, in connection with the descendants of Noah's son Ham:

> The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan . . . Cush was the father of Nimrod; he [Nimrod] began to be a mighty man on earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord." The beginning of his kingdom was **Babel**, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of **Shinar**. —Gen. 10:6–10

The fact that this passage not only mentions Shinar but says that the "beginning" of Nimrod's kingdom was Babel, seemed indisputably to connect Nimrod with the building project. Indeed, it was only reasonable to suppose that Nimrod was something like the leader or sponsor of the project, for why else would the city be called the "beginning of *his* kingdom"? And why else should Nimrod have gone on to found *other* cities, like Erech and Accad, mentioned in the same verse, or Nineveh and the other cities mentioned in Gen. 10:11–12—why else but that he had been forced to abandon Babel because God had frustrated his plans there?

Thus, interpreters determined that Nimrod must have been the one who conceived or commissioned the tower. And precisely for that reason, the rest of the above passage now seemed particularly interesting. For what was the Bible trying to say when it called Nimrod a "mighty man," a "mighty hunter," indeed, "a mighty hunter before the Lord"? These might sound like praiseworthy titles. But two things caused interpreters to view them with suspicion. One was Nimrod's very name. To speakers of Hebrew "Nimrod" seems to come from the root meaning "rebel." A biblical figure named Rebellious was likely to be some sort of villain. And the second, of course, was the now-established "fact" of Nimrod's involvement in the building of the tower—for the tower had obviously met with God's disapproval. Both the story itself and the name suggested that Nimrod was some sort of rebel against God, a challenger of divine authority, a "mighty hunter *before* [and perhaps a would-be snarer *of*, a hunter *against*] the Lord." A number of sources therefore make Nimrod out to be a wicked character, distinguished by his arrogance and challenging attitude toward God, some specifically in connection with the tower-building project:

> But those things that are here [on earth] are against those things which are there [in heaven]. For this reason it is not ineptly said [that **Nimrod** was] "a giant *before* God" [Gen. 10:9] which clearly [means] *in opposition* to the Deity. —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 2:82

> He began to be violent before the Lord. —Symmachus Gen. 10:8

> Now Cush became the father of Nimrod. He began to be **arrogant** before the Lord.[1]

1. This is Pseudo-Philo's "translation" (a reinterpretation, really) of Gen. 10:8, "Cush was the father of Nimrod; he [Nimrod] *began to be a mighty man* on earth." Interestingly, in Pseudo-Philo's account, Nimrod seems to play some role in the building of the tower (*Biblical Antiquities* 6:13–14), but the leader there is named Iectan (who may be identical with the Joktan of Gen. 10:25–29).

And Fenech and **Nimrod** said to Joktan [Iectan], "Where are the men whom you locked up [for refusing to build the tower]?"

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 4:7, 6:13

Nimrod, the grandson of Ham the son of Noah, an **audacious** man endowed with innate force, incited the people to insolence and contempt toward God . . . Lest God seek once again to flood the earth . . . he would build a tower higher than the water would be able to reach up to, and so seek to avenge the destruction of their ancestors.[2]

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:113–114

He was mighty in sinning before the Lord; therefore it is said "like Nimrod, a mighty man in sinning before the Lord." —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 10:9

He was a mighty man, powerful in hunting and mighty in sinning before the Lord. He used to entrap human beings through their speech and say to them: Abandon the [religious] statutes of Shem and adopt the statutes of Nimrod. For this reason it is said "Like Nimrod the mighty one"—mighty in hunting [people] and mighty in sinning before the Lord.[3]

—*Fragment Targum* Gen. 10:9

[God said:] "There were three kings who became emboldened before Me [until] I revealed Myself in My judgments and set their names at nought. Nimrod, when he became emboldened with the army of the Cushites, from the beginning of his boldness I revealed Myself and killed him."

—*Tibat Marqa* 218b–219a

Nimrod the son of Cush was the first to seize tyrannical power, [previously] unused, over the people and he ruled in Babylon, which was called Babel because there the speech of those who were building the tower became confused. —Jerome, *Hebrew Questions in Genesis* 10:8

It is humility that builds a safe and true path to heaven, raising aloft the heart towards God—not *against* God, in the way that that same giant [Nimrod] was said to be a hunter "against God" [Gen. 10:9] . . . He and his people thus erected a tower against God, by which is signified irreligious arrogance. —Augustine, *City of God* 16.4

Nimrod said to his people: Come, let us build for ourselves a great city and let us settle therein, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth as the earlier people, and let us build a great tower in its midst. We will ascend

2. The tradition presented by Josephus is obviously trying to find some connection between the story of the tower and the story of the flood that preceded it. And it does: Nimrod builds the tall tower as protection against God's bringing another flood. In this way, humanity will not need to fear further divine punishment.

3. The idea that the victims of Nimrod's "hunting" were actually human beings whom he deceived may be borrowed here from a similar motif about Esau. See Chapter 11.

> to heaven, for God's power is only over water [to bring a flood], and we shall thus gain great fame in the land. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 24

The Builders Were Giants

If Nimrod was indeed behind the building of the tower, then there was a further point of interest in the biblical description of him in Gen. 10:6–10 (cited above). Some interpreters thought that the Bible's calling Nimrod mighty in the phrases "mighty man" and "mighty hunter" was intended to suggest something more than mere physical strength: it seemed to be implying something about his size as well. As a matter of fact, the same word, "mighty" *(gibbor),* had been used of the offspring of the Nephilim in Gen. 6:4. If the Nephilim were giants,[4] and if the word "mighty" is used to describe both their offspring and Nimrod, then perhaps indeed this word meant something like "mighty in size," gigantic. This was just how the ancient Greek translators rendered these phrases:

> And [Cush] begot Nimrod; he began to be a **giant** upon the earth. He was a **giant** hunter before the Lord God. — Septuagint Gen. 10:8–9

If Nimrod was a giant, one can better understand how a tower built by him could be a real threat and could have brought about the divine response that it did. For a giant, or a group of giants, might indeed build an enormous tower, perhaps even one reaching all the way to heaven:

> The Assyrian city of Babylon was first founded by those who escaped the flood. They were giants, and they built the tower well known in history. When the tower was destroyed by God's power, these giants were scattered over the whole earth.
>
> — (Pseudo-)Eupolemus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:17:2–3)

Apparently their great height had not only enabled these giants to build a very tall tower, but it had previously enabled them to "escape" the great flood without having recourse to Noah's ark—presumably, they were simply tall enough to keep their heads above the waters. Similarly,

> While these giants were living in Babylonia, they were destroyed by the gods because of their wickedness. One of them, Belus, escaped death and came to dwell in Babylon. There he built a tower and lived in it. It was named Belus, after Belus who built it.
>
> — "Anonymous writings" (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:18:2)

The Tower Lies in Ruins

There remained only to ask what finally happened to the tower, which, according to verse 5, had not only been started but perhaps even completed ("And the Lord came

4. See Chapter 5.

down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men *had built*").[5] The Bible says nothing of its fate. God makes the speech of the builders unintelligible and scatters them over the face of the earth, but the tower itself is not mentioned again, and one might presume from the text that God left it standing where it was.

But, surely, God would not have simply left a serviceable tower undisturbed, ready for the next group of sinners to use! Considering this question, interpreters noted God's own words just before stopping the project:

> And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people and they all have one language, and this is what **they have begun** to make." —Gen. 11:6

The indicated phrase implied that the tower had only been *started.* Interpreters thus concluded that the tower was left as an unfinished monument, a view that seemed to confirm the claim of some that this or that half-destroyed or unfinished structure in the ancient Near East was in fact the abandoned tower. Indeed, if the tower now lay in ruins, perhaps it had not merely been abandoned, but destroyed:

> And the Lord sent a wind against the tower and overthrew it to the ground. It is now between Asshur and Babylon in the land of Shinar. He named it the Collapse.[6] —*Jubilees* 10:26

> But immediately the Immortal One imposed a great compulsion
> on the winds. Then the winds **cast down the great tower**
> from on high, and stirred up strife for mortals among themselves.
> Therefore humans gave the city the name Babylon.
> But when the tower fell, and the tongues of men
> were diversified by various sounds, the whole
> earth of humans was filled with fragmenting kingdoms.
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 3:101–107

> The tongues
> of all were loosed, but on them came the wrath
> of the Most High God, hurled down, and the wondrous tower fell.
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 11:10–13

> Said R. Ḥiyya bar Abba: Of the tower that they made, one third was burned, one third was swallowed up, and one third is still standing. Anyone who climbs to its top can see the date trees of Jericho [and they look] like grasshoppers. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Noaḥ* 18

5. The same phrase, however, might equally well be understood as "were building" without indicating whether it was in fact complete. See below.

6. This seems to reflect a play on the name "Shinar," apparently here interpreted as "shake, overthrow." Similarly, Philo, *Confusion of Tongues* 68, explains the name as "shaking out"; see also b. Talmud *Zebaḥim* 113b, and cf. j. *Berakhot* 4:7b (bottom). Origen says "a shaking of teeth," an explanation representing two distinct Hebrew words, *šn* ("tooth") and *n'r* ("shake").

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In short: The real crime involved in the building project was the tower itself, which was intended for the purpose of "storming heaven" or some related evil desire. For this plan and the arrogant attitude underlying it the builders were punished. Their leader was Nimrod. He himself was a wicked giant and a rebel against God; he may have been aided by other giants. As a result of this deed, the people themselves were scattered and their great tower was cast down to the ground.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Tower of Babel

The "One Language" Was Hebrew: The story of the tower begins with the assertion that the whole earth was "of one language and one speech." But the Bible does not say what that one language was. Most early interpreters assumed that that language was Hebrew, since (among other reasons) Scripture, written in Hebrew, purports to give the very words through which God created the world, addressed Adam and Eve, and so forth. Thus, the first language was Hebrew:

> And all the inhabitants of the earth were of one tongue and one speech and in the language of the temple they used to converse, for through it had the world been created in the beginning.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* Gen. 11:1

> And the whole earth was of one speech . . . for they spoke the language of the Sole One of the world [that is, God]. — j. *Megillah* 1:11

> For it is written that there was at first one language [common] to all people . . . and that language is called Hebrew. — Augustine, *City of God* 16.11

> In the language by which the world was created
> They [the generation of the tower] did speak.
>
> — Yannai, *Piyyuṭim* (5:5 in Zulay edition p. 12; 9:5 in Rabinowicz edition p. 112)

> What was the language which they spoke? The holy tongue [Hebrew], by which the world was created. — *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Buber edition), *Noaḥ* 28a

> For until that time [of the tower incident] the sacred Hebrew tongue that had been given to humankind held sway.
>
> — *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitiones* 1:30

(Note that Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5:30, states that all people "used one divine language," but he does not identify the language there as Hebrew. Hebrew's great antiquity, and priority to Aramaic at least, is implied by Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 31:47.)

The same idea is reflected in the book of *Jubilees*, where, interestingly, Abraham has to be *taught* the Hebrew language, since it—the original language—had become confused and forgotten after Babel. The job of teaching him is assigned to the angel who is the speaker of *Jubilees:*

> And the Lord God said, "Open his mouth and his ears, that he may hear and speak with his mouth, with the language which has been revealed." For it had ceased from the mouths of all humanity from the day of the overthrow [of Babel]. And I opened his mouth and his ears and his lips, and I began to speak with him in Hebrew, the tongue of creation. — *Jubilees* 12:25–26

(Note that Abraham is called "Abram the Hebrew" in Gen. 14:13; this is explained as indicating that he *spoke* Hebrew in *Genesis Rabba* 41[42]:8.)

The notion that Hebrew was the original language and, thus, the language that had been given by God to humanity, was extremely important for subsequent thinking about many issues connected with language. For if Hebrew alone was the "sacred tongue," and if it was in fact the language of creation and the language of heaven, then all other languages had to be less than sacred. At the same time, the story of the tower implied that Aramaic, Arabic, Greek, Latin, the various European vernaculars and so forth were all merely deviations or degenerate forms of Hebrew—and this idea did much to shape the way people thought about the origin and interrelationship of languages for centuries.

It should also be noted, however, that *some* ancient interpreters held out the belief that the original language had in fact been Aramaic/Syriac:

> From Adam until the tower, they spoke this language, Syriac, which is the most wide[spread] and largest of languages; it is called Aramaic, and it is the queen of all languages. Earlier writers have been wrong to say that Hebrew was the first, and in this they have introduced a mistake into their writing. For all the languages in the world are derived from Syriac.
>
> —(Syriac) *Cave of Treasures* (W) 24

Others held that Greek was the first. See further Charles, *APOT* 2:17 n; Ginzberg, *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern,* 91–94; Shinan, "Midrashic Parallels to Targumic Traditions," esp. 189; Rabinowicz, *Maḥzor Piyyuṭei Yannai,* 112; Winston, "Aspects of Philo's Linguistic Theory"; Adler, "Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha," 152–154.

The origin of the expression "holy tongue" as a synonym for Hebrew is unknown. It appears in a Qumran text, (4Q464) *Apocryphon*^{b}; see Eshel and Stone, "The Holy Tongue at the End of Days." It seems to me that both the targumic phrase "language of the temple" (on which see Shinan, *The Embroidered Targum,* 113–115) and the Jerusalem Talmud's "language of the Sole One of the world" are later attempts to explain the meaning of this (by then) long-established expression[7] and should not be taken seriously as reflecting its original sense.

Jewish sources generally speak of the "seventy languages" that resulted from the confusion of speech at Babel. The conception of seventy languages or peoples has ancient roots and was connected with the exegesis of other biblical verses, principally Deut. 32:8. It may be that *Jubilees* 44:34, which mentions the "seventy nations" immediately after having numbered Jacob's family entering Egypt at seventy souls, sought to establish some correspondence between the two numbers, as later Jewish exegetes did explicitly. Indeed, perhaps the original text read something like: "and therefore were established seventy nations." (For more on the seventy languages, see Kugel, "Two Introductions," 95–100.) Note in connection with Deut. 32:8:

7. In the case of "language of the Sole One of the world," it may be that the intention is likewise to explain the apparent pleonasm of Gen. 11:1, "one language and one speech," the former phrase being reinterpreted as "language of the One [Divinity]."

> He appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord's own portion.
> —Sir. 17:17

At the same time, a tradition of seventy-two languages is well attested in later writings, based on a (minimalist) head count of the peoples named in Genesis 10:

> From Shem, and with Shem [himself], there were twenty-seven nations; the total of all the nations was thus seventy-two. Each one of them had its own separate people and language and place.
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 8:1

> And the seventy-two princes began to build the tower, and God made one tongue into seventy-two. —(Armenian) Story of Noah, in Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to the Patriarchs and Prophets*, 93

One exhaustive study of the influence of the Bible on later ideas about language is Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel.*

One Language and One Plan: The Bible says that, before the building of the tower, the earth was "of one language and one speech" (literally, "single words"). This seemed somewhat repetitious—what did "one speech" mean if not one language? Some interpreters concluded that the second phrase meant that people (or at least some people) also shared the same *ideas,* that is, the phrase "one speech" referred to the plan to build the tower:

> When the nations in their **single-minded** wickedness were put to confusion . . . —Wisd. 10:5

> We suggest then that by the words "the earth was all one lip and one voice" [Septuagint Gen. 11:1] is meant a **consonance of evil deeds** great and innumerable. —Philo, *Confusion of Tongues* 15 (also 83)

> And all the inhabitants of the earth were of one tongue and one speech and **one counsel.** — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 11:1

The same interpretation apparently underlies the retelling in *Jubilees:*

> [God tells the angels:] "Come, let us go down and confuse their tongues so that they do not understand one another and are dispersed into cities and nations and **one plan** no longer remains with them, until the day of judgment." —*Jubilees* 10:22

Changed Faces of Babel: A similar distinction may stand behind another passage relating to the flood:

> However, God divided the languages of the earth's inhabitants when they began to build the tower, and **He changed their faces,** so that no one could recognize his fellow, nor could they each understand the language of their neighbors. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 7:5

There is nothing about God changing the builders' physical appearance in the Bible. However, just before confusing their language, God says, "Behold, they are *one people* and they all have one language" (Gen. 11:6). Some interpreters no doubt wondered how the builders' sudden inability to understand one another could cause them to split up into different peoples; despite the communications problem, could they not still recognize each other as kinsmen and countrymen? Pseudo-Philo thus suggested that God's intervention also had the effect of changing each person's appearance; it was this transformation that enabled them to cease being "one people." Note, in this connection, the later attempt to explain the "single words" of Gen. 11:1 as "unified words." This explanation, found in various rabbinic sources, went on specifically to assert that the generation of the tower builders "loved one another" (*Genesis Rabba* 38:6; see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba* 355 n).

They Tried to Storm Heaven: Interpreters were divided as to the true motive of the tower builders since that motive was not clear from the biblical account. In the creation of the overall motif "They Tried to Storm Heaven" a specific biblical passage outside Genesis 11 may have played a role:

> You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High." —Isa. 14:13–14

As noted earlier (see Chapter 5, *OR*, "Angels Fell"), this passage was apparently significant in regard to the fallen angels and, in particular, the person of Satan as presented by some ancient interpreters. But the notion of ascending to heaven for evil purposes no doubt carried over to the tower of Babel story and helped to explain why the people were punished for the apparently innocent act of building a city.

A passage from the prophet Zephaniah may also have influenced this motif, since it speaks of a time when

> I [God] will change the speech of peoples to a pure speech . . . On that day, you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against Me, for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones. —Zeph. 3:9–11

The apparent mention of a return to "pure" speech, along with the theme of a *rebellion* against God, could not but suggest the Babel story. Zephaniah's subsequent mention of "arrogance" may in turn have influenced some of the texts surveyed above to mention this as one of the builders' prominent characteristics. (This passage in Zephaniah is also alluded to in the Qumran text, [4Q464] *Apocryphon*^{b}.) Ps. 55:9 (some texts, 55:10) mentions "violence and strife" in connection with God's "confus[ing] their tongues"; although the verse does not specifically relate to the Babel narrative, it may also have helped to characterize the builders' lawlessness.

A War against God: Under the general rubric of "They Tried to Storm Heaven" a host of more specific motifs are witnessed in the various excerpts cited in this chapter: the builders stormed heaven so that they might live there, or to discover what heaven was made of, or to tap its water resources, or to establish a defense against future floods. All of these explanations may have developed as simple elaborations of the biblical narrative. And quite apart from them, other texts asserted that the builders' real crime was idolatry, and that the storming of heaven was therefore secondary or irrelevant (on which see below).

However, as discussed, a number of sources suggested rather specifically that the tower was constructed as part of a war against God.[8] What are the exegetical origins of this motif? The Bible's reference to the tower's extraordinary height was no doubt the principal consideration in the development of this idea. Towers themselves were an instrument of war in antiquity, and although this structure was clearly not a *siege*-tower, some military associations doubtless clung to the word. It should be noted as well that when God takes notice of the tower's construction, He says:

> "Behold they are one people and they all have one language, and this is what they have begun to do; and now, nothing that they undertake to do **will be impossible** for them." —Gen. 11:6

The expression "nothing will be impossible" *(lo' yibbaṣēr mēhem)* is a rather rare usage, and this rarity elsewhere led interpreters to connect it with a more common, homonymous root meaning to "prune" or "pluck" (see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 359). But the verb *bṣr* can also mean "fortify" in a military sense and is used prominently in the case of fortified cities *('ārê mibṣār).* It would thus certainly be plausible for an interpreter to understand God's words as meaning "nothing will now be fortified from [= against] them." Although the interpreters just cited do not point specifically to this phrase as the origin of their interpretation, it may be that their various references to making war against God ultimately derive from this understanding of "nothing will be impossible."

They Made an Idol: As for the idea that the purpose of the building project was idolatry, one partial witness to this tradition was seen earlier:

> And they said: Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach to the heavens, and let us make for ourselves at its top an idol and we will put a sword in its hand, and it will make war against Him.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 11:4

This text actually appears to conflate two separate motifs, "They Tried to Storm Heaven" and a quite separate notion that the builders' crime was simply making an idol to worship. The latter motif appears alone elsewhere:

8. Perhaps to be connected to this motif is another passage from the *Sibylline Oracles,* 11:7–10: "[God created] another race/of restless men, who in *opposition to heaven*/built a tower to an awful height."

> "And let us make for ourselves a name" [Gen. 11:4]: It was taught in the academy of R. Ishmael: the word "name" here refers to idolatry.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 38:8[9]

With regard to the targum tradition, it may be that the word "name" *(šēm)* in "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower . . . and let us make a *name* for ourselves" (Gen. 11:4) is being interpreted as if it were instead the word for "there" *(šam)*, since this targum adds in its translation the extra specification "let us make for ourselves *at its top*" (that is to say, "there"). If so, then the text would simply have the builders saying, "Let us make for ourselves *there*, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Make *what* for ourselves? By this interpretation, Scripture had (presumably out of a desire to avoid recording blasphemy) omitted the object of the verb "make," and so our translator has supplied it, "let us make for ourselves at its top an idol."

Genesis Rabba 38:8 (which presents the same idea, that the builders wished to place an idol at the top) asserts that the word *šēm* itself means idol. Behind this statement no doubt stands a long tradition of speculation whose origins may be quite independent of the reading of *šēm* ("name") as *šam*, "there." One further bit of evidence of this tradition is found in Pseudo-Philo's version of the same verse:

> And they said, each to his neighbor, "Let us take bricks and let each of us write **our names** on the bricks and burn them with fire; and whatever is burned through and through will be used for mortar and brick."
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 6:2

In Pseudo-Philo's understanding, the act of building the tower will result, in the most (as it were) concrete sense, in the builders "making a name" for themselves, since the very bricks will bear their names. Later, however, a group of men refuses to participate:

> "We are not casting in bricks, nor are we joining in your scheme. We know the one Lord, and Him we worship." — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 6:4

The clear implication is that making the bricks somehow runs counter to the belief of these men in the one true God—which sounds like the same connection of "name" with idolatry. Perhaps this tradition theorizes that, since so many ancient names (including some names in the Bible) are built around the name of a foreign deity, the builders' proposal to write their own names on the bricks was in reality tantamount to writing the names of foreign gods on the bricks. See Chapter 7, *OR*, "Abraham and the Tower."

Wicked Taskmasters of Babel: A quite separate reason for God's destruction of the tower was that the builders ruthlessly exploited their workers:

> And he [the angel] said: "These are the ones who plotted to build the tower. These whom you see forced many men and women to make bricks. Among

9. See the discussion of manuscript variants of this lemma in Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba*, 358; also, *Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 11:3.

> them, one woman was making bricks in the time of her delivery; they did not permit her to be released, but while making bricks she gave birth. And she carried her child in her cloak and continued making bricks."
>
> —*3 Baruch* (Greek) 3:5

> If anyone fell [from the tower] and died, they would pay no mind to it, but if a brick fell they would weep and say, "Woe is us! How shall another be raised in its place?" —*Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 11:3

This motif was apparently created on the basis of the common mention of bricks *(lĕbēnîm)* here and in the Exodus narrative (Exod. 1:14, 5:7, and so on). Just as there the cruelty of the taskmasters was ultimately punished by God, so too in the case of Babel.

The Builders Were Giants: One of the fragments cited in connection with this motif is attributed by Eusebius to "anonymous writings" concerning the flood:

> In some **anonymous writings** we found that Abraham traced his family to the giants. While these giants were living in Babylonia, they were destroyed by the gods because of their wickedness. One of them, Belus, escaped death and came to dwell in Babylon. There he built a tower and lived in it. It was named Belus, after Belus who built it.
>
> —"Anonymous writings" (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:18:2)

Many modern scholars have attributed this passage, like that found in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:17:2–3, to "Pseudo-Eupolemus"; however, this identification has lately been questioned. See the discussion in Doran's translation in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:873–888; also, Holladay, Fragments, 1:158–159. On the identification of Belus with Nimrod, see Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolymos' Two Greek Fragments," esp. 89–90, and more generally, van der Horst, "Nimrod after the Bible." It is further to be noted that Philo the Epic Poet may speak of Abraham who

> . . . left the splendid enclosure of the **awesome offspring.**
>
> —Philo the Epic Poet (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:20:1)

The reference is far from clear (and even the translation is contested), but this poet seems in any event to be referring to Abraham's departure from Ur in Chaldea. If that place is here called the "enclosure of the *awesome offspring*," then this phrase might arguably refer to the race of giants that built the tower. Such is the conclusion of some recent scholars: see van der Horst, "The Interpretation of the Bible by the Minor Hellenistic Jewish Authors," 526; Holladay, *Poets*, 254; for another reading, Attridge in *OTP* 2:783.

God and the Angels: In Gen. 11:7, when God says, "Come, let us go down and confuse their speech," who was He addressing? As with Gen. 1:26, interpreters did not suppose that this was the "royal we." Instead, they theorized that God was addressing the angels:

> Then the Lord God said to us [angels] . . ., "Come let us go down and confuse their tongues . . ." So the Lord went down and we went down with him. — *Jubilees* 10:22–23

> We should give careful consideration to the question of what is implied by the words which are put into the mouth of God, "Come and let us go down and confuse their tongue there" [Gen. 11:7]. For it is clear that He is conversing with some persons whom He treats as His fellow workers . . . Let us consider what these are. God is one, but He has around Him numberless potencies, which all assist and protect created being . . . There is too, in the air, a sacred company of bodiless souls, commonly called angels."
> — Philo, *Confusion of Tongues* 168, 171, 174

> "Come, and going down let us confuse . . ." [Gen. 11:7]—it is to be understood that this was said to the angels. — Augustine, *City of God* 16.5

> And God said to the seventy angels who stand before him, "Come let us go down and let us confuse their speech." — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 11:7

> A new Qumran fragment:
>
> upo]n the tower and He sen[t
> to] inspect the building [— (4Q243) *Pseudo-Daniel* fragment 10, 2–3

may suggest that God's "Let us go down" was really a polite way of ordering the angels to descend, since the verb "sent" (if this is the proper reading) would imply that God remained in Heaven.

7

Abraham Journeys from Chaldea

(GENESIS 12)

Abraham turns his back on astronomy.

Abraham Journeys from Chaldea

(GENESIS 12)

❖ ❖ ❖

Abraham, a descendant of Noah through his son Shem, lived with his family in the city of Ur in Chaldea. God promised to bless Abraham and make his descendants into a great nation. Having left Ur with his father, Terah, his wife, Sarah, and his nephew Lot, Abraham stayed for a time in Haran and then continued his travels into the land of Canaan. Once there, however, he discovered that there was famine in the land, and he and his wife, Sarah, continued on to Egypt. After an eventful stay there, they returned to Canaan.

ALTHOUGH Abraham's name[1] is mentioned in passing in Gen. 11:27–31, his story really begins with the opening words of chapter 12:

> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country and from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; and I will make your name great, so that it will be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you will I curse, and all the families of the land will be blessed because of you." —Gen. 12:1–3

So begins this biblical figure's great adventure—his journey to Canaan, his stay in Egypt, and everything that ensues.

Yet readers of these opening words were doubtless disturbed by them. For the Bible has just now begun Abraham's story, and suddenly God is promising him that he will be blessed, he will found a great nation, and so forth—what had Abraham done to deserve these things? Moreover, if God was so pleased with Abraham, why did He begin by telling him to leave his homeland? To leave one's homeland meant leaving the security of family and friends and becoming a defenseless wanderer. If God had truly wished to bless Abraham and grant him all manner of good things, would He not have at least allowed him to stay where he was?

In searching for an answer to such questions, early interpreters of course took into account Abraham's overall "image" in the Bible. For throughout the rest of his story in Genesis, Abraham is presented as God's devoted servant, someone who obeyed every divine commandment (note, in this regard, Gen. 26:5). In particular,

1. At the beginning of the story his name is Abram and his wife's Sarai; only later (Gen. 17:16) are they changed to Abraham and Sarah. Except when citing the biblical text, however, I refer to them consistently by their later names, as ancient interpreters generally did.

God singles out Abraham elsewhere as one "who loved Me" (Isa. 41:8; in some translations, "my friend")—as if, of all the people mentioned in the Bible, Abraham was the one who loved God the most. In keeping with this, 2 Chr. 20:7 also speaks of "Abraham *who loved You.*" Thus, it seemed to interpreters that the promises made by God at the beginning of Genesis 12 must have had something to do with Abraham's great love of, and devotion to, God.

But there was one part of the Bible that seemed to shed special light on these opening words of Genesis 12. It was a passing reference to Abraham's departure from his homeland found later in the Bible, at the end of the book of Joshua. Though the reference there is brief, to ancient interpreters it seemed to supply precisely the information that was missing in Genesis itself:

> And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Your ancestors lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan.'" —Josh. 24:2–3

It struck ancient interpreters that God says here, "I took your father Abraham," setting him apart, as it were, from Terah and Nahor, who are mentioned along with him in the previous verse. Why single out Abraham?

Ancient interpreters concluded that Abraham must somehow have been different from Terah and Nahor—that is why he is singled out. And surely it was significant that the previous verse, after mentioning Terah, Abraham, and Nahor, adds: "and they served other gods." Who "they" refers to here is not clear; but if Abraham is singled out in virtually the next breath, "Then I took your father Abraham," it seemed that the reason must be that "they" refers to Terah and Nahor and the others, *but not to Abraham! They* served other gods, but Abraham did not, and for that reason "Then I took your father Abraham."

Such a conclusion could only be bolstered by another biblical verse that mentions Abraham:

> Consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who bore you: **him alone did I call**, and bless him and and make him many. —Isa. 51:2

If God called Abraham *alone,* is this not another way of saying that Abraham was quite unique among his family members? He—and not his father, Terah, or his brother, Nahor—was summoned personally to God's service.

Abraham the Monotheist

Out of this basic insight—arrived at by reading the beginning of chapter 12 of Genesis in the light of Josh. 24:2–3—arose an interpretive tradition that held Abraham's great virtue (never mentioned in Genesis itself, nor even stated explicitly in the Joshua passage) to have been his refusal to worship other gods. *They* served other gods, but not Abraham. And so Abraham came to be thought of in more general terms as the great opponent of polytheism (the belief in the existence of

many gods), in fact, as the person who, in the midst of a nation that worshiped many gods, had become convinced that in truth there is only one God.

How far back this line of thinking goes we do not know, but it is certainly present very early. For example, it is found in a part of the book of Judith that some scholars date to the second century B.C.E. (if not earlier). And it may be significant that the theme of Abraham's recognition of the existence of only one God is presented in Judith in a somewhat offhand manner—Abraham himself is not even mentioned there by name. One might conclude that the author of Judith thought (or wished to claim) that it was simply common knowledge that the ancestor of the Jews had left his homeland because of his belief in the existence of only one God:

> [A foreign general explains:] This people [the Jews] is descended from the Chaldeans. At one time they lived in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers who were in Chaldea. **For they had left the ways of their ancestors, and they worshiped the God of heaven, the God they had come to know**; hence they [the Chaldeans] drove them out from the presence of their gods and they fled to Mesopotamia, and lived there for a long time. Then their God commanded them to leave the place where they were living and go to the land of Canaan. —Jth. 5:6–9

It is interesting that this passage presents an answer to our second question as well, namely, why along with promising Abraham all sorts of blessings God had told him to leave his homeland. The text in Judith suggests that this is in fact related to Abraham's belief in the one true God: Abraham and his family had to leave Chaldea "because they would not follow the gods of their fathers who were in Chaldea . . . hence they [the Chaldeans] drove them out from the presence of their gods."

This same idea—that Abraham rejected the worship of many gods and their idols and believed only in the one true God—is found in other ancient sources as well:

> And the child [Abraham] began to realize the errors of the land—that everyone was going astray after graven images and after impurity.
>
> And he began to pray to the Creator of all so that He might save him from the errors of mankind . . . And he said [to his father], "What help or advantage do we have from these idols . . . ? Worship the God of heaven." . . . And his father said to him: ". . . Be silent my son, lest they kill you."
>
> —*Jubilees* 11:16–17, 12:2, 6–7

> He [Abraham] grew up with this idea and was a true Chaldean for some time, until, opening the soul's eye from the depth of sleep, he came to behold the pure ray in place of the deep darkness, and he followed that light and perceived what he had not seen before, One who guides and steers the world, presiding over it and managing its affairs. —Philo, *On Abraham* 71

> You are the One who delivered Abraham from ancestral godlessness.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.22

> And when all those inhabiting the land were being led astray after their [idols], Abraham believed in Me and was not led astray with them.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 23:5

> He thus became the first person to argue that there is a single God who is the creator of all things . . . Because of these ideas the Chaldeans and the other people of Mesopotamia rose up against him, and having resolved, in keeping with God's will and with His help, to leave his home, he settled in the land of Canaan. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.154–157

And so both questions now seemed to have the same answer: God promised Abraham all those things in Genesis 12 because Abraham, unique among the people in Chaldea, had come to know the one true God and so had refused to worship the Chaldean gods, "the gods of their fathers"; and for precisely this reason, the Chaldeans would no longer allow Abraham to dwell in their midst, which is why God begins by saying, "Go forth from your homeland."

Terah, Priest of Idolatry

"They served other gods," it says in Josh. 24:2, presumably referring to Abraham's father, Terah, and his brother, Nahor. Since Scripture says so (and so matter-of-factly), interpreters seeking to understand the full meaning of Abraham's story must have returned again and again to this striking statement to consider all its possible implications. Indeed, perhaps this reference to his father and brother serving other gods explained not only *why* Abraham ended up being the one to whom God promised great things in Genesis 12, but also *how it was* that Abraham came to know that there is only one God in the first place and that all the "other gods" are simply false. Now, elsewhere in the Bible the worship of "other gods" is frequently described—caricatured, one might say—as bowing down to "gods of wood and stone," that is, idols, mere human creations. And so, ancient interpreters and retellers of the story of Abraham enjoyed depicting at length Terah's ministering and tending to such idols. Terah became not just an idol worshiper, but a priest of idolatry, or a manufacturer or seller of idols. With such a father, Abraham must in his youth have gotten a close-up view of the folly of worshiping idols, and it was this exposure that might ultimately have led him to realize that these "other gods" are simply an illusion:

> And he [Abraham] separated from his father so that he might not worship the idols with him.
>
> And it came to pass . . . that Abram said to his father, "O father," and he said, "Yes, my son?" And he said: "What help or advantage do we have from these idols before which you worship and bow down? For there is no spirit in them, because they are mute, and they are an error of the mind . . ." And his father said to him, "I also know that, my son, but what shall I do to the people who have ordered me to serve before them [that is, the idols]. If I speak to them truthfully, they will kill me because they themselves are

attached to them [the idols] so that they might worship them and praise them." —*Jubilees* 11:16, 12:1–3, 6–7

When I was watching over the gods of my father Farah [Terah] and my brother Nahor, I was experimenting [to find out] which god was truly the strongest. Then, at the time when my [priestly] lot came up and I was to finish the service of my father Farah's sacrifice to his gods of wood and stone, of gold and silver and copper and iron, I, Abraham, having entered their sanctuary for the service, found a god named Marumat,[2] which had been carved out of stone, fallen at the feet of an iron god, Nakhin. And it came to pass that, when I saw this, my heart was troubled, and I thought to myself that I, Abraham, would be unable to return it to its place all by myself, since it was heavy, [carved] out of a great stone; so I went to inform my father, and he went in with me. And as we both were moving it to return it to its place, its head fell off of it in such a way that I was left holding on to its head. And it came to pass, when my father saw that the head of his god, Marumat, had fallen off of it, he said to me, "Abraham," and I replied, "Here I am." And he said: "Bring me a chisel from the house." And I brought it. Then he carved another Marumat, without a head, out of another stone, and [placed on it] the head that had been broken off from [the first] Marumat, and then smashed that [first] Marumat.

Then I said to myself, "What are these useless things that my father is doing? Is he not rather a god to his gods, since it is by virtue of his sculpting and shaping, by his skillfulness, that they come into being? It would be more fitting for them to bow down to my father, since they are his handiwork. Yet what is my father's reward from his labors? Behold, Marumat fell down and was unable to get up in his own temple, nor could I lift him on my own, until my father came and then we lifted him together. And even so we were unable, and [Marumat's] head fell off of him, and [my father] placed it upon another stone of another god which he had made without a head . . ." And I said to myself, "If it is thus, how then can my father's god Marumat, having a head made from one stone and [the rest] being made from another stone, save someone or hear a person's prayer and grant him anything?"

—*Apocalypse of Abraham* chs. 1, 3

R. Ḥiyya said: Terah was an idolator. Once he went off somewhere and left Abraham to sell [idols] in his place. A certain man came wishing to buy. [Abraham] said to him: "How old are you?" He said: "Fifty." He said: "Fifty years old and you are going to bow down to something only one day old [that is, this idol]?!" The man went off in embarrassment. Later, a woman came bearing a container of flour. She said to him, "Here, offer this before them [the idols]." He took a stick and broke them [the idols] and then put the stick into the hand of the biggest of them. When his father came he said

2. There have been many suggestions for the underlying sense of this apparently Hebrew or Aramaic name. One possibility is *mar 'umot*, "lord of nations."

to him, "What happened to these?" He said to him: . . . "One [idol] said, 'Let me be the first to eat,' another said, 'No, let me be the first to eat,' then the biggest one took a stick and broke them [the others]." [Terah said:] "Why are you mocking me—do these idols know anything?" [Abraham] said: "Cannot your ears hear the words coming from your own mouth?"

— *Genesis Rabba* 38:13

Abraham the Astronomer

In the ancient world, Chaldea was famous for one thing in particular: it was the home of astronomy and astrology. So great was the association between Chaldea and the study of the stars that the very word "Chaldean" came to mean "astronomer" in both Aramaic and Greek. Many interpreters therefore naturally assumed that Abraham the Chaldean must himself have been something of an astronomer. And so a number of early sources present Abraham as both a learned astronomer and a teacher of this occult lore to others:

Abram sat up during the night on the first of the seventh month, so that he might observe the stars from evening until daybreak so that he might see what the nature of the year would be with respect to rain. — *Jubilees* 12:16

[Orpheus tells Musaeus about God, that no one can]
see Him; for around [Him] a cloud has been fixed . . .
Except a certain unique man, by descent an offshoot
of the Chaldeans. For he was knowledgeable about the path of the Star,
and the movements of the spheres around the earth,
in a circle regularly, but each on its own axis.
[This Chaldean, Abraham, understood]
how He guides the winds [that is, spirits, subsidiary forces] around both air and water.

— *Pseudo-Orphica* (Recension B) vv. 21, 27–31 (cited in Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 124)

Abraham excelled all in nobility and wisdom; he sought and obtained the knowledge of astrology and the Chaldean craft, and pleased God because he eagerly sought to be reverent. At God's command, he traveled to Phoenicia and dwelt there. He pleased the Phoenician king by teaching the Phoenicians the cycles of the sun and moon, and everything else as well . . . [Later, when he was in Egypt,] Abraham lived in Heliopolis with the Egyptian priests and taught them much: He explained astrology and the other sciences to them.

— [Pseudo-]Eupolemus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17:3–4, 8)

Abraham . . . came to Egypt with all his household to the Egyptian king Pharethothes and taught him astrology.

— Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.18:1)

> He [Abraham] introduced them [the Egyptians] to arithmetic and transmitted to them the laws of astronomy. For before the coming of Abraham the Egyptians were ignorant of these sciences, which thus traveled from the Chaldaeans into Egypt, when they passed to the Greeks.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 167–168

> And He said to him [Balaam]: Did I not speak to Abraham in a vision concerning this people, saying, "Your descendants shall be as numerous as the stars of heaven" [Gen. 22:17], at the time when I lifted him above the firmament and showed him the arrangement of all the stars?
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:5

> In those days, Abraham was born and was given over by his father to study astronomy. —*Historical Paleya* (Popov, p. 21)

Tipped Off by the Stars

At the same time, interpreters had to ask: was there not some connection between astronomy/astrology and Abraham's devotion to God? Surely it was not just chance that Chaldea—Astronomyland—was the place in which Abraham had discovered that there is only one God. And so interpreters found an alternate explanation for how Abraham came to know that there is only one God: they connected his refusal to worship "other gods" (implied by Josh. 24:2–3) with his knowledge of the stars. Somehow, Abraham came to understand that it is not the stars but God who controls human destiny:

> And he was sitting alone making observations [of the stars] and a voice came into his heart saying, "All the signs of the stars and the signs of the sun and the moon are all under the Lord's control. Why am I seeking [them out]? If He wishes, He will make it rain morning and evening, and if He desires He will not make it fall, for everything is under His control."
>
> —*Jubilees* 12:17–18

> The Chaldeans exercised themselves most especially with astronomy and attributed all things to the movements of the stars, believing that whatever is in the world is governed by forces encompassed in numbers and numerical proportions. They exalted the existence of what is visible, and took no thought for what is perceivable to the mind and [yet] invisible. But seeking out the numerical arrangement according to the cycles of the sun, moon, the planets and the fixed stars, as well as the changes of the yearly seasons and the overall connection of the things of heaven with what happens on earth, they supposed that the world itself was god, sacrilegiously making out that which is created to be like the One who had created it.
>
> He [Abraham] grew up with this idea and was a true Chaldean for some time, until, opening the soul's eye from the depth of sleep, he came to behold the pure ray in place of the deep darkness, and he followed that light

and perceived what he had not seen before, One who guides and steers the world, presiding over it and managing its affairs.

—Philo, *On Abraham* 69–71 (also *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 3:1)

He [Abraham] left Chaldea at the age of seventy-five, having been told by God to move to Canaan, and he settled down in that [land] and left it to his descendants. He was skilled at understanding all things, and persuasive to those who listened to him; nor was he mistaken in what he conjectured. For that reason his conception of virtue surpassed that of other people, and he came to have a new understanding of, and to modify, the idea of God then adhered to by all.

He thus became the first person to argue that there is a single God who is the creator of all things, and that whatever any of these other things contribute to the good of the world, they are enabled to do so at His command, and not by any inherent force of their own. He was able to figure this out by the changes which land and sea undergo, and those that are connected with the sun and the moon, and from all those occurring in the skies. For if these bodies had any power over themselves, they would surely have arranged for themselves to be regularly ordered; but since this is not so, it is clear that they come together for our benefit not by any authority of their own, but by the power of the One who commands, to whom alone it is proper to give honor and thanks.

Because of these ideas the Chaldeans and the other people of Mesopotamia rose up against him, and having resolved, in keeping with God's will and with His help, to leave his home, he settled in the land of Canaan.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:154–157

And so, the motif "Abraham the Astronomer"—based on the simple fact that the Bible names Chaldea as Abraham's birthplace—led to a new motif, one that explained *how* Abraham came to be a monotheist: it was Abraham's knowledge of astronomy and observations of the heavens that led him to discover that there is only one God.

Abraham Rescued from Chaldea

Whether Abraham was an idol maker's son who rebelled, or an astronomer whose researches led him to conclude that there is only one God, interpreters could safely conclude that Abraham's new ideas about God would not have been acceptable to the Chaldeans. *That* was why God began by telling Abraham to "go forth from your country and from your kindred" (Gen. 12:1).

Yet there was another side to this tradition. It held that Abraham did not just casually leave his homeland, but that God had in fact *rescued* him from the hands of his own countrymen. Support for this idea was found elsewhere in the Bible:

Therefore, thus says the Lord, who **redeemed Abraham**, concerning the house of Jacob . . .

—(traditional Hebrew text of) Isa. 29:22

"Redeemed" means not only "bought back," but "ransomed" or "rescued from captivity." These words of Isaiah might thus be seen to suggest that, in telling Abraham to leave Ur, God had in fact *rescued* him, taking him out of some difficult or dangerous situation. It was not hard for ancient interpreters to imagine such a scene (especially since many Jews in later times—including the interpreters' own days—had found themselves in just such a position): Abraham, having proclaimed that there is only one God and that the official religion of his homeland was mere foolishness, must have soon been pursued by an angry mob of Chaldeans or hounded by a regime that felt Abraham's assertion undermined its very authority. Indeed, such a scenario is implied in a number of passages seen earlier:

> For they had left the ways of their ancestors, and they worshiped the God of heaven, the God they had come to know; hence they [the Chaldeans] **drove them out** from the presence of their gods and **they fled** to Mesopotamia, and lived there for a long time. Then their God commanded them to leave the place where they were living and go to the land of Canaan.
>
> —Jth. 5:8–9

> And his father said to him, "I also know that, my son, but what shall I do to the people who have ordered me to serve before them [that is, the idols]. If I speak to them truthfully, **they will kill me** because they themselves are attached to them [the idols] so that they might worship them and praise them."
>
> —*Jubilees* 12:6–7

> Because of these ideas the Chaldeans and the other people of Mesopotamia **rose up against** him, and having resolved, in keeping with God's will and with His help, to leave his home, he settled in the land of Canaan.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:157

> You are the One who **delivered** [that is, saved] Abraham from ancestral godlessness. —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.22

Abraham Saved from Fire

This reasonable supposition (backed up by Isa. 29:22) that the Chaldeans might have sought to harm Abraham because of his beliefs soon took on a new form. For, the city in which Abraham and his family lived was called Ur. But the word *'ur* in Hebrew had another meaning as well: "fire" or "flame." Ancient readers of the Bible could not help concluding that this was no mere coincidence. And so, when God later says to Abraham:

> "I am the Lord who took you out of [the] *'ur* of the Chaldeans . . ."
>
> —Gen. 15:7

many interpreters found in these words a hidden meaning, a hint about some fire or burning that had taken place in Ur and from which God had in fact saved Abraham, *taking* him from the midst of the flames. In one version, the fire comes down from heaven:

> And it came to pass, while I was considering such things with my father Terah in the courtyard of [his] house, that the voice of the Almighty came down from the heavens in a **stream of fire** saying aloud "Abraham, Abraham!" and I said, "Here I am." And He said, "You are searching in your mind and the thoughts of your heart for the God of gods and the Creator: I am He. Leave Terah your father and go forth from his house [compare Gen. 12:1] so that you will not be killed because of the sins of your father's house." So I went out. And it came to pass, when I went out, that I had not even gotten as far as going beyond the doors of the courtyard when the sound of great thunder came forth and **burned** him and his house and everyone in the house to a distance of forty cubits. —*Apocalypse of Abraham* 8:1–6

In another, widely diffused version of this motif, the fire was a fiery furnace prepared by the Chaldeans to burn Abraham for his heresies:[3]

> And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot and his daughter-in-law Sarai, Abram's wife, and [he] went out with them from the Chaldeans' **fiery furnace** to go to the land of Canaan. [Later, God said to Abraham:] "I am the Lord who took you out of the fiery furnace of the Chaldeans to give you this land to inherit." —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 11:31, 15:7

> [The Levites prayed:] "It was you yourself, O Lord God, who chose Abram and led him **out of the fire** of the Chaldeans." —(Vulgate) Neh. 9:7

> [Nimrod said to Abraham:] You are speaking foolishness. Let us worship fire and [if not] I will cast you into its midst—then let your God whom you worship come and save you from it. —*Genesis Rabba* 38:13

In yet another variant of this motif, the fire turns out to be none other than the one found in the tower of Babel story, which the builders had proposed to make in order to prepare the bricks for the tower ("Come, let us make bricks *and burn them thoroughly,*" Gen. 11:3). Abraham, along with others of similar conviction, refuses to help make these bricks to build the tower:

> And those men answered saying, "We will not contribute bricks [literally, "stones"] to you, and we will not be associated with your plan. We recognize the one Lord, and He is the one whom we worship. Even if you were to cast us into the fire with your bricks, we would not agree [to join] with you." And the leaders [of the builders] were angry and said, "As they have spoken,

3. A similar incident is recounted in the book of Daniel, in which three youths in Babylon are cast into a fiery furnace by the Babylonian king and saved by God (Dan. 3:19–23). The tradition that understands the "fire" of the Chaldeans as a fiery furnace seems clearly to be based on the narrative in Daniel. No doubt the fact that God says to Abraham, "I *took you out* of Ur," instead of something more like "I told you to leave," only further encouraged interpreters to identify the "Ur" in question as a great fire from which Abraham had been rescued. (Indeed, interpreters must have wondered why God should say, "I am the Lord who took you out of [the] *'ur* of the Chaldeans" in the first place. Did not Abraham *know* who God was? These words therefore seemed to be intended more as a reminder to Abraham of God's previous beneficence—*saving* him from the fire of the Chaldeans.)

so do to them. If they do not agree to contribute the bricks, let the fire consume them along with your bricks."

[Later, God says:] "And when all those inhabitants of the land were being led astray by their erroneous ideas, Abraham believed in Me and was not led astray with them. And I snatched him from the **flame** and took him and brought him over all the land of Canaan."

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 6:4–5, 23:5

Abraham Was Upset

After staying in Haran for a time, Abraham continued on his journey to Canaan. When he arrived there, however, he found the land stricken with famine, and he and Sarah continued on to Egypt in order to get food.

This journey to Egypt certainly troubled interpreters. For one thing, as the couple was preparing to cross the Egyptian border, Abraham instructed the beautiful Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister rather than his wife, lest they kill him in order to take her for themselves. "Say you are my sister," he says, "so that it may go well with me because of you, and so that my life may be spared on your account" (Gen. 12:13). These hardly sounded like heroic words! To make matters worse, the Bible records that Sarah acted on Abraham's advice and that, as a result, she was taken by Pharaoh to his palace for an unspecified period of time (until God "afflicted Pharaoh with great plagues" and he discovered the truth). If Abraham was upset by her departure, the Bible does not mention it—in fact, it implies at one point that Abraham's silence actually caused him to profit by this interlude (Gen. 12:16).

Interpreters were understandably disturbed by Abraham's apparent cowardice and subsequent silence. But the fact that the Bible narrated the whole incident so quickly—in less than a dozen verses—certainly left room to suppose that Abraham's true feelings, and even some of his actions, had simply been omitted in the Bible's telegraphic account. Many ancient writers, in retelling the story, thus felt entitled to add in what the story had somehow left out, an account of Abraham's deep distress at these events. (Some also simply skipped over what Abraham had said to Sarah, implying or stating that she had been taken to Pharaoh's palace by force.)

So Abram went to Egypt [and] lived in Egypt five years before his wife was taken from him **by force** . . .[4] When Pharaoh took Abram's wife Sarai by force for himself, the Lord punished Pharaoh and his household very severely because of Abram's wife Sarai. —*Jubilees* 13:11–13

He [Abraham] had a wife distinguished greatly for her goodness of soul and beauty of body, in which she surpassed all the women of her time. When the

4. Not only does this account omit Abraham's words to Sarah, but the words "taken . . . by force" are intended to make it clear that Abraham in no way cooperated with Pharaoh's deed. Moreover, the fact that Abraham had been in Egypt for five years before Sarah was taken from him may further be intended to suggest that she was not taken as a result of anyone being under the mistaken (first) impression that the two were not married.

> Egyptian officials saw her and admired her beauty . . . they told the king. He sent for the woman and, seeing her extraordinary beauty, paid little regard to decency or the laws enacted to show respect to strangers . . . [He] intended, he said, to take her in marriage, but in reality merely to dishonor her. She who in a foreign country was at the mercy of a licentious and cruel-hearted despot and had no one to protect her—for her husband was helpless, menaced as he was by the terror of stronger powers—joined him [Abraham] in fleeing for refuge to the last remaining championship, that of God.[5] —Philo, *On Abraham* 93–95

> I, Abram, **wept greatly**, I and my nephew Lot as well on the night that Sarah was taken away from me **by force**. On that night I prayed and begged and pleaded, and in great suffering, as the tears went forth, I said: Blessed are You, God Most High, Master of the whole universe. For You are master and ruler over all, You rule over all the kings of the earth, meting out justice to all of them. Now I lodge my complaint with You, Lord, against Pharaoh Zoan, king of Egypt, that my wife has been taken from me **by force**. Execute justice upon him for me and show forth Your great hand against him and his house, and do not allow him to defile my wife this evening, so that I may know about You, my Lord, that You are master of all the kings of the earth." And I wept. —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 20:10–16

> When Abraham saw what had happened, he **began to weep** and pray before God, saying, "Master of the universe! Is this what comes of the faith I have placed in You? But now, act in accordance with your mercy and faithfulness and do not disappoint my hope." Sarah likewise wept and said, "Master of the universe! I had no prior inclination, but when you said 'Leave your homeland,' I believed your words. Yet now I am left all alone, without father or mother or husband—shall this wicked man [Pharaoh] now come and abuse me? Act in keeping with Your great name and the faith that I placed in your words." Said God to her: "By your life, nothing ill will happen to you or your husband." —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Lekh Lekha* 5

Abraham's Dream

One retelling of the biblical story, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, reckoned with the problem of Abraham's apparent cowardice in another way, suggesting that there had been a good reason for Abraham to tell Sarah what he did ("Say you are my sister"). It all came about because of a dream that Abraham had:

> And I, Abram, dreamt a dream on the night that I entered the land of Egypt, and I saw in my dream a cedar tree and a beautiful, tall, palm-tree. Then

5. Philo omits all mention of Abraham's request of Sarah that she say she is his sister. Pharaoh is presented as acting in violation of the laws of the land and solely out of lust. Philo says that Pharaoh claimed he "intended" to marry Sarah in order to account for Pharaoh's words in Gen. 12:19 ("I took her as my wife"). However, Philo says that this was merely a ruse, and that it was only as a result of God's intervention that "the chastity of the woman was preserved" (*On Abraham* 98).

> some people came and sought to cut down and uproot the cedar and to leave the palm-tree alone. But the palm-tree protested, "Do not cut down the cedar, for both of us are from the same root." So the cedar was spared for the palm-tree's sake, and it was not cut down.
>
> That night I awoke from my sleep and I said to my wife Sarah, "I dreamt a dream and I am frightened by this dream." And she said, "Tell me your dream so that I may know." And I began to tell her the dream, and I made known to her the meaning of the dream.
>
> —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 19:14–19

In the dream, the cedar is Abraham and the palm tree is Sarah. What the dream says, therefore, is that Abraham's life is in great danger, and he can only be saved if Sarah says the right thing. Now if Abraham had indeed had such a dream, it would have virtually constituted a divine *commandment* for Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she was Abraham's sister, since dreams in the Bible are generally messages from God. Abraham's conduct would therefore have been an instance not of cowardice but of obedience to God.

But did he really have such a dream? It may be that the author of this text found a tiny bit of support for the dream in the Bible itself. For, in the biblical version, when Abraham starts his instructions to Sarah, he says, "Behold, *now I know* that you are a beautiful woman; and it will come to pass that, when the Egyptians see you . . ." (Gen. 12:11–12). These are strange words for Abraham, Sarah's husband of so many years, to be saying to her—especially since "I know" in Hebrew often carries the connotation of "I have [just] found out," and joined with "behold *now*" it could easily seem to be implying that Abraham *now* knows something that he did not know previously. But surely he knew before now that his wife was beautiful. What then could the text mean?

If Abraham's words are read in the Hebrew in a slightly different way, they convey a striking difference in meaning: "Behold, now I know [or "I have just found out"]—since you are a beautiful woman—that it will come to pass that, when the Egyptians see you . . ." In this way what Abraham knows, or has just found out, is not simply that Sarah is beautiful, but that, given Sarah's great beauty, the Egyptians will try to kill him and take her for themselves. This does indeed make Abraham's "Behold I know" seem a bit more reasonable. But this approach would have raised a further question for interpreters: how could Abraham *know* that the Egyptians would try to kill him, indeed, how can anyone *know* for certain what is going to happen in the future? Unless, of course, Abraham had been told as much by God. It was apparently such reasoning as this that led the author of the *Genesis Apocryphon* to suppose that God had informed Abraham of what was to happen through a prophetic dream.[6]

6. God in fact goes on to refer to Abraham as a "prophet" in Gen. 20:7, after Sarah has been taken to the house of Abimelech under similar circumstances. That such a title was given to Abraham *in that context,* where the narrative itself provides scant justification for calling him a prophet, may have led interpreters to suppose that it was some sort of *prophetic vision* that had led Abraham in both incidents to tell people that Sarah was his sister. And what better place to locate such a prophetic vision than in

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In short: There was good reason for God to promise Abraham manifold blessings. For Abraham had, even in his homeland, been a dogged opponent of idol worship. Through his study of the stars and/or his exposure to the idols worshiped by his own father, Abraham had come to understand that there is only one true God. That was why the Chaldeans, who worshiped the stars and bowed down to idols, sought to kill Abraham, even, in one interpretation, casting him into a fiery furnace in Ur. God saved Abraham and ordered him to leave his homeland. When he found Canaan in the midst of a famine, he journeyed to Egypt, and a prophetic dream warned him of coming danger.

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connection with Abraham's "Behold I know" in Gen. 12:11? Incidentally, it may be that Sarah's words in the *Genesis Apocryphon* passage cited, "Tell me your dream *so that I may know*," reflect this understanding of Abraham's words as implying a prophetic vision. He says, "Behold I know," and she says, "Tell me your dream so that I will know too!"

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Abraham Journeys from Chaldea

Abraham, Friend of God: It was observed in passing that the Hebrew Bible elsewhere describes Abraham as one "who loved Me" or "My friend" (Isa. 41:8), and that this description is echoed in 2 Chron. 20:7. "Friend of God" became Abraham's unofficial title among ancient interpreters. It appears in *Jubilees* 19:9, 30:20; *Damascus Document* 3:2 (partially); (4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* col. 2, 8; Prayer of Azariah 12; Philo, *Abraham* 89 and elsewhere; *4 Ezra* 3:14; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10:5; James 2:23; *1 Clem.* 10:1; *Targum Neophyti* and others on Gen. 18:17; and frequently thereafter in both rabbinic and patristic sources. Strangely, the "friend of God" in Pseudo-Philo is Moses (*Biblical Antiquities* 24:3, 32:8, and so on).

Abraham and the Tower: God's promise to Abraham comes at the start of Genesis 12. The previous chapter deals with the tower of Babel and God's punishment of the tower's builders. If, shortly afterward, the Bible suddenly turns to Abraham and his journey from Chaldea, could it not be hinting at some relationship between the two incidents? Perhaps Abraham had bravely refused to participate in the building of the tower and, as a reward, God had promised him all that He had and also arranged for Abraham to leave the entire region of the tower:

> When the nations in their single-minded wickedness were put to confusion, she [wisdom] recognized the righteous man [Abraham] and kept him blameless before God. —Wisd. 10:5

(For "single-minded wickedness" as a reference to Gen. 11:1, see Chapter 6, *OR*, "One Language and One Plan"; "confusion" is similarly a reference to Gen. 11:7, 9. Abraham, the "righteous man," is said to have been kept "blameless"; the latter term alluding to Gen. 17:1.) Such an explanation might be kept quite distinct from that other tradition suggesting that Abraham had uniquely recognized God and rejected idolatry. Here, he was simply "righteous" and not one of the tower builders. However, soon the two traditions fused; according to the versions of this motif found elsewhere (see Chapter 6, *OR*, "They Made an Idol"), the tower project itself was idolatrous and Abraham's refusal to participate was motivated by his abhorrence of idolatry. See at length Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*, ch. 6.

Broken Gods: A number of ancient sources presented Abraham's rejection of polytheism as deriving from his realization that a broken idol was unable to fix itself (see above, "Terah, Priest of Idolatry"). This understanding perhaps derives ultimately from the Bible's own anti-idolatry polemic in such passages as Isa. 44:9–20, Jer. 10:3–9, and Ps. 115:4–8, all of which stress that idols are merely man-made. But the idea that a *broken* god is unable to help itself is found—without any connection to the story of Abraham—in the Letter of Jeremiah:

> For just as an earthenware vessel, once broken, becomes useless, so are their gods. [Moreover,] set up in their houses [that is, temples], their [the gods'] eyes become filled with dust from the feet of those who enter.
>
> —Letter of Jeremiah 17

(On this translation, see Charles, *APOT* 1:602 n.)

Abraham the Astronomer: The fragments cited earlier from Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* and attributed by him to Eupolemus and Artapanus present Abraham not only as someone knowledgeable in astronomy but as a *teacher* of astronomical lore to others. Apparently, to these authors Abraham's knowledge of astronomy was a good thing, an indication of his outstanding wisdom. Later sources similarly present Abraham as such a teacher:

> The most wonderful Abramos has shown us about this position in his books . . . and he himself on his part invented other things and tested them, especially on genitures inclined to traveling . . .
>
> At which seasons and times the travels of such genitures will take place is made clear by the configurations said to be drawn by Abramos.
>
> —Vettius Valens, *Anthologiae* 2:28

> All the things that . . . Abram, Orpheus, and Critodemus and all others who are experts in this profession [astronomy and astrology] related we have read through in equal degree . . .
>
> The position of the daemon we deduce by this calculation; we inserted it into this book because Abraham has shown by a similar calculation that this is the position of the Sun. —Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, 4:18

Other sources, however—both Hellenistic and rabbinic—while connecting Abraham's monotheism to his understanding of the stars, stress the opposition between these two; it would therefore be inappropriate for Abraham to teach astronomy to others and so potentially mislead them. See further Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 55–56; Siker, "Abraham in Greco-Roman Paganism."

One passage in the *Sibylline Oracles* 3 seems to reflect the same opposition between astronomy and monotheism found in the motif "Abraham the Astronomer," although Abraham himself is not specifically named:

> There is a city in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans,
> whence comes a race of most righteous men [the Jews].
> They are always concerned with good counsel and noble works
> for they do not worry about the cyclic course of the sun
> or the moon or monstrous things under the earth . . .
> Neither do they practice the astrological predictions of the Chaldeans
> nor astronomy. For all these things are erroneous.
>
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 3:218–228

The same connection of Abraham to astronomy is reflected in a well-known rabbinic comparison:

> Said R. Isaac: Abraham was like someone traveling from place to place who saw a building all lit up. He thought: is it possible that there can be such a building without someone looking after it? The building's owner looked out at him and said, "I am the owner of the building." Similarly, since Abraham asked, "Is it possible for the world to exist without someone looking after it?" God looked out at him and said, "I am the one who looks after it, the lord of the whole world." — *Genesis Rabba* 39:1

The text specifies that the building is "all lit up" *(dôleqet),* and it is this light, apparently emanating from the building itself, that persuades the traveler that there must indeed be someone inside. Thus Abraham the astronomer, contemplating the lights emanating from the heavens (that is, the stars), must have come to the same conclusion, that such lights should not be attributed any independent existence on their own, but should be understood merely as signs of life of the One inside, that is, indicating the existence of the heavenly building's owner.

Many later commentators have understood the word *dôleqet* in this text as "burning" and explained the building as representative of the world gone awry in Abraham's generation; see most recently Mandel, "The Call of Abraham"; Kister, "Observations on Aspects of Exegesis," 24. However, this explanation hardly fits Abraham's question, "Is it possible that there can be such a building without someone looking after it?" If what he were contemplating was a building being destroyed by fire without its owner or superintendent being present—well, that happens all the time! What is more, the image of a building burning away while its owner stands idly by—indeed, apparently stands *inside the building itself,* from

God speaks to Abraham from behind the heavenly bodies.

which he then looks out (or down) and addresses the traveler—is absurd on the face of it. Furthermore, the biblical verse to which this motif is attached, Gen. 12:1, has nothing to do with the "world gone awry" theme: it has to do, as we have traced at length, with Abraham's recognition of the existence of the one true God, a theme that served to explain why it was that God addressed Abraham in Gen. 12:1ff. and promised him all that He promised. Now, it is this theme (and not that of the world gone awry) that is being evoked by Abraham's question, "Is it possible that there can be such a building without someone to look after it?" The question thus makes sense only if the building is all lit up, for only such a circumstance would lead him to conclude that there is someone inside the building. Note, finally, that the Hebrew *manhîg* ("leader," "superintendent," translated above as "someone to look after it") corresponds fairly closely to Philo's "One who guides and steers the world" (cited earlier)—used in the context of the "Abraham the Astronomer" motif. In addition to all this, the similarity between this passage in *Genesis Rabba* and another in *Midrash ha-Gadol* (ed. Magulies, 210) is decisive (contra Kister, "Observations," 24): since the latter is unequivocally about Abraham's recognition of the one true God and *not* about the "world gone awry," here is one more proof that the castle is all lit up and not "burning." (For an ancient *piyyut* containing the "Abraham the Astronomer" theme, see Kister, "Observations," 24–25; on the meaning of *bîrāh* in the above passage, see Mandel, "Birah as an Architectural Term in Rabbinic Literature.")

With regard to Josephus' version of the overall motif "Abraham the Astronomer" (cited earlier), it should be explained that Josephus reasons as follows: Abraham, if he was well versed in the movements of the sun and moon and stars, certainly perceived that they all lack "regular order." For the solar year (as Josephus knew well) is approximately 365 days long—what an odd number! The lunar year, twelve months long, falls short of the solar year by more than a week. The movements of the stars and planets change and overlap in similarly varying patterns. If any one of these heavenly bodies were in control (as many ancient peoples believed), would not that star or planet have contrived to make its cycles regular, indeed, to show, by having everything else follow *its* patterns, that it was indeed the dominant force in the universe? But since this is not the case, not even—as an astronomer like Abraham would have known—with the most distant of the "fixed stars," it is evident that no one of these heavenly bodies controls the universe, but that the motion of all of them is controlled by their Creator. See, for a related discussion, Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher," 145–149; Sandmel, "Abraham's Knowledge."

Hierarchy of False Gods: A somewhat similar note is sounded in another narrative expansion:

> Having considered such things, Abraham came to his father and said: "Father Terah. Fire is to be worshiped more than your gods of silver and gold, stone and wood, because fire can burn your gods; your gods, being flammable, are therefore subservient to fire, and fire even curses them as it consumes your gods. But I would not call it [fire] a god either, since it is

> subjugated to the waters. The waters are much more to be worshiped than it, since they put fire out and cause the fruits of the earth to [grow]. But neither would I call them gods, because the waters go down underneath the earth. I would call the earth far more venerable, because it outdoes the nature of water. But neither would I call it a goddess, since it is dried out by the sun and is arranged by man for working [that is, plowing]. I would call the sun more venerable than the land, because by its lights it illuminates the whole universe. But I would not call it a god either, because when night comes it is covered with darkness. Nor would I call the moon or the stars gods, because their light also becomes dark at times in the night."[7]
>
> — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 7:1–9

> Said Abraham to him [Nimrod]: Let us worship fire. He [Abraham] said: Let us worship water that quenches fire. He said: Well then, let us worship water. He said: Let us worship the clouds that bring the water. He said: Well then, let us worship the clouds. He said: Let us worship the wind that brings the clouds. He said: Well then, let us worship the wind. He said: Let us worship human beings who can withstand the wind.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 38:13

Here too, the fact that no one feature of the natural world can be shown to predominate over the others argues for the existence of a higher, unseen Mover.

Abraham's Heavenly Journey: We saw one attestation of the motif "Abraham the Astrologer" that alluded to Abraham's ascent into heaven:

> And He said to him [Balaam]: Did I not speak to Abraham in a vision concerning this people, saying, "Your descendants shall be as numerous as the stars of heaven" [Gen. 22:17], when **I lifted him above the firmament** and showed him the arrangement of all the stars?
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:5

Abraham's heavenly journey is recounted at length in the *Testament of Abraham,* chapters 10:1–15:2 (Rec. A), 8:3–11:14 (Rec. B). No scriptural justification for Abraham having ascended to heaven is offered in this account. Elsewhere, however, it is associated with Genesis 15,

> And He took him outside and said, "Look toward the heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then He said, "So shall your descendants be."
>
> — Gen. 15:5

The expression "took him outside" seemed strange: did not Abraham know how numerous the stars were without being taken "outside"? Some interpreters therefore concluded that "outside" really meant "out of this world":

7. This text contains a number of striking Hebraisms, including "waters" for "water," "fruits of the earth" (= produce), "I would call," in the sense of "I would consider," "subservient" *(měšû'ăbbad)* meaning "ranked below," and "work" in the sense of "plow."

> "And He took him outside": . . . R. Judah b. R. Simon said in the name of R. Yoḥanan: He raised him up higher than the dome of the firmament. This is why it is said to him, "Look at [*habbēṭ*] the heavens"; this word [*habbēṭ*] is used only of looking downward. — *Genesis Rabba* 44:12

At the same time, this passage is not far from the "covenant between the pieces" (Gen. 15:7–21) and the revelations (some of them, apparently, extraterrestrial) made to Abraham at that time; see further Chapter 9, "Abraham Saw a Dire Future."

Out of Astrology: The same verse—Gen. 15:5—was explained by other interpreters as a gentle reminder to Abraham to dissociate himself once and for all from the sort of learning championed in Chaldea:

> "And He took him outside and said, 'Look toward the heaven . . .'" [Gen. 15:5]. Then [God said to Abraham:] "You are a prophet now and no astrologer." — *Genesis Rabba* 44:12

> Said Rab: "Whence do we know that the stars have no power over Israel's fate? From the verse, 'And He took him **outside** [and said, "Look toward the heaven, and number the stars . . ."].' For Abraham had just said to God: '[Behold, you have given me no offspring, and] a slave born in my house shall be my heir' [Gen. 15:3]. He answered: No! 'A son yet to be born to you shall be your heir' [Gen. 15:4]. Said Abraham: 'But Lord, I have consulted my astrology and found that I am not destined to engender a son!' He replied: 'Depart [literally, **go outside**] from your astrology!'" — b. *Shabbat* 156a

In this interpretation, the biblical phrase "And He took him outside" is understood not as a physical "taking" (for certainly that sort of anthropomorphic implication would have appeared strange), but as a spiritual departure: God *caused him to go outside* his astrological calculations and understand that He alone ruled Abraham's fate. The emperor Julian "the Apostate" (331–363 C.E.; so called because he abandoned Christianity) fixed on this verse for quite a different purpose:

> For Abraham used to sacrifice even as we do, always and continually. And he used the method of divination from shooting stars . . . Tell me why He who dealt with him [in Genesis 15], whether angel or God, brought him forth and showed him the stars? For while he was still inside the house, did he not know how great is the multitude of the stars that at night are always visible and shining? But I think it was because He wished to show him the shooting stars, so that as a visible pledge of His words He might offer to Abraham the decision of the heavens that fulfills and sanctions all things.
> — Julian the Apostate, *Against the Galileans* 356C–357A

Note that Philo had likewise felt called upon to give this verse a nonobvious interpretation, one not far removed from that seen above:

> Most rightly, then, is it said "He led him out outside," outside of the prison of the body, outside of the lairs where the senses lurk, outside of the

> foolishness of deceitful words and ideas. Above all, he led him outside of himself, out of the belief that he thought and apprehended through an intelligence which did not need to acknowledge any other authority and which owed allegiance to no one other than itself.
>
> —Philo, *Who Is Heir* 85

Lastly, it is to be observed that *Jubilees* adds something in its restatement of this verse:

> He brought him outside and said to him: "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you can count them." **When he had looked at the sky and seen the stars,** He said to him, "Your descendants will be like this."
>
> —*Jubilees* 14:4–5

The indicated words do not appear in the corresponding biblical verse, Gen. 15:15. But the idea that God should have given Abraham a commandment without Abraham immediately seeking to carry it out was quite unacceptable to the author of *Jubilees,* so the missing action had to be supplied. A similar addition to the biblical narrative was made later by the author of the *Genesis Apocryphon;* he created a detailed account of Abraham's journey throughout the land of Canaan (21:15–19), a journey unreported in Scripture but undertaken in obedience to God's words in Gen. 13:17.

Abraham Was in Ur—or Was It Haran? According to Gen. 11:31, "Terah took Abram his son [and the rest of their family] and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there." If this account follows chronological order, then when God speaks to Abraham in Gen. 12:1 (two verses later), Abraham must already be living in Haran. But if so, why does God say to him then, "Go forth *from your country* and *from your kindred* and your father's house"—Ur was Abraham's country and and the place of his extended family, not Haran. (To make matters worse, Gen. 12:4–5 again refers to Haran, as if that was indeed where these words were spoken to Abraham.)

Interpreters put forward various solutions. One was to claim that the words "Go forth from your country" were indeed spoken to Abraham in Ur and that Gen. 12:1–4 is therefore something of a flashback—as if Gen. 12:1 were really saying, "Now the Lord *had* said to Abraham [back in Ur], 'Go forth from your country.'" Such, for example, seems to be the position adopted by Philo of Alexandria: the passage cited takes place while Abraham is still in Ur, and Philo goes on to specify that it was *there* that God spoke to him:

> [God said to Abraham:] "Give up those who explore the heavens and the Chaldean science and move, for a short while, from the greatest city—that is, the world—to a smaller one, through which you will be able to understand better the One who directs all things." For that reason, he [Abraham] is said to have journeyed first from the land of the Chaldeans to that of Haran.
>
> —Philo, *On Abraham* 71 (also *On Abraham* 62; *Migration of Abraham* 184–189)

Similarly, in the New Testament, Stephen, though about to be martyred, seems to go out of his way to take a position on this exegetical problem:

> "Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, **before he lived in Haran,** and said to him, 'Go forth from your country and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.' **Then** he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran." —Acts 7:2–4

But other interpreters held that God's words "Go forth from your country" were in fact spoken to Abraham *in Haran.* If so, then the references to "your country" and so forth must have meant "the country in which you are now living," or perhaps, broadly speaking, the whole geographic area. This seems to be the position of the book of Judith, for it says (at the conclusion of the passage cited earlier in this chapter):

> Hence they [the Chaldeans] drove them [Abraham and his family] out from the presence of their gods and they fled to Mesopotamia [Haran], and lived there for a long time. **Then** their God commanded them to leave **the place where they were living** and go to the land of Canaan. —Jth. 5:8–9

Though the sequence of events is far from clear, it appears that a passage cited earlier from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* also presumes that God's words were spoken to Abraham in Haran:

> [God says:] "Leave Terah your father and go forth from his house [≅ Gen. 12:1] so that you will not be killed because of the sins of your father's house." So I went out. And it came to pass, when I went out, that I had not even gotten as far as going beyond the doors of the courtyard when the sound of great thunder came forth and burned him and his house and everyone in the house to a distance of forty cubits. —*Apocalypse of Abraham* 8:4–6

If Terah himself is killed in this incident, then it must have taken place *after* Gen. 11:31, when Terah and Abraham leave Ur together. The same text later makes it clear that Terah was indeed killed:

> [God asks Abraham:] "Why did your father not obey your voice and abandon the demonic worship of idols until **he perished,** and all his house with him?" —*Apocalypse of Abraham* 26:3

It may be that these two passages both specifically mention Terah's *house* because of God's words in Gen. 12:1, "Go forth from your country and from your kindred and *your father's house.*" God apparently specified leaving Terah's house, in this interpretation, because the house itself was to be destroyed.

Josephus, in his retelling of these events, also seems to favor Haran as the place where God spoke to Abraham. Thus, at one point he supplies a different motive for the move from Ur to Haran, as if to say that it was not because of any divine commandment that Abraham left Ur:

> Terah hated Chaldea because of the death of Haran; they all moved to Haran in Mesopotamia, where Terah also died and was buried, after a life of 205 years. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:152

But elsewhere he says:

> Because of these ideas [of Abraham], the Chaldeans **and the other people of Mesopotamia** rose up against him, and having resolved, in keeping with God's will and with His help, to **leave his home,** he settled in the land of Canaan. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:157

Here (and elsewhere)[8] Josephus may be deliberately telescoping the events and places: the "other people of Mesopotamia" seems designed to include Haran, in which case Abraham's "home" may be nothing less than the entire region.

Jubilees offers an extremely clever solution. Abraham travels to Haran as per Gen. 11:31. He stays there for fourteen years. Then, one day, he seeks God's advice:

> Shall I return to Ur of the Chaldeans, who are [now] earnestly requesting that I return to them? Or shall I stay here, in this place [Haran]?" . . . And the word of the Lord was sent to him . . .: "Go forth from your country and from your kindred and your father's house to the land which I shall show you" [Gen. 12:1]. —*Jubilees* 12:21

God's words in Gen. 12:1 now have a new meaning: Leave "your country," that is, Ur—do not go back there. At the same time, leave "your kindred" (perhaps meaning those relatives that Abraham had left back in Ur, or perhaps meaning Abraham's own brother Nahor and his family now living in Haran). Indeed, leave "your father's house," that is, the very house in which your father is presently living, in Haran. Go instead to the land which I will show you.

By having Abraham thus raise the possibility of a return to Ur, the author of *Jubilees* was able to account for God's telling Abraham *in Haran* to leave his homeland of Ur: what He meant was, leave it forever, do not go back there. At the same time, the Bible's mention of "your kindred and your father's house" allows the author of *Jubilees* to raise, and then reject, another possibility, that of staying in Haran. (This also makes the wording of Gen. 12:1 considerably less redundant: "Go forth from your country *and* from your kindred *and* from your father's house" now refers to three quite different things.)

Abraham the Monotheist: Was Abraham the "discoverer" of the one true God? "Rediscoverer" would be more accurate, since all interpreters held that Adam, for example, had known the one God in the Garden of Eden. Worship of the stars and other natural bodies must therefore have crept in at a later point. One tradition held

8. In a later passage, Josephus says of Abraham: "At the age of seventy-five he left Chaldea, *God having bidden him to remove to Canaan*" (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:154). It seems that "Chaldea" here means "Haran," since the Bible states that Abraham "was seventy-five years old when he left *Haran*" (Gen. 12:4). Did Josephus simply make a mistake, or is greater "Chaldea" intended to include the city of Haran and so solve the problem?

that such worship began in the time of Enosh, Seth's son. For the mention of Enosh's birth is followed by the puzzling sentence "At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord." Some interpreters held that this verse actually referred to the time when people began to call heavenly bodies by the name of the Lord, first praising the Creator by his created, and eventually mistaking the latter for the former. Others saw Enosh in an altogether positive light and associated the advent of polytheism with yet other antediluvian figures. See further Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation.* Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* (2:9) locates the turn to idolatry in the time of Tubal-Cain (Gen. 4:22).

Haran Perished in the Furnace: As we have seen, "*'ur* of the Chaldeans" can be taken to mean "the flame of the Chaldeans." Quite apart from Abraham's being saved from a fiery furnace—a motif based on God's words to Abraham in Gen. 15:7—there exists another motif dependent on this same phrase. It arose from a somewhat earlier biblical mention of the "Ur of the Chaldeans":

> Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in **Ur of the Chaldeans.** —(traditional Hebrew text of) Gen. 11:28

If *'ur* here means "flame" or "fire," then the implication is that Haran, Abraham's brother, perished in some sort of conflagration before the family left their homeland.[9] But how? Building on the extant tradition of "Abraham the Monotheist," ancient interpreters suggested that the fire in question might have been *set* by Abraham: repelled by his father's idol-worship, he resolved once and for all to put the whole idol-filled temple to the torch. Unfortunately, Abraham's brother Haran became trapped in the blaze:

> And in the sixtieth year of the life of Abram . . . Abram arose by night and burned the house of the idols, and he burned all that was in the house, and no man knew it. And they [the Chaldeans] arose in the night and sought to save their gods from the midst of the fire. And Haran hastened to save them, but the fire flamed over him, and he was burnt in the fire, and he died in Ur of the Chaldeans before Terah his father. —*Jubilees* 12:12–14

> Now, Abraham's father was an idol-maker, and Abraham saw his father's gods and said to himself, "How can my father make and manufacture these [things]? They cannot make me know the creator of the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon and the stars." Abraham was turning over such things in his mind and was deep in thought. And it happened, on a certain day, that he got up in the morning and set fire to the house in which his father's gods were, and the house was burned up along with the gods. And it came to pass that Fara [*sic;* should read "Haran"], his brother, Lot's father, tried to take out his father's gods from the fire and was burned along with

9. The phrase "before his father Terah" is somewhat ambiguous, since in Hebrew as in English it could be taken spatially or temporally. It was translated as "in the lifetime of Terah" (that is, while Terah was still alive) in *Targum Neophyti* and Peshitta; see Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 58.

> the gods. When the Lord God saw what Abraham desired and that he alone desired to become His friend, God appeared to him, saying, "Go forth from your land and from your kindred." [Gen. 12:1]
>
> — *Historical Paleya* (Popov, pp. 21–22)

Targum Neophyti apparently preserves an echo of this tradition:

> And his father Terah was still alive when Haran died in the land of his birth, in the fiery furnace of the Chaldeans. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 11:28

(See also *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 11:28 and Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch,* 5:40.) The idols burned by Abraham also appear in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in what may likewise be an echo of this motif:

> [Terah] called me, saying "Abraham, Abraham," and I said, "Here I am." And he said: "Gather some pieces of wood . . . and prepare [that is, heat up] food with them for my lunch." And it came to pass, when I was choosing the wood, I found among them a small god . . . and on its head was written, "the god Barisat." [Then] I put Barisat next to the burning fire and warned him: "Barisat, be careful that the fire does not go out . . ." When I came back, I found Barisat fallen on his back, with his feet enveloped by fire and burning fiercely. And it came to pass that when I saw it, I laughed . . . [Later,] I said to [Terah], "Father Terah, praise . . . your god Barisat, for, as if out of love for you, he threw himself into the fire in order to cook your food."
>
> — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 5:1–14

As noted, the motif "Haran Perished in the Furnace" is quite separate from "Abraham Saved from Fire," although the two depend on the same pun (Ur = fire). Which came first? The very fact that "Haran Perished in the Furnace" is found in an ancient work like *Jubilees,* whereas nary a hint of "Abraham Saved from Fire" is found in that text, nor in Ben Sira or the Wisdom of Solomon, might suggest that the latter motif is more recent: its first undeniable appearance is in Pseudo-Philo and the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* both probably first century C.E. However, a somewhat ambiguous piece of evidence might argue the contrary:

> For this one [Abraham], who left the splendid enclosure
> Of the awesome race [that is, Babylon], the Praiseworthy One [God] with thundering sound **prevented the immolation.**
>
> — Philo the Epic Poet, cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.20.1

Various commentators have seized upon the highlighted phrase as a reference to God's stopping of the sacrifice of Isaac, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it may well be that the "immolation" in question was the burning of Abraham in a fiery furnace. (See further Holladay, *Fragments,* 2:257–258.) If so, then this motif would arguably go back to the second century B.C.E.

Whatever the date of these motifs' earliest attestations, it seems likely that "Abraham Saved from Fire" developed out of "Haran Perished in the Furnace" rather than vice versa. The original purpose of "Haran Perished in the Furnace" was

to clarify the troubling biblical assertion cited earlier, "Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans" (Gen. 11:28). Interpreters certainly must have found it strange that Haran should live to adulthood and yet die before his father. Stranger still was the fact that the Bible tells us nothing of the circumstances in which this (apparently unnatural) death occurred. Given this void, the otherwise gratuitous pun, Ur = fire, seemed to offer one valuable piece of information: it supplied at least a hint about *how* Haran died—he perished in a fire. This was enough to allow interpreters to fill in the remaining details, connecting this "fire of the Chaldeans" to Abraham's zealous campaign against idolatry.

It was apparently only after the punning equation of Ur with fire had gotten about—thanks to this motif—that interpreters took the further step of incorporating this "fire" into another, entirely separate motif, the one seen above, "Abraham Rescued from Chaldea." They began to claim that Abraham had been saved not just from (unspecified) Chaldean animosity to his monotheism (as witnessed in Judith, *Jubilees,* and other early sources) but from a fire—eventually, a fire that the Chaldeans had built for him (on the model of Dan. 3:19–23). Thus was born the hybrid "Abraham Saved from Fire." That Abraham in this new motif became a martyr willing to surrender his very life for his beliefs may also suggest a post-*Jubilees* dating: the theme of Jewish martyrdom became particularly characteristic of midrashic creations from the period of the Roman persecutions.

It is noteworthy that, in addition to the idea that Abraham was cast, à la Daniel, into a fiery furnace (*Biblical Antiquities* 6:5 and elsewhere), Pseudo-Philo's retelling mentions an earthquake:

> And then Iectan, the leader, carried away with feeling, took Abram and cast him with the bricks into the fiery furnace. God, however, made a great earthquake, and burning fire shot forth from the furnace in flames and flaming sparks and burned up all those who were standing around in front of the furnace. And all those who were incinerated that day were 83,500. But Abram had not the slightest injury from the burning fire.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 6:16–17

This earthquake is hardly a necessary component in the motif (and it is indeed lacking in other versions). Perhaps it was originally another source of fire, quite independent of the "fiery furnace," from which Abraham was saved.

The two motifs, "Haran Perished in the Furnace" and "Abraham Saved from Fire," actually exist side by side in *Targum Neophyti* to Gen. 11:28–31. (On *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* in this context, see Hayward, "Inconsistencies and Contradictions in Targum-Pseudo-Jonathan," 49–52.) Indeed, the two are somewhat clumsily reconciled in *Genesis Rabba,* in the continuation of a passage cited earlier:

> [Nimrod said to Abraham:] You are speaking foolishness. Let us worship fire and [if not] I will cast you into its midst—then let your God whom you worship come and save you from it. Haran stood there undecided. He said [to himself]: I will do one of two things. If Abram wins, I will say that I am on Abram's side, and if Nimrod wins, I will say that I am on Nimrod's side.

> When Abram was cast into the fiery furnace and was saved, he [Nimrod] said to him [Haran]: Whose side are you on? He said: Abram's. Then they took him and cast him into the fire. — *Genesis Rabba* 38:13

G. Vermes discussed some of these traditions but failed to understand their relationship; see his *Scripture and Tradition,* 76–90. The judgment of R. H. Charles, which Vermes criticizes (p. 86), was, as so often, correct. The motif "Haran Perished in the Furnace" was widely disseminated to Christians by Jerome (*Questions in Genesis,* Gen. 11:28 and 12:4) and later transmitted by the Logothete chronographers, George Syncellus, George Cedrenus, and George the Monk; see Adler, "Abraham and the Burning of the Temple of Idols," 95–117. Note as well the presence of "Abraham Saved from Fire" in the "Book of Asatir" (Ben Ḥayyim edition, p. 119); also, Kister, "Observations on Aspects of Exegesis," 25, Gutmann, "Abraham in the Fire."

What Happened to Terah? Terah was 70 years old when Abraham was born (Gen. 11:26). At some point they both left Ur and went to Haran. Abraham is then said to have left Haran at the age of 75 (Gen. 12:4). Logically, Terah would then have been 145 years old. But apparently Terah did not go along with his son to Canaan. For the Bible also says that Terah died *in Haran* when he was 205 years old (Gen. 11:32). Does this mean that Abraham abandoned his aged father in Haran and proceeded to Canaan alone? Many ancient interpreters had trouble accepting this idea.

They put forward various alternatives. The version of the Pentateuch preserved by the Samaritans presents no problem: in that version Terah dies not at the age of 205, but at 145, allowing Abraham to leave for Canaan just after his death. Another possibility was to reckon that Abraham was not *chronologically* but "theologically" 75 years old when he left Haran—that is, it had been 75 years since he had recognized his Creator in Ur and fled to Haran. If so, then the numbers can be made to work out. If Abraham had stayed in Ur until the age of 60, he would then have left Haran 75 years later, or at the age of 135. Terah, 70 years his senior, would then be 205, the age he had been at his death according to Gen. 11:32. (See on this Jerome, *Questions in Genesis,* Gen. 12:4; Augustine discusses two possibilities in *City of God* 16.14–16.)

It is interesting that a fragment discovered at Qumran, (4Q252) *Genesis Pesher,* does not reflect such an attempt to advance Abram's age:

> Terah was one hundred and fo[r]ty years old when he left Ur of the Chaldeans and went to Haran, and Ab[ram was s]eventy. For five years Abram stayed in Haran and then left. — (4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* col. 2: 8–10

According to this reckoning, Abram was indeed 75 when he left Haran for Canaan, and Terah, at 145 years of age, still had 60 years of life left. This Qumran fragment breaks off shortly after this point; perhaps it sought nonetheless to deal with the problem of Abraham's apparent abandonment of his father in Haran. (The specification that Abraham was 70 *when he left Ur* is apparently aimed at a further

chronological difficulty in the Bible, the perceived conflict between Gen. 15:13 and Exod. 12:40–41 with regard to the duration of the Egyptian captivity. See Bernstein, "4Q252," 13–14.) Interestingly, *Jubilees* (12:12) specifies that Abraham was 60 years of age at the time when he burned the house of idols; see further Brock, "Abraham and the Ravens." *Midrash Leqaḥ Tob* sets Abraham's age at 70 when he left Ur; some others do not specify his age. (See Rattner, *Seder 'Olam*, 4 n.)

About the overall question Philo asserts that Abraham did not continue on to Canaan until *after* his father's death:

> Abraham migrated from Chaldea and dwelt in Haran, and **after his father's death** he left that country as well. — Philo, *The Migration of Abraham* 177

It is not clear, however, how he reconciles this assertion with the biblical numbers. The same chronological sequence appears as well in the New Testament:

> Then he [Abraham] departed the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And **after his father died,** God removed him from there into this land. — Acts 7:4

Another possibility was to suppose that Abraham first went to Canaan for a time, then returned to his aging father and stayed with him until his death, and then returned to Canaan permanently. Such a solution is found in *Jubilees* (12:28) and in later Jewish sources in part to accommodate the chronology implied by Gen. 15:13 (Rattner, *Seder 'Olam*, 4 n). It was also adopted by many Christians, who were further constrained by the observation just seen (Acts 7:4) that Abraham went to Canaan *after* his father's death. For a more detailed discussion, see Charles, *Jubilees*, 103–104 n; Brock, "Abraham and the Ravens," 137–152; Milikowsky, "*Seder Olam* and Jewish Chronography," 115–139; Adler, "Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha," 160–164.

Abraham's Dream: This motif originated as an explanation of the words spoken by Abraham to Sarah, "Behold, now[10] I know that you are a beautiful woman." Quite apart from the matter of Abraham's apparent cowardice, these words troubled interpreters for a different reason: they seemed to imply that Abraham had *just now* found out that his wife of so many years was beautiful. Didn't he know before? One tradition answered the question by suggesting that Abraham had always behaved with great modesty with his wife and that, as a result, he had never seen her undressed until the day that they were to cross into Egypt. Then, however, when they came to the river that marked the border,

> they uncovered their flesh in order to cross, and Abram said to his wife Sarah, "Prior to now I had not looked upon your flesh, but **now I know** that you are a beautiful woman." — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 12:11

10. Many modern translators fail to understand this Hebrew idiom and so render Abraham's words simply as "I know that . . ." But *hinnē-na'* does carry a particular nuance, and one that is properly captured in numerous ancient translations as "now." See Fassburg, *Studies in Biblical Syntax*, 36–73.

A somewhat different explanation—or two—can be found elsewhere:

> All those years she was with him and *now* he says to her, "Behold I know that you are a beautiful woman . . ."! But it means that people normally become unsightly when traveling. R. Azariah said in the name of R. Yudah son of R. Simon: [Abraham said:] We have gone all around Aram Naharaim and Aram Nahor and we have not found a woman as beautiful as you. Now that we are entering a place of ugly and swarthy people, "Say you are my sister" [Gen. 12:13]. — *Genesis Rabba* 40:4

According to the first (anonymous) explanation, it is easy for people to look their best when they stay in one place; but traveling takes its toll, imposes a different diet and regime, and may even prevent the use of cosmetics and beauty aids. So it is that Abraham says, "*Now* I know . . ."—only now have I discovered that you are beautiful even under such difficult circumstances. The second explanation has Abraham observe that, in effect, he and Sarah have by now wandered over much of the inhabited world and nowhere has he seen a woman as beautiful as she. Now that they are about to enter a land known for its ill-favored people, there is little likelihood that a rival to her beauty exists anywhere in the world, hence "*Now* I know . . ." And since indeed the Egyptian women are so unlikely to be beautiful, her own beauty will stand out all the more. For that reason in particular, "Say you are my sister" (Gen. 12:13).

With regard to Abraham's dream in the *Genesis Apocryphon,* we should note that, according to *Jubilees* 27:1, a dream similarly came to Rebekah warning her that Esau would try to kill Jacob. Here the exegetical purpose is similar: if Esau had only *thought* these words ("said *in his heart,*" Gen. 27:41), how could they have subsequently been told to Rebekah (Gen. 27:42)—save by some divine communication? In this connection, mention should be made of the addition to Genesis found in fragmentary form in (4Q364) *Reworked Pentateuch* fragment 3, column 2. The purpose of this addition seems to have been an explanation of the biblical phrase "lest I lose the two of you in one day" (Gen. 27:45). The phrase "in one day" has been deliberately omitted in the *Reworked Pentateuch:* probably its intention was to make Isaac out to be saying that Esau had already been "lost" to him because of his Hittite wives, and so to establish a real connection between Gen. 27:45 and 46, rather than implying (as Genesis itself does) that Rebekah simply used Esau's Hittite wives as an excuse for sending Jacob to Aram.

Sarah's Virtue Intact: Numerous ancient texts assert or imply that Pharaoh never acted on his desires with Sarah. This conclusion may in part reflect a more general tendency among ancient interpreters to conflate this incident in Genesis 12 with similar ones in Genesis 20 and 26 (involving, respectively, Sarah and Abimelech and Rebekah and Abimelech). In the first of these two, the Bible states that "Abimelech did not approach her [Sarah]" (Gen. 20:4). This statement may have been what suggested to interpreters that Pharaoh likewise had not touched Sarah. (See Shinan and Zakovitch, *Abram and Sarai in Egypt,* 86.) Some interpreters were

likewise inclined to see the "plagues" that afflicted Pharaoh (Gen. 12:17) as having begun as soon as Sarah entered his household (though the Bible seems to imply otherwise):

> All appetite for pleasure was eradicated [in Pharaoh] and replaced by visitations of the opposite kind . . . Thus the chastity of the woman was preserved. —Philo, *On Abraham* 96–98

> On **that very night,** God Most High sent against him [Pharaoh] a pestilential spirit to afflict him . . . He could not approach her, nor did he know her, though he was with her for two years.
>
> —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:16–17

> On their arrival in Egypt, all fell out as Abraham had suspected: his wife's beauty was noised abroad, so that Pharaoh, the king of the Egyptians, not content with the reports of her, was fired with a desire to see her and **on the point** of laying hands on her. But God thwarted his criminal passion by an outbreak of disease. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:163–164

Jerome, troubled by the same incident, offered a solution based upon an analogous situation elsewhere in the Bible:

> According to the book of Esther, whichever of the women pleased the king would spend "six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women" (Est. 2:12) , and only then would she go in to the king. And so it might have been that Sarah, after she had pleased the king, had her entry to the king prepared for a year; in the meantime Pharaoh gave many things to Abraham, and was subsequently stricken by God—but she all the while had remained untouched by any act of intercourse with him.
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 12:15–16

On various reflexes of midrashic motifs about this incident in later Islamic writings, see Firestone, "Difficulties in Keeping a Beautiful Wife," 196–214.

Hagar, Gift of Pharaoh: Later in the story of Abraham, we learn that Sarah had an Egyptian maid, Hagar (Gen. 16:1), who eventually became Abraham's concubine. But how did Sarah acquire Hagar? Although the Bible had not mentioned her existence before, in the incident with Pharaoh, the text notes:

> And for her [Sarah's] sake, he [Pharaoh] dealt well with Abram: and he acquired sheep oxen, he-asses, menservants, **maidservants,** she-asses, and camels. —Gen. 12:16

The Bible does not say so specifically, but if Sarah subsequently is said to have an *Egyptian* maidservant named Hagar, it seemed reasonable to suppose that she had been one of the maidservants mentioned in this verse, part of the bounty apparently bestowed on Abraham by Pharaoh.

[Abraham recalls:] And then [they brought] Sa[r]ai to m[e] and the king gave her [m]uch [silver and g]old and much clothing of linen and purple [and put them] before her, and Hagar as well.

— (1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:30–32

And Abram's wife Sarai did not bear him children, but she had an Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, the daughter of Pharaoh, [Pharaoh had] given her to her as a maidservant. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 16:1

Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter. When Pharaoh saw the [good] deeds done by Sarah in his house, he took his daughter and gave [her] to her. "Better," he said, "that my daughter be a servant-girl in this house than a noble-woman in another house." — *Genesis Rabba* 45:1

8

Melchizedek

(GENESIS 14:17–20)

An uncircumcised priest?

Melchizedek

(GENESIS 14:17–20)

❖ ❖ ❖

After his return to Canaan, Abraham suddenly found himself drawn into a great war: Lot, Abraham's nephew, had been taken prisoner, and Abraham intervened to save him, taking a band of men with him. They succeeded in freeing Lot; afterward Abraham returned home. It was then that he encountered a certain Melchizedek, the king of Salem. Melchizedek brought out bread and wine; he was "a priest of God Most High." Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and he gave him a tithe (tenth) of his possessions.

MELCHIZEDEK is something of an enigma in the Bible. We are not told the name of his father or his mother, or anything about his family. He is not mentioned anywhere in the various lists of Noah's descendants. We are not told *when* he was born—nor even *that* he was born—and the Bible is equally silent about his death. Nor, for that matter, is the location of his kingdom, Salem, known for sure. Thus, almost everything about him was mysterious for ancient interpreters. His encounter with Abraham certainly seemed designed to impart some lesson—but what exactly was it? Nothing really happened in this meeting, save that Melchizedek brought out food and then blessed Abraham (as priests were later to bless people who came to the Jerusalem Temple). Abraham then apparently[1] gave him a tithe (as people were also to bring tithes to the temple). But these very details were what was most intriguing in the story. For Melchizedek thus seemed to be a priest. But how could that be? The priesthood itself had not yet been established, nor had the Jerusalem Temple been built. Yet here was Melchizedek, bluntly described as a "priest of God Most High." Not only that, but Melchizedek apparently had not the slightest connection to the priesthood that would eventually be established in Israel—for that priesthood was hereditary, and its family line went back through Abraham, not Melchizedek! Who was this so-called priest?

A Generous Host

Many ancient interpreters supposed that, if the Bible had gone out of its way to describe this puzzling (and apparently inconsequential) episode, it must be that Melchizedek had nevertheless done something significant. The main thing that he

1. The text says simply "*he* gave *him* a tithe" without specifically identifying who the giver or the recipient was. Since Melchizedek is a priest, however, he (like later priests and temple personnel) would normally have been the recipient and Abraham therefore the giver.

did, according to the biblical account, was to "bring out bread and wine," although the text does not say for whom. Perhaps, in characteristically understated fashion, the Bible here was alluding to an extraordinary act of generosity, the providing of food and drink (and wine at that!) to Abraham's entire army. In any case, a number of writers specified what the Bible did not, that the food and drink were given to Abraham's whole company:

> And Melchizedek the king of Salem brought out food and drink to Abram and **to all the men** who were with him; and he was a priest to God Most High. And he blessed Abram and said: Blessed is Abram to God Most High, master of heaven and earth; and blessed is God Most High, who has given over your enemies into your hand. And he [Abraham] gave him a tithe from all the possessions of the king of Elam and his confederates.
>
> —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 13:14–17

> He [Melchizedek] stretched his hands to heaven and honored him [Abraham] with prayers on his behalf and offered sacrifices of thanksgiving for the victory and feasted handsomely **those** who had taken part in the contest, rejoicing and sharing their gladness as though it were his own.
>
> —Philo, *On Abraham* 235

> Now this Melchizedek hospitably entertained Abraham's **army**, providing abundantly for all their needs, and in the course of the feast he began to extol Abraham and to bless God for having delivered his enemies into his hand. Abraham then offered him a tithe of the spoils, and he accepted the gift.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 181

Righteous King and Priest

Other things, however, suggested that Melchizedek must have been a noteworthy figure in his own right. To begin with, *Melchizedek* seems to mean something like "king of righteousness" or "king of justice" in Hebrew.[2] It occurred to some that this might be not his real name but—like "king of Salem" and "priest of God Most High"—a title, one that might hold the key to his real importance. Perhaps he was an extraordinarily just and righteous king.

> [Jerusalem's] first founder was a leader of the Canaanites, called in his native tongue "righteous king"—for so indeed he was.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6:438

> He is first, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness.
>
> —Heb. 7:2

2. One of the peculiarities connected with this name is that, in the traditional Hebrew text, it is written with a space between its two parts, *malki ṣedeq*—as if it were actually two different names or two separate words. The first word might thus appear to mean "my king," while the second part would be "justice" or "righteousness."

Moreover, since "Salem" corresponded to the last part of the name "Jerusalem," some interpreters concluded that Melchizedek had been Jerusalem's first king and founder. Indeed, if he was a "priest," perhaps he had also founded some sort of sanctuary in Jerusalem, a forerunner of the great temple to be built there centuries later:

> For this reason he was the **first to serve as a priest before God** and, having been the first to build the temple, gave to the city previously called "Salem" the name *Jerusalem* [understood in Greek as "Holy Salem"].
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6:438 (also *Jewish Antiquities* 1:180–181)

> And Melchizedek, the king of **Jerusalem** . . . was a priest serving in the high priesthood before God Most High. — *Targums Onqelos, Neophyti* Gen. 14:18

> He was made king by reason of his greatness . . . and moreover was a high priest, which office he had received from Noah in succession.
>
> — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 11:2

> The Jerusalem temple was built in his [Melchizedek's] domain, as it says, "And Melchizedek, king of Salem . . ." [Gen. 14:18], and "Salem" means Jerusalem, as it says, "His [God's] abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion" [Ps. 78:3 (some texts: 2)].
>
> — *Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 11:10

Divinely Appointed High Priest

There was, however, another factor that bore on Melchizedek's true identity. The name "Melchizedek" appears in one other place in the Hebrew Bible, in a passing reference in Psalm 110. The language of this psalm is somewhat obscure in Hebrew; here is one modern translation of its opening lines:

> The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."
> The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes!
> Your people will offer themselves freely on the day you lead your host upon the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning like dew your youth will come to you.
> The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "**You are a priest forever, after the line of Melchizedek**."
>
> — Ps. 110:1–4

Ancient readers of the story of Abraham and Melchizedek in Genesis looked to this psalm to help clarify its significance. But that meant first of all deciding to whom these words were addressed and what they meant. Here, the potentially ambiguous writing system of biblical Hebrew played a crucial role: the Hebrew words that correspond to those highlighted above could in fact be read and understood in two

radically different fashions. This led to the development of two different schools of thought on the identity of Melchizedek among the Bible's ancient interpreters.

One way of understanding the highlighted words in Ps. 110:4 was: "You are a priest forever by my order [or "on my account"], O Melchizedek." If this is the right translation, then it is Melchizedek who is being addressed throughout the psalm, and everything else in the psalm that refers to "you" must therefore be talking about Melchizedek. The psalm would thus seem to recount that Melchizedek had been appointed to the priesthood by God Himself (since the whole of verse 4 would now be: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever by my order, O Melchizedek'"). This would of course correspond to his description in Genesis as a "priest of God Most High"—indeed, a priest who was personally appointed by God must have been no ordinary priest but an ancient forerunner to the exalted office of high priest:

> When the **high priest** of God Most High saw him [Abraham] approaching and bearing his spoils . . . —Philo, *On Abraham* 235

> You [O God] are the one who **appointed** Melchizedek as a **high priest** in Your service. —*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.23

> And Melchizedek, the king of Jerusalem . . . was a priest serving in the **high priesthood** before God Most High. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 14:18

The Heavenly Melchizedek

But interpreting Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek in the light of Psalm 110 led to other, more radical conclusions. After all, the Melchizedek described in the psalm seemed in some ways superhuman. His royal scepter had come from God Himself ("The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter"). In fact, Melchizedek is apparently the "lord" referred to in the first line, who was commanded by God to "sit at my right hand" like some sort of angel or divine being.

It is from this interpretation of Psalm 110 that there emerged the figure of a heavenly Melchizedek, an angelic being who sits next to the divine throne.[3] Such a Melchizedek is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where (in a text going back to the early first or second century B.C.E.) he is said to be ready to punish the guilty and save the righteous in the great day of reckoning:

> Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of the laws of Go[d on that day and he will sa]v[e them from] Belial and from all his k[indred spirits,] and to his aid will (come) all the "gods"[4] of [justice and] he [Melchizedek] is the one w[ho will stand on that day over] all the sons of God and will ord[ain] this [asse]mbly.
>
> This is the Day of P[eace, a]bout which [God] spoke [of old in the words

3. If so, the description in Gen. 14:18 as "king of Salem" had to be reinterpreted; the same letters could be read as "king of peace."

4. Apparently used in the sense of "angels."

of] the prophet [Isai]ah, who said "[How] beautiful on the mountains are the messen[ger]'s feet, [pr]oclaiming peace."[5]

—(11Q13) *Melchizedek Text* 2.13–16

It may be that the interpretation of the name "Melchizedek" had a role in the understanding of this angel's precise functions: he is the "king of justice" in the sense that he "will carry out the vengeance of God's laws." This understanding also corresponds to the psalm's assertion that "he will execute judgment among the nations" (Ps. 110:6). Some identified this angelic Melchizedek with the archangel Michael.

In a liturgical text among the Dead Sea Scrolls are further possible references to Melchizedek the angel; unfortunately, the text here is quite fragmentary:

] priest[s
G]od of knowledge and [
Melchi]zedek, priest in the assemb[ly of God[6]

—(4Q401) *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* 11.1–3

] holy ones of [
holine]ss [?] consecrate [
Mel]chizedek [

—(4Q401) *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* 22:1–3

Although both passages are fragmentary, if the restoration of the name Melchizedek is correct, it would seem from the overall context (namely, a hymn describing the service of God performed by the angels in the heavenly temple) that Melchizedek is, here as well, an angel, indeed perhaps the highest of the angels serving God in heaven.

Another crucial ambiguity found in Psalm 110 also contributed to the identification of Melchizedek as an angel or heavenly being. It is the verse translated above as, "From the womb of the morning like dew your youth will come to you." This could be translated in a radically different way—and was. The old Greek ("Septuagint") translation of this verse reads:

From the womb, before the morning star, **I have begotten you.**

—Septuagint Ps. 110:5

If these words were spoken by God to Melchizedek (as they seemed to be in context), then they meant that Melchizedek is God's "son." Now, "sons of God," as

5. Here as well, apparently, Melchizedek's title in Genesis, "king of Salem," is understood as "king of peace."

6. The phrase "assembly of God" may be a reference to Ps. 82:1. Interestingly, the lines just prior to those cited above from 11Q *Melchizedek* also refer to this psalm: "He [God] has decreed the year of favor for Melchizedek . . . as it is written about him [apparently, Melchizedek] in the songs of David, where it says, '*Elohim* [st]ands forth in the asse[mbly of God], in the midst of the gods he rules'" (col. 2, ll. 9–10). It seems that the divine name "Elohim" here is interpreted as a reference to Melchizedek, while the "gods" in the same line refer to the angels, thus eliminating any polytheistic implications from this psalm.

we have seen, was a phrase elsewhere understood as referring specifically to the angels.[7] If so, then this "son of God" who sits at God's right hand, must have been an angel charged with executing divine justice on earth, the angelic "king of justice."

A somewhat related Melchizedek appears in the work called *2 Enoch,* which may go back to the early first century C.E. In this text, Melchizedek seems to be born to Sopanim (or "Sothonim"), the wife of Noah's (mythical) brother Nir, without any prior act of sexual intercourse (*2 Enoch* 71:2). The idea that Melchizedek was so conceived may be in keeping with the interpretation of Ps. 110:5 just seen: God's words "I have begotten you" meant that Melchizedek was begotten without any human progenitor. In any case, God promises Nir that, although a great flood is coming to destroy the earth, Melchizedek will be safe:

> Behold, I plan now to send down a great destruction onto the earth. But concerning the child [Melchizedek], do not be anxious, Nir, because I in a short while shall send my archangel Gabriel. And he will take the child and put him in the garden of Eden, and he will not perish with those who must perish . . . And Melchizedek will be my priest to all priests, and I will sanctify him and I will change him into a great people who will sanctify me.
>
> — *2 Enoch* (A) 71:27–29

However much this Melchizedek had a human mother, he nonetheless seems to have acquired superhuman traits: miraculously saved from the flood, he is actually permitted to reenter Eden, and will go on to become some sort of "priest to all priests"—in keeping with Melchizedek's title in Genesis, "a priest [directly] to God Most High."

The Christian "Order of Melchizedek"

But there was a second way of reading the crucial verse Ps.110:4. Instead of indicating the person being spoken to (that is, "You are a priest forever by my order, *O Melchizedek*"), the word "Melchizedek" could be understood as part of the previous phrase; then the verse would read, "You are a priest forever, after the order of [or "for the sake of," "on account of"] Melchizedek."[8] If so, then the psalm was addressed *not* to Melchizedek but to some undefined "you," a "you" who is also being referred to in the first line of the psalm as "my lord."

Early Christians interpreted this "you" as Jesus. (Indeed, the fact that Psalm 110 began "The Lord said to my lord" was offered as proof that there were indeed two heavenly "Lords"; see Mark 12:35–37 and parallels, Acts 2: 34–36). Consequently, the psalm seemed to be saying that Jesus was in fact a priest:

> Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by Him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you," as it also says elsewhere [in the same psalm], "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications . . . and he became the source of eternal salvation to all who

7. See above, Chapter 5, "A Bad Match."

8. This is the translation of Ps. 110:4 in the old Greek (Septuagint) version.

> obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.
>
> For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the [war] and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever.[9] —Heb. 5:5–10, 7:1–3

For the author of Hebrews, it was certainly important that the Melchizedek of Gen. 14:17–20 was a "priest to God Most High" without having been from the traditional priestly line. For, this meant that the "you" of Psalm 110—by this interpretation, Jesus—could likewise be appointed a high priest without being of priestly descent (see Heb. 9:11–12). That is what "You are a priest forever, *after the order of Melchizedek*" meant to this author—a priest directly appointed by God.

It was not a big step to interpret the person of Melchizedek as a foreshadowing of other elements of Christianity, including the Eucharist:

> "Salem" means specifically "peace," of which our Savior is said to be king. For concerning him does Moses say, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High." He offers him "bread and wine" [Gen. 14:18], holy food, as a prefiguring of the eucharist. It is true that the name "Melchizedek" means "just king," but justice and peace are synonyms.
>
> —Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 4:161, 3

An Uncircumcised Priest?

At the same time, the fact that Melchizedek was a priest without the usual genealogy, and that he had apparently not undergone circumcision nor followed other Jewish laws and practices, was taken by Christians from an early period as a biblical proof that such things were not important.

> For if [circumcision] were necessary, as you think, God would not have formed Adam uncircumcised, nor would He have looked with favor upon the gifts of Abel, who offered sacrifices but was not circumcised, nor would Enoch, who was not circumcised, have pleased him . . . The priest of God Most High, Melchizedek, was without circumcision, and he had tithes given him by Abraham as offerings. Abraham was the first to receive circumcision in the fleshly sense, and yet he was blessed by Melchizedek [the uncircum-

9. It is interesting that, according to the second line of interpretation described above, all the supernatural traits in Psalm 110 should belong to the "you" addressed in the psalm and *not* to Melchizedek, who could simply be an ordinary priest so designated by God. Yet in the excerpt from Hebrew 7, Melchizedek seems to have retained some of his supernatural traits from the first line of interpretation described: he is "without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever."

> cised], after whose order God has announced by David [for example, in Psalm 110] that He would establish the eternal Priest.
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 19:3–4 (also ch. 33)

> Likewise Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, was not circumcised and did not keep the sabbath, yet he was chosen for the priesthood of God.
>
> —Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 2

Others maintained the opposite:

> Likewise, [Melchizedek] was born circumcised, as it says "And Melchizedek, king of Salem" [interpreted as the king who was *šālēm*, "complete" or "perfect," hence, circumcised]. —*Abot deR. Natan* (A) 2

> He was righteous and he was born circumcised. —*Genesis Rabba* 26:3

Melchizedek in Samaria

As we have already glimpsed, Jewish sources generally held that Melchizedek's kingdom, Salem, was simply a shortened form of the name "Jerusalem":

> And the king of Sodom heard that Abram had given back all the captives and all the booty, and he went up to meet him; and he came to **Salem, which is Jerusalem.** —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* col. 22:12–13

> There he was received by the king of Solyma, Melchizedek . . . Solyma was in fact the place called thereafter **Jerusalem**.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 180 (also *Jewish War* 6:438)

> And Melchizedek, **king of Jerusalem**, brought out bread and wine.
>
> —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 14:18

> And Melchizedek, the **king of Jerusalem** . . . was a priest serving in the high priesthood before God Most High. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 14:18

Some interpreters, however, thought otherwise. A tradition existed that identified "Salem" as a site at or near Shechem, the capital of Samaria (formerly the northern kingdom of Israel). A fragment attributed to (Pseudo-)Eupolemus (who may or may not have been a Samaritan) actually mentions Melchizedek in retelling the story of Abraham. However, this text says that Melchizedek served as a priest in a temple on the Samaritan mountain, Mt. Gerizim, near Shechem:

> He [Abraham] was accepted as a guest by the city at the temple of *Argarizin* [that is, Mt. Gerizim] which means "mountain of the Most High." He also received gifts from Melchizedek, who was a priest of God and king as well.
>
> —(Pseudo-)Eupolemus, *Fragment One* 5–6

Elsewhere, as well, Salem is identified as a place in its own right:

> And Jacob came to **Salem, the city of Shechems**. —Septuagint Gen. 33:18

> And . . . Jacob went up to Salem, **to the east of Shechem**, in peace.[10]
>
> — *Jubilees* 30:1

> And Jared became the father of Enoch and he built a city and called it Salem the Great. — *al-Asaṭir* 2:5

The idea that Salem was at or near Shechem would have been very useful to the Samaritans. For in later times, too, they considered Mt. Gerizim to be sacred and, indeed, the *real* site intended by God for His temple (not Jerusalem). If Melchizedek had been a priest of God in their territory way back in the time of Abraham, here was biblical proof that their claims for the sanctity of their own temple and its priests were truly valid.

Melchizedek Was Shem

Many Jews must have found such uses of the story of Melchizedek disturbing. No doubt the situation was eased somewhat by a contrary tradition that held that "Melchizedek" was simply an honorific name of Shem, Noah's son.

> About Shem[']s being a prophet] it says, "Upon My word, Melchizedek" [Ps. 110:4].[11] — *Seder Olam* 21

> And Melchizedek, the king of Jerusalem, **who was the great Shem** . . .
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 14:18

> Likewise Shem was born circumcised, as it says, "And Melchizedek, king of Salem . . ." [interpreted as the king who was *šālēm*, "complete" or "perfect," hence, circumcised]. — *Abot deR. Natan* (A) 2

> This Melchizedek was Shem. — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 11:2

> The [Jews] say that he [Melchizedek] was Shem, Noah's son, and counting up the total years of his lifetime [eight hundred years, according to Gen. 11:11] they demonstrate that he would have lived up to [the time of] Isaac [and so certainly could have encountered Abraham in Gen. 14:18–21].
>
> — Jerome, *Questions in Genesis*, Gen. 14:18

This identification—while probably of ancient origin—must have helped to "domesticate" Melchizedek in the face of some of the claims made regarding his true identity. For if Melchizedek was indeed Shem, a distant ancestor of the Jews, and if his high priesthood was associated with the very site on which the great temple was to be built (Salem, understood as Jerusalem), then here was really only another indication that Jerusalem had always been God's chosen spot for His sanctuary and

10. Here is a double translation of the Hebrew *šlm*, understood as both "to Salem" and "in peace."

11. I have translated the verse in this fashion to reflect the apparent interpretation of *Seder Olam* here: Melchizedek [Shem] was a "priest to the Lord Most High *upon My word*"—that is, one whose mission it was to communicate the divine word, a prophet. (With this understanding of "priest" *Seder Olam* goes on to cite Gen. 14:18.)

that the Jewish people, even in the time of their remotest ancestors, had already been chosen by God to supply that sanctuary with its priests.

Services No Longer Needed

Nevertheless, a later rabbinic tradition proposed a rather different understanding of Abraham's meeting with this mysterious figure. According to this interpretation, the whole significance of the biblical story can be grasped only by considering the wording of the blessing that Melchizedek offers. He says:

> Blessed be Abram to God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hands. —Gen. 14:19–20

In these lines the Rabbis saw a crucial mistake on Melchizedek's part: he blessed Abraham *before* blessing God, which was a great sacrilege. As a result, they concluded, God must have decided that Melchizedek was not a very good choice for the priesthood after all:

> R. Zechariah said in the name of R. Ishma'el: God at first wished to have the priesthood come from Shem [that is, Melchizedek], as it is written, "and he was a priest to God Most High" [Gen. 14:18]. But when he [Melchizedek] put Abraham's blessing before God's own, God resolved to have the priesthood descend from Abraham instead . . . And thus it says, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek' [Ps. 110:4]." ["After the order," *'al dibrātî,* should be interpreted as] "because of the words [*'al dibbûrô*] of Melchizedek." Likewise it says "and **he** was a priest to God Most High"—*he* was a priest, but not his descendants. —b. *Nedarim* 32b

According to this interpretation, the words in Psalm 110, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek," were not spoken to Melchizedek but to his *replacement,* who was to found the priestly dynasty in Israel. Melchizedek himself had proven to be an unsuitable priest: if the Bible says, "he was a priest," it means to imply by this "he alone": his descendants would not inherit the job from him.

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: Melchizedek provided bread and wine to Abraham and all of his troops. He was king of Jerusalem and perhaps its founder; his name meant "king of righteousness" (or "justice"). He served there as a priest, perhaps a divinely appointed high priest. Indeed, some interpreters concluded that Melchizedek was in reality an angel or semidivine being. Early Christians further saw in him a foreshadowing of Jesus—a priest by divine appointment rather than through priestly pedigree, whose gift of bread and wine foreshadowed the Eucharist and whose uncircumcised state demonstrated that circumcision was not necessary. Another tradition, however, held that "Melchizedek" was simply an honorific title for Noah's son Shem, who had inherited the priesthood from him; the priesthood was taken away from him because of his defective blessing.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Melchizedek

Abraham's Journey: Before giving its account of the war between the four kings and the five (Genesis 14), the *Genesis Apocryphon* recounts the details of a certain journey that Abraham undertook:

> [Abraham recalls:] I began by going around from the river Gihon and going next to the Sea until I reached the Mountain of the Ox, and I journeyed next to the great Sea of Salt and went by the Mountain of the Ox eastward, to the breadth of the land, until I reached the river Euphrates, and then I went around the Euphrates until I reached the Red Sea to the east, and then I proceeded by the Red Sea until I reached the extension of the Reed Sea which goes out from the Red Sea, and then I turned southward, until I reached the Gihon River and then I returned safely back to my house.
>
> —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* 21:15–19

Nothing corresponding to this journey appears in the Bible, save the fact that God says to Abraham at one point:

> "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward, and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land which you see I will give to you . . . Arise, **walk through the length and breadth of the land,** for I will give it to you."
>
> —Gen. 13:14–17

It apparently bothered the author of the *Genesis Apocryphon* that Abraham should have been commanded by God to do something without the Bible specifying that he carried out the commandment. Since it was obvious that Abraham must have done as he was bidden, this author simply filled in the details. (On this type of narrative expansion, see Chapter 7, *OR,* "Out of Astrology.")

Thirteen or Thirteenth? The chronology of the war in Genesis 14 is somewhat troubling:

> Twelve years had they [the five subject kings] served Chedorlaomer and thirteen they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.
>
> —Gen. 14:4–5

The phrase "and thirteen they rebelled" is ambiguous: does it mean "in year number thirteen" (that is, after serving for twelve years, in the next year they rebelled), or does it mean that they rebelled *for thirteen years?* On this question interpreters differed:

> . . . in the thirteenth year they rebelled . . .
>
> —Septuagint, *Samaritan Pentateuch,* Peshitta, Vulgate, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,* etc., Gen. 14:4[12]

12. Note that even this wording contains an ambiguity, since if the biblical text states that they served for twelve years, then by all accounts the rebellion began in the thirteenth year. The question, left

> For twelve years they gave their tribute to the King of Elam, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. —(1Q20) *Genesis Apocryphon* 21:26–27

> From the time of the dispersion [after the tower of Babel] until Abraham went forth from Haran was twenty-six years: these are the "twelve years [that] they served Chedorlaomer **and the thirteen** they rebelled, and in the fourteenth year." [Gen. 14:4]. —*Seder Olam* 1

> . . . and for thirteen years they rebelled . . .
> —*Targum Onqelos, Targum Neophyti* (marginal gloss) Gen. 14:4

> Rabbi Yose said: Twelve plus thirteen makes a total of twenty-five years, but Rabbi Simeon said: There were thirteen years all told.
> —*Genesis Rabba* 141:6

Abraham's 318 Were One: Gen. 14:14 states that when Lot was taken prisoner, Abraham "led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen." The fact that the Bible should specify exactly how many "trained men" Abraham had seemed strange—especially since this number is of no significance for the rest of the story. The Septuagint translation only compounded the problem:

> When Abraham heard that his nephew Lot had been taken prisoner, he **numbered** his own [men], those born in his house, three hundred and eighteen. —Septuagint Gen. 14:14

Why stress this number? It was the practice in ancient times to use letters of the alphabet to represent numbers—so that, for example, A equals one, B two, and so forth. (The next letter after the one corresponding to ten would be made to represent twenty—rather than eleven—and in this way the twenty-plus letters of the Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Slavonic, and other alphabets could be used to represent any three- or four-digit number with relative ease.) But one result of this widely used system was that certain numbers seemed to have, or could be made to have, symbolic value. And so it was with 318:

> For it [Scripture] says: "And Abraham circumcised from his household eighteen and three hundred men."[13] What is the lesson being imparted here? Notice that the "eighteen" comes first, and only after that the "three hundred." The eighteen is [written] "J," ten, plus "E," eight—and so you have JEsus. Then, since grace was to come about through the cross, in[dicated by the shape of] the letter T [which stands for 300], it then says "and three hundred." —*Letter of Barnabas* 9:8

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ambiguous by these translations, is how long this rebellion lasted, one year or thirteen. (It had to be either one or thirteen, since the text continues, "And in the fourteenth year," that is, either fourteen after twelve years of service plus one year of rebellion, or fourteen after thirteen years of rebellion.)

13. This is, of course, not a citation of Gen. 14:14 as we know it, but apparently a blend of Gen. 17:23 and 27 with Gen. 14:14.

Rabbinic interpreters found another explanation. It so happens that the Hebrew letters of the name Eliezer, Abraham's servant mentioned in Gen. 15:2, have a numerical value of exactly 318. Perhaps, then, what Scripture was hinting at by giving this precise number was that Abraham took with him only a single helper, his faithful servant:

> It was Eliezer alone, since the number of "Eliezer" is 318.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 43:2

See further Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:224.

The Gnostic Melchizedek: In the gnostic library found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, there is an entire treatise on Melchizedek, which may have been composed in its original form as early as the second century C.E. Here Melchizedek appears (as in the fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls cited earlier) as an eschatological high priest and warrior. Later Christian sources likewise speak of the (by then heretical) belief that Melchizedek was a supernatural power or heavenly being, and mention a heretical sect of "Melchizedekians." Thus, Hyppolitus mentions the belief "that a certain Melchizedek is the great power, and that he is greater than Christ; in fact they say that Christ is in his likeness" (*Refutation of All the Heresies* 7:36). On the gnostic Melchizedek, see Pearson, "Introduction to IX, 1: Melchizedek," 19–40; also, Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition.*

There also are hints of an angelic or soteriological Melchizedek even in rabbinic texts:

> Said R. Isaac: it is written, "And the Lord showed me four smiths" [Zech. 2:3; some texts, 1:20]. These are they: Elijah, the Messiah, Melchizedek, and the war priest.[14]
>
> — *Pesiqta deR. Kahana, Ha-ḥodesh* 9

See also *Song of Songs Rabba* 2:13; *Pesiqta Rabbati, Ha-ḥodesh* 15 (Friedmann ed., p. 75a); *Midrash ha-Gadol, Va'era* 6:7; cf. b. *Sukkah* 52b; Aptowitzer, "Malkizedek."

Melchizedek Was Shem: As noted, many Jewish sources identify Melchizedek with Shem. Some scholars have suggested that this was first done in the context of later Jewish-Christian polemics: if Melchizedek was actually Shem, then he was the ancestor of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the idea of a priesthood extending back through him was less disturbing to Jews than the notion of a "priest of God Most High" who lacked any connection to the Jewish people or the later levitical priesthood.

It seems likely, however, that Melchizedek's identification with Shem actually came about before any such Christian arguments existed (and certainly before the time when Christian arguments seemed to Jews to require refutation). After all, who *was* Melchizedek to early interpreters? Why was the genealogy of such an important person—the "priest of God Most High," no less—not mentioned? Identifying him as Shem, whose genealogy was known, provided an answer, and an easily accepted

14. See on this b. *Yoma* 72b.

one. (Nor did this solution create any problem with chronology: according to Genesis 11, Shem would still have had two hundred and ten years of life left at the time of Abraham's birth.) And there was just a hint of Shem being a priest in the blessing that Noah had given to his son Japhet:

> May God enlarge Japhet, and let **him** dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. —Gen. 9:27

The word "him" is ambiguous in Hebrew as in English. It normally would seem to refer to Japhet, but it also could be taken as a reference to God: "May God enlarge Japhet, but let *Him* dwell in the tents of Shem." Many interpreters chose the latter interpretation, for example:

> [Noah said:] "May the Lord enlarge Japhet, but may the Lord dwell in Shem's dwelling place." —*Jubilees* 7:12

> And in the tents of Shem He will dwell, the land that He gave to Abraham who loved Him.[15] —(4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* col. 2, 7–8

> ". . . but let Him cause His Presence [*Shekhinah*] to dwell in the sanctuaries of Shem." —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 9:27

But in that case, what did it mean to speak of God *dwelling* in the tents of Shem? For God is deemed to dwell in a *sanctuary*—the Temple in Jerusalem or, before that, in the priestly tabernacle. Thus, if God is said here to dwell in the "tents of Shem," those tents themselves must have constituted some sort of sanctuary (or house of study—see Chapter 11, *OR*, "Jacob the Scholar") and Shem must have been a *priest.* "Melchizedek," then, could be understood as an honorific title given to Shem ("king of justice" or the like) and the whole incident described in Gen. 14:17–20 could truly have been an encounter between Abraham and Shem. Familiar with this tradition of the Jews, Jerome and Ephraem both refer to it, as we have seen. See also Aptowitzer, "Malkizedek"; Rodriguez Carmona, "La figura de Melquisedec en la literatura targúmica."

It should be noted that the equation of Melchizedek with Shem might serve an apologetic purpose as well: it could demonstrate that "Shem" had indeed inhabited Salem (= Jerusalem) in ancient times and hence that all of Canaan *had originally been given to Shem* as his inheritance after the flood. This important piece of information is, of course, lacking in the biblical account. On the contrary, there one finds the clear indication that this land was allotted to Ham's son Canaan (Gen. 10:6, 15–19). However, at least one ancient source suggested that Canaan's settlement of this territory was in contravention of the original distribution of lands:

> Ham and his sons went into the land which he was to occupy, which he had acquired as his share, in the southern country. When Canaan saw that the

15. The Hebrew text has no capital letters, of course, but there is no ambiguity here—God is being referred to, since it was hardly Japhet who gave the land "to Abraham who loved Him"! It is therefore all the more noteworthy that this text has inverted the word order of Gen. 9:27, displaying a subtle feel for biblical Hebrew, since this changes the emphasis as well, as if the Bible were saying: "Let God enlarge Japhet, but *it is in the tents of Shem* that He will dwell."

> land of Lebanon as far as the stream of Egypt was very beautiful, he did not go to his hereditary land to the west of the sea. He settled in the land of Lebanon, on the east and west, and from the border of Lebanon and on the seacoast . . . His father Ham and his brothers Cush and Misraim said to him, "Do not settle in **Shem's residence,** for it emerged by their lot for Shem and his sons" . . . But he did not listen to them, he settled in the land of Lebanon, from Hamath to the entrance of Egypt . . . For this reason the land was named the land of Canaan. —*Jubilees* 10:28–34

Jubilees does not mention it, but the fact that Shem himself is glimpsed later on, *sub specie* Melchizedek, inhabiting Salem certainly showed that this "land of Canaan" was originally Shem's. This same connection was made explicitly in *Midrash Aggadah;* see Himmelfarb, "Some Echoes of Jubilees in Medieval Hebrew Literature," 121. On later, Christian versions, see Adler, "Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha," 152–154.

The Heavenly Melchizedek: About *11Q13 Melchizedek Text* and related material there is a substantial bibliography. See inter alia van der Woude, "Melchisedek als himmlische Erlösergestalt"; Carmignac, "Le document de Qumran sur Melkisedeq"; Delcor, "Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts"; Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchireša;* Puech, "Notes sur le Manuscrit de XI Melkisedeq"; Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition;* Flusser, "Melchizedek and the Son of Man"; Gianotto, *Melchisedek e la sua Tipologia;* Vivian, "I Movimenti che si oppongono al Tempio."

Melchizedek in Samaria: We saw above the connection of "Salem" with Samaria and, specifically, the site of the Samaritan holy mountain, Mt. Gerizim. Such an idea found support elsewhere in the Bible. For, in the story of Jacob, the Bible at one point relates, "And Jacob came *safely* to the city of Shechem"(Gen. 33:18). The Hebrew word "safely" here, *šālēm,* is the same as the name of Melchizedek's kingdom. This may be merely a coincidence, but some interpreters justifiably concluded that the correct meaning of that verse was, in fact, "And Jacob came *to Salem,* the [or "a"] city of Shechem." (This is how the verse is translated, incidentally, in the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Peshitta as well.) Along the same lines, the book of Judith refers to a "valley of Salem" that might well have been in or near Samaria:

> So they sent to every district of Samaria, and to Kona and Beth-horon and to Choba and to Aesora and **the valley of Salem,** and immediately seized the high hilltops. —Jth. 4:4–5

(Wherever the "valley of Salem" was, it does not seem to have been in the area of Jerusalem, since the next verse refers to Joakim the high priest, "who was in Jerusalem at that time" sending orders to the troops, apparently from a distance.) Likewise, the Septuagint text of Jer. 41:5 refers to eighty men who arrived from "Shechem, Salem, and Samaria," further suggesting that there was a Salem near

Shechem.[16] John the Baptist, according to John 3:23, "also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim [= Salem], because there was much water there."[17] Finally, it is to be noted that Eusebius' *Onomasticon,* from the early fourth century C.E., and the sixth-century Madaba map both identify Salem as another name for Shechem. (The latter source, however, may depend on the former, and the former on the various biblical passages cited.) See further Emerton, "Site of Salem."

The clear implication of at least some of these texts is that Salem was next to—or perhaps just another name for—the city of Shechem, which was located at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, in the heart of Samaritan territory. To Samaritans this must have meant that Melchizedek had lived right in their own land. However, the identity of this *šlm* was further complicated by Jacob's vow at Bethel, and particularly his words "if I come again to my father's house *in peace* [*bšlwm*]" (Gen. 28:21), as well as the pericope Gen. 35:1–8 dealing with burial of "foreign gods" at Shechem and the construction of an altar at Bethel. On this whole subject see Emerton, "Site of Salem," and Shinan and Zakovitch, *"And Jacob Came Shalem."*

The idea that Melchizedek's kingdom, Salem, was located in or around Shechem is, as was seen, also reflected in *Jubilees* 30:1, though the author of this work was hardly a Samaritan polemicist. For further reflections on the Samaritan Melchizedek, see Heinemann's discussion in *Aggadah and Its Development* (Hebrew), 98–102; also, Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story of Mechizedek," which discusses an apparently Christian text in which Salem is located at Mt. Tabor. Heinemann asserts that "there is no doubt that the Samaritans took the further step of identifying Melchizedek's city with Shechem (as opposed to the Jewish tradition that held it to be Jerusalem), thereby further supporting their claim with regard to the holiness of Mt. Gerizim from most ancient times" (p. 101). Emerton likewise states that the "identification of Salem with a site near Shechem was probably derived from the Samaritans" ("Site of Salem," 48). However logical this hypothesis may be, it suffers from a certain lack of evidence, especially if the (Pseudo-)Eupolemus passage cited earlier did not come (and many scholars now agree that it may not have) from the hand of a Samaritan at all. In this connection it is to be noted that the Samaritan composition *al-Asaṭir,* admittedly of considerably later date, contains no echo of any glorified, Samaritan Melchizedek. On the contrary, in *al-Asaṭir* Melchizedek is identified as the king of *Sodom* and, after giving thanks to "God Most High" à la Gen. 14:19, gives Abraham a tithe (instead of vice versa). None of this seems to square with any Samaritan attempt to claim Melchizedek as their own.

The location of biblical Salem continues to intrigue modern scholars, and far from all have accepted its association with Shechem. Emerton ("Site of Salem") has argued forcefully for the identification of Melchizedek's city with Jerusalem. Note

16. The traditional Hebrew text reads, "eighty men arrived from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria," but this appears inappropriate to Jeremiah's time, since Shiloh had long before been destroyed (Jer. 7:12).

17. Eusebius' *Onomasticon* s.v. Aenon locates this "Salim" eight Roman miles south of Beth Shean (Scythopolis); see Emerton, "Site of Salem," 50.

that Jerome also maintained that "Jerusalem, where Melchizedek reigned, was earlier called 'Salem,'" explaining that a "mistake has cropped up" regarding its identity with the city of Shechem because the name Salem was used for two different locales (*Questions in Genesis* 33:18; Jerome adds, "We have likewise found it to be the case with regard to various sites in Judaea, that the same name for a city or place exists in one tribe and another"). However, as Emerton has shown ("Site of Salem," 47, 50), Jerome was not entirely consistent on this question.

Melchizedek Missing: A crucial passage corresponding to the Melchizedek tithe incident appears to be missing from the book of *Jubilees* (13:35). One theory is that the passage was deliberately excised at an early point in the book's transmission—perhaps a reflection of the growing interest in the supernatural Melchizedek. A. Caquot, basing himself on the Gunda-Gunde ms. 74, proposed reading here: "Abraham gave him [Melchizedek] and his seed the first tithe for the Lord." See Caquot, "Le livre de Jubilés," 257–264; VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 82.

9

The Trials of Abraham

(GENESIS 15–22)

Isaac offered as a sacrifice (hands unbound).

The Trials of Abraham

(GENESIS 15–22)

❖ ❖ ❖

God appeared to Abraham in Canaan, once again promising him the land for his offspring in a solemn agreement. He also revealed to Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt; after four hundred years they would be freed and return to Canaan. But Sarah, Abraham's wife, had been childless for many years; where would his descendants come from? At Sarah's urging, Abraham took her maidservant Hagar as a concubine and she soon bore him a son, Ishmael.

Some years later, God told Abraham that he and his descendants had to be circumcised as part of God's covenant. Abraham acted at once: he and his son Ishmael and all the males of his household were circumcised the same day. Afterward, three angels in human form appeared to Abraham with good news: Sarah would at last bear Abraham a son of her own. And so it was. In due time she gave birth to Isaac, though she and Abraham were quite advanced in age.

When Sarah later saw Ishmael mocking her little son, she told Abraham to banish Ishmael and Hagar, and he reluctantly complied. Isaac was now the only son in Abraham's household. But then Abraham received a horrifying commandment from God: Take your beloved Isaac and offer him up to Me as a sacrifice. Once again, Abraham unhesitatingly obeyed. However, as he was about to kill his son upon the altar, an angel called out to him to stop. Abraham offered up a ram, miraculously caught by the horns in a thicket, in place of his son.

GOD'S COMMANDMENT to Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice is presented in the Bible as a test. The episode begins, "After these things God *tested* Abraham" (Gen. 22:1), and after it is over, the angel who tells Abraham to stop says, "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." The test has been passed.

But surveying the whole of Abraham's life as it is narrated in Genesis, ancient readers could not help thinking that the incident with Isaac was not the first time that Abraham had been tested. In fact, his whole life seemed to be one long series of divinely instituted challenges. From the very start, when God had first told Abraham to leave his homeland, it was to go "to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Why did not God say "to the land of Canaan"? This order sounded as if it was deliberately worded to test Abraham's faith, as if God were saying, "Follow me! I will not even tell you where we are going."[1]

1. In fact, these words of God in Gen. 12:1 even *sounded* strikingly similar to His words at the start of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac: in the latter incident God likewise did not reveal the name of the

And then there was all the rest. As we have seen, no sooner had Abraham arrived in Canaan than he found himself in the midst of a famine and was forced to go down to Egypt. Once in Egypt, Abraham's wife, Sarah, had been taken from him by Pharaoh. Were *these* the "blessings" promised to Abraham? More difficulties followed: Abraham's nephew Lot was captured, drawing Abraham into a war in order to secure his safe return. Then there was the matter of Sarah's barrenness itself, and the troubles that ensued when Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, gave birth to Abraham's son Ishmael. And so on and so forth. In the eyes of many interpreters, Abraham's life seemed to be full of tests, and noticing the precise wording of the sentence that begins the incident of the offering of Isaac, "After *these things* God tested Abraham" (Gen. 22:1), some interpreters concluded that the unspecified "these things" referred to all Abraham's previous trials and tribulations—that, no less than the commandment to sacrifice his own son, the previous incidents in Abraham's life were also tests.

In line with this view, it struck interpreters as significant that, in a prayer uttered centuries after Abraham's death, the biblical hero Ezra had summed up Abraham's life in these words:

> You are the Lord God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and changed his name to Abraham, and You **found his heart to be faithful** to You and made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite. —Neh. 9:7–8

The highlighted words seem to refer to God's testing of Abraham—for what did God's *finding* Abraham's heart to be faithful mean but that, after having caused him to be sorely tried, He had become convinced of the man's loyalty and steadfastness? But if so, then it was perhaps significant that God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 seems, according to Ezra's prayer, to have come about *after* Abraham was tested and found faithful. That could only suggest to later interpreters that God had begun testing Abraham even before the covenant of Genesis 15. Here was a further indication in the Bible that the earlier trials in Abraham's life had indeed been divinely sent tests.

Abraham the Tested

And so, for ancient interpreters, Abraham's "image" was primarily that of "Abraham the Tested," the one who had been tried repeatedly by God:

> In spite of everything, let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who is **putting us to the test** as he did our forefathers. Remember what He did with Abraham, and how he tested Isaac . . . For He has not **tested** us with fire, as

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place, but instead told Abraham to offer up his son "as a burnt offering on one of the mountains *of which I shall tell you*" (Gen. 22:2). The two incidents thus seemed verbally linked, and if the latter was specifically called a "test" in Gen. 22:1, then the former had perhaps likewise been a test, although Scripture did not say so explicitly.

> He did them, to search their hearts, nor has He taken revenge upon us; but the Lord scourges those who draw near to Him, in order to admonish them.
>
> —Jth. 8:25–27

> Abraham was the father of a multitude of nations, his glory was untarnished.
> He kept the commandments of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with Him.
> He established His covenant in his flesh, and when **tested** he was found faithful.
> Therefore He established by oath to bless nations by his offspring,
> To cause them to inherit from sea to sea, and from river to the ends of the earth.[2]
>
> —Sir. 44:19–21

> Remember the deeds of the fathers, which they did in their generations; and receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when **tested**, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?[3]
>
> —1 Macc. 2:51–52

> [Even before the offering of Isaac] the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in every affliction which he had told him, for he had **tested** him with regard to [leaving his] country, and with famine [in Canaan], and had **tested** him with the wealth of kings, and had tested him again through his wife when she was taken forcibly, and with circumcision; and He had **tested** him through Ishmael and Hagar, his maid-servant, when he sent them away. And in everything in which He had **tested** him, he was found faithful; he himself did not grow impatient, yet he was not slow to act; for he was faithful and one who loved the Lord.[4] —*Jubilees* 17:17–18

The list in *Jubilees* above mentions seven tests specifically, but elsewhere it is asserted that Abraham underwent no fewer than ten such trials:

> And she [Sarah] died in Hebron. When Abraham went to mourn over her and bury her, we [angels] tested him to see if his spirit was patient and if he was not rash with the words of his mouth; and he was found to be patient in this and was not disturbed . . . This was the **tenth test** by which Abraham was tested, and he was found faithful, patient in spirit. —*Jubilees* 19:2–3, 8

2. The phrase "was found faithful" seems to deliberately echo Neh. 9:8, cited above.

3. Again, "was found faithful" echoes Neh. 9:8. The phrase "and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" comes from Gen. 15:6 and pertains to a part of the Abraham narrative entirely separate from the offering of Isaac. Thus perhaps here too is an early indication that Abraham's "tested" status had spread out from the one explicit test with Isaac to include other incidents of Abraham's life.

4. Here as well, the word "faithful"—appearing no fewer than three times in two sentences—is intended to echo Neh. 9:8. "One who loved the Lord" reflects Isa. 41:8.

> Abraham our father (may he rest in peace) was tested **ten times** and he passed them all. This is an indication of how great was Abraham's devotion.
>
> —m. *Abot* 5:3

Abraham's many tests soon became a commonplace:

> Among other things—it would take too much time to list them all—Abraham was tested through [the incident of] the offering up of his beloved son Isaac.
>
> —Augustine, *City of God* 16.32

Abraham Saw a Dire Future

One incident that might at first seem to have little to do with "Abraham the Tested" is the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 15. Through this solemn agreement God officially granted the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. Here, surely, was a positive note in Abraham's story.

Yet along with this grant of land came a solemn warning:

> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram: "Know that your descendants will dwell in a land that is not theirs and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years. But I will mete out justice to the nation for whom they slave, and afterward they will come out with great wealth. As for you yourself, you shall die in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."
>
> —Gen. 15:12–16

These words of God hardly foretold a happy future—slavery, oppression, four hundred years . . . No wonder "dread and great darkness" fell on Abraham! And so this covenant (sometimes called the "covenant between the pieces" because it was solemnized between the pieces of sacrificial animals, Gen. 15:10, 17) also turned out to be a trying event, another difficulty confronted by Abraham.

Considering this passage as a whole, however, interpreters came to a further conclusion: what was particularly trying about this incident was the fact that God had actually shown Abraham *far more* than the period of slavery in Egypt to be endured by his descendants. To begin with, if God had shown Abraham four hundred years of future history, it seemed logical to interpreters that He would have shown him the rest as well, including the punishment to be meted out to the later "nation[s] which they serve." Such a notion could only be supported by the text's mention of the "dread and great darkness falling" on Abraham (Gen. 15:12)—for certainly such dread ought not to have been caused merely by the sight of his descendants' sojourn in, and exodus from, Egypt. Interpreters therefore came to view this incident as a fully prophetic apocalypse in which Abraham was afforded a view of all of human history, of heaven and hell, and other things normally hidden from the sight of mere mortals.

"As the sun was setting, an ecstasy fell upon Abraham . . ." [Septuagint Gen. 15:12]. This is what is felt by those who are [prophetically] inspired and suddenly possessed by God . . . For indeed, the prophet, even when he seems to be speaking, in reality is silent, and his organs of speech, mouth, and tongue are wholly in the employ of Another, to show forth what He wishes.

—Philo, *Who Is Heir* 258, 266

Then a voice came to me saying twice to me: "Abraham, Abraham." And I said, "Here I am." And He said, "Behold, it is I. Fear not, for I am before the universe and the mighty, the God who created at the first, before the light of the universe. I am a defense for you and your helper [Gen. 15:1]. Go get Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon, and make me a pure sacrifice. And in this sacrifice I will place the ages. I will announce to you **guarded things** and you will see great things which you have not seen, because you desired to search for Me, and I called you one who loves me [Isa. 41:8]."

—*Apocalypse of Abraham* 9:1–6

And when they [the inhabitants of the earth] were committing iniquity before You, You chose for Yourself one among them whose name was Abraham. You loved him and to him alone did You reveal the end of the times, secretly, by night, and with him You made an everlasting covenant, and promised him that You would never forsake his descendants.

—*4 Ezra* 3:13–15

Simeon b. Abba said in the name of R. Yoḥanan: [God] showed him [Abraham] four things: Hell, the foreign kingdoms [that would dominate Israel], the giving of the Torah, and the future temple. He said to him: so long as your descendants busy themselves with the latter two, they will be saved from the former two. —*Genesis Rabba* 44:21

He [God] showed him [Abraham] that his offspring would sin, and that they would be saved by the prayers of their righteous ones.

—Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 12.3

This prophetic revelation no doubt unnerved Abraham; however, despite the dire future awaiting his offspring, he never wavered in his faithfulness to God.

As we have seen, interpreters saw subsequent events of Abraham's life—Sarah's infertility; the banishing of Ishmael and his mother, Hagar; Abraham's circumcision; and so forth—as additional tests. In these as well, Abraham showed himself to be God's faithful and obedient servant. Yet certainly the greatest of the tests to which Abraham would be subjected was yet to come: God's commandment that Abraham offer up his beloved Isaac on a sacrificial altar. That he was willing to give up the son for whom he had so long waited and hoped was indeed a testimony to Abraham's faith in God.

But even this inspiring narrative raised questions for early interpreters. Why, to begin with, should God *want* to test Abraham? Certainly not in order to find out whether Abraham was worthy. For, as we have just seen, Abraham had already

proven himself worthy many times in the past. Why yet another test now, and this one (lest there be any doubt about its purpose) specifically designated as a test ("And it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham," Gen. 22:1)? Moreover, why in general should God *need* to test people? Does not an all-knowing God know in advance who is worthy and who is not, indeed, who will pass and who will fail? What good was served by putting Abraham through an ordeal whose results were known to God in advance?

Challenged by Angels

In seeking the answer to these questions, interpreters looked to other parts of the Bible, in particular, to the book of Job, another biblical figure whom God had tested. In his case, however, the test was initiated not by God but by Satan, who in effect challenged God's high opinion of Job: "Do some harm to him, indeed, afflict all that he has, and then see if he does not curse You to Your face" (Job 1:11).

To ancient interpreters it seemed plausible that, with regard to Abraham as well, God may have received a challenge from Satan or some other angel(s). The opening sentence of the episode, "After these things God tested Abraham," seemed to offer interpreters confirmation for this theory. For in Hebrew, the word for "things" can also mean "words." If this sentence is understood as meaning "After these *words* . . ." could not Scripture be hinting that certain words had been spoken to God (by Satan or the other angels) and that *after* them, and as a result of them, "God tested Abraham"?

> There were **words** in heaven regarding Abraham, that he was faithful in everything that He told him, [that] the Lord loved him, and in every difficulty he was faithful. Then the [Satan-like] angel Mastema came and said before God, "Behold, Abraham loves Isaac his son, and he delights in him above all else. Tell him to offer him as a sacrifice on the altar. Then You will see if he will carry out this command, and You will know if he is faithful in everything through which You test him." Now the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in every affliction which he had told him, for he had tested him with regard to [leaving his] country, and with famine . . . And in everything in which He had tested him, he was found faithful; he himself did not grow impatient, yet he was not slow to act; for he was faithful and one who loved the Lord. —*Jubilees* 17:15–18

> And He gave him [Abraham] a son in his extreme old age and brought him forth from a sterile womb. But all the angels were jealous of him and the heavenly hosts hated him. And it came to pass that, since they hated him, God said to him [Abraham] "Kill the fruit of your womb for Me and bring him before Me as a sacrifice offered by you to Me."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:1–2

> "And it came to pass, after these things [words] . . ." After what words? Said R. Yoḥanan in the name of R. Yosi ben Zimra: After the words spoken by **Satan**. For the text earlier relates, "and the boy grew up and was weaned, and

> Abraham made a great banquet on the day that Isaac was weaned" (Gen. 21:8). At that time Satan said to God: "Master of the Universe! You have blessed this old man at the age of one hundred years with offspring. Yet amidst all [the bounty of] this banquet that he prepared, was there not one pigeon or fowl for him to sacrifice before You?" He replied: "All that he did he did only for the sake of his son. Still, were I to say to him, 'Sacrifice your son before Me,' he would sacrifice him at once." Hence it says thereafter, "And [after these words] God tested Abraham." —b. *Sanhedrin* 89b

According to this tradition, then, God was well aware of Abraham's faithfulness long before this test and knew in advance that Abraham would pass it. If He went ahead with it anyway, it was to prove Satan wrong.

God Made It Known

But in interpreting in this way, these writers seemed to contradict what the Bible itself says explicitly later on. For in the biblical account, after Abraham has demonstrated his willingness to offer up his beloved Isaac, God says to him: "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22:12). "Now I know" seems to imply "I did not know before." How then could the author of *Jubilees* and other interpreters maintain that God *did* know all along?

The answer lies in yet another ambiguity in the Hebrew. For the same consonants that spell the Hebrew word "I know" *(yd'ty)* can also be read in such a way as to mean "I have made known" or "I have notified." This is apparently how some interpreters chose to understand the text:

> [God tells Abraham:] "All the nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendants because of the fact that you have obeyed my command. I have **made known to everyone** that you are faithful to Me in everything that I have told you. Go in peace."[5] —*Jubilees* 18:16

> [God says:] "For now **I have made it known** so that you may be seen by those who do not know you, and I have shut the mouth of those [angels] who are forever speaking against you.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:4

> For now I have made known . . . —Peshitta (some versions) Gen. 22:12

> [For the words] "now I know . . ." [in Gen. 22:12, read instead] "now I have made known" to everyone that you are one who loves me, and so "you have not withheld your son" [Gen. 22:12]. —*Genesis Rabba* 56:7

5. The same "I have made known" also appears earlier, where *Jubilees* restates Gen. 22:12 as "For now I have made known [or "shown"] that you fear the Lord." (This is so at least in the Latin version of the text. The Ethiopic version has "Now I know," but this probably represents a "correction" of the translated *Jubilees* text by some later copyist who wanted it to conform exactly to the words in the Bible as they were, by then, commonly translated.)

> Abraham was tested through [the incident of] the offering up of his beloved son Isaac to prove his pious obedience and so make it known to the world, not to God . . . It says "Now I know" for "Now I have made known"—for certainly God was not ignorant [of this] previously.
>
> —Augustine, *City of God* 16.32

Thus, God's great test of Abraham took place in response to a challenge and was carried out in order to prove Abraham's virtues not to God, but to others—Satan, the other angels, or the world at large.

But there was another troubling question arising out of the story, and it concerned the role of Isaac. Isaac is spoken of in reverential terms in the Bible: indeed, God is more than once called the "God of Abraham, *of Isaac,* and of Jacob," and along with these other two, Isaac is specifically referred to as God's "servant" (Exod. 32:13). And yet, while the virtues of Abraham and Jacob are recounted in detail in the Bible, relatively little is said about Isaac. Apart from this glimpse of him as the near-victim of God's command to Abraham, the main incidents of Isaac's life reported in the Bible are his encounter with Abimelech in Genesis 26 and his blessing of Jacob instead of Esau in Genesis 27. Neither of these incidents involves any conspicuous display of Isaac's virtues.

And so, interpreters anxious to discover what *was* praiseworthy in Isaac's life were naturally drawn back to the story of his being bound on the altar and prepared for sacrifice by his father. It certainly seemed that his willingness to be sacrificed was no less heroic or praiseworthy than Abraham's willingness to carry out God's commandment to sacrifice him. Was this not Isaac's great and heroic act—the fact that, on that fateful day, he offered himself willingly to the sacrificial knife?

The trouble is, that is not what the Bible says. There is no indication in the biblical narrative that Isaac willingly consented to anything—he seems rather to be an unknowing victim, virtually a prop. On the way to the place of the sacrifice there is an exchange between father and son that proves that Isaac has no idea of what is about to happen:

> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and knife, and the two of them walked together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father," and he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Here is the fire and the wood, **but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?**" Abraham said, "God will provide Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked together.
>
> —Gen. 22:6–8

Isaac's question about the sacrificial lamb makes it clear that, at this point, he himself does not know who the *real* intended victim is. If so, then Isaac was truly no more than an unwilling participant caught up in events beyond his control. The same conclusion is reinforced by another detail in the narrative: at the moment of the sacrifice, the Bible reports that Abraham "bound his son Isaac and laid him upon the altar" (Gen. 22:9). If Isaac were a willing participant, what need was there to tie him up? And this understanding of Isaac's role could only be reinforced by

what the angel says to Abraham at the end of the story (Gen. 22:16–18): it is because *you*, Abraham, "have done this and not withheld your son, your only son" that God will bless *you*. There is no mention of anything Isaac did because, apparently, he did nothing worth mentioning. What virtue can be imputed to Isaac in this whole affair?

Isaac Was a Willing Victim

Unless . . . Given the necessity of finding *something* praiseworthy concerning Isaac in the story, an interpreter might still come up with an indication, no matter how slight, that Isaac had consented to be sacrificed. And slight indication there was. After all, the text makes no mention of Isaac resisting or trying to flee. It simply says: "When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood" (Gen. 22:9). Is not this silence eloquent? After all, Abraham is an old man—well over a hundred, his age at Isaac's birth (Gen. 21:5). We do not know how old Isaac is, but he is certainly old enough to ask the question that he asks about the sacrificial lamb, and old enough to carry the wood. Conceivably, then, such a boy or young man could not have been tied up by his aged father if he himself had struggled or attempted to flee. Thus, if Abraham was indeed able to go ahead as planned and offer Isaac as a sacrifice, could it have been in any way other than with Isaac's active cooperation?

A number of sources go out of their way to suggest that Isaac was indeed a willing participant. Such a view is implied in a passage seen earlier:

> Remember what he [God] did with Abraham, and **how he tested Isaac** . . . For He has not tested us with fire, as He did them, to search their hearts.
>
> —Jth. 8:26–27

If Isaac was tested by God, it certainly must have been in this incident, for it is the only testlike episode in his whole life. And if it was a test, was it not (as this passage suggests) also specifically a test of faith, a determination of Isaac's willingness to give up his very life should God demand it? So other interpreters as well suggested that Isaac in the episode was the prototype of a religious martyr:

> Eleazar, though being consumed by fire, remained unmoved in his reason . . . and by reason like that of **Isaac**, he rendered the many-headed rack ineffective. —4 Macc. 7:12–14

> Remember . . . the father by whose hand Isaac would have submitted to being slain for the sake of religion. —4 Macc. 13:12 (also 16:20)

> And as he [Abraham] was setting out, he said to his son, "Behold now, my son, I am offering you as a burnt offering and I am returning you into the hands of Him who gave you to me." But the son said to the father, "Hear me, father. If [ordinarily] a lamb of the flocks is accepted as a sacrifice to the Lord with a sweet savor, and if such flocks have been set aside for slaughter

> [in order to atone] for human iniquity, while man, on the contrary, has been designated to inherit this world—why should you be saying to me now, 'Come and inherit eternal life and time without measure'? Why if not that I was indeed born in this world *in order to* be offered as a sacrifice to Him who made me? Indeed, this [sacrifice] will be [the mark of] my blessedness over other men—for no such thing will ever be [again]—and in me the generations will be proclaimed and through me nations will understand how God made a human soul worthy for sacrifice."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:2–3

> [Abraham tells Isaac that he is to sacrifice himself:] Isaac, however, since he was descended from such a father, could be no less noble of spirit [than Abraham], and received these words with delight. He said that he never would have been worthy of being born in the first place were he not now to carry out the decision of God and his father and submit himself to the will of both. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:232

> Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he acted righteously and truthfully through faith? Isaac, knowing full well what was to happen, was willingly led forth to be sacrificed. —*1 Clement* 31:2–4

Together in Mind

Beyond such an argument based on common sense and the age of the participants, there was another detail in the biblical text itself that might have indicated that Isaac was a willing participant. For at no time does the biblical account actually say *when* Abraham informed Isaac that he was to be sacrificed; as the moment approached, Abraham—apparently in silence—simply "built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood" (Gen. 22:9). But certainly at some point he must have told Isaac what was going to happen. And, on closer inspection, the biblical passage cited above seems to contain a clue as to when Isaac was told:

> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and knife, **and the two of them walked together**. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father," and he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." **And the two of them walked together.** —Gen. 22:6–8

That the phrase "and the two of them walked together" is repeated just two verses after it was first uttered must have struck interpreters as suspicious: why should the Bible repeat itself? And such suspicion could only be reinforced by the particular placement of the repeated phrase. It comes right after Abraham has told Isaac that God Himself will provide the sacrifice; *we* know that Abraham secretly means by this Isaac himself. But could it not be that Isaac at that moment also

understood that this was what Abraham meant? Then "and the two of them walked together" could mean something like: both of them went along with the plan, both knew exactly what they were about to do.

> Going at the same pace—no less with regard to their thinking than with their bodies—down the straight path whose end is holiness, they came to the designated place.[6] —Philo, *Abraham* 172

> [Abraham says to Isaac:] The Lord will provide a lamb for himself for the burnt offering, my son—and if not, you will be the lamb for the burnt offering. And the two of them walked together with firm intention.
> — *Targum Neophyti* and *Fragment Targum* (Paris Ms.) Gen. 22:8

> And the two of them walked together—the one to slaughter, the other to be slaughtered. — *Genesis Rabba* 56:4

Offering Foreshadowed Crucifixion

Of all the Hebrew Bible's narratives that were read *typologically*—that is, as prefiguring the events of the New Testament—perhaps none was so evocative as the story of Abraham's offering up of Isaac, which was understood by Christians from early times as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion:

> If God is for us, then who is against us? He who **did not spare** His own son but gave him up for us all, will He not also give us all things along with him?[7]
> —Rom. 8:31–32

> [Jesus was the fulfillment of] that which was foreshadowed in Isaac, who was offered upon the altar. — *Letter of Barnabas* 7:3

> Since indeed Abraham, having followed, in keeping with his faith, the commandment of God's word, did with a ready mind give up his only begotten and beloved son,[8] for a sacrifice unto God, that God again might be well pleased to offer unto Abraham's whole seed His only begotten and dearly beloved son to be a sacrifice for our redemption.
> —Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4:5, 4

Soon enough, other correspondences between the two narratives were explored:

> And on this account Isaac carried the wood on which he was to be offered up to the place of sacrifice, just as the Lord Himself carried His own cross.

6. Philo's "at the same pace" seems immediately predicated on the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew *yaḥdaw,* which it understands as "at the same time" *(hama).* Cf. his *Migration of Abraham* 166.

7. Here the phrase "did not spare" seems to be a deliberate evocation of the same phrase in Gen. 22:12 and 16.

8. "Only begotten" and "beloved" seem to correspond to Gen 22:1, "Take now your son, your *only one,* whom you *love.*" In the Septuagint, the Hebrew *yĕḥîdĕkā,* "only one," is understood as *yĕdîdĕkā,* "beloved." See also John 3:16.

Finally, since Isaac himself was not killed—for his father had been forbidden to kill him—who was that ram which was offered instead, and by whose foreshadowing blood the sacrifice was accomplished? For when Abraham had caught sight of him, he was caught by the horns in a thicket. Who then did he represent but Jesus, who, before He was offered up, had been crowned with thorns? —Augustine, *City of God* 16, 32

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In short: Abraham's life was marked by many divinely instigated tests (ten in all). Abraham trusted in God and passed each one. Even God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 was a test, since Abraham was given a frightening view of all of future history and other secret things. God initiated Abraham's greatest test, the offering up of Isaac, in order to demonstrate Abraham's faith to Satan or others who doubted Abraham. In this test, Isaac was a knowing and willing participant, for he, no less than his father, put his trust in God. Christian interpreters saw in this episode a foreshadowing of the crucifixion.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Trials of Abraham

Ten Tests: The tradition that Abraham had to undergo specifically *ten* tests is widespread among rabbinic sources, which frequently list all the tests in question. However, these lists disagree as to which incidents make up the ten. See *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 26; *Abot deR. Natan* version A, 34, version B, 37; *Midrash Tehillim* 18 and 95; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:218 n. 52. In many cultures the number ten is a conventional one; its use in this context may have been strengthened by God's mention of ten "tests" in Num. 14:22, and see also Job 19:3. Joseph also refers to ten tests in *Testament of Joseph* 2:7.

Man of Faith: A number of passages examined earlier seem to stress—in part on the basis of Ezra's words in Neh. 9:7–8—that what Abraham's many tests had demonstrated was his *faithfulness:*

> He established His covenant in his flesh, and when tested he was found **faithful.** —Sir. 44:20

> Was not Abraham found **faithful** when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? —1 Macc. 2:52

> [Even before the offering of Isaac] the Lord knew that Abraham was **faithful** in the midst of his afflictions . . . And in everything in which He had tested him, he was found **faithful,** and his soul was not impatient, yet he was not slow to act; for he was **faithful** and a lover of God.
>
> This was the tenth test by which Abraham was tested, and he was found **faithful,** patient in spirit . . . For he was found **faithful** and was recorded in the heavenly tablets as the friend of God. —*Jubilees* 17:17–18, 19:8–9

> Abraham was found faithful to [G]o[d for favor[
> —(4Q226) *Pseudo-Jubilees*^{b} fragment 7.1–2

The Hebrew word "faithful" underlying Ezra's prayer and the other sources above clearly has the sense of "trustworthy," one *in whom* faith can be placed. This idea, especially in Greek, was not far removed from another sense of "faithful" *(pistos):* one who is characterized by faith, especially, one who puts his faith in God. The Bible in any case specifically mentions Abraham's trust in God as one of his virtues:

> And he had faith [or "believed"] in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. —Gen. 15:6

It is therefore not surprising to find Abraham described as a person "characterized by faith" in this other sense as well, one who, in the face of adversity, never ceased to trust in God:

And so, by necessity must the words "And Abraham believed in God" be added to [his] praises . . . And it is well said [in the same verse] that "it was reckoned to him as righteousness," for nothing is more righteous than to have an unmixed and unblemished faith in God alone.

— Philo, *Who Is Heir* 90, 94 (see also *Special Laws* 3:228; *Migration of Abraham* 43–44, 132, and frequently elsewhere)

Thus "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" [Gen. 12:3]. So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. — Gal. 3:6–9

For what does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" . . . That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants—not only to the adherents of the law, but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all. — Rom. 4:3, 16 (also 4:17–25)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise . . . By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. — Heb. 11:8–17

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar. You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed in God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

— James 2:21–23

Abraham, who was designated the "friend" [of God, Isa. 41:8], was found to be faithful in that he was obedient to the words of God.

Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he acted righteously and truthfully through faith? — *1 Clement* 10:1, 31:2–4

Abraham felt that nothing could justify disobedience to God and that in all things he must submit to His will. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:225

Shema'yah said: the faith which their father Abraham had in Me was sufficient for me [now] to split the sea before them, as it is written, "And he had faith in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" [Gen. 15:6]. — *Mekhilta, Wayhi* 3

See also Attridge, *Hebrews*, 311–314; Urbach, *The Sages*, 32–35.

Justified by Faith: The other half of this same verse also proved to be extremely significant to interpreters:

> And he believed in the Lord; and He **reckoned it to him as righteousness.**
>
> —Gen. 15:6

The phrase "reckoned it to him as righteousness" has a somewhat judicial ring in Hebrew, almost as if it were saying, "And God found in Abraham's favor." In the context of the broader theme of "Abraham the Tested," this phrase might seem to imply that God judged Abraham to have passed the test because (once more, apparently) Abraham had "believed the Lord." Abraham's belief in God, in other words, was what caused the case to be decided in his favor: belief was the decisive item.

This verse was extremely important for later Christianity, since Paul saw in it an argument against the view that carrying out the commandments of the Torah was what would bring God to "find in one's favor." Arguing against this view (which he referred to as "justification by works"), Paul said that Gen. 15:6 proved that it was Abraham's faith, his trust in God, that won him God's favor. Moreover, the fact that Abraham was not yet circumcised at the time of this incident proved that such justification would be granted to the circumcised and uncircumcised alike. See Romans 3 (esp. 21–31) and chapter 4, as well as James 2:14–26 (cited partially above); also, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 92; Ireneaus, *Against the Heresies* 4:25. For some modern views, see von Rad, "Faith Reckoned as Righteousness" in his *Problem of the Hexateuch,* 125–130; Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 359–362, 369–378; Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans* 3:21–26; Chilton, "Aramaic and Targumic Antecedents of Pauline Justification"; on the connection of Gen. 15:6 and Ps. 106:30–31, see Moberly, "Abraham's Righteousness (Genesis XV 6)."

In particular, Paul's understanding of this verse ought to be read in the light of other uses of the word "righteousness" (Hebrew *ṣĕdāqāh,* Greek *dikaiosunē*) in Second Temple literature (see in this connection Fiedler, "*Dikaiosunē* in der Diaspora-jüdischen und Intertestamentarischen Literatur"; Cohen, "The Jewish Dimension of Philo's Judaism"). The Greek term apparently functioned as a shorthand for "observance of the divine commandments" or "religious observance" among Greek-speaking Jews. This is certainly the meaning of *dikaiosunē* in Philo, *Special Laws* 4:135–136, *Who Is Heir* 95; *Psalms of Solomon* 14:2, Josephus, *Jewish Antiqities* 12:291; Matt. 5:20, 6:1, etc. (See also Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount,* 101 n. 2; idem, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism,* 55–62.) Thus, Paul's declaration:

> But now the righteousness [*dikaiosunē*] of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.
>
> —Rom. 3:21

If "righteousness" had previously been used in the sense of "observance of the divine commandments," Paul's interpretation of Gen. 15:6 explicitly sought to redefine the term.

With regard to the equivalent Hebrew term, *ṣĕdāqāh,* the same association of

proper religious observance may underlie the allusion to Gen. 15:6, which concludes a recently published *Halakhic Letter* from Qumran:

> Seek from Him that He straighten your counsel and remove from you any evil opinion or counsel of Belial, so that you may rejoice at the end of time when you discover some of our words are indeed correct; and it will be accounted to you as righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh)* if you do what is right and good [Deut. 12:28] before Him, to your benefit and that of Israel.
>
> —(4Q398) *Halakhic Letter*

In the same sense does Kohath refer to the "laws of Abraham and the *righteousness* of Levi and myself" *(bdyny 'brhm wbṣdqt lwy wdyly)* in (4Q542) *Testament of Qahat* fragment 1:8. Given this background, Paul's interpretation of Gen. 15:6 in Romans 3–4 and elsewhere is really rather in keeping with how that verse must have sounded to many Jews, whether it was quoted in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek:

> And he believed in the Lord; and He **reckoned it to him as the keeping of the commandments.** —Gen. 15:6

Sarah Smiled with Pleasure: In the Bible, Sarah laughs at the thought that she, a ninety-year-old woman, could give birth to a son (Gen. 18:12). The three strangers (angels) who bring this news reproach her, saying, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). It thus seems that the ancestress of Israel entertained doubts, however fleeting, about God's powers. Needless to say, interpreters sought in one way or another to soften this impression of Sarah as a scoffer or doubter.

> Thereat the woman **smiled** and said that childbearing was impossible, seeing that she was ninety years old. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:198

Another possibility was that Sarah had laughed not in disbelief, but because this intimate subject was being discussed openly by Abraham with the three strangers or angels; yet another was that her laughter was a sign of pleasure or amazement, rather than one of doubt:

> And Sarah laughed because she heard that we [angels] discussed this matter with Abraham.[9] —*Jubilees* 16:2

> Abraham evidently **rejoices** and laughs, because he is to beget Isaac, [that is] **Happiness.** Sarah, who is virtue, laughs as well.[10]
>
> —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 3:218

> And Sarah was amazed in her heart, saying, "Can I indeed now bear a child?" —*Targum Neophyti* 18:12

9. Similarly, while Abraham laughs in Gen. 17:17, in *Jubilees* "Abraham fell prostrate and was very happy" (*Jubilees* 15:17). Note that Abraham similarly "rejoices" in the Onqelos translation of this same verse, while *Targum Neophyti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan* read "was amazed." Similarly, Ephraem says: "he laughed in his heart, that is, he was astounded" (*Commentary on Genesis* 17:17).

10. There was some ground for Philo's interpreting this laughter as "enjoyment" because of the Septuagint's "will rejoice with me" (Gen. 21:6; see below). See also *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 4:17.

> For the father had laughed when he was promised to him, **astonished with joy;** so too the mother, when he was promised again through the three men, **doubting in joy** . . . But that laughter, even if it was one of joy, was not, however, one of complete faith [which is why Sarah was reproached by the angel]. —Augustine, *City of God* 16.31

Sarah's laughter in Gen. 18:12 was connected by interpreters to other instances of laughing, in particular that of Gen. 21:6 (Septuagint, Peshitta, and other versions: ". . . will rejoice along with me"); see the discussion in Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 114–115. See also Jaubert, "Symboles et figures christologiques."

Abraham Saw a Dire Future: We saw earlier a number of sources that suggested that Gen. 15:12–16 was interpreted as a prediction of far more than the Israelite enslavement in Egypt. One rabbinic version of this motif (cited above) states:

> [Abraham saw] four things: Hell, the foreign kingdoms [that would dominate Israel], the giving of the Torah, and the future temple. He said to him: so long as your descendants busy themselves with the latter two, they will be saved from the former two. — *Genesis Rabba* 44:21

Each of the four things mentioned in this text is actually an exegetical elaboration of some element in the biblical text, and three of them are attested independently in prerabbinic literature.

Abraham's Vision of Hell: Particularly suggestive in the revelation of Gen. 15:12–16 was God's mention at the end of the passage that "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." This phrase could likewise be translated: "for the iniquity of the Amorites *has not yet been paid for* [or "avenged," "requited"]." If so, then perhaps what Abraham saw was the punishment to be paid after death by the Amorites—and other people—for their numerous and notorious sins. Indeed, the mention of a "smoking furnace and fiery torch" (Gen. 15:17) could only suggest that Abraham had a vision of hell (Gehenna):

> [God relates:] Now I sent upon him [Abraham] a sleep and surrounded him with fear and set before him the **place of fire** in which the deeds of those doing wickedness against Me are expiated, and I showed him the **fiery torches** by which the righteous who believed in me will be enlightened. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 23:6

> [God tells Abraham:] I will announce to you in them [the sacrifices] what will come upon those who have done evil and just things in the race of man.

> [Later, Abraham relates:] And I saw on the air to whose height we had ascended a strong light which cannot be described. And behold, by that light there burned a fiery Gehenna, and a [mass of] people in the likeness of men.

> [Later, God says:] "And I will tell you what will be, and everything that will be in the last days. Look now at everything in the picture." And I [Abraham]

looked and saw in the image what had been before my time. And I saw the likeness of Adam, and along with him was Eve, and with them the cunning adversary, and Cain, who had been led by the adversary to break the law, and Abel who had been killed, and the destruction brought upon him and given by the lawless one. And I saw fornication and those who desire it, the impurity it imparts and their fervor [for it]; and the fire of their destruction in the depths of the earth. And I saw theft there, and those who pursue it, and the retribution established for them, the verdict of the Great Court.

— *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9:10, 15:5–6, 24:2–7

And behold Gehenna which is like a furnace, like an oven surrounded by sparks of fire, by flames of fire, into the midst of which the wicked fell because the wicked rebelled against the Law in their life in this world. But the just, because they observed it, will be delivered from the affliction. All this was shown to Abram when he passed between the pieces.

— *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 15:17

R. Nathan said: whence do we know that God showed our father Abraham Gehenna . . .? It says, "the sun set and there was great darkness and behold, a smoking furnace, and a fiery torch which passed through the pieces" [Gen. 15:17]—this [smoking furnace] refers to Gehenna, as it says, "He has a furnace in Jerusalem" (Isa. 31:9). — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Yitro, Baḥodesh* 9

And the sun set and it was dark, and Abraham beheld Gehenna sending up smoke and fiery sparks and coals with which to judge the wicked, and he passed between the pieces. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 15:17

That which is then added—"And when the sun was setting, there was a flame, and behold a smoking furnace and flaming torches which passed in the midst of the divided things"—signifies that at the end of the world, mortal beings are to be judged by fire.[11] — Augustine, *City of God* 16.24

The Sin of the Amorites: An additional reference to this same revelation of hell contains a puzzling element:

[The angel Iaoel says to Abraham:] I am the one who was commanded to open up hell and destroy those **who worshiped the dead.** I am the one who ordered your father's house to be burned with him, since he honored the dead. — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10:11–12

Why this mention of worshiping the dead as *the* sin whose punishment in hell is revealed to Abraham? The clue is the biblical passage on which it is based, God's mention to Abraham that "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). In rabbinic literature, witchcraft, worshiping the dead, and the like are particularly associated with the Amorites (see m. *Ḥullin* 4:7, Tosefta *Shabbat* chs. 6 and 7; Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshuṭo Shabbat*, 79–100, esp. 86–88, 100). Reflections of

11. See 1 Cor. 3:12–15.

this reputation of the Amorites are to be found elsewhere in Second Temple writings:

> And the fifth black waters which you have seen poured down—those are the works which the Amorites have done, and the invocations of their incantation which they wrought, and the wickedness of their mysteries, and the mingling of their pollutions . . . —*2 Baruch* 60:1

> And these are the precious stones that the Amorites had in their sanctuaries, the value of which cannot be estimated . . . For even if only one of the Amorites was blind, he would go and put his eyes on [one of the stones] and recover his sight. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 25:12

Someone acquainted with this characterization of the Amorites might well understand Gen. 15:16 to be saying that the Amorite sin *par excellence*—witchcraft, necromancy, and so on—has not yet been fully paid for (in hell) *but is being paid now.* With that, God revealed to Abraham the sufferings of those who committed the Amorite sin of necromancy.

It may be that the author of *Jubilees* was similarly reflecting on the significance of Gen. 15:16 when he wrote:

> And the Amorites dwelt there instead of them [the Rephaim]; [they are] **evil and sinful,** and there is no people today who have fully equalled all of their sins. And therefore they had no length of life in the land. —*Jubilees* 29:11

Here, however, there is no indication of the nature of Amorite sinfulness.

Abraham Saw the Four Empires: The mention of the "fourth generation" in Gen. 15:16 also supported the idea that God had revealed to Abraham far more than the Israelite enslavement in Egypt. For this "fourth generation" might not necessarily refer to the four hundred years just mentioned by God as the time of Israelite enslavement in Egypt; indeed, it seemed likely that it referred to something else.[12] Now, the book of Daniel had foreseen the succession of *four empires* that will hold sway over Israel (Dan. 2:31–45, 7:3–27). It seemed possible to some that the "fourth generation" mentioned here might be connected with the four empires. Perhaps what God had shown Abraham was the rise and fall of those four empires, after which the "fourth generation" (that is, the fourth generation of Jews to survive the fall of a foreign empire) would "return" to once more be sovereign in their homeland.

12. Note also that the sentence about this "fourth generation" (Gen. 15:16) is separated from God's previous words about the Egyptian slavery by a whole sentence (Gen. 15:15) describing Abraham's death. Rather than continuing on a subject that had apparently been dropped, this verse mentioning the "fourth generation" seemed to be taking up some event later on in Israelite history. Note further that the Septuagint understood Exod. 13:18 to refer to the Israelites leaving Egypt after the *fifth generation,* and this interpretation would further support the idea that the "fourth generation" of Gen. 15:16 was not a reference to the Exodus generation at all.

> [Abraham says:] And behold, I saw four ascents[13] coming upon them [my progeny], and how they [the nations] burned the Temple with fire and carried off the sacred things that were there.
>
> And [God] showed me the multitude of His people and said to me [Abraham], "Because of this, my anger will be [kindled] against them through the four ascents that you saw, and through these will come retribution for their deeds." — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 27:3, 28:3–4

> And the sun was about to set and a sweet sleep fell on Abraham and behold, Abraham saw four empires rising against him, "fear," that is Babylon, "darkness," that is Media, "great," that is Greece, "falling," that is [evil Rome, which is destined to fall and rise no more].
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 15:12

> He [also] showed him the four kingdoms that were destined to enslave his descendants, as it says, "And the sun was about to set and a deep sleep fell on Abraham, and behold, fear and great darkness falling upon him" [Gen. 15:12]. *Fear* is the kingdom of Babylon, *darkness* is the kingdom of Media, *great* is the kingdom of Greece, *falling* is the fourth kingdom, wicked Rome.
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Yitro, Baḥodesh* 9

(These four words—"fear," "darkness," "great," "falling"—were apparently identified by some with the "birds" mentioned in Gen. 15:11; see below.)

Abraham Saw the Temple: Another possibility was that God had shown Abraham the future Temple (or its heavenly prototype). This might have been suggested by the absence of any mention of an altar when God orders Abraham to "take" certain animals for Him (Gen. 15:9)—animals that Abraham subsequently slaughters (Gen. 15:10). What was the purpose of this exercise? Perhaps it was intended to instruct Abraham about how sacrifices were to be offered in the future—including the place where such offerings would be made:

> And He said, "Hear, Abraham! This temple which you have seen, the altar and the ornaments—this is the plan for a sanctuary to My glorious name, where every petition of man will enter and dwell."
>
> — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 25:4–5

> [God says to Baruch:] I showed it [the Heavenly Temple] to Adam before he sinned . . . Afterward I showed it to my servant Abraham in the night between the pieces. — *2 Baruch* 4:3–4

> He [also] showed him the future Temple and the order of the sacrifices, as it is said, "And He said to him, 'Take for me a three-year-old heifer . . .'" [Gen. 15:9]. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Yitro, Baḥodesh* 9

13. The Slavonic text may be corrupt here. It is possible, however, that each of the four empires is referred to as an "ascent" in keeping with an ancient tradition surrounding the angels "ascending and descending" in Gen. 28:12; cf. Ladder of Jacob 5:7, 10.

The Animals Were Symbolic: Since the biblical account did not mention that Abraham had built an altar or actually sacrificed the animals, other interpreters suggested that God's mention of the animals had contained a hidden message:

> And the natures of the . . . animals are related to the parts of the universe. The ox [is related] to the earth, for it ploughs and tills the soil. The goat [is related] to water, the animal being so called from its rushing about or leaping, for water is impetuous . . . The ram [is related to] air, since it is very violent and lively . . . The dove [is related to] the planets . . . and the turtledove [is related to] the fixed stars.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 3:3

> And I [God] said to him [Abraham]: "Bring me a three-year-old calf and a three-year-old she goat and a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a dove [Gen. 15:9] . . . I compare you to the dove, because you have received from Me a city that your sons will begin to build in My sight. The turtledove, however, I liken to the prophets who will be born from you; and the ram I liken to the wise men who will be born from you, illuminating your sons. The calf I liken to the multitude of peoples who will be made many through you; the she-goat I liken to the women whose wombs I shall open and they will give birth."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 23:6–7

> The turtledove and the pigeon you will give to Me, for I will ascend on the wings of the birds to show you what is in the heavens, on the earth and in the sea, in the abyss and in the lower depths, in the garden of Eden and in its rivers, in the fullness of the universe.
>
> —*Apocalypse of Abraham* 12:10

> By the three-year-old calf and the three-year-old ram and the three-year-old goat [He showed] either that they [Abraham's descendants] would be saved after three generations, or that kings, priests, and prophets would be among them.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 12:3

> Here as well, therefore, a symbolic message was given through the animals—the heifer, the she-goat, the ram, and the two birds, turtle and dove—so that he [Abraham] might discover through them what was to come and have no doubt about what was in store. Through the heifer is symbolized a people who are put under the yoke of the law, and through the she-goat the same people, who are destined to be sinful, and through the ram the same people again, who are likewise destined [later] to rule.
>
> —Augustine, *City of God* 16.24

The birds mentioned in Gen. 15:11 were likewise interpreted symbolically, indeed, sometimes identified with the four kingdoms (see above) via the four dreadful words of the next verse, "fear," "darkness," "great," and "falling":

> May it not be that by the flight of the birds over the divided [bodies Scripture] alludes to and warns against the attack of enemies?
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 3:7

> And the birds came down . . . These are the kingdoms of the earth [marginal gloss, "These are the four kingdoms that are to enslave the sons of Abram . . ."] when they are to counsel evil against the house of Israel, but by the merits of their father Abraham they will be saved.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 15:11

The Animals Were Sacrificed: Still other interpreters assumed that the animals had indeed been intended for sacrifice on an altar, and that the text had simply omitted mention of it:

> And that day passed and Abram offered up the pieces and the birds and their fruit offering and their libation. And the fire consumed them.
>
> — *Jubilees* 14:19

> He mentions five animals which are offered on the sacred altar . . . But instead of "bring [or "offer"] to Me," it is said most excellently "take for Me," for to a mortal creature there is nothing properly his own, but all things are the gift and grace of God.
>
> — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 3:3

> Then, **before the altar was erected,** while birds of prey were flying to the scene lusting for the blood, there came a divine voice announcing that his posterity would for four hundred years find evil neighbors in Egypt.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:185

> Then a voice came to me saying twice to me: "Abraham, Abraham." And I said, "Here I am." And He said, ". . . Go get me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon, and make me a pure sacrifice. And in this sacrifice I will place the ages."[14]
>
> — *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9:1–2, 5

> And He said: **Offer** before Me a heifer, three years old.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos, Neophyti, Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 15:9

> From the morning until the evening Abraham stood in front of his offering and prevented any bird from flying down onto his sacrifice. Afterwards, the fire came down on Abraham's sacrifice, [which had thus been] accepted, and He appeared to him and spoke these things to him.
>
> — Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 12:2

Four Hundred Years from Abraham: The mention in Gen. 15:13 that the Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites would last 400 years conflicted with biblical chronology elsewhere, not only the 430 years mentioned in Exod. 12:40 but (more

14. The apparent meaning is that the particulars of this sacrifice will also contain a message about the future; if so, this text appears to blend the two traditions just seen, (a) that the animals and birds mentioned had symbolic value, and (b) that they were truly a sacrificial offering (although the biblical text does not say so).

problematically) the considerably shorter period of time that resulted if one tallied up the ages of Kohat, Moses' grandfather, Amnon, his father, and Moses himself. One solution proposed by ancient interpreters was to suggest that the higher figure represented a calculation from the time of the birth of Abraham's son Isaac until the end of the Egyptian enslavement. For details, see Chapter 17, *OR,* "How Long, O Lord?"

Isaac Foreshadowed the Church: We saw that the binding of Isaac was read by Christians typologically as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion. But Isaac himself was presented elsewhere in the New Testament as a foreshadowing of another sort:

> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law[s of the Torah], do you not hear the Torah? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, and the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory, these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery [that is, Ishmael]; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children [the Jews]. But Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother . . . Now we [Christians], brethren, like Isaac, are children of the promise. —Gal. 4:21–28

This influential and complicated "allegory"—in modern terminology, typology—has been the subject of much speculation. Its basic lines are as follows: Ishmael was born the way most children are born, "according to the flesh," that is, in the course of nature, while Isaac's birth came about as the result of divine intervention, "through promise."[15] This distinction between flesh and promise allowed Paul to suggest that Abraham's actual, physical descendants, the Jews, are represented in the biblical story by Ishmael, born "according to the flesh," while those whom Paul views as Abraham's spiritual descendants, the Christians, correspond to the son (Isaac) who was born spiritually, "through promise." The fact that Ishmael's mother was a slave and Isaac's a free woman suggested a further point of correspondence: the covenant between God and the Jews (symbolized by Ishmael's mother, Hagar)—namely, the laws given to the Jews on Mt. Sinai—was a kind of slavery, enslavement to the law, while the new covenant of Christianity (symbolized by Isaac's mother, Sarah) was, according to Paul, one of freedom. On connections of Paul's reading to earlier material, particularly Philo, *Preliminary Studies (De Congresso)* 13–23, see Cothenet, "L'arrière-plan de l'allégorie d'Agar"; Dieter Betz, *Galatians,* 238–252; Bruce, "Abraham Had Two Sons."

Incidentally, Paul's assertion that "Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia" has also been frequently debated, since later geographers located Sinai not in Arabia but in the area now known (for that reason) as the Sinai Peninsula; such need not have been the case, however. As for Paul's typological identification of Hagar as an

15. Cf. Rom. 9:8: "That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children born of the promise who are considered to be Abraham's offspring."

Arabian mountain, this makes far more sense if one knows of the existence in Transjordan of a site called "Hagra of Arabia." The name of this site is preserved in various rabbinic texts as well as in *Targum Onqelos,* hence it was arguably known to Paul (Onqelos' rough contemporary). Indeed, the targum text makes the same connection as Paul apparently did between the name of Sarah's servant and the geographic site:

> Then the angel of the Lord found her [Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness, near the spring on the road to Hagra.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 16:7

See further Aberbach and Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis,* 97; Steinhauser, "Gal. 4:25a."

All this in turn led Paul to an additional conclusion with regard to relations between Jews and Christians in times to come. He suggested that the later episode of Abraham's banishment of Isaac's older brother Ishmael (Gen. 21:9–21) foreshadows the triumph of Christianity over Judaism:

> But just as back then, the one who was born according to the flesh [Ishmael] persecuted the one who was born according to the spirit [Isaac], so is it now. But what does Scripture say? "Cast out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman" [Gen. 21:10].
>
> — Gal. 2:29–30

One interesting echo of this passage extends its lesson to include the next pair of brothers in Abraham's progeny, Jacob and Esau:

> This, then, is what the patriarch Isaac says [to his son Esau]: "You shall serve your brother [Jacob]. But the time will be, when you shall shake off and loose his yoke from your neck" [Gen. 27:40]. He means that there will be two peoples, one the son of the slave-girl, the other of the free woman—for the letter is a slave, whereas grace is free [cf. 2 Cor. 3:6]—and the people that pays attention to the letter will be a slave as long as it needs to follow the expounder of learning in the spirit.
>
> — Ambrose of Milan, *Jacob and the Happy Life* 4.13

Paul had elsewhere observed that the same God who chose Isaac over Ishmael likewise discriminated between two brothers in the next generation, Jacob and Esau (see Rom. 9:10–13). In that case, the fact that the *younger* brother ended up being favored was taken by some Christian writers as further support for the theme of Christianity's "new covenant" taking precedence over the "old covenant" of Judaism:

> Is this case [i.e., the second set of promises made to Abraham] the only one in which the second thing is stronger than the first? No, in many other matters of this sort you will find the same things foreshadowed. Moses broke and cast down the first set of tablets, those of the Law according to the letter; he received a second Law according to the spirit, so again, second

> things are stronger than the first . . . Ishmael was the first, Isaac the second, and here a similar form of preference for the second may be observed. You may find this adumbrated in the case of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of Ephraim and Manasseh and likewise in a thousand others.
>
> —Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 9:1

How Old Was Isaac? The Hebrew text twice refers to Isaac in this incident as a *na'ar,* a vague term usually translated as "youth" or "lad." This hardly pins things down. (In Gen. 37:2, *na'ar* is used to refer to a 17-year-old man, whereas in Exod. 2:6, *na'ar* refers to a three-month-old baby!) Josephus' description of Isaac as 25 seems to tally with one contemporaneous rabbinic calculation. (See Feldman, "Josephus' Version of the Binding of Isaac," 121 n. 36.) Milikowsky's edition of *Seder Olam* (2:450–451) sets Isaac's age at 26 on the basis of the reading of ms. L (Parma Palatina, 2787). The printed edition of *Seder Olam* states that Isaac was 37, and this figure is found elsewhere in rabbinic writings. It derives from the fact that, immediately following the account of the binding of Isaac, Sarah is said to die at the age of 127 (Gen. 23:1–2); interpreters concluded that the two events must have occurred at approximately the same time or, even, that the binding of Isaac *caused Sarah's death*—that is, Sarah was so shocked to learn of the near sacrifice of her only son that she herself died. If Sarah's death at the age of 127 thus occurred shortly after the binding of Isaac, then he must have been 37 at the time, since Sarah was 90 at his birth. Understanding Isaac to have been 25, 26, or 37 certainly supported the notion that he was a willing participant; indeed, his heroism was held up as a model for Jewish martyrs during the Roman occupation of Palestine. Note, finally, that according to *Jubilees* Abraham seems to have been 110 at the time of Isaac's birth (compare *Jubilees* 11:15 and 16:15)—in apparent contradiction of the straightforward statement of Gen. 21:5 that he was 100 at the time. (See further VanderKam, *Jubilees,* 87 n; Milikowsky, "*Seder Olam* and Jewish Chronography," 136; idem, *Seder Olam,* 1:173–174.) For more on the whole incident, see Spiegel, *The Last Trial;* Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition,* 193–229; Le Déaut, *Nuit pascale,* 131–212; Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac;* Hayward, "The Present State of Research"; Brock, "Genesis 22 in the Syriac Tradition"; Harl, "La 'ligature' d'Isaac."

Where Was Moriah? Genesis reports that God commanded Abraham to go to "the land of Moriah" and sacrifice his son "on one of the mountains" there (Gen. 22:2). But where is the land of Moriah? The book of Chronicles suggests that the place was none other than Jerusalem, future site of the great Temple, for in recounting how the Temple was built, it observes,

> Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem **on Mount Moriah.** —2 Chron. 3:1 (contrast 1 Kings 6:1)

This identification may derive from the name Moriah itself, which could be understood as meaning "place of the *fear* of God" or, alternately, "place where God *is seen*" (the latter in keeping with Gen. 22:14). To "fear God" is a biblical expression meaning to be in awe of God and (hence) to do God's will—an apt name for the

future site of the Jerusalem Temple. That site is likewise spoken of as the place where God "is seen" (Exod. 23:16–17, 34:23, and other verses in their original sense), further justifying the identification of it with "Moriah."

Various early translations thus identify the place as something other than the place called Moriah, some of them apparently seeing in this word a *description* rather than a proper name:[16]

> And He said, "Take your son, the beloved one, whom you have loved, and go to the **lofty** land."[17] —Septuagint Gen. 22:2

> "Take your son . . . and go to a **high** land." —*Jubilees* 18:2

> . . . and betake yourself to the **land of worship.**
> —*Targum Onqelos, Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 22:2

> . . . to the land of **seeing.**
> —Symmachus, Vulgate, *Samaritan Pentateuch* Gen. 22:2

> . . . to the land **clearly seen.** —Aquila Gen. 22:2

If so, then it certainly *might* have been the site of the future Jerusalem Temple:

> Abraham named that place "The Lord Saw" so that it is named "The Lord Saw." **It is Mt. Zion.** —*Jubilees* 18:13

> On the third day, when the mountain was in view, [Abraham] left his companions in the plain and proceeded with his son alone to that mount whereon king David **afterwards erected the Temple.**
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:226

> And Abraham worshiped and prayed there in that place and said before God: Here shall be the [place of] worship of future generations.
> —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 22:14

> On the mountain of the Lord's Temple, where Abraham offered up his son Isaac . . . —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 22:14

> "And God said to him, 'Take your only begotten son, whom you love, Isaac, and go forth into a high land . . .'" The Hebrew tongue's manner of speaking is difficult to render into Latin. Where now it says "go forth into a high land," in Hebrew it has *moria* . . . The Jews say that this is the mountain on which the temple was later established. —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 22:2

The Samaritans, in keeping with their identification of God's designated sanctuary site as Mt. Gerizim, naturally located Moriah there.

16. Feldman has suggested that the Septuagint may have wished to avoid calling Mt. Moriah by its name since in Greek *mōria* means "folly." See further Feldman, "Josephus As a Biblical Interpreter of the Aqedah," 227. However, this would hardly explain the presence of the very similar tradition in *Jubilees*. See next note.

17. The letters of the name Moriah *(mryh)* are quite similar to those of the words "elevated place" *(mrwm)* or "high" *(rmh)*.

> [It says] "he lifted up his eyes [and saw the place from afar]" [Gen. 22:4]. He would not have lifted up his eyes were he not previously bowing down, for it was morning time and Abraham had been praying. And to where was his prayer directed, if not to Mt. Gerizim? — *Tibat Marqa* 95b-96a

Note that the Peshitta Gen. 22:2 translates this phrase "to the land of the Amorites." See also Lowy, *Samaritan Bible Exegesis*, 38–41; Le Déaut, *Nuit pascale* 163–170; Hayward, "The Present State of Research," 142–144.

Isaac Asked to Be Tied Up: Why was Isaac tied up by his father before the attempted sacrifice? After all, if he really was a willing victim, there should have been no need for restraints. Apparently this detail bothered a number of commentators. Both Philo (*On Abraham* 167–177) and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 1:232–233) pointedly omit it. Others suggest that the binding was *requested* by Isaac, part of his heroic effort to be sacrificed in accordance with proper sacrificial procedure:

> [Isaac said:] "Father, bind my hands well lest I, at the moment of my pain, squirm about and confuse you, so that your sacrifice will be invalid and we be cast into the Pit of destruction in the world to come . . ." At that moment a heavenly voice cried out, "Come you [angels] and see two who are unique in the world, one that slaughters and the other that goes to be slaughtered; the one that slaughters does not hesitate, and the one to be slaughtered stretches forth his neck." — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* Gen. 22:10

> ". . . and he bound his son Isaac . . ." He [Isaac] had said to him, "Father, bind my hands and feet according to law, lest I struggle against you." — *Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 22:9

This tradition may be in evidence somewhat earlier:

> And when Isaac saw his father's hand wielding a sword and descending upon him, he **did not flinch.** — 4 Macc. 16:20

A fragment from Qumran ends tantalizingly:

> Isaac said to Abraham [his father: Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb] for the sacrifice? Abraham said to [Isaac: God will provide the lamb] for Himself. Isaac said to his father: T[ie? . . .] — (4Q225) *Pseudo-Jubilees*

See on this last VanderKam in *DJD* 8, 151–152. On the Christian significance of the act of binding, see Harl, "La 'ligature' d'Isaac"; note also the discussion of "binding" in Davies and Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History," and Hayward's rejoinder, "Present State of Research"; also, Braun, "Le sacrifice d'Isaac dans le quatrième évangile d'après le Targum."

In addition to the passage cited from Pseudo-Philo in the body of this chapter (LAB 32:3), the incident is further mentioned in LAB 18:2 and 40:2, but the author falls short of saying that Isaac requested to be bound.

Your Seed Will Call Out: When Sarah told Abraham to banish his concubine Hagar and their son Ishmael, he was at first distressed, until God reassured him:

> Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for through Isaac shall your seed [that is, descendants] be called. —Gen. 21:12

Many interpreters were troubled by God's later command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac: didn't Abraham know at once that God would not really allow him to sacrifice his son, since He had already said that Abraham's descendants would be traced through Isaac? (See below, "Offering Taught Resurrection"; also, *Genesis Rabba* 56:8, "[Abraham said to God:] Previously You told me 'for through Isaac shall your seed be called,' then You changed [Your mind] and said 'Take your only son . . .' [Gen. 22:2], and now You tell me, 'Do not harm the lad . . .' [Gen. 22:12].")

A unique solution to this problem was suggested in a passage seen earlier:

> [Isaac said to Abraham:] "Hear me, father. If [ordinarily] a lamb of the flocks is accepted as a sacrifice to the Lord with a sweet savor, and if such flocks have been set aside for slaughter [in order to atone] for human iniquity, while man, on the contrary, has been designated to inherit this world—why should you be saying to me now, 'Come and inherit eternal life and time without measure'? Why if not that I was indeed born in this world *in order to* be offered as a sacrifice to Him who made me? Indeed, this [sacrifice] will be [the mark of] my blessedness over other men—for no such thing will ever be [again]—and **in me the generations will be proclaimed** and through me nations will understand how God made a human soul worthy for sacrifice." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:3

The highlighted words represent this author's restatement of Gen. 21:12, "for through Isaac shall your seed be called"—but with a difference. As the phrase that follows it ("and through me nations will understand") makes clear, the *calling* in this verse does not refer to genealogical descendance but to *calling out,* informing and making known. It may well be that the original (Hebrew) text had Isaac say: *kî bî yiqrĕ'û haddôrôt,* "for about me shall the generations call out [in the sense of "read"] and through me nations will understand . . ." The translator mistook this text (in the light of Gen. 21:12) for the passive *yîqārĕ'û* and thus translated it "in me the generations *will be* proclaimed." But with the putative original reading, Isaac would be offering up his own interpretation of God's words in Gen. 21:12: He had promised that "about Isaac will your descendants call out [or "read"] to [or "for"] you," and such a promise would in fact be upheld, rather than violated, if Isaac were killed on the altar.

God Made It Known: As noted, this understanding of *yd'ty* is also reflected in the Peshitta, the traditional Bible translation of Syriac Christianity; however in some manuscripts it becomes "Now *you* [Abraham] have shown." See Brock, "Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition." The difference between God making known Abraham's faithfulness and Abraham himself making it known is not very great, however; see also Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 115–117.

"You Are the Lamb": One targumic tradition concerning the exchange between Abraham and Isaac on the way to Moriah was seen earlier:

> [Abraham says to Isaac:] The Lord will provide a lamb for himself for the burnt offering, my son—and if not, you will be the lamb for the burnt offering. And the two of them walked together with firm intention.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* (Paris ms.) Gen. 22:8

These words are actually a clever restatement of what Abraham says in Gen. 22:8, "God will provide himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." It was possible to divide this sentence in half and understand it quite differently: "God will provide Himself the lamb" *that is* (or, alternately, *and if not*) "for the burnt offering [will be] my son." The same idea is found elsewhere:

> The Lord will provide Himself a lamb, and if not, the lamb for the sacrifice is my son. — *Genesis Rabba* 56:4

A number of early sources suggest an additional play on the word *seh,* which means "lamb" in Hebrew but "you" as a direct object in Greek:

> The Lord will provide Himself *seh* for the burnt offering: . . . in the Greek language, "**you** are the sacrifice," nevertheless "the two of them walked together." — *Pesiqta Rabbati* 40 *(Baḥodesh ha-shebi'i)*

Offering Foreshadowed Crucifixion: The allusion in Rom. 8:32 to the Genesis narrative came to have great significance, indirect though it may have been. The allusion itself is certainly felt in Paul's use of the word "spare," but it also may be carried in the expression "His own son," Greek *tou idíou huiou.* This phrase is sometimes rendered "*only* son" since *idíou* here may represent a translation of

The binding of Isaac, with upright ram (center).

Hebrew "your only [son]" *(yĕḥîdĕkā)* in Gen. 12:2, 12, and 17; see also John 3:16. It was taken up by Origen, *Homilies in Genesis* 8, and Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4:5.4. For a discussion of the early development of this typological correspondence, see Davies and Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History," as well as Spiegel, *The Last Trial;* Le Déaut, *Nuit pascale;* and Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 530–532 and works cited there.

The correspondence between the ram and Christ, present in the passage cited from Augustine in the body of this chapter, was also a Christian commonplace:

> In the ram, which was hanging from the tree and was sacrificed as an offering in place of Abraham's son, was prefigured the time of [Jesus], who was hung from a tree like the ram and tasted death for the sake of the whole world. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 20:3

The same idea was sometimes represented visually, with the ram depicted as hanging from a tree (= crucified): Bregman, "The Depiction of the Ram in the Aqedah Mosaic at Beith Alpha."

Offering Taught Resurrection: The Torah itself does not discuss the issue of the resurrection of the dead, but this was a subject of great interest to Jews and Christians in late antiquity. Various rabbinic texts bear witness to a tradition that held that Isaac was actually slaughtered and resurrected and hence constituted a biblical instance of resurrection after death. (This motif is based in part on the fact that only Abraham is mentioned as returning after the incident in Gen. 22:19. See on this Spiegel, *The Last Trial,* 3–8; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection.*) A New Testament text partially cited earlier takes up the same theme:

> By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named" [Gen. 21:12]. He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. —Heb. 11:17–19

Here too, the point seems to be the establishment of a precedent for the idea of the resurrection of the dead within the Hebrew Bible. Abraham, according to the author of Hebrews, must have believed in resurrection if he could offer Isaac up as a sacrifice at God's command after this same God had promised that Abraham's descendants would be traced through Isaac.

Abraham's Last Test: Although the tradition of Abraham's ten tests is quite ancient, different interpreters listed different groups of ten tests. The offering of Isaac, coming toward the end of Abraham's life story and having a certain finality about it, was sometimes listed as Abraham's tenth and final test. It is interesting, therefore, that *Jubilees,* the most ancient source for the ten-test tradition, lists Abraham's purchase of a burial cave for his wife Sarah (Genesis 23) as Abraham's last test. *Jubilees* had a point. If the offering of Isaac was indeed Abraham's last test, then it should have been followed by a period of bliss unalloyed. Instead, it is

followed by the mention of Sarah's death (Gen. 23:1–2) and, subsequent to that event, a curious account of how Abraham bought the cave of the Machpelah as a burial plot for her. *That* narrative is then followed by the assertion that God "blessed Abraham in all things" (Gen. 24:1), which surely would be a fit conclusion to Abraham's final test.[18] These considerations doubtless influenced *Jubilees'* choice.

But did the purchase of the burial plot really constitute a test? It seems, in context, to be more of a demonstration of the niceties of negotiation in the ancient Near East. If Abraham's purchase of the Machpelah cave had any significance beyond this, it would seem to lie in the fact that he did indeed *purchase* the cave, and that his descendants' claim to it in later times therefore rested not on any act of generosity on the part of the Hittites who owned the area, but on an actual purchase transacted in full compliance with legal standards. But again—this hardly made the incident into a test! *Jubilees'* explanation is that making Abraham negotiate its purchase was a test:

> When Abraham went to mourn for her [Sarah] and to bury her, we [angels] were testing whether he himself was patient and not annoyed in the words that he spoke. But in this respect, too, he was found to be patient and not disturbed, because he spoke with the Hittites in a patient spirit . . . This was the tenth test by which Abraham was tried, and he was found to be faithful [and] patient in spirit. He said nothing about the promise of the land which said that the Lord would give it to him and his descendants after him. He pleaded for a place there to bury his dead [and] he was found to be faithful and was recorded on the heavenly tablets as the friend of the Lord.
>
> —*Jubilees* 19:3–4, 8–9

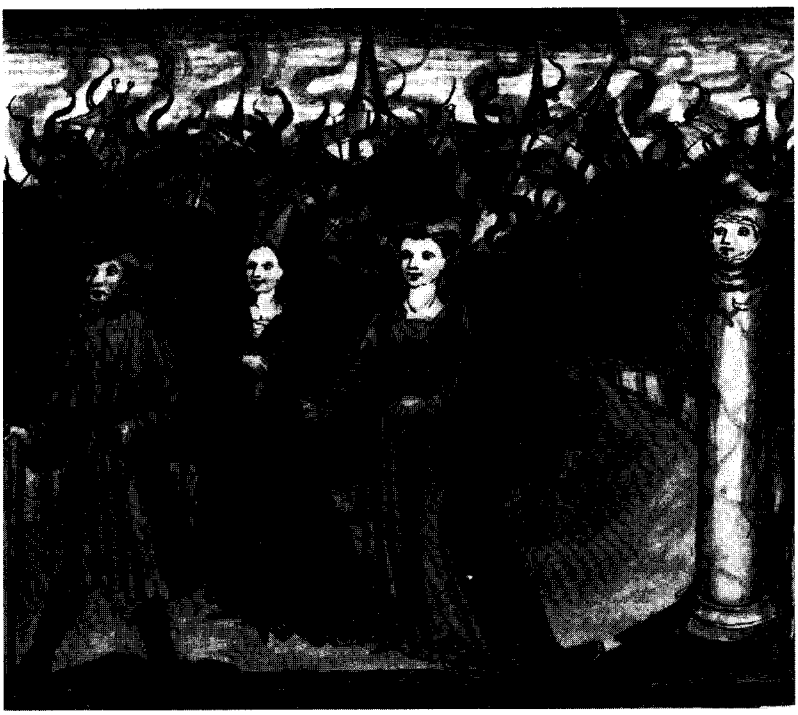
To the author of *Jubilees,* Abraham by right ought not to have had to pay anything for the Machpelah cave, since God had already given to him and his descendants the whole of the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, he paid for it; what is more, if the Bible went to the trouble of narrating the whole complicated negotiation for its purchase, was it not to show Abraham's extraordinary patience in the whole affair? Not only was he more than civil with the Hittites, but he did not once protest to God.

18. The translation "*had* blessed Abraham in all things" found in some modern versions is interpretive and hardly required by the Hebrew text.

10

Lot and Lot's Wife

(GENESIS 18–19)



Lot and his two daughters: they meant well.
(Note pillarized wife and destroyed city in background.)

Lot and Lot's Wife

(GENESIS 18–19)

❖ ❖ ❖

When Abraham first left his homeland of Ur, he was accompanied by his nephew Lot. Later, Lot continued with him to Canaan, but once established there, they separated: Lot took the fertile land of the Jordan valley, settling in Sodom, while Abraham stayed in the territory to the west (Gen. 13:8–12).

Despite this separation, Abraham continued to look after his nephew. When Lot was taken prisoner in the war that broke out between the city-states of the Jordan valley and their eastern overlords (Genesis 14), Abraham went into battle to free him. Later, when God announced to Abraham that He was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their "wickedness" (Gen. 18:16–33), Abraham intervened to try to save them—presumably on Lot's account. Lot was indeed saved, but the whole region was scourged; when Lot's wife looked backward, she became a pillar of salt. Later, in their place of refuge, Lot's daughters conspired to get their father drunk so that they might have relations with him. From the resulting pregnancies were born the ancestors of two nations, Ammon and Moab.

IT WAS HARD for interpreters to know what to make of Lot. Was he good or bad? On the one hand, he was Abraham's nephew, and like Abraham, he had willingly left Ur and its presumed evils—this certainly made him sound good. Moreover, when Abraham pleaded with God to spare Sodom, he did so on the grounds that destroying the city might mean killing the righteous along with the wicked. Presumably, Lot was among these "righteous"—and, in fact, God then did send angels specifically to get Lot and his family out of Sodom before its destruction. So here too was an indication that Lot was good.

On the other hand, some of Lot's deeds were questionable at best. Given a choice of where to live in Canaan, he had moved right into Sodom. The Bible narrates the event in these terms:

> So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed to the east; thus they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and **moved his tent up to Sodom**. Now the men of Sodom were evil and very sinful against God.
>
> —Gen. 13:11–13

If the text observes (quite needlessly, at this point in the story) that the men of Sodom were evil sinners, then why did Lot move in with them? Certainly he could have pitched his tent elsewhere in the valley. Perhaps, after all, he was not much

better than the wicked men of Sodom, whom, at one point later on, he addresses as "my brothers" (Gen. 19:7). And although Lot *is* saved from Sodom before its destruction, his subsequent doings are hardly exemplary. He ends up having relations with his two daughters, who get him drunk for the occasion, and the two sons born from these shameful unions end up being the ancestors of the Ammonites and Moabites, the only two peoples whom God specifically excluded from the "assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:3). None of this, needless to say, reflects very well on Lot.

Lot the Righteous

It is not surprising that, given these conflicting signals in the Bible itself, ancient interpreters disagreed on how Lot was to be viewed. Some sources describe him as altogether righteous and good:

> Wisdom rescued a **righteous** man when the ungodly were perishing; he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities. Evidence of their wickedness still remains: a continually smoking wasteland, plants bearing fruit that does not ripen, and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul. For because they passed wisdom by, they not only were prevented from recognizing the good, but also left for mankind a reminder of their folly, so that their faults would not be able to pass unseen. —Wisd. 10:6–8

> [You are] the one who kindled the fearful fire against the five cities of Sodom, and turned a fruitful land into salt because of those living in it, and snatched away **pious** Lot from the burning.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12: 22

> "He who walks with wise men becomes wise . . ." [Prov. 13:20]. This refers to Lot, who accompanied our father Abraham and learned from his good deeds and ways. —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 25

> Lot was a wholly righteous man, but since he did not study [Torah], Abraham did not wish to be his neighbor and said to him, "Depart now from me" [Gen. 13:9]. —*Alphabet of Ben Sira* 268

This tradition of "Lot the Righteous" is likewise found in early Christian sources. Some Christians saw in Lot yet another biblical figure who, while uncircumcised and not part of Israel, was nonetheless blessed:

> By turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, He [God] condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly; and . . . He rescued the righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds). —2 Pet. 2:6–8

> Because of his hospitality and piety, Lot was saved from Sodom.
>
> —*1 Clement* 11:1

> Lot was saved out of Sodom without circumcision, when those very angels and the Lord led him forth. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 19:4

> [Paul recalls:] When these had passed on I saw another with a beautiful face and I asked, "Who is this, sir?" . . . And he said to me, "This is Lot who was found righteous in Sodom." —*Apocalypse of Paul* 27

> In Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot was righteous.
> —(Armenian) *Story of Noah* (in Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha*, 93)

Lot also appears in the Qur'an as a righteous figure:

> And behold, Lot also was one of those who had been [divinely] sent, and We saved him and his household, every one, except for an old woman [Lot's wife] who stayed behind. —Qur'an 37:132–134

Lot the Wicked

A great many other interpreters nonetheless found Lot to be a less than positive figure. If he was saved in the destruction of Sodom, perhaps (as Gen. 19:29 seemed to imply) it was only because of Abraham's earlier supplications, or because of Abraham's own moral stature:

> And in like manner, God will execute judgment on the places where they have done according to the uncleanness of the Sodomites, just as the judgment of Sodom. But Lot we [the angels] saved; for God **remembered Abraham**, and sent him out of the midst of the overthrow.
>
> And he [Lot] and his daughters committed sin upon the earth, such as had not been on the earth since the days of Adam till his time; for the man lay with his daughters. —*Jubilees* 16:6–8

> For Lot was saved not for his own sake so much as for the sake of the wise man, Abraham, for the latter had offered prayers for him.
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 4:54

> If he was able to escape Sodom, as Scripture indicates, he owed this more to Abraham's merits than his own. —Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 5:3

> And when the Lord was destroying the cities of the plain, the Lord remembered **Abraham's** merit and He sent forth Lot from the midst of the destruction. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 19:29

> When the angels overthrew Sodom and saved him [Lot] because of **Abraham's** merit, they said to him "Escape to the mountain lest you perish" [Gen. 19:17], [meaning that] by the merit of that great mountain Abraham you have escaped; now go to him. —*Pesiqta Rabbati, Bayyom ha-shemini* 3

As mentioned earlier, the fact that Lot *chose* to live in Sodom certainly seemed suspicious. But even his earlier decision to separate from Abraham—caused, the

Bible says, by strife between their own shepherds (Gen. 13:7)—did not reflect well on Lot:

> [Abraham recounts:] After that day, Lot departed from me because of the deeds of our shepherds. And he departed and settled in the valley of Jordan, taking all his riches with him; and I myself added much to his possessions. As for him, he grazed his flocks and came to Sodom. At Sodom, he bought for himself a house and lived in it. And I lived on the mountain of Bethel. And I was **disturbed** that my nephew Lot had parted from me.
>
> — *Genesis Apocryphon* 21:5–7

> [Lot] was an unsteady and indecisive person, turning this way and that, sometimes fawning on him [Abraham] with loving embrace, sometimes rebellious and refractory through the instability of his character.
>
> — Philo, *Abraham* 212 (also *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 4:47)

> It is written, "And there was strife between Abraham's shepherds and Lot's" [Gen. 13:7]. And why did they strive with each other? When a man [that is, Abraham] is righteous, then the members of his household are likewise righteous . . . but when a man is wicked [like Lot], then the members of his household are likewise wicked.
>
> [Later,] God said to them [Lot's shepherds]: I said to Abraham that I would give this land to his sons—to *his* sons and not to that wicked man [Lot] as you suppose. — *Pesiqta Rabbati, Bayyom ha-shemini* 3

> When he [Lot] separated from Abraham, Scripture says, "And Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley" [Gen. 13:11]—that is, Sodom. For Lot saw that the people of Sodom were plunged in wantonness and he chose Sodom **so that he might do as they did**.
>
> Similarly, Lot [later] says to the men of Sodom, "Behold, I have two daughters . . ." Normally, a man will sacrifice himself for his daughters or his wife: either he kills or is killed [on their behalf]. But Lot was ready to turn over his daughters to them for iniquity! Said God to him: Well then, you can keep them for yourself, and eventually little schoolchildren will laugh about you when they read, "And Lot's two daughters became pregnant from their father" [Gen. 19:36]. — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Vayyera* 12

Sodomites' Sexual Sins

If early interpreters were thus somewhat divided about Lot, they were equally perplexed about the city of Sodom. God destroyed it because of the terrible things that were being done there—but what exactly were those things? Strangely, the Genesis narrative does not say. The men of Sodom are said to be "evil and very sinful" (Gen. 13:13), and at one point God observes that the Sodomites' "sin is very grave" (Gen. 18:20), but that is all we are told.

To some interpreters Sodom's sin seemed clear enough: homosexual practices. After all, when the angels sent by God arrived at Lot's house, "the men of Sodom,

both young and old, every one of them" (Gen. 19:4) came to surround the house and demanded to have sexual relations with them. Was this not clear proof that the unnamed sin of the Sodomites consisted of just such practices (later known, as a result, by the word "sodomy")?

In addition to specifically homosexual practices, some interpreters attributed to the Sodomites other, heterosexual sins, specifically, adultery and fornication. The reason is a certain verse in the book of Jeremiah:

> They [Jerusalemite prophets] **commit adultery** and deal falsely and encourage evildoers, so that no one repents—they are all **like Sodom** to me.
>
> —Jer. 23:14

If God equated adulterers in Jerusalem to the people of Sodom, then it followed that the latter were no less guilty of adultery than of homosexual acts. As a result, Sodom came to be known generally as a place of sexual profligacy:

> And in this month the Lord executed his judgments on Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Zeboim, and all the region of the Jordan, and He burned them with fire and brimstone, and destroyed them until this day, even as I have declared to you all their works, that they are wicked and exceedingly sinful, and that they defile themselves and commit fornication in the flesh, and work uncleanness on the earth. And in like manner, God will execute judgment on the places where they have done according to the uncleanness of the Sodomites, just as the judgment of Sodom.
>
> [Later on,] he [Abraham] told them [his descendants] about the punishment of the giants and the punishment of Sodom—how they were condemned because of their wickedness; because of the sexual impurity, uncleanness, and corruption among themselves they died in sexual impurity.
>
> —*Jubilees* 16:5–6, 20:5
>
> You make married women impure, you lie with whores and adulteresses, you marry heathen women, and your sexual relations will be like Sodom and Gomorrah. —*Testament of Levi* 14:6
>
> My children, recognize in the skies, in the earth, and in the sea, and in all created things, the Lord who made all things, so that you do not become as Sodom, which changed the order of nature. —*Testament of Naphtali* 3:4
>
> You shall commit fornication with the fornication of Sodom, and shall perish, all save a few, and shall renew wanton deeds with women.
>
> —*Testament of Benjamin* 9:1
>
> And made them an example to those who were to be ungodly; and . . . He rescued the righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked. —2 Pet. 2:6–7
>
> . . . just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serving as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. —Jude 7

> The whole region of that irreligious city was destroyed, where lewdness between males had become as habitual as other deeds that the law declares permissible. —Augustine, *City of God* 16.30

The Proud and the Stingy

Interestingly, however, there was another tradition that held that the Sodomites' sin actually had nothing to do with homosexual acts or adultery or fornication. Instead, their fault was pride or stinginess, an unwillingness to help the unfortunate of this world.

The origin of this other tradition is not hard to find. It comes from a passage in the book of Ezekiel, where the prophet compares the people's sins to those famous sins of the (now defunct) people of Sodom:

> Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had **pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy**. They were **haughty**, and did abominable things before Me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. —Ezek. 16:49–50

According to this list, it was primarily the Sodomites' pride and their failure to aid the poor amidst their own prosperity that caused God to smite them. (The "abominable things" may also refer to Sodom's licentiousness, but this is not certain.)

As a result, a great many interpreters read the story of Lot quite differently. He had settled in a city of haughty, wealthy, but inhospitable and tight-fisted people. In such circumstances, Lot was, if anything, a *victim* of the Sodomites, since, as a newcomer and a stranger, he was likely to suffer from their lack of hospitality.

> He did not spare the neighbors of Lot, whose **arrogance** made them hateful.
>
> —Sir. 16:8

> You [O God] burned with fire and brimstone the **arrogant** Sodomites, who were unseen in their vices, and you made them an example to posterity.
>
> —3 Macc. 2:5

> Others [the Sodomites] had refused to **receive strangers** when they came to them. —Wisd. 19:14

> Now, about this time the Sodomites, overweeningly **proud** of their numbers and the extent of their **wealth**, showed themselves insolent to men and impious to the Divinity, insomuch that they no more remembered the benefits that they had received from Him, hated **foreigners** and avoided any contact with others. Indignant at this conduct, God accordingly resolved to chastise them for their **arrogance**, and not only to uproot their city, but to blast their land so completely that it should yield neither plant nor fruit whatsoever from that time forward.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:194–195

> [Jesus tells his disciples:] And if anyone does not receive you [that is, fails to be hospitable] . . . truly I say to you it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.
>
> —Matt. 10:14–15

> Someone who says, "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours" [that is, who is unwilling to be generous] . . . this is the disposition [characteristic] of Sodom. —m. *Abot* 5:10

> R. Yehudah said: They announced in Sodom that anyone who gave bread to the poor, the sojourner or the destitute would be burned. Now, Pelotit was Lot's daughter and she was married to one of the leaders of Sodom. She saw a poor man afflicted in the public square and she was sorely grieved for him. What did she do? Every day, when she went to draw water, she would take some food from her house and put it in her pitcher, and so would feed the poor man. The people of Sodom wondered: how is this poor man managing to live? When they found out, they took [the woman] to be burned.
>
> —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 25

But what were the Sodomites *really* guilty of, fornication or arrogance and stinginess in the midst of their prosperity? Perhaps it was all of these.

> The region of the Sodomites . . . was laden with innumerable injustices, especially those arising from **gluttony** and **lust** . . . The cause of this excess in licentiousness among the inhabitants was the unfailing abundance of their wealth, for, provided with deep soil and ample water, this region every year enjoyed a harvest of all manner of crops . . . They threw off from their necks the law of nature by indulging in **strong drink, rich food, and forbidden forms of intercourse.** —Philo, *Abraham* 134–135

Indeed, the fact that the Bible seemed to contain an unnecessary duplication in its description of the Sodomites—they are said to be both "wicked" and "sinful" (Gen. 13:13)—might in itself be a subtle hint that two entirely different and unrelated sorts of sins were involved:

> Now the men of Sodom were wicked with their wealth, and they were sinful with their bodies before the Lord, exceedingly.
>
> —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 13:13

> And the people of Sodom were wicked toward one another and sinful with sexual sins and bloodshed and idolatry before the Lord, exceedingly.
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 13:13

Abraham's Hospitality

Being stingy and unhospitable, especially to strangers, was no small matter. From ancient times, this had been considered a particularly grave fault. Indeed, the Sodomites' stinginess (if that was in fact their crime) stood in sharp contrast to

Abraham's behavior. For he was celebrated among early interpreters for his generosity, especially to strangers.

This tradition derives mainly from the description of Abraham's generosity when he encounters God's angels on their way to destroy Sodom. The incident begins as follows:

> And God appeared to him [Abraham] at the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and saw three men standing near him; and when he saw he **ran** from the door of the tent to meet them, and he **bowed down** to the ground. He said: "My lords, if I have found favor with you, please do not depart from your servant. Let a little water be taken to wash your feet, and take your rest under the tree, while I fetch some bread so that you may sate yourselves, after which you may continue on—since, after all, you *have* stopped by your servant's place. They answered: "Do indeed as you have said." So Abraham **hastened** to Sarah in the tent, and said, "**Hurry**! Knead three measures of fine flour and make cakes!" Then Abraham **ran** to the herd and took a calf, tender and goodly, and gave it to his servant-boy, who **hastened** to slaughter it. Next he took butter and milk, and the calf that had been slaughtered, and he served it to them. Then he stood near them under a tree while they ate.
>
> —Gen. 18:1–8

The whole lesson of this lengthy passage (and why was such a detailed description necessary if it were *not* in order to teach some lesson?) seemed to be that hospitality and generosity to strangers are a great virtue. Thus, seeing the three strangers (who later turn out to be angels and no mere mortals, Gen. 19:1), Abraham immediately offers them every courtesy. He *runs* to meet them and with exceeding humility begs them to take a meal; the passage then stresses how he and his household *hurry* lest these guests be kept waiting one extra moment.

For interpreters, all this was an indication that Abraham was a man of extraordinary generosity, in particular with regard to strangers:

> That [Abraham] had a multitude of servants is clear . . . [Yet] he himself becomes as an attendant and a servant [to the visiting angels] **in order to show his hospitality.**
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 4:10 (also *Abraham* 107–114)

> All the years of his life he [Abraham] lived in quietness, gentleness, and righteousness, and the righteous man was very **hospitable.** For he pitched his tent at the crossroads of the oak of Mamre[1] and welcomed everyone—rich and poor, kings and rulers, the crippled and the helpless, friends and

1. Since the Bible specifically mentions that Abraham was at the "oaks of Mamre," this interpretive tradition understands that detail as likewise implying something about Abraham's generosity. For he could have pitched his tent anywhere. If he decided to do so at what was apparently a well-known spot in (or just outside) Hebron (see Gen. 23:17, 19, etc.), he must have done so because he *wanted* to welcome strangers.

> strangers, neighbors and passersby—[all] on equal terms did the pious, entirely holy, righteous, and hospitable Abraham welcome.
>
> — *Testament of Abraham* (A) 1:1–2

> O my sons, be **generous to strangers** and you will be given exactly what was given to the great Abraham, the father of fathers, and to our father Isaac, his son. — *Testament of Jacob* 7:22

> And remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it. — Heb. 13:2

> Abraham . . . used to go out and look all around and when he would find travelers he would invite them into his house. To someone who was not used to eating wheat bread he would [nonetheless] give him wheat bread, to someone who was not used to eating meat he would give meat, and to someone who was not accustomed to drink wine he would nonetheless give wine. Moreover, he went and built for himself a large mansion on the road and would leave food and drink there so that anyone who came by would enter and eat and drink and bless God, and that gave him [Abraham] great satisfaction. — *Abot deR. Natan* (A) 7

Lot Learned from Abraham

Given this tradition, it seemed likely that Lot had learned from his uncle the lesson of hospitality. For, like Abraham, Lot welcomed the angels and prevailed upon them to accept his hospitality (Gen. 19:1–3). And if Lot and his family were subsequently spared—the only residents of stingy Sodom not killed in the destruction—was this not further indication that Lot, unlike his neighbors, was indeed generous?

> But the angels came to the city of the Sodomites and Lot invited them to be his guests, for he was very kindly to strangers and had learned the lesson of Abraham's generosity. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:200

> Because of his **hospitality** and piety, Lot was saved from Sodom.
>
> — *1 Clement* 11:1

> "He who walks with wise men becomes wise . . ." [Prov. 13:20]. This refers to Lot, who accompanied our father Abraham and learned from his good deeds and ways. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 25

Lot's Wife Sinned

As Lot and his family fled Sodom, Lot's wife disobeyed the order of the angels not to look back (Gen. 19:17), "and she turned into a pillar of salt" (Gen. 19:26). Interpreters found it difficult to understand what was so bad about Lot's wife turning around. The Bible did not say, so some felt free to search out their own explanations. All interpreters agreed that her deed must somehow have been *sinful.* Perhaps she turned around more than once, displaying thereby a flagrant disregard

for divine commandments; perhaps her gesture testified to her own indecision or lack of faith; or perhaps she was motivated by too great an attachment to her way of life in Sodom or to the sinful relatives she had left behind:

> But Lot's wife, who during the flight was continually turning round towards the city, overly curious about it, notwithstanding God's prohibition of such action, was changed into a pillar of salt. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:203

> And since Lot's wife was a descendant of the people of Sodom, she looked back to see what ultimately would happen to her father's house. And she remains a pillar of salt until the time of the resurrection of the dead.
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 19:26

> Remember Lot's wife: Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it. —Luke 17:32–33

> Lot was saved from Sodom, when the entire region was judged by fire and brimstone. In this way the Master clearly demonstrated that He does not forsake those who hope in him, but destines to punishment and torment those who turn aside. Of this his wife was destined to be a sign, for after leaving with him she changed her mind and no longer agreed, and as a result she became a pillar of salt to this day, that it might be known to all that those who are of two minds and those who **question the power of God** fall under judgment and become a warning to all generations. —*1 Clement* 11:1–2

> [She] serves as a solemn and sacred warning that no one who starts out on the path of salvation should ever yearn for the things that he has left behind.
> —Augustine, *City of God* 10.8

A Visible Reminder

But there was another way of understanding the punishment of Lot's wife, one that was connected to a still larger question in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The inhabitants of this region had sinned; they should have been punished, by all means. But was that a reason for God to blight the landscape forever, turning what once was a flourishing and rich valley into a smoldering wasteland? The biblical narrative offered no explanation, but it was not hard for interpreters to come up with one. If the land itself had been destroyed forever, was this not so that the area would stand as a visible token, a vivid reminder for later generations of what can befall those who defy God's word?

> [Sodom and environs] were turned into a smoking waste as a testimony to their wickedness; with plants that bear fruit before they ripen, and a pillar of salt standing there as a memorial of an unbelieving soul. For having passed Wisdom by, they were not only distracted from a knowledge of the good, but also left behind for the world a monument of their folly, so that they were unable to go undetected in their failure. —Wisd. 10:7–8

> And to this day it goes on burning . . . a monument of the disastrous event . . . providing proof of the sentence decreed by the divine judgment.
> —Philo, *Abraham* 141

> By turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, He [God] condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly. —2 Pet. 2:6

> Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities . . . serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. —Jude 7

> You [O God] burned with fire and brimstone the arrogant Sodomites, who were unseen in their vices, and You made them an example to posterity.
> —3 Macc. 2:5

In similar fashion, if Lot's wife had been turned into a *pillar of salt,* was it not so that this pillar might also serve as a visible reminder?

> [Lot's wife] was changed to a pillar of salt: I have seen this pillar, which remains to this day. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 203

> Of this his wife was destined to be a sign, for after leaving with him she changed her mind and no longer agreed, and as a result she became a pillar of salt to this day. —*1 Clement* 11:1–2

> For what is to be learned from the fact that those who were rescued by the angels were then forbidden to look back—if not that a soul ought not to return to its old life after it has been freed from it through grace? . . . Hence, Lot's wife remained [fixed] where she looked back, and she was turned into salt in order to supply men of faith with a grain of wisdom, serving as an example of that of which they are to beware.
> —Augustine, *City of God* 26:30

Lot's Daughters Meant Well

Lot's incestuous union with his daughters seemed to provide obvious grounds for condemning him:

> And [Lot] and his daughters committed sin upon the earth, such as had not been on the earth since the days of Adam till his time; for the man lay with his daughters. And behold, it was commanded and engraved concerning all his seed, on the heavenly tablets, to remove them and root them out, and to execute judgment upon them like the judgment of Sodom, and to leave no seed of the man on earth on the day of condemnation. —*Jubilees* 16:8–9

It is interesting, however, that some interpreters seized upon a detail in the biblical text to defend the daughters' actions. For when the daughters resolve to do this deed, it is because the older says to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come to us after the manner of all the earth" (Gen. 19:31). Now,

in context, this seems to mean merely that Lot's daughters, dwelling alone in an isolated mountain cave with their father (Gen. 19:30), had no one ("not a man on earth") to turn to for a mate. But perhaps the expression "not a man on earth" meant more:

> These virgins, because of their ignorance of external matters and because they saw those cities burned up together with all their inhabitants, supposed that the whole human race [had been destroyed at the same time], and that no one remained anywhere except the three of them.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 4:56

> His maiden daughters, in the belief that the whole of humanity had perished, had intercourse with their father, taking care to elude detection; they acted thus to prevent the extinction of the race.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:205

> In keeping with their simplicity and innocence, these daughters imagined that all humanity had perished, just as the Sodomites had, and that the anger of God had descended upon the whole earth.
>
> —Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.31.2

> They saw the fire, they saw the burning sulphur, they saw the destruction of everything, and . . . they saw as well that their own mother had not been saved. Thus they imagined that there was taking place something similar to what had happened in the time of Noah, and that they had been left with their father alone to insure the continuity of the human race.
>
> —Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 5:4 (also *Contra Celsum* 4.45)

> They believed that the entire world had been destroyed, as in the generation of the flood. —*Genesis Rabba* 51:8

> Since they [Lot's daughters] thought that a sea of fire had destroyed the whole world, just as water had in the time of Noah, the older said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come let us make our father drink wine" [Gen. 19:31–32]. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 19:31

> However, the justification that is offered for the daughters, namely, that they thought that the entire human race had been killed and for that reason lay with their father, still does not exculpate the father.
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 19:30

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In short: Many interpreters held Lot to have been a righteous and good man, whose generosity—in stark contrast to the stinginess of the Sodomites—was at least one reason for his having been rescued from the doomed city. If so, this virtue had no doubt been taught to Lot by his uncle Abraham, whose hospitality to strangers was unparalleled. Despite Lot's apparent virtues, other interpreters believed him to have been wicked and saw his settling in sinful Sodom as hardly accidental. Whether Sodom's sin was stinginess or sexual license, such interpreters judged Lot to have been scarcely better than his neighbors. As for Lot's wife, she was turned into a pillar of salt as a lesson to humanity. His daughters, however, could hardly be blamed for their sin: they believed that all of humanity had perished in the destruction of Sodom, and so were merely seeking to perpetuate the human race.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Lot and Lot's Wife

Three "Men" Were Angels: Before the destruction of Sodom, three men came to visit Abraham in Gen. 18:1–15. These three were the subject of some speculation among interpreters. To begin with, were they men or angels? The traditional Hebrew text consistently refers to them as "men." However, in Gen. 18:10, 13, and elsewhere "the Lord" speaks in places where, it would seem, the three men should be speaking. Interpreters naturally concluded that the three were angels, spokesmen or representatives of God:

> But he [Lot] lingered, so the angels seized him.
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 19:16 (also, 19:1)

> But he [Lot] lingered, so the angel seized him.
>
> —*Samaritan Pentateuch* Gen. 19:16

> Three angels were sent to our father Abraham at the time when he was circumcised . . . He lifted up his eyes and behold, three angels in the likeness of men stood in front of him. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 18:1–2

> . . . the three men [who] appear[ed to Abrah]am at the oaks of Mamre are angels. —(4Q180) *Pesher of the Periods* 2:3–4

See further Weiss, "Fragments of a Midrash on Genesis"; Dimant, "The Pesher on the Periods."

There Had to Be Three: But if they were angels, then why should there have been *three* of them (Gen. 18:2)—would not one have sufficed? Moreover, having stated that there were three, why should the Bible then go on to say that only *two* of them went to Sodom (Gen. 19:1)? From this discrepancy, ancient interpreters concluded that the three must have been sent to fulfill different purposes.

> They confessed themselves messengers of God, of whom one had been sent to announce the news of the child and the other two to destroy the Sodomites. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:198

> [Trypho argues:] Those three, then, whom Scripture terms men, were actually angels, two of them having been sent to destroy Sodom, and [the third] one to bring the good news to Sarah that she was to have a child; having been sent for this purpose, when he had accomplished his task he went on his way. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56

> Three angels were sent to our father Abraham after he had been circumcised [in Gen. 17:24], and the three of them were sent for three [different] purposes, since it is quite impossible for one angel from on high to be sent to perform more than one purpose. The first angel was sent to announce to our father Abraham that Sarah would give birth to Isaac, and the second

> angel was sent to save Lot from the midst of the destruction [of Sodom], and the third angel was sent to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 18:1

> Who were the three men? [The angels] Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. Michael came to announce the news to Sarah, Raphael to heal Abraham, and Gabriel to overthrow Sodom. But does it not say [later on], "two angels came to Sodom at nightfall" (Gen. 19:1)? Michael went along with him [Gabriel] in order to rescue Lot. —b. *Baba Metzia* 86b

Early Christians, however, concentrated on the fact that God apparently stayed to talk with Abraham *after the angels left* (Gen. 18:22) and that these angels themselves, or at least one of them, had been referred to as "the Lord" (Gen. 18:1, 10). All this suggested that more than one aspect of the Deity may have been involved:

> One of those three is both this God in question [that is, Christ] and yet is called an angel [in the Greek, "messenger"], because, as I said already, He announces the messages of God [the Father] the Maker of the universe.
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56:10

Eventually, the number "three" came to hold a deeper meaning for Christian commentators—once the doctrine of the trinity (which had not existed as such in the earliest phase of church teachings) was adopted by Christians. Indeed, any hint of a "foreshadowing" of the trinitarian idea in the Old Testament was important:

> Now under the oak-tree at Mamre, Abraham saw three men, whom he invited in and received with hospitality, serving them as they dined. Yet Scripture does not say, at the beginning of this account, "three men appeared to him," but "the Lord appeared to him." Then, however, recounting how it was that the Lord did in fact appear to him, it adds the matter of the three men, whom Abraham invites to his hospitality in the plural number, though afterward he speaks to them in the singular, as if One; and as One He [God] promises a son by Sarah. —Augustine, *On the Trinity* 2:10–11

This theme (known in Latin as *tres vidit et unum adoravit,* "He saw three and worshiped one") became a commonplace of medieval Christian exegesis and the subject of debate between Christians and Jews. See further Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 4:2; Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten;* also, Berger, *Nitzaḥon Yašan.*

The Angels Didn't Really Eat: There was another problem with Abraham's generous hospitality toward the angels. Angels were generally held to be immaterial and unable to eat or drink. (This idea is presupposed by the story of the birth of Samson, where Samson's father, Manoah, mistakenly offers food to an angel, "for Manoah did not know that he was an angel of the Lord" [Judg. 13:16]; for later attestations see Tobit 12:9, Sir. 16:27.) Perhaps, then, when they seemed to be

accepting Abraham's offer of a lavish meal, what they were really saying was that Abraham should feast while they watched:

> And they [the angels] said [to Abraham], "Do as you have spoken" [Gen. 18:5]. They said: "As for us, we do not eat or drink, but you, who *do* eat and drink, *you* do as you have spoken." — *Genesis Rabba* 48:18

But if the angels did indeed fail to partake of the meal, what did the Bible mean by saying that "they ate" (Gen. 18:8)? Perhaps they merely pretended to eat:

> The conduct of the meal was such as it should be. The guests [the angels] showed to their host the frank simplicity of a festive gathering . . . It is a

The angels visited Abraham. They didn't have much to eat.

> marvel indeed that though they neither ate nor drank, they gave the appearance of both. —Philo, *On Abraham* 117–118

> [Abraham] ordered loaves of fine flour to be made forthwith and killed a calf and cooked it and brought it to them as they reclined under the oak; and they gave him to believe that they did eat.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:197

> And the Commander-in-chief [the archangel Michael] said [to God], "Lord, all the heavenly spirits are incorporeal, and they neither eat nor drink. Now he [Abraham] has set before me a table with an abundance of all the good things which are earthly and perishable. And now, Lord, what shall I do? How shall I escape his notice while I am sitting at one table with him?" The Lord said: "Go down to him, and do not be concerned about this. For when you are seated with him, I shall send upon you an all-devouring spirit, and, from your hands and through your mouth, it will consume everything which is on the table. Make merry with him in everything."
>
> — *Testament of Abraham* (A) 4:9–10

> It is written that "they ate" [Gen. 18:8] . . . I should say that the word *ate* is intended in the same way as we ourselves might say of fire that it *devoured* everything, and that we ought not at all to understand this to mean that they ate by [actually] chewing with teeth and jaws.
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 57

> . . . and he [Abraham] stood next to them underneath the tree and they **seemed to him** as if they were eating and as if they were drinking.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 18:8

> Is it possible that they really ate? No, it is rather that they **looked as if** they were really eating and drinking. —b. *Baba Metzi'a* 86b

The same idea—that the angels did not really eat, that indeed the whole feast may have been a delusion—may stand behind a tradition witnessed elsewhere:

> Sarah said [to Abraham]: You must know, my lord, the three heavenly men who stayed as guests in our tent beside the oak of Mamre when you slaughtered the unblemished calf and set a table for them. After meat had been eaten, the calf got up again and exultantly suckled at its mother.
>
> — *Testament of Abraham* 6:4–5

> And it came to pass, when they were about to get up from the table after having eaten with him, behold, the mother of the calf [that Abraham had sacrificed, Gen. 18:7] came howling in search of her calf. The slaughtered calf thereupon got up from the table and followed after its mother.
>
> — *Historical Paleya* (Popov, p. 43)

Alternately, the angels may indeed have eaten like humans—after all, they were on earth and so perhaps were simply conforming to local custom:

> Then the Lord said to [the archangel] Michael: "Arise and go to Abraham and stay with him as a guest. And whatever you see [him] eating, you also eat." — *Testament of Abraham* (B) 4:15

> The proverb says, "when you enter a city, follow the [local] custom." On high, where there is no eating or drinking, Moses ascended and became like them [heaven's denizens], "And I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, I did not eat any food or drink any water . . ." [Deut. 9:9]; below, where there *is* eating, he [Abraham] stood near them while they ate. — *Genesis Rabba* 18:14

On the general topic, see Goodman, "Do Angels Eat?" 160–175.

Lot the Wicked: A passage seen earlier contained a subtle dig at Lot:

> And in like manner, the Lord will execute judgment on the places where they commit the same sort of impure actions as the Sodomites, just like the judgment of Sodom. But we [angels] went about rescuing Lot; for the Lord **remembered Abraham**, and sent him out of the midst of the overthrow [of Sodom]. — *Jubilees* 16:6

The highlighted words are apparently an allusion to what the Bible says with regard to the destruction of Sodom: "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot from the midst of the destruction" (Gen. 19:29). Apparently, the text is referring to Abraham's earlier prayer that the righteous of Sodom be spared (Gen. 18:23–33): God "remembers" this appeal and therefore decides to save Lot, presumably because he is righteous. But in quoting this verse, the author of *Jubilees* (who, as we have seen, considers Lot to be thoroughly depraved) must have had something else in mind, since in his view Lot would hardly qualify as one of the "righteous" mentioned in Abraham's prayer. And indeed, *Jubilees* contains no account of Abraham's prayer on behalf of the righteous of Sodom; moreover, in the very next verse following his rescue from Sodom, *Jubilees* denounces Lot's incestuous union with his daughters, "a sin . . . which had not occurred on the earth from the time of Adam until his time" (*Jubilees* 16:8). Thus, in saying, "But we [angels] went about rescuing Lot; for the Lord remembered Abraham," what *Jubilees* seeks to imply is that if God had considered Lot merely on his own merits, he certainly would have perished with the other Sodomites. It was only because Lot was Abraham's nephew that he was saved. (This same interpretation was made explicit in some of the later sources cited in the chapter; see also b. *Berakot* 54b, *Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 19:26.)

Lot Bought a House: Another, somewhat negative interpretation bearing on Lot appears in another passage cited above:

> At Sodom, he [Lot] bought for himself a house and lived in it. And I lived on the mountain of Bethel. And I was disturbed that my nephew Lot had parted from me. — *Genesis Apocryphon* 21:5–7

How does the author of this text know that Lot *bought a house* in Sodom? The Bible says no such thing—in fact, it had earlier specified that, to the contrary, Lot had "moved his *tent* as far as Sodom" (Gen. 13:12), as if to stress that he was not taking up permanent residence there.

In Genesis 19, however, it is clear that Lot now lives in a *house* in Sodom. He brings the angels "under the shelter of my roof" (Gen. 19:8), and when a crowd later forms outside, they try to break down the front door—an act that would obviously make no sense with regard to a tent. From all this the author of the *Genesis Apocryphon* concludes that Lot must at some point have given up his temporary and tentative dwelling in Sodom for a more permanent one. And this certainly did not speak well of him—it meant that he was settling down with the sinners and, apparently, liking it. For this reason the *Genesis Apocryphon* has Abraham specifically mention the purchase of this house; presumably it was a contributory factor in Abraham's concern over his nephew's behavior.

Lot's Daughter Pelitit: A rabbinic tradition cited earlier holds that Lot had a daughter named Pelitit (or Pelotit) who, unlike the other women of Sodom, actually cared for the needy and helped to keep a certain poor man alive by giving him food. When her "crime" was discovered, the people of Sodom condemned her to be burned. The story further relates that Pelitit then appealed to God for help:

> She said: Lord of the world, execute justice on the people of Sodom for my case, and her cry rose up before the glorious throne. God said: Let me now go down and see if in accordance with her cry that is coming to me . . .—for, if the people of Sodom have indeed behaved in keeping with the cry of this young woman, I will overthrow [Sodom, turning] its foundations upward and its upper parts downward. For the text says [literally, "Let me go down and see] if in accordance with *her* cry"; it does not say *their* cry, but *hers.*
>
> — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 25

This tradition is clearly an elaboration of the motif "The Proud and the Stingy," which arose, as we have seen, from Ezek. 16:49. But the figure of Pelitit herself was generated by a peculiarity in the Genesis narrative. Hearing the cry arising from Sodom and Gomorrah, God says, "Let me now go down and see if in accordance with *her* cry they have wrought destruction" (Gen. 18:21). The word "her" seems to refer to the city of Sodom or Gomorrah, since cities in Hebrew are feminine. Still, two cities were mentioned; why did not God say *their cry*—indeed, would not the plural have better suited the multitude of people involved? And why the word "cry" at all? As in English, this word in Hebrew is used principally for cries of distress or despair—whereas the Sodomites were apparently having a fine time in their wickedness and not crying at all!

Out of such considerations apparently arose the idea that "her cry" referred not to that of a city but to that of a single, otherwise unmentioned female residing in these wicked surroundings—hence, the righteous Pelitit. She appears elsewhere as well:

> And God said to the attending angels: The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah that they are persecuting the poor and and decreeing that anyone who gives bread to a poor person will be burned with fire—how great is [this cry], and their sin, how enormous. Let Me now reveal myself and see if they have done in keeping with the cry of the girl Pelitit which has come before Me—[then] they merit destruction! But if they repent, are they not as innocent before me as if I had not known? I will not exact punishment.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 18:20–21

Sinning in Secret: We saw that interpreters were divided as to the nature of Sodom's sinfulness. This was in part because of the apparent vagueness in God's condemnation of Sodom:

> Then the Lord said: "Behold, the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah—how great! Yea, their sin is very grave. I will now go down and see whether they have indeed acted utterly in keeping with this outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know." — Gen. 18:20–21

This passage does not actually say what Sodom's sin was. Nevertheless, it may have seemed to interpreters to have contained a slight hint as to the nature of that sin. For ancient readers could not but be struck by the representation of God as having to "go down and see" if the Sodomites had indeed been sinning as reported. Didn't God Himself *know* what was going on there? Why should He have to "go down" and check?

One answer was that God certainly knew what had already happened—knew, that is, of the Sodomites' sinfulness—but wished now to judge their action, consider it, and then "check" to see whether the Sodomites would repent of their sinfulness or not.

> [God said:] Let me now reveal Myself and **judge** whether they have acted according to their cry which has risen before me; I will destroy them if they do not repent, but if they repent, I will not exact payment.[2]
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 18:21

A similar interpretive solution seems to be attested in a text from Qumran:

> [He (God) said: "The outcr]y of Sodom and Gomorrah—how gr[eat!] Yea, their sin is very grave. I will now go down and see whether in keeping with

2. This translation apparently takes God's words "I will now go down" and changes them to something less anthropomorphic: "I will now be revealed." The next words, "and see," are understood in the sense of passing judgment, "I will now be revealed and *judge* . . ." As for the rest of the sentence, the phrase "acted utterly" *('asu kalah)* is broken in two by Onqelos. The first word is thus simply "acted," while the second is now analyzed as an independent entity, the noun that means "destruction." Hence: I will judge "whether [it has been] according to their cry which has risen before me; if they have [so] acted, then [I will bring] *destruction;* [for] if they do not repent, then I will know [and I will exact punishment]." In other words, by translating in this fashion Onqelos clearly implies that God was well aware of what the Sodomites had done, but was revealing himself in order to test them and see whether this revelation would cause the Sodomites to repent.

> this outcry which has come [to me **I will**] **act utterly**, and if not, I will know." —(4Q180) *Pesher of the Periods* 2:5–7

Here instead of understanding, in keeping with the biblical text, that God went down to see if the Sodomites had "indeed acted utterly in keeping with the cry," this text—if the above restoration is correct—would seem to come up with a radically different reading. God is held to know exactly what is happening in Sodom on the basis of the cry rising up to heaven: his "going down" is for the purpose of deciding whether *He* will "act utterly" and bring about the destruction of the Sodomites. (On this reading, see also Dimant, "Pesher on the Periods," 84.)

Philo argued that the biblical narrative was actually designed to impart a lesson to human beings—that it is a good idea to look deeply into any matter before reaching a conclusion—and therefore represents God as doing so, even though in fact God knows all things. Here too, then, God's "seeing" is connected to an act of judgment:

> This statement [that is, Gen. 18:21] is rightly one of true condescension and accommodation to our nature, for God through His prescient power knows all things, including the future, as I said a little while earlier. And He wishes to instruct those who were to act in accordance with the sacred legislation not to give orders to anyone lightly and immediately, but first to enter into matters and inspect, observe, and examine them individually with all care, and not to be deceived by obvious appearances . . . [And therefore Scripture] represents the ruler and sovereign of the universe as not believing beforehand but as inquiring and examining whether the facts follow rumor.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 4:24

> This is said not as if [to assert that] He did not know that they had sinned, for He had said previously that "their sins are very grave" [Gen. 18:20]. However, it was said as an example to judges, lest they decide something in advance on the basis of hearing alone. For if He who knows all things nevertheless set aside His knowledge lest He enact punishment before a trial, how much more ought those who know nothing to set aside their ignorance lest they carry out a sentence before the case is heard.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 16:1

Another tradition, however, understood God's words as indicating that the Sodomites had been sinning *in secret.* For what could God mean by saying that Sodom's "cry," the *sound* of its sin, had risen up to Him? Did this not imply that the *sight* of their sin had been somehow concealed, that they had, as it were, been sinning behind closed doors in an attempt to escape detection? God's words in Gen. 18:21 might even be pronounced in a somewhat different way and acquire a new meaning—not, "I will go down and see" but "I will go down and cause to be seen,"[3] that is, show to the world the very sins that they had hoped to conceal:

3. A similar instance is Deut. 32:20, where God is reported to say, "I *will see* what becomes of them [the people of Israel]." The Septuagint here (but not in Gen. 18:21) reads not "I will see" but "I will show" (that is, "cause to be seen").

> For because they passed wisdom by, they not only were hindered from recognizing the good, but also left for mankind a reminder of their folly, so that their faults would not be able to pass **unseen**. —Wisd. 10:8

> You [O God] burned with fire and brimstone the arrogant Sodomites, who were **unseen** in their vices, and you made them an example to posterity. —3 Macc. 2:5

> They imagine that perhaps their evil deeds are not revealed to Me. — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* Gen. 18:21

All these texts imply that the Sodomites were somehow sinning in secret. But if so, then what was the nature of their sins? Certainly it was not the mistreatment of the poor or the other behavior alluded to in Ezek. 16:49–50—for these could easily be seen by anyone. Instead, their sins must have been of the sort that are committed in private—the licentiousness mentioned by other interpreters—whose sound had reached heaven, but of which the Sodomites believed God to be unaware.

It is interesting that the idea of sinning in secret, along with the arrogant greed attributed to the Sodomites, appear side by side in a passage that speaks not of the Sodomites but of an anonymous group of (Israelite?) "sinners":

> Their wealth was extended to the whole earth, and their glory to the ends of the earth.
> They exalted themselves to the stars, they said they would never fall.
> **They were arrogant with their possessions**, and they did not acknowledge [God?].
> **Their sins were in secret,** and even I did not know.
> Their lawless actions surpassed the gentiles before them; they completely profaned the sanctuary of the Lord.
> — *Psalms of Solomon* 1:4–8

Although these sinners are clearly *not* the Sodomites, it may be that this description—basing itself on the famous comparison in Isa. 1:10 (see below)—borrowed elements from the traditional understanding of the Sodomites' sins and applied them to contemporary Israelites.

Jerome evokes the theme of "Sinning in Secret" in conjunction with the Sodomites, but in rather the opposite sense:

> The Septuagint translation needlessly adds "in God's sight" here.[4] The inhabitants of Sodom were in fact wicked and sinners [not "in God's sight" but] among men. But to be a "sinner in God's sight" is said of one who might appear to be righteous among men.
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 13:13

4. The traditional Hebrew text has "sinners *against* [*lĕ*] God," a sense faithfully rendered by the Greek *enantion* and Jerome's own *coram* in the Vulgate. His use of the word "needlessly" seems to imply that the Greek is somehow overly specific or, perhaps, to presume a Hebrew text in which the entire phrase is lacking.

Jerome asserts that there was nothing secret about the Sodomites' sinfulness at all—everyone knew about it. Has he perhaps gotten the traditions wrong? On the general subject of the interpretive history of Sodom and Gomorrah, see Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities.* Finally, Menahem Kister ("A Contribution to the Interpretation of Ben Sira," 328) proposes to translate *hammit'abbērîm* in the Hebrew version of Sir. 16:8 as "who perished in their pride." The Greek translator apparently read *hammito'abîm,* "hateful."

Sodom and Isaiah: In the first chapter of the book of Isaiah, the prophet harangues the people by comparing them to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!" (Isa. 1:10). Tradition held that these words were among the causes of Isaiah's death:

> [The false prophet Belchira accuses Isaiah:] Isaiah himself has said "I see more than Moses the prophet." For Moses said, "No man can see God and live" [Exod. 33:20], but Isaiah has said, "I have seen God and behold, I live" [cf. Isa. 6:1]. And Jerusalem also he called Sodom, and the princes of Judah and Jerusalem he has declared to be the people of Gomorrah . . . And the words of Belchira pleased him exceedingly and he sent and seized Isaiah.
>
> — *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 3:8–12

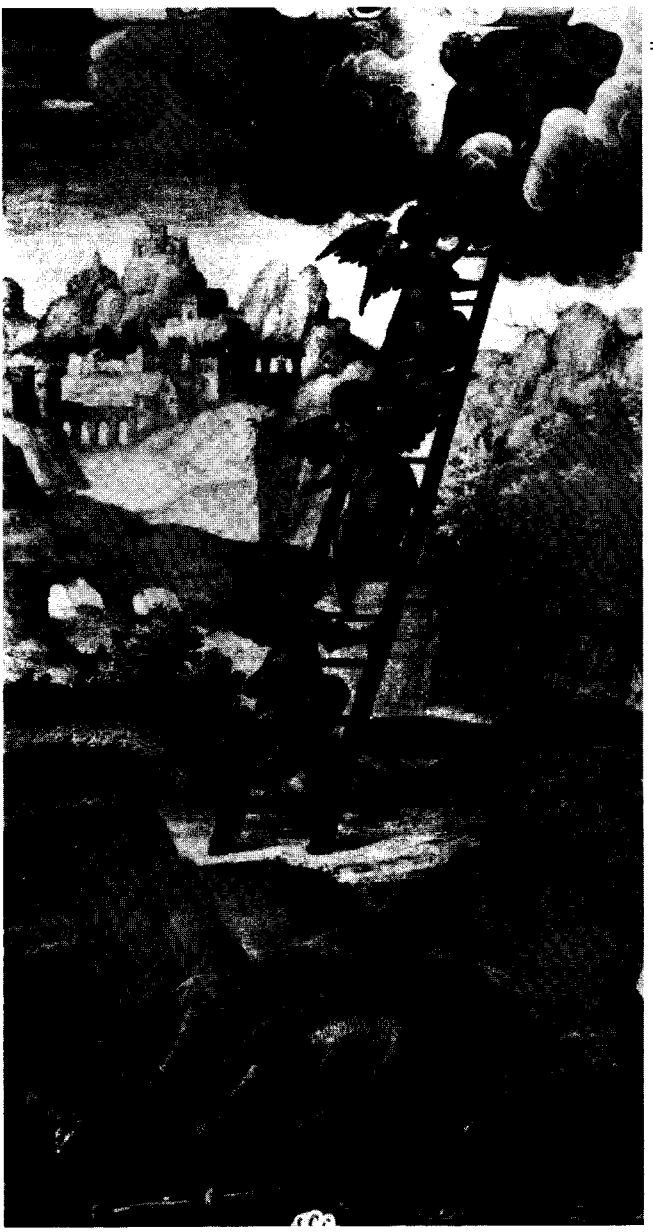
> The Jews say that Isaiah was killed for two reasons: because he called them princes of Sodom and people of Gomorrah, and because, while God had said to Moses, "You cannot see my face" [cf. Exod. 33:20], he had dared to say, "I have seen the Lord sitting on his lofty and exalted throne" [Isa. 6:1].
>
> — Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 1:10

The b. Talmud (*Yebamot* 49b) contains a similar interpretation, which, however, omits Isaiah's comparison of Jerusalem to Sodom.

11

Jacob and Esau

(GENESIS 25–28)



The ladder was a message.

Jacob and Esau

(GENESIS 25–28)

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Abraham's son Isaac eventually married; his wife was named Rebekah. After some time Rebekah became pregnant with twins, but "the children struggled together in her innards." Seeking divine counsel, she learned that the two infants in her womb were to found two great and rival nations. At the time of their birth, Esau emerged first from the womb, then Jacob, his "younger" (if only by a few minutes) brother. Esau was to become the ancestor of the Edomites, and Jacob the ancestor of the people of Israel.

As they grew, the boys proved to be rather different from each other: Esau was an outdoorsman and a hunter, while Jacob stayed at home. Esau was his father's favorite, Jacob his mother's. Jacob was also apparently the cleverer of the two, for as a youth, he twice got the better of his brother. Once, when Esau was very hungry, Jacob got him to sell his precious birthright for a mere bowl of lentil stew. On another occasion (with the help of his mother), Jacob fooled their father into granting to him the blessing that Isaac had intended to give to Esau. Esau's anger over both incidents was such that Jacob had to flee to Aram, to the house of his uncle Laban. On the way he had a remarkable dream, in which he beheld a great ladder rising into the heavens.

JACOB is the immediate ancestor of the people of Israel. He is, in this sense, the embodiment of the people as a whole, the national hero. Yet in reading this first part of his story, early interpreters could not but be a little disturbed by Jacob's behavior, particularly with regard to his brother, Esau. Esau seems to be a bit of a fall guy in the Bible, and no match for his clever younger brother. Getting Esau to sell his birthright, worth a considerable amount of money,[1] for a bowl of lentils certainly seemed to make Jacob out to be something of sharpster, and the way in which he later tricked their father into blessing him instead of Esau could only confirm that impression.

Needless to say, such behavior scarcely seemed appropriate for the founder of God's people, Israel. Nor, for that matter, did it square with the Jacob we see elsewhere, a man devoted to God and heedless of material possessions, who spontaneously promises to tithe all his wealth to God (Gen. 28:22) and even in time of great distress can only say to Him, "I am not worthy of all You have granted me" (Gen. 32:10). Given this "other" Jacob, interpreters naturally tried to find evidence

1. According to the law stated in Deut. 21:7, the firstborn brother is to receive a double share of his father's estate; this is his "birthright."

of Jacob's goodness wherever they could, and to prove that whatever the evil that happened to Esau, it was entirely justified.

Such evidence was not too hard to come by. Early on in their story, the Bible itself contrasts the two brothers in these terms:

> And the two boys grew up. Esau became a man knowledgeable about hunting, a man of the field, but Jacob **was a simple man, dwelling in tents**. Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of the hunt; but Rebekah loved Jacob.
>
> —Gen. 25:27–28

This contrast—Esau the outdoorsman versus Jacob the homebody—is introduced here, it seems, to provide background for the later story of Isaac's blessing, in which Jacob is able to fool his father precisely because he is at home while Esau is off hunting. But ancient interpreters did not consider these words mere background. Instead, they saw a fundamental statement about the differences in the two brothers' characters.

Jacob Was Not Just "Simple"

Jacob was "a simple man, dwelling in tents"—this in itself seemed to counter the notion that Jacob was a clever trickster. But "simple" in Hebrew *(tām)* can also mean "pure," "innocent," or even "perfect"—and these traits, more than mere "simplicity," would help defend Jacob against the charge of having unfairly taken advantage of his brother. How could someone whom the Bible itself defines as innocent or perfect be anything but utterly virtuous?

> [Rebekah recalls to Isaac when they are both old:] You blessed your **perfect** and true son Jacob because he has **virtue only and no evil**. From the time he has come back from Haran until today he has not denied us anything but always brings us everything in its season. He is sincerely happy when we accept [anything] from him, and he blesses us . . ." Isaac said to her: "I know [this] as well, and I see the actions of Jacob who is with us, that he honors us with his whole heart."
>
> —*Jubilees* 35:12–13

> And the two boys grew up, and Esau became a man knowledgeable in hunting, a man [who was] lord of the fields, and Jacob was a man **perfect** in good work, dwelling in schoolhouses.
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 25:27

> Lest Jacob's stratagem [in getting the blessing that was intended for Esau] be thought of as fraudulent trickery—and lest [therefore] this [incident's] highly significant hidden meaning not be pursued—earlier Scripture had stated that "Esau was a man knowing how to hunt, a man of the fields, but Jacob was a simple man, staying at home." Some have interpreted this [word "simple"] as "without guile." But whether it means "without guile," or "simple," or rather "without pretense," what kind of guile could in any case be involved in the obtaining of a blessing by someone who is "without guile"?
>
> —Augustine, *City of God* 16.37

Jacob the Scholar

And, come to think of it, what did the Bible mean by describing Jacob as "dwelling in tents"? Interpreters were struck by the plural *tents* here—does a person need more than one tent to dwell in? If the word appears in the plural, it must have been intended as a subtle hint that, in addition to staying in his own tent, Jacob also regularly spent time, "dwelt," in another tent. And what sort of tent might that be, if not that of a schoolteacher who could instruct the boy in reading and writing? Perhaps, indeed, the other tent was a full-blown schoolhouse of Jewish learning. (Such apparent anachronisms were, curiously, not a problem for ancient interpreters.)

> And . . . Rebekah bore to Isaac two sons, Jacob and Esau, and Jacob was a smooth and upright man, and Esau was fierce, a man of the field, and hairy;[2] and Jacob dwelt in tents. And the youths grew, and Jacob **learned to write**; but Esau did not learn, for he was a man of the field, and a hunter, and he learned war, and all his deeds were fierce. And Abraham loved Jacob,[3] but Isaac loved Esau. — *Jubilees* 19:13–15

> And the two boys grew up, and Esau was a skilled hunter, a man who went out to the fields, and Jacob was a perfect man who frequented the schoolhouse. — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 25:27

> And Jacob was a man perfect in good work, dwelling in schoolhouses. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 25:27

> . . . the righteous Jacob, who observed the entire Torah, as it is said, "And Jacob was a perfect man, dwelling in tents."[4] — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 336

Esau the Wicked

Esau, as noted, is something of a fall guy in Genesis, a big, athletic, not-too-discerning young man. But if Jacob was made out to be altogether virtuous and studious, Esau's image was likewise modified by early interpreters—if anything, in

2. The detail of Esau being "hairy" comes from Gen. 25:24, when Esau is said to come out of the womb "all his body like a hairy mantle"; the word "hairy" *(sa'ir)* is meant to suggest Mt. Se'ir, his future homeland. But to interpreters the idea of a "hairy" Esau went well with their picture of Esau the crude, animal-like hunter. Thus Philo: "The ruddy body and hairy hide are a sign of a savage man who rages furiously in the manner of a wild beast" (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 4:160).

3. Note that the biblical text had said that Isaac loved Esau, but *Rebekah* loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). Apparently the author of *Jubilees* was bothered by the idea of Jacob being a "momma's boy" and so substituted Abraham for Rebekah, also putting this new clause *ahead of* the one about Isaac loving Esau. In this way not only does Abraham become Jacob's patron (and Abraham doubtless was, in the eyes of most interpreters, even more worthy than Isaac), but it also appears that Isaac's love for Esau was sort of a "consolation prize," since Jacob was already loved by the worthy Abraham.

4. The fact that Jacob "dwelt in tents," that is, frequented the schoolhouse, was what allowed him to "observe the entire Torah," since the Torah was the normal schoolhouse curriculum.

even more radical fashion. He became utterly wicked, a crafty, bloodthirsty embodiment of evil.

Part of the motive for this change is to be found in the later history of Israel, as reflected in the Bible itself. After all, Esau was the ancestor of the Edomites, Israel's close neighbor and sometimes fierce enemy. Later biblical texts frequently heaped scorn on the Edomites,[5] and sometimes this scorn was couched in terms that reflected back on the founder of that nation.

> For the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you [Esau], and you shall be cut off forever. —Obad. 1:10

> "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you [Israel] say, "How have you loved us?"
>
> "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. "Yet **I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau**; I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." —Mal. 1:2–3

In context, both Obadiah and Malachi seem to be talking about the history of the two peoples, Israel and Edom. But reading these verses, interpreters could not help seeing in them as well a characterization of the two original brothers. And if God "hated" Esau, the original Esau, then it must have been because he personally was evil:

> There were born two sons, Jacob and Esau. And God loved Jacob, but He hated Esau because of his deeds. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:5

> And You set apart Jacob for Yourself, but Esau You hated; and Jacob became a great multitude. —*4 Ezra* 3:16

> When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, "The elder will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." —Rom. 9:10–13

Another indication of Esau's wickedness was the later history of one of his descendants in particular. The Amalekites were one of the tribes that made up the Edomites; their founder, Amalek, was, according to Gen. 36:12, Esau's grandson. The tribe of Amalek had particularly bad associations with later Israelites: the Amalekites attacked Israel at Rephidim (Exod. 17:8–15), and God later commanded the Israelites to "blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Deut. 25:29)—the only nation in the world so condemned. As the ancestor of the Amalekites, then, Esau became, so to speak, retroactively more wicked. Although he himself might seem to be a harmless fall guy in the biblical text, interpreters could

5. Negative references to the Edomites are not hard to find in the Bible, especially in the later books. Israel's neighboring country is frequently condemned, notably in the brief book of Obadiah, as well as in such passages as Isaiah 34, Jer. 49:7–22, Ezek. 25:12–14, 35:1–15, Psalm 137, and Lam. 4:21–22.

not think of Esau without also thinking of the Amalekites and attributing to Esau all the cruelty and baseness of this tribe.

Nor did the chain of descendants stop with Amalek. Centuries later, King Saul of Israel was punished by God for sparing the life of Agag, then king of the Amalekites. But is not mercy one of God's celebrated traits? If, therefore, Saul was *punished* for sparing Agag's life, here was further proof that the Amalekites were in a class by themselves, a people utterly hated by God; and Esau, Agag's remote ancestor, tended once again to be tarred with the same brush. Finally, among Agag's descendants was the evil plotter of the book of Esther, the wicked Haman (Est. 3:1). Haman was the all-time villain of Jewish history, the man who sought "to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day" (Est. 3:13). If Haman too ultimately descended from Esau, then this certainly clinched the case against Jacob's twin. However benign the person of Esau might appear on the outside, interpreters could have little doubt that he was consummately wicked on the inside.

Good and Evil in Utero

Thus, interpreters sought to read between the lines of the Genesis narrative to find evidence of Esau's fundamentally evil character. One potentially telling detail was the fact that Jacob and Esau were said to struggle in their mother's womb before they were even born. In context, this struggling simply seems to foreshadow the future contentious relations between their descendants, the nations of Israel and Edom. But interpreters saw this struggle in utero as indicating something else, that the two boys were of themselves of fundamentally opposite natures, good and evil:

> Rebekah . . . had conceived the two warring natures of good and evil, and considering the two of them carefully—as wisdom might dictate—she perceived them to be jumping about [inside her], the first skirmishes of the war that was to go on between these contenders. —Philo, *Cain and Abel* 4

> When she passed by houses of idol-worship, Esau would squirm about, trying to get out, as it says, "The wicked turn astray [*zoru*][6] from the womb" (Ps. 58:4); when she would pass synagogues or study-houses, Jacob would squirm to get out, as it says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer. 1:5). —*Genesis Rabba* 63:6

Esau the Warrior

The Bible's description of Esau as a skillful hunter (Gen. 25:27) likewise seemed to offer a clue as to his true nature. Just as the description of Jacob as "simple" and

6. This word is apparently being associated specifically with the practice of idolatry, called in Hebrew "foreign [*zarah*] worship." The biblical phrase cited next with regard to Jacob, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer. 1:5), could likewise be interpreted as: "Before I formed you in the womb, I *caused you to know.*" If so, it might imply that God initiates his chosen servants like Jeremiah (and, perhaps as well, Jacob) into the true religion even before they are born.

"dwelling in tents" in this verse came to be taken as an indication of Jacob's virtue and scholarliness, so were the words "knowledgeable about hunting, a man of the field" interpreted to Esau's disadvantage. After all, a skillful hunter is (to put it bluntly) someone who is good at killing. Perhaps Esau in fact *enjoyed* killing; if so, then he might not have been particularly bothered even by taking of a human life:

> And the boys grew up, and Esau became a hunter, hunting birds and animals, a man who went out into the fields to kill living things—and it was he who killed Nimrod and his son Enoch. But Jacob was a man perfect in his deeds, studying in the academy of Eber, expounding the teachings given by God. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 25:27

It was only a small step from the hunter of animals to the killer of men—and, in fact, elsewhere in the Bible another passage made such a step even easier for interpreters. The passage comes later on in the story of the two brothers, when Jacob manages to end up with the blessing intended for Esau. After he learns what has happened, Esau is crushed and asks his father, "Do you not have a single blessing left for me, my father? Bless me as well, father!" (Gen. 27:38). Isaac obliges as best he can:

> From the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and from the dew of heaven on high. And **by your sword shall you live**, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall cast his yoke from your neck. —Gen. 27:39–40

In context, "by your sword you shall live" probably means "You will always have to have your sword at the ready," you will always be defending yourself. These words in any case certainly do not mean "you will be a great warrior," since the next clause goes on to imply that Esau will still be subservient to Jacob. And yet "you will be a great warrior" is precisely how early interpreters came to understand these words. "Esau the Hunter" and "Esau the Warrior" fit well together, and it was not long before these two biblical passages combined to create an Esau who delighted in bloodshed and excelled at warfare.

> And the youths grew, and Jacob learned to write; but Esau did not learn, for he was a man of the field, and a hunter, and he learned war, and all his deeds were fierce. — *Jubilees* 19:14

> What is the meaning of the words, "By your sword you shall live"? Most naturally has [the text] shown that the life of the foolish man [exemplified by Esau] is warfare without peace or friendship . . . For he [rejoices] in strife and avarice, thinking it the part of zeal to do wrong and thereby to overreach [someone else]. — Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 4:235

> God revealed Himself to the descendants of the wicked Esau and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They said to Him: "What is written in it?" He said: "You shall not murder" [Exod. 20:13]. They said to [God]: "But that is the inheritance that our father left to us, 'By your sword shall you live' [Gen. 27:40]." — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh*

Esau Means Rome

From the first century B.C.E. on, the great war-maker in the life of Israel was the Roman empire, which gained political power over the Jewish homeland and later crushed two doughty attempts on the Jews' part to win their independence (68–70 C.E. and 133–135 C.E.). The Romans enforced their rule through military might and the ruthless suppression and punishment of all sources of possible resistance.

It was natural that the Jews, in seeking to understand their present predicament under Roman rule, should look to the Bible for clues—and for hope. To many, the "true" identity of the Romans was not hard to find: their love of war, their swaggering cruelty, and their living "by the sword" all suggested that they were the spiritual descendants of Esau. Indeed, there must have been something comforting in thinking of the Romans as the present-day equivalent of biblical Esau, for just as God had helped Jacob to triumph over his physically larger and stronger brother, so He might help the Jews to throw off the Roman yoke:

> [An angel tells Jacob:] "The Most High will raise up emperors from the descendants of your brother Esau [that is, Rome], and they will receive all the power of the races of the earth who have caused harm to your seed. And they [that is, your "seed"] will be delivered into his [Esau's, that is, Rome's] hands and he will ill-treat them. And he will begin to hold them by force and rule over them, and they will not be able to oppose him, until the day when his decree will go out against them to worship idols and sacrifice to the dead." — *Ladder of Jacob* 5:8–11

> [Isaac's words in Gen. 27:22] "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" [really refer to the people of Israel and Rome,] for Jacob rules only through his voice, but Esau [Rome] rules only through his hands. — *Genesis Rabba* 65:19

Perhaps indeed the fact that Jacob seized his brother's heel at the time of their birth indicated that the age of the Romans' ascendancy would be followed by that of the Jews:

> [The angel tells Ezra:] "Jacob's hand held Esau's heel from the beginning, for Esau [that is, the ascendancy of Rome] is the end of this age, and Jacob [the ascendancy of Israel] is the beginning of the age that follows. For the end of a man is his heel, and the beginning of a man is his hand; between the heel and the hand seek for nothing else, Ezra." — *4 Ezra* 6:8–10

> "And his hand seized Esau's heel" [Gen. 25:26]—there is no kingdom in this world after Esau's kingdom except Israel's alone.
>
> — *Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 25:26

Esau the Deceiver

Not only was Esau turned into someone bloodthirsty and cruel, but, in certain sources, he was also viewed as something of a deceiver. This idea came as well to be connected with the description of Esau as a hunter:

> Concerning Esau, the hairy one, **wily** in wickedness, [Scripture] says: "Esau was skilled in hunting, a man of the country" [Gen. 25:27]. For wickedness, which goes hunting after the passions, is by nature unable to inhabit the city of virtue. —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 3:2

> "Esau became a man knowledgeable about hunting, a man of the field . . ." (Gen. 25:28): Said R. Abbahu [commenting on the apparently unnecessary phrase "man of the field"—for what hunter is not a man of the field?]: he used to hunt both in the field and in the house. —*Genesis Rabba* 63:10

Esau Didn't Care

In the same attempt to blame Esau wherever possible, ancient readers sought to reinterpret the story of Esau's sale of his birthright. Jacob's success in getting his older brother to sell him this valuable item for a pittance was not understood as implying any ill of Jacob. On the contrary! Jacob was seen as trying to relieve Esau of riches that would otherwise cause him to sin:

> The literal meaning [of this story] shows the greed of the younger [brother] in wishing to deprive his elder brother of his rights. But the virtuous man [Jacob] is not greedy . . . [He] understands that a continuous and unlimited abundance of possessions will provide the wicked man [Esau] with the occasion for, and the cause of, sin . . . He considers it most necessary to remove [Esau] from evil . . . for the improvement of character. And this does no harm, but is a great benefit to him.
>
> —Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 4:172

In any case, the fact that Esau *agreed* to sell his birthright for almost nothing—and that, afterward, he was said to have "despised" it (Gen. 25:34)—was taken as an indication that this whole episode in the Bible had been intended to illustrate Esau's fundamentally impious nature:

> . . . that no one be immoral and irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. —Heb. 12:16

> Scripture thus shows that Esau did not sell his birthright because of hunger, since it says that after he ate, "Esau got up and left and [still] despised his birthright." He did not sell it because of hunger, therefore, but because he indeed considered it to be worthless and sold it for nothing.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 23:2

Jacob Told the Truth

In short, ancient interpreters exploited every possibility in the Genesis narrative to make Jacob into a model of virtue and Esau into the opposite. But the champions of Jacob still had some explaining to do. For there remained the incident in which Jacob tricked his father into giving him his blessing. How could a moral person do such a thing? It was bad enough that he took advantage of the old man's blindness

and misled him by donning hairy animal skins to simulate his brother's hirsute arms. But still worse, Jacob actually lied to his father:

> So he went in to his father and said, "Father?" and he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" And Jacob said to his father, "**I am Esau**, your firstborn . . ." Then Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands, so he blessed him. He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "**I am.**" —Gen. 27:18–24

Americans raised on the story of George Washington and the cherry tree have but to consider passages such as this one to realize what a poor example Jacob might seem to offer growing young minds. No wonder, then, that in retelling these events, ancient interpreters sought to create a somewhat different emphasis in Jacob's words:

> He [Jacob] went in to his father and said, "**I am your son.** I have done as you told me; come and sit down and eat of what I have caught, father, so that you may bless me." . . . And Jacob went close to his father Isaac, and he [Isaac] felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's but the hands are the hands of Esau," and he did not recognize him, because there was an ordering from heaven to turn his mind astray . . . And he said, "Are you my son Esau?" and he said, "**I am your son.**" —*Jubilees* 26:13–19

Here, Jacob tells no lie: he twice asserts what is only the truth, that he is indeed Isaac's son. But how could such a distortion square with what the Bible itself says?

It should be remembered that the biblical text was originally transmitted without punctuation or capital letters, so that where a sentence begins or ends was often a matter of opinion. Exploiting this situation (along with the frequent omission of the verb "to be" in biblical Hebrew), an interpreter might maintain that the opening exchange between Jacob and his father—namely, "Who are you, my son?" "I am Esau, your firstborn"—could just as easily be read as follows: "Who are you? My son?" "I am. [But] Esau is your firstborn." It seems that the author of *Jubilees* had something like this in mind. This same approach is likewise witnessed later on:

> "And Jacob said, 'I am Esau your firstborn' [Gen. 27:19]": He stopped in the middle; he said, "I am," but "Esau is your firstborn."
>
> —*Midrash Leqaḥ Tob* 27:19

> "I am . . ." Jacob saw in a prophetic vision that his descendants were to stand at Mount Sinai and receive the Ten Commandments, which begin with the words "I am" (Exod. 20:2). [Having mentioned this] he added: "But Esau is your firstborn." —*Midrash Aggadah* 27:19

God Wanted Jacob to Be Blessed

Whatever Jacob might or might not have said (or where in his sentence he might have paused), interpreters were in any case struck by one obvious fact: Jacob does actually succeed in having his father really believe that he is Esau. But how could such a thing have happened? Could a father, even a blind and aged father, manage to confuse two such different sons? And would he likely be taken in by such a shabby trick as the substitution of an animal hide for a hairy human forearm? No one, no matter how old or blind, could fall for such a ruse! Unless . . . unless, reasoned interpreters, it had been God's plan all along that Jacob be blessed by Isaac—in which case, it was God who had guided Jacob's and Isaac's actions. (This hypothesis seemed only to be confirmed by subsequent events, since Isaac did not subsequently withdraw his blessing, and the sacred line did end up being passed down through Jacob, not Esau.)

> And to Isaac as well did God give a son [that is, Jacob], for the sake of Abraham his father.
> He gave him [Jacob] the covenant of the former ones [Abraham and Isaac], and **a blessing rested on the head of Israel;**
> and **He confirmed him in the blessing,** and He gave him his inheritance.[7]
>
> —Sir. 44:22–23

Indeed, to make the deception work, God might have temporarily weakened Isaac's powers of perception and so prevented him from seeing through the sham.

> And he [Isaac] did not recognize him, because there was an ordering from heaven to turn his mind astray. —*Jubilees* 26:17–18

> Because of a [divine] dispensation the prophet [Isaac] failed in sight, and afterward was again established and became keen of sight. But the dispensation was a blessing, that not a wicked man but one deserving of blessings might obtain it. —Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 4:196

> And it came to pass that when Isaac was old and his eyes were too weak to see, and the holy spirit departed from him[8] so that Jacob would receive the blessings . . . —*Fragment Targum* Gen. 27:1

> Isaac could not change his blessings . . . because he knew that the word of God had been fulfilled, just as it had been told to Rebekah [in Gen. 25:23].
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 25:2

7. One Hebrew manuscript reads "confirmed him in the birthright," suggesting that Jacob's acquired status as firstborn, purchased from Esau for some porridge, was confirmed by subsequent events. See Exod. 4:22.

8. The point is apparently that the words "to see" in the Bible's "and his eyes were too weak to see" are not necessary: weak eyes are, by definition, eyes that do not see well. For that reason, "see" is taken in the sense of (divinely granted) understanding, supporting the idea that it was not only Isaac's vision that God took away, but also (at least temporarily) his powers of discernment.

If indeed it had been God's will all along to have Jacob gain his father's blessing, then Jacob's conduct in the whole affair was far more justifiable: he was simply doing what was necessary to carry out the divine plan.

The Ladder Was a Message

Having gotten a blessing that his father had intended for Esau, Jacob was now in some danger, for he had aroused Esau's hatred (Gen. 27:41). Rebekah resolved to send Jacob to stay for a while with her brother Laban in Haran, to give Esau time to cool off. Jacob set out on his journey, but at nightfall he stopped to rest:

> And he came to the place and decided to spend the night there, for the sun was setting. And he took from among the stones in that spot in order to put under his head, and he lay down in that place. And he dreamt that there was a ladder set upon the earth whose top reached to heaven, and the angels of God were going up and down upon it.
>
> And the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. The land upon which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. And your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall extend outward to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south, and all the families of the land shall be blessed through you and through your descendants. For I shall indeed be with you and I shall watch over you wherever you go, and I shall return you to this land; I will not leave you until I have done what I have told you."
>
> And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "The Lord is indeed present in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid, and he said, "How fearful is this place. Surely this is the house of God and the very gate of heaven." —Gen. 28:11–17

This vision of Jacob's was particularly puzzling to early interpreters. To begin with, why a *dream* at all—why did not God simply speak to Jacob, as He had to Abraham? Moreover, what was this dream intended to communicate? If the point had been merely to tell Jacob that "the land upon which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants," there certainly would have been no need for a ladder with angels going up and down. What is more, something about this dream obviously frightened Jacob, since the text says, "And he was *afraid,* and he said, 'How *fearful* is this place.'" But what could be so frightening about a ladder with angels on it?

Pondering these questions, interpreters came to the conclusion that the ladder itself was some sort of symbolic message about the future, Jacob's own or that of his descendants:

> Perhaps as well [Jacob] caught a glimpse of his own [future] life in this visionary ladder . . . The affairs of men are by their very nature comparable to a ladder because of their irregular course. For a single day (as someone well put it) can carry the person set on high downward and lift someone else

upward, for it is the nature of none of us to remain in the same circumstances, but rather to undergo all manner of changes . . . So the path of human affairs goes up and down, subjected to unstable and shifting happenstance. —Philo, *On Dreams* 1:150, 153–156

Jacob then went to Laban his uncle. He found a place and, laying his head on a stone, he slept there, for the sun had gone down. He had a dream. And behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth, whose top reached to heaven. And the top of the ladder was the face of a man, carved out of fire. There were twelve steps leading to the top of the ladder, and on each step to the top there were human faces, on the right and on the left, twenty-four faces including their chests. And the face in the middle was higher than all that I saw, the one of fire, including the shoulders and arms, exceedingly terrifying, more than those twenty-four faces.

[Later, an angel explains the dream to Jacob:] "You have seen a ladder with twelve steps, each step having two human faces which kept changing their appearance. The ladder is this age, and twelve steps are the periods of this age, and the twenty-four faces are the kings of the lawless nations of this age. Under these kings the children of your children and the generations of your sons will be tested; they [the kings] will rise up because of the wickedness of your offspring. And they [the foreign kings] will make this place empty by four ascents because of the sins of your offspring. And upon the property of your forefathers a palace will be built, a temple in the name of your God and your fathers' [God], but in anger against your children it will be made deserted, until the fourth descent of this age." —*Ladder of Jacob* 1:1–6, 5:1–9

"And he dreamt that a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the heavens and the angels of God were going up and down on it . . ." (Gen. 28:12): Said R. Samuel b. Naḥman: Is it possible that these were the ministering angels [whose job it is to serve before God in Heaven]? Were they not instead the guardian angels of the nations of the world [that would rule Israel in the future]?[9] He [God] showed him [Jacob] Babylon's angel climbing up seventy rungs and going down again. Then he showed him Media's angel going up and down fifty-two, and then Greece's going up and down one hundred and eighty. Then Rome's went up and up, and he [Jacob] did not know how many [rungs it would ascend]. Jacob took fright at this and said: Oh Lord, do you mean that this one has no descent? God said to him: Even if you see him reach the very heavens, I will still cause him to go down, as it is written, "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord" [Obad. 1:4]. —*Leviticus Rabba* 29:2

9. This notion of angelic guardians of different kingdoms is reflected in the book of Daniel (Dan. 10:13, 20, etc.).

Angels Wanted to See Him

But there was another explanation of the same passage. Some interpreters theorized that, whatever it was that Jacob had dreamed, the contents of his dream were not what was being set forth in the Bible. On the contrary, the sudden appearance of the ladder with the angels *actually took place* while Jacob slept on the ground below. But why should a ladder and a group of angels suddenly materialize? The Bible had said that the angels were "going up and down *upon it* [the ladder]," but these same words in Hebrew could be translated as "going up and down *upon him,*" that is, upon Jacob, for Jacob's sake. Some early interpreters therefore understood that, while Jacob slept, a band of angels had descended to earth on a great ladder in order to catch a glimpse of this extraordinary individual and then ascended back to heaven:

> And he [Jacob] dreamt . . . and the angels who had accompanied him from his father's house went up to announce to the angels on high: "Come and see the righteous man [Jacob] whose likeness is set upon the divine throne, the one whom you have wanted to see." Then the holy angels of God "went up and down to gaze **upon him**."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* (ms. P), Gen. 28:12

> Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending **upon** the Son of man." —John 1:50–51

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: Jacob and Esau were not what they might at first seem. Esau was actually a wicked deceiver and the cruel ancestor of many of Israel's enemies, from Amalek to the Roman empire. Jacob, by contrast, was a thoroughly righteous and studious young man. Although Isaac had intended to give his blessing to Esau, it was God who caused him to bless Jacob instead, and, despite appearances, Jacob never actually lied to his father. Indeed, so great was Jacob's piety that, when he spent the night at Bethel, the angels of heaven flocked down to earth via the ladder in order to see the countenance of this great man.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Jacob and Esau

Jacob the Scholar: Note that Jerome was also familiar with the tradition equating "tent" with study-house in another verse, Gen. 9:27, "May God enlarge Japhet, and may He dwell in the *tents* of Shem." Commenting on this, Jerome notes:

> This is prophesied concerning us [the Christian Church], who **in learning and knowledge of Scripture** have come to replace the rejected Israel.
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 9:27

Somewhat differently, Philo seems to have associated Gen. 9:27 with the hereditary priesthood that would ultimately be Israel's exclusive province:

> [Of Israel] the oracles say that they are "the palace and priesthood of God" [= Exod. 19:6], thus following in due sequence the thought originated in Shem, in whose houses it was prayed that God might dwell [Gen. 9:27]. For surely by "palace" is meant the [heavenly] King's house, which is indeed holy and the only inviolable sanctuary. —Philo, *On Sobriety* 66

One passage seen earlier mentions the name of the school in which the scholarly young Jacob had studied:

> And the boys grew up, and Esau became a hunter, hunting birds and animals, a man who went out into the fields to kill living things—and it was he who killed Nimrod and his son Enoch. But Jacob was a man perfect in his deeds, studying in the **academy of Eber**, expounding the teachings given by God. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 25:27

A well-known rabbinic tradition asserts that various biblical figures studied in a rabbinic-style academy (or two) founded by Noah's son Shem and his great-great-grandson Eber. The roots of this tradition are various. See Chapter 20, *OR*, "Torah Kept by the Patriarchs"; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:187 n. 51, 192 n. 63, 225 n. 102; also, Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 100–105.

One form of this motif specified that Jacob studied in two academies:

> And Jacob was a simple man, dwelling in tents: two tents, the study-house of Shem and the study-house of Eber." — *Genesis Rabba* 63:10

This version clearly represents a logical extension (and forgetting) of the original rationale of this motif, namely, that two tents were not necessary for "dwelling," and that one of them must have therefore been not a dwelling place but a house of learning: here, the plurality of "houses" is taken to mean two houses of study. Shem's connection with sacred learning seems to derive, as we have seen, from the association of his "tents" with the divine presence in Gen. 9:27.

As for Eber's connection with divine lore, one rationale is suggested by an early rabbinic text:

> R. Yose said: Eber was a great prophet, for it [must have been] through the Holy Spirit [that] he called his son Peleg [that is, "split"], as it says, "For in his [Peleg's] days the earth was divided" (Gen. 10:25). — *Seder Olam* 1

The reasoning behind this remark (as *Seder Olam* goes on to explain) is that Peleg could not have been named after "the earth was divided," since his (apparently younger) brother Joktan fathered thirteen sons who ended up being spread over a wide geographic area—apparently *as a result* of the earth's being "divided." Thus, initially Eber and his two sons and grandchildren must have all lived in the same place. If so, then nothing less than prophetic inspiration must have been responsible for Eber's choice of a name for his elder son at the time of his birth. Such a prophet would quite naturally be a candidate to head an institute of divine learning. (Note that Eber also figures on the list of prophets in *Seder Olam* 21.)

Esau Means Rome: The equation of Esau with Rome may ultimately derive from the Roman associations of the Idumaean (that is, Edomite) King Herod; but the absence of this identification in sources originating in that time or even somewhat later is troubling. See Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:272; Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People* 3:320, n. 78; Cohen, "Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought"; Hadas-Lebel, "Jacob et Esau ou Israël et Rome"; idem, "L'évolution de l'image de Rome"; Kugel, "Ladder of Jacob." This identification otherwise builds on Edom's role as a symbol of evil in earlier writings; see Cresson, "The Condemning of Edom in Postexilic Judaism"; Hoffman, "Edom as a Symbol of Evil."

Apart from their identification with Esau's descendants, the Romans were sometimes connected with another people mentioned in the Bible, the Kittim, who were said to be descendants of Javan (= Ionia, Greece) in Gen. 10:4. (The name is apparently that of Citium in Cyprus.) For this reason, the word "Kittim" was sometimes used in reference to the Macedonians or Greeks. In 1 Macc. 1:1, Alexander the Great is said to come "from the land of the Kittim," while 1 Macc. 8:5 refers to Perseus as "king of the Kittim." However, the identification of the Kittim with the Romans is found fairly clearly in various texts from Qumran: (1QM, 4Q285, 4Q491, etc.) *War Scroll,* (4Q169) *Nahum Pesher* 3–4, and others.[10] The "Kittim" mentioned in Num. 24:24 are translated as "Rome" in *Targum Onqelos* and *Pseudo-Jonathan,* and as "Italy" (erased but still legible) in *Targum Neophyti* and the Vulgate. The "Septuagint" version of Daniel and Jerome likewise translated Kittim as "Romans" in Dan. 11:30 (the text itself seems to refer to Roman ships coming from Cyprus). Similarly, in *Genesis Rabba* the four descendants of Javan listed in Gen. 10:4, "Elisha and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim," are (anonymously) restated as "Hellas and Tarsus, Italia, and Dardania." The same tradition appears in *Targum Neophyti* ad loc. and other targums, and the equation of Kittim with Rome is found as well as in the targum of Ezek. 27:6, the Vulgate *("de insulis Italiae"),* Jossipon, and later

10. Interesting in this connection is the mention of the Kittim in (4Q554) *New Jerusalem* fragment 2 col. 3 and then, two lines later, "Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites." This certainly suggests that, while the Kittim were identified with the Romans by this author, Israel's other, *classical* enemies, including Edom, were mentioned in addition precisely because none of them was yet equated with Rome.

sources. See Theodore and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba* 344 n; Flüsser, *Jossipon,* 7 n; Yadin, *The Scroll of the War,* 22–26; Dimant, "Qumran Sectarian Literature," 505; Jellicoe, *Septuagint,* 86; Brooke, "The Kittim in the Qumran Pesharim." The situation is aptly summed up in a famous[11] bit of English verse:

> And so we may arrive by Talmud skill
> And profane Greek to raise the building up
> Of Helen's house against the Ismaelite,
> King of Thogarma, and his habergeons
> Brimstony, blue and fiery; and the force
> Of King Abaddon, and the **beast of Kittim**;
> Which Rabbi David Kimchi, Onkelos,
> And Aben Ezra do interpret Rome.
>
> —Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist* (1610), act 4, scene 3

Esau the Deceiver: Most versions of this motif connected it to the apparent pleonasm in Gen. 25:27, "Esau was a man knowledgeable about hunting, a man of the field." The fact that Esau is said to be *both* a hunter and a man of the field was taken to mean that he "hunted" both inside and out, that is, that he tried to trap people as well as animals. (So it was in the version cited from *Genesis Rabba* 63:10 earlier.) In all likelihood, however, this motif developed out of another biblical site, the very next verse:

> Isaac loved Esau, **because he ate of his game**; but Rebekah loved Jacob.
>
> —Gen. 25:28

The highlighted phrase literally means "because game in his mouth"—and it is, if anything, more awkward in Hebrew than in English. But the word translated as "game" could also be read (in fact, somewhat more smoothly in Hebrew) as if it were the noun "hunter," or possibly even as a verb, "he hunted." In either case, the sentence would then seem to be saying that Isaac loved Esau because Esau had somehow *snared him* into doing so, he was a "hunter with his mouth" or "he hunted with his mouth." In context, of course, that is hardly what the Bible appears to be saying: "because he ate of his game" makes far better sense in the story. But an interpreter who was out to "get" Esau—as well as to save a bit of Isaac's reputation, since he might otherwise appear to have been swayed by such a superficial thing as Esau's hunting abilities—might nonetheless prefer the idea that Esau had somehow tricked his father into loving him more, whereas Jacob was the son truly deserving of his father's affections.

The connection of this verse, Gen. 25:28, with our motif is still preserved elsewhere in the rabbinic corpus:

> When Esau used to come from being outside, he would ask his father, "Father, is salt a material that requires tithes?" And Isaac would be impressed [at such a question] and say, "Behold, this son of mine is certainly

11. It was later cited by Hart Crane as the epigraph to "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen."

very careful about observing the divine commandments . . ." In such a fashion Esau used to **hunt him** [his father] **with his mouth.**

—*Midrash Tanḥuma, Toledot* 8

The indicated words are from Gen. 25:28; at the same time, the phrase "when Esau used to come from being outside" is an allusion to the previous verse and the idea that Esau "hunted" both inside and out.

Incidentally, *Jubilees* goes out of its way to assert that, while Isaac may have preferred Esau for a time, his good sense eventually changed that state of affairs:

[Rebekah says to Isaac:] "You know the way that Esau thinks—that he has been malicious since his youth and that he is devoid of virtue, because he wishes to kill him [Jacob] after your death . . . [Esau] has treated us badly, he has gathered your flocks and has taken all your possession away from you by force . . ." [Isaac replies:] "At first I did love Esau more than Jacob, after he was born, but now I love Jacob more than Esau, because he [Esau] has done so many bad things and lacks [the ability to do] what is right. The entire way he acts is [characterized by] injustice and violence and there is no justice in him." —*Jubilees* 35:10–13

Esau's Priestly Garments: When Jacob went in to deceive his father and receive the blessing intended for Esau, Rebekah took "the best garments of Esau her older son" and put them on Jacob (Gen. 27:15). These garments are important, since the text later notes that Isaac "smelled the scent of his garments and blessed him" (Gen. 27:27). But what could there be about the *scent* of these garments that caused Isaac to bless his son?

The continuation of this verse holds the clue:

. . . and he smelled the scent of his garments and blessed him and said: "See, the scent of my son is as the scent of a field which the Lord has blessed."

—Gen. 27:27

The particular spot on earth that "the Lord has blessed" was, for many interpreters, the future site of the Jerusalem Temple, and the mention of a pleasing odor in that connection could not but bring to mind the incense offerings to be placed on that spot:

He said, "See! the scent of my son is like the scent of the sweet incense which will be offered on the altar on the Temple mount, that is the mountain which [God] has blessed." —*Targum Neophyti* 27:27

This teaches that God showed him [Isaac] the [future] temple . . . [about which it says], "my sweet savor" [Num. 28:2]. —*Genesis Rabba* 65:23

But if the scent of Jacob's clothes suggested the future site of the Temple, then it seemed only reasonable to suppose that the garments themselves were *priestly* garments, perhaps handed down from days of old:

"And Rebekah took garments of Esau, her older son . . ." The Jews say that the firstborns performed the office of the priesthood and had priestly

> garments which they wore when they offered sacrifices to God before Aaron was chosen for the priesthood. —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 27:15

> God clothed Adam with the garments of the high priesthood, since he was the firstborn of the world, then came Noah and [passed them on to Shem, and Shem] passed them on to Abraham, and Abraham passed them on to Isaac, and Isaac passed them on to Esau, who was his firstborn. But when Esau saw his wives worshiping other gods he left them [the priestly garments] with his mother. Since Jacob had bought the birthright from Esau, Rebekah said, "Jacob has bought the birthright from Esau, it is only right that he should wear these clothes," as it is written, "And Rebekah took the best garments of Esau, her older son . . ." [Gen. 27:15].
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma* (Buber ed.), *Toledot* (p. 133)

A second tradition held that Esau's garments came from Nimrod and were of a martial, rather than priestly, character; see Hayward, "Date of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan," 215–246.

The War between Jacob and Esau: We saw that Isaac's words to Esau, "by your sword you shall live" (Gen. 27:40), were extremely important in shaping his image as a warrior among early interpreters. But the rest of Isaac's words were also important.

> And by your sword shall you live, and you shall serve your brother; but **when you break loose**, you shall cast his yoke from your neck.
> —Gen. 27:40

The Hebrew phrase "when you break loose" *(ka'ăšer tārîd)* was difficult for interpreters, since the verb is rather rare. The Septuagint translation of it indicates that the Greek translators had before them (or chose to substitute) a more common Hebrew verb, *tôrîd,* yielding in Greek *kathelēs,* "when you depose" or "when you overpower." (The same translation appears in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan;* see Geiger, *Bible and Its Translations,* 296.) Similarly:

> And it shall be, when you **bring down** . . . —Symmachus Gen. 27:40

> And it shall be, if you [Esau] cause [them] to go astray and to **go down** . . .
> —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 27:40

Presumably what this meant was: when you bring *him* (Jacob) down, you will be able to cast his yoke from your neck. But how could Esau bring Jacob down? Another ancient translation supplied the answer:

> And you shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall be, when his sons transgress the laws of the Torah, you shall strip off his yoke from your neck. —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 27:40

It is far from clear how Onqelos is trying to make sense of the Hebrew, but perhaps he associates *tārîd* with the roots *rdh* or *rwd,* which might suggest the meaning "cause to go astray" or "rebel." Alternately, he may be understanding it in the sense

of *tôrîd,* as in the Septuagint. In either case, it will thus be Esau's descendants who will cause Israel's "rebellion" or "downfall," that is, the failure to live by the laws of the Torah; this will permit Esau—through his progeny—to gain ascendency. (Such a translation would certainly be appropriate after "Esau"—that is, Rome—had gained ascendancy in Israel's homeland.) In a similar vein,

> Said R. Yose b. Ḥalafta: If you see your brother Jacob throwing the yoke of Torah off his neck, persecution is ordained against him, and you will be able to rule over him. — *Genesis Rabba* 67:7

It seems that both of the above interpretations (*Targum Onqelos* explicitly) understand the words of Gen. 27:40 as referring to the *descendants* of Jacob and Esau ("when his sons transgress the laws"), presumably far in the future. Indeed, the wording seems intended to explain how it could have happened that the Jews were to be subject for so long to the Roman empire. Similarly:

> And you shall live by your sword, and you shall serve and be subservient to your brother [marginal gloss, "the Jews"]; and it shall be, when the sons of Jacob study the Torah and keep the commandments, they shall place their burdensome yoke upon your neck; but it shall be when the sons of Jacob abandon the commandments and prevent themselves from studying the Torah, you shall rule [perhaps, *tirdeh*] over him [*sic*] and shall throw off the yoke of servitude from your neck. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 27:40

But there was another way of reading this verse: it could refer to the two brothers themselves, Jacob and Esau. If so, then Isaac would be telling his son Esau that, sometime *within his own lifetime,* Esau would "live by the sword," that is, take up his sword in some kind of armed conflict, a conflict in which Esau would come out the loser; consequently, "you will serve your brother" until such time as Esau or his descendants could "cast [Jacob's] yoke from off your neck."

Had there in fact been such an armed conflict between Jacob and Esau? Not according to the Genesis narrative itself, but elsewhere the Bible certainly seemed to refer to such a battle:

> For three transgressions of Edom [Esau's other name according to Gen. 25:30], yea, for four, I will not revoke [the punishment]: **For his pursuing his brother with a sword** and casting aside all pity, allowing his anger to run wild forever and keeping his wrath eternally. — Amos 1:11

Was not Amos alluding in these lines to some armed confrontation between "Edom" (Esau) and his actual brother, Jacob? If so, then Jacob and Esau had indeed once come to blows. Thus originated the tradition, found in *Jubilees,* the *Testament of Judah,* and later sources, of a war between the forces of Jacob and those of Esau and his sons. In this war, Esau not only *lives* by the sword, he dies by it: Jacob kills him in battle (thereby accounting for his death, unreported in the Bible):

> And when Jacob saw that he [Esau] was adversely inclined toward him with his heart and with all his soul as to slay him . . . then he told his own

> [people] and his servants to attack him and all his companions . . . Then Jacob bent his bow and shot an arrow and pierced his brother Esau and killed him. — *Jubilees* 37:24–38:3

> [Judah, Jacob's son, speaks:] For eighteen years my father was at peace with his brother Esau and his sons with us, after we had come out of Mesopotamia from Laban. When the eighteen years were completed, in the fortieth year of my life, Esau, my father's brother, came against us with a mighty and strong throng. Jacob struck Esau with an arrow, and he was taken up to Mount Seir, and as he went he died at Adoniram.
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 9:1–3

The account in *Jubilees* (certainly the older) seems to be a composite of traditions, since Esau here is initially opposed to the attack but then ends up leading it. (Such switches are often an indication that an author is trying to reconcile two contradictory accounts.) But that its version (along with the various other accounts of a conflict between Jacob and Esau) derives from an early attempt to explain Isaac's blessing in Gen. 27:39–40 is apparent in several explicit references to that blessing hidden in the *Jubilees* text:

> And [Esau's sons] said to their father: Is this not the very way you have acted from your youth until today? You are putting your neck **under his yoke.**

> Jacob's sons pressed hard upon the sons of Esau in the Mt. Seir, and they **bowed their necks** to become servants for Jacob's sons . . . And [they] placed the **yoke of servitude** upon them, so that they paid tribute to Jacob and his sons always. And they continued to pay tribute to Jacob until the day that he went down into Egypt. And the sons of Edom have not extricated themselves from the **yoke of servitude** which the twelve sons of Jacob had imposed on them until this day. — *Jubilees* 37:8, 38:10, 12–14

Similarly, the *Testament of Judah* specifies the contents of the "yoke" placed on Esau:

> They regularly gave us 200 *cors* of wheat and 500 baths of oil and 500 measures of wine, until the famine, when we went down into Egypt.
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 9:8

In both these accounts it appears that Jacob's "yoke" continued to be imposed on Esau until the time when Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. (The sentence in *Jubilees* asserting that the Edomites have not gotten rid of their yoke "until this day" flatly contradicts the sentence just before it; perhaps it was added later on in order to reflect renewed Jewish domination of the Edomites.) If, originally, the "yoke" remained in place until Jacob's descent to Egypt, then presumably this story reflected another interpretation of Gen. 27:40: the mysterious *ka'ăšer tārîd* is taken as referring to the nation of Israel's "going down" *(ka'ăšer tērēd)* to Egypt—it is only then, Isaac tells Esau, that you will cast his yoke from off your neck.

Another biblical verse may also have influenced this tradition of war between Jacob and Esau. After Jacob has gotten the blessing intended for Esau, Esau says,

"The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). But when Isaac does indeed die, the account of his death (Gen. 35:29) is followed neither by any mention of Esau's revenge nor by any account of a retraction of his vow. Instead, Isaac's death is immediately followed by a list of Esau's wives and the sons he had by them (Gen. 36:1–5), which in turn is followed by the observation that Esau took all his household and property "and went to a land, away from his brother Jacob" (Gen. 36:6).

As often happened, the juxtaposition of such apparently unrelated items may have led interpreters to seek some hidden connection between them. And was not that connection Esau's promise to kill his brother as soon as their father was dead? *That* was why Scripture introduced the list of Esau's sons—they were the ones who, in *Jubilees,* would lead the attack against Jacob and his family, after which Esau would settle definitively elsewhere, "away from" his brother Jacob. Both the expression "away from" (*mippĕnê,* which more literally means "from the presence of" or sometimes "out of fear of") and the fact that the text instead of specifying where Esau went only, rather awkwardly, says, "to a land" *('el 'ereṣ)* suggested that Esau was indeed fleeing—presumably, after some armed conflict.

Thus it is certainly no accident that the *Jubilees* account specifies that the conflict between Jacob and Esau began "on the day that Isaac, the father of Jacob and Esau, died" (37:1). That was the day that Esau had said he would kill Jacob, and it is apparently because he indeed attempted to carry out this threat that the Bible next lists his descendants—his confederates in the plan—and then mentions elliptically their flight "to a land" out of fear of Jacob.

On other, unrelated aspects of this tradition, see Schwarzbaum's "Prolegomenon" to Gaster, *Jerahmeel,* 48–49 and works listed there; also, Gaster, *Jerahmeel,* lxxxii–iv; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:315–316. Unfortunately, many scholars have been misled by the fact that *Midrash Wayyisa'u* (= *Yalqut Shimoni* [1:135]) and other sources present the story of the war between Jacob and Esau alongside the war of Jacob and his sons with the Amorites; such scholars have acted as if these two make up a single original narrative. This is not the case, as *Jubilees* 34:1–9, the *Testament of Judah* 3–7, and even *Midrash Wayyisa'u* make clear. The war between Jacob and Esau, as we have seen, is essentially an elaboration of Gen. 27:40, whereas that of Jacob with the Amorites is intended to account for Jacob's otherwise mysterious reference to his capturing Shechem "from the Amorites with my sword and bow" (Gen. 48:22), as well as Jacob's praise of Judah's fighting prowess in Gen. 49:9. See further Safrai, "Midrash Wayyisa'u—The War of the Sons of Jacob in Southern Samaria." Another Jewish interpretation of Amos 1:11 held that this verse referred to Esau's pursuing of Jacob in the womb, resulting in an injury to their mother: Sperber, "Varia Midrashica IV." See also the discussion of Gen. 27:40 in connection with Esau's repentance in Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 335–336.

Many Stones into One: There is a slight discrepancy in the biblical narrative with regard to Jacob's "pillow" on that fateful night. At the beginning of the story, the narrative speaks of "stones" in the plural—"And he took from among the *stones* in that spot in order to put under his head" (Gen. 28:11). At the end of the story,

however, the text mentions a single stone, "And Jacob arose in the morning and he took the *stone* which he had put at his head" (Gen. 28:18). Which was it, one stone or more than one? A number of sources concluded that a change had taken place during the course of the night:

> The stones that our father Jacob had taken and placed beneath his head as a pillow, when he arose the next morning he found that they had all become one stone, and that was the stone which he set up as a monument and poured oil on its top. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 28:10

> "And he took the stone that he had put at his head . . ." (Gen. 28:18)—R. Isaac said: This is to teach us that when all the stones had been gathered together in a single spot, each of them said, "Let this righteous man set his head on *me!*" Then all of them were fused into a single stone.
>
> —b. *Ḥullin* 91b

The Ladder Was a Message: This basic motif is actually represented in two rival motifs cited earlier. According to the first, the *ladder alone* constituted a message for Jacob:

> Jacob then went to Laban his uncle. He found a place and, laying his head on a stone, he slept there, for the sun had gone down. He had a dream. And behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth, whose top reached to heaven. And the top of the ladder was the face of a man, carved out of fire. There were twelve steps leading to the top of the ladder, and on each step to the top there were human faces, on the right and on the left, twenty-four faces including their chests. And the face in the middle was higher than all that I saw, the one of fire, including the shoulders and arms, exceedingly terrifying, more than those twenty-four faces.
>
> [Later, an angel explains the dream to Jacob:] "You have seen a ladder with twelve steps, each step having two human faces which kept changing their appearance. The ladder is this age, and twelve steps are the periods of this age, and the twenty-four faces are the kings of the lawless nations of this age. Under these kings the children of your children and the generations of your sons will be tested; they [the kings] will rise up because of the wickedness of your offspring." — *Ladder of Jacob* 1:1–6, 5:1–6

The number of steps on the ladder in itself constitutes a message about the future of Jacob's descendants, and—to further explain Jacob's frightened reaction—the ladder comes equipped with twenty-four terrifying faces, two per step, and one more face at the top, "more [terrifying] than those twenty-four faces." Thus, by observing the *ladder alone,* Jacob was to understand that in the coming "twelve periods of this age," his descendants would be persecuted by twenty-four different kings from foreign nations.

But that motif did not really explain the biblical text adequately: the "angels

ascending and descending" still needed to be accounted for. Thus there developed a second motif:

Guardian Angels of the Four Empires: This motif takes as its point of departure the conceit of the book of Daniel, according to which four separate empires are to hold sway over the Jews in succession: the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks (Dan. 2:31–45, 7:1–28). In keeping with this conceit, the creator of this new motif held that the number of angels on Jacob's ladder was exactly four, and that their "ascending and descending" was meant to show to Jacob that each foreign empire that was to dominate Israel would rise for a time but eventually fall, and that the period of Israel's domination would eventually come to an end. This motif was cited in its full form from a rabbinic source:

> "And he dreamt that a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the heavens and the angels of God were going up and down on it . . ." (Gen. 28:12): Said R. Samuel b. Naḥman: Is it possible that these were the ministering angels [whose job it is to serve before God in heaven]? Were they not instead the guardian angels of the nations of the world [that would rule Israel in the future]? He [God] showed him [Jacob] Babylon's angel climbing up seventy rungs and going down again. Then He showed him Media's angel going up and down fifty-two, and then Greece's going up and down one hundred and eighty. Then Rome's went up and up, and he [Jacob] did not know how many [rungs it would ascend]. Jacob took fright at this and said: Oh Lord, do you mean that this one has no descent? God said to him: Even if you see him reach the very heavens, I will still cause him to go down, as it is written, "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord" [Obad. 1:4] — *Leviticus Rabba* 29:2

However, an allusion to this second motif is likewise found in the *Ladder of Jacob,* immediately following the passage just cited:

> Under these kings the children of your children and the generations of your sons will be tested; they [the kings] will rise up because of the wickedness of your offspring. And they [the foreign kings] will make this place empty by four *ascents* because of the sins of your offspring. And upon the property of your forefathers a palace will be built, a temple in the name of your God and your fathers' [God], but in anger against your children it will be made deserted, until the fourth *descent* of this age [*do sxoda 4-i věka sego*].
>
> — *Ladder of Jacob* 5:7–9

Here, superimposed on the motif "The Ladder Was a Message" is an allusion to the ascents and descents of the four guardian angels in the second motif. In all likelihood, this second motif is the later of the two; see Lucas, "The Origin of Daniel's Four Empires Scheme Reexamined"; Kugel, "The Ladder of Jacob."

Jacob's Countenance on the Heavenly Throne: The story of Jacob's dream mentions that there was a ladder "set upon the earth whose top reached to heaven."

The words "whose top" in Hebrew literally mean "and its [or "his"] *head.*" Theoretically, one could read this sentence as if the "head" in question were not the ladder's at all, but Jacob's! "And he [Jacob] dreamt that there was a ladder set upon the earth; *and his head* reached to heaven." This potential ambiguity led to an interpretive tradition in which Jacob's "head"—or, rather, a statue or bust of Jacob—had somehow found its way into heaven. One version of this tradition was glimpsed in passing earlier:

> And he [Jacob] dreamt that there was a ladder set upon the earth and whose top reached to heaven, and the angels who had accompanied him from his father's house went up to announce to the angels on high: "Come and see the righteous man [Jacob] **whose likeness is set upon the divine throne**, the one whom you have wanted to see." Then the holy angels of God "went up and down to gaze upon him."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* (ms. P) Gen. 28:12

Jacob's head has "reached to heaven" in the sense that his portrait has been carved on the heavenly throne of God.

The same notion stands behind the strange vision of the *Ladder of Jacob,* which observed that "the top of the ladder was the face of a man, carved out of fire." This idea, that at the ladder's top was a human face, apparently comes from taking the Hebrew expression "the *head* of the ladder" in the manner explained. In any event, it became a rabbinic commonplace that Jacob's bust had been carved on the divine throne; as the angels say to Jacob in another version of this tradition, "You are the one whose portrait is carved on high" (*Genesis Rabba* 68:12).

Ascending and Descending: There was another little problem connected with the story of Jacob's dream, and that is that the angels on the ladder are said to be "going up and down" (literally, "ascending and descending"). In Hebrew, as in English and many other languages, this is the usual order of these verbs: things are generally said to go "up and down" rather than "down and up." But in the case of angels, the expression poses a problem, for angels are generally thought to be "up" to begin with. Should not the text then have said that the angels were going "down and up" on the ladder?

Two basic answers to this question were developed in rabbinic sources. The first held that these *particular* angels had in fact been "down" to begin with—that they had been on earth at the time of Jacob's dream and took advantage of the ladder to ascend back into heaven. Then they, or some other angels, subsequently went down the same ladder to the sleeping Jacob. This exegetical tradition also appears in the passage above:

> And he [Jacob] dreamt that there was a ladder set upon the earth and whose top reached to heaven, and the **angels who had accompanied him from his father's house** went up to announce to the angels on high. . . .
>
> — *Targum Neophyti, Fragment Targum* (ms. P) Gen. 28:12

But what had these angels been doing on earth in the first place? The above passage suggests that their mission had been to accompany Jacob on his journey. Other

versions specify that the angels were on earth because they had been exiled from heaven for some crime—"revealing secrets about the Master of the world" or boastfully saying in Sodom, "We are going to destroy this place" (Gen. 19:13), instead of "the Lord is about to destroy this city" (Gen. 19:14). Thus exiled, these angels wandered the earth until Jacob's dream and the ladder, thanks to which they were able to reenter heaven. For that reason the text says "ascending and descending."

The other answer, of course, was to see "ascending and descending" as describing not two individual actions but repeated actions, multiple goings up and down, so that the order implied by the verbs was no longer felt to be significant. But why would the angels keep going up and down the ladder? Why else but to view Jacob? Indeed, if the last words in the phrase "going up and down *on it*" can be understood to mean "for him" or "because of him," then this interpretation can be combined with the idea of Jacob's heavenly portrait to suggest that the angels were both descending *for him,* to see the real Jacob sleeping on the ground, and then ascending *for him,* to see his portrait on high: "They went up to see his portrait, then went down to see him sleeping" (*Genesis Rabba* 68:12). The reading "for him" also underlies John 1:51. See Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 112–120; Clarke, "Jacob's Dream at Bethel"; Rowland, "John 1:51."

12

Jacob and the Angel

(GENESIS 29–32)

Leah brought to Jacob's bed: perhaps a bit too much to drink?

Jacob and the Angel

(GENESIS 29–32)

❖ ❖ ❖

Jacob continued his journey until he reached the house of his uncle Laban, where he was warmly welcomed. Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel, and it was not long before Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel, the younger. Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob as a wife in exchange for seven years' labor. However, on the night of the wedding, Laban tricked Jacob by substituting Leah. After Jacob discovered the fraud, Laban said that in his country it is considered improper to marry off a younger daughter before the firstborn. He agreed to give Rachel to Jacob as a second wife—in exchange for another seven years' service.

Jacob ultimately had twelve sons by his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. These twelve sons were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. He also had a daughter, Dinah. Jacob prospered in Laban's house, in part because of a stratagem that allowed him to gain a good part of Laban's flocks in keeping with the terms of an agreement that the two had negotiated. Jacob was now a rich man. But he also sensed the growing resentment of Laban and his family. At length, God commanded Jacob to leave with his wives and children and livestock and head back to his homeland.

Years had passed since his feud with his brother, Esau, and Jacob hoped that the matter had been forgotten. However, as he neared the land where Esau had settled, Jacob received word that his brother was approaching with a small army. Frightened, he sent Esau a lavish gift of livestock in the hope of appeasing him. That night, having sent his family to the other side of the Jabbok ford, Jacob was left alone, and "a man wrestled with him until daybreak." The "man," apparently an angel, blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel.

THE REPUTATION of Jacob's uncle Laban among ancient interpreters was quite in keeping with the biblical text. He was held to be a cheat and a scoundrel, the man who switched brides on Jacob's wedding night, then robbed Jacob of his rightful wages (Gen. 31:7, 41–42). Even after Jacob had worked for him for twenty years, Laban nevertheless exclaimed, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine" (Gen. 31:43). He was a selfish, sly, and wicked man.

Jacob Knew Right Away

Of all Laban's machinations, however, the one that bothered interpreters the most was the very first, the switched brides. How could he have succeeded in fooling

Jacob on his wedding night? After all, Jacob had waited seven years for Rachel to be his wife—surely he must have known that the woman in his chamber that night was not Rachel, but Leah. What is worse, the Bible seemed to say that Jacob did not discover the fraud until the next morning:

> But in the evening he [Laban] took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her . . . And **in the morning**, behold it was Leah; and Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me?"
>
> —Gen. 29:23–25

One possible explanation was that Jacob indeed discovered the fraud almost at once but, under the circumstances, waited until later to complain to Laban:

> Laban prepared a banquet, took his older daughter Leah, and gave [her] to Jacob as a wife. But Jacob was not aware [of this], because Jacob thought she was Rachel. He went in to her, and, to his surprise, she was Leah. Jacob was angry at Laban and said to him, "Why have you acted this way?"
>
> —*Jubilees* 28:3–4

Similarly, if Jacob discovered the deception right away, the fact that he said nothing until the next morning might indicate that he was not entirely opposed to the substitution:

> [Laban] agreed to and promised the marriage of his youngest daughter to him. However, he did not at all aim that this should be, but, rather, contrived some trick. He sent Leah, who was her older sister, to the man for his bed. In any case, it **did not remain hidden** from him; rather he understood the mischievousness and received the other maiden. He was mated with both, who were his kinfolk.
>
> —Theodotus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.22.3)

> He had indeed come [to Laban's house] in order to marry only one woman; but when another was put in her place, he did not send away the one that he had unintentionally had intercourse with that night, lest he seem to hold her in derision—and [in any case,] when, for reasons of propagating offspring, there was no law prohibiting the taking of several wives, he took as well the one [Rachel] to whom he had originally pledged to be married.
>
> —Augustine, *City of God* 16.36

Deluded in the Dark

Other interpreters, however, believed that Jacob was indeed fooled until the next morning. Perhaps he was deceived by the darkness, as well as by a bit of overindulgence in the wedding festivities:

> Laban accepted this proposal and, when the time expired, prepared to celebrate the wedding festivities. When it was night, however, he [Laban] sent into Jacob's bedroom (who was quite unaware) the other daughter,

> who was older than Rachel and unattractive in appearance. Jacob [had been deluded] by wine and the dark. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:300–301

> In the evening they [the revelers] came to escort them [the wedding couple] in and they put out the candles. He [Jacob] said to them: "What's this?" They said to him, "Do you think that we are immodest, as you people are?" —*Midrash ha-Gadol* 29:23

Additional Trickery Required

However, granting that Jacob had been deluded by the darkness did not account for the actions of the two sisters, Rachel and Leah. Why did not Rachel, Jacob's beloved, object to the substitution? To pull off the switch, some additional trickery must have been required:

> Rachel said [to Leah, long after the incident:] "I was prepared for marriage to him [Jacob] first, and it was for my sake that he served our father for fourteen years . . . You are not his [true] wife, it was only by trickery that you were taken to him in my place. My father tricked me and replaced me that night, not permitting Jacob to see me. If I had been there this would not have happened." —*Testament of Issachar* 1:10–13

What is more, Leah herself must have actively helped Jacob to be fooled:

> All that night he kept calling her "Rachel" and she kept answering him "Yes?" "But the next morning, behold, it was Leah" [Gen. 29:25]. He said to her, "Liar and daughter-of-a-liar!" She answered: "Can there be a schoolmaster without any pupils? Was it not just this way that your father called out to you 'Esau' and you answered him [see Gen. 27:24]? So when you called me I likewise answered you." —*Genesis Rabba* 70:19

In other words, given Jacob's earlier deception of his own father in a similar fashion, he really did not have much right to reproach Leah now.

Weak, Bleary Eyes

Whether or not Jacob was actually deluded, interpreters were equally curious about why Laban had gone to the trouble of switching his two daughters in the first place. Most did not take Laban's own explanation (that the younger daughter was not to be married off before the older) as truthful. Instead, they reasoned, Laban had been motivated by a crucial difference in his two daughters' appearances. For when they are first described, they are presented in these terms:

> Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Now Leah's **eyes were soft**, but Rachel was comely of form and of appearance. And Jacob loved Rachel. —Gen. 29:16–18

The significance of the word "soft" seemed to hold the key to understanding this whole incident. For if Leah's eyes were soft and (as the text goes on to add) Jacob preferred Rachel, then perhaps having "soft eyes" was some sort of defect, one that would make Laban have to resort to trickery in order to find Leah a husband. Thus, some interpreters concluded that she indeed had something wrong with her eyes:

> And Leah's eyes were weak. —Septuagint Gen. 29:17

> For Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah; for Leah's eyes were weak, though her figure was very lovely; but Rachel's eyes were beautiful, her figure was lovely, and she was very pretty. —*Jubilees* 28:5

> [At first, it had been decided that] Leah was in fact to be married to Esau, and Rachel to Jacob. But Leah used to stand at the crossroads and ask what Esau was like, and they would say to her: He is an evil man, a murderer, one who robs travelers, and "red and like a hairy mantle all over" [Gen. 25:25], a wicked man who has done all things abominable to God. When she heard these things she wept and said: My sister Rachel and I have come from the same womb, yet Rachel is to be married to the righteous Jacob, while I am to be married to the wicked Esau! And so she wept and afflicted herself until her eyes became soft. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Vayyeṣe* 4

> And Leah was bleary-eyed with weeping, for she had prayed God not to be given to the evil Esau [as a bride]; but Rachel was pleasant in form and beautiful in appearance. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 29:17

> [Leah] had overheard people talking at the crossroads. They had said: Rebekah has two sons and Laban has two daughters; the older is to go to the older, and the younger to the younger. Then she stayed at the crossroads and kept asking: What is the older one like? [They answered:] He is a wicked man, one who robs people. And what is the younger like? "A simple man, dwelling in tents" [Gen. 25:27]. And so she wept until her eyelashes fell out. —b. *Baba Batra* 123a

> Her [Leah's] eyes were hateful, but [Rachel] was altogether radiant. —*Cave of Treasures* (W) 31:27

"Nice Eyes, But . . ."

Another approach was possible, however. A number of interpreters saw the reference to Leah's soft eyes as, in fact, a compliment. In context, however, this would seem to imply that, *apart from* her soft eyes, Leah was not nearly as attractive as her sister:

> And Leah's eyes were pleasant, but Rachel was beautiful in form and pleasant in appearance. —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 29:17

> When it was night, however, he [Laban] sent into Jacob's bedroom (who

> was quite unaware) the other daughter, who was older than Rachel and unattractive in appearance. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:301

> Laban carried out this trickery [in part] because of Leah's unattractiveness, for during the seven years of Rachel's betrothal, no one had come to marry her [Leah]. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 27:2

> The one woman attracted her husband's favor by her beauty, while the other seemed to be rejected because of lacking it.
> —John Chrysostom, *Homilies* 56

Somewhat similarly:

> And Leah's eyes were **lifted upward** in prayer as she asked to be given to the righteous Jacob as a wife, but Rachel was pleasing in her traits and beautiful in her appearance. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 29:17

God Multiplied Jacob's Flocks

Those who are taken advantage of sometimes come out the winner nonetheless. Because of Laban's trickery, Jacob was eventually blessed with a very large family: he ended up with two wives and the two handmaidens they brought with them, and together they bore him twelve sons, the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Inadvertently, then, Laban had helped to carry out God's plans for Jacob. Ancient interpreters, in stressing Laban's duplicity in the whole affair, sought not only to show that the designs of the wicked come to nought, but also to bring out Jacob's good qualities by contrast. Throughout, they felt, Jacob had tried to deal fairly and honestly even with this slippery relative.

Indeed, if Jacob later ended up with the better part of Laban's flocks, it was not—as the biblical account itself suggests—because of Jacob's clever manipulation of certain streaked wooden rods (Gen. 31:37–43). These rods were either quite irrelevant or else an instrument of divine intervention: in either case, Jacob got the greater share because God, or an angel, had so arranged it:

> They agreed among themselves that he [Laban] would give him his wages; all the lambs and kids which were born a dark gray color or dark mixed with white were to be his [Jacob's] wages. [But] all the dark-colored sheep kept giving birth to [offspring] with variously colored spots of every kind and various shades of dark gray. The[se] sheep would in turn give birth to [lambs] which looked like them. All those with spots belonged to Jacob and those without spots to Laban, [so] Jacob's possessions grew very large.[1]
> —*Jubilees* 28:27–29

1. Note that there is no mention here of the stripped rods; the pattern of births alone gave Jacob so many flocks.

R. Ḥunia [of Hauran] said: the ministering angels would take [animals] from Laban's flocks and put them into Jacob's flocks.

— *Genesis Rabba* 73:10

The good man [Jacob] did this not of his own devising, but because divine grace inspired his mind [to do so]. For, you see, it was not done on the basis of any human reasoning, since it was quite extraordinary and beyond the grasp of logic. — John Chrysostom, *Homilies* 57

You might ask how it was that Jacob could do this, setting the peeled rods at the troughs so that they [the flocks] would breed in front of the rods, since this would appear to be stealing. The answer is that this was not, Heaven forbid, anything like stealing, for the angel had already spoken to him [as Jacob later says, Gen. 31:11–12]. What Jacob did he did on the angel's instructions. — *Midrash Leqaḥ Tob* Gen. 30:39

Rachel Was Not a Crook

But what of Jacob's wife Rachel? There was one strange action of Rachel's that threatened the good reputation of this ancestress of Israel and made her look, alas, like a true daughter of Laban. For once Jacob and his wives had resolved to leave Laban's house and to return to Canaan,

Jacob arose, and set his sons and his wives on camels; and he drove all his cattle, all the possessions which he had acquired, the cattle which he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. While Laban had gone to shear his flocks, **Rachel stole her father's household gods** . . . [After Laban caught up with them:] Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat upon them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched, but did not find the household gods.

— Gen. 31:17–19, 34–35

The Bible's frank statement, "Rachel stole her father's household gods," certainly must have bothered a number of early interpreters. It was, of course, possible to soften the language a bit:

And Laban went out to shear his flocks and Rachel **took** her father's idols.

— *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 31:19 (also 31:32)

Still, softening the language did not make Rachel's action much more palatable. Why did she take what did not belong to her? And why, later on, did she lie to her father to prevent him from discovering the gods in her saddlebags?

Most interpreters tried to find some good motive for her action—or at least to deny what one might otherwise think from reading the Bible alone, that Rachel actually thought that these household gods were worth owning, perhaps even worth worshiping:

Rachel, having taken along the images of the gods which it was the custom of her fathers to worship, fled along with her sister and their children and the handmaidens and their sons and their possessions . . . Rachel did indeed bring the images of the gods; she had been taught by Jacob to disdain such idol worship, but, [she thought,] if they [that is, she and the rest of Jacob's family] were chased down and overtaken by her father, they might have recourse to them [the idols] in order to obtain a pardon.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:310–311

"And Rachel stole the household gods . . ." (Gen. 31:19). Her purpose in this was on God's behalf; for she said: "Now we are going our way. Can we leave this old man in the midst of his idolatry?" That is why Scripture found it necessary to say, "And Rachel stole . . ."[2] —*Genesis Rabba* 74:5

Happy was Rachel, who concealed the false idols of the Gentiles and declared that their images were full of uncleanness. And let no one believe that she had betrayed the respect and devotion due her father because she sat while he stood . . . When the cause of religion was at stake, faith had a just claim upon the judgment seat, while unbelief, like a defendant, deserved to stand. —Ambrose, *Jacob and the Happy Life* 5.25

Since she wished to free even her father of idolatry, she took them [the household gods] away. —Theodoret, *Questions in Genesis,* Gen. 31:19

Why did she steal them? So that they would not tell Laban that Jacob was leaving along with his wives and children and flocks. But can household gods really speak? Yes, as it is written, "The household gods speak falsehood" [Zech. 10:2]. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyeṣe'* 12

When [Laban] saw all that Jacob had, he said: "All these things belong to me. Since you have taken all of them, why have you also stolen my gods, the household gods before which I used to bow down?" [compare Gen. 31:30]. It was indeed for that reason that Rachel had stolen them, lest they [the gods] tell Laban that Jacob had fled, as well as in order to remove them from her father's house. —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 36

Jacob Struggled with an Angel

Jacob thus fled his father-in-law's house and headed back to his own land, Canaan. At the Jabbok ford, having sent his wife and children to the other side, he encountered a mysterious "man" with whom he struggled all night and who eventually gave Jacob his other name, Israel. Now this seems to be a, perhaps *the,* crucial incident in Jacob's life, and interpreters were anxious to understand it fully. Who was this "man," and what did the struggle with him mean?

2. The point is that, had this really been a reprehensible act, Scripture would simply not have mentioned it, since it has no particular importance in the story. If it is nevertheless mentioned, it must be because the action somehow reflected well on Rachel or contained some moral lesson.

To most interpreters, it seemed obvious that the man in question was actually an angel. To begin with, that is what the prophet Hosea had said in a passage alluding to the same incident:

> In the womb he [Jacob] seized his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he struggled with God. He struggled with an **angel** and overcame; he wept and he pleaded with him. —Hos. 12:4–5 (some texts, 3–4)

While this passage itself is not entirely clear (who does the word "he" refer to in "he wept and he pleaded with him"?), it seems indisputable that the words "He struggled with an angel and overcame" refer to the mysterious episode. Thus, the "man" was in fact an angel. And, on reflection, such a conclusion could only have seemed obvious to interpreters. After all, there are a number of other beings first described as men in the Bible who turn out to be angels.[3] What is more, Jacob's opponent ended up blessing him and giving him a new name—just as God had earlier blessed and given a new name to both Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah (Gen. 17:5–6, 15–16). This was another good reason to suppose that Jacob's opponent was a messenger sent by God, that is, an angel. Finally, the whole mysterious nature of the combat—the fact that it takes place late at night and with a strange, unidentified adversary who apparently must depart before sunrise—further suggested some kind of supernatural confrontation.

But identifying the man as an angel posed problems of its own. What was one to make of the new name that the man/angel gave to Jacob?

> And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have **struggled with God and with men**, and you have prevailed."
>
> —Gen. 32:27–28

If Jacob's opponent was an angel, then why should the text say "you have struggled *with God?*" Struggling with an angel is not the same as struggling with God. Likewise, if it was an angel, Jacob's new name should really have been "struggled-with-angel," not "struggled-with-God" (that is, Isra-el).

One solution was obvious: "God" here might be just a short way of saying "*angel of* God."

> He said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have made yourself great **with angels of God** and with men and you have overcome them."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 32:28 (also *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,* Peshitta)

> He further ordered him to be called Israel. In the Hebrew tongue, this signifies the **adversary of an angel of God.**
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:333

3. The three "men" who visit Abraham in Gen. 18:2 were generally reckoned to be angels; similarly, Daniel is addressed by a quasi-divine "man" in Dan. 12:7. The angel who appears to Manoah is likewise described as a "man" (Jud. 13:10, 11), and Manoah is in fact unaware that he is an angel (Jud. 13:16).

Similarly, "God" in Gen. 32:28 might be understood more generally as "heavenly being" or "heavenly power" (both of which would certainly include angels as well):

> I should like, I said, to learn from you gentlemen what is the force of the name Israel. And as they were silent, I continued: I will say what I know . . . The name Israel means this: a man overcoming power. For *Isra* is "a man overcoming," and *el* is "power."
>
> — Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 125:1–3

> You have grappled with **beings from above** and overcome them, with beings from below and overcome them. "Beings from above" refers to the angel . . . "Beings from below" refers to Esau and his princes.[4] — *Genesis Rabba* 78:3

Mighty with God's Help

But such was hardly the only way of understanding the meaning of Jacob's new name. The "with" in "struggled with" is somewhat ambiguous, in Hebrew as well as English. It could mean that Jacob had fought "in the company of" or even "with the help of" God. And even the Hebrew for "struggle"—an extremely rare word—might be understood differently: it could also mean something like "was strong" or "was a ruler."

As a result, many interpreters concluded that Jacob's new name had nothing to do with struggling with (in the sense of "against") God or even an angel of God. It meant that Jacob had been strong *with the help of* God or had been *exalted with* (that is, into the company of) God:

> And he said to him, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.[5] For you have **been strong with God**, and you shall be powerful with men." — Septuagint Gen. 32:29

> She [Divine Wisdom] protected him [Jacob] from his enemies, and kept him safe from those who lay in wait for him; in his arduous contest she **helped him** to victory, so that he might learn that **godliness is more powerful** than anything. — Wisd. 10:12

> He said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you are great before God and with men, and you have overcome."
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 32:29

4. "Chiefs" (or "princes") is the word used of Esau's descendants in the genealogies of Gen. 37:15–19, 29–30, and 40–43. Thus, our text apparently sees the angel's words, "you have struggled with . . . *men* and prevailed," as a prediction of future events, foretelling not Jacob's personal victory over his brother, Esau, but the victory of Jacob's children, the people of Israel, over Esau's "chiefs," the various Edomite rulers.

5. The wording here is slightly different from the traditional Hebrew text cited above. Note the wording of Gen. 35:10 in the traditional Hebrew text, "No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel *shall be your name.*" Cf. Gen. 17:5.

. . . for you have made yourself great with angels of God and with men and you have overcome them.

— *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 32:28 (also *Pseudo-Jonathan, Samaritan Targum*)

. . . for you have been strong with an angel. — Peshitta Gen. 32:28

For you have ruled with God. — Aquila Gen. 32:28

Now we understand the passage in this way, that to wrestle *with* Jacob does not mean to wrestle *against* Jacob, but that the angel, who was present in order to save him, and who after learning of the progress he had made gave him the additional name of Israel, **wrestled together with him**, that is, was on his side in the contest and helped him in the struggle. For undoubtedly it was some other against whom Jacob was fighting and against whom his struggle was being waged. — Origen, *On First Principles* 3.2.5

Israel Means Seeing God

There was yet another explanation of Jacob's new name that likewise eliminated the implication that Jacob had in any sense struggled with (that is, "against") God. This explanation saw in "Israel" three separate Hebrew words, *'iš rā'â ēl*, "man who saw God" (or perhaps *yašur 'ēl*, "[he] sees God"). Such an understanding of the name would fit exceedingly well in context, since this whole episode occurs in a place called Peniel, which means "face of God." The Bible goes on to make a point of explaining this name just after Jacob has gotten his blessing:

So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been preserved." — Gen. 32:30

Similarly:

And Jacob called the name of that place "Appearance of God."

— Septuagint Gen. 32:31

Now, if the name "Israel" means "man who saw God," then the whole story takes on a somewhat different coloring: Jacob struggled with a "man" who was actually an angel (that is, in this view, an earthly manifestation of God), after which the angel blessed him by changing his name to man-who-saw-God, and Jacob further commemorated the same incident by calling the place "Face [or "Appearance"] of God." What was important, then, was not the conflict itself, but the fact that, in the course of it, Jacob had actually seen God's face:

For seeing is the lot of the freeborn and firstborn Israel, which [name], translated, is "[the one] seeing God."

— Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 208 (also *On Dreams* 172, etc.)

Therefore, celebrating the resurrection festival on the Lord's day, we rejoice over the one who indeed conquered death, having brought to light life and

> immortality. For by him you brought the gentiles to yourself, for a treasured people, the true Israel, the friend of God, who sees God.
>
> — *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.36.1

> In place of "Israel," read "[each] man saw God" *('iš rā'â 'ēl),* for all his deeds were straight before Him. — *Seder Eliahu Rabba* 25 (some versions, 27)

> Israel means "a man seeing God," while others say it is a "man who will see God." — Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–c. 236 C.E.), *Pentateuch Fragment* 16, on Gen. 49:7

> It is this people alone which is said to "see God," for the name Israel when translated has this meaning. — Origen, *On First Principles* 4.3.12

> Israel means "seeing God," in the sense of the knowing and contemplative faculty in man. — Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 11.6.31

> He gave Jacob the new name Israel, which means, "one who sees God."
>
> — John Chrysostom, *Homilies* 58, on Genesis 2–3

> However, he [Jacob] then asked for a blessing from that same angel whom he had just overcome. The granting of this [new] name was thus the blessing [mentioned]. For Israel means "one seeing God," which in the end will be the reward of all the saints. — Augustine, *City of God* 16:39

> Thereafter He created a congregation of angels . . . and a firstborn called Israel, which is "the man that sees God."
>
> — *On the Origin of the World* (Nag Hammadi) 105:20–25

Understanding the meaning of Israel in this fashion was an interpretation with far-reaching consequences. For if, in its underlying level of meaning, Israel meant "man seeing God" or (as Philo said) "the mind that contemplates God and the world," then the Bible became not merely the saga of a particular people that had lived in a particular place and time, but the timeless, placeless account of all who seek to "see" God. Early Christians in particular were drawn to this notion. If "Israel" was not so much a proper name as a spiritual state, then one need not have been born a Jew to be a part of it. Indeed, the very identity of Israel could change; the "true Israel" (as one excerpt above says explicitly) became for some Christians not the Jewish people but the new church.

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In short: Laban was a cheat and a scoundrel. He substituted his less-than-perfect daughter Leah for Rachel not for the reason he gave, but in order to marry her off. Jacob may have discovered the ruse right away but said nothing to Laban until later. Despite Laban's trickery, Jacob dealt fairly with him; that he ended up with a good part of Laban's flocks was the result not of human trickery but of divine intervention. Even Rachel, when she took her father's household gods, did so with the best of intentions. Jacob's wrestling opponent at the Jabbok was an angel. The new name that Jacob received from him, Israel, therefore referred to struggling not with God, but with an angel; it also seemed to mean that Jacob had been exalted with, or helped by, God, and described Jacob as the "man who saw God."

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Jacob and the Angel

Sneaky Laban: As noted, Laban's reputation for sneakiness among ancient interpreters essentially derived from the biblical narrative itself, where this sly, deceitful man sought out every opportunity to take advantage of his nephew. It is therefore all the more surprising to find that the book of *Jubilees* endorses the lame excuse that Laban gave to Jacob after the "switched brides" incident:

> Laban said to Jacob: "It is not customary in our country to give the younger daughter before the older" [Gen. 29:26]. [And indeed,] it is not right to do this because this is the way it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets: that no one should give his younger daughter before his older one, but he should first give the older and after her the younger. Regarding the man who acts in this way they will enter a sin in heaven. There is none who is just and does this because the action is evil in the Lord's presence. Now you [Moses] order the Israelites not to do this. They are neither to take nor to give the younger before giving precedence to the older, because it is very wicked.
>
> —*Jubilees* 28:6–7

Given this author's fierce campaign against "wantonness" in any form, one might expect him to be ill-disposed to marriages contracted in consideration of, for example, physical beauty as the decisive factor. Still, to suggest that it is actually *sinful* to marry off a younger daughter before the older—that indeed, the prohibition of such marriages is to be found among the "heavenly tablets" (in *Jubilees*, a divinely established corpus of laws and teachings that seems to include all of Scripture and scripturally derived *halakhah*)—seems quite extraordinary, especially because it puts the author of *Jubilees* in the position of taking sides with the wicked Laban against the virtuous Jacob.

Jubilees' words, however, become more understandable in the light of its author's overall attitude toward the book of Genesis: he considered it a fundamentally crypto-*halakhic* work. That is, its various narratives about the patriarchs were not simply history, but law: they had been included in the Torah because they present (albeit sometimes in hidden fashion) various legal teachings that were given to Israel's ancestors long before the Sinai revelation, teachings about the Sabbath, festivals, and the yearly calendar, plus priestly procedure, laws of purity, and so forth—or at least because they make clear that such teachings had indeed been imparted during the period of the patriarchs. However, if such is the overall nature of the book of Genesis, why does it also include the entertaining but utterly inconsequential story of the switched brides? *Jubilees'* answer is that this incident is not inconsequential at all; it too contains a *halakhic* teaching, namely, that one may not marry off a younger daughter before the older. That the order in which daughters are married off was actually an issue close to this author's heart is difficult to believe: what was close to his heart was the overall claim he wished to make about Genesis, in the service of which he was willing to convert Laban's lame excuse into a scriptural law.

In connection with this same incident, Jacob's reaction to his uncle's original proposal—that he work for Laban for seven years in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage—struck later interpreters because of its curious wording. Jacob tells his uncle: "I will serve you for seven years for Rachel, *your younger daughter.*" But certainly Laban did not need to be told that Rachel was his younger daughter! Why then these extra words?

> [Jacob] said to him: "Since I know that the people of your region are cheats, let me make my dealings with you clear. I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter." "For Rachel"—that is to say, for Rachel and not for Leah. "Your . . . daughter"—lest you bring in someone from the street whose name also happens to be Rachel. "Younger"—lest you decide to switch your daughters' names [in order to give me the older one]. Still [as the proverb has it], no matter how straitly you try to bind a wicked man, it will do you no good. —*Genesis Rabba* 70:17

Weak, Bleary Eyes: The idea that Leah's eyes had become "weak" from weeping over her prospective marriage to Esau was in itself apologetic, a way of explaining that the Torah was not in fact demeaning the person of Israel's ancestress Leah. See *Genesis Rabba* 70:16 and the discussion in Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 16.

Assembled for Advice: Yet another explanation for Laban's motive in switching brides is found in numerous sources. It derives from the verses that preceded the switch itself:

> Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. —Gen. 29:21–22

To be sure, Laban gathers "all the men of the place" to celebrate the imminent wedding. Yet why should the Bible have mentioned this gathering? Aren't weddings usually celebrated in the company of invited guests? The specific mention of this gathering in the biblical text led interpreters to look for something significant in it—and since this gathering is immediately followed by Laban's switching of the brides, interpreters concluded that the suggestion to do so may have come from these "men of the place":

> "So Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast" [Gen. 29:22]. Then Laban said to them, "Behold, for seven years this righteous man has been among us and our wells have not lacked water and our drinking troughs have been plentiful.[6] What advice can you give me so that

6. Jacob's miraculous effect on the region's water supply was deduced from Gen. 29:10, "Jacob went and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother." It seemed unlikely that the Bible would have devoted such attention to this mundane matter of the well and its cover were there not some further significance to Jacob's action. And so interpreters supposed that this one act not only supplied water for the flocks on that occasion but continued supplying abundant water for the next seven years.

> we can keep him here with us another seven years?" And they advised him to cheat [Jacob] and give him Leah as a bride instead of Rachel.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 29:22

> He gathered together all the people of the place and said to them: "You know how squeezed we used to be for water, but since this righteous fellow has arrived, our waters have been blessed." They said to him: "Do whatever seems right to you [in order to keep him]." He said: "If you so wish, I could cheat him by giving him Leah, since he loves Rachel very much."
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 70:19

The very idea that Laban wanted to keep Jacob in his household was implied by more than the mention of this gathering. In fact, it seems to have been generated principally by the exchange in Gen. 30:25–35, in which Jacob requests to leave Laban's house and Laban offers Jacob payment in order that he stay, noting that "the Lord has blessed me on your account" (Gen. 30:27). Apparently, interpreters transferred that later state of affairs—Jacob wanting to leave, and Laban wanting him to stay—back to the time of the wedding, and connected Laban's desire to keep him with Jacob's previous miraculous deeds at the well when he first arrived. Somewhat differently (but apparently likewise on the basis of Gen. 30:27), Ephraem suggests that Laban devised his scheme in order to cause his flocks to increase (*Commentary on Genesis* 27:2).

Jacob's Moderation: We saw earlier the motif "God Multiplied Jacob's Flocks." Jerome, for one, did not quite endorse the idea behind it, namely, that Jacob had ended up with the better part of Laban's flocks strictly because of divine intervention. On the contrary, it was Jacob's use of the peeled rods that had produced the desired results, just as the biblical account said. What was nonetheless remarkable in the incident was the moderation that had characterized Jacob's use of this bit of technology:

> What Scripture says, however, is this: Jacob, a clever and shrewd man, served the cause of justice and fairness through this new stratagem. For if the flocks had all given birth to multicolored lambs and kids, there would have been some suspicion of trickery, and the jealous Laban would have openly opposed the arrangement. Therefore he [Jacob] acted moderately in all things, so that he himself would receive the proper reward for his labors while Laban would not end up being altogether despoiled.
>
> — Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 30:41–42

Jacob Concealed from Laban: Interpreters maintained that Jacob had ended up with a hefty share of Laban's flocks not through any trickery of his own, but because of divine intervention. But if so, then why did Jacob *flee* Laban's house like a thief in the night? Indeed, why did the Bible openly admit that, in so doing, Jacob had deceived (literally, "stolen the heart of") Laban?

> So Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. —Gen. 31:20

In the eyes of ancient interpreters, no real deception could have been involved. Instead, Jacob's departure was the natural reaction of someone to Laban's bad character, and while he may have *hidden* his departure from Laban, this was not necessarily an act of deception:

> And Jacob concealed himself from Laban the Syrian in that he did not tell him that he was fleeing. —Septuagint Gen. 31:20

> Rightly, therefore, will Jacob run away from the man who has no part in the good things of God . . . [Laban's] hatred, then, was the cause of [Jacob's] flight. —Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 20, 23

> And Jacob concealed from the heart of Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he was going. — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 31:20

Even some modern translators shrink from translating the Hebrew idiom "stole the heart of"—which clearly means "deceive"—and prefer in its place "outwit." On the Septuagint rendering and its relation to *Jubilees* 29:4, see further Charles, *Jubilees*, 175 n; VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 185 n.

The Talking Household Gods: A number of sources suggested that Rachel had stolen Laban's household gods to prevent them from telling Laban of her flight with Jacob and the rest of the family. Thus:

> It was indeed for that reason that Rachel had stolen them, lest they [the gods] tell Laban that Jacob had fled, as well as in order to remove them from her father's house. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 36

> Why did she steal them? So that they would not tell Laban that Jacob was leaving along with his wives and children and flocks. But can household gods really speak? Yes, as it is written, "The household gods speak falsehood" [Zech. 10:2]. — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyeṣe'* 12

The idea that Laban's gods were able to speak and thus might have been able to tell him of Jacob's flight was related to what Laban had said to Jacob in Gen. 30:27, "I have learned by divination [*niḥašti*] that the Lord has blessed me on your account." Since it was true, according to ancient interpreters, that God had indeed caused Laban's affairs to prosper because of Jacob, that must have meant that Laban's divinations were correct. But how exactly had he *divined?* The only thing connected with Laban that even remotely smacked of divination was the later mention of Laban's gods, stolen by Rachel.

Putting all this together, interpreters concluded that these gods had told Laban earlier about the reason for his prosperity. Since he had gotten the correct answer on that occasion, he would probably get the correct answer again when he asked the gods where Jacob and his family were now. It was thus in order to delay her father's

discovering their flight—and not for any monetary gain—that Rachel took Laban's household gods.

Unclean Idols: One source cited earlier asserted that Rachel not only did not value her father's household gods but even called them unclean:

> Happy was Rachel, who concealed the false idols of the Gentiles and declared that their images were full of uncleanness.
>
> —Ambrose, *Jacob and the Happy Life* 5.25

Rachel never declared the gods "unclean"—she stole them, then hid them in her saddlebags and fled with the rest of her family. Later, however, when Laban overtook the party, she prevented her father from searching her saddlebags by sitting on top of them and saying, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me" (Gen. 31:35). This, Ambrose seems to be saying, was no base deception on Rachel's part. Instead, she was declaring that, just as menstruation imparts uncleanness according to biblical purity laws, and

> . . . everything upon which she lies during her impurity shall be unclean; everything also upon which she sits shall be unclean, —Lev. 15:20

so were her father's idols analogously impure, "full of uncleanness." Similarly:

> She dismissed them [the idols] as being of no value [and showed this by] making of them a seat of menstruation on the day that they were sought.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 29:4

I have not found any similar explanation in rabbinic sources, but it is difficult to believe that it did not once exist. Perhaps the remark attributed to R. Yoḥanan that the "idols were turned into ladles [or "cups"]," that is, *qîtônôt* (*Genesis Rabba* 74:35)—which makes little sense as is—represents a confusion in transmission between *qîtônôt* and *kîtanît,* "linen cloth, undergarment."

Exalted with God, Powerful with Men: As noted, the Hebrew word for "struggled" *(sārîtā)* in Gen. 32:28, "For you have struggled with God and with men," is quite rare. It occurs only here and in Hos. 12:4–5. That it means "struggled" might be inferred from the more common word for "struggle" (or "wrestle") used in Gen. 32:24. However, *sārîtā* also looks as if it might be related to the root *srr* (written with the Hebrew letter *sin*), which means "to rule [or "be great"]" or perhaps *šrr* (indistinguishable from the former in the consonantal Hebrew text), which means "to be strong." This potential confusion is what is responsible for the variety of interpretations seen earlier. Now, the former meaning, "be great"—in the sense of "be *made* great, be exalted"—came to be connected with another motif:

> "For you have been made great with God and with men" [Gen. 32:29]: You are the one whose portrait is etched on high. —*Genesis Rabba* 78:3

If *sārîtā* means "you have been made great," then perhaps the angel is alluding to the appearance of Jacob's portrait on the heavenly throne (see Chapter 11, *OR,* "Jacob's Countenance on the Heavenly Throne").

But whether *sārîtā* was to be interpreted as "you have been made great" with God or "you have struggled," why should the text add "and with men"? What men? Either Jacob was made great or struggled with an angel or with an actual "man"—in any case, *men* (in the plural) seemed quite inappropriate. Moreover, why should the text add, "and you have prevailed"? Certainly Jacob had not prevailed with God![7]

If one little letter is dropped from the Hebrew text of Gen. 32:28, the second "and" disappears from the verse, and this in turn changes the apparent tense of the verb that follows it. The meaning thus becomes: "for you have struggled with God, and with men you *shall* prevail." This is how the verse was transmitted elsewhere:

> And he said to him, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. For you have been strong with God, and you shall be powerful with men." —Septuagint Gen. 32:28

> For if you have been strong against God, how much more shall you be powerful against men? —(Vulgate) Gen. 32:28

In context, this version makes great sense. For the struggle with the angel takes place on the night preceding what Jacob fears will be a deathly confrontation with his brother Esau and his men. According to the Septuagint text, the angel thus blesses Jacob by saying to him, in effect: You have wrestled with *me* all night. Don't worry! With *men* (Esau and his band) you shall now prevail.

Jerome at one point alludes to this interpretation:

> Therefore the sense is: your name shall not be called "supplanter," that is, Jacob, but your name shall be called "a prince with God," that is, Israel.[8] For just as I [that is, the angel speaking to Jacob] am a prince, so you as well, who have been able to wrestle with me, shall be called prince. Moreover, if you have been able to wrestle with me, who am God or an angel (for on this there are various interpretations) how much more shall you be able to do so with men, that is with Esau, from whom you ought to fear nothing.
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 32:28–29

Note that (4Q158) *Biblical Paraphrase,* an explicative text, clearly has the version found in the traditional Hebrew text, ". . . with men *and* you shall prevail." This same text supplies what the Bible did not, the contents of the angel's blessing: "May the Lord make you fruitful and multiply [and grant you] knowledge and understanding and save you from all corruption and . . . to this very day and for generations of eternity."

7. The verses from Hosea cited above seem in fact to be one very early attempt to resolve these difficulties. For the words "He struggled with an angel and overcame" appear to be a restatement of the preceding phrase, "he struggled with *God,*" the latter being an allusion to the name *Israel* or the tradition of Gen. 32:28, "You have struggled with God and with men." This struggling with God, Hosea seemed to be saying, was actually a struggling with an angel.

8. Jerome's explanation contains a further connection of the name "Israel" with the Hebrew *sar,* a word that Jerome elsewhere renders as "prince" (*princeps:* see, e.g., Vulgate Gen. 21:22, Exod. 2:14, etc.) and yet that clearly sometimes designates angels like Michael (Dan. 12:1, in the Vulgate *princeps*).

Israel Means "Seeing God": The passage cited from the *Apostolic Constitutions* clearly seems to reflect a Christian editor's wording, since it speaks of the gentiles becoming the "true Israel." Nevertheless, many scholars have insisted that behind this wording stands an earlier, Jewish version, something like:

> For through her [Wisdom] He has led us to Himself to be a particular people, Israel, the race beloved by God, the one that **sees God.**

Such a text would quite properly fit in the collection of Hellenistic Jewish prayers that underlie this section of the *Apostolic Constitutions.* See Goodenough, *By Light, Light,* 312. On "seeing God" in Philo's thought, see Kahn (Cohen-Yashar), "Israel—Videns Deum"; Delling, "The 'One Who Sees God' in Philo"; Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought,* 61–127.

J. G. Kahn (Cohen-Yashar), "Did Philo Know Hebrew?" 342, suggests that the passage from *Seder Eliahu Rabba* cited in the body of this chapter is to be understood as "a man whom God saw" rather than "a man who saw God." The matter certainly deserves further study since, no matter how construed, the phrase "a man who saw God/a man whom God saw" is somewhat clumsy in the overall context.[9] In any case, it seems fairly clear that *'îš rā'â 'ēl* is being used in this *Seder Eliahu Rabba* passage out of an awareness of that very similar explanation of the name which was still being advanced by Christians as the true sense of the name at the time when *Seder Eliahu* was composed.

As for the explanation of the name Israel as *'îš rā'â 'ēl,* "man who saw God," there is a slight problem in that such a derivation would seem to require turning the initial consonant in Hebrew from *y* into the glottal stop *' (aleph).* There certainly is ample evidence of confusion between these two in initial position, yet it is interesting to note that Jerome went out of his way elsewhere to maintain their distinctness:

> The Septuagint translators gave the etymology of this name [Issachar] as "there is a reward" [that is, Hebrew *yēš sākār*]. Therefore, one ought to conclude not, as many others have mistakenly interpreted via the addition of a pronoun, that what is written is "*he* is a reward," but that the whole name is to be translated as "there is a reward," for *Is* means "there is" and *sachar* means "reward." —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 30:17–18

9. Kahn points to the explicative phrase that immediately follows in the text, which he would understand as "for all his deeds are arrayed [*mĕkûwwānîm*] before Him." This is certainly possible, though the word *mĕkûwwānîm* is more likely used here in the same sense as in m. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 2:6 and elsewhere, "straight, in perfect accord." As I make it out, the overall argument of this passage is thus as follows: Hos. 9:10, "[God said:] Like grapes in the desert I found Israel," refers to the twelve tribes of Israel during their desert wanderings (and not, as one might think, to Israel, Jacob, the individual). The twelve tribes were indeed comparable to prized fruit, our passage says, because "they did the bidding of their father Jacob." In support of this reading the text then says, "In place of *Israel* read 'each man saw God' [*'îš rā'â 'ēl*], for all his deeds were straight before Him" (alternately: "were in perfect accord" with Jacob's example, "before him"). In other words, what God found in the desert was not Israel the man but rather a whole group of people each of whom was acting uprightly (or in accordance with Jacob's example), "each one saw God" as Jacob had.

It seems most unlikely that any etymology of this name depended on the "addition of a pronoun," namely, the Hebrew *hû'* ("he is"), since that would still hardly fit the name Issachar. Instead, it would seem that Jerome here is referring to (and rejecting) a derivation of the name Issachar (Hebrew *yissākār*) as "*man* of reward," that is, *'îš sākār.* Perhaps, then, the derivation of Israel as "seeing God" rather than "man seeing God" similarly represents a discomfort with changing the initial *y* of *yisrā'ēl* into the glottal stop '. (Note that Jerome himself mentions the etymology of Israel as "a man seeing God" but rejects it: see Questions in Genesis 32:28.)

Israel the Angel: There is considerable evidence of an ancient belief that one of God's angels was named Jacob or Israel. The origins of such an idea are no doubt diverse. Certainly the very name *Israel* and its explanation in Gen. 32:28 were important factors. If *sārîtā* was interpreted to mean "you [Jacob] have [now] been *exalted* with God" (on this interpretation, see above), then perhaps what the text was really saying—since Jacob had in fact not been exalted and had not been "with" God but remained on earth—was that God had created some heavenly counterpart to the earthly Jacob, an angel by the same name. Likewise, if *Israel* really meant "man who saw God," then perhaps the "man" in question was not the earthly Jacob but an angelic Israel who, dwelling in heaven, might quite naturally *see* God on a regular basis. In either case, this idea of an angel named Jacob or Israel would fit well with another motif examined earlier, that of Jacob's countenance on the heavenly throne (see above; also, Chapter 11, *OR,* "Jacob's Countenance on the Heavenly Throne").

Other biblical verses were likewise marshaled to support the idea that there was something angelic or godly about Jacob: Gen. 33:20 (understood as "And the God of Israel called *him* [= Jacob] 'god'"—see b. *Megillah* 18a); Deut. 33:26, "There is none like God, O Jeshurun"—but if anyone is, it is Jeshurun (= Israel) (see *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 355, *Midrash Tannaim ad* Deut. 14, etc.); and perhaps also Ps. 24:6 in the traditional Hebrew text. But the text most clearly associated with the idea of Israel-the-angel seems to be Exod. 4:22, "Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son." While, in context, this refers to the people of Israel, some interpreters used this verse to support the notion that God had created a heavenly man or being at the beginning of the Creation (see Chapter 2, *OR,* "Plato and Scripture Agree" and "God's Firstborn, Israel"), a being whose name was (or whose names included) *Israel.* Thus, Philo speaks of

> God's **firstborn** [cf. Exod. 4:22], the *logos,* who holds the eldership **among the angels,** their ruler, as it were. And many names are his, for he is called "the Beginning," and the Name of God, and His Lord, and the Man after His image, and "**he that sees,**" **that is, Israel.**[10] —Philo, *Confusion of Tongues* 146

10. Similarly, the gnostic treatise *On the Creation of the World* depicts "a firstborn whose name is Israel, the one who sees God" standing before the heavenly throne amid the angels. See on this whole subject the introduction by J. Z. Smith to the "Prayer of Joseph" in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:699–712, Bohlig, "Jacob as an Angel."

Such a heavenly Israel is also prominent in the now lost *Prayer of Joseph,* a (presumably Jewish) apocryphon cited by several early Christian writers. One fragment, preserved in Origen's *Commentary on John,* 2:31, reads as follows:

> I, Jacob, who am speaking to you, am also Israel, an **angel of God** and a ruling spirit. Abraham and Isaac were created before any work. But I, Jacob, whom men call Jacob but whose name is Israel, am he whom God called Israel, which means, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every living thing to whom God gives life.
> And when I was coming up from Syrian Mesopotamia [Paddan Aram], Uriel, the angel of God, came forth and said that I had descended to earth and I had tabernacled among men and that I had been called by the name of Jacob. He envied me and fought with me and wrestled with me, saying that his name and the name of every angel was to be above mine. I told him his name and what rank he held among the sons of God. "Are you not Uriel, the eighth after me? and I, Israel, the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God, am I not *Israel,*[11] the first minister before the face of God?" And I called upon my God by the inextinguishable name. — *Prayer of Joseph,* fragment 1

According to this text, Jacob has a double identity: as Jacob he "had tabernacled among men," that is, assumed human form, but he is at the same time Israel, the heavenly being. The struggle that took place at the Jabbok ford was thus a fight not between a man and an angel, but between two angels, Jacob/Israel and Uriel. (This view would, among other things, help account for the ability of "Jacob" to overcome an angelic opponent.) On other aspects, see Smith in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:699–712; Kister, "Observations on Aspects of Exegesis," 1–34; Hanson, "The Treatment in the LXX of the Theme of Seeing God."

The angel Israel was probably not just an ordinary angel; he likely belonged to the highest category of angels, referred to by various names in the literature of the Second Temple period. One name for this highest class was "angel[s] of the presence" (literally, "of the countenance," "of the face"); in *Jubilees* and elsewhere this name designates (along with "angels of holiness") the most exalted group of angels in heaven.[12] What this particular title means, and where it comes from, is a matter of some dispute, but certainly one possibility is that "countenance" here means the

11. The text here has "Israel" but apparently intends by this the etymologized understanding of the name, "a man seeing God"; having Jacob again assert in the same sentence that he is Israel otherwise makes little sense, while the etymology "a man seeing God" connects directly with what follows, namely, "the first minister before the *face* of God."

12. See *Jubilees* 1:27, 29; 2:1, 18; 15:27; 31:14; *Testament of Levi* 3:4–8; *Testament of Judah* 25:2; also, Ginzberg, *Legends,* vol. 6, s.v. "Angel of the Face." At Qumran, in keeping with a favorite theme of *Jubilees,* members of the sect were likened to the angels of the presence in their praise of God: "For You have granted Your glory to all those of Your counsel [i.e., members of the sect] in common with the angels of the presence" (1QH 6:13). (On this theme, see Licht, *Megillat ha-Hodayot,* 113, also Introduction, p. 49; cf. 1QSb 4:25–26.) See further Hollander and DeJonge, *Commentary,* 230 n; Davidson, *Angels at Qumran,* 194–196.

divine face: the *mal'ak happānîm* is the angel who is privileged to "see the divine face," on the analogy to the privileged courtiers who are permitted to see the face of the king in a human court (see 2 Kings 25:19, Esther 1:10, 14, etc.; see also Chapter 21, *OR*, "The Angel of the Exodus"). If so, then it must certainly have seemed likely that one such angel might be the one called *Israel*, in the sense of "man [= angel] who saw God." This angel's connection to the people of Israel would be above all typological: just as Israel is a "priestly nation" (Exod. 19:6) whose high priest can actually enter into God's presence in the holy of holies, so such an "angel of the face" would be similarly privileged in heaven. This is why God reassured Moses as He did in Exod. 32:34—"my angel" means "my own particular angel, the angel of My face"—and why this angel was associated with, specifically, the people of Israel (cf. also Num. 20:16).

Geza Vermes has argued that the angel Phanuel in *1 Enoch* (40:9, 54:6, 71:8–9, 13)—the place name Peniel or Penuel in the biblical story—is to be identified with the Sariel of *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 32:25 and (1QM) *War Scroll* 9:15–16, Uriel/Sariel in *1 Enoch* 9:1, and the name "Israel." See Vermes, "The Archangel Sariel." To those references should be added:

> And Sariel the archangel came to me and I saw . . . and the angel [Sariel] said to me "What is your name?" and I said "Jacob." "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but your name shall be **similar to my name, Israel.**"
>
> — *Ladder of Jacob* 3:3, 4:1–3

Rabbinic texts do not generally speak of "angel[s] of the face"; this category apparently became, in rabbinic texts, the "ministering angels" *(mal'ăkê haššārēt)*. There is, however, the angelic *sar happānîm* ("prince [= "angel"] of the countenance") whose career overlaps with that of Metatron in mystical texts. See, inter alia, Yadin, *Scroll of the War*, 240; Schaeffer, *Rivalität;* Davidson, *Angels at Qumran;* Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelogy"; Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, 115–118; Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands*, 105–109.

His Turn to Sing: In the Genesis narrative, Jacob's opponent says, "Let me go, for the day is breaking" (Gen. 32:26). But what difference did that make? By a common (and ancient) reckoning, the principal occupation of angels in heaven was thought to be that of singing God's praises. Some interpreters therefore suggested that this angel was late for his appointed time to sing:

> [God said: Did I not speak of this] as well to Jacob, his [Abraham's] grandson[13] 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. — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:5–6

13. The Latin text reads "to Jacob his third son whom I called firstborn," but this does not make very good sense. Certainly the intention is "grandson." The Latin may preserve a translator's confusion of *šĕlîšî* ("third") with *šillēš*, "grandson."

> And [the angel] said: "Let me go, for dawn is rising, and the time has come for the angels on high to praise, and I am the chief of those who praise."
> — *Targum Neophyti,* Peshitta Gen. 32:26

> And [the angel] said: "Let me go, for dawn is rising, and the time has come for the angels on high to praise the Lord of the world, and I am one of the praising angels, and since the day the world was created my turn to praise has not come until now." — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 32:26

> And he said: "Let me go, for dawn is rising." [Jacob] said to him: "What, are you a thief or a gambler, that you are afraid of the dawn?" He replied: "I am an angel, and from the day that I was created, my turn to praise has not come up until now." — b. *Ḥullin* 91b

Jacob and the Crucifixion: Jacob was wounded in his fight with the angel. According to the biblical account,

> And when he [the angel] saw that he could not overcome him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint in wrestling with him . . . Then the sun arose on him as he crossed Penuel, and he was limping because of his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel to this day do not eat the sinew of the hip which is in the hollow of the thigh, for Jacob's thigh was put out of joint at the sinew of the hip. — Gen. 32:25, 31–32

This passage puzzled both Christians and Jews. Why should Jacob's limp have been mentioned? It certainly was of no further consequence in the Bible and, in fact, was never even mentioned again.

To Christians who sought in the Old Testament hints or foreshadowings of the New, these verses were particularly tantalizing, since such apparently unnecessary or quizzical passages often had hidden meanings or foreshadowings. The very idea of Jacob having been *wounded* suggested to some the wounding of Jesus in the crucifixion:

> But since our Christ was also to grow numb,[14] namely in toil and in the sense of suffering at the time that He was to be crucified, [Scripture] proclaimed this also beforehand by having Jacob's thigh be touched and making it grow numb.[15] — Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 125:5

At the same time, the idea of an angel assuming human form and struggling with Jacob suggested to other Christians the concept of divine incarnation, namely, the belief that Jesus was God in human form. If so, then it was not Jacob who foreshadowed Jesus, but the angel:

> Jacob, however, as I said a bit earlier, was also called Israel, which name was applied still more to the people engendered from him. This name, however,

14. The Septuagint version, which is the basis of Justin's remarks, understands by the Hebrew word *vatteqa'* (rendered above as "put out of joint") that what happened to Jacob in the fight was that his thigh "became numb." Consequently, Justin uses this term here.

15. For Justin, the whole incident at the Jabbok foreshadows the temptation episode in Matt. 4:10.

was given to him by the angel who had struggled with him on the way back from Mesopotamia, and who, quite clearly, was himself a foreshadowing of Christ. —Augustine, *City of God* 16:39

The Sinaitic Nerve: For rabbinic Judaism, the problem posed by the same biblical passage was quite different. The passage speaks of what sounds like an accepted Jewish practice with regard to eating meat: "Therefore the children of Israel to this day do not eat the sinew of the hip which is in the hollow of the thigh." The "sinew of the hip," commonly understood to refer to the sciatic nerve, would thus seem to be prohibited. And indeed, the Mishnah discusses at some length the implications of this prohibition and how it is to be observed. But the problem was this: the great promulgation of divine law took place at Mt. Sinai, after the Exodus from Egypt. Yet in all the laws mentioned there, including those that deal specifically with the various foods that can and cannot be eaten, there is not a word about the "sinew of the hip" being prohibited. Why not? Moreover, since these *other* laws about food were not given until the revelation at Mt. Sinai, it was generally assumed that, before that time, *any* substance could be eaten—pork, shellfish, and other "unclean" animals, as well as animals improperly slaughtered or prepared. It seemed to the Rabbis improbable that under such circumstances the law of the "sinew of the hip" could have been in force.

Said R. Yehudah: Was it not from the time of Jacob's sons onward that the law of the "sinew of the hip" was ordained? Yet at that time they were still allowed to eat unclean animals! They answered: This law was promulgated at Sinai, but it was written down in its place. —m. *Ḥullin* 7:6

They said to R. Yehudah: Does it say [in this passage] in the Torah, "Therefore the children of *Jacob* to this day do not eat the sinew of the hip"? Does it not say, "Therefore the children of *Israel*. . ." But they were not referred to as the "children of Israel" until the time of Mt. Sinai.[16] Thus, this law was promulgated at Sinai, but it was written down in its place [that is, in connection with the story of Jacob] in order to explain the reason for its being prohibited to them. —b. Talmud, *Ḥullin* 101a

16. As a reference to the people of Israel this is true. However, the expression "children of Israel" (= Jacob's sons) does occur in Gen. 46:5, etc., at the time when Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. The above passage in the Talmud thus goes on to suggest that the law concerning the sinew of the hip was in force from that time on.

13

Dinah

(GENESIS 34)

Shechem and Hamor ask for Dinah: God ordered their destruction.

Dinah

(GENESIS 34)

❖ ❖ ❖

Once back in Canaan, Jacob and his wives and children stayed for a time near the city of Shechem. On one occasion, Jacob's daughter Dinah went into Shechem. While she was there, the son of Hamor, Shechem's ruler, saw Dinah, "and he seized her and lay with her and violated her." Afterward, Hamor's son—whose name was the same as that of the city, Shechem—wished to keep Dinah as his wife, and he asked his father to approach Jacob to arrange for the marriage.

When Jacob's sons learned of this proposal, they were outraged. However, rather than simply refuse, "they answered Shechem and his father Hamor with guile" (Gen. 34:13). Such a marriage, they said, would be possible only if the bridegroom and all the men of Shechem were circumcised, as they themselves were. Hamor agreed, and all the males of the city underwent circumcision. Three days later, with the men of the city now in pain because of the operation, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi entered the city and attacked it, killing Hamor and Shechem and all the other males. Jacob protested to his sons, saying that this deed might invite retaliation from other Canaanites, but Simeon and Levi answered, "Shall our sister be treated as a harlot?"

THE STORY of Dinah is a single, isolated episode, without obvious connection to the rest of Genesis. Dinah herself does not reappear; the Bible does not say if she became pregnant after being raped, nor if she ever married anyone else; essentially, she disappears. As for the consequences of the revenge on Shechem, there were none: the threat of reprisal from the Canaanites (mentioned by Jacob at the end of the story) never materialized. In this sense, the story seems wholly unrelated to the broader historical saga in which it is located, and this only compounded the mystery of its overall meaning for ancient interpreters. Why had it been included in Scripture? To many, it seemed that the story must contain some kind of moral lesson, but if so, the overall message was unclear. The events themselves are narrated with what can only be described as studied neutrality. There is no indication whether Simeon and Levi are to be regarded as heroes or foolish hotheads, nor, for that matter, is there even any clear condemnation of Shechem himself. *God is nowhere mentioned,* and at the end of the story we have no idea if this act of revenge was met with divine approval or disapproval.

Uncontrolled Anger

Another biblical text, however, seemed to interpreters to shed light on the true significance of this incident. For, while the story of Dinah is not explicitly men-

tioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, interpreters from earliest times found an allusion to it at the end of the book of Genesis, when the aged Jacob blesses each of his sons in turn. When he comes to Simeon and Levi, he says:

> Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence are their stock-in-trade. Into their company let me not come, in their assembly let me not rejoice. For in their anger, they killed a man; and when in a good mood, they maimed an ox! Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their wrath—how unyielding! I will divide them up in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.
>
> —Gen. 49:5–7

Jacob's mention of Simeon and Levi jointly killing "a man" in their anger seemed to be an unambiguous reference to the revenge on Shechem (specifically, to Gen. 34:25–26). And the reference to Jacob's clear disapproval of what these two brothers did seemed to tip the scales against them. After all, Jacob was a righteous man. If, years after the incident, he still blamed his two sons for their deed, was this not the Bible's way of telling us that they had indeed acted reprehensibly?

> Why else did Jacob, our most wise father, censure Simeon and Levi for their irrational slaughter of the entire tribe of the Shechemites, saying, "Cursed be their anger." For if reason could not control anger, he [Jacob] would not have spoken thus. —4 Macc. 2:19–20

For some, then, the story of the rape of Dinah contained a moral lesson about the control of anger. However heinous Shechem's crime, Simeon and Levi went much too far in their revenge, perpetrating a slaughter that this author could only call "irrational."

Shechem Deserved Death

Surprisingly, however, most interpreters seem to have concluded just the opposite: what Simeon and Levi did was altogether appropriate, even honorable. There were good reasons to think so. To begin with, the tribe descended from Levi was later singled out for a special honor: the Levites became the priestly tribe, the one from which Aaron and all subsequent priests were said to descend (as well as the tribe of Aaron's brother Moses, greatest of the prophets). If Levi were being condemned for his hot temper in the story of Dinah as well as in Jacob's reference to him in Gen. 49:6, why was not the priesthood given to some other tribe? What is more, Shechem's crime *was* heinous. It just did not seem reasonable that the point of this whole story was the overreaction of Simeon and Levi. Certainly the chief villain was Shechem himself. And so, despite Jacob's words in Gen. 49:5–7, most early interpreters were naturally inclined to view Simeon and Levi's action as basically praiseworthy.

Another obvious factor that pushed interpreters to take Simeon and Levi's side was the fact that they were, after all, Jacob's sons, Israelites, while Hamor and Shechem were foreigners. It was a clear case of us-against-them, and even if the story itself is presented in rather neutral terms, interpreters quite naturally supposed that its point was to condemn the "them" and praise the "us." What is more,

Shechem was a northern city, situated in Samaria, and, as the (eventually separate) inhabitants of that region came to be viewed with disapproval by many Jews,[1] any biblical story involving their city and their ancestors would almost inevitably be affected. Many interpreters thus concluded that the point of the story of Dinah was the wickedness and depravity of Shechem and the heroism of Simeon and Levi.

But if that was so, a fundamental problem nonetheless remained: were the brothers right to *kill* Shechem? After all, the crime of rape, however hateful, is not normally punishable by death. Indeed, elsewhere in the Bible, the penalty prescribed by God is clearly far less severe:

> If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty pieces of silver, and she shall be his wife as a result of his having violated her; he may not divorce her all his days.
>
> —Deut. 22:28–29

The case described in this law seems strikingly similar to that of Shechem and Dinah. For in both, a man rapes a young woman who is neither married nor engaged. In fact, the two texts use nearly identical terms to describe the crime—"seize," "lie with," "violate." Yet the law in Deuteronomy says that the man in such a case should be treated rather leniently. He is simply required to pay a fine and to marry the young woman himself,[2] and he must remain married to her "all his days." Familiar with this law, interpreters could not help wondering why Shechem had been condemned to death.[3] After all, he wanted to marry Dinah, just as the law prescribed; he even wanted to pay her father an extravagant amount of money (Gen. 34:12), doubtless far in excess of the fifty pieces of silver required by the law. Why then did not Jacob and his sons accept the offer?

Foreigners Are Different

One possible answer was obvious: Shechem was a foreigner. The only difference between him and the perpetrator in Deuteronomy is that he was "the son of Hamor

1. Samaritans and Jews doubtless experienced some tensions and strife even in earlier periods, but many biblical scholars now believe that a final rift between the two groups did not occur until late in the second century B.C.E. After that time, Jewish interpreters would certainly tend to regard Samaritans as outsiders or enemies, and, at times, to project such feelings onto their interpretation of biblical texts. See also Chapter 8.

2. This is to occur only if the marriage is acceptable to the woman and her family (as later interpreters make plain) and not in violation of other laws. Note that, for later interpreters, this law of rape likewise applied to cases that we would describe as "statutory rape" and seduction.

3. One might argue, of course, that the Torah had not yet been given to Israel, and that this law of leniency was thus not known to Jacob and his sons. But there are many instances in which early interpreters state or imply that Israel's ancestors acted in accordance with laws of the Torah even before they were given. Besides, why should God have allowed Simeon and Levi to act as they did if what they did was wrong? He ought to have punished *them*, or at the very least the biblical account ought to have condemned their action. That such was not the case—indeed, that Levi was later rewarded with the priesthood forever—certainly implied that God approved of their action and that, as a result, *there was some crucial difference* between Shechem and the rapist described in Deuteronomy. See below.

the Hivite" (Gen. 34:2), that is, a Canaanite, a foreigner living in the land that God had given to Jacob and his descendants. Perhaps that was why Scripture, after mentioning Shechem's crime, went on to describe it as a "disgrace *in Israel*" (Gen. 34:8)—as if the national honor itself had been violated—and to stress repeatedly that Shechem had in fact "defiled" Dinah (Gen. 34:5, 13, 27).

And so, it is not surprising to find that interpreters highlighted Shechem's foreignness in retelling the story:

> Then Judith . . . cried out to the Lord with a loud voice, and said: "O Lord God of my ancestor Simeon, to whom You gave a sword to take revenge on the **strangers** . . ." —Jth. 9:2

> And you, Moses, command the children of Israel and warn them not to give any of their daughters to the **foreigners** and not to marry any **foreign women,** because that is abominable before the Lord. For this reason I have written for you in the words of the Torah everything that the Shechemites did to Dinah . . . Israel will not be free from uncleanness while it has a one of the **foreign women** or if anyone has given one of his daughters to any **foreign man.** —*Jubilees* 30:11–14

> [Simeon and Levi later justify their deed:] "It would not be proper for them to say in their congregations and schools, 'uncircumcised [that is, non-Israelite] men defiled virgins, and idol-worshipers [defiled] the daughter of Jacob.'" —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 34:31

> When Shechem . . . being now enamored of her, asked his father to take the girl for his wife. Hamor, agreeing, went to Jacob to request that Dinah now be legally joined to his son Shechem. Jacob, having no way to gainsay because of the standing of the person asking, still thought it unlawful to marry his daughter to a **foreigner**, and asked permission to hold a council on the subject of his request. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:337–338

Intermarriage Is Forbidden

For such interpreters, it was not just that foreigners were somehow not nice, or not deserving of mercy. Rather, the matter turned on the whole issue of intermarriage between Jews and other peoples. A great many biblical texts suggested that marriages between the people of Israel and the other peoples living in Canaan were disapproved of by God, indeed, strictly forbidden:

> You shall not make marriages with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons . . . For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.
> —Deut. 7:3–6

Later biblical books make it clear that, at a certain point after the Jews' return from exile in Babylon, marriages between Jews and non-Jews became a major concern. The book of Ezra thus relates how Ezra discovered with grief that some of his fellow

Jews had taken foreign wives—he mentions by name, in addition to Canaanite women, "Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites" (Ezra 9:1)[4]—and goes on to report a solemn undertaking (covenant) that was made with regard to such marriages:

> [Shecaniah confesses to Ezra:] "We have broken faith with our God and have married non-Jewish women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to divorce these women along with their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. Let it be done in accordance with the Torah. Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it." Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. And they took the oath. —Ezra 10:2–5

The book of Ezra then goes on to list individually all those who had taken foreign wives and who were required to divorce them. Nor did the matter of intermarriage slip into obscurity after this episode. Many postbiblical writings likewise stressed that marriages between Jews and non-Jews are a grave sin.

Against such a background, the biblical story of Dinah—and, in particular, the violent reaction of Simeon and Levi—took on a new dimension. Surely a foreign prince who had not only raped Jacob's daughter, but had then subsequently tried to *marry* her, was an arch villain, as much (or more so!) for his marriage proposal as for his original crime. For this reason some interpreters further specified that the marriage proposed by Shechem was actually prohibited:

> If there is a man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any foreigner, he is to die. He is to be stoned because he has done something sinful and shameful within Israel. —*Jubilees* 30:7

> Jacob, having no way to gainsay [the proposed marriage] because of the standing of the person asking, still thought it **unlawful** to marry his daughter to a foreigner, and asked permission to hold a council on the subject of his request.[5] —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:337–338

A Wise Answer

But if it was forbidden for Dinah to be given in marriage to a foreigner, then why didn't Jacob and his sons simply say so? Instead, they tricked all the men of Shechem into undergoing circumcision and then, with the town's defenders thereby incapacitated, Simeon and Levi entered the town and killed them all at

4. "Amorite" should probably be emended to "Edomite" on the basis of a parallel passage in 1 Esd. 8:69.

5. Note that in this passage Josephus does not even clearly define Shechem's crime as rape; he "stole her away and lay with her." The whole reason for Jacob's reluctance is the fact that marriage to a foreigner would be "unlawful."

swordpoint. Not only was this an apparent case of collective punishment, but the brothers had clearly lied to achieve their ends. The Bible does not hide from the facts:

> The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor **deceitfully**, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us." —Gen. 34:13–14

Some interpreters, however, rose to the defense of the brothers even in this matter. True, the Bible says "deceitfully." But if intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews was forbidden, then what the brothers were saying—at least the part cited above—was hardly deceitful; it was the plain truth. Perhaps, then, "deceitfully" really meant something more like "cleverly" or even "wisely":

> They [Dinah's brothers] spoke **deceitfully** with them and dealt **cleverly** with them . . . For this reason I have written for you in the words of the Torah everything that the Shechemites did to Dinah, and [specifically] how the sons of Jacob spoke, saying, "We will not give our daughter to a man who is uncircumcised because that would be a disgrace for us." For it *is* a disgrace for Israel, for those who give and those who take any of the foreign women, for this is unclean and abominable to Israel. —*Jubilees* 30:3, 12–13

> And Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with **wisdom** and spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister.
>
> —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 34:13

> And Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor in the greatness of their **wisdom** and spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister.[6]
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 34:13

> "The sons of Jacob answered Shechem [and his father Hamor deceitfully]": R. Samuel b. Naḥman said: Can anyone believe that this was a fraudulent [response], when the Holy Spirit [itself, that is, the divine author of the second half of this verse] said, "for he had [indeed] defiled their sister Dinah"?[7] —*Genesis Rabba* 80:8

The Whole City Was Guilty

Thus, in the view of many interpreters, the brothers were quite right to have killed Shechem for his crime, and even their earlier statement about being unable to permit their sister to marry an uncircumcised man was, in itself, no deception but simply a statement of fact.

6. Isaac's words to Esau in Gen. 27:35, "Your brother came *in guile*," underwent a similar transformation to "wisdom" in the targums and elsewhere.

7. In other words, the very fact that the second half of this verse—undoubtedly expressing the sentiments of the Bible's inspiring spirit—apparently seeks to justify the brothers' words indicates that they were not being deceitful.

Still, the brothers did more than execute the rapist; they also killed his father, Hamor, and all the men of the town. What was *their* crime? At first glance, this seemed like an egregious case of collective punishment, slaughtering a whole city for a crime committed by one of its citizens. The issue apparently troubled ancient interpreters. Most concluded, however, that if the entire city had been punished, it must in some fundamental way have shared in Shechem's guilt. And here, on close examination, the Bible itself offered ancient interpreters some confirmation. Although elsewhere it is quite specific about Shechem acting alone, in one verse toward the end of the story, the Bible seems to include others in the crime against Dinah:

> And the sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because **they** [the Shechemites] had violated their sister. —Gen. 34:27

The use of the plural in this verse suggested to interpreters that the city as a whole was in some sense guilty of the crime; all its men had played a role. A number of interpreters specifically picked up on this detail:

> [The continuation of Judith's prayer, cited above:] "O Lord God of my ancestor Simeon, to whom You gave a sword to take revenge on the strangers [plural] who had loosed the adornment of a virgin to defile her, and uncovered her thigh to put her to shame, and polluted her womb to disgrace her; for You said, 'It shall not be so'—and **they** did so. Therefore You gave up their rulers to be slain, and their bed, which was ashamed of the deceit **they** had practiced, to be stained with blood, and You struck down slaves along with princes, and princes on their thrones; and You gave their wives for a prey and their daughters to captivity, and all their booty to be divided among your beloved sons, who were zealous for You, and abhorred the pollution of their blood, and called on You for help—O God, my God, hear me also, a widow . . ." —Jth. 9:2–4

> Jacob and his sons were angry at the men of Shechem because **they** defiled Dinah, their sister. So they spoke deceptively with them and acted in a crafty manner toward them and tricked them. Simeon and Levi entered Shechem unexpectedly and carried out punishment on all the Shechemites: they killed every man whom they found there and did not leave a single one alive. They killed them all painfully because **they** had dishonored their sister Dinah. —*Jubilees* 30:3–4

> It is proper that they should say in the congregations of Israel and in their schoolhouses, "The uncircumcised were killed on account of a virgin, and idol-worshipers [were killed] because **they** defiled Dinah, the daughter of Jacob." —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 34:31

City with a Criminal Past

Other early retellings seem to suggest that the Shechemites were punished not specifically for their complicity in the rape of Dinah, but because it was only the

latest incident in a series of crimes stretching back for generations. They and the other Canaanite tribes had always mistreated strangers and taken advantage of the defenseless—perhaps, indeed, that was why it was proper that they all be destroyed:

> God smote the inhabitants of Shechem, for they did not honor whoever came to them, whether evil or noble. Nor did they determine rights or laws throughout the city. Rather, deadly works were their care.
>
> —Theodotus, Fragment 7 (cited from Alexander Polyhistor in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.22.9)

> [Levi recalls:] But I saw that God's verdict upon Shechem was "Guilty"; for they had sought to do the same thing to Sarah and Rebekah as they had [now] done to Dinah our sister, but the Lord had stopped them. And in the same way they had persecuted Abraham our father when he was a stranger, and they had acted against him to suppress his flocks when they were big with young; and they had mistreated Ieblae, his homeborn slave. And in this way they treated all strangers, taking their wives by force and banishing them. But the anger of the Lord against them had reached its term. So I said to my father: Do not be angry, lord, because through you the Lord will reduce the Canaanites to nothing, and he will give their land to you and your seed after you. —*Testament of Levi* 6:8–7:1

God Said No

Some of the above passages specify that Simeon and Levi were merely instruments of divine justice, that it was God Himself who had decreed the death of the Shechemites, not for purposes of revenge, but as a punishment. Yet, as was observed earlier, the story itself is actually narrated with studied neutrality. There is no indication that God even approved of the violence, never mind that He ordered it. Whence this idea?

Interpreters bent on finding some opening, however slight, in the narrative's neutrality eventually turned their attention to that moment in the story when Jacob's sons first hear of the rape:

> The sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard of it; and the men were indignant and very angry, because he [Shechem] had committed a disgrace in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, and **such a thing ought not to be done.** —Gen. 34:7

Why does the biblical narrative add this last phrase? In context, it seems to be what literary critics call "implied direct speech." That is, the text, in reporting the brothers' reaction, presents what they said to one another—"Shechem has committed a disgrace in Israel by lying with Dinah; such a thing ought not to be done!"—without going to the trouble of saying "this is what they said," instead simply stating their thoughts as if from the narrative's own point of view.

Viewed from a certain angle, however, these same words can take on (or be purposely given) a different meaning. For if the Bible adds, "and such a thing ought not to be done," might one not conclude that these are *God's own words?* After all,

they are not specifically attributed to the brothers; could they not be in the nature of an "editorial comment" outside the narrative itself? There may even be a hint of such an interpretation in the Septuagint translation of this same verse. The Hebrew phrase (which might be rendered still more literally "and it ought not to be done thus") comes out in the Greek:

> . . . and the men were sorely grieved and very distressed, because he [Shechem] had committed a disgrace in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter; and it **shall not be** thus. —Septuagint Gen. 34:7

The wording "and it *shall not be* thus" might suggest, a touch more in the Greek than in the Hebrew, some sort of editorial comment about future policy, or indeed about the subsequent events, rather than merely the implied direct speech of the brothers.

In any case, other authors clearly presented the idea that Gen. 34:7 contains God's own statement about the Shechem affair—"let it not be done thus."

> You [God] gave a sword to take revenge on the strangers who had loosed the adornment of a virgin to defile her, and uncovered her thigh to put her to shame, and polluted her womb to disgrace her; for **You** said, "It shall not be so"—and they did so. —Jth. 9:2

> [The angel of *Jubilees* says:] And **let it not be done thus** henceforth again that a daughter of Israel shall be defiled. —*Jubilees* 30:5

God Ordered Their Destruction

It followed that these words in the narrative were actually a divine verdict of execution: having said "let it not be done thus," God then ordered the destruction of the townsfolk or, in the extreme formulation, actually killed them Himself:

> **God smote** the inhabitants of Shechem, for they did not honor whoever came to them, whether evil or noble.
>
> —Theodotus, Fragment 7 (cited from Alexander Polyhistor in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.22.9)

> For the verdict was ordered **in heaven** against them, that they might annihilate with a sword all of the men of Shechem because they committed a disgrace in Israel. And the Lord handed them over to Jacob's sons, so that they might exterminate them with the sword and carry out the punishment [decreed] against them. —*Jubilees* 30:5–6

> But I saw that **God's verdict** upon Shechem was "Guilty" . . . So I said to my father: Do not be angry, lord, because through you the Lord will reduce the Canaanites to nothing. —*Testament of Levi* 6:8–7:1

> And Simeon and Levi drew their swords from their sheaths and said, "Behold, have you seen these swords? With these two swords **the Lord God** punished the insult of the Shechemites [by] which they insulted the sons of

Israel, because of our sister Dinah whom Shechem the son of Hamor had defiled." —*Joseph and Aseneth* 23:14

Dinah Married Job

The later life of Dinah is passed over in silence. We catch not the slightest glimpse of her in Jacob's household during the long story of Joseph, and while her name is mentioned once more, in passing, in a list of Jacob's descendants (Gen. 46:15), she apparently did not join her father and brothers in going down to Egypt. What became of her?

A number of early sources suggest that Dinah became the wife of Job, the central figure of the biblical book bearing his name. For although that book mentions the fact that Job had a wife, it does not say what her name was. This was just the sort of blank that early interpreters were anxious to fill, especially when they could do so by "borrowing" a name or a character from somewhere else. Now while the book of Job does not say *when* Job lived, Gen. 36:33 mentions a certain "Jobab" among the descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau. If "Jobab" was another form of the name Job,[8] then Job might have been around—and looking for a wife—at precisely the time when Dinah was returned from Shechem to her father's house.

[Job says:] I am from the sons of Esau, the brother of Jacob, of whom is your mother Dinah, from whom I begot you. My former wife had died with the other ten children in a bitter death. —*Testament of Job* 1:5–6

And they [Simeon and Levi] took their sister Dinah and went away from there. And afterward Job took her as a wife and fathered from her fourteen sons and six daughters, that is, seven sons and three daughters before he was struck down with suffering, and afterward seven sons and three daughters when he was healed. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 8:7–8

And Dinah his wife said to him . . . —*Job Targum*, translating Job 2:9

R. Abba b. Kahana said: Dinah was the wife of Job. —*Genesis Rabba* 57:4

It is said that Job lived in the time of Jacob and that he married Dinah, Jacob's daughter. For it says in Job [that he said to his wife] "You are speaking the way one of the foolish women [*nebalot*] might speak . . ." [Job 2:10], and it says in [regard to Dinah] "For he has committed a disgrace [*nebalah*] in Israel." —j. *Baba Bathra* 15:2

8. Such an identification is found specifically in a note at the end of the Septuagint version of the book of Job. There it says that Job "was previously named Jobab . . . He himself was the son of Zerah, of the sons of Esau . . . These were the kings who ruled in Edom, which place he himself also governed. First, Balak, the son of Zippor, and the name of his city was Dennaba; and after Balak, Jobab, who is called Job" (Septuagint Job 52:17). A similar tradition is found in a passage of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* (9.25:1–4) attributed, via Alexander Polyhistor, to a certain "Aristeas."

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In short: Shechem's crime was particularly heinous because, as a foreigner, he was not to marry a daughter of Jacob's; any such union was a defilement. His offer to marry Dinah and to have his kinsmen intermarry with Jacob's family thus only compounded his offense. Simeon and Levi did well to kill not only him and his father, but the other men of Shechem as well, for they had cooperated in Shechem's crime or had a history of evil behavior. Indeed, Jacob's sons were merely instruments of divine punishment, for God Himself had sentenced the Shechemites to die for their crimes. As for Dinah, she eventually married Job, a descendant of Jacob's brother, Esau.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Dinah

Dinah "Went Out" for a Party: The story of Dinah begins by stating that Dinah "went out to visit the women [or "girls"] of the land." The word "women" makes it clear that Dinah in no way intended to meet Shechem or any other man, and that she was therefore not in the slightest bit responsible for what happened. But interpreters still no doubt wondered why Dinah should have wanted to enter the city at all—what business did she have there? In his retelling, Theodotus supplied one possible answer:

> And Dinah, still a virgin, came into Shechem when there was a festival, since she wished to see the city. —Theodotus, Fragment 4 (cited from Alexander Polyhistor in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.22.4–6)

Josephus (perhaps aware of Theodotus' poem, or at least the interpretive motif underlying it), presented the same answer, but in such a way as to connect it more specifically to Scripture's mention of the "women":

> Since the people of Shechem were holding a festival, Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, went into the city to see the adornments of the women of the place. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:337

Other interpreters, however, saw her "going out" as a sign of immodest behavior—in which Dinah was merely following the example of her mother, who is also said to have "gone out" (Gen. 30:16). (In the latter instance, Leah clearly went out for purposes of cohabitation; so, these exegetes reasoned, perhaps Dinah's "going out" was similarly motivated. See *Genesis Rabba* 80:1, *Midrash Tanḥuma, Vayyišlaḥ* 7, and so on.)

The Three Stages of Sin: The brief retelling of the rape of Dinah found in the book of Judith contains, as we have seen, a number of deviations from, or additions to, the biblical narrative. One such addition comes in Judith's description of the rape itself. She says:

> O Lord God of my father Simeon, to whom You gave a sword to take revenge on the strangers who had **loosed the adornment** of a virgin to defile her, and **uncovered her thigh** to put her to shame, and **polluted her womb** to disgrace her; for you had said, "It shall not be done"—yet they did it.
>
> —Jth. 9:2

The Genesis account makes no mention of "loosening the adornment" of Dinah, nor of "uncovering her thigh" nor "polluting her womb"—these are details added by the author of Judith. But why? Perhaps this author is simply providing a more graphic description of what occurred. But there may also be an element of interpretation here, specifically, an interpretation of the precise wording of the description of Shechem's actions as described in the Bible. For there it says that Shechem "saw

her . . . and seized her and lay with her and raped her" (Gen. 34:2). Noticing Scripture's use of these four different verbs, the author of Judith may have understood that Scripture wished thereby not merely to set out the sequence of events, but to highlight separate actions performed by Shechem, each of which, it seemed, must have been worthy of condemnation. (For why else, this interpreter seems to be asking, would Scripture have mentioned all these graphic details instead of just telling us—indeed, in more modest language—that Dinah had been raped?) And so the author expands Scripture's mentioning that Shechem "saw her" into an indication that he *saw what he should not have seen,* that is, "loosed the adornment of a virgin," apparently an allusion to removal of the hair covering that modesty required a woman to wear.[9] When he says that Shechem next "uncovered her thigh," he may similarly be explicating the phrases "he seized her" and "he lay with her" in Genesis; the last especially would seem superfluous given what follows ("he raped her")—superfluous unless "he lay with her" is understood to refer to something other than the act of rape itself. All this in turn would seem to be designed to build up the enormity of Shechem's offense and so justify in the minds of readers the apparently unequal punishment inflicted on all the inhabitants of Shechem as a result of the rape.

A similar sequence of actions is portrayed in the Mishnah, in its discussion of the penalty prescribed for the suspected adulteress in Num. 5:11–28. The biblical punishment (as understood by the Mishnah) calls for the woman to be publicly humiliated, and the Mishnah seeks to justify the particulars of this punishment.

> She adorned herself for sin, therefore God['s prescribed punishment] called for her to be made unattractive [by having her hairdo undone and her jewelry removed]. She uncovered herself for sin, therefore God['s prescribed punishment] called for her likewise to be uncovered. The sin began at her thigh and the belly afterward, therefore let the thigh be afflicted first, and afterward the belly [as per Num. 5:21, "the Lord makes your thigh fall and your belly swell up"], nor shall the rest of the body escape.
>
> —m. *Soṭah* 1:7

The sequence envisaged in the first two sentences (her hair loosened and then her body uncovered) is the same as that envisaged in Judith's retelling of the rape of Dinah; the (quite distinct) sequence in the final sentence corresponds to Judith's phrases "uncovered her thigh" and "polluted her womb." Is this merely coincidence? Note also that the first sentence's allusion to removing her [hair?] ornaments,[10] in combination with the last sentence's reference to "thigh" and "belly" [= womb], matches the three details mentioned in Judith. Finally, in this connection one might adduce another early rabbinic text:

9. The Greek word *mitra* (which was apparently the original form used here; a scribal error turned it into *mētra,* "womb") can mean a belt or girdle, but elsewhere in the Old Greek it translates Hebrew *pe'er,* "adornment," a word typically associated with adornments of the hair or head. (See Grintz, *The Book of Judith,* 140–141.) Therefore, the allusion here is probably to the uncovering of Dinah's hair.

10. See previous note.

> It is said that Rahab the harlot was ten years old when the Israelites went forth from Egypt, and during all the forty years that Israel was in the desert she was a harlot. At the age of fifty she became a convert, and prayed: Master of the Universe, just as I have sinned with **three things,** bring about my forgiveness with three things, a rope, a window, and a wall, as it is said, "Then she let them down with a rope through the window, for her house was in the wall of the city, so that she dwelt in the wall" (Josh. 2:15).
>
> — *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael, Yitro* 1

It is not clear what Rahab's sinning "with three things" refers to, but perhaps this is another allusion to the three referred to in both Judith and the Mishnah.

God Said No: We saw earlier that the implied direct speech of Gen. 34:7 ("And the men were indignant and very angry, because he [Shechem] had committed a disgrace in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, *and such a thing ought not to be done*") came to be understood as an "editorial comment" rather than as part of the narrative. Beyond this, however, it should be observed that the precise wording of this phrase in Hebrew seems to express a feeling of moral outrage that is absent from the bland English equivalent. Thus Abimelech, after he has almost been led to commit adultery because of Abraham's deception, uses a similar expression. He says to Abraham: "What have I done against you, that you would have brought a great sin upon me and my kingdom? *Things that ought not to be done* you have done with me" (Gen. 20:9). Things that "ought not to be done" are terrible things, outrages, and not merely things that ought not to be done.

Killed One Each: In the biblical account, Simeon and Levi entered the city of Shechem and slaughtered all of its inhabitants:

> Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came upon the city unawares, and **killed all the males.** They slew Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. And the sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city.
>
> — Gen. 34:25–27

There can be little doubt that it was Simeon and Levi alone who killed the townsmen; not only does the text specifically say so, but it adds that the (other) sons of Jacob "came upon the slain," that is, when they arrived, the dead were already dead.

It is interesting, therefore, that at least one ancient retelling of the story of Dinah specifies that Simeon and Levi did *not* kill all the males:

> [Levi recalls:] And I killed Shechem first, and Simeon [killed] Hamor. And after that the brothers came and smote the city with the edge of the sword.
>
> — *Testament of Levi* 6:4–5

Here Levi apparently commits only one killing, that of Shechem, while his brother Simeon similarly kills only Shechem's father, Hamor. As for the rest of the city's

inhabitants, they are killed, Levi says, by the other brothers. But why should his account so flagrantly contradict that of the Bible itself?

There is a potential parallel to this view of things in a passage attributed to the Hellenistic poet Theodotus, who is cited, via Alexander Polyhistor, in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica:*

> Thus then Simeon rushed upon Hamor himself and struck him upon his head; he seized his throat in his left hand, then let it go still gasping its last breath, since there was another task to do. At that time Levi, also irresistible in might, seized Sychem [= Shechem] by the hair; the latter grasped his knees and raged unspeakably. Levi struck the middle of his collarbone; the sharp sword entered his inward parts through the chest; and his life thereupon left his bodily frame. When the other brothers learned of their deed, they assisted them and pillaged the city; and after rescuing their sister, they carried her off with the prisoners to their father's quarters.
>
> —Theodotus, Fragment 8 (cited in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.22.10–12)

When the dust clears from this epic battle scene, it is clear that here, too, Simeon has killed Hamor and Levi, Shechem. What of the remaining Shechemites? On this point Theodotus is not clear: he says that the other brothers "assisted" Simeon and Levi (presumably, in subduing the city), but he does not mention any further killings specifically.

Having Simeon and Levi kill only one man apiece, as specified in the *Testament of Levi* and perhaps implied in Theodotus, may have made for a more acceptable scenario on several counts. First, it seemed likely that an entire city, no matter how disabled, might more easily have been slaughtered by ten brothers than by two. Second, spreading the responsibility over all the brothers may have served to soften the image of Simeon and Levi, causing them to appear less bloodthirsty. But if this tradition served such purposes, it also derived from a particular piece of interpretation, in this case, once again, Jacob's words to his two sons at the end of his life:

> Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence are their stock-in-trade. Into their company let me not come, in their assembly let me not rejoice. For in their anger, **they killed a man;** and when in a good mood, they maimed an ox! Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their wrath—how unyielding! I will divide them up in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.
>
> —Gen. 49:5–7

Now, of course, this assertion need not be taken literally as meaning they each killed *one single man.* Apparently, however, that is how it sounded to some people, for one ancient translation went out of its way to clarify that more than one "man" was the intended meaning:

> For in their anger they killed **men.** —Septuagint Gen. 49:6

This change indicates a certain discomfort among ancient interpreters with the singular form "man"—for if Jacob literally says that Simeon and Levi killed "a

man," how can that square with the Genesis narrative? Such discomfort is reflected as well in rabbinic sources:

> "For in their anger they killed a man"—Did they kill only one man? And does it not say, "And they came upon the city unawares and killed all the males" [Gen. 34:25]? But it means that they [the Shechemites] were accounted by God and by them [Simeon and Levi] as if they were only one man. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayḥi* 10; also *Genesis Rabba* Ms. Vat. 99:5 (Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba*, 1256)

It is to answer this same question that the interpretive tradition found in the *Testament of Levi* and Theodotus first arose. Yes, it asserts, Jacob did say, "they killed a man," and by this he meant quite literally that each brother killed a man; Simeon killed Hamor and Levi killed Shechem. For the same reason Gen. 34:26 specifies that Simeon and Levi killed (presumably: only) "Hamor and his son Shechem." As for the statement in Gen. 34:25 that the two brothers "killed all the males," it does indeed conflict with both the specification that follows it and with Jacob's words in Gen. 49:6. Gen. 34:25 must therefore have a different meaning: it must be some sort of general assertion about what happened in the attack on Shechem, "all the males were killed." This general assertion is then clarified by what immediately follows it: since Simeon and Levi killed Hamor and Shechem, the rest of the killing had to have been done by someone else, presumably, the other brothers.[11] See further Kugel, "Story of Dinah." On the original meaning of Gen. 49:5, see Caquot, "Siméon et Lévi sont frères."

Intermarriage Is Forbidden: As noted, the gravity of this sin is a theme found in many extrabiblical works. It is interesting to see, therefore, how—much as in the story of Dinah—the prohibition of intermarriage came to color the perception of other biblical heroes and their stories in the eyes of early interpreters. Thus, for example, in the apocryphal book of Tobit, when the aged Tobit comes to impart his wisdom to his son, he says:

> Beware, my son, of all immorality. First of all, take a wife from among the descendants of your fathers and do not marry a foreign woman who is not of your father's tribe; for we are the sons of the prophets. Remember, my son, that Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, our fathers of old, all took wives from among their brethren. —Tob. 4:12

In similar fashion, Pseudo-Philo in his *Book of Biblical Antiquities* finds the issue of intermarriage to be the point of several biblical stories even when it is not specifically mentioned. For example, this book asserts that Tamar, who in the Bible tricks her father-in-law into having sexual relations with her (Genesis 38), did so out of the purest of motives:

> [Amram said to his compatriots:] "And so did our ancestress Tamar behave, for her intent had not been fornication, but, not wishing to withdraw from

11. Cf. the well-known rabbinic interpretive rule that, when a general assertion is followed by a specification, "you must interpret in keeping with the specification."

> the sons of Israel, she thoughtfully declared: It is better for me to die for having become pregnant[12] by my father-in-law than to be mingled with the Gentiles . . . And her intent saved her from all danger."
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:5

(See further Chapter 14, *OR,* "Tamar's Righteousness.") Similarly, "lust[ing] for foreign women" was, according to Pseudo-Philo, one of the great crimes committed by the people during the time of the Judges (44:7), and he even seems to justify the death of a woman in Judges 19 on the grounds that she had "committed sin with the *Amalekites*" (45:3), a detail absent from the biblical text.

The book of *Jubilees* similarly expands upon Rebekah's stated fear that her son Jacob may marry a Canaanite woman (Gen. 27:46). In *Jubilees,* this becomes the occasion for a long speech by Jacob himself:

> [Jacob says to Rebekah:] "Behold, mother, I am [sixty-three] years old, and I . . . have not even thought of taking me a wife of the daughters of Canaan. For I remember, mother, the words of Abraham our father, for he commanded me not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, but to take me a wife from the seed of my father's house and my kindred . . . I swear before you, mother, that all the days of my life I will not take me a wife from the daughters of the seed of Canaan, and I will not act wickedly as my brother has done." — *Jubilees* 25:4–9

Similarly, the *Temple Scroll* (vaticinating, perhaps, Solomon's problematic multiple marriages) stipulates that the king must marry monogamously and from within his own people:

> And let him [the king] **not marry a woman from all the daughters of the nations,** but let him acquire a wife only from his father's clan, from his father's kin. And let him not take another woman in addition to her, for she alone shall be with him all the days of her life; but if she dies he may marry another woman from his father's clan and kin. — *Temple Scroll* 57:15–19

On the prohibition of intermarriage, see also Philo, *Special Laws* 3:29; *Testament of Job* 45:3; *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:6; and *Jubilees* 20:4, 22:20, and 30:7. On Philo, see Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity,* 71–75.

A Sincere Proposal: There is one slight contradiction in the biblical narrative that bothered some ancient interpreters. While Simeon and Levi ultimately overcame the city of Shechem alone, the earlier proposal to the Shechemites that they be circumcised did not come *only* from these two brothers:

12. The Latin text reads "for having *mingled*" *(commixta)* and this parallels *commisceri* in the next clause. However, it seems more plausible that Tamar would have spoken concretely of the situation at hand and said, "become *pregnant* by my father-in-law." If *commisceri* represents the Hebrew *ht'rb* or *nt'rb,* it is not hard to see how an earlier *ht'br* or *nt'br* ("become pregnant") could have become confused with this verb in the light of its use in the next clause. On the contrary, it is the lack of parallelism that makes for Tamar's pungency: Better to become pregnant . . . than to be commingled!

> The **sons of Jacob** answered Shechem and his father Hamor with guile, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised." —Gen. 34:13–14

This wording presented a subtle, but important, discrepancy. If the "sons of Jacob"—presumably all of them—answered Shechem and Hamor "with guile," having already planned to trick them into circumcision the better to kill them off in a surprise attack, then why on the day of the attack did only two of these brothers, Simeon and Levi, actually carry out the killing? If all were in on the plan, why were not all involved in its execution?

This question is apparently reflected in the Septuagint, where the verse cited above (Gen. 34:14) is rendered somewhat differently:

> And **Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah,** said to them: "We will not be able to do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised."
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 34:14

Here, it is specifically Simeon and Levi who deceive the Shechemites, and the contradiction thus disappears: these two planned the attack and these two carried it out. (That this version is an editorial reworking of the text is, however, clear from Gen. 34:25, where, in both the Septuagint and the traditional Hebrew text, Simeon and Levi are presented as if for the first time: "Then the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords . . .")

But there was another way to explain the same discrepancy, and that was to understand the brothers' words in Gen. 34:14 as a sincere proposal. That is, Jacob's sons, or at least most of his sons, accepted the idea that Dinah be married to Shechem, and for that reason sincerely asked the Shechemites to undergo circumcision. Only Simeon and Levi objected and, in a zealous, two-man offensive, succeeded in killing all the townsmen of Shechem by themselves. Then the other brothers, seeing the damage already done, joined in with them in plundering the city.

Such a view of the events is found in Theodotus' account:

> But when Sychem the son of Hamor saw her [Dinah], he loved her; and after seizing her as his own, he carried her off and ravished her. Then, coming back again with his father to Jacob, he asked for her in the partnership of marriage. **Jacob** said that he would not give her until all the inhabitants of Shechem were circumcised and became Jews. Hamor said that he would persuade them . . .
>
> As Hamor went into the city and encouraged his subjects to be circumcised, one of the sons of Jacob—Simeon by name—decided to kill Hamor and Sychem, since he was unwilling to bear in a civil manner the violent attack upon his sister. When he decided this, he shared it with his brother [Levi].
>
> —Theodotus, Fragment 4 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:22.5–6, 8)

Here, *Jacob* proposes circumcision—apparently quite sincerely. It is only afterward that one of his sons, Simeon, decides *on his own* to kill Hamor and Shechem and

thus not to permit things to go forward as planned. Thus, the circumcision and the slaughter were unrelated, and those who eventually undertook the latter (Simeon and Levi) must have been opposed to circumcision as a means to allowing intermarriage between the two groups.

This same basic understanding of the biblical text seems to underlie the *Testament of Levi.*[13] Here again, Jacob and most of the brothers are apparently in favor of Dinah being married to Shechem, and for that reason sincerely propose that the Shechemites be circumcised. But Levi will hear nothing of it, since he is "zealous":

> [Levi recalls:] And after this I counseled my father and Reuben my brother to bid the sons of Hamor not to be circumcised; for I was zealous because of the abomination which they had wrought on my sister. And I killed Shechem first, and Simeon [killed] Hamor. And after that the brothers came and smote the city with the edge of the sword. And father heard of it and was angry and distressed, because they had accepted the circumcision and had been killed after that, and in his blessings he did otherwise.[14]
>
> — *Testament of Levi* 6:3–6

Understanding the proposal of circumcision as a sincere one solved a great many problems for ancient interpreters. First, the problem of deception disappeared: now, no one was a liar. Jacob and most of his sons sincerely told the Shechemites to be circumcised, and Simeon and Levi, equally sincerely, opposed the planned union and ultimately frustrated it at swordpoint. (As for the word "deceitfully" in Gen. 34:14, it would have to be understood as "wisely," as explained in the body of this chapter.) What is more, the contradiction between twelve brothers planning the attack and only two carrying it out is likewise eliminated: the attack was, from start to finish, the affair of only Simeon and Levi. Finally, it is easier to understand why Jacob at the end of his life blamed Simeon and Levi alone: the planned attack was their doing and flew in the face of his own solution to the problem, circumcision and merger with the Shechemites.

The Whole City Was Guilty: As we saw earlier ("City with a Criminal Past"), the *Testament of Levi* (along with the Hellenistic poet Theodotus) maintained that the Shechemites and other Canaanites had a history of both sexual misconduct and mistreating foreigners,[15] and for this reason—and not because they were *all* guilty specifically in the matter of Dinah—their collective punishment at the hand of Jacob's sons was entirely justified. Yet the rival motif, "The Whole City Was Guilty" (which maintained, on the basis of Gen. 34:27, that the Shechemites were indeed *collectively* guilty of the rape of Dinah), is also found in the *Testament of Levi.* For, having advanced the idea of the Shechemites' past crimes, the text then moves to another matter:

13. I mean the version reflected in the Vatican manuscript, Cod. Graec. 731. For the preferability of its reading, see Kugel, "Story of Dinah," 8–12.

14. That is, he cursed instead of blessed: Gen. 49:7.

15. These same crimes were also imputed to the Sodomites. See Chapter 10.

> And I said to father: Do not be angry, lord, because through you the Lord will reduce the Canaanites to nothing, and He will give their land to you and your seed after you. For from this day on Shechem will be called a city of imbeciles; for as a someone mocks a fool, so we mocked them; because **also they** had wrought folly in Israel to defile our sister.
>
> — *Testament of Levi* 7:1–3

The presence of two rival motifs in a single source, both of which are designed to account for the same biblical phenomenon (in this case, the collective punishment of the whole city of Shechem), is not a rarity in ancient literature. It usually comes about because the ancient author in question was aware of two different traditions both of which were deemed authoritative. Rather than choosing between them, the ancient author simply incorporates both in his retelling.

In this case, however, it is noteworthy that the sentence above concerning the city of Shechem does not really follow the one that precedes it: for if God is really giving the land to Jacob and his descendants, why should Shechem *henceforth* be called a "city of imbeciles"? (This seems to imply that the "imbeciles," the Shechemites, would still be living there, rather than that the city would pass to the possession of Jacob and his descendants.) Apparently, the author (or editor) of the *Testament of Levi* has somewhat clumsily introduced here an entirely separate bit of biblical interpretation, one that not only runs afoul of the "City with a Criminal Past" motif otherwise espoused by this testament but, indeed, a motif that, on reflection, may be seen to concern the later inhabitants of Shechem rather than the *original* Shechemites involved in the story of Dinah.

Shechem the Non-People: To understand the remark in the *Testament of Levi* 7, we must go back to God's words in Deut. 32:21, "so I will make them [the Israelites] jealous with a non-people, with a foolish nation I will anger them." What was this "non-people" to which God was referring? Apparently, ancient exegetes held that the reference here was to the Samaritans. Such an identification was no doubt based on the biblical report that the cities of Samaria, whose inhabitants had been exiled by the Assyrian king, were repopulated by a conglomeration of different nations (2 Kings 17:24–31). As a result, the Samaritans came to be thought of as, quite literally, not *a people* but a mishmash of different peoples. Therefore, when Deut. 32:21 speaks of a "non-people," exegetes concluded that the reference had to be to Samaria.

A reflection of this ancient bit of exegesis is found in Ben Sira:

> With two nations [*gôyîm*] my soul is vexed, and the third is not a people [*'am*];
> Those who live in Seir, and Philistia, and the foolish nation [*gôy nābāl*] that dwells in Shechem.
>
> — Sir. 50:25–26

Here, the identification of Deuteronomy's "nation-that-is-not-a-people" with the Samaritans is clear enough. Moreover, Ben Sira picks up the second part of

Deut. 32:21, "with a foolish nation I will anger them," by repeating the same phrase: the Samaritans are "the *foolish* nation that dwells in Shechem." (For the historical background of this passage in Ben Sira, see Purvis, "Ben Sira and the Foolish People of Shechem." The thinking reflected in Ben Sira no doubt underlies two other early references to the same exegetical tradition, that found in (4Q 372) *Apocryphon of Joseph*^{b} as well as that reflected in *Midrash Tanna'im,* both of which identify this foolish people with the Samaritans. See Schuller, "4Q 372: A Text About Joseph"; Hoffman, *Midrash Tanna'im,* 196. Note also the discussion of Samaritan origins in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12:257–264, and cf. 9:288–291.)

But this second part of Deut. 32:21 raised an obvious question: why were the Samaritans said to be foolish? The "non-people" part was certainly clear in view of their composite origins—but what was *foolish* about them? To answer this second question another midrashic motif was devised, that found in the *Testament of Levi* 7:3. For at some point it was noticed that the crime of the Shechemites in the Dinah story had been referred to with a similar-sounding term: "The sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard of it; and the men were indignant and very angry, because he [Shechem] *had wrought a folly in Israel* (or, "committed a disgrace") by lying with Jacob's daughter" (Gen. 34:7). If what the Shechemites had done with regard to Dinah was described as a "folly" *(nĕbālâ),* then this might explain why Deut. 32:21 had referred to the later inhabitants of Shechem, the Samaritans, as a "foolish" people *(gôy nābāl)*—a subtle allusion to the sort of conduct that had always been associated with that place.

Yet even that did not answer the question satisfactorily. For certainly rape is no mere "folly": why then had the Bible called it that in the case of Dinah? To modern scholars, of course, the word *nĕbālâ* does not just mean "folly." For while this word can sometimes refer to the conduct of a *nābāl,* a fool (see, for example, Isa. 9:16, 32:6), it is most often found in connection with grave sexual offenses (Deut. 22:21, Judg. 19:23–24, 20:6 and 10, 2 Sam. 13:12, Jer. 29:23; compare Hos. 2:12) and should be translated in such cases as "disgrace," "outrage," or the like.

Apparently, however, this usage puzzled ancient interpreters, who were likely to see the root for "fool" in the word even when it did not belong. (Thus, the Septuagint translates *nĕbālâ* in this verse as *askhēmon,* "shame," but translates the nearly identical usage in Deut. 22:21 as *aphrosunē,* "folly.") And so, the motif represented in the *Testament of Levi* comes to explain the association of the root *nābāl,* "fool," with the rape of Dinah. The latter was termed a *nĕbālâ not* because it was mere "foolishness"—it was much worse than that!—but because, as a result of the rape, the sons of Jacob "mocked" or made fools of the Shechemites. The Hebrew or Aramaic verb underlying "mocked" here might well be the D-form of the same root *nbl,* which, however, truly means not "mock" but "disgrace." Indeed, that is the whole point of this exegetical motif: the rape of Dinah was called a *nĕbālâ* because, as a result of it, the sons of Jacob *disgraced* the Shechemites, and even today Shechem is known as a "city of fools" in memory of this event.

The author of the *Testament of Levi,* aware of this tradition, tacked it on to the end of his retelling of the Dinah story. But, in so doing, he inadvertently included a reflection of the interpretive expansion of Gen. 34:27 seen above in Judith and *Jubilees,* to the effect that the Shechemites *as a group* were guilty of the rape of

Dinah: "for as a someone mocks a fool, so we mocked them; because *also they* had wrought folly in Israel to defile our sister." The fact that this explanation of the collective punishment of the Shechemites conflicts with the main one presented in the *Testament of Levi* should not be surprising—for, as was noted earlier, double explanations for the same thing frequently coexist in interpretive texts. But this case in particular should not seem surprising, since it comes in the midst of a remark that was tacked on later to a text that originally sought to explain the Shechemites' punishment in quite different fashion.

Gave His Seed to Intermarriage: The passage from *Jubilees* cited above seeks to connect the Dinah episode with the prohibition of intermarriage. But, in the continuation of the section cited, *Jubilees* goes on to make what looks like a strange assertion:

> And if there is any man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is from the seed of the gentiles, he shall surely die; they shall stone him with stones, for he has committed a disgrace in Israel. And also the woman will be burned with fire because she has defiled the name of her father's house and so she will be uprooted from Israel. And let not an adulteress or any uncleanness be found in Israel all the days of the generations of the earth. For Israel is holy to the Lord, and any man who causes defilement shall surely die: they shall stone him with stones. For it has so been ordained and written in the heavenly tablets regarding all the seed of Israel: whoever causes defilement shall surely die; he shall be stoned with stones. And to this law there is no limit of days, and no remission or atonement: the man who has [so] defiled his daughter shall be rooted out of the midst of Israel, because he has given of his **seed to Molech,** and acted impiously so as to defile it. —*Jubilees* 30:7–10

Who is Molech? The reference is to a series of biblical laws found in the book of Leviticus:

> You shall not give any of your offspring to be passed to Molech, and you shall not profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.

> Any man from the sons of Israel or any stranger dwelling in Israel who gives of his offspring to Molech shall die; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. And I myself shall set my face against that man and I shall cut him out from the midst of his people; for he gave of his offspring to Molech, making my sanctuary impure and profaning my holy name. And if any of the people of the land disregard that man when he gives of his offspring to Molech, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and I will cut them off from among their people, him and all the others who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech. —Lev. 18:21, 20:2–5

Molech was a pagan god whose worship apparently consisted of having a child "passed through fire." Burning children as a form of pagan sacrifice is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (Deut. 12:31, 2 Kings 16:3, Jer. 7:31, 19:5, and elsewhere) and is

condemned in the strongest terms. But, perhaps because, in later times, this practice was no longer current, giving one's offspring "to Molech" acquired a new, polemical interpretation: it now meant giving one's child to a gentile in marriage. This is clearly how the author of *Jubilees* understood the prohibition in Leviticus: he says that any father who arranges for his daughter to marry a non-Jew is guilty of giving "of his seed to Molech." And *Jubilees* was not alone in this. A similar interpretation is found elsewhere:

> And do not give of your seed[16] for sexual relations with a daughter of the nations to pass over[17] to idolatry and do not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Lev. 18:21

> ["... who gives his seed to Molech" means] who has relations with a woman from among the Gentiles. — *Targum Neophyti* marginal note to Lev. 20:2

> And do not cast of your seed to impregnate a foreign woman.
> — Peshitta Lev. 18:21

> It was taught in the school of R. Ishmael: ["You shall not give any of your offspring to be passed to Molech," in Lev. 18:21] refers to an Israelite who has relations with a non-Jewish woman and so engenders a son [who will be given over] to idol-worship. — b. *Megillah* 25a

A similar interpretation had been mentioned disapprovingly in the Mishnah:

> One who says that "You shall not give any of your offspring to be passed to Molech" [Lev. 18:21] means "you shall not give of your seed to reproduce[18] with a non-Jew" is to be silenced with a rebuke. — m. *Megillah* 3:9

It is thus no accident that the *Jubilees* passage above specifies the punishment for a Jew who gives his daughter to a gentile for marriage as "they shall stone him with stones." The father's punishment is precisely the punishment Scripture had prescribed for giving one's offspring to Molech, death by stoning. As for the daughter's punishment, burning, it is relatively rare in the Bible; it is mentioned as a punishment only in two instances of "harlotry" (Gen. 38:24, Lev. 21:9) and one similar case of sexual misconduct (Lev. 20:14). Of course, the daughter was not guilty of harlotry per se. But it seems that, to the author of *Jubilees,* she was guilty of something like harlotry, since she apparently went along with her father's plan to marry her off to a gentile. Not reporting this sinful undertaking of her father's would thus be—according to the author of *Jubilees*—precisely the crime that the law of Molech in Leviticus goes on to describe, namely, that of family members of the father who

16. The word in the Leviticus passage translated throughout as "offspring" means, literally, "seed." It seems entirely possible that *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* here interprets this word literally as "semen" and therefore sees in this verse not a prohibition of arranging for one's *child* to marry a gentile, but a prohibition of sexual intercourse with non-Jews.

17. This interpretation of the Bible's wording, "to be passed to Molech," understands the phrase as to *cross over* into idolatry, rather than to *physically* pass through fire.

18. Apparently the biblical phrase "to be passed over" *(leha'abir)* is being associated here (and perhaps in the previous two passages) with the homonymous root meaning "to make pregnant."

"disregard that man when he gives of his offspring to Molech." Such family members are, according to Leviticus, guilty of "*playing the harlot* after Molech." And so, for the author of *Jubilees,* the daughter *was* guilty of a kind of harlotry after all. Therefore he goes on tacitly to compare her to the daughter of a priest who "plays the harlot," since he says of her that she "defiled the name of her father's house," echoing the phrase used of a priest's daughter who is guilty of sexual impropriety: she "profanes her father" (Lev. 21:9).[19] Like the priest's daughter, she was therefore condemned to death by burning. See also: Vermes, "Leviticus 18:21"; Albeck, *Mishnah* 2:505 n; Maori, *The Peshitta Version,* 168–169.

Finally, a tantalizing fragment from Qumran probably addressed the same issue of causing one's offspring to pass over to Molech (that is, intermarry):

> Whoever] lies with[
>]a man as one lies with[
>]to cause to pass[
>]the covenant of God with their hearts[
>
> —(6Q15) *Damascus Document,* fragment 5

The overall context clearly deals with forbidden sexual relations: the first line may have restated the biblical prohibition of bestiality, while the second apparently repeated that of homosexual unions. The lone phrase "to cause to pass" might in other circumstances appear incomprehensible, but given the interpretive tradition traced above, it is a good bet that this line as well referred to a type of forbidden union, namely, one between a Jew and a non-Jew.

True Brothers Indeed: In introducing Simeon and Levi just before their act of revenge, the Genesis narrative contains a strange qualifier: "And two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, *Dinah's brothers . . .*" (Gen. 34:25). This apparently unnecessary mention of Simeon and Levi's family relationship suggested to rabbinic exegetes that a subtle point was being made about the actions of the two brothers:

> If Scripture had simply said "Simeon and Levi," would I not know that they are Jacob's sons? But it says "Jacob's sons" to draw attention to the fact that [although they were Jacob's sons, yet] they did not consult with Jacob. *"Dinah's brothers":* Was she the sister of only these two—was she not the sister of all Jacob's sons? But because they exerted themselves on her behalf she is mentioned in their name. For similarly does it say, "And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister . . ." [Exod. 15:20]—Was she not also Moses' sister? But because Aaron exerted himself on her behalf [see Num. 12] she is called with his name. —*Genesis Rabba* 80:10–11

A similar observation appears in Josephus' retelling:

> Most of the [other brothers] held their peace, but Simeon and Levi, the girl's brothers, born of the **same mother,** mutually agreed on the following course. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:339

19. "Father's house" further echoes another case of sexual impropriety, the one mentioned in Deut. 22:21, wherein the daughter "play[s] the harlot in her father's house."

Swords from Heaven: The Bible says that Simeon and Levi "each took his sword and came upon the city unawares" (Gen. 34:25–26). The word translated "unawares" actually means "with certainty" elsewhere, and so it was understood by the Septuagint translators:

> . . . each took his sword and came upon the city **in safety.**
>
> — Septuagint Gen. 34:25

Understood in this fashion, however, the verse appeared only more problematic: how could two men overcome an entire city "in safety"? Even if their recent circumcision had a disabling effect on the men of Shechem, it seemed unlikely that they would be unable to defend their very lives, all the more so if they had to defend them against only two attackers. Nevertheless, Simeon and Levi launched their attack "in safety" or "with certainty," as if sure of the outcome from the start.

In an effort to understand, interpreters turned to what just preceded the phrase "in safety," namely, the mention of Simeon and Levi's swords. Perhaps they were no ordinary swords but special weapons whose very nature guaranteed that those who bore them would succeed in battle. If so, then not only Gen. 34:25, but the whole narrative, would become more comprehensible.

Thus was born an interpretive motif which held that, in fact, the swords were special weapons given to Simeon and Levi by God:

> O Lord God of my ancestor Simeon, to whom You gave a sword to take revenge on the strangers . . . — Jth. 9:2

> Then the angel brought me down to the earth and gave me a shield and a sword, and said to me, "Execute vengeance on Shechem for the sake of Dinah, your sister."[20] — *Testament of Levi* 5:3

> And Simeon and Levi drew their swords from their sheaths and said, "Behold, have you seen these swords? With these two swords the Lord God punished the insult of the Shechemites [by] which they insulted the sons of Israel, because of our sister Dinah whom Shechem the son of Hamor had defiled. And the son of Pharaoh saw their swords drawn and was exceedingly afraid and trembled over his whole body, because their swords were flashing forth like a flame of fire. — *Joseph and Aseneth* 23:14

If the swords used by the brothers were indeed special, particularly deadly swords, that would explain why Jacob says what he says in his "blessing": "Simeon and Levi are brothers, *weapons of violence* are their stock-in-trade." Jacob highlighted the weapons because they had played such a crucial role in the conquest of Shechem.

This tradition appears likewise to have influenced other tales of heroes:

20. Note that both *Testament of Levi* and Judith speak of a single sword. They may well be reflecting the biblical text, which for technical reasons of grammar gives "sword" in the singular. Certainly exegetes understood that "each took his sword" in Gen. 34:25 meant *two* swords. But perhaps the use of the singular reinforced the idea that God had supplied the means for overcoming all of Shechem, a single, powerful weapon capable of subduing the entire city.

> [The prophet] Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave Judah a golden sword, and as he gave it he addressed him thus: "Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries."
>
> —2 Macc. 15:15–16

See further Kugel, "Story of Dinah."

What Was Jacob's Sword? There was one troubling verse elsewhere in Genesis that seemed to contradict the whole story of Dinah. For later on, when the aged Jacob is addressing his son Joseph, he says to him:

> Moreover, I have given you, over your brothers, one *šekem* which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and bow. —Gen. 48:22

It was not at all clear to ancient interpreters (nor to modern ones!) what the word *šekem* means here. This word is, in Hebrew, identical with the name of Shechem the city, and since Shechem was to be part of territory allotted to Joseph's descendants in the land of Israel, it seems that Jacob may simply be informing Joseph that Shechem will be his. At the same time, *šekem* also means "shoulder" in Hebrew, and so it may be that this verse is actually a punning declaration, "I have given you one *shoulder* over your brothers," that is, one additional portion over that given to all the brothers (see also Gen. 48:5).

But if that is the sense of these words, why does Jacob add, "which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and bow"? That he apparently refers to the Shechemites as Amorites is not particularly troubling, since "Amorites" can serve as a general name for the Canaanite tribes (and, for later interpreters, for any "pagan"). But what role did *Jacob* have in his sons' conquest and slaughter of Shechem? The story of Dinah certainly implies that he was against the whole idea (Gen. 34:30), and his apparent condemnation of Simeon and Levi in Gen. 49:5–7 suggested to interpreters that even as an old man Jacob still blamed his sons for their rash behavior.

Wrestling with this problem, some interpreters took the verse to imply that, Jacob's condemnation notwithstanding, he did not stand idly by during the fighting:

> And behold, I hereby give you the city of Shechem, one portion as an extra gift over your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorites at the time when you went into it [the city]; and I went and helped you with my sword and with my bow. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 48:22

Since Scripture does not mention Jacob ever *helping* his sons, however, perhaps his role was confined to being available:

> [Said R. Levi b. Sisi:] Our ancestor Jacob did not wish his sons to act thus, but when they did so anyway, he said, "How can I allow my sons to fall victim to the nations of the world?" What did he do? He took his sword and his bow and stood at the gate of Shechem and said: "If any foreigners seek to join battle with them, I shall fight on their behalf." This is what is meant

> by the phrase "Shechem, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow" [Gen. 48:22]. — *Genesis Rabba* 80:10

Yet another possibility was to interpret Jacob's reference to his "sword" (or both "sword" and "bow") *metaphorically* as a reference to Simeon and Levi. Such may be the intention behind this brief remark:

> Jacob instructed his sons with regard to punishment, and he would call them **the sword of the Lord,** which is the river of fire[21] prepared with its waves to engulf the evildoers and the impure. — *Testament of Jacob* 7:13

Jacob says he used his sword and his *bow.* But while the Dinah story mentions that the Shechemites were killed at swordpoint (Gen. 34:25–26), it says nothing about the use of bows. Now, it so happens that Jacob's phrase "with my bow," *bĕqaštî,* is written in identical fashion with *baqqāšatî,* "my prayer." If Jacob's role in the fighting is not mentioned in the Dinah story, then perhaps what he is referring to here is not fighting at all, but prayer (a still more powerful weapon): by seeking God's help for his sons, Jacob had in fact secured the victory "with *my* 'sword,' [that is,] with my prayer." Such an interpretation underlies the translation of Onqelos:

> And I have given you one extra portion over your brother's, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my prayer and with my supplication. — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 48:22

The War with the Amorites: Finally, other interpreters dissociated Jacob's "sword" in Gen. 48:22 from the Dinah incident entirely. From early times, apparently, Jacob's words here had been understood by some as referring to an incident other than the revenge of Dinah, one that resulted in the *recapture* of Shechem after the slaughtered city had been settled by someone else, some "Amorites." Such a solution would not only account nicely for Jacob's words, "I have given you . . . Shechem, which *I* took from the hand of the *Amorites* with my sword and bow," but would also resolve the apparent contradiction between these words and the account of Simeon and Levi's revenge in Genesis 34 (where Jacob takes no role and apparently even disapproves of the action).

Jubilees thus understands Gen. 48:22 as referring to a military confrontation at Shechem between Jacob and the "seven kings of the Amorites" (*Jubilees* 34:2–9). This story, whose origins may be very ancient, could eventually have become colored by the actual battles of the Maccabees in their revolt against the Seleucids. The same story also seems to underlie part of the *Testament of Judah* (chapters 3–7), and it is found in some detail in *Midrash Vayyissa'u* (cf. *Yalquṭ Shimoni* 133) as well as in the later collections *The Chronicles of Yeraḥme'el* (chapter 36) and *Sefer ha-Yashar.*

Priestly Garments Transmitted: Still another dissociative approach suggested that what Jacob was giving Joseph in this verse was not the city of Shechem at all,

21. The "river of fire" *(nahar dinur)* mentioned in Dan. 7:10 was the subject of much later speculation. See *Genesis Rabba* 78:1; Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:21, 24.

but the garment[22] that Adam had gotten in the Garden of Eden, which was subsequently passed on by Adam to Seth, Methuselah, Noah, and so forth until Jacob got it from his brother Esau, "the Amorite." (See Chapter 3, *OR,* "Garments Saved.") This tradition is found in *Targum Neophyti* and the *Fragment Targum,* Gen. 48:22.

Levi Was Given the Priesthood: If Simeon and Levi had done well to avenge Dinah the way they did, perhaps the incident *did* have some effect on later history—perhaps the fact that the Levites came to be the priestly tribe was due to the zeal of their ancestor. According to *Jubilees:*

> [T]he Shechemites . . . were handed over to Jacob's two sons, and they [Simeon and Levi] killed them painfully. It was a just act for them and it was written down to their credit. And Levi's descendants were chosen for the priesthood and to be Levites, that they might serve before the Lord as we [angels do,] continually, [so that] Levi and his sons will be blessed forever. For he was zealous to carry out justice, punishment and revenge on all who rise against Israel. —*Jubilees* 30:17–18

Of course, one problem with this notion is that Levi's brother Simeon does not seem to get any reward for his part. Giving the priesthood to Levi because of the vengeance while giving Simeon nothing hardly seemed fair. It is thus interesting that *Jubilees* itself offers two other accounts of Levi's attaining the priesthood: in 31:14 the priesthood is given to him in a special blessing by Isaac, while in 32:3 he is given the priesthood by dint of being the tenth son counting backward! The *Testament of Levi* relates that Levi acquired the priesthood because of a prayer he prayed:

> When I was feeding the flocks in Abel-Maul, the spirit of understanding of the Lord came upon me, and I saw all men corrupting their way, and that unrighteousness had built for itself walls, and lawlessness sat upon towers. And I was grieving for the race of the sons of men, and I prayed to the Lord that I might be saved.
>
> [Then an angel tells Levi:] "The Most High has heard your prayer, to separate you from iniquity, and that you should become to Him as a son, and a servant, and a minister of His presence . . . Levi, I have given you the blessings of the priesthood." —*Testament of Levi* 2:3–4; 4:2, 5:2

Behind this multiplication of traditions in *Jubilees,* the *Aramaic Levi Document,* and the *Testament of Levi* stands a complicated chain of traditions. See Kugel, "Levi's Priestly Elevation." Alternatively, Simeon might have been passed over for the priesthood because he married a Canaanite woman, thus violating the very prohibition that his attack on Shechem was designed to uphold. That Simeon married a

22. Onqelos had translated *šekem* as "portion" (in Aramaic, *ḥûllaq*), and this may represent a very old tradition of its (punning) meaning in the biblical verse. But the similar-sounding *ḥalûq* also means "shirt" in Aramaic, and this translation tradition may thus have generated the notion that Jacob is here referring to Adam's garment from Eden.

Canaanite might be inferred from Gen. 46:10; *Jubilees* 34:20 says so explicitly. For a further explanation, see "The War of Simeon and Levi" below.

The War of Simeon and Levi: There is a certain dissonance in the treatment of the Dinah episode within the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.* For, while the *Testament of Levi* treats this incident at length, the *Testament of Simeon* scarcely mentions it. This is certainly remarkable when one considers how, elsewhere in the *Testaments,* the author seizes on whatever scant details can be found in Scripture concerning Jacob's various sons and elaborates upon them in his homiletic discourse. Why is not a large segment of the *Testament of Simeon* devoted to the Dinah incident, just as a large part of the *Testament of Levi* is?

Equally striking, and not unrelated, is the fact that the *Testament of Simeon* contains an allusion to Jacob's same "blessing" of Simeon and Levi mentioned in the *Testament of Levi* 6:6, but with a significant difference.

> [Simeon tells his sons:] For I have seen in a copy of the book of Enoch that your sons after you will be brought to ruin by fornication, and they will do harm to Levi with the sword, but they will not prevail against Levi, because he will fight the war of the Lord and will conquer your hosts. And they will be few in number, divided among Levi and Judah, and there will be none from you to [attain] sovereignty, as also my father Jacob **prophesied** in his blessings. — *Testament of Simeon* 5:4–6

What Simeon has seen in the "writing of Enoch" (which here seems to mean the preexistent Torah) is that the tribe of Simeon will suffer heavy losses because of "fornication" and will become "few in number." This is indeed what happens later in the Pentateuch: while the tribe of Simeon is numbered at the beginning of the desert wanderings at 59,300 (Num. 1:23), by the time of the second census they are down to 22,200 (Num. 26:14). Where did they all go? An obvious possibility was that they perished in the plague that befell Israel after Zimri's sin with the Midianite woman, the "sin of Baal Peor" (Numbers 25). Zimri was, after all, a Simeonite; his tribesmen doubtless also sinned with other Midianite women, and as a consequence many Simeonites must have died "by fornication" in this plague.

But even if *all* those who died in the plague were Simeonites, that still would not account for all their population losses, for "those that died in the plague were twenty-four thousand" (Num. 25:9), leaving another 13,100 Simeonite dead to be accounted for in some other fashion. It is apparently for this reason that the *Testament of Simeon* adduces another catastrophe that further diminished the Simeonite population: there was some sort of armed conflict between the tribes of Levi and Simeon, and it was that conflict, fiercely fought on both sides, that resulted in Levi's victory (for theirs was the side of justice, "the Lord's war") and Simeon's reduction to "few in number."

Whence did the author of the *Testament of Simeon* deduce the existence of such a war between Simeon and Levi? It seems that this idea was generated by none other than Jacob's "blessing" of Simeon and Levi in Genesis 49. (Simeon seems to say as much at the end of the above-cited passage: what I have just described is "as also my

father prophesied in his blessings.") Apparently, this author chose to understand Jacob's opening words, "Simeon and Levi are brothers, tools of violence are their weapons" (Gen. 49:5) as meaning they are brothers, *yet* tools of violence are their weapons. That is, even though they are brothers, they will eventually come to blows: the tribe of Simeon will attack Levi at swordpoint, but Levi will eventually triumph, and Simeon will be diminished and dispersed. For why else (according to this view) did Jacob decide to join Simeon and Levi together in the same blessing—the only two brothers to be so joined? Certainly he did not do so because their fates were similar! Levi went on to inherit the priesthood, whereas Simeon fell into obscurity and was passed over entirely by Moses in *his* blessings (Deuteronomy 33). Thus, if Jacob joined them together in Gen. 49:5–7, all the while referring to their "tools of violence," bloodshed, and fierce anger, it must have been because he foresaw that these two tribes would be joined in battle.

In fact, it was apparently this war between the tribes of Simeon and Levi that would determine their different fates, for (according to the *Testament of Simeon*) Levi "will fight the war of the Lord and will conquer your [Simeon's] hosts, and they will be few in number, *divided in Levi and Judah,* and there will be none for sovereignty." The indicated phrase appears likewise to be an allusion to Jacob's blessing, specifically, its last line: "I will divide them in Jacob and I will scatter them in Israel" (Gen. 49:7). But here too a radical transformation has taken place: the "them" of Gen. 49:7 no longer refers to the tribes of Simeon and Levi conjointly; only the *Simeonites* will be divided in Israel, territorially and with regard to their future functions. One might have expected that Simeon, Jacob's second son and hence next in line after (the discredited) Reuben, would have inherited one or both of the two great hereditary prizes, priesthood and kingship. Yet, mysteriously, he was passed over for both. This came about, according to the *Testament of Simeon,* at least in part because of the war with Levi: it seems that these *prizes* were likewise "divided among Levi and Judah," leaving neither priestly nor political dominion for Simeon, "and there will be none [of you Simeonites] for sovereignty." (Sovereignty, *hēgemonia,* here probably embraces both the priesthood and kingship, indeed, this is explicitly so elsewhere. Thus [1Q21] *Aramaic Levi* fragment 1 speaks of the "kingship of the priesthood," and the *Testament of Reuben* elsewhere says "For to Levi did the Lord give sovereignty." See also Greenfield and Stone, "Aramaic Levi," 218, and de Jonge, "The Testament of Levi and 'Aramaic Levi.'")

What can be learned from both this passage in particular and from the *Testament of Simeon*'s failure to mention the rape of Dinah or the subsequent revenge? The answer is obvious. The *Testament of Simeon* seeks to deny, or at least pass over in silence, Simeon's role in the affair: the incident itself is not mentioned, and Jacob's blessing of Simeon and Levi—which other texts (including the *Testament of Levi*) explain as talking about the events at Shechem—is interpreted in such a way as to refer to some unknown war between Levi and Simeon. And why is that? It seems likely that, for the author of the *Testament of Simeon* (as for the authors of Judith and *Jubilees*), the revenge on Shechem was entirely a good thing. As *Jubilees* observes:

> And on the day when the sons of Jacob slew Shechem, a writing was recorded in their favor in heaven that they had executed righteousness and uprightness and vengeance on the sinners, and it was written for a blessing.
>
> — *Jubilees* 30:23

As far as *Jubilees* is concerned, not only was the act of revenge "on the sinners" (plural) justified, but it constituted an act of righteousness to be recorded to Jacob's sons' credit in heaven. As we have seen, *Jubilees* elsewhere maintains that it was in part for this act that Levi had been granted the priesthood (*Jubilees* 30:17–18).

Now, the position of the *Testament of Simeon* on the same issue must be deduced from its silence, always a risky procedure. Yet the silence here is almost deafening. For, after all, the great theme of the *Testament of Simeon* is *zēlos*, both "zeal" and "envy." What would have been easier than to have Simeon, in his confessional mode, bemoan the overzealous slaughter of the Shechemites as another instance of *zēlos* gone wild? Or the *Testament of Simeon* could have adopted the somewhat fence-sitting position found in the *Testament of Levi.* It could have admitted that although Jacob condemned the revenge in his blessings because what Simeon had done was indeed against Jacob's will and was another instance of zeal unrestrained, the slaughter turned out to be ultimately justified because the Shechemites had been destined by God to extinction because of their evil ways.

These obvious possibilities are passed up in the *Testament of Simeon,* which even interprets Jacob's "blessing" in Gen. 49:5–7 so as to have it refer *not* to the Shechem incident at all, but to some unknown future battle between the tribes of Simeon and Levi. Apparently, even Jacob's condemnation of his two sons' "wrath" in the incident was too much for the author of the *Testament of Simeon* (or the originator of this interpretation) to bear: he could not stand the slightest implication that there was anything wrong with the brothers' revenge, and so he converted Jacob's words into a condemnation of Simeon alone for some otherwise unknown battle between his descendants and those of Levi.[23] (In similar fashion, *Jubilees* avoids mentioning the contents of Jacob's blessings, dismissing them in a single, broad reference in 45:14.) And, since Simeon's own fate hardly turned out favorably—he was passed over for the priesthood and kingship and omitted entirely from Moses' blessings—the author of the *Testament of Simeon* likewise found it necessary to suppress any connection between Simeon and the revenge elsewhere in the text. It might as well not have happened, for any role that Simeon played in the incident would have (as in *Jubilees*) accrued to his credit and would thus call into question the later fate suffered by Simeon and his descendants.

All this is to say that the *Testament of Simeon* and the *Testament of Levi* seem to present rather different views of the incident at Shechem. The *Testament of Simeon* apparently believed the brothers' act of revenge was altogether good and therefore went through the contortions that we have seen. The *Testament of Levi* took a more balanced view, accepting Jacob's condemnation at face value (while offering one slight justification for Levi's role, namely, that Levi had from the beginning opposed

23. Perhaps he had in mind the Levites' slaughter of their (unidentified) fellow Israelites after the Golden Calf incident (Exod. 32:25–28).

circumcision) but at the same time suggesting that what happened was ultimately in keeping with God's decision to destroy the Canaanites in general. The *Testament of Simeon*'s view is thus in harmony with that of *Jubilees* and (apparently) Judith, whereas the *Testament of Levi*'s once again inclines more in the direction of Theodotus' account, which, at least in the fragmentary form in which it has come down to us, contains no indication that the deed was one of "righteousness" or "uprightness." The contrast between the *Testament of Simeon* and the *Testament of Levi* on this point is potentially significant for an understanding of the evolution of the *Testaments* as a whole.

Dinah Was Asenath's Mother: There was apparently another tradition—not necessarily contradictory to the motif "Dinah Married Job"—that sought to connect the story of Dinah with that of Joseph, which follows it in the Bible. When Joseph is in Egypt, he is said to have married "Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On" (Gen. 41:45). Who was this Asenath? Given the strictures against intermarriage that we have seen, it no doubt pained interpreters to think that the righteous Joseph had married a woman who was not descended from his own people (indeed, that he had married the daughter of a pagan priest!). Was there not some other possibility? Perhaps. For this man, Asenath's father, Potiphera, seemed to have a name very similar to that of Potiphar, another figure in the story of Joseph who is descrbed as a "eunuch of Pharaoh" (Gen. 39:1). If Potiphera/Potiphar was a eunuch, then there was good reason to believe that he was not Asenath's *real* father. But if not, who then was? This tradition identified Shechem as Asenath's real father and Dinah as her mother. Asenath had been born nine months after the episode at Shechem and had subsequently been adopted by the childless Potiphera and brought up as his own daughter. Knowing that Asenath was thus descended on her mother's side from his own family, Joseph had not hesitated to take her as his bride. This tradition, reflected in a number of rabbinic and later texts, has been thoroughly studied by Aptowitzer, "Asenath, the Wife of Joseph."

14

Joseph's Ups and Downs

(GENESIS 37 AND 39–41)

Joseph falsely accused: a collective accusation.

Joseph's Ups and Downs

(GENESIS 37 AND 39–41)

❖ ❖ ❖

Of all his children, Jacob loved Joseph the most, for he was the "son of his old age"; Jacob gave him a specially decorated outer garment. The other brothers hated the young Joseph and eventually conspired to kill him. At the last minute, however, they relented and instead sold him as a slave to a passing caravan. When they returned home, they told Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Meanwhile, Joseph was brought down to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, a high official of the court. He soon rose to the top of Potiphar's staff. But when Joseph refused to be seduced by Potiphar's wife, she accused him of attacking her, and Joseph was put in jail.

In prison along with Joseph were Pharaoh's chief butler and baker. One night, the two had similar dreams, and each asked Joseph to interpret his. Joseph interpreted the dreams correctly and, in keeping with his words, the chief butler was soon restored to his former post, while the baker was executed.

Sometime later, Pharaoh too had a dream, and the chief butler recommended Joseph to interpret it. Joseph was whisked out of jail and brought to the royal court. After hearing the dream, he explained to Pharaoh that it foretold a period of plenty in Egypt, to be followed by a famine. To help prepare for the lean years ahead, Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of storing up and distributing grain to the whole country. Joseph thus became ruler over all of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. Soon enough, the brothers who had betrayed him would come bowing down before him to ask for grain.

THE STORY of Joseph is the longest single narrative in Genesis. Through it all, what stands out is Joseph's abiding trust in God, for although he is unjustly treated on more than one occasion, he does not lose hope or give in to bitterness. As it happens, he not only ends up ruling over all of Egypt, but, in subsequent chapters, manages to use his high office to teach his brothers a lesson in proper conduct. At the end of his long adventure, he is at last happily reunited with his brothers and his father, Jacob.

Unlike many other biblical stories we have seen, Joseph's had little that seemed to *demand* explanation or interpretation. Interpreters instead devoted their energies to retelling his story in such a way as to highlight Joseph's many virtues, as well as to look deeply into its various little details.

One such detail was the matter of his brothers' hatred for Joseph. After all, the Bible says elsewhere that "you shall not hate your brother in your heart" (Lev. 19:17). Why then did Joseph's brothers—the ancestors of God's chosen people and pre-

sumably, therefore, outstanding individuals—hate him so much? Certainly one reason for their hatred according to the biblical narrative was the fact that Joseph was their father's favorite son, as witnessed by the expensive garment that Jacob had given him.

It's a Wise Child

Why should Jacob have favored Joseph over all his other sons? The Bible explains that Joseph was the "son of his [Jacob's] old age" (Gen. 37:3), but this hardly seemed like an adequate reason to ancient interpreters. After all, Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother, was even more of a "son of old age" to Jacob. Since he, no less than Joseph, was a son of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel, there really was no reason for Jacob to favor Joseph over Benjamin. If anything, Benjamin should have been loved more than any of the other brothers.

Considering the situation, interpreters concluded that the Bible must have meant something else by the phrase "son of his old age." If Joseph was not *younger* than all the brothers, perhaps he surpassed them in some other way. Now, in the Bible "old age" is frequently associated with wisdom: "old man" is practically a synonym in biblical Hebrew for "sage" or "wise man" (see, for example, Ezek. 7:26, 26:9, Ps. 105:22, Lam. 5:14, Job. 32:9, Ruth 4:9). Perhaps, then, in saying that Joseph was a "son of his old age," the Bible really meant he was a "son of his wisdom"—that is, Joseph was an exceptionally intelligent child:

> Because he [Joseph] excelled all the other sons of Jacob in wisdom and understanding, his brothers plotted against him.
>
> —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.23.1)

> Thus his father, observing in him a noble mind greater than the usual, marvelled at him and admired him, and he loved him more than his other sons. —Philo, *On Joseph* 4

> When Jacob had begotten Joseph by Rachel, he loved him more than the other sons, both because of the beauty of his body and the virtue of his mind, for he excelled in intelligence. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:9

> And Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than his other sons, for he was a wise son to him. — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 37:3

Eating from the Flocks

Another apparent reason the brothers hated Joseph was that he brought back an "evil report" about them to their father (Gen. 37:2). This report particularly intrigued interpreters. What exactly had Joseph said about his brothers? The Bible itself offered a clue or two:

> These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph was seventeen years old when he was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a youth with the sons of

> Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back an evil report about them to his father. —Gen. 37:2

The verse seems straightforward enough, but on closer examination it may be seen to contain a minor contradiction. First it says that Joseph was shepherding "with his brothers"—presumably, all of them—and then it adds that he was "with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives." The conclusion of interpreters seems to have been that Joseph was indeed shepherding with all of them, but that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah had been singled out for special attention by the text because Joseph's evil report concerned them in particular. And what were the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah doing that was wrong? Again, from the context it appeared to interpreters that Joseph must have reported something concerning their conduct as shepherds:

> [Joseph's brother Gad recalls:] And Joseph said to his father, the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah are killing the best animals and eating them against the advice of Judah and Reuben. He saw that I had set free a lamb from the mouth of a bear, which I then killed, but that I had killed the lamb when I was saddened to see that it was too weak to live; and we had eaten it.
>
> — *Testament of Gad* 1:6–7

> "And Joseph brought an evil report . . ." [Gen. 37:2]. Said R. Meir: [Joseph said:] Your sons are guilty of eating limbs taken from a living animal.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 84:7

Thus, according to this interpretation, Joseph had seen his brothers eating the animals that were put in their charge. Rightly or wrongly, he had reported this back to his father, thus incurring his brothers' hatred.[1]

Resembled Jacob in All Things

However, this same biblical verse also seemed to provide other reasons for the brothers' hatred:

> These are the generations of **Jacob: Joseph** was seventeen years old when he was shepherding the flock with his brothers. —Gen. 37:2

The phrase "These are the generations of Jacob" would, one might expect, normally be followed by a list of Jacob's sons, beginning with the oldest (that is how other such "These are the generations of . . ." work in the Bible). But here there is no list at all. Instead, only one son is mentioned, Joseph. Interpreters thus understood that Scripture was trying to imply by this wording that Joseph was Jacob's son *par excellence,* that, of all his sons, Joseph was the one who was most like Jacob himself:

> [Joseph recalls at the end of his life:] And [God] preserved me to old age in strength and in beauty, for I was like Jacob **in all things.**
>
> — *Testament of Joseph* 18:4

1. The passage from the *Testament of Gad* in fact suggests that it was all a mistake: the lamb in question had been so badly mauled by a bear that it was too weak to live anyway.

> "These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph . . ." [Gen. 37:2]: So it appears that Joseph resembled his father **in all things**, and all that happened to Jacob similarly happened to Joseph. — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyesheb* 1

If so, here was another reason for the other brothers to be resentful.

Deeds of Youthful Foolishness

Finally, the same biblical verse states that Joseph was seventeen years old, but then adds that he was a "youth." This word (*na'ar*) is usually used for boys younger than seventeen—in fact, it is even what Scripture calls the three-month-old Moses (Exod. 2:6). And why, in any case, should the text say that Joseph was a "youth" after it had already told us his exact age? Interpreters therefore concluded that "youth" was intended here to refer to Joseph's behavior rather than merely his age:

> For when he is keeping the flock with his illegitimate brothers [the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah], he is spoken of as young . . . The "young" disposition, then, is one that cannot as yet play the part of shepherd with its true-born brothers. — Philo, *On Sobriety* 12–14

> He was seventeen years old, yet [the text] says he was a "youth"? But this means he did deeds of youthful foolishness: he bedaubed his eyes and smoothed back his hair and raised his heel. — *Genesis Rabba* 84:7

Joseph's immature behavior while shepherding with his brothers, alluded to in Scripture's use of the single word "youth," thus provided yet another good reason for his brothers' hatred.

For the Price of Shoes

Whatever the precise cause, Joseph's brothers did indeed hate him, and that is why they sold him as a slave to caravanners bound for Egypt. One minor detail is left hanging in this part of the story. The Bible says that Joseph's brothers "sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver" (Gen. 37:28),[2] but it does not say what the brothers did with the money. A number of texts, however, contain the somewhat strange assertion that they then spent the money on shoes:

> [Zebulon recalls the incident:] In his [Joseph's] price I had no share, my children. But Simeon and Gad and six others of our brothers took the price of Joseph and bought sandals for themselves and their wives and their children. — *Testament of Zebulon* 3:1–2

> And they sold Joseph to Arabs for twenty pieces of silver and they bought shoes with them. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 37:28

> And each of them took two pieces of silver to buy shoes for their feet. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 38

2. In the Septuagint the text says "twenty pieces of *gold*"; that was probably closer to the price of a slave at the time this translation was made.

The source of this tradition originally had nothing to do with the story of Joseph. Once, in ancient times, the prophet Amos had rebuked the people of Israel in these terms:

> Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke [the punishment]: for their selling a righteous man for silver, and a needy one for a pair of shoes. —Amos 2:6

In these words Amos meant to indict Israel for its lack of pity (for the passage continues: ". . . they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted . . .") as well as for its overall sinfulness.[3] But in time, this general condemnation came to be understood as a specific reference to the story of Joseph. For Joseph certainly was a "righteous man"—righteousness was his outstanding characteristic—and the traditional Hebrew text does say that he was sold "for silver." Who could Amos have been talking about if not him? As a result, the second part of the verse, "and a needy one for shoes," was likewise understood to apply to Joseph, leading to the idea that Joseph's brothers had indeed bought shoes with the money realized on the sale of their brother.

Joseph's Great Virtue

Sold as a slave, Joseph ended up in the house of Potiphar. What took place next—the attempt of Potiphar's wife to seduce Joseph, his steadfast refusal of her advances and, finally, her false accusation against him—was really only one small part of Joseph's tumultuous story. But, for various reasons, the encounter of Joseph and Potiphar's wife eventually came to be seen by ancient interpreters as *the* central episode of his life. His ability to resist temptation came to be seen as Joseph's great virtue, and many suggested that Joseph's rise to power came as a reward for this virtue:

> Remember the deeds of the fathers, which they did in their generations; and receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? Joseph in the time of his distress kept a commandment [that is, the prohibition against adultery], and became lord of Egypt. —1 Macc. 2:51–53

> It is for this reason, certainly, that the temperate Joseph is praised, because by mental effort he overcame sexual desire. For when he was young and in his prime, by his reason he nullified the frenzy of his passions. Not only is reason proved to rule over the frenzied urge of sexual desire, but also over every desire. —4 Macc. 2:2–4

3. Amos 8:6 also makes it clear that reference to "selling the righteous" for silver or shoes does not refer specifically to Joseph, since in this verse personified Israel confesses to "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes."

> You, O Lord, did not neglect Joseph, but gave him to rule over Egypt—a reward of the **self-control** that You enable.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12:24

> R. Yudan said in the name of R. Benjamin b. Levi: [Joseph] was rewarded in kind. Thus, his mouth, which had abstained from sinning [with Potiphar's wife, was rewarded by Pharaoh's words], "You shall be over my house, and *by your mouth* shall all my people be ordered" [Gen. 41:40]; similarly, his neck, which had abstained from sin [in the same incident], was rewarded: "Then Pharaoh . . . put a golden chain around his *neck*" [Gen. 41:42] . . . his body, which likewise abstained from sin, he [Pharaoh] "arrayed in garments of fine linen" [Gen. 41:42].
>
> —*Genesis Rabba* 90:3

The centrality for interpreters of the incident with Potiphar's wife may be seen even in this apparently well-rounded summary of Joseph's life:

> When a righteous man [Joseph] was sold, Wisdom did not desert him, but delivered him from sin. She [Wisdom] descended with him into the dungeon, and when he was in prison she did not leave him, until she brought him the scepter of a kingdom and authority over his masters. Those who accused him she showed to be false, and she gave him everlasting honor.
>
> —Wisd. 10:13–14

Although Potiphar's wife is not mentioned directly, this brief overview nevertheless contains two separate allusions to the seduction story: Wisdom "delivered [Joseph] from sin," that is, from the clutches of his master's wife, and later "those who accused him [namely, of having tried to attack Potiphar's wife] she [Wisdom] showed to be false."

A Very Handsome Man

If early interpreters were fond of celebrating Joseph's virtue in resisting the sin of adultery, they were no doubt also puzzled by one aspect of the story: Why did Potiphar's wife try to seduce her own servant? After all, he was far below her station. Would not a woman bent on adultery turn to one of her social equals, rather than to a mere household slave? But they saw an answer to this question in the Bible itself:

> So [Potiphar] left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and he [Potiphar] had no concern save for the bread that he ate. Now Joseph was **comely of form and comely of appearance**. And it came to pass, after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and said, "Lie with me."
>
> —Gen. 39:6–7

The fact that Scripture went out of its way to assert that Joseph was handsome—indeed, that it used such an emphatic turn of phrase as "comely of form and comely of appearance"—and that, right after this assertion, it went on to recount his mistress's adulterous proposal, both seemed intended to explain why Potiphar's

wife had acted as she did. She found herself irresistibly attracted to the handsome Joseph. As a result, early interpreters placed great stress on Joseph's unique handsomeness:

> She [Potiphar's wife] was driven mad by the youth's handsomeness.
> —Philo, *On Joseph* 40

> [Joseph recounts:] And He [God] gave me beauty as a flower, beyond the beautiful ones of Israel. —*Testament of Joseph* 18:4

> Therefore Joseph was comely in appearance and beautiful to look upon, because no wickedness dwelt in him—for the face makes manifest the troubles of the spirit. —*Testament of Simeon* 5:1

> When Jacob had begotten Joseph by Rachel, he loved him more than the other sons, both because of the beauty of his body and the virtue of his mind.[4] —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:9

Girls Climbing the Walls

The idea that Joseph was uniquely handsome did not derive solely from the Bible's describing him as "comely of form and comely of appearance," however. Another verse in the Bible contributed greatly to Joseph's reputation for being attractive to women, at least according to some interpreters. The crucial verse is found in that series of blessings with which Jacob blesses his sons before his death. When he turns to Joseph, Jacob says:

> Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough upon a spring; the vines climb upon a wall. —Gen. 49:22

Now, the Hebrew of this text is extremely difficult, and the above translation (which appears in many modern Bibles) is merely one way of trying to understand its words. But the phrase it translates as "fruitful bough" literally means only "son of fruitfulness" or "son who has been fruitful." How, then, did translators get the idea that this meant, specifically, a fruitful plant or "bough"? Noticing that this "son of fruitfulness" was said to be "upon a spring" or fountain, they concluded that the fruitful thing being referred to had to be *some sort of plant* whose fruitfulness (the verse seemed to be saying) came from its having been planted next to a source of water.[5] And once this was decided, the last part of the verse—which more literally says, "the daughters climbed the wall"—was interpreted as a further reference to

4. Note that these last two quoted passages are apparently trying to explain why Scripture had said both "comely of form" and "comely of appearance." Josephus and the *Testament of Simeon* both seem to understand this apparent repetition as reflecting two different *kinds* of beauty, physical and spiritual.

5. This idea was reinforced by such biblical verses as Jer. 17:8 and Ps. 1:3, where the righteous man is compared to a tree planted next to a stream.

this same plant, its daughter-*vines.* Hence, "the vines climb a wall." Actually, the roots (so to speak) of this interpretation are quite old:

> My son who will grow great,[6] Joseph, my son who will be blessed **like a vine standing on a spring of water**; two tribes will come forth from his sons [and] they will each receive a portion and inheritance.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:22

Here, not only is the same plant image present, but the daughter-vines are given additional meaning: they represent, specifically, the tribes of Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, each of whom acquired an equal share with Joseph's brothers in Jacob's inheritance.

But there was another way of reading this verse. In this other reading, Jacob calls Joseph a "son of fruitfulness" or "son who has been fruitful" because he is, quite literally, his *son,* and one who has been, and will continue to be, fruitful and great. If so, then there is no reference to a plant here at all,[7] and thus no necessity for the "daughters" to be daughter-vines. They might be simply daughters, ordinary young women. But then, why should these daughters have been mentioned here, what was their connection with Joseph? The verse says, "the daughters climb the wall." Interpreters therefore surmised that the "daughters" or young women in question were climbing a wall or some other high structure in order to *catch sight of Joseph,* the man described in Gen. 39:6 as "comely of form and comely of appearance."

> My son who has grown great, Joseph, my son who has grown great and mighty . . . the daughters of the kings and satraps looked at you [from] upon the windows and listened to you from the lattices.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:22

> And when [the Egyptian sages] praised you [Joseph], the daughters of the rulers [of Egypt] would walk along the walls . . . so that you might look at them. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 49:22

> A growing son, Joseph, a growing son and handsome of mien; the girls ran about upon the wall. — (Vulgate) Gen. 49:22

Elsewhere Jerome, translator of the Vulgate, explained this passage's meaning:

> And the sense of this section is: O Joseph, you who are thus called because the Lord added you to me, or because you are to be the greatest among your brothers . . . O Joseph, I say, you who are so handsome that the whole throng of Egyptian girls looked down from the walls and towers and windows.
>
> — Jerome, *Hebrew Questions in Genesis* 49:22

6. The phrase "son who has been fruitful" is transformed here into a prediction of the future, "my son who will be fruitful," hence, "who will grow great."

7. It so happens that the word for "spring," *'ayin,* can also mean "eye." Interpreters who rejected the plant approach therefore took the verse to be referring to a fruitful son who was "appealing to the eye," "overcoming the [evil] eye," and so forth.

The same tradition may stand behind a scene in a considerably earlier text:

> Joseph said to [Potiphar:] "Who is this woman who is standing on the **upper floor** by the window? Let her leave this house," because Joseph was afraid, saying, "This one must not molest me too." For all the wives and **daughters** of the noblemen and satraps of the whole land of Egypt . . . when they saw Joseph, suffered badly because of his beauty.
>
> — *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:3–4

Cast Down Their Jewelry

Indeed, one version of this interpretation—building further on the word "climb" (*ṣa'adah*) which resembles a Hebrew word for jewelry (*eṣ'adah*)—has the daughters cast their precious jewels and gold in front of Joseph so that he might take notice of them:

> For all the wives and daughters of the noblemen and satraps of the whole land of Egypt . . . when they saw Joseph, suffered badly because of his beauty. But Joseph despised them; and the messengers whom they sent to him with gold and silver and valuable presents Joseph sent back with threats and insults. — *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:4

> The daughters of the kings and satraps looked upon you from the windows . . . and cast down before you their bracelets, rings, and necklaces, ornaments and all kinds of gold, hoping that you might lift your eyes and look at one of them. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:22

> The daughters of the rulers [of Egypt] would walk along the walls and cast down in front of you bracelets and golden ornaments so that you might look at them. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 49:22

> Moreover, Joseph rode in a chariot and crossed the whole territory of Egypt, and the Egyptian girls would climb up on the wall and cast down upon him golden rings that he might perchance look upon their beauty.
>
> — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 39

Thus, the biblical evidence for Joseph's good looks became stronger and stronger. Not only does the Bible refer to him with the emphatic "comely of form and comely of appearance," but ancient interpreters saw in Jacob's blessing of Joseph a further allusion to Joseph's appearance: the young ladies of Egypt were so smitten by him that they cast their valuable jewelry at his feet, just in the hope of stealing a glance. No wonder Potiphar's wife could not restrain her passion!

Joseph Was Not Tempted

According to most ancient interpreters, Joseph reacted to such attentions as a model of chastity and virtue: never once was he even tempted to submit to the advances of

Potiphar's wife. Indeed, in retelling the story, they delighted in exaggerating his resistance:

> And she pleaded with him for one **year** and a second, but he refused to listen to her. She embraced him and held on to him in the house in order to compel him to lie with her, and closed the doors of the house and held on to him; but he left his garment in her hands and **broke the door** and ran away from her to the outside. — *Jubilees* 39:8–9

> [Joseph recalls:] How often did the Egyptian woman threaten me with death! How often did she give me over to punishment, and then call me back and threaten me, and when I was unwilling to lie with her, she said to me: You will be my master, and [master] of everything that is in my house, if you will give yourself to me.
>
> [Even after I was imprisoned,] often she sent to me saying: Consent to fulfill my desire and I will release you from the bonds and deliver you from the darkness. And **not even in thought** did I ever incline to her . . . When I was in her house, she used to bare her arms and breasts and legs, that I might go with her, and she was very beautiful, splendidly adorned in order to beguile me. But the Lord guarded me from her attempts.
>
> — *Testament of Joseph* 3:1–3, 9:1–2, 5

Remembered Jacob's Teachings

At the same time, interpreters wondered what it was that had allowed Joseph to remain unswayed by his master's wife, especially in the face of such pressures as described above. What enabled Joseph to resist? The Bible itself seemed to contain one clue:

> But he [Joseph] refused and said to his master's wife: "Lo, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge; there is no one greater than me in the house, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, in that you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness and **sin against God**?"
>
> — Gen. 39:8–9

Joseph refused to cooperate because it would have been a *sin*. But how could he have known such a thing? Pagan societies might also outlaw adultery, but they certainly would not define it as a "sin against God" (the latter meaning, to ancient interpreters, the one supreme God worshiped by Israel). Thus, Joseph's own words here implied that someone—presumably, his own father, Jacob—had taught him that adultery was a sin against God. Faced with temptation, Joseph must therefore have remembered his father's teachings:

> And his master's wife lifted up her eyes and saw Joseph, and she loved him, and pleaded with him to lie with her. But he did not surrender himself, and he remembered the Lord and what his father Jacob used to read to him from

> the words of Abraham, that no man is to commit adultery with a woman who has a husband; that there is a death penalty which has been ordained for him in heaven before the most high Lord. And Joseph remembered what he had said and refused to lie with her. — *Jubilees* 39:5–7

> But I remembered the words of my father, and going into my chamber, I wept and prayed to the Lord. — *Testament of Joseph* 3:1–3

> Joseph said, "I will not sin before the Lord God of my father Israel nor in the face of my father Jacob." And the face of his father Jacob, Joseph always kept before his eyes, and he **remembered his father's commandments.** — *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:4–5

> Joseph overcame his impulses because of the strong teaching that he had received from Jacob. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 49:24

Saw Jacob's Face

Other interpreters suggested that it was not only the memory of Jacob's teachings, but a strategically timed vision of Jacob's face, that allowed Joseph to stand up in the face of temptation:

> And the **face of his father Jacob** Joseph always kept before his eyes, and he remembered his father's commandments. — Joseph and Aseneth 7:4–5

> R. Huna said in the name of R. Matna: He saw the image of his father and his desire departed. — *Genesis Rabba* 87:8

> "And she seized him by the garment . . ." [Gen. 39:12]: At that moment, the image of his father entered and appeared to him in a vision. — b. *Soṭah* 36b

This motif actually has its origin in another part of Jacob's blessing of Joseph at the end of Genesis. Modern translators generally render the difficult Hebrew of this verse as follows:

> Yet his [Joseph's] bow remained unmoved, his arms were made agile, by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the **Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.** — Gen. 49:24

Ancient interpreters, understanding this verse as a reference to Joseph's resistance to temptation, explained that that resistance came about because Joseph saw[8] the rock (that is, the stone figure or image) of Israel (another name for Jacob). At least the first part of this interpretation appears explicitly in another ancient translation:

> Yet his [Joseph's] bow remained unmoved, his arms were made hasty by his master Jacob; thence there **appeared** the rock of Israel. — *Samaritan Targum* (M) Gen. 49:24

8. This verb is obtained by pronouncing the word *rō'eh* in Gen. 49:24 ("shepherd") as *rā'āh,* "saw."

A Collective Accusation

After Joseph fled from her clutches, leaving his garment behind, Potiphar's wife resolved to turn her frustrated seduction into an accusation of attempted rape:

> And when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house, she called to the people of her household and said to them, "See! A Hebrew man has been brought to us to 'sport' with us—he came into me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. When he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me and fled."
>
> —Gen. 39:13–15

Interpreters were struck by one detail in this false accusation. Potiphar's wife suddenly switches to the plural at one point: "A Hebrew man has been brought to *us* to 'sport' with *us*." The "royal we," as we have seen, is rather rare in biblical Hebrew. Why was she suddenly speaking of "us"?

Ancient interpreters concluded that the plurals were no rhetorical flourish. What Potiphar's wife was actually doing was trying to get the people of her household—particularly the female servants and other women—to join her in accusing Joseph. In the biblical narrative she is Joseph's sole accuser, but interpreters concluded from the "we's" that she must have persuaded others to support her story:

> **Those** who accused him [Joseph] she [Wisdom] showed to be false and gave him everlasting honor. —Wisd. 10:14

> [Potiphar's wife later tells her husband:] "You have brought to us," she said, "a Hebrew boy as a house-servant, who not only led you astray when you casually and without inquiry set him over your household, but now has had the audacity to dishonor my body. For, not satisfied to have availed himself merely of the **women among his fellow slaves**, he has become utterly lustful and lascivious and has sought to lay his hands upon me, the mistress of the house, as well." —Philo, *On Joseph* 51

> "She called to the people of her household . . ." [Gen. 39:14]: She put the righteous one in the mouths of all of them. —*Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 39:14

> She cried out in a loud voice and her servants assembled in order to be witnesses for her, [attesting] not to what she had [actually] wanted to do, but to what she wished to claim. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 35:1

> On that particular day, they all went to their idolatrous rites, but she made herself out to be sick. When her [female] friends came back, they went to visit her. They said to her: What is wrong that your face is thus? She told them the entire episode. They said to her: You have no remedy but to tell your husband thus and so, so that he will shut him [Joseph] up in prison. She said to them: I beg of you—each of you say that he also sought the same from you. And so they did. —*Midrash Abkir* in *Yalqut Shimoni* Gen. 39:14

Pharaoh's Servants Applauded

Clamped into prison because of his mistress's false accusation, Joseph did not lose hope, and soon enough, his rescue came. Having successfully interpreted the dreams of his cellmates, Pharaoh's chief butler and baker, he eventually came to the attention of Pharaoh himself. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream then led to his rapid ascent:

> This proposal [concerning the coming famine and how to head it off] seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the spirit of God?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so wise and discerning as you are; you shall be over my house and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." —Gen. 41:37–40

Thus, in a matter of a few hours, Joseph rose from the status of prisoner to second-in-command of all of Egypt!

Interpreters noticed, however, that Pharaoh's advisers never answered his question—"Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the spirit of God?" On the one hand, the text says that Joseph's interpretation and proposal "seemed good" to them, so perhaps they were happy at Joseph's rise to power.

> All of the pharaoh's princes, all of his servants, and all who were doing the king's work loved him because he conducted himself in a just way.
>
> —*Jubilees* 40:8

> The king, having heard both his interpretation of the dreams, so exactly and skilfully divining the truth, and his advice to all appearance most profitable in its foresight for the uncertainties of the future, bade his companions come closer to him so that Joseph might not hear, and said: "Sirs, shall we find another man such as this, who has in him the spirit of God?" When they with one accord praised and applauded his words . . .
>
> —Philo, *On Joseph* 116, 119

Joseph Had Been Scorned

On the other hand, professional jealousy being as common in ancient times as in modern ones, some interpreters assumed that Pharaoh's question had gone unanswered because his advisers could not bring themselves to praise Joseph. After all, had he not been introduced to Pharaoh a few minutes earlier with the disdainful description "a boy, a Hebrew, a slave" (Gen. 41:12)? Perhaps this description captured what most Egyptians thought of Joseph:

> [Aseneth answers her father's proposal that she marry Joseph:] Why does my lord and father speak words such as these, to hand me over, like a captive, to a man [who is] an **alien**, and a **fugitive**, and was **sold** [as a slave]?
>
> —*Joseph and Aseneth* 4:9–11

Said R. Samuel b. Naḥmani: Cursed are the wicked, for [even when they wish to], they cannot perform a good deed properly. [Thus, the chief butler said:] a youth, that is, a fool; a Hebrew, that is, someone different [from us]; and a slave, for it had been established by Pharaoh in the royal writings that a slave could not become king. — *Genesis Rabba* 89:7

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In short: Joseph was his father's favorite because he was exceptionally intelligent, as well as because he resembled Jacob in all things. His brothers hated him because of their father's favoritism, and because Joseph had reported on their activities while shepherding their flocks. After they sold Joseph as a slave, they used the money to buy shoes. Joseph's greatest act, and the key to his later success, was his resistance to temptation while a slave in Potiphar's house. He was never tempted by Potiphar's wife, because the memory of his father's teachings, and/or a sudden vision of his father's face, saved him from error. In Pharaoh's court, his wisdom was so dazzling that all approved him for high office—although his apparently lowly origins may nonetheless have caused resentment.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Joseph's Ups and Downs

Spotted or Colored? The nature of the special garment given to Joseph by his father, a *kĕtōnet passîm,* was far from clear to early interpreters. While the first word was a fairly common biblical word for a loose-fitting tunic or shift, the significance imparted by the second word was less certain. Interestingly, the same Hebrew phrase actually occurs in one other place in the Hebrew Bible, in the story of Amnon and Tamar (see 2 Sam. 13:18–19); from there, however, one can only learn that a *kĕtōnet passîm* can be worn by women as well as men, and that it is apparently a costly garment. The Septuagint translators described the garment as *poikilos,* meaning "spotted" or "multicolored." On the basis of a phrase in the m. *Nega'im* 11:6, L. Ginzberg has suggested that the phrase refers to an upper garment in which figures are woven. See his *Legends,* 5:329. *Genesis Rabba* associates the word *passîm* with *pas* [*yād*], "palm [of the hand or sole of the foot]" and asserts therefore that the garment "reached the palm of his hand," an understanding reflected as well in the translations of Aquila ("a tunic reaching the ankles") and Symmachus ("a tunic with long sleeves"); see further Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 208.

Eating from the Flocks: According to what Gad says in the *Testament of Gad,* Joseph's evil report had all been a mistake: Joseph saw him eating a lamb from the flock and concluded that he had killed the lamb because he was hungry, whereas in fact the lamb had previously been attacked by a bear and had been so badly mauled that it had to be slaughtered.

Why did the author of the *Testaments* make Joseph out to have been mistaken? It may be that Gad's words here are intended to explain the somewhat strange expression used for "evil report" in Gen. 37:2, *dibbātām rā'āh.* The word *dibbātām* in itself implies an evil report, even slander (Num. 14:36, Prov. 10:18, 25:10). To further describe such an "evil report" as *rā'āh,* "bad," is like saying a "bad evil report" in English. Why did Scripture use an apparent pleonasm? Perhaps the tradition reflected in the *Testament of Gad* understands that the "evil report" was (furthermore) *bad* because it was wrong! If the Bible says that Joseph brought back a *bad* evil report, then it must mean that Joseph had been in error in the evil that he reported.

Three Bad Reports: It is also interesting to observe that rabbinic sources mention three different traditions about Joseph's bad reports:

> "And Joseph brought an evil report . . ." (Gen. 37:2): Said R. Meir: [Joseph said:] Your sons are guilty of eating limbs taken from a living animal. Said R. Judah: they [the sons of Leah] are belittling the sons of the servant women [Bilhah and Zilpah] and calling them slaves. Said R. Simeon: they are setting their sights upon the daughters of the land.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 84:7

The reasoning behind the first tradition is basically the same as that underlying the *Testament of Gad:* since the "evil report" is mentioned in the same verse that says that Joseph was shepherding with his brothers, then it would seem logical that his evil report *concerned* their shepherding. ("Eating limbs taken from a living animal" was certainly something Joseph's brothers ought to have known was a sin, since—by rabbinic interpretation—it was one of the things specifically forbidden since the time of Noah; see Chapter 5, *OR,* "Noahide Laws." Hence it was preferable to connect this universally acknowledged sin—as opposed to merely eating from the flocks, which was not a sin but merely poor shepherding—to Joseph's report.)

The second tradition apparently originates out of the internal contradiction in Gen. 37:2: if Joseph was shepherding with *all* of his brothers, why does the text then add that he was "with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah"? The answer provided here takes its cue from the fact that Bilhah and Zilpah were actually not (as this verse describes them) Jacob's "wives" but his wives' *servants,* whom Jacob had taken as concubines. If the Bible nevertheless calls them his "wives" here, perhaps it is hinting that their inferior status had something to do with Joseph's evil report. But what? Perhaps it was that the *other* brothers were treating the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah as inferiors because of their mothers' inferior standing. Hence, our interpreter says, the other brothers were "belittling the sons of the servant women [Bilhah and Zilpah] and calling them slaves."

The third explanation, that the brothers were "setting their sights upon the daughters of the land," seems to have been engineered to explain the fact that Joseph was later falsely accused by Potiphar's wife: why should this calamity have happened to the righteous Joseph? The answer provided is that that episode was a *divine punishment* for Joseph's evil report: for just as Joseph had said (perhaps falsely, if that is the sense of a "*bad* evil report") that his brothers were seeking to seduce the "daughters of the land," so he would later be falsely accused of the same crime.

Tamar's Righteousness: The story of Joseph is interrupted by the brief narrative of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38). Joseph's brother Judah is now a mature man, the father of three sons. His oldest, Er, dies shortly after marrying Tamar; his second son, Onan, then takes Er's place as Tamar's husband (in keeping with the practice of levirate marriage)—but he too dies. Judah promises her his third son, Shelah, but delays out of fear that he too might meet an early death. Tamar, eventually frustrated by her father-in-law's delaying tactics, dresses up on one occasion as a prostitute in order to trick Judah himself into having relations with her. When, subsequently, she becomes pregnant, Judah declares her guilty of fornication, not knowing that he himself is the father. Tamar is on the point of being executed when she produces the pledged personal items that Judah had unwittingly given to the "prostitute" in lieu of payment. Seeing them, Judah concedes, "She is more righteous than I am" (Gen. 38:26).

This story raised all manner of questions in the minds of ancient readers, but certainly the principal one surrounded Judah's cryptic remark, which seemed to hold the clue to the story's overall significance. (For other aspects of the ancient

interpretation of this story, see Shinan and Zakovitch, *Story of Judah and Tamar;* on Judah's drunkenness in connection with this incident, see Chapter 15, *OR,* "Judah the Drunkard.") What did Judah mean, "*more* righteous"—had he been particularly righteous in seeking out the company of a prostitute or, for that matter, in depriving Tamar of her promised spouse for so long? Meanwhile, Tamar's actions—dressing up as a prostitute, then having relations with her own father-in-law—hardly bespoke great righteousness on her part. Indeed, the story was altogether troubling. (In this connection see Alexander, "Rabbinic Lists of Forbidden Targumim.")

One solution to the immediate problem of Judah's strange remark was to break it in two. In Hebrew this yields: "She is righteous. From me." The first assertion could then be taken in its judicial sense, namely, "She is in the right" or "She is innocent," whereas the second might seem to answer the question just asked by Tamar, "To whom do these [pledged items] belong?" (Gen. 38:25), or perhaps another, larger question: "By whom is Tamar pregnant?"

> And Judah recognized them and said, "She is in the right. She is pregnant from me, on account of the fact that I did not give her to my son Shelah."
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 38:26

> And Judah recognized [that is, admitted] and said, "My daughter-in-law Tamar is innocent, inasmuch as I did not take her for my son Shelah."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 38:26 (cf. Gen. 38:25)

Read in this fashion, Judah's assertion no longer has to do with Tamar's being *more* righteous: he simply acknowledges that she is innocent and that he himself is the father. Yet such a reading hardly solved all problems. After all, was Tamar now *innocent* because it turned out she had committed the act with her father-in-law?

There was another solution. Judah's statement could indeed be taken as a comparison—"Tamar was indeed more righteous than I was"—if what was being compared was not their respective roles in the case at hand (which in any case offered little basis for comparison, since they had done dissimilar things), but their behavior in regard to the one issue they had both confronted, that of choosing a mate. In this matter Judah had not acted laudably. At the tale's beginning he is said to have married a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua, although marriage with Canaanites was clearly undesirable, even forbidden (see Chapter 13, "Intermarriage Is Forbidden"). This marriage must thus have been a great sin, and its ill consequences—in the absence of any other evident teaching in the story—became the point of the whole narrative for ancient readers.

If, therefore, at the story's conclusion Judah says of Tamar, "She is more righteous than I am," was he not speaking of her attitude toward such marriage strictures? Out of this basic hypothesis developed the reasonable supposition that Tamar, although she was not an immediate descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, must nonetheless have come from the same basic stock:

> Judah took as a wife for his firstborn Er one of the **Aramean** women, whose name was Tamar. — *Jubilees* 41:1

> After these things my son Er married Tamar from **Mesopotamia,** a **daughter of Aram.** — *Testament of Judah* 10:1

As such, she, like Judah himself, ought presumably not to have been joined to a Canaanite in marriage. And in this matter, on reflection, she had indeed been "more righteous" than Judah, waiting patiently for Shelah to be given to her and then finally, *en désespoir de cause,* even tricking her own father-in-law into having relations with her rather than resorting to marriage with one of the locals, that is, a Canaanite. Her "righteousness" thus consisted in her avoiding a Canaanite marriage—in contrast to her own father-in-law:

> [Judah confesses:] Being smitten by her [the daughter of the Canaanite Shua], I "fell in" with her and went against the Lord's commandment and the commandment of my fathers and I married her. And the Lord requited me in keeping with my heart's inclination. — *Testament of Judah* 13:7–8

> [Amram said to his compatriots:] "And so did our ancestress Tamar behave, for her intent had not been fornication, but, not wishing to withdraw from the sons of Israel, she thoughtfully declared: It is better for me to die for having become pregnant[9] by my father-in-law than to be mingled with the Gentiles . . . And her intent saved her from all danger."
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:5

Everyone Went to a Festival: We saw earlier that most interpreters held Joseph to have been a model of virtue, not having been tempted in the slightest by the indecent proposal of Potiphar's wife. At the same time, a number of minor details in the story seemed therefore to cry out for explanation. For example, how might one explain some of the strange circumstances surrounding that fateful day in Potiphar's house when Potiphar's wife made one final attempt to seduce him:

> But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and **none** of the members of the household **was in the house,** she caught him by his garment saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and went outside. — Gen. 39:11–12

Of all the family, retainers, and household staff of an important official like Potiphar, the only two people to be present on that particular day were Joseph and Potiphar's wife, a circumstance that certainly struck some interpreters as suspicious. There must have been a reason:

> And so, when it came time for a public festival—one in which women, too, usually frequented the festivities—she pretended to her husband to be sick, for she was eager to be alone and have the leisure to proposition Joseph.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:45

> It was taught in the school of R. Ishmael: that particular day was their festival, and they had all gone to their idolatrous rites, but she told them that

9. On this translation see Chapter 13, *OR,* "Intermarriage Is Forbidden," n. 12.

> she was sick. She said [to herself] that there was no day in which she might indulge herself with Joseph like this day! —b. *Soṭah* 36b

Thus, if there was no one else in the house, this was certainly no accident; there must indeed have been some sort of festival or public assembly that day. But if so, the fact that Joseph and Potiphar's wife stayed behind now seemed more than a little suspicious. Perhaps, indeed, *both of them* had done so intentionally—for what "work" would Joseph have to do on a day when no one else was working?

> R. Yoḥanan said: this [verse] teaches that the two of them [Joseph and Potiphar's wife] had planned to sin together. [For it says,] "He entered the house to *do his work.*" Rab and Samuel [had disagreed on this phrase]; one said that it really means to do his work, the other that it [is a euphemism that] means "to satisfy his desires." —b. *Soṭah* 36b

Apparently to scotch any such rumor, an ancient translation went out of its way to specify the nature of the "work" that Joseph had gone to do:

> And it happened on a certain day that Joseph entered the house in order to check the account books. — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 37:11

A Collective Accusation: This expansion of Gen. 39:14 in turn led to another, the "Assembly of Ladies," whereby Potiphar's wife convenes the ladies of the court for a meal, so that they too could behold her handsome servant. They are so struck by Joseph's beauty that, in some versions, they cut their hands with the knives that they are holding. See further Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 28–65.

Why Wasn't Joseph Killed? For such a grave offense as attempting to rape his master's wife, a slave like Joseph might well have been summarily executed by the Egyptians. Why was he spared? Early interpreters developed a host of different answers. One held that Potiphar's wife herself intervened, telling her husband, "Do not kill him and lose your money, but imprison him" (*Midrash Abkir* and later sources). Another set of traditions asserted that Potiphar actually *knew* that his wife's accusation was false, and therefore he did not have Joseph killed; however, he had Joseph imprisoned to save the honor of his wife and children (*Genesis Rabba* 87:9). And how did he know that Joseph was innocent? A child—perhaps Asenath, Joseph's future bride—told Potiphar of Joseph's innocence (*Yalqut Shimoni* 1:146; also found in Origen and *Sefer ha-Yashar*); an examination of Joseph's garment showed it was ripped from behind, indicating that he was fleeing, not attacking (*Qur'an* 12:25–29; *Sefer ha-Yashar;* cf. Philo, "On Joseph" 52); a ruse of Potiphar's wife involving egg whites was revealed to be false (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 39:14, 20). On these, see Grünbaum, "Zu Jussuf und Suleicha," 524, Aptowitzer, "Asenath, the Wife of Joseph"; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 63 n. 39, 64–65, n. 47.

Pharaoh's Counselors Prevented from Interpreting: Interpreting dreams was a common enough activity, and, as dreams go, Pharaoh's was not all that

challenging. Anyone should have been able to figure it out! As Asenath observes, in seeking to cast aspersions on Joseph and his achievements,

> Is he not a shepherd's son from the land of Canaan, and he himself was caught in the act [when he was] sleeping with his mistress, and his master threw him into the prison of darkness, and Pharaoh brought him out of prison, because he interpreted his dream **just as the old women** of the Egyptians interpret [dreams]? No, I will not be married.
>
> —*Joseph and Aseneth* 4:10–11

Interpreting Pharaoh's dream as Joseph had done was, when one thought about it, really not so special. It seemed strange, then, that this dream should have baffled Pharaoh's own counselors, the greatest sages and wise men of Egypt. An explanation had to be found:

> Pharaoh again saw double dreams, of ears of grain and of cows. Although interpreting them was easy for anyone, their explanation had been hidden even from Pharaoh's wisemen for Joseph's sake.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 35:4

> And Pharaoh told them [his counselors] his dream and it was impossible for any of them to interpret it for Pharaoh for it had been so arranged by God. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 41:8

Other sources, noting that Scripture says that "there was none who could interpret it *to Pharaoh,*" understood this phrase as indicating *to Pharaoh's satisfaction.* They did indeed come up with interpretations—the seven cows represented seven daughters of Pharaoh, or seven cities, or seven kings—but none of these met with Pharaoh's approval. See Ginzberg, *Legends,* 2:66–67.

Joseph Knew Seventy Languages: Given Joseph's status as an ex-slave, an ex-convict, and a foreigner to boot, it did not seem plausible to interpreters that he should have risen to such high office solely on the strength of his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (which seemed, upon reflection, only obvious). Fortunately, there was another passage elsewhere in the Bible that seemed to allude to the same period in Joseph's life and to supply additional details concerning his appearance before Pharaoh:

> Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon on our feast day.
> For it is a statute in Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
> He established it as a testimony in Joseph, when he went out over the land of Egypt:
> "A tongue I had not known I hear."
>
> —Ps. 81:3–5

Actually, in context, the name "Joseph" in this psalm seems not to refer to Joseph himself but to his descendants, and perhaps to the entire people of Israel. (Indeed, the form of the name here in Hebrew, *yĕhôsēf,* is different from the usual spelling of

Joseph's name, *yôsēf.*) The psalm in fact seems to present a series of references to the people of Israel, calling them first by the name "Israel," then "Jacob," then "Joseph."

But this was not how rabbinic interpreters chose to read the psalm. Instead, Joseph here was Joseph *the individual*—even if he had an extra syllable in his name—and the psalmist must thus be talking about the time when Joseph the individual "went out over the land of Egypt." When was that? It so happens that, after Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and Pharaoh put him in charge of the whole country, the Bible says that "Joseph *went out over* the land of Egypt" (Gen. 41:45). Presumably, then, this psalm is talking about just that moment, the time of Joseph's elevation over all of Egypt. But what then does the crucial last line, "A tongue I had not known I hear," refer to? That line seemed to hold the whole key to Joseph's promotion:

> Said R. Yoḥanan: At the time when Pharaoh said to Joseph, "And without your assent no one shall lift up hand or foot . . ." (Gen. 41:44), Pharaoh's astrologers said: "Will you appoint to rule over us a slave whose owner bought him for a mere twenty pieces of silver?!" He replied: "I find royal qualities in him." "If so, then [let us see if] he knows the seventy languages of the world [as a true king should]."
>
> [At once] the angel Gabriel came to teach him the seventy languages, but Joseph could not master them. [Gabriel] then added an extra letter from the divine name,[10] and he was able to learn them, as it says, "He put a testimony in his name, *yehosef,* when he went out over the land of Egypt, [saying,] 'Languages I did not know I [now] understand' (Ps. 81:5)."[11]
>
> —b. *Soṭah* 36b

Some versions of this tradition stipulate that Pharaoh was seated at the time on an enormously high throne that had seventy steps leading up to it. This detail was intended to account for the somewhat strange wording of Gen. 41:40, which in the Hebrew literally means: "Only the throne shall I be bigger [or "make bigger"] than you." See further Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash."

10. The divine name, or even a single letter of it, was held to have special powers. See Chapters 4, 17.

11. This more accurately translates Ps. 81:4 as it is being understood by the interpreter. Note that the plural "languages" can be read in the Hebrew as easily as the singular; similarly, *sāmô,* "he put it," can be read as *šĕmô,* "his name." The Hebrew word for "hear" can also mean "understand."

15

Jacob's Sons in Egypt

(GENESIS 42–50)

Jacob blessed his sons and Joseph's at the end of his life.

Jacob's Sons in Egypt

(GENESIS 42–50)

❖ ❖ ❖

Famine now descended on Egypt, just as Joseph had predicted, and it was not long before Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt in search of grain. When they came before the Egyptian official in charge of grain distribution—Joseph himself—they did not recognize him. He recognized them, however, and accusing them of being spies, threw them into jail. After three days, Joseph set them free, on the condition that they return with their youngest brother, Benjamin, who had not accompanied them to Egypt. Joseph also kept Simeon as a prisoner, to make sure that they would indeed return.

After some time (for Jacob was reluctant to let his youngest son leave), the brothers did return with Benjamin, and Joseph invited them to his house to a feast, while still keeping his identity secret. Afterward, he gave them fresh sacks of grain and sent them on their way. However, Joseph had instructed his steward to hide his silver goblet in Benjamin's sack, and once the brothers had left, he sent his steward in pursuit in order to accuse them of having stolen the goblet. When the goblet was indeed found in Benjamin's sack, Benjamin was seized as the thief. The brothers returned to Joseph, and Judah intervened, offering to be imprisoned himself in Benjamin's place.

Now Joseph could no longer restrain himself; he burst into tears and said, "I am Joseph." He assured his stupefied brothers that he bore them no resentment and told them to go to Canaan and return with their father, Jacob, so that they might all live in Egypt together. This they did, and Jacob and his sons and grandchildren settled in the land of Goshen. Before his death, Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Then he blessed his own sons, each in turn, and asked that, after he died, they make sure to return him for burial in Canaan. They did as he asked. Some time later, just before his own death, Joseph was to make a similar request: "When God remembers you and brings you up out of this land . . . you shall carry up my bones from here."

AFTER REVEALING his true identity to his brothers, Joseph was quick to reassure them of his good will, even though they had sold him as a slave and caused him so much hardship. "Do not be distressed or angry that you sold me here," he said, "for it was God who sent me before you, for sustenance . . . It is not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45:5, 8). Thus, once again, Joseph showed himself to be a model of virtue. His behavior was likewise in keeping with the most

literal interpretation of God's commandment elsewhere, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart . . . You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people" (Lev. 19:19–20).

A Good Reason for Concealing

But, given these facts, interpreters could not help wondering why Joseph had nevertheless put his brothers through the imprisonment, worry, and suspense that he did. If he did not bear any grudge, why did not Joseph identify himself to them as soon as they came down to Egypt to buy grain?

Interpreters generally believed that Joseph must have had a good reason for concealing his identity. Perhaps the very fact that Joseph's brothers did *not* recognize him struck him as extraordinary—as if it was indeed God's will that he keep his identity secret from them. If so, he only acted in accord with this divine hint, disguising with great effort his warm feelings toward his brothers and (as Scripture says, Gen. 42:7) acting like a stranger toward them when in fact he felt otherwise:

> He [Joseph], seeing those who had sold him, immediately recognized them all, though none of them recognized him. It was not **God's will** to reveal the truth as yet, for cogent reasons which were best at the time kept secret . . . [Joseph] forcibly dominated his feelings and, keeping them under the management of his soul, with a carefully considered purpose, he **pretended** . . . to be hostile and annoyed. —Philo, *On Joseph* 165

Similarly:

> If, however, it was because of his [Joseph's] greatness and rank and harsh manner of speaking [to them] that they [the brothers] did not recognize him, this was done by God in order that he remain hidden from them until all his dreams had come to pass through the very ones who had sold him so that they [the dreams] would turn out to be false.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 37:7

Another possibility was that Joseph wished to have news of his family but was not sure that he could trust his brothers enough to question them directly:

> It was in order to discover news of his father and what had become of him after his own departure that he so acted; he moreover desired to learn the fate of his brother Benjamin, for he feared that, by such a ruse as they had practiced on himself, they might have rid the family of him also.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:99

Joseph Tested His Brothers

Or perhaps it was that Joseph himself was bent on *testing* his brothers, manipulating events so as to see if they would once again be guilty of standing idly by as their

younger brother (Benjamin, this time) was unjustly taken from them. If so, the brothers eventually passed Joseph's scrutiny:

> And Joseph devised a plan whereby he might learn their thoughts as to whether thoughts of peace prevailed among them.
>
> And Joseph saw that they were all in accord with one another in goodness, and he could not restrain himself, and he told them that he was Joseph.
>
> —*Jubilees* 42:25, 43:14

> All this and what had gone before was intended to test what feeling they showed under [Joseph's] very eyes toward his own mother's son [Benjamin] . . . This was the reason why he accused them of spying, and questioned them about their family in order to know whether that brother was alive and had not been the victim of a plot . . . This again was why, after inviting them to the hospitality of his table, he entertained his mother's son on a richer scale than the rest, but meanwhile observed each of them to judge from their looks whether they still kept some secret envy . . . Finally . . . he [decided to] pretend that the cup had been stolen and to charge the theft to the youngest, for this would be the clearest way of testing the real feeling of each, and their attachment to the brother thus falsely accused.
>
> —Philo, *On Joseph* 232–235

> This he did to test his brothers and see whether they would assist Benjamin when he was arrested for theft and in apparent danger, or would abandon him, assured of their own innocence, and return to their father.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:125

Joseph Disdained Revenge

Whatever Joseph's precise motive in keeping his identity a secret, one thing was clear from the Bible: Joseph did not harm his brothers, though he certainly had the power to do so. For interpreters, this was a highly significant point, and one that some did not hesitate to expand upon or embroider:

> Promoted to so high a command, invested with the first office after the king, looked up to by east and west, flushed with the vigor of his prime and the greatness of his power, with the opportunity of revenge in his hands, he might have shown vindictiveness; he did not do so.
>
> [Later, Joseph's brothers] recalled how he saw them straightaway on their first trip [to Egypt], when he certainly could have put them to death or, at the very least, refused to provide them with food against the famine, so, far from taking vengeance, he treated them as worthy of his favor, and indeed, he gave them food for nothing [by later ordering that their money be returned to them].[1]
>
> —Philo, *On Joseph* 165–166, 249

1. In the story this detail seems to be part of Joseph's psychological manipulations, but here it is attributed to his generosity toward his brothers.

> [Benjamin recalls:] Joseph also urged our father to pray for his brothers, that the Lord would not hold them accountable for their sin which they so wickedly committed against him. — *Testament of Benjamin* 3:6

> [Simeon says:] And when we went down to Egypt, and he bound me as a spy, I knew that I was suffering justly, and I grieved not. Now Joseph was a good man, and had the Spirit of God within him; being compassionate and full of pity, he bore no malice against men, but loved me just as the rest of his brothers. — *Testament of Simeon* 4:3–4

> And when we went down to Egypt, Joseph bore no malice against us. — *Testament of Zebulon* 8:5

> And Joseph recognized his brothers, but was not known by them. And he did not deal vengefully with them, and he sent and summoned his father from the land of Canaan; and he went down to him.[2] — Pseudo-Philo, *Book of Biblical Antiquities* 8:10

It is clear that, to all these interpreters, Joseph's initial accusation and imprisonment of his brothers as spies, as well as all the subsequent psychological manipulations and machinations, could not have been caused by any lingering resentment on Joseph's part for what his brothers had done to him. He was, on the contrary, utterly forgiving.

Reuben Lost His Inheritance

After Joseph made himself known to his brothers, the whole family was reunited in Egypt and settled there in the rich land of Goshen. But before Jacob died, he made a strange declaration to his son Joseph:

> And now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine: Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the offspring born to you afterward shall be yours; they shall inherit from the share of their brothers [Ephraim and Manasseh]. — Gen. 48:5–6

Apparently, what Jacob does here is officially "adopt" Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, for purposes of inheritance. Thus, instead of the two of them later *dividing* what would have been Joseph's fair share of the inheritance, each of them is to get a whole share on his own, just as Reuben, Simeon, and the other brothers will. And so it indeed turned out. When the Israelites returned to their homeland after the exodus, there was not one tribe called "Joseph," but two separate tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, each with its own (large and fertile) territory.

In effect, then, Joseph ended up acquiring a *double share* of the inheritance for

2. Note that Joseph "did not deal vengefully with them" is all that this author has to say about Joseph's back-and-forth dealings with his brothers. For Pseudo-Philo, the disdaining of revenge was the whole point.

his children. Now this was apparently not an unusual phenomenon in ancient Israel. As a matter of course, the firstborn was given a double share of his father's estate. There was only one trouble. Joseph was not the first-born, Reuben was. In fact, Jacob's giving him a double share of the inheritance seemed to stand in flagrant contradiction to a law later given to Israel:

> If a man has two wives, and one of them is favored over the other; and if they have both borne him children, the favorite wife and the non-favorite, but the firstborn son belongs to the non-favorite; then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not give preference to the son of the favorite wife over the son of the non-favorite wife, the [real] firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the non-favorite wife, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is indeed the firstborn, and the right of the firstborn belongs to him.
>
> —Deut. 21:15–17

This actually sounds strikingly like the case of Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel. For it was clear from the beginning that Rachel was Jacob's favorite; *she* was the one he wanted to marry, and he only ended up with Leah because of Laban's trickery. But Leah had the first child, Reuben. And, as the firstborn, Reuben should have gotten a double portion as his inheritance. Yet it seemed that, by "adopting" Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob was in fact giving a double portion not to Reuben but to Joseph, Rachel's son. Is it possible that Jacob was going counter to the way of the Torah?

Interpreters certainly would have been troubled by such a thought, were it not for a cryptic passage that suggested otherwise. It comes, once again, in the series of blessings that Jacob gives to each of his sons at the end of Genesis, just before he dies.[3] When he turns to bless Reuben, Jacob says:

> Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in pride and preeminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it, you went up to my couch. —Gen. 49:3–4

In Hebrew, these words are more difficult than the translation printed above might suggest. (In fact, *all* translations of this passage are partly guesswork, for scholars today are still puzzled by how the words are to be fitted together.) But the phrases "you went up to your father's bed . . . you went up to my couch" seem, at any rate, fairly clear. They apparently allude to an earlier episode in Reuben's life, in which he is said to have had relations with his father's own concubine, Bilhah. Perhaps it was because this incident was so shameful that it had all but been passed over in silence in the earlier Genesis narrative. For it is related there in a single verse, Gen. 35:22 ("While Israel dwelt in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it").

3. We have already examined two of these, the joint blessing of Simeon and Levi and that of Joseph (see above, Chapters 13 and 14).

In any case, years later, when Jacob gives his final blessing to Reuben, he is apparently still thinking of this incident. And what he seems to say is that *because* "you went up to your father's bed," you will not be getting from me what you otherwise might, "you shall not have preeminence." In other words, because you, Reuben, sinned with Bilhah, you will not be getting the double portion that normally goes to the firstborn. Instead (as Jacob's "adoption" of Ephraim and Manasseh in Gen. 48:5–6 suggests), that double portion has been allocated to Joseph.

None of this is stated openly in Jacob's blessing of Reuben. However, this interpretation of those ambiguous words is actually found in another passage within the Hebrew Bible. It comes in a section far removed from our story, in a parenthetical remark at the beginning of the book of Chronicles:

> The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel (for he *was* the firstborn; but because he defiled his **father's couch,** his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to that birthright) . . . —1 Chron. 5:1

Here, quite unambiguously, Reuben is said to have lost his birthright because he "defiled his father's couch." (In fact, this very phrase is quoted from Jacob's blessing, where Jacob says "you *defiled* it, you went up to *my couch*" [Gen. 49:4].)

This same interpretation of Jacob's blessing of Reuben is found, not surprisingly, among the Bible's ancient interpreters. It not only accounted for a somewhat ambiguous biblical text (Gen. 49:3–4), but also explained why Jacob had actually done nothing wrong in "adopting" Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:5–6) so as to give Joseph a double portion in the inheritance.

> And Israel [Jacob] blessed his sons before he died. And he told them everything that would happen to them in the land of Egypt and he informed them [about] what would happen to them in the last days. And he blessed them and he gave to Joseph a **double portion** in the land. And he slept with his fathers. —*Jubilees* 45:14–15

> Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the beginning of my sorrow . . . The birthright was yours, and kingship and the high priesthood were destined for you. But because you sinned, Reuben my son, the birthright was given to my son Joseph, and the kingship to Judah, and the high priesthood to Levi's tribe. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:3

A similar interpretation may appear in this fragmentary text:

> "Reuben, you are my firstborn, the beginning of my strength, preeminent in pride and preeminent in power. You have been wanton as water—you shall not have preeminence. You went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it; he ascended his couch" [≅ Gen. 49:3–4]. The interpretation is that he reproached him because he slept with Bilhah his concubine and he said "You are my firstborn" [. . .] Reuben was the beginning of his order.
>
> —(4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* 4:3–7

But interpreters still could not help wondering what exactly had happened between Reuben and Bilhah. As we have just seen, this episode is recounted in a single verse, Gen. 35:22—as if the whole matter was too awful to mention.[4] How could one of Jacob's sons, the ancestor of the whole tribe of Reuben, have committed such a reprehensible deed? And how could Bilhah, ancestress of two tribes, have cooperated? Seeking the answer to these questions, interpreters found some help in the very words of Jacob's blessing, cited above.

Bilhah Bathing

A number of ancient sources suggest that there were extenuating circumstances in Reuben's crime. He had not simply approached Bilhah with an indecent proposal. Instead, the whole sorry business came about because he had caught sight of her while she was bathing:

> And Reuben saw Bilhah, Rachel's maid, the concubine of his father, bathing in water in a private place, and he loved [desired] her. —*Jubilees* 33:2

> [Reuben recalls:] Had I not seen Bilhah bathing in a covered place, I would not have fallen into this great iniquity. For my mind taking in the thought of the woman's nakedness would not allow me to sleep until I had done the abominable thing. —*Testament of Reuben* 3:11

The same tradition may be echoed elsewhere:

> Our rabbis said: You [Reuben] sinned **with water,** let one who is drawn from water [that is, Moses] come and bring you back, as it is said, "Let Reuben live and not die" [Deut. 33:6]. —*Genesis Rabba* 98:4

These accounts all reflect a common tradition suggesting that Reuben saw Bilhah bathing. In that sense, then, Reuben's sin was a little like that of David and Bathsheba, which likewise began with David seeing Bathsheba bathing (2 Sam. 11:2). This hardly exonerated Reuben, but the implied comparison might have made his crime seem somewhat less monstrous.

While this interpretation was certainly designed to apologize for Reuben's deed, it is worth pointing out that it is based (however tenuously) on the words of Jacob's blessing:

> Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in pride and preeminent in power. **Unstable as water,** you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it, you went up to my couch. —Gen. 49:3–4

The word "unstable" in the above, standard, translation is itself somewhat free, an attempt to make sense of a difficult phrase. The Hebrew word in question more properly means "immoral" or "wanton"—and so it was understood by ancient interpreters. But how can something be as wanton as water—water *isn't* wanton! In

4. Presumably for similar reasons of modesty, the Mishnah (*Megillah* 4:10) prescribes that this verse not be translated in the synagogue.

the absence of a clear answer, some interpreters apparently combined the reference to "water" with the somewhat similar account of David's sin with Bathsheba in order to suggest that, if Reuben is being compared *to* water (and in a way that did not make much sense), perhaps it was because water itself had something to do with Reuben's crime: Like Bathsheba, Bilhah had been *in water,* bathing, and it was seeing her in her bath that incited Reuben to do what he did. (Indeed, the relatively rare word "wanton" [*paḥaz*] may have further brought to mind the Hebrew root *ḥazah,* "behold, see," and suggested that Reuben had beheld something or someone in water—Bilhah bathing—and had consequently been drawn to sin.)

Bilhah Was Asleep

As for Bilhah, it was significant that Jacob's words make no mention of her. They simply say that Reuben *alone* "went up" to Jacob's bed.

> Unstable as water, you [Reuben] shall not have preeminence, because you [singular] went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it, you went up to my couch. —Gen. 49:4

If Reuben alone went up to Jacob's bed, then it must have been that Bilhah was *already in the bed* when Reuben "went up." (Further, if it was *Jacob's* bed, then Jacob must have been away at the time.) Thus, there was no reason not to conclude that Bilhah had in all innocence gone to bed alone that night, indeed, that she was asleep at the time and, hence, a wholly innocent victim.

> And he [Reuben] hid himself at night, and he entered the house of Bilhah [at night] and he found her sleeping alone on a bed in her house. And he lay with her, and she awoke and saw, and behold Reuben was lying with her in the bed, and she uncovered the border of her covering and seized him,[5] and cried out when she discovered that it was Reuben. And she was ashamed because of him, and released her hand from him, and he fled.
>
> —*Jubilees* 33:3–5

> [Reuben recalls:] For while our father Jacob had gone to Isaac his father . . . Bilhah became drunk and was asleep uncovered in her chamber. Having then gone in and seen her nakedness, I did the impiety, and leaving her sleeping, I departed. —*Testament of Reuben* 3:11–15

> "You went up to your father's bed"—This indicates that he went in to Bilhah when she was asleep. For this reason she was not cursed [by Jacob] along with him. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 42.2

In sum, both participants could point to extenuating circumstances in this sin. Reuben had been led on by the sight of Bilhah in her bath, and Bilhah herself was fast asleep when he had approached to commit his sin.

5. It may be that the text here has been confused in the process of transmission; it would make more sense if it said that *he* (Reuben) "uncovered the border of her covering and seized *her,* and *she* cried out when she discovered that it was Reuben."

Jacob Foretold the Future

Jacob blessed each of his children at his bedside. The "blessing" of Reuben (really more of a reprimand than a blessing), as we have just seen, was understood to fill in some of the gaps in the story of Reuben's sin with Bilhah, as well as to explain why the double portion of the firstborn was taken away from Reuben and given to Joseph. Reuben's was thus a highly significant blessing, as were those parts of the blessings of Simeon and Levi and Joseph examined in earlier chapters. But the blessing that was probably the most significant of all for early interpreters was that of Judah. Once again, the words are cryptic, the translation far from certain:

> Judah are you, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies, your father's sons shall bow down to you.
> Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he lay as a lion, and as a lioness—who dare rouse him?
> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to Shiloh [or "until Shiloh comes"], and to him shall be the obedience of peoples.
> Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes; his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.
>
> —Gen. 49:9–12

This passage had great significance for interpreters in part because of the overall framework of Jacob's blessings. As already noted, some of the blessings seemed to talk about past events: Reuben's sin with Bilhah, Joseph's dazzling appearance and his resistance of temptation, Simeon and Levi's attack on the city of Shechem. Yet when Jacob sets out to utter these blessings, he does not say, "Let me tell each of you what I think of you on the basis of your past deeds." Instead he says:

> Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in days to come. —Gen. 49:1

In other words, however much the blessings make reference to the past, they are essentially predictions of the future—the future of both the individual sons and of the tribes that will spring from them. And this was how interpreters generally viewed them:

> And Israel [Jacob] blessed his sons before he died. And he told them everything that would happen to them in the land of Egypt and he informed them [about] what would happen to them in the last days.[6]
>
> —*Jubilees* 45:14

6. The author thus sees a two-tiered set of predictions in Jacob's blessings: some parts have to do with the immediate future ("everything that would happen to them in the land of Egypt"), other parts with the remote future, the "last days." The same dual scheme may also underlie Josephus' words (in the next quotation): Jacob prays for his sons' immediate happiness, but he also prophesies concerning their descendants in Canaan.

> After passing seventeen years in Egypt, Jacob fell sick and died. His sons were present at his end, and he offered prayers that they might attain happiness and foretold to them in prophetic words how each of their descendants was destined to find a home in Canaan, as in fact long after came to pass. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:194

In short, the blessings contained *predictions,* prophecies. For this reason, the part of Judah's blessing that begins "The scepter shall not depart from Judah. . ." could not but attract attention. In context, of course, these lines clearly refer to the future: in time to come, Jacob is saying, the royal dynasty to be established in Israel will come from Judah's offspring and it "shall not depart." And so it was: King David, who established that dynasty centuries after Jacob's death, was indeed from the tribe of Judah. What Jacob seemed to be predicting, then, was not only that a descendant of Judah—David himself—would end up being king, but also that no one from another tribe would ever take over the kingship, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah."

Kingship Will Not Depart Forever

But, of course, the scepter *did* depart from Judah. Centuries later, the Jewish homeland was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. The king, scion of the Davidic dynasty, was led away in chains, and never again did a descendant of David sit on the royal throne. Instead, the people of Israel went on to suffer a long period of outside domination by one foreign ruler after the next. As time went on, people yearned more and more for the restoration of the Davidic kingship and the military and political power that went with it.

It was at this point that the words of Jacob's blessing of Judah became particularly significant. For, had Jacob been wrong in saying that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah"? *Perhaps not,* perhaps the meaning of these words was not that someone from Judah would always rule Israel (and, that, as a consequence, Israel would never be ruled by foreigners), but that, on the contrary, no matter how much Israel was dominated by foreign rule, it would eventually regain the rule over its own house, that is, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah *forever.*"

Such an interpretation now seemed virtually required by the words of the next line, "until he comes to Shiloh [or "until Shiloh comes"], and to him shall be the obedience of peoples." For whatever the *other* words meant, the "until" seemed to imply that, sometime in the future, something was going to happen to affect the state of affairs in the previous line. Certainly Jacob did not mean to say that the scepter would not depart *until* such-and-such occurred at Shiloh. First of all, nothing had happened at Shiloh (a city in Israel) or anywhere nearby at the time when the people of Israel lost their "scepter" and independence to the Babylonians. And, second, why should Jacob bless his son Judah by telling him that his tribe would rule *until* such-and-such a time? For these reasons, interpreters understood Jacob to be saying that the scepter would not depart *forever* from Judah, that it

would remain, as it were, in storage, until some later point. These words were thus taken as a prediction of the *restoration* of kingship to Judah.

> The ruler shall not depart from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children's children **forever.** — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:10

The word "forever" here does not correspond to any word in the Hebrew original of this verse. Instead, it represents a conscious attempt by this translator to make sense of an ancient prophecy. Jacob could not have meant that kingship simply would not depart from Judah, not even once, since that had not turned out to be true. The real meaning must therefore have been that it would not depart forever, that sometime it would be restored. Similarly:

> [Judah says:] The Lord will bring upon them factions, and there will be continuous wars in Israel, and my rule shall be ended by a foreign people, **until** the salvation of Israel comes, **until** the God of righteousness appears, so that Jacob may enjoy peace, along with all the nations. He will guard the power of my kingdom forever. For with an oath the Lord swore to me that my kingship will not depart from my seed all the days, **forever.**
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 22:1–3

Here, the author makes explicit that Jacob did *not* mean by "The scepter shall not depart" that Judah would always rule. On the contrary, says Judah, "my rule shall be ended by a foreign people." Foreigners will indeed conquer and rule over us. What, then, did "The scepter shall not depart" mean? It meant that "my kingship will not depart from my posterity *all the days, forever.*"

Another King Will Come

In reading Jacob's blessing of Judah in this fashion, interpreters were not only trying to bring their hopes and dreams to bear on a somewhat ambiguous biblical passage. They were also, consciously or otherwise, reading that passage in the light of other parts of the Bible—God's own words to prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah assuring them that Israel's fortunes would indeed someday be restored as before. For it was the great message of these and other prophets that a time was coming, and not far off, when divine justice would once again reign supreme, and afflicted, storm-tossed Israel would return to her former greatness.

A number of such prophetic passages seemed to speak of an individual who would bring about or inaugurate this return. Presumably, this individual would be a king in the Davidic line, "a sprout from the stock of Jesse [David's father]" (Isa. 11:1), who would once again bring justice and righteousness to his people.[7] This figure came, in time, to be referred to by the Hebrew word *māšîăḥ* ("anointed one"),

7. Numerous other passages from the Hebrew Bible suggest that Israel's savior would come from the house of David and, hence, the tribe of Judah. See also: Jer. 23:5, 30:9, 33:15, 17, 22; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Mic. 5:1; Zech. 3:8; 6:11–12.

originally a somewhat elegant synonym for "king." It entered English as the word "messiah."

Did Jacob's blessing refer to such an individual? Not necessarily. But in saying "The scepter shall not depart" he was certainly alluding to the king's power—and it was only a short step from the king's power to the king or ruler himself. It is thus noteworthy that, from the time of the Septuagint on, "scepter" in this verse was sometimes translated or understood as "ruler" (the person) or "king."

> A **ruler** shall not be absent from Judah, nor a **leader** from his loins.
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 49:10

> A **ruler** will not depart from the tribe of Judah so long as Israel has dominion, and he who sits on David's throne [will not be c]ut off.[8]
>
> —(4Q252) *Pesher on Genesis* 5:1–2

> The **ruler** shall not depart from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children's children forever. — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:10

To these interpreters it seemed that Jacob was prophesying not simply about Israel's return to glory but about a particular individual who would preside over this restoration. "Scepter," as a matter of fact, soon came to be understood as a divine codeword for this messiah, the one who would restore Israel's fortunes. Part of the reason is that another passage, one that also seems to predict the coming of such a king, likewise uses the term "scepter": "A star will proceed from Jacob, and a *scepter* shall rise from Israel" (Num. 24:17).[9] Surely this was no coincidence. If both this verse and Jacob's blessing refer to this future individual as a scepter, it must be that "scepter" is the messiah's official title or nickname.

> Then shall the Scepter of my kingdom shine forth, and from your [that is, Judah's descendants'] root shall arise a stem; and from it shall grow a rod of righteousness to the Gentiles, to judge and to save all that call on the Lord.
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 24:5–6

Until a New King Comes

In line with this same tendency, interpreters were inclined to see in the phrase "Until he comes to Shiloh" a further hint about the coming of the expected ruler. The word "until" seemed to imply that this phrase referred to the *time* when the new ruler would arrive.

But what did the city of Shiloh have to do with all this? There was no obvious connection between this old site of a temple (1 Sam. 1:3 and elsewhere) and the future restoration of kingship. Fortunately, the vagaries of the Hebrew writing system, and the rules of Hebrew grammar, allowed for other interpretations.

8. This text represents a double translation, Hebrew *šēbeṭ* being represented in the words "ruler" *and* "tribe." The latter part of this sentence is based on Jer. 33:17.

9. This passage is discussed more fully below; see Chapter 24.

> A ruler shall not be absent from Judah, nor a leader from his loins, until there come the things stored away **for him**; and he is the expectation of the nations. —Septuagint Gen. 49:10

> The ruler shall not depart from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children's children forever; until the messiah comes, **to whom** belongs the kingdom, and to him shall the peoples be obedient.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:10

> . . . until there comes the one **to whom** it [in some versions, "the kingdom"] belongs. —Peshitta Gen. 49:10

> Kings shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor yet scribes teaching the law from the sons of his sons, until the time that the anointed king comes, **to whom** belongs the kingdom. — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:10

The name "Shiloh" does not appear here at all. Instead, these translators apparently understood the same Hebrew letters as "what is his" or "what belongs to him" (*šellô*)—hence, also, "the things stored away *for him.*" Perhaps they were influenced by a similar verse elsewhere in the Bible:

> And you, O unhallowed wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment—Thus says the Lord God: Remove the turban, and take off the crown; this shall not be this [that is, "this shall not remain as it is"] . . . A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it; even this shall not be, until there comes the one **to whom belongs** [*'ašer-lô*, literally, "whose is"] the right, and I shall give it. —Ezek. 21:30–33 (some texts, 25–27)

A Ruler of the World

Lastly, interpreters saw in Jacob's words to Judah a hint that this king or leader, once he did arrive, would be no mere local potentate; his arrival would be heralded worldwide. Consider the last clause of the Genesis verse:

> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to Shiloh [or "until Shiloh comes"], and to him shall be the obedience of **peoples.** —Gen. 49:10

The mention of "peoples" certainly suggested to interpreters some connection between the promised king and the other nations of the world. However, what exactly that connection would be was far from clear, at least judging by this verse; the word translated as "obedience" here (in Hebrew, *yiqqĕhat*) is rather rare and must have puzzled more than one ancient interpreter.

The Septuagint translators apparently associated it with the root meaning "to expect" or "wait for" (*qwh*). This yielded, approximately: "to [or "for"] him is the expectation of the peoples," or, somewhat more elegantly, "he is the expectation of the nations."

> A ruler shall not be absent from Judah, nor a leader from his loins, until there come the things stored away for him; and he is the expectation of the nations. —Septuagint Gen. 49:10

But this rare word does actually occur in one other place in the Bible, where it seems to have a meaning somewhat different from "expectation":

> The eye that mocks a father and scorns the *yiqqĕhat* of a mother will be plucked out by river ravens and devoured by vultures. —Prov. 30:17

The apparent sense of this proverb is that someone who mocks and scorns his parents will die unburied.[10] While the precise sense of the word *yiqqĕhat* is not absolutely clear here either, it seems likely that it refers to something that is normally given or owed to a mother—obedience, respect, and so forth. (This is, in any case, a common theme in Proverbs—see Prov. 1:8, 6:20, 20:20, 23:22, and so on.) If so, then the same word in Jacob's blessing must mean not that nations are "waiting for" or "expecting" him, but that once he arrives, the nations of the world will look to him as children look to their parents— obediently, respectfully, perhaps even fearfully:

> [Isaac blesses Judah:] "Be a prince—you and one of your sons [presumably: in every generation]—for Jacob's sons. May your name and the name of your sons be one that goes and travels around in the **entire earth** and the regions. Then the **nations** will be frightened before you; all the nations will be disturbed; all peoples will be disturbed."[11] —*Jubilees* 31:18

> The ruler shall not depart from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children's children forever; until the messiah comes, to whom belongs the kingdom, and to him shall the peoples be **obedient.**
>
> —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:10

> Kings shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor yet scribes teaching the law from the sons of his sons, until the time that the messiah king comes, to whom belongs the kingdom, and to him shall all the kingdoms be **subservient.** —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:10–11

This last translation in particular reflects belief (supported by other biblical passages, to be sure) in a messiah who will *rule the world.* This notion came to be known to those outside Israel as well:

> But what more than all else incited them [the Jews] to war was an ambiguous oracle, likewise found in their Sacred Scriptures, to the effect that at that

10. That is, since he has failed to honor his parents, his children will not honor him, even failing to perform the duty of burial, the most basic filial obligation.

11. It is not certain that the author of *Jubilees* is consciously referring to Gen. 49:10 here—after all, the speaker is Isaac, not Jacob. But Jacob's blessings do not appear in *Jubilees* in any case, and it seems clear that here, as in Gen. 49:10, the subject is the grant of kingship to the tribe of Judah. On balance, therefore, it certainly seems plausible that the mention of the nations' "fright" (the same term in Hebrew means "respect") may indeed be a reflection of the word *yiqqĕhat* in Gen. 49:10 and Prov. 30:17.

> time one from their country would become ruler of the **world.** This they understood to mean someone of their own race, and many of their wise men went astray in their interpretation of it. The oracle, however, in reality signified the sovereignty of Vespasian, who was proclaimed emperor on Jewish soil. —Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6:312–313 (also 3:399–403)

> An old and long-standing belief had spread throughout the orient to the effect that it was fated at that time for the rulers of Judaea to hold sway over **all things**. This prediction—which later events showed to have referred to the Roman emperor—the Jews attributed to themselves, and rebelled.
> —Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4:5 (see also Tacitus, *History* 5.13)

If the "peoples" in Gen. 49:10 suggested a worldwide ruler, the verse that follows, with its evocation of wine growing and abundant vineyards, was eventually interpreted in keeping with the same idea. For it was not a far jump from the "blood of the grape"—an elegant kenning for wine in Gen. 49:11—to blood pure and simple (cf. Isa. 63:1–6).

> How pleasing is the messiah king who is destined to rise from the house of Judah, who girds his loins and goes out to do battle against his enemies and kills kings and rulers, reddening the mountains with the **blood** of their slain and whitening the valleys with the fat of their men. His clothes are wallowed in **blood**, like one who presses grapes. —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:10–11

At the same time, worldwide conquest might lead to worldwide peace, the same peace spoken of so frequently by Israel's prophets and visionaries. Perhaps this was another reason for the mention of other "peoples" in Gen. 49:10.

> [Judah says:] The Lord will bring upon them factions, and there will be continuous wars in Israel, and my rule shall be ended by a foreign people, until the salvation of Israel comes, until the God of righteousness appears, so that Jacob may enjoy peace, along with all the **nations**.
> —*Testament of Judah* 22:1–2

Why Did Joseph Put It Off?

After Jacob finished blessing his sons, he died, and—in keeping with his wishes (Gen. 47:29–30)—his last remains were transported to Canaan for burial. When Joseph died some years later, he made a similar, but not identical, request:

> And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die; but God will remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph caused the sons of Israel to swear, saying "God will remember you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." —Gen. 50:24–25

This request struck ancient interpreters as rather strange. For why indeed did not Joseph ask that his bones be taken up to Canaan right away, as Jacob had requested?

Why wait until the time when "God will remember you"? Several answers were proposed:

> And he [Joseph] put them [his brothers] on oath regarding his bones, for he knew that the Egyptians would not take him and bury him in the land of Canaan. For Makamaron, king of Canaan, while living in the land of Assyria, fought in the valley with the king of Egypt . . . and the gate of Egypt was shut, and no one went out of Egypt and no one went in. And Joseph died . . . and they buried him in the land of Egypt. —*Jubilees* 46:6–8

> The bones of Joseph the Egyptians kept in the treasure-houses of the palace, since their wizards told them that at the departure of Joseph's bones there would be darkness and gloom in the whole land and a great plague on the Egyptians, so that even with a lamp no one could recognize his brother. —*Testament of Simeon* 8:1–3

> Joseph was the one who buried his father—and there was none among the brothers greater than him [Joseph] . . . Who then was there greater than Joseph [who might in turn bury him, and so maintain the principle of "buried by someone greater"]? . . . It was Moses who was found worthy [to take care] of Joseph's bones [and for this reason Joseph had to wait for final burial until the time of the Exodus]. —m. *Soṭah* 1:9

According to *Jubilees,* a war had caused the Egyptian border with Canaan to be sealed, so that Joseph's bones could not be transported immediately. Knowing this, Joseph therefore asks his brothers to make sure that he would eventually be buried there. According to the *Testament of Simeon,* the Egyptians were planning to hide Joseph's bones in order to prevent the Exodus and the accompanying plagues, which had been predicted by Pharaoh's "wizards." It is for that reason (for Joseph has been forewarned, or else has foreseen these events himself) that he makes his strange request. According to the Mishnah, Joseph knew that his bones would have to wait until the time of Moses for him to have been buried by someone even greater than himself.

But how did Joseph know that there *would* eventually be an exodus? For he asserts, as if it were a fact known to him, that one day "God will remember you, and bring you up out of this land" (Gen. 50:24). Interpreters concluded that Joseph, like other ancestors of Israel, must have been blessed with prophetic gifts:

> By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. —Heb. 11:22

Joseph's statement to his brothers that "God will remember you" indicated to interpreters that the events that were to follow—the enslavement of the Hebrews and their subsequent redemption—were known to Joseph at the moment of his death. Believing that the redemption would indeed come about, he requested "by faith" that his bones be transported at that time.

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: Joseph never sought revenge against his brothers for what they had done to him. Instead, his accusations against them and his manipulations of them were designed to test them or to teach them. Because of his virtue, Joseph was granted the double portion normally given to the firstborn. Reuben had lost this privilege as a result of his sin with Bilhah, which, however, was not as reprehensible an act as it might have appeared: there had been mitigating circumstances, and Bilhah herself was in any case quite innocent. Jacob's blessings, given to his sons before his death, foretold the future of the people of Israel; in particular, his blessing of Judah predicted a restoration of Israel's fortunes by a future king. Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan was honored immediately after his death. Joseph, however, requested that his remains be brought to Canaan only at the time of the Exodus.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Jacob's Sons in Egypt

Why Didn't Joseph Contact His Father? Joseph's apparent lack of concern for his father troubled interpreters. Why for all those years did he fail to get word to Jacob that he was still alive? Several answers were proposed:

> But though Joseph had prospered for nine years, he did not send for his father, because he was a shepherd, as were Joseph's brothers; and to the Egyptians it is disgraceful to be a shepherd. That this was the reason why he did not send for him he himself made clear. For when his relatives came, he told them that if they should be summoned by the king and asked what their occupation was, they should say that they were breeders of cattle.
>
> — Demetrius the Chronographer, Fragment 2
> (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.21:13)

Another approach was simply to see Joseph as negligent in this regard—and therefore to explain the false accusation of Potiphar's wife as having been a divine punishment for Joseph's thoughtlessness in not contacting Jacob:

> When Joseph found himself thus [promoted to supervisor of Potiphar's house], he began to eat and drink and curl his hair and said: "Blessed is the Lord who has caused me to forget my father's house [that is, the pain of separation]." Said God to him: "Your father is grieving for you in sackcloth and ashes and you are eating and drinking and curling your hair? Now your mistress will join battle with you and will make your life miserable."
>
> — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyesheb* 8

The origin of this tradition is apparently the sentence that Joseph speaks upon the birth of his son Manasseh, "For God has made me *forget* all my hardship and *all my father's house*" (Gen. 41:51).

But Jacob may have known in any case that his son was alive. How? Scripture says that, after the brothers had soaked Joseph's garment in blood to make it look like some accident had occurred,

> They brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; see if it is your son's garment or not." And he recognized it and he said, "My son's garment—a wild beast has devoured him, Joseph has been torn to pieces."
>
> — Gen. 37:32–33

Why should Jacob say that a *wild beast* had devoured his son? Joseph might as easily have been murdered by bandits or met his end in some other way. Interpreters therefore explained Jacob's words differently:

> Said R. Huna: The spirit of prophecy glimmered in him and he said *a wild beast has devoured him,* meaning the wife of Potiphar.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 84:19

> And he recognized it and he said, "It is my son's garment, but a wild beast did not eat him, nor has he been killed by human beings, but I see through the holy spirit that a wicked woman has risen up against him."
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 37:33

Changed Appearance: When they came down to Egypt in search of grain, the brothers went before Joseph; why did they not recognize him right away? True, he was dressed as an Egyptian and spoke Egyptian—still, he *was* their brother, and they knew he must be somewhere in Egypt. It thus seemed strange to interpreters that the brothers did not figure things out right away. There must have been a reason:

> Therefore He [God] either changed or added grandeur to the appearance of the regent [Joseph] or else perverted the understanding of the brothers from properly apprehending what they saw. — Philo, *On Joseph* 165

Perhaps it was simply that Joseph was now older:

> He recognized his brothers, but they had no thought of him, for he was but a lad when he parted from them and had reached an age when his features had so changed as to make him unrecognizable to them.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:97

> For he had left them with fullgrown beards, so Joseph recognized his brothers (Gen. 42:8), but they, who had not left him with a fullgrown beard, did not recognize him. — *Genesis Rabba* 91:7

Alternately, by saying that the brothers did not *recognize* Joseph at this point, what Scripture wished to do was to suggest a connection with their earlier behavior. For, in selling him as a slave, they had failed to *recognize* that he was in any case their brother and therefore deserving of mercy:

> And Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but they had not recognized him in that they had had no pity upon him [when he was at their mercy]; but Joseph now recognized them in that he had pity upon them [and did not have them killed]. — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyigash* 5

Joseph Foreshadowed Jesus: The theme of Joseph having suffered without wishing any ill to those who caused his suffering suggested to early Christians another instance of the Old Testament foreshadowing the New. A Christian editor of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* apparently added a few details to heighten this correspondence:

> And [Joseph] spent in the pit three days and three nights.[12]
>
> — *Testament of Zebulon* 4:4

12. The Genesis narrative does not say how long Joseph was in the pit, but it seems to have been only a few minutes or hours at the most (Gen. 37:25). Thus, the mention of three days and three nights here is most likely a reference to the New Testament, Matt. 12:40, although it is to be noted that Jonah likewise is said to spend three days and three nights in the belly of a fish (Jon. 1:17, Septuagint version). See also Hos. 6:2.

> Therefore, Simeon and I sold him to the Ishmaelites for **thirty** pieces of gold, and ten of them we hid, and showed the twenty to our brothers.[13]
>
> — *Testament of Gad* 2:3–4

> [Benjamin recalls:] Joseph begged our father to pray for his brothers, so that the Lord would not count as a sin against them the evil that they had done to him. And Jacob cried out: My good child, you have touched your father Jacob to the innards. And he embraced him and kissed him for two hours, saying: Through you shall be fulfilled the prophecy of heaven concerning the Lamb of God and Savior of the world, and that a blameless one shall be betrayed by lawless men, and a sinless one shall die for ungodly men by the blood of the covenant, for the salvation of the gentiles and of Israel.
>
> — *Testament of Benjamin* 3:6–8

How Many Extra Portions? When the brothers are invited to feast with Joseph in his house, Scripture mentions that "Benjamin's portion was five times greater than all of theirs" (Gen. 43:34). Assuming that the other brothers had a normal amount of food, this must have meant that Benjamin's plate was piled embarrassingly high. It is apparently for this reason that Josephus modified the text in his retelling:

> But Joseph, while entertaining them all with cordiality, honored Benjamin with **double portions** of the dishes before him.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:123

The author of *Jubilees,* by contrast, was not embarrassed. It is not clear why,[14] but his retelling actually increases the proportion of Benjamin's share:

> And they ate before him and he gave them all a portion, but the portion of Benjamin was seven times larger than that of any of theirs. — *Jubilees* 42:23

One thing that may have figured in this author's thinking was the frequent use of "seven" in the biblical world: all kinds of things come in sevens, from the seven days of creation to the seven cows in Pharaoh's dream. But *five* is a far less common biblical number. Thus, the Bible's stipulation of the size of Joseph's portion seemed to call out for explanation:

> A crucial question arises as to why Joseph gave Benjamin a fivefold portion at the meal even though he would not be able to consume so much meat. He did this because six sons had been born to his father by Leah, whereas

13. The "thirty" seems designed to evoke the sum paid to Judas in the Gospel narrative (Matt. 26:15). Note that while both the traditional Hebrew text of Genesis and the Gospel of Matthew speak of "pieces of *silver,*" the *Testament of Gad* follows the Septuagint text of Genesis in speaking of "pieces of *gold.*" The *Testament of Gad* adds that Simeon and Gad *hid* ten of the gold pieces to account for the mention of only twenty pieces in the biblical text.

14. Perhaps *Jubilees* was influenced by some piece of arithmetic similar to that (obviously ancient one) attributed to Demetrius the Chronographer (see below). According to the manuscript tradition of the Demetrius fragment, Benjamin's portion plus Joseph's equaled seven in all. If so, some "seven" tradition may have infiltrated the account of *Jubilees* and undergone further distortion.

> only two sons had been born to [Jacob] by Rachel, his [Joseph's] mother. For this reason, he [Joseph] served up five portions for Benjamin and he himself took one. Thus there were between them six portions, that is, as many as all the sons of Leah had taken.[15]
>
> —Demetrius the Chronographer, Fragment 2 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.21:14)

Some rabbinic texts present another way of getting to the number five:

> "And he gave them portions" (Gen. 43:34): He brought out portions in the feast and gave each of them his own portion. He [thus] gave Benjamin a portion; then Joseph took his own portion and gave it to Benjamin, Asenath [Joseph's wife] gave hers to Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh gave theirs too, and as a result Benjamin ended up having five portions.[16]
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyigash* 4

And why did Joseph do all this? Philo offered his own, rather satisfying, psychological explanation:

> This again was why . . . after inviting them to the hospitality of his table, he entertained his mother's son [Benjamin] on a richer scale than the rest, but meanwhile observed each of them to judge from their looks whether they still kept some secret envy. —Philo, *On Joseph* 234

Such an explanation would certainly be acceptable to those who, like Philo, saw all of Joseph's manipulations of his brothers as some sort of test.

Joseph's Non-Divining Goblet: Joseph instructed his steward to hide his goblet in Benjamin's sack and, when it is found there, to accuse him of stealing it with these words: "Is this not what my master drinks from? And what is more, *he uses it for divination;* you have acted very badly" (Gen. 44:5). The association of Joseph with divining is reinforced when, after the brothers return to him with the steward, Joseph says, "What is this that you have done? Did you not know that a man like me *would surely divine it* [= figure it out]?" (Gen. 44:15).

But the idea that Joseph should even *claim* to be a diviner and a practicer of

15. There are problems with the numbers in the manuscript tradition of this passage; I have followed the emendations suggested by other editors. See Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 1:84–86.

16. "Portion" in this retelling is not the word used in the Bible, but another Hebrew word (*manah*) that can mean both portion and something closer to our word "treat" or "delicacy." (For this latter sense in rabbinic Hebrew, see, for example, *Genesis Rabba* 87:4, "When my father would see a nice *manah* he would give it to me.") Perhaps the midrashist is assimilating the biblical word for "portion" to this second sense in order to suggest that Joseph gave all the brothers some *hors d'oeuvre* or preliminary tidbit, and it was in regard to this "portion" that Benjamin ended up with five times that of the others. (It hardly seems reasonable to believe that, according to *Tanḥuma*, Joseph, his wife, and two sons all gave up their entire meals to Benjamin and sat there without eating!) Limiting the fivefold portion to some sort of *hors d'oeuvre* strains the reader's credibility somewhat less. See also the explanation offered by the commentary on *Midrash Tanḥuma, Eṣ Yosef*, ad loc.

auguries may have disturbed some interpreters. After all, divining had been specifically outlawed elsewhere in the Torah (Lev. 19:26). In *Jubilees,* the steward's accusation, put in Joseph's own mouth, reads:

> [Joseph reproached his brothers:] "Do you not know that a man **takes pleasure** in his cup, as I do in this cup. And you stole it from me!"
>
> — *Jubilees* 43:10

(See on this VanderKam, *Jubilees,* 285 n.) Likewise:

> "Is this not what my master drinks out of, and he [also] conducts tests with it." — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 44:5

> "Did you not know that a man such as I conducts tests?"
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 44:15

Similarly, Philo and Josephus both assimilate the phrase "he uses it for divination" to the Greek custom of toasting and pledging over wine (Greek *propinō*) and so avoid the implication that Joseph was a diviner.

But some rabbinic and later sources seem, on the contrary, to take delight in the implication that Joseph claimed to be a diviner, using it to explain in greater detail the events of the feast to which Joseph had invited his brothers the previous day:

> Said R. Naḥman b. Isaac: When he invited them to the feast, he wished Benjamin to be placed next to him, but he did not know how to accomplish this [without giving away his identity]. So he took his goblet and struck it [like a diviner] and said to them: "I might have thought that Judah was the firstborn [of you], since he is the one who speaks first. But now I see [in my goblet] that Reuben is the firstborn and Judah is simply talkative." He then put Reuben at the head of the diners. He took his goblet again and struck it and said: "Simeon, come and take your place next to him, for you are second in line." Then he did the same with Levi and Judah and all of them [the sons of Leah] in the order of their birth. Then he took his goblet again and struck it and said, "I see in the goblet that all of you are the sons of one father [as Joseph had been told in Gen. 42:11] but that your father had many wives." He then called to Dan and Naphtali and he said to them, "Come, take your places," until he had them all placed according to the order of their birth. When Benjamin was the only one left, he said to him, "I see that this one had a brother who became separated from him, and that his mother is no longer alive. As a matter of fact, I likewise had a brother who became separated from me, and my mother is likewise no longer alive. Let him therefore come and sit next to me." And he did indeed sit next to him, as it is written, "And they sat in front of him, the firstborn in keeping with his birthright, and the youngest in keeping with his youth" [Gen. 43:33].
>
> — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Wayyigash* 4

This expansion wonderfully explains why Joseph could later say to his brothers, "What is this that you have done? Did you not know that a man like me would

surely divine it?" (Gen. 44:15). For after such a demonstration at dinner, they certainly *should* have thought he could divine anything! What is more, this account also nuances the meaning of Scripture's observation that, at Joseph's banquet, the brothers "sat in front of him, the firstborn in keeping with his birthright, and *the youngest in keeping with his youth;* and the men looked at one another in amazement" (Gen. 43:33). The phrasing is, of course, intended to suggest that they were seated in order of their birth, starting with the oldest. Still, why did not Scripture simply say that they were seated "each according to his years"—that is, why did it specifically mention the firstborn and the youngest, implying that there was something special about the way these two were placed? Moreover, what was so amazing about Joseph being able to guess the ages of the brothers? Perhaps he simply had a good eye for ages. And certainly he already knew that Benjamin was the youngest—what, then, was so difficult in seating "the youngest in keeping with his youth"? The answer presented here is that there was indeed some *exceptional* piece of divination connected with two brothers in particular, the oldest and the youngest. In the case of Reuben, Joseph was able to "figure out" that he was the oldest in spite of Judah's apparent role as spokesman for the group. To be able to know this really did seem to require divination. As for Benjamin, Joseph not only knew that he was the youngest, but also "divined" that it was *his* brother who was no longer among them (Gen. 42:32), as well as that his mother had died. Here again was an extraordinary piece of divination—so of course "the men looked at one another in amazement" (Gen. 43:33). Moreover, since there is something special about the placement of these two brothers in particular—Reuben at the head of the brothers, and Benjamin at the opposite end of this group—it may be that Scripture sought to imply that these two had ended up sitting *closest to Joseph* (who dined separately, Gen. 43:32). In other words, this interpreter seems to suggest that, in seating the brothers in the order of their birth—presumably in some sort of great circle or rectangle—Joseph had thus arranged things so that Reuben and Benjamin, sitting where the circle or rectangle closed, would also be closest to him; that is why Scripture says that the brothers "sat *in front of him,* [specifically] the firstborn in keeping with his birthright, and the youngest in keeping with his youth" (Gen. 43:33). There is an echo of this tradition elsewhere:

> He [Joseph] arranged his brothers—**as if by means of the divining goblet**—"the firstborn in keeping with his birthright, and the youngest in keeping with his youth" [Gen. 43:33] . . . Joseph struck it [the goblet] and arranged them in order. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 37:7, 38:3

66 + 3 = 70? A glaring mathematical contradiction seems to come in the list of Jacob's descendants who went down to Egypt. For, after listing the individual names, the Bible observes:

> All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own offspring, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all; and

> the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob that came into Egypt **were seventy.** —Gen. 46:26–27

The trouble is, they weren't! Sixty-six plus Joseph and his two sons make sixty-nine, not seventy. To resolve the difficulty, many rabbinic sources add in Jochebed, the daughter of Levi. She is actually said to have been born to Levi *in Egypt* (Num. 26:59), and was presumably for that reason omitted from this list (since it consisted only of those who "came into Egypt" [Gen. 46:8, 26–27], not of people who were *born in* Egypt, except, of course, for Joseph's Egyptian-born sons). If, however, Jochebed had been born just as they were entering Egypt, then she could be said both to have been born *in Egypt* (as per Num. 26:59), yet also be counted among those who *entered* Egypt. This would add one more person and bring the total up to the required seventy.

> All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own offspring, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all; and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him, were two, along with Joseph, who was [already] in Egypt, and Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born as they entered Egypt, between the walls; the total of all the persons of the house of Jacob that entered Egypt was seventy.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 46:26–27

Another possibility was to include Jacob himself in the number, or God Himself, or Serah the daughter of Asher (mentioned in Gen. 46:17 but apparently not counted), or yet others (see *Genesis Rabba* 94:9).

It is interesting that the list of actual names that *precedes* Gen. 46:26–27 also appears to be at odds with its final summation. For this list contains *subtotals:* The children of Jacob's wife Leah are said to have totaled thirty-three (Gen. 46:15); those of Zilpah, sixteen (Gen. 46:18); those of Rachel, fourteen (Gen. 46:22); and those of Bilhah, seven (Gen. 46:25). Adding these subtotals together, one does indeed end up with a grand total of seventy. Josephus, who was doubtless bothered by the problem of $66 + 3 = 70$, ignored Gen. 46:26–27 in his retelling and concentrated instead on the preceding list and its subtotals. This allowed him to come up with the required seventy names while specifically excluding Jacob from the total (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:183).

The translation of the Septuagint agrees with none of the above. For, in listing the descendants of Joseph, it includes the sons and grandsons of Ephraim and Manasseh (these do not appear in the traditional Hebrew text), five in all. Adding five to the traditional total of seventy, one obtains seventy-five—and this is indeed what appears in the Septuagint version of Gen. 46:27. However, the mathematics of the Septuagint likewise appears difficult, since it says:

> And all the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, who came out of his loins, besides the wives of the sons of Jacob, were sixty-six. And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in the land of Egypt, were **nine** souls; all the souls of

> the house of Jacob who came with Joseph into Egypt were seventy-five souls. — Septuagint Gen. 46:26–27

Nine plus sixty-six does indeed equal seventy-five—but where did these "nine" come from? Joseph plus his two sons and their five descendants make only eight![17] Here too was a problem. Incidentally, the Septuagint's total of seventy-five also appears in the Septuagint version of Exod. 1:5 (as well as in one Exodus manuscript discovered at Qumran) and, in the Septuagint manuscript Codex Alexandrinus, at Deut. 10:22 (the traditional Hebrew text and other Greek manuscripts have "seventy" in Deut. 10:22). Philo seeks to justify the discrepancy between Exod. 1:5 (in his text, seventy-five) and Deut. 10:22 (seventy) by suggesting that the extra five represent the five senses (*Migration of Abraham* 199–201). The same total of seventy-five appears in the New Testament, Acts 7:14, influenced by the Septuagint.

Finally, *Jubilees* presents a total of sixty-nine *plus* Jacob himself in order to arrive at seventy. However, its way of arriving at sixty-nine names does not correspond to that of the traditional Hebrew text. Pseudo-Philo's list (*Biblical Antiquities* 8:11–14) is confused and the names do not agree with the numbers. See further Charles, *APOT* 2:75 n.

Ephraim's Blessing Foreshadowed the Church: We saw that Jacob's adoption of Joseph's two sons had the effect of giving a double portion of Jacob's inheritance to Joseph. Scripture further reports that, in blessing Joseph's sons, Jacob "crossed his hands" and blessed the younger, Ephraim, with his right hand (Gen. 48:14). In context, this is an indication that, though the younger, Ephraim will prove to have sired the mightier tribe (Gen. 48:19). But early Christians saw in this act a foreshadowing of the triumph of Christianity:

> And in another prophecy Jacob speaks more clearly to Joseph his son, saying, "Behold, the Lord has not deprived me of your presence; bring your sons to me, that I may bless them." And he brought Ephraim and Manasseh, intending that Manasseh, because he was the older, should be blessed, for he brought him to the right hand of his father Jacob. But Jacob saw in the Spirit [that is, prophetically] a symbol of the people to come [namely, Christianity]. And what does it say? And Jacob **crossed his hands,** and placed his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the second and younger, and blessed him. And Joseph said to Jacob, "Transfer your right hand to the head of Manasseh, for he is my firstborn son." And Jacob said to Joseph, "I know, my child, I know, but the greater will serve the lesser. Yet this one too shall be blessed." Observe how, by these means, he has ordained that this people should be first, and heir of the covenant. — *Letter of Barnabas* 13:4–6

The same interpretation is found frequently among later writers.

17. It is as eight that they are counted in the subtotals of the Septuagint, which therefore—to make matters worse—only total seventy-four when added up, not the seventy-five reported in Septuagint Gen. 46:27.

Reuben Not Guilty: If *Jubilees* and the *Testaments* suggested extenuating circumstances that led up to Reuben's sin with Bilhah, some rabbinic texts went even further: they held that Reuben in fact committed no sin at all!

> Was the righteous Reuben guilty of fornication? Heaven forfend! Rather, after Rachel died, Jacob took Bilhah and put her on the bed [formerly occupied by Rachel]. When Reuben saw this he acted zealously and went and upset the bed, and Scripture considers this [as serious] *as if* he had lain with her. — *Genesis Rabba* 97 (new numbering; see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 1205)

> Said R. Samuel b. Naḥmani, R. Yoḥanan said: Anyone who says that Reuben actually sinned with Bilhah is mistaken. For it says immediately afterward, "And the sons of Israel were twelve" [Gen. 35:22], and this is to teach that all of them were considered equal [that is, Reuben had *not* sinned and so entered a class by himself]. But if so, then how can I explain the words "And Reuben lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine" [Gen. 35:22]? It means that he changed his father's bed around, and Scripture considers this [as serious] as if he had lain with her.
>
> It is taught: R. Simeon b. El'azar said: That righteous man [Reuben] was saved from sin and that evil deed was not committed by him—for [otherwise,] would it be possible that his offspring be destined to stand on Mt. Ebal and say, "Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife" [Deut. 27:20] if this sin had been committed by him?! But how then can one explain the words "And Reuben lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine" [Gen. 35:22]? . . . He was requiting an insult to his mother [Leah]. For he had said: Just because my mother's sister [Rachel] became a co-wife with my mother [instead of Leah being Jacob's *only* wedded wife], then should my mother's handmaiden [Bilhah] likewise be a co-wife? That is why he went and changed around her bed. — b. *Shabbat* 55b

A number of factors contributed to this "whitewash," but certainly the most important is the refusal of Jacob, out of a sense of modesty, to speak directly of Reuben's crime in Gen. 49:3–4. Instead, he used the delicate circumlocution "went up to your father's bed . . . [and] defiled it." Taking advantage of this circumstance, the above interpreters turned Reuben's crime into one of merely disturbing the furniture. In support of this approach, these exegetes could perhaps point to the mention in Gen. 49:4 of "your father's *beds*" (in the plural; see also 1 Chron. 5:1). After all, if Jacob said *beds,* then he surely must not have been reproaching Reuben for having sinned with Bilhah, since that would, presumably, involve only one bed; since the text says "beds," perhaps Reuben's sin had instead to do with the *beds themselves,* in the plural because he was upset about two beds, his own mother's and Bilhah's.

Another contributing factor was the Bible's use of the verb "defile" here. For "defile" *(ḥillēl)* in biblical and especially Mishnaic Hebrew is a technical term connected with ritual purity; why should the Bible say here that Jacob's couch

became *defiled?* It must therefore have appeared to interpreters that this word was being used metaphorically, that Reuben had merely "upset" *(Genesis Rabba)* his father's bed. Indeed, the words for "upset" used in connection with this motif—*bilbēl* or *qilqēl*—may have been chosen so as to echo slightly (and so explain) the Bible's use of *ḥillēl* in this context.

Finally, the reading from *Genesis Rabba* cited above ("Rather, after Rachel died . . .") is that found in the Paris, Oxford, Vienna, and other manuscripts, as opposed to versions that read, "Rather, after his mother Leah died . . ." See on this reading Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 1205. Since Rachel's death is mentioned just prior to the incident (Gen. 35:18), "Rachel" certainly seems to make more sense. The "Leah" reading may, however, assume that Leah's death (mentioned only obliquely in Gen. 49:31) occurred shortly after Rachel's. If so, then it was just after Leah's death that Jacob brought her servant Bilhah to occupy the bed previously occupied by Leah. Reuben, enraged, overturned it and thus requited the insult to his mother.

Reuben's Illness: According to one ancient tradition, Reuben was struck with a life-threatening illness after his sin:

> [Reuben says to his brothers and children:] I solemnly admonish you today by the God of heaven, that you not walk in the ignorance of youth and impurity to which I gave myself up and defiled the bed of my father, Jacob. For I tell you that He struck me with a severe wound in my loins for seven months, and if our father, Jacob, had not prayed to the Lord on my behalf, the Lord would have destroyed me. For I was thirty years old when I did this evil thing before the Lord, and for seven months I was **sick to the point of death.** — *Testament of Reuben* 1:6–8

The idea that Reuben became ill as a result of his sin is reflected as well in one rabbinic tradition:[18]

> Raba said [that Jacob told Reuben:] "You remembered the punishment for the thing [that you did], then you became sick with a dread disease, then you ceased to sin." —b. *Shabbat* 55b

The story of Reuben's disease may have originated with some dissatisfaction with the lightness of Reuben's apparent punishment (losing his double portion of the inheritance) in the Bible. Still, was there any scriptural indication that Reuben had ever been punished with a near-fatal disease?

Two factors seem relevant here. The first is the wording of Moses' blessing of Reuben at the end of Deuteronomy, "Let Reuben live and not die, and may his numbers be many" (Deut. 33:6). This is a strange thing for Moses to say long after Reuben's death! Some exegetes, therefore, may have thought these words of Moses

18. This explanation is actually an attempt (one of several) at explaining the difficult word *paḥaz* in Gen. 49:3 by seeing in each of its letters a shorthand *(noṭariqon)* for a whole word. See further Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba* 1205.

were an allusion to some time when Reuben was still alive but in danger of dying—that Moses was quoting a prayer used when Reuben was ill. Such a prayer—especially since it turned out to be efficacious—must have been prayed by Reuben's own father, Jacob. And so it is noteworthy that the *Testament of Reuben* not only suggests that Reuben was punished with a deathly illness but then adds, "and if my father, Jacob, had not prayed to the Lord on my behalf, the Lord would have destroyed me."

Moreover, Philo attributes the words "Let Reuben live and not die . . ." to *Jacob,* in spite of their inclusion in Deuteronomy:

> And while Abraham prays, as we have said, that the grace of hearkening to holy words and learning holy truths may live, **Jacob,** the Man of Practice, prays for the life of natural goodness, for he says, "Let Reuben live and not die." —Philo, *On the Change of Names* 210

This may be not a lapse of memory on Philo's part but simply another reflection of an exegetical tradition that held Moses' words "Let Reuben live and not die . . ." to be a quotation from an earlier prayer prayed by Jacob on Reuben's behalf when he was deathly ill.[19] See on this and related topics, Kugel, "Reuben's Sin with Bilhah."

As Reuben Lay Dying: The second point is that, in the passage just cited from the *Testament of Reuben,* Reuben specifies that he was thirty years old when he committed this sin. (By contrast, *Jubilees,* a source often used by the *Testaments,* says that Reuben was twenty-one at the time.) Now, according to the chronological framework of the *Testament of Reuben,* Reuben was exactly thirteen years older than Joseph (see *Testament of Reuben* 1:1–2). In other words, Joseph was seventeen at the time of Reuben's sin. But seventeen is precisely the age of Joseph when, according to Scripture, he was shepherding with his brothers:

> These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph was seventeen years old when he was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. —Gen. 37:2

We saw earlier (Chapter 14, "Resembled Jacob in All Things") that interpreters were bothered by the fact that the words "These are the generations of Jacob" were not followed (as one would normally expect) by the name of Jacob's firstborn, Reuben. Why "Joseph"? It may be that the *Testament of Reuben* specifies Reuben's age as it does to suggest that Reuben, having just committed his sin with Bilhah, was now mortally ill (he remained so for a period of seven months, this testament says). Alluding to this situation, Scripture says, "These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph . . ." For Reuben was nowhere to be seen—he lay on his deathbed—and it

19. About this verse the medieval Jewish commentary *Ḥizquni (Ḥazzequni)* explains: "*Let Reuben live and not die*—Since he sinned against his father's honor [with Bilhah] he was worthy of death, as it says, 'Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be lengthened . . .' [Exod. 20:12] [implying] that if you do not honor them, your days will be shortened! That is why he said, '. . . and not die.'"

was Joseph who, because the original firstborn had sinned and now lay dying, was in line to become the new firstborn.

Reuben's Punishment Still Greater: According to 1 Chron. 5:1, as we have seen, Reuben was punished for his sin by losing his birthright. But some interpreters saw his loss as even greater than that:

> Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the beginning of my force. You were slated to receive three portions, the birthright [of the firstborn], the priesthood, and the kingship. [But] because you acted in keeping with your own inclination, just like water, you have not profited: you shall not receive an additional portion. For you went up to your father's bed, thereby profaning my couch. My son, you have gone up.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:3–4

> Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the beginning of my sorrow; you were worthy of taking three extra portions over your brothers: the birthright which was yours, and the kingship and the high priesthood. These were worthy to [be given to] you. Because you sinned, Reuben my son, the birthright was given to my son Joseph and the kingship to Judah and the high priesthood to the tribe of Levi.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:3–4

The idea that Reuben also lost the hereditary priesthood and the kingship for his descendents likewise came to be connected to Jacob's blessing of Reuben:

> Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, **preeminent in pride and preeminent in power.** Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it, you went up to my couch. —Gen. 49:3–4

The word translated as "pride" here really means "lifting up." These interpreters apparently saw in it an allusion to the two priestly functions of lifting up sacrifices in the Temple or lifting up their hands to bless the people. As for "power," it quite naturally suggested the political and military power of the king.

> "Preeminent in 'lifting up'"—for to you [Reuben] was destined the high priesthood, and "lifting up" refers to the high priesthood, about which it is said, "And Aaron lifted up his hands to the people and blessed them" [Lev. 9:22]. And "preeminent in power"—for you were destined the kingship, and "power" refers to the kingship, as it says, "And he will give power to his king" [1 Sam. 2:10]. — *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Buber ed.), *Wayḥi* 11

Poured Out Like Water: It was mentioned that in Jacob's blessing of Reuben, the word rendered by some modern translators as "*unstable* as water" actually means something closer to "wanton." The root *pḥz* is found, for example, four times in the Hebrew fragments of Ben Sira (Sir. 4:30, 8:2, 41:17, 42:10), suggesting that this word, though somewhat erudite, was still in use in Second Temple times.

Its apparent meaning there is connected with immorality (specifically, sexual immorality in 41:17 and 42:10). A similar meaning of "immorality" (and perhaps "arrogance") attends the use of this root elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Judg. 9:4, Jer. 23:32, and Zeph. 3:4. Thus, early interpreters of Jacob's blessing of Reuben would most likely have understood Jacob to be reproaching his son for having been immoral or arrogant "as water." (Thus the Septuagint translated the word *paḥaz* here with the Greek verb *exubrizō,* from the root meaning "wantonness, insolence.") But this nuance only heightened the problem, for how can *water* be "immoral" or "insolent"? Out of this the "wanton *in* water" tradition developed. For a brief history of the word *paḥaz* in biblical and later Hebrew, see Greenfield, "The Meaning of PḤZ"; also idem, "The Words of Levi Son of Jacob in *Damascus Document* IV 15–19."

This tradition notwithstanding, there is another, independent interpretation of this phrase—one that is also attested in *Testament of Reuben:*

> [Reuben says to his brothers and children:] I solemnly admonish you today by the God of heaven, that you not walk in the ignorance of youth and impurity **to which I gave myself up** and defiled the bed of my father, Jacob.
>
> — *Testament of Reuben* 1:6

In another translation:

> See here, I call the God of heaven to witness to you this day, so that you will not behave yourselves in the ways of youth and sexual promiscuity **in which I indulged myself** and defiled the marriage bed of my father, Jacob.
>
> — *Testament of Reuben* 1:6 (*OTP* 1:782)

The phrase "to which I gave myself up" or "in which I indulged myself" literally means "in which I was *poured out*" (Greek *exechuthēn*). While this word is sometimes used in Greek for giving oneself over to an emotion, it seems that the author of this testament may have chosen it specifically to suggest another significance to the mysterious description of Reuben as "unstable [or "wanton"] *as water*"—Reuben was *poured out* (as water is) when he indulged himself with his father's concubine. Such an interpretation would only have been supported by a similar expression in the book of Psalms. Referring likewise to turbulent emotion (here, apparently, fear) the psalmist says, "I have been *spilled out like water,* and all my bones are pulled apart" (Ps. 22:14). If "*spilled out* like water" means "given over to uncontrollable emotion," then perhaps that was the import of Reuben's being "like water" in Gen. 49:4. It is noteworthy that the Septuagint translation of Ps. 22:14 renders "spilled out" with the same Greek word used in the *Testament of Reuben,* namely, *exechuthēn.*

The idea that Reuben's assertion in *Testament of Reuben* 1:8 that he was "poured out" is in fact an allusion to a then-common explanation of Gen. 49:4 is considerably strengthened when one considers Jerome's translation of this same verse:

> [Jacob says to Reuben:] "You were poured out like water."
>
> — (Vulgate) Gen. 49:4

Jerome's "you were poured out" *(effusus es)* is the exact Latin equivalent of *Testament of Reuben's exechuthēn.*

The same basic idea of water as representing overflowing emotion may underlie the expansive translation of this phrase shared by *Targums Neophyti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan* and the *Fragment Targum.*

> Reuben, my son, I compare you to a little garden into which rushing streams have entered, and, unable to withstand them, it [the garden] is spoiled by them—for just so, Reuben my son, have you been spoiled despite your good deeds. [But] the sin that you committed you will commit no more and it will be forgiven you for your sin.[20] —*Fragment Targum,* ms. V, Gen. 49:4

Somewhat differently:

> You have "wandered like water" which has left its [proper] channel and irrigated another land. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 42.2

Yet another tradition sees in the mention of water an allusion to Reuben's character:

> [But] because you acted in keeping with your own **inclination,** just like water, you have not profited: you shall not receive an additional portion. For you went up to your father's bed, thereby profaning my couch. My son, you have gone up. —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:4

> You have flowed in all directions like water, you do not stand.
>
> —Peshitta Gen. 49:4

Apparently, Reuben is like water because he "went with the flow"; he did not stand on his own by resisting his inclination to sin but, like water, simply descended to the lowest level. Onqelos' next phrase, incidentally, "you have not profited: you shall not receive an additional portion," is really a double translation of the Hebrew *'al tōtar.* The first phrase relates the apparent root, *ytr,* to financial gain or profit (this sense is not common in Mishnaic Hebrew, but it appears frequently in the biblical book of Ecclesiastes). The second phrase associates the root *ytr* to its more frequent meaning of "be extra" or "additional."

Similar is the Septuagint's rendering,

> You have run out of control like water, do not boil over,
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 49:4

where both verbs used, *exubrizō* and *exzeō,* work well with the image of overflowing (indeed, the phrase "like water" above could conceivably be construed as modifying either verb). On the former translation, see Levine, "*Hubris* in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities.*" On the Septuagint and later Greek versions, see Salveson, *Symmachus,* 59–60. The verse is mentioned as well in a Qumran text:

> "You have been wanton [*pḥzth*] as water, you shall not have preemi-

20. The text apparently understands the Hebrew as if it read as follows: "Wanton as water, you shall no more [sin]. For you have come up from [the sin of] your father's lying-down; you profaned my bed *then,* [but now] you have come up."

> nence . . ." [≅ Gen. 49:4]—its interpretation [*pšrw*] is that he [here] rebuked him for having lain with his concubine Bilhah. He said: Reuben, you are my firstborn [. . .] Reuben was the first of his lineage [. . .]
>
> —(4Q252) *Genesis Pesher*

Apart from the slightly different wording of the biblical text, what is remarkable about this "interpretation" *(pesher)* is that it is so unremarkable, a quite straightforward version of Jacob's blessing in its biblical context. It is, however, possible that this passage went on to more elaborate or actualizing interpretations in its continuation, alas, now missing. See further Kugel, "Reuben's Sin with Bilhah."

Another King Will Come: It was seen earlier that the word "scepter" in Jacob's blessing of Judah in Gen. 49:10 was interpreted as referring to a human being, a future leader.

> A **ruler** shall not be absent from Judah, nor a leader from his loins.
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 49:10

> A **ruler** will not depart from the tribe of Judah so long as Israel has dominion, and he who sits on David's throne [will not be c]ut off.[21]
>
> —(4Q252) *Genesis Pesher,* col. 5, 1–2

> The **ruler** shall not depart from the house of Judah, nor the scribe[22] from his children's children forever. —*Targum Onqelos* Gen. 49:10

> **Kings** shall not cease from the house of Judah.
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Gen. 49:10

Interestingly, this same word, "scepter," was used in another verse, one that was also understood as a prophecy:

> [Balaam said:] "A star shall proceed from Jacob, and a **scepter** from Israel."
>
> —Num. 24:17

Since both verses were uttered in the context of predictions of "the end of days" (Gen. 49:1, Num. 24:14), the reference in Num. 24:17 to a "scepter" arising from Israel could hardly be seen as coincidental. Balaam and Jacob must have been talking about the same thing. As a result, these two verses were often cited jointly, twin testimonies concerning Israel's future leader; see further Chapter 24, "A Ruler of the World."

Not surprisingly, the idea that the word "scepter" referred to a *man* and not merely to the symbol of kingship is reflected in regard to this later verse as well:

> A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a **man** shall spring out of Israel.
>
> —Septuagint Num. 24:17

21. This text represents a double translation, with the Hebrew *šēbeṭ* represented in the words "ruler" *and* "tribe."

22. For more on the Septuagint's "leader" vs. "scribe" in Onqelos, etc., see Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition,* 49–55.

> When a king arises from Jacob and **an anointed one** [*mĕšîḥā'*] is installed . . . — *Targum Onqelos* Num. 24:17

Underlying this understanding may be not merely wishful thinking but a bit of careful philology. For while the Hebrew word *šēbeṭ* does usually mean "staff" or "tribe," there are a few verses where this word must mean something like "leader." Prominent among these are Moses' words to the Israelites before his death:

> You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God: your leaders, your "tribes" [*šibtêkem*], your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel. — Deut. 29:9 (some texts, 10)

"Your leaders, your tribes" just doesn't work: every other word in this list (and it continues into the next verse, Deut. 29:11) refers to individual people, and it is only logical that "tribes" does so as well. Disturbed by this problem, the Septuagint translators apparently construed "your leaders, your tribes" as what is called, in Greek rhetoric, a *hendiadys,* two nouns whose conjunction is in reality intended to convey a single idea, sometimes via a genetive relationship:

> You all stand today before the Lord your God: your **heads of tribes,** your elders. — Septuagint Deut. 29:10

But it need not be so. The word *šēbeṭ* might simply mean "leader" in this verse, a natural metonymic extension of the meaning "[ruler's] staff" common elsewhere in the Bible. This same sense of *šēbeṭ* as "leader" is found in Josh. 23:2 and 24:1 and 2 Sam. 7:7 ("the word that I spoke with one of the 'tribes' of Israel," restated quite properly in 1 Chron. 17:6 as "the word that I spoke with one of the *leaders* [*šōpĕṭê*] of Israel"). Another example might be Deut. 33:5, which should perhaps be translated: "And He became king in Israel when the heads of the people assembled, *all the leaders* [not "the tribes"] *of Israel.*" (See further Falk, "*Šôpēṭ* and *Šēbeṭ,*" along with the learned correction of Loewenstamm, "*Šôpēṭ* and *Šēbeṭ.*") In the light of all this, the idea that the word "scepter" in Jacob's blessing and Balaam's prophecy refers to a man, a future leader, is hardly unreasonable—and it may not have had a little to do with the early understanding of both verses as messianic prophecies.

Judah Will Never Depart: One of the most incisive explanations of Judah's blessing in Gen. 49:10 is that found in a fragment from Qumran:

> A ruler will not depart from the tribe of Judah so long as Israel has dominion, and he who sits on David's throne [will not be c]ut off. For the [word] *mĕḥōqēq* [Gen. 49:10, usually translated "the ruler's staff"] means the covenant of kingship [that was granted to David by God, 2 Sam. 7:11–16] and the thousands of Israel are the "feet" [mentioned in Gen. 49:10]. Until the true messiah comes, an offspring of David, for to him and to his seed was granted the covenant of kingship over his people for eternal generations. — (4Q252) *Genesis Pesher* col. 5, 1–4

Unlike the other interpretations seen, the anonymous author of this fragment interprets the sense of Gen. 49:10 much as a modern commentator might: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" is understood to refer to Judah's relationship *to the other tribes;* it is Jacob's assertion that, so long as his descendants have sovereignty over themselves ("so long as Israel has dominion"), Judah will be the tribe that supplies the nation with its rulers. It says nothing about sovereignty *returning* to Israel after long absence or anything eschatological; it simply means that this tribe is to provide the kings. The phrase "nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" is likewise understood to refer to this tribe's kingly prerogatives: the "covenant of kingship" will not be reassigned to anyone else from "between [that is, among] the *feet,*" the masses, of Israel; Judah will always remain the tribe of kingship. The next phrase, to be sure, refers to the messiah, but once again the point is the exclusive position of the tribe of Judah. The true messiah will have to be from this same tribe, the text argues, because the covenant of kingship was granted to it "for eternal generations."

A nonmessianic interpretation is found as well in Pseudo-Philo:

> [Joshua said:] And now, may the fullness of Your mercies sustain your people and may Your inheritance [Israel] choose a man such that he and his offspring will be rulers for Your people. Is it not of this that our father Jacob spoke [when he said]: "A chief shall not be lacking from Judah, nor a leader from his thighs"? —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 21:4–5

The Feet Mean a Child: One translation of Gen. 49:10 adds a curious stipulation concerning the promised king:

> Kings and rulers will not depart from the house of Judah, nor scribes who teach the Torah from his seed, until the time when the anointed king shall come, **the youngest of his children,** and to him will the nations melt away.
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 49:10

This description of the messiah as the "youngest" apparently understands the phrase "from between his feet" in Gen. 49:10 in the light of the appearance of the same expression in Deut. 28:57, which was understood in ancient times as meaning "her youngest [or "newborn"] who comes out from between her legs." Not only were the phrases "between his feet" and "between her legs" virtually identical, but the word translated as "youngest" was strikingly similar to the phrase "until there *comes to Shiloh*" in Gen. 49:10. See Hayward, "Pirqei deRabbi Eliezer and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan." Note further that the *Samaritan Pentateuch* reads *dglyw* in place of the Masoretic text's *rglyw,* yielding:

> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a ruler from **among his flags.**
> — *Samaritan Pentateuch* Gen. 49:10

The word *degel* not only means "flag" but refers as well to the military encampments of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings, and it is certainly in this

sense that such a version was understood. See further Liver, "Doctrine of the Two Messiahs," 157 n.

Until a New King Comes: As discussed earlier, the Septuagint translation alluded to things "stored away" for the new king, apparently reflecting an understanding of "Shiloh" similar to that of *Targum Onqelos* and other sources, "[that which is] *of him*":

> A ruler shall not be absent from Judah, nor a leader from his loins, until there come the things stored away for him; and he is the expectation of the nations. —Septuagint Gen. 49:10

But this understanding of the verse in itself became the subject of contention. Justin refers to another form of the Septuagint text that was more explicitly messianic:

> Now, Gentlemen, I could contest with you about the passage, which you interpret by affirming that it reads "until there come the things stored away for him." But this is not the [correct] translation of the Septuagint, but, "until there comes the one for whom it is stored up."
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 120:4

See further Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," 218.

A Ruler of the World: The troublesome word *yiqqĕhat* in Gen. 49:10 might, as we saw, be interpreted as "expectation" or even "obedience." But it was also associated with the root meaning "gather," and so could also be understood as meaning "to him [the future ruler] will be an assembly of people." This understanding is reflected in Aquila's Greek translation of the Bible as well as in *Genesis Rabba* 99; see further Greenfield and Stone, "Remarks on the Aramaic Testament of Levi from the Geniza," 223. Of course, *gathering* the exiles of Israel is a theme evoked in connection with the Torah's predictions of future suffering and renewal (Deut. 30:3, 4), and the same theme is a leitmotiv of the latter part of the book of Isaiah and other texts commonly associated with messianic speculation. Thus, to say that the appearance of the future ruler spoken of in Gen. 49:10 will be accompanied by a gathering of the people was to strengthen this figure's messianic connections.

In this regard it should also be observed that the Septuagint translators had rendered the previous verse:

> A lion's whelp, O Judah! You have risen up from a shoot.
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 49:9

The word "shoot" *(blastos)* was the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew *ṭerep*, a word that commonly means "prey" or "food" (an understanding reflected in other ancient and modern translations of this verse and, in view of the larger context, most probably the intended sense) but that can also mean "branch" or "leaf," the apparent source of the Septuagint rendering. The fact that this messianic passage spoke both of someone *rising* and of a *shoot* connected it to other messianic

passages such as Num. 24:17, Isa. 11:1, and others. See further Chapter 24, *OR*, "Rising Greek Star."

It is to be stressed that ideas about the messiah and future history did not exist in a vacuum, nor were they confined to speculation about one biblical verse alone; numerous foci in the Hebrew Bible were found to provide information about this topic, and Jewish (and, later, Christian) views underwent a marked evolution. For further bibliographic references and a schematic survey of the phenomenon, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People,* 2:488–554, and more recently Collins, *The Scepter and the Star,* and other references below, Chapter 24. Note further that the identity of the "ambiguous oracle" mentioned by Josephus has been much debated: Blenkinsopp, "The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry"; Hengel, *The Zealots,* 244–246; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity,* 140–141.

A Colt and an Ass: The long-awaited Messiah was, in the view of Christians, Jesus of Nazareth: indeed, the word *christos* (English "Christ") is simply the Greek translation of *māšîaḥ,* "anointed one" [= "king"]. Christians—building on some of the interpretations seen above—thus sought to read Jacob's blessing of Judah as a prophecy of the events of the New Testament. In fact, the part of the blessing that begins "Binding his colt to the grapevine" appears to have had some role in the Gospel narrative itself.

The description of Judah as "binding his *colt* [or "donkey"] to the *grapevine,* and his *ass's foal* to a choice *vine*" may originally—as some modern scholars have suggested—have simply been a reference to two favorite occupations pursued in the territory of biblical Judah, donkey caravaning and grape growing. But these words eventually acquired messianic associations as well. For the prophet Zechariah, speaking of the coming redeemer, described him in these terms:

> Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, yea, upon a **colt,** the **foal of an ass.** —Zech. 9:9

The use of the indicated words here in Jacob's blessing further supported the idea that what Jacob was talking about in the blessing was indeed the arrival of Israel's long-awaited king. "Binding his colt to a grapevine" was now understood as referring to the king's actual arrival as he dismounted from his colt.

In the Zechariah passage, it is not clear whether the "donkey" and the "colt, the foal of an ass" are two animals or one: the word that joins them, translated above as "yea," might mean here either "and" or "that is to say." If it is "and," then there are two animals; if "that is to say," then only one. Similarly, in Jacob's blessing, "Binding his colt to a grapevine *and* his ass's foal to a choice vine" could be two references to the same animal or could refer to two different animals. It is therefore interesting that the gospel of Matthew (but *not* the parallel accounts in the other gospels) represented Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as involving two different mounts:

> Then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me . . ." This took place to fulfil what was spoken

> by the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of an ass" . . . They brought **the donkey and the colt,** and put their garments on them, and he sat on top of **them.** —Matt. 21:1–7

See further Baumstark, "Die Zitate des Mt.-Evangeliums."

Bloody Clothes of the King: It was observed that the reference to Judah as washing his clothes in wine (Gen. 49:11), while it may originally have referred to the abundance of grapes in the land allotted to Judah's descendants, was later interpreted as referring to the future messianic king's bloody ascendency over Israel's enemies. A mysterious passage in the book of Isaiah supported this interpretation:

> Who is this who comes from Edom, in **crimson** clothing from Bozrah, the one that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, announcing vindication, saving mightily." But why is your clothing **red,** and your garments like those of someone who treads the wine press? "I have indeed trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me. I trod them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my garment." —Isa. 63:1–3

It is far from clear who the speaker cited in this passage might be, but many ancient interpreters took this figure to be the messiah himself. If so, then it could hardly be coincidental that in both this passage and in Jacob's blessing of Judah, mention is made of clothing that has been turned red with the "blood of the grape." Such clothing was understood to be a hallmark of the messiah.

> He is clad in a **robe dipped in blood,** and the name by which he is called is the Word of God . . . From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will **tread the wine press** of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. —Rev. 19:13–15

Christians associated this blood with the blood of the crucifixion: McNamara, *New Testament and the Palestinian Targums,* 230–233, 255; Shotwell, *Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr,* 42; Klaasen, "Jesus and the Messianic War."

Judah the Drunkard: Although some ancient interpreters saw Jacob's blessings in Genesis 49 as predictions about the future, this was not universally true. Some rabbinic and other traditions saw in Jacob's words reflections of the lives of his actual sons—in other words, saw Jacob as talking about things that had already taken place, rather than (or in addition to) things that were yet to be.

One nonrabbinic interpreter of whom this is most conspicuously so is the author of the *Testament of Judah* in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.* Many modern commentators have failed to grasp the extent to which this author—or the texts and traditions on which the *Testament of Judah* is based—looked to Gen. 49:8–12 for information about Judah's personal history. Thus, Jacob's words "Judah

are you, your brothers shall praise you; your hand is on your enemies' neck; let your father's sons bow down before you" (Gen. 49:8) were understood as relating to the war with the Amorites/Canaanites (see Chapter 13, *OR*, "The War with the Amorites"). The tradition of this war was doubtless known to the author from *Jubilees* (and perhaps elsewhere). It suited him specifically as a good explanation for Jacob's otherwise mysterious praise of Judah's fighting abilities in Gen. 49:8. Indeed, for this author, the meaning of Jacob's words was: "*Since* your hand was upon your enemies' neck [in this war], your brothers will end up acknowledging you [as king]."

The same is true of Jacob's next sentence:

> "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as a lioness, who dare rouse him up?" —Gen. 49:9

These words are the source of an account in the *Testament of Judah* (chapter 2) of an incident in Judah's youth, wherein he slew a lion, a leopard, and other animals. That is, instead of seeing Jacob's mention of the animals in this verse as some sort of heroic metaphor, this author understands Jacob's words as referring to actual "prey" from which Judah "went up."

The same approach is witnessed in this testament's handling of the end of Jacob's blessing:

> Binding his foal to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he washes his clothes in wine, and his garments in the blood grapes; his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. —Gen. 49:11–12

Presumably, these words refer to the future homeland of the tribe of Judah, so rich in grapevines that one might as well use wine rather than water to wash one's clothes. But the author of the *Testament of Judah* understood these words, once again, as relating to Judah the person, indeed, to his past life. They refer to a personal flaw of his, his weakness for alcohol, a weakness that led him to marry a Canaanite woman—the great sin in his life according to this text (as well as Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*). See Chapter 14, *OR*, "Tamar's Righteousness."

The same author found more support in the biblical text for Judah's weakness for drink, for elsewhere he relates:

> And after these things, while Tamar was a widow, she heard after two years that I was going up to shear the sheep, and she adorned herself in bridal array, and sat in the city of Enan by the gate . . . Now, having become drunk at the **waters of Kozeba,** I did not recognize her because of the wine, and her beauty deceived me through the fashion of the adorning.
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 12:1–3

This text maintains that Judah had become drunk "at the waters of Kozeba." No such detail exists in the biblical narrative of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)—he is not said to be drunk at all, and there is no mention of a place called "the waters of Kozeba." There exists, however, one connection of Judah with such a place. When the narrative first relates Judah's marriage to the Canaanite woman Shua, it men-

tions that she gave birth to Er, Onan, and Shelah, adding in regard to this last son's birth "and he [Judah] was in Khezib when she bore him" (Gen. 38:5).[23] Khezib and Kozeba seem to refer to the same Judaean site, the latter being the form that appears in 1 Chron. 4:22; a third form of the name, Akhzib, appears in Josh. 15:44 and Micha 1:14.

But why should the *Testament of Judah* say here that Judah was at Kozeba at the time of his sin with Tamar? This detail seems to contradict what was said just two verses earlier, namely, that Tamar was sitting "in the city of Enan by the gate." Had Judah gotten drunk in one place called Kozeba and then traveled to Enan and there seen Tamar?

The answer is quite clear in context: "waters of Kozeba" here is an appellation, a sort of kenning, for wine, that is, the liquid that deceives (Hebrew *kzb*). (Note that some manuscripts of the *Testament of Judah* indeed have "wine" here instead of "waters of Kozeba"; see Hollander, *Testaments,* 63.) The connection between wine and deception is clearly hinted at elsewhere in this testament:

> I knew that the race of Canaan is wicked, but the disposition of youth blinded my heart, and when I saw her [Shua] pouring out wine, **I was deceived owing to the intoxication** of wine, and I met her.
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 11:1–2

Wine's capacity to deceive and dull the mind makes of it the great evil in this testament: it is because of wine (inter alia) that Judah married a Canaanite woman in the first place (8:2, 13:6, 14:6), and it was because of wine that he failed to divorce her even though he knew of her evil ways (11:1–2). Indeed, Judah does not cease to preach the evils of alcohol in his testament:

> And now, my children, be not drunk with wine; for wine turns the mind away from truth and throws in it the passion of lust and leads the eyes into error . . . For behold, it made me also err, so that I was not ashamed of the multitude in the city, in that before the eyes of all I turned aside to Tamar and wrought a great sin.[24] — *Testament of Judah* 14:1–5

Thus, it is hardly surprising that, if Judah sinned with Tamar, it was because he was, once again, drunk. But why use this roundabout way of referring to his drunkenness, being "at the waters of Kozeba," instead of simply saying that he had drunk wine? This turn of phrase seems to reflect a related bit of exegesis connected with the verse mentioned above, Gen. 38:5, "and he [Judah] was in Khezib when she bore him." After all, why should Scripture make this apparently pointless remark? It adds nothing to the story itself, and it seems particularly suspicious that the narrative should tell us, without any apparent purpose, where *he* was when she was

23. This is the traditional Hebrew text; the Septuagint has "*she* was in Khasbi [Khezib] . . ."

24. One might note, in passing, that this last passage also contains another bit of ancient interpretation, an explanation of the place name "[Petah] Eynayim" found in Gen. 38:14. In *Testament of Judah* 12:1 this phrase is understood as an actual place, but in *Testament of Judah* 14:5 these same words are apparently interpreted as "the opening of the eyes," since Judah says that "before the eyes of all I turned aside to Tamar." Cf. *Genesis Rabba* 85:7 and Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba,* 1041.

giving birth.[25] And so the interpretation of the *Testament of Judah* is that Khezib/Kozeba was no toponym at all, even back in Gen. 38:5; Khezib is a metaphorical allusion to wine's deceptive powers. Judah was thus "in Khezib" when his wife was giving birth in the sense that he was not in full possession of his faculties, he was habitually drunk—otherwise he would have divorced this Canaanite woman long before.

Note that the expression "waters of deceit" *(mêmê kāzāb)* is used in the *Damascus Document:*

> When the man of scoffing arose who poured out to Israel from the **waters of deceit** and caused them to go astray in a trackless wilderness . . .
>
> — *Damascus Document* 1:14–15

Joseph's Prophetic Request: Other explanations for Joseph's request appear in rabbinic sources, and the idea that Joseph's bones were hidden by the Egyptians was to be significant in the understanding of the Exodus narrative itself. See Chapter 18, *OR,* "Moses Alone Took the Bones"; also, Max Wilcox, "The Bones of Joseph: Hebrews 11:2"; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 125–155.

25. It is perhaps for this reason that the Septuagint version reads, "*she* was in Khasbi" (above, n. 23).

16

Growing Up in Pharaoh's Court

(EXODUS 1–4)

Pharaoh's wise men predicted a future savior.

Growing Up in Pharaoh's Court

(EXODUS 1–4)

❖ ❖ ❖

Jacob's descendants thus settled down in Egypt. But the Egyptians soon forgot Joseph and all that he had done for them, and they made the Israelites into slaves. Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, even decreed that all newborn Israelite boys were to be thrown into the River Nile. One Israelite mother obeyed this decree, but in such a way as to save her child: she put him into the Nile inside a little box. The baby floated up near Pharaoh's daughter, who was bathing in the river, and she decided to save his life and adopt him as her own. She named him Moses, "drawn up [from the water]."

When Moses was grown, he became aware of his people's suffering and tried to help them. One day, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew man, and Moses killed the Egyptian. But word of this deed soon spread, and Moses fled to Midian to escape punishment. There he married Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian.

While Moses was in Midian, God spoke to him from a burning bush and told him to return to Egypt in order to free the Israelites and lead them out of Egypt. Moses did not feel qualified for this mission, being "heavy of speech and heavy of tongue," but he reluctantly agreed and headed back to Egypt.

THE BOOK of Exodus introduces us to Moses, the greatest of the prophets and the man who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and to the land given to them by God. Naturally, ancient readers of the Bible were interested in every detail touching on the life of this central figure, including his early years.

A Plan to Finish Them Off

The story of Moses begins with a brief description of how the Israelites came to be slaves in Egypt:

> And there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know of Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are greater and mightier than we are. Let us deal wisely with them, lest they increase further, and it shall be that when war breaks out, they will join with our enemies and fight against us, and then will depart from the land." They therefore set taskmasters over them in order to oppress them with their burdens, and they built store cities for Pharaoh, Pithom and Raamses. —Exod. 1:8–11

A number of things in this passage attracted the attention of interpreters, but perhaps none so much as the phrase used by the Egyptian king "Let us deal *wisely*

with them." For the word "wisely" brought to mind the fact (attested in the story of Joseph) that Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, was constantly surrounded by his own circle of wise men and advisers (Gen. 41:8). To whom, then, could he have been speaking here if not to these same wise men? Indeed, in saying "Let us deal *wisely* with them," the king seemed not only to be appealing to these sage advisers for help, but urging them to come up with some particularly wise plan for dealing with Israel.

So it was that ancient interpreters came to view Pharaoh's various decrees against the people of Israel as part of some clever plan drawn up by these advisers. But what was clever about it? Pharaoh's original complaint was that the Israelites were growing too numerous ("Behold, the people of Israel are greater and mightier than we are," Exod. 1:9). Interpreters therefore came to the conclusion that the hard labor decreed by Pharaoh was not really for the purpose of building cities or the like, but was actually designed to diminish the Israelite population, perhaps discouraging them from having further children:

> And with the rearing of pyramid after pyramid they **exhausted our race**, which was thus apprenticed to all manner of crafts and became inured to toil . . . The Egyptians wished to **finish off** the Israelites with hard labor.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:203–204

> "And He saw our oppression" (Deut. 26:7) . . . this refers to marital separation, as it is written, "[And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob] and God saw the Israelites, and God knew" (Exod. 2:24–25).[1] —*Passover Haggadah* (cf. *Midrash ha-Gadol* on Deut. 26:7 [*Midrash Tanna'im* 56:7])

> "And they embittered their lives with hard labor, with mortar and bricks, and with *all the work in the field*" (Exod. 1:14): Were they working in the fields? Was it not in the city [for the text had just said that "they built store *cities* for Pharaoh," Exod. 1:11]? But the Egyptians had decreed that the Israelite men should sleep out in the fields while the women slept in the cities, in order to prevent them from multiplying further.
>
> —*Midrash Abkir* (cited in *Yalqut Shimoni* 163)

Why Only the Boys?

But if the hard labor had been decreed in order to stop the Israelites from increasing, why then did Pharaoh further order that all the Israelites' newborn boys be killed? Interestingly, many interpreters concluded that this new decree was *not* issued because (as the Bible itself seems to indicate, Exod. 1:12) the first strategy had

1. God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob included the promise of numerous descendants (Gen. 15:5, 17:16, 21:12, 35:11). If later, when the Israelites were in Egypt, the Bible says that God remembered this covenant and then "saw" the Israelites and "knew" (without saying *what* God knew), one might conclude by this juxtaposition that God (1) remembered his promise of numerous descendants, (2) saw how the Israelites had ceased multiplying in Egypt, and (3) knew therefore that the Israelites were willingly abstaining from marital relations.

not succeeded. After all, Pharaoh was in a position to make his plans succeed. Moreover, if his purpose in issuing a new decree had been to stop the growth of the Israelite population, it certainly would have made more sense for him to order that newborn *girls* be killed, since, if the boys were now killed and there were, as a consequence, fewer available husbands, this would not necessarily mean fewer Israelite births.[2] Thus, interpreters concluded that the new decree about killing the boys must have had a somewhat different purpose.

> He ordered that the females who were born be allowed to multiply—since woman is, by her natural weakness, unfit for warfare—but that the males be destroyed, so that these would not increase in the various cities. For a mighty abundance of men can be a military outpost [for an invader] which will be hard to capture or get rid of. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:8

> And the Egyptians answered their king, saying, "Let us kill their males, and we will keep their females so that we may give them to our slaves as wives. And whoever is born from them will be a slave and will serve us."
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:1

> He ordered all the females born to the Hebrews to be [allowed to be] brought up, since women are unfit for warfare, whereas the males were to be destroyed. —Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1.23.2

> What need had Pharaoh to allow the females to stay alive? This is what they said: "We will kill the males and keep the females for wives for ourselves," for the Egyptians were plunged in wantonness. —*Exodus Rabba* 1:18

A Future Savior

As for Pharaoh's subsequent decree to cast the newborn boys into the Nile (Exod. 1:22), interpreters reasoned that this order must have had yet another, quite separate rationale. Again, it seemed unlikely that the midwives' flimsy pretext (that the Hebrew women gave birth before the midwife could arrive, Exod. 1:19) ought to have deterred Pharaoh from his original plan. Instead, interpreters fixed on the fact that, immediately after telling of Pharaoh's order to cast the boys into the Nile, the Bible goes on to narrate the tale of Moses' birth. If Pharaoh's wise men were indeed so wise, perhaps they had foreseen Moses' birth and told the king that the Israelites' savior—a boy—was indeed about to be born:

> One of the priestly scribes (who were able to foretell the future with extreme accuracy) then announced to the king that there would be born at that time to the Israelites one who, after he was grown up, would bring low the rule of the Egyptians while exalting the Hebrews, and would surpass all in virtue and gain glory never to be forgotten. The king, in keeping with this sage's

2. This is because, in biblical times, one man could have several wives. In a polygamous marriage, each wife may theoretically end up having as many children as she would have had if she had a husband all to herself.

advice, therefore ordered that any male offspring of the Israelites should be cast into the river and exterminated.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:205–206

He [Pharaoh] was panicked . . . by those [royal counselors] who, based on the number of years elapsed, declared that the Hebrews were about to be liberated. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 1:2

The wizards said to Pharaoh, "A boy is destined to be born, and he will lead Israel out of Egypt." He [Pharaoh] considered the matter and said: "Cast all the male children into the Nile, and he [this future savior] will be cast in with them." —*Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 48

Jannes and Jambres

Thus, both Pharaoh's initial decision to make the Israelites slaves and his later decrees about killing the newborn boys were more than they might first appear. They were actually attempts by Pharaoh to stave off disaster—to diminish the Israelite population as a whole, and then to kill off the Israelites' future savior at birth. Such were the harsh measures prescribed by Pharaoh's close advisers.

Who were these advisers? They reappear later in the book of Exodus, when Moses, now grown, goes to Pharaoh to gain the Israelites' freedom and matches wits with the men of Pharaoh's court. Once again, however, the text fails to give their names and simply refers to them throughout as Pharaoh's "wise men" or "wizards." Nevertheless, a number of ancient texts do supply names for at least two of these sages, Jannes and Jambres. ("Jannes" seems to be a form of the Hebrew name *Yoḥanan,* "John"; "Jambres" [or "Mamre"] is of uncertain origin):

In days gone by, Moses and Aaron arose by the hand of the Prince of Lights [that is, the Good Spirit], but Belial [Satan] in his cunning raised up **Yoḥana** [Jannes] **and his brother** when Israel was saved for the first time.

—*Damascus Document* 5:17–19

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it . . . As **Jannes and Jambres** opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith. —2 Tim. 3:1–8

Then Pharaoh fell asleep, and he saw in his dream, and behold [a great balance, and] all of the land of Egypt was in one scale and a young kid in the other, and the scale with the kid in it outweighed the other scale. Whereupon he sent for the wizards of Egypt and he told them his dream. Then Jannes and Jambres, the chief wizards, spoke up and said to Pharaoh: A son is to be born to the people of Israel, and through him they will bring the

land of Egypt to ruin. Therefore, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, followed their advice and said to the Jewish midwives . . . [Exod. 1:16].

— *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 1:15–16

[Nicodemus tells Pontius Pilate:] "For Moses also, when he was sent by God into Egypt, did many signs which God commanded him to do before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And there were there servants of Pharaoh, Jannes and Jambres, and they also did signs not a few which Moses did, and the Egyptians held them as gods, Jannes and Jambres. And since the signs which they did were not from God, they perished as well as those who believed in them." — *Gospel of Nicodemus (Acts of Pilate)* 5:1

Said **Joḥana and Mamra** to Moses, "Are you bringing straw to Ḥafarayim?"[3]

— b. *Menaḥot* 85a

Now, it is noteworthy that in the biblical account, the unnamed counselors or wizards of Pharaoh do more than merely give advice. They duplicate Moses' feat of turning his staff into a snake (Exod. 7:11), and match his skill in turning the Nile to blood (Exod. 7:22) and summoning the frogs (Exod. 8:7). Even if they were ultimately outdone by Moses (Exod. 8:18, 9:11), their exploits certainly suggested that these were extraordinary magicians. Soon their abilities became proverbial:

[A demon tells king Solomon:] I, King Solomon, am called Abezethibou . . . I was present at the time when Moses appeared before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, hardening his heart. I am the one whom Jannes and Jambres, those who opposed Moses in Egypt, called to their aid. I am the adversary of Moses in [performing] wonders and signs. — *Testament of Solomon* 25:2–4

And in the presence [of the ki]ng, he [Jannes] opposed Moses and his brother Aaron by doing everything t[hey had done].

— Fragment from putative *Jannes and Jambres*

There is another magical group, deriving from Moses, Jannes, Lotapes, and the Jews, but many thousands of years after Zoroaster.

— Pliny the Elder (d. 79 C.E.), *Historia Naturalis* 30.2.11

Next are Jannes and Jambres, Egyptian sacred scribes, men judged to be inferior to none in magic, when the Jews were expelled from Egypt. They were chosen by the people of Egypt to stand up to Musaeus [here, Moses], the leader of the Jews, and a man most powerful in prayer to God.

— Numenius (second century C.E.), *On the Good*

If you find one trivial reason that might have led me to woo Pudentilla for the sake of some personal advantage, if you can prove that I have made the

3. When Moses first performed miracles in Egypt, the Egyptian wizards thought he was, like them, a mere magician, of which there was no short supply in Egypt. They therefore asked him, "Are you bringing straw to Ḥafarayim?"—that is, are you bringing coals to Newcastle, supplying Egypt with what it already has in abundance?

very slightest profit out of it, I am ready to become Carmendas, Damigeron, that Moses whom you know about, Johannes [Jannes], Apollobex, Dardanus himself, or any other magician of note since the time of Zoroaster and Ostanes. —Apuleius, *Apology* ch. 90

Balaam, Job, and Jethro

A later tradition identified Pharaoh's counselors not as Jannes and Jambres, but as three prominent figures known from elsewhere in the Bible, Balaam, Job, and Jethro. (All three were deemed to have lived in the time of Moses, and all three were non-Israelite sages; for both these reasons, it seemed at least possible that *they* might have been the unnamed wise men of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus.) Of the three, Balaam was judged to have been the one who was truly wicked—in part, no doubt, because of the role he later played during Israel's wanderings in the wilderness (see Chapter 24).

There were three who counseled [Pharaoh], Balaam, Job, and Jethro. Balaam, who actually counseled [Pharaoh to kill the newborns], was later killed; Job, who was silent, was therefore condemned to suffering [as described in the book of Job]; Jethro, who fled, [was rewarded].

—b. *Soṭah* 11a

It is interesting, however, that the tradition that identified Balaam as one of Pharaoh's counselors sometimes came to be connected as well with that of Jannes and Jambres. These two were thought to be Balaam's sons or servants:

And after they [Moses and Aaron] left, Pharaoh sent and called to Balaam the magician and **Jannes and Jambaris** [*sic*] his sons the sorcerers.

— *Chronicles of Moses* (cited in *Yalqut Shimoni* 173)

And God was angry that he [Balaam] was going to curse them [the Israelites] and the angel of God stood in the road to oppose him, and he [Balaam] was riding on his ass, and his two servants, Jannes and Jamris [*sic*] were with him. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Num. 22:22

Death by Water

Instructed by his advisers, Pharaoh first ordered that the newborn Hebrew boys be killed by the midwives at the time of birth, but later issued a new decree to the people as a whole: all newborn boys were to be cast into the Nile. In considering this new order, interpreters wondered why the Bible mentioned the *means* by which the newborn boys should be killed, "cast into the Nile." Some could not but see in this detail a hint of that great principle of divine justice, "measure for measure." For just as Pharaoh now sought to kill off the Israelites with water, so were the Egyptians later punished when Pharaoh's own troops were killed with water at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:28):

> Just as the men of Egypt cast their [the Israelites'] sons into the river, so He took revenge on one million, and one thousand strong and ardent men perished on account of one infant whom they threw into the midst of the river. —*Jubilees* 48:14

> When they [the Egyptians] had resolved to kill the infants of your holy ones (although one child [Moses] who had been [thus] exposed was saved), You took from them as punishment a host of their own children, and destroyed them all at once with a mighty flood. —Wisd. 18:5

> [God speaks to Moses' parents through a prophetic dream:] "Behold, he who will be born from you will be cast forth into the water; likewise, through him the water will be dried up [at the Red Sea]."
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:10

> By the same measure by which they [the Egyptians] measured out, so was it measured out to them. They said, "Cast every newborn boy into the Nile" [Exod. 1:22], so You measured out to them by the same measure, as it says, "Pharaoh's chariotry and army He cast into the sea" [Exod. 15:4].
> —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Shirta* 4 (end)

This idea—that Pharaoh's decree about casting the newborns into the Nile resulted in the Egyptians being punished with water—later came to be combined with the traditions about Pharaoh's wise men. In this new version of the story, it is Pharaoh's counselors who come up with the idea of drowning the newborns in the Nile, but they do so for a rather unusual reason. Their extraordinary sagely powers had led them to consult the greatest source of wisdom of all, the Bible—even before it had been given to mankind!—and, pondering its words, they had come to the conclusion that water was indeed the best means of finishing off the Israelites:

> "Come, let us deal wisely . . ." [Pharaoh's counselors replied:] To what shall we sentence the Israelites? If we sentence them [to die] by fire, [we risk divine reprisal], for it is written [in the Bible], "For behold, the Lord shall come with fire" [Isa. 66:15] and "For with fire the Lord passes judgment" [Isa. 66:16]. If we sentence them [to die] by the sword, it likewise says, "and by his sword [He will punish] all flesh" [Isa. 66:16]. Let us therefore sentence them [to die] by water, for God has already sworn that he will nevermore bring a flood into the world, as it is said, "For this is like the waters of Noah to Me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth . . ." [Isa. 54:9].
>
> What they did not understand was that, while God would nevermore bring a flood over the whole world, upon a single nation he might indeed bring a flood [as he brought the Red Sea down upon the Egyptian soldiery, Exod. 14:28]. What is more, He did not bring it down upon them, but they rushed willingly into the waters, as it says, "And the Egyptians fled into it" [Exod. 14:27]. Hence R. El'azar said: Why is it written, "by the very thing by

which they mistreated them . . ." [Exod. 18:11]? They got cooked in their own stewpot.[4] —b. *Soṭa* 11a

Schooled in Every Wisdom

Cast into the Nile, Moses ended up being saved by Pharaoh's daughter, who raised him as her own. The Bible says nothing, however, of the education that Moses received in Pharaoh's court. Such a great leader, ancient readers assumed, certainly must have received a proper schooling. But why, then, did the text not mention Moses' education?

To make matters worse, when God later tells Moses to go to Pharaoh in order to argue his people's cause, Moses replies, "Oh my Lord, I am not a man of words . . . but I am *heavy of speech and heavy of tongue*" (Exod. 4:10). Eloquence, in the ancient world, was thought to be largely the result of schooling—and it was one of the most important things a person could possess. Was Moses thus saying that his education had been incomplete, and that this all-important trait was somehow lacking in him? This would have constituted a serious flaw in the eyes of ancient readers (just as, say, most modern political candidates would be at a decided disadvantage if the record showed that they had dropped out of high school). And in any case, the idea that Moses had *not* received a thorough education was certainly contradicted by the eloquent words he spoke throughout the Bible—and in particular by the book of Deuteronomy, which is, almost from beginning to end, one long, highly eloquent speech uttered by Moses just before his death. For all such reasons, then, ancient interpreters were quick to supply what the book of Exodus had omitted, some account of Moses' schooling:

[Moses says:]
Throughout my boyhood years the princess did,
for princely rearing and instruction apt,
provide all things, as though I were her own.
—Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 36–38

Arithmetic, geometry, the lore of meter, rhythm, and harmony, and the whole subject of music . . . were imparted to him by learned Egyptians. These further instructed him in the philosophy conveyed in symbols . . . He had Greeks to teach him the rest of the regular school course, and the inhabitants of the neighboring countries for Assyrian literature and the Chaldean science of the heavenly bodies. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:23

Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son, and Moses was educated in all the wisdom of Egypt, and he was powerful in his words and actions. —Acts 7:21–22

4. That is, they had tried to kill the Jews with water, now they themselves were drowned in the Red Sea. The comparison may be strengthened by a pun, for the Hebrew for "mistreated" here (*zādû*) sounds like the same verb used of Jacob when he cooked [*wayyazzed*] the stew he later sold to Esau (Gen. 25:29).

Or perhaps his education was homegrown after all:

> [The angel tells Moses:] Afterwards, when you had grown up, you were brought to the daughter of Pharaoh and you became her son. But Amram, your [Israelite] father, taught you writing. And after you completed three weeks [of years, that is, twenty-one years], he brought you into the royal court. —*Jubilees* 47:9

> When Moses had finished the years of his education, he was taken into Pharaoh's house. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 2:4

Moses' Speech Defect

If Moses was indeed thoroughly educated, however, it was still necessary to explain his later words to God, "Oh my Lord, I am not a man of words . . . but I am heavy of speech and heavy of tongue" (Exod. 4:10). How could someone schooled in every branch of wisdom, including eloquence, be "heavy of speech"? It occurred to interpreters that Moses might have been referring here not to any lacuna in his education, but to an actual speech defect, some physical deformity of his mouth or tongue that prevented him from speaking in the usual fashion.[5] There may be a hint of this in one early Greek recounting of the story of Moses:

> I am not by nature eloquent;
> **my tongue with difficulty speaks, I stammer,**
> so that I cannot speak before the king.
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 113–115

> He [Moses] pleased his parents by his beauty, but grieved them by his speech impediment. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 2:4

Some interpreters not only maintained that Moses was indeed the victim of a physical deformity that impeded his speech, but even suggested how he might have acquired that deformity. Their explanation connected Moses' speech problems to the tradition (seen above) of Pharaoh's wise men and their warnings about a boy that might grow up and save Israel:[6]

> At one time she [Pharaoh's daughter] brought Moses to her father and showed him and told him that, having considered the royal succession, and if God did not will her to have a child of her own, then were this boy, of such godly appearance and nobility of mind, and whom she had miraculously received through the grace of the river, brought up as her own, he might "eventually be made the successor to your own kingship." Saying these things, she gave the child into her father's hands, and he took him and, as he

5. Moses elsewhere describes himself as "uncircumcised of lip" (Exod. 6:12), and this unusual expression might likewise indicate some physical deformity.

6. The following passages all bear witness to a single tradition. The earliest of them, from Josephus, shows no awareness of what was clearly the story's original rationale—to explain how Moses became "heavy of speech and heavy of tongue"—since Josephus makes no mention of the burning coal or test found in the other versions.

embraced him, put his crown on the child's head as an act of affection toward his daughter. But Moses took it off and threw it to the ground and, as might befit a young child, stepped on it with his foot. Now this appeared to hold an evil omen for the kingdom. Seeing this, the sacred scribe who had foretold how his [Moses'] birth would bring low the Egyptian empire, rushed headlong to kill him, and, crying out dreadfully, said: "This, O King, this is the child whom God had indicated must be killed for us to be out of danger! He bears witness to the prediction through this act of treading on your sovereignty and trampling your crown . . ." But Thermouthis [Pharaoh's daughter] snatched him away, and the king, having been so predisposed by God (whose care for Moses saved him), shrank back from killing him.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:232–236

And [after Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter], Pharaoh took him and embraced him, but he [Moses] took Pharaoh's crown from off his head and put it on his own head . . . And Pharaoh's counselors were disturbed: . . . some said to kill him, and some said to burn him. Now Jethro [one of Pharaoh's counselors] was seated among them. He said to them: This child has no sense yet, as you can verify if you bring before him on a platter a piece of gold and a burning coal. If he puts his hand out for the burning coal, then he has no sense and he ought not to be condemned to death; but if he puts his hand forth to the gold, then he does have sense and you should kill him. At once they brought before him a piece of gold and a burning coal, and Moses put forth his hand to take the gold. But the angel Gabriel came and pushed his hand aside and his hand seized the coal and he put it to his mouth with the coal still in it and his tongue was injured, and from this he became "heavy of speech and heavy of tongue" (Exod. 4:10).[7]

—*Exodus Rabba* 1:26

And they brought before the child a charger with burning coals, and a charger with gold red like the fire, saying "If he catches at the gold, it is evident that he took hold of the king's beard purposely, but if he catches at the fire, he did it innocently in his ignorance. And Moses stretched out his hand unto the fire, and sparks stuck on the child's finger, and he cried out, and carried his finger quickly to his mouth, and held it to his tongue, and his tongue was burned; wherefore Moses, the savior of Israel, came to be of slow tongue and stammering in the house of Pharaoh.

—Armenian Apocrypha, *History of Moses* (Issaverdens, pp. 113–114)

Jealous of Moses

Growing up in Pharaoh's court, the young Moses must have become a prominent figure in Egyptian society. Indeed, according to one tradition, his talents and high

7. It seems that this explanation may have been inspired by another biblical passage, that of the call of the prophet Isaiah. For when Isaiah is sanctified for prophecy, an angel touches him on the lips with a burning coal (Isa. 6:6–7).

standing caused others—even the king himself—to be jealous of Moses. It was to escape the king's jealousy, and not because Moses had killed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, that Moses fled:

> When [the Egyptian king] saw the fame of Moses, he was jealous of him and tried to kill him on some pretext . . . But when Aaron, the brother of Moses, found out about the plot, he advised his brother to flee to Arabia.
>
> —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.7, 17)

> These [Egyptians] . . . counseled the king to kill him [Moses]. He had in fact arrived on his own at the same course of action, out of envy for Moses' abilities in warfare and of [fear of] his own [concomitant] loss of standing, and so, urged on by these holy sages, he now was prepared to try and kill Moses. He, however, found out about the plot beforehand, and secretly fled.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:254–255

Zipporah the Ethiopian

Moses fled to Midian. No sooner did he arrive there than he acted to save the daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian, as they watered their flocks at the well.[8] Invited to Jethro's dwelling, Moses soon married one of the daughters, Zipporah, and settled down at his father-in-law's house. Interestingly, later on, the Bible speaks of Moses' having married an *Ethiopian* woman:

> Miriam and Aaron spoke out against Moses, because of the Cushite [Ethiopian] woman whom he had married, for he had indeed married a Cushite woman. — Num. 12:1

In context, it might seem that this was a different wife. Yet, since the text nowhere else mentions this other wife, some interpreters naturally concluded that Zipporah was, in fact, the "Ethiopian" in question.

> [Zipporah introduces herself to Moses:]
> This land, O stranger, all bears Libya's name,
> but tribes of sundry races dwell throughout;
> the **dark-skinned Aethiops**. Yet there is one
> who ruler, prince, and sole commander, he
> rules all this state and judges mortal men;
> a priest, the father of myself and these.
>
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 60–65

> Moses fled into Midian and there he married Zipporah the daughter of Jethro, who was, as may be surmised from the names of those born from

8. According to the tradition described earlier, Jethro was an adviser in Pharaoh's court. But, of course, the biblical text says that he was the "priest of Midian" who became Moses' father-in-law (Exod. 3:1). How, then, did Jethro get from Pharaoh's court to Midian? As briefly glimpsed above (excerpt from b. *Soṭa* 11a and *Exodus Rabba* 1:9), he was said to have fled Egypt after Pharaoh's wicked decree to kill Israel's newborn boys.

> Keturah, of the stock of Abraham, for he [Jethro] was a descendant of Jokshan, who was born to Abraham by Keturah. And from Jokshan was born Dedan, and from Dedan, Reuel, and from Reuel, Jethro and Hobab, and from Jethro, Zipporah, whom Moses married . . . Now, it says that Abraham had sent his sons **to the east** to dwell there.[9] And it is for this reason that Aaron and Miriam said at Hazeroth that Moses had married an Ethiopian woman. —Demetrius the Chronographer (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.29.1, 3)

> Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses with regard to the Ethiopian wife that he had taken—but was not this Ethiopian woman Moses' own wife Zipporah? For just as an Ethiopian woman's skin is distinct from that of others, so was Moses' wife Zipporah [distinguished,] lovely in appearance and beautiful of form, and distinguished in good deeds from all the women of that generation. —*Targum Neophyti* Num. 12:1

Miraculously Burning Bush

Now established in Midian, the son-in-law of a prominent citizen, Moses might indeed have lived out his life in peace and prosperity. But one day, God summoned Moses to return to Egypt to free the Israelites.

The way in which God first called Moses aroused the curiosity of many interpreters. For, according to the biblical account, Moses saw a wondrous sight: "And behold! a bush was burning, but the bush was not consumed" (Exod. 3:2). But, when one thinks about it, what is so wondrous about such a spectacle? Surely the Creator of the universe could have chosen something much more dramatic and impressive than a simple thornbush that somehow keeps on burning! It is not surprising that some early writers, in retelling the story, therefore felt obliged to change the Bible's description to make it appear a little more miraculous:

> Moses prayed to God that the people might be delivered from their sufferings. While he was thus supplicating, fire suddenly appeared **up out of the ground** (he [Artapanus] says), and it burned, **although there was no firewood nor other wooden substance** in that place. Moses was frightened by what happened and he fled. But a divine voice told him to make war against Egypt and to save the Jews and lead them to their ancient homeland. —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.21)

9. Gen. 25:6. Demetrius' point is that Zipporah was actually a distant relative of Moses, since they both descended from Abraham. He derives this idea from Gen. 25:2–3, which says that Abraham was the father of Jokshan, and Jokshan was the father of Dedan. One old form of Gen. 25:3, reflected in the Septuagint version, then adds that Dedan was the father of Reuel. Since, according to Exod. 2:18, Zipporah's father (or, according to Demetrius, grandfather) was called Reuel, it would seem that Zipporah in fact descended from Abraham. If so, Demetrius argues, then she was not really an "Ethiopian," but was so called in Num. 12:1 because she was among those descendants of Abraham that had settled in "the east," a region that included Ethiopia.

One line of interpretation stressed that not only was the bush not consumed by the fire, but its green leaves and fruit were in fact unchanged despite the blaze:

> [Moses says:]
> Aha! What token this from yonder bush,
> some sign beyond belief to mortal men?
> A bush that sudden burns, with raging flame,
> **and yet its shoots remain all green and fresh.**
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 90–93

> Here it was that he witnessed an amazing prodigy: a fire was ablaze on a bramble-bush, yet had left its **vesture of green and its bloom intact,** nor had one of its **fruit-laden branches** been consumed, although the flame was great and exceeding fierce. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2.266

> . . . [the bush was] **green** and not consumed.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* (marginal note) Exod. 3:2

> Moses saw a great miracle, for he saw the bush and it was **blossoming** and shooting up in the midst of the fire. — *Midrash ha-Gadol* Exod. 3:2

The reason for this particular embellishment is not hard to find. In describing the burning bush, the traditional Hebrew text had referred to the "burning fire" in a somewhat unusual phrase (*labbat 'ēš*) whose first word sounded a bit like the word for "blossom" (*liblēb*). Interpreters apparently took this as a subtle hint that the bush was in fact blossoming despite the fire.[10]

The Medium Was the Message

Others, however, saw in the miracle of the burning bush another purpose. The bush was *in itself* a message. God had chosen to speak to Moses out of a burning thornbush because the bush itself would symbolically tell Moses something about Israel's endurance of Egyptian oppression:

> There was a bush, a thorny, puny sort of plant, which, without anyone setting it on fire, suddenly started burning and, although spouting flames from its roots to the tips of its branches, as if it were a mighty fountain, it nonetheless remained unharmed. So it did not burn up, indeed, it appeared rather invulnerable; and it did not serve as fuel for the fire, but seemed to use the fire as *its* fuel. Toward the very center of the flames was a form of extraordinary beauty, which was like nothing seen with the eye, a likeness of divine appearance whose light flashed forth more brightly than the fire, and which one might suppose to have been an image of the One Who Is [God]. But let it rather be called an angel [that is, a herald], for, with a silence more eloquent than any sound, it heralded by means of a sublime vision things that were to happen later on. For the bush was a symbol of those who suffer

10. Moreover, the traditional Hebrew text contains an irregular spelling of this phrase (*labbat 'ēš* instead of *lahăbat 'ēš*), one that even more directly suggested the connection with "blossom" (*liblēb*).

> the flames of injustice, just as the fire symbolized those responsible for it; but that which burned did not burn up, and those who suffered injustice were not to be destroyed by their oppressors. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:65–67

> And why was God revealed to him [Moses] in this way? Because he [Moses] was having his doubts and wondered if the Egyptians might not succeed in destroying Israel. Therefore, God showed him a burning fire, yet it [the bush] was not consumed. He said to him: just as this bush is burning in the fire but is not consumed, so the Egyptians will be unable to destroy Israel.
> —*Exodus Rabba* 2:5

"I Am the One Who Is . . ."

From the midst of the burning bush, God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and free the people of Israel. But Moses protested that he was unfit for the job and, among the reasons for his hesitation, he mentioned the fact that he would be unable even to tell the Israelites the name of the God who had appeared to him, since he himself did not know His name (Exod. 3:14). God's answer, "I am who I am," might at first sound like a polite but firm "Mind your own business." But that could not be God's real intention, since in the very next verse, He does in fact tell him His name. What, then, could "I am who I am" possibly mean?

The word "I-am" in Hebrew sounds somewhat like the proper name of God that appears in the next verse. That name is written in Hebrew with the letters YHWH.[11] Like the word "I-am," this name of God seemed to be derived from the Hebrew root meaning "to be" or "cause to be." Thus, in saying "I am who I am," God might not have been putting Moses off, but revealing to him something about His very nature. So it appeared to the ancient Greek translators of the Bible:

> And God said to Moses, "I am the One who is ["the being One"]." And He said, "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, 'The One who is' has sent me to you." —Septuagint Exod. 3:14

This translation—which clearly seeks to deviate from the biblical text, since there are more literal ways of saying "I am who I am" in Greek—understands God to have been telling Moses something about His nature, "I am the One who is." This translation was of great significance to Greek-speaking Jews, since it resonated with elements of the Greek philosophical tradition; "the One who is" became a way of referring to God.

11. Because of its great sanctity, this name ceased to be pronounced by Jews, who systematically substituted for it the Hebrew word for "my Lord" [*'ădônay*]. Substituting "my Lord" for this name is an old tradition witnessed in many ancient texts, including the Septuagint, which regularly uses the word *Kurios* ("Lord") in its place. Most modern Bibles likewise substitute the word "Lord," writing it in small capitals (LORD) to make clear that the word is a substitute for this proper name of God. Since it has four consonants in Hebrew, the name is sometimes referred to as the Tetragrammaton, from the Greek for "four-letter [name]."

> All men who were ignorant of God were thus foolish by nature: they could not perceive the **One who is** from the good things that are visible.
>
> —Wisd. 13:1

> And in this way You spoke to Moses, your faithful and holy servant, in the vision at the bush: I am the One Who Is, this is for Me an eternal name, and a remembrance to generations of generations.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.33.6

> I am the **One who is**, but you consider in your heart.
> I am robed with heaven, draped around with sea,
> the earth is the support of my feet, around my body is poured
> the air, the entire chorus of stars revolves around me.
>
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 1:137–140

> Grace to you and peace from **Him who is** and who was and who is to come.
>
> —Rev. 1:4

In particular, Philo of Alexandria regularly referred to God in his writings as "the One who is," and on several occasions he set out his own understanding(s) of God's words to Moses in this passage:

> It follows that no name can legitimately be assigned to the One who truly exists. For, to the prophet [Moses], curious as to what he should answer those who inquire about His name, He said, "I am the One who is," which means that it is my nature to *be,* not to be called.
>
> —Philo, *On the Change of Names* 11

> This is why Moses will say of Him, as best he may in human speech, "I am the One who is," since those who come after Him do not exist in the sense of [true] being, but are merely by reason of appearances said to exist.
>
> —Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 160

> [God said:] "I am the One who is" to [express the idea] that, although there are not in God *things* that a man can seize upon, he may still apprehend His existence.
>
> —Philo, *On Dreams* 231

"I Am the Eternal . . ."

At the same time, the Hebrew words for "I am who I am" can also be understood as "I will be as I am [now]," or "I will be who I will be," or even "I will cause to be [those] whom I will cause to be." To other interpreters, therefore, this pronouncement seemed to be a statement about God's eternity, or a promise:

> And the Lord said to Moses, "I am who I am," and He said, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites: He who spoke and created the world in the beginning, and who is later [in the time to come] to say *Be* and they shall be—He is the one who sent me to you."
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Exod. 3:14

> R. Isaac said: God said to Moses: "Say to them: 'I am the One who was, I am the One right now, and I am the One who will be in the time to come. That is why the word "I-am" appears here three times.'" —*Exodus Rabba* 3:7

Perhaps in this sense:

> I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. —Rev. 1:8

Somewhat differently:

> God said to Moses: "Moses, say to the Israelites that my name is 'I will be who I will be.' And what does 'I will be who I will be' mean? Just as you are [that is, act] with Me, so will I be [act] with you . . . If they [Israel] open [their hands to the poor] and give, so will I open [my hand] to them, 'The Lord will open his treasure-house to you . . .' (Deut. 28:12)."
> —Midrash Wehizhir, *Mishpatim* (Leipzig ed. p. 85)

An Angel in the Hotel

In the ensuing exchange, God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and free the Israelites. After much discussion, Moses agreed to accept the mission and set out on the return journey. No sooner had he departed, however, than Moses had an encounter that nearly cost him his life:

> And it happened that, at an inn along the way, the Lord met him [Moses] and sought to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched it to his feet and said, "You are a bridegroom of blood to me," and He left him alone. Thus, it was then that she said "bridegroom of blood" for circumcision. —Exod. 4:24–26

These verses seemed completely mysterious. Why, having commissioned Moses to return to Egypt, should God then decide to kill him? And why should Zipporah's circumcising her son and her mention of a "bridegroom of blood" have apparently led to God's leaving "him" (Moses?) alone? Even today, most biblical commentators seem baffled by this brief passage.[12]

In grappling with it, ancient interpreters first came to the understandable conclusion that it could not actually have been God who sought to kill Moses. For, not only did that seem quite unlikely in the larger context, but it would have hardly been appropriate for God to "seek to kill" anyone—if He *sought* to kill someone, then that someone would be killed! Moreover, the text does not say "God sought to

12. Its point may in fact be to explain the existence of the expression (apparently well known in biblical times) "bridegroom of blood." The story would seem to be explaining that this phrase does *not* imply that circumcision should or may be performed on a man just before his marriage (as opposed to at infancy), but that "bridegroom of blood" originated at the time when Moses, the "bridegroom" of Zipporah, was saved thanks to being *bloodied* by the circumcision of their son. If so, then "bridegroom of blood" notwithstanding, infancy is the only proper time for circumcision, as the Bible elsewhere maintains (Gen. 17:12).

kill him" (though this is clearly what is implied); it only says "[he] sought to kill him." But if not God, then who?

> It happened that, on the way, in the inn, an **angel of the Lord** met him and sought to kill him. — Septuagint Exod. 4:24

> [A friendly angel later relates:] And you [Moses] know . . . what **Prince Mastema** [a wicked angel] desired to do with you when you returned to Egypt, on the way, when you met him at the shelter. Did he not desire to kill you with all of his might and save the Egyptians from your hand, because he saw that you were sent to execute judgment and vengeance upon the Egyptians? But I delivered you from his hand. — *Jubilees* 48:2–4

> And it happened that, at an inn along the way, an **angel of the Lord** met him and sought to kill him. — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 4:24

> And Zipporah took a flint and cut the son's foreskin and brought it near the feet of **the Destroyer.** — *Targum Neophyti* 4:25

> [Zipporah said after the incident:] "How strong is this blood of circumcision, that it rescued this bridegroom from the **Angel of Death.**"
> — *Fragment Targum* (P) Exod. 4:26

Circumcision Delayed Is Circumcision Denied

Thus, it was an angel that tried to kill Moses. But why? The biblical text relates that Zipporah managed to save Moses by circumcising her son. This seemed to suggest that circumcision—or, rather, the absence of it—had something to do with the angel's attack on Moses in the first place. For, since God's covenant with Abraham called for all boys to be circumcised eight days after their birth (Gen. 17:12), it seemed only logical that the reason for the attack on Moses at the inn was that Moses had somehow been negligent with regard to this important duty and had failed to circumcise his son within the prescribed time limit. To delay circumcision even for a brief time was to deny its crucial importance.

> Great indeed is [the commandment of] circumcision, for there was not the slightest delay concerning it granted [even] to the righteous Moses.
> — m. *Nedarim* 3:11

> And so, when, along the way, he [Moses] sought to take care of their lodgings[13] and as a consequence neglected the matter of circumcising his son Eliezer, ". . . the Lord met him [Moses] and sought to kill him" [Exod. 4:24]. — *Exodus Rabba* 5:8

13. Why would the Bible mention that this incident took place "at the inn" unless it was to hint that the inn had something to do with the reason for the attack? Hence, this interpreter reasons, Moses, in taking care of finding an inn, neglected something more important. Note further that the Hebrew word for "inn" (*malōn*) sounds like the verb for "circumcise" (*mūl*), perhaps suggesting a relationship between the two in the story.

A Prenuptial Agreement

But was Moses really the sort to neglect God's requirements? Given the fact that his father-in-law was a "priest of Midian," some interpreters were more inclined to place the blame elsewhere:

> At the time that Moses had said to Jethro, "Give me Zipporah your daughter as a wife," Jethro said to him, "Accept this one condition that I will tell you and I will give her to you as a wife." He said: "What is it?" Jethro said to him: "The son that is born to you first will be given over to idolatry [and, hence, not circumcised], those [born] thereafter can be given to the worship of [your] God." He accepted this condition . . . For that reason did the angel seek to kill Moses at the inn, whereupon "Zipporah took a flint and cut the foreskin of her son." — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Jethro, Amalek*

> And Zipporah took a flint and cut off the foreskin of her son, and brought it near the feet of the destroyer and said, "The bridegroom [Moses] wanted to circumcise, but **his father-in-law did not allow him** to; and now may the blood of this circumcision atone, so that it might rescue the bridegroom from the hands of the Angel of Death." — *Fragment Targum* (V) Exod. 5:25

Perhaps it was Zipporah who made this stipulation:

> He married Zipporah who bore him two sons: one he circumcised, but the other she did not let him circumcise. For she took pride in her father and brothers [who were uncircumcised], and although she had agreed to be Moses' wife, she did not wish to adopt his religion . . . She thus allowed one to continue on the circumcision of Abraham, while forbidding the other [to be circumcised], through whom her father's tradition of the foreskin would be preserved. — Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 2:8

Thus Zipporah or her father, Jethro, the Midianite priest, was responsible for Moses' failing to circumcise his son—and because of it, Moses nearly perished on his way back to Egypt.

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In short: Pharaoh consulted his wise men about getting rid of the Israelites, and it was these sages—particularly Jannes and Jambres—who suggested two strategies, one aimed at reducing the Israelite population and the other at killing off Israel's future redeemer. Nevertheless, that redeemer (Moses) was not killed, but grew up in Pharaoh's court, where he was educated in all the ways of wisdom. Once grown, he had to flee to Midian; there he married an "Ethiopian," Jethro's daughter Zipporah. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, a symbol of the Israelites' future victory over Egypt, and told Moses to return to Egypt. He also revealed to him the secret significance of His name. Moses set out for Egypt, but on the way, an angel tried to kill him for having failed to circumcise his son. Zipporah's swift action saved Moses' life.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Growing Up in Pharaoh's Court

Pharaoh's Unstated Fears: When he appeals to his wise men for help in dealing with the Israelites, Pharaoh's stated motive seems somewhat strange: "Let us deal wisely with them, lest they grow great, and it shall be that when war breaks out, they will join with our enemies and fight against us, and *then will depart from the land*" (Exod. 1:10). Why should Pharaoh's ultimate worry be that the Israelites might leave—if he was so disturbed by this increasing alien population in his land, wouldn't he *want* them to go? Various later sources therefore suggested that Pharaoh really had other things on his mind:

> Come now, let us take counsel against them to see by what laws we may diminish them before they multiply, lest when war break out against us, they join on their own with our enemies and **destroy us** and not leave a single one of us [alive] and then depart from the land.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 1:10

> It says that *they* will depart, and not [what Pharaoh really feared], "*we* [Egyptians] will [be forced to] depart." For, as R. Abba bar Kahana said, he [Pharaoh] was like one who, instead of speaking of something bad happening to himself, phrases it in terms of someone else.[14]
>
> — *Exodus Rabba* 1:8

Jannes and Jambres: A new study of this tradition has been made by Albert Pietersma, who discovered fragments of the putative *Jannes and Jambres* and has now published them along with an exhaustive review of the entire Jannes-Jambres tradition: see Pietersma, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians.* Note especially his list of references to these two magicians in ancient sources, only some of which have been cited above. Pietersma theorizes that the "Yoḥanah and his brother" mentioned in the *Damascus Document* fragment (5:18–19) cited earlier represent the first stage of this tradition, in which the mention of these (apparently Israelite, according to Pietersma) opponents of Moses was, in fact, a veiled allusion to the Maccabean brothers Jonathan and Simon. Later on, these wrong-headed Israelites would have been transformed into *Egyptian* opponents of Moses and, ultimately, into the gifted magicians of later legends. (However attractive this theory, the case for "Jonathan" being transformed into *Yoḥanah* is linguistically weak, and the point of transforming Jonathan and Simon into Israelite opponents of Moses *at the time of the Exodus* seems altogether strange. What is noteworthy is that the offhand manner by which this tradition is mentioned in the *Damascus Document* suggests that it was already widely known by that time.)

14. That is, rather than incite the "evil eye" by speaking of some future disaster befalling *him*, he speaks of it happening to someone else.

Pharaoh's Dream: We glimpsed briefly (in the excerpt *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 1:15–16) the motif of Pharaoh's dream, which warned him of the birth of Moses and subsequent disaster for Egypt. This motif apparently developed by analogy from the warning dreams that an earlier Pharaoh had had in Joseph's time (Gen. 41:1–8) and, more specifically, from the role of the "wise men" there as dream interpreters. If the new Pharaoh now appeared to have summoned his wise men (with the words "Let us deal *wisely* with them"), was this not an indication that he too had had some sort of prophetic dream that he wanted interpreted? (Indeed, the fact that Pharaoh's "prediction" in Exod. 1:10—to the effect that Israel would "depart from the land"—did later turn out to be true seemed to be further proof that he had had some sort of prophetic vision of the future.) It only remained for interpreters to imagine what sort of dream Pharaoh might have had.

Another, somewhat longer version of the same motif appears in other sources:

> One hundred and thirty years after Israel had gone down to Egypt, Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was sitting on his throne and he looked up and saw an old man standing in front of him holding a balance, such as that which merchants use for weighing. And the old man took the balance and held it up in front of Pharaoh. Then he took all of Egypt's elders, her princes and officials, and gathered them and put them into one scale; and then he took a young kid and put it into the other scale. And the young kid outweighed all the others. Now Pharaoh was quite abashed by this frightening vision—for why should the kid outweigh all the others?—and he woke up and it was a dream. When he arose in the morning, he summoned all his servants and told them the dream, and they were exceedingly frightened. And one official of the king's said: "This foretells a great evil that will arise in Egypt in the latter days. For a boy will be born to Israel who will bring the land of Egypt to ruin. Therefore, if the king approve, let a decree be sent by him and let it be written in the laws of Egypt, so that any male child born among the Hebrew be killed, so that this evil will cease from the land of Egypt. And so the king did, as it says, "And the king of Egypt said to the Israelite midwives . . . 'When you assist the Hebrew women to give birth, look upon the birthstool, and if it is boy, then kill it'" [Exod. 1:15–16].
>
> — *Chronicles of Moses* (cited in *Yalqut Shimoni* 164)

Pharaoh's wise men thus foresee the birth of Moses and warn him. In most versions of this motif, Pharaoh acts on this advice by ordering the death of all newborn boys. But one late retelling combines this motif of the foreknowledge of Moses' birth with that other motif of enforced marital separation:

> The diviners of the Egyptians said to Pharaoh that on such a day of such a month, a savior of Israel would be [conceived], and that he would deliver Israel from his [Pharaoh's] yoke. When Pharaoh heard this, he took care that in that same month, all the men of Israel should be absent [from their wives] on a deer hunt . . . But the providence of God disposed in such a

> manner that Amram [Moses' father] brought Jochebed [Moses' mother] with him; and she conceived on the same day that the astrologers indicated.
>
> —Armenian Apocrypha, *History of Moses* (Issaverdens, p. 112)

Hebrew Midwives: According to Exod. 1:15, Pharaoh ordered the "Hebrew midwives" to kill all the baby boys that they delivered. But the phrase "Hebrew midwives" is ambiguous: were these Egyptian women who served as midwives to the Hebrews, or were they Hebrew women who were midwives? The first hypothesis seemed more likely on practical grounds—for how could Pharaoh realistically have asked Hebrew women to kill the offspring of their own compatriots? Moreover, the midwives later speak of Israelite women in the third person, calling them "animals" (in some translations, "healthy," "vigorous"). This too would certainly imply that they were *not* Israelites. Yet the text later observes that the Hebrew midwives "feared God" (Exod. 1:17), which seemed to imply that they were not Egyptians (who worshiped other gods), but Israelites.[15] And why, in any case, should Israelite women have *Egyptian* midwives—could not they themselves practice this profession?

It is thus not surprising to find disagreement on this point among different interpreters. The Septuagint translates "Hebrew midwives" as "midwives of the Hebrews," which seems to tilt slightly toward the hypothesis that the midwives were not Hebrews. Philo repeats the Septuagint phrase (*Who Is Heir,* 128) but does not say anything more specific. Josephus does; he says that the midwives were in fact Egyptians, "for this office was, by his [Pharaoh's] orders, to be performed by women who, as compatriots of the king, were not likely to transgress his will" (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:207). (Josephus therefore mentions nothing about their "fearing God" and implies that they willingly carried out Pharaoh's order.)

The Bible actually mentions two of the midwives by name, Shiphrah and Puah. (Interestingly, the former name appears in the Septuagint and the Vulgate as "Sepphora," the same name as that of the Midianite woman Moses marries in Exod. 2:21.) Rabbinic tradition maintains that these two were not only Hebrews but were none other than Jochebed and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moses (see *Sifrei Numbers* 78 [Horovitz edition, 74]; also, Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:393, n. 17). When they later give Pharaoh the somewhat unflattering excuse that they could not carry out his orders because the Israelite women are "animals" *(ḥayyôt),* the targumic tradition, perhaps associating this word with the Aramaic root *ḥwy* ("tell, say"), asserts that the Israelite women prayed to God and were thus able to deliver their children unassisted (*Targums Neophyti, Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Fragment Targum*). The same word was sometimes interpreted as "midwives" in keeping with the Hebrew *ḥayyāh* ("midwife"); see further Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 64–65; Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 76.

15. Quite to the contrary, a modern scholar might point out that this expression in biblical Hebrew usually referred to what might be called nowadays "common decency" and nothing specific to Israelite religion; see thus Gen. 20:11, 42:18, etc. But such was not the ancient interpreters' understanding of this expression.

A Future Savior: There is a slight irregularity in the traditional Hebrew text of Pharaoh's later decree:

> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live." —Exod. 1:22

This wording was obviously troubling, since it seemed to imply that Pharaoh was telling *his own people* to kill their newborn sons, "every son that is born." The version reflected in the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and elsewhere does not raise such a difficulty:

> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people: "Every son that is born **to the Hebrews** you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."
> —Septuagint, *Samaritan Pentateuch* Exod. 1:22

> Then he [Pharaoh] ordered to cast the Hebrew newborn males into the deep-flowing river. —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 12–13

> And the king of Egypt ordered all his people, saying, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews throw into the river; but let their females live."
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:1

> And Pharaoh the king of Egypt had given orders regarding them [the Israelites] that **they were to throw their sons,** every male that was born, into the river. —*Jubilees* 47:2

Contrary to this tradition is one that held that Pharaoh had indeed meant *all* newborn boys, Egyptian or Hebrews, were to be killed. The reason was that his counselors had informed Pharaoh of the exact day on which Israel's future savior would be born, but they were unable to say whether he would be born an Egyptian or an Israelite. See Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:393–394.

Born in the Dunes: A widely diffused midrashic motif has it that, because of Pharaoh's persecutions, the Israelite women used to go out into the fields to have their babies. Once the babies were born, the women would leave them out in the wild to be cared for by the angels. Thus, for example:

> And it came to pass, when the time of pregnancy of the women had almost come to an end, they went out in the field and there gave birth to their children, and they left them in the field. The Lord then sent an angel, who washed the children . . . When the children were weaned, they returned to their father's house. —*Chronicles of Yeraḥme'el,* 42.4

Ultimately, this motif came to be embellished with all manner of scriptural associations (see thus the version in b. *Soṭah* 11b)—so much so that its textual point of departure has been lost, and it has wrongly been associated with such promising candidates as the verse just discussed, Exod. 1:20 ("For they [the Israelite women] are animals"), or even chalked up to "the motif of children hidden in the bosom of the earth [which] belongs to international folklore" (Schwartzbaum, "Prolegome-

non" to Gaster, *Chronicles of Jerahmeel,* 53). Actually, this midrashic expansion originates in Exod. 1:7, "and the earth became full with them," a phrase that, in Hebrew, seems rather to mean: "and the earth *filled them up,*" with "them" as the direct object of the verb. This phrase suggested that the newborns were somehow covered over with earth or buried in the fields. (Interestingly, the root "to be full" also meant "to be pregnant" in later Hebrew and Aramaic, and may be responsible for other aspects of this motif.) The Septuagint translates this phrase "and the earth caused them to increase," which represents basically the same understanding of the Hebrew syntax (that is, "them" as the direct object of the verb). Note further that both *Targum Onqelos* and the Septuagint translated the Hebrew *sgr* ("close over") in Gen. 2:21 by a verb meaning "fill" *(mly, anaplēroō).*

Amram, Noble Father of Moses: We are not told the name of Moses' father in the story of his birth, but later on (Exod. 6:20) the text specifies that he is Amram, the son of Kohath. As a descendant of Levi, Amram would have been regarded as belonging to the Israelite nobility, as indeed both Philo and Josephus specifically observe:

> His mother and his father were among the noblest of people. Members of the same tribe, it was their common cast of mind, as much as their common ancestry, that drew them close. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:7

> Amram belonged to the Hebrew nobility.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:210

Other sources maintain that he was the "leader of his generation" or the "head of the Sanhedrin" (b. *Soṭah* 12a, *Exodus Rabba* 1:13). This insistence on Amram's prominence may reflect not only his Levite origins, but more specifically the Bible's description of him as a "*man* . . . from the house of Levi" (Exod. 2:1). The word for man here, *'îš,* sometimes implied high station (as in this same chapter, Exod. 2:14; see also Num. 13:2) and in later times was used as an honorific title for, for example, the high priest (m. *Yoma* 1:7). Note also the tradition of Moses' exceptional wealth: Beer, "The Riches of Moses."

Amram's Divorce: The brief account of the circumstances of Moses' birth was of concern for another reason. For Exod. 2:1 reads in full: "Now a man [Amram] went out from the house of Levi, and he took a daughter of Levi." The wording, in English as in Hebrew, seems somewhat cumbersome: why say he "went out of the house of Levi" and then add that he "took a daughter of Levi"? What ought to have been described as a single act—getting married—is presented here as if it involved two separate actions, "going out" and only *then* marrying. Indeed, since Amram goes out "*from* the house of Levi" and then marries a woman apparently belonging to the same "house of Levi," it seems as if these are not only two separate actions, but opposed ones: first Amram "went out," then he apparently *came back* and married.

There were other questions as well. The "house of Levi" might seem, in the light

of later Israelite society, to refer to the *tribe* of Levi: it is as if the text is trying to tell us that a certain Levite (that is, a man from the "house of Levi") went and married a Levite woman (a "daughter of Levi"). At the time that these events took place, however, one could hardly yet speak of a *tribe* of Levi: Levi was the name of an individual Israelite, one of Jacob's sons, who was the grandfather of Amram, the Levite man in the story. Under these circumstances, the "house of Levi" could hardly refer to anything other than Levi's immediate family, perhaps, in fact, to the actual house in which that family lived. By the same token, a "daughter of Levi" would likewise mean, in this time period, an actual daughter of Jacob's son Levi. So, for example, is this verse explained in the *Aramaic Levi Document* (*Cambridge c* 18–20, *d* 14–15 and the *Testament of Levi* 12:4); there, Levi recounts that Jochebed, the woman who will eventually give birth to Moses, is his (Levi's) daughter, born on the same day as his grandson Amram (Moses' future father). But if understood in this fashion, the actions of this verse were even more troubling. Why should Amram's son, dwelling in the very "house of Levi," *go out* in order to marry Levi's daughter at all?

If this were not enough to move interpreters to seek some alternate explanation for this verse, surely the verses immediately preceding and following it were. The verse just before contained the words of Pharaoh's decree, "Every son that is born you shall cast into the Nile" (Exod. 1:22). But would it make sense for someone, right on the heels of such a dire decree, to go out and get married, thus running the risk of bringing into the world a son condemned to be drowned at birth? As for the verse that follows, it states that the "daughter of Levi" in question then "conceived and bore a son" (Exod. 2:2), Moses. But two verses later we are informed that the newborn baby had an older sister. Where did *she* come from if Moses was the first child of this marriage?

Out of all these considerations developed a tradition to the effect that Amram had changed his mind about married life. At first he was married to Jochebed, Levi's daughter (and it was then that his son Aaron and daughter Miriam were born). Later, however, when Pharaoh decreed that the newborn boys should be killed, Amram separated from his Jochebed lest they have a son who might fall victim to the decree. It was then that he "went out of the house of Levi," leaving his divorced wife behind. Still later, he thought better of his action, and returned "and took [back] the daughter of Levi [his former wife]":[16]

> Amram was the leader of his generation. When he heard Pharaoh's decree, "Cast all newborn boys into the Nile" [Exod. 1:22] he said, "We are struggling in vain!" and he divorced his wife [lest they have any more children].

16. In its rabbinic form (for example, b. *Soṭah* 12a, cited below), the exegesis is apparently somewhat different: "went out from the house of Levi" is taken to mean "divorced his wife." ("House" is elsewhere explained as meaning "wife"; see m. *Yoma* 1:1.) The phrase "took the daughter of Levi" is then explained as "took *the advice of* the daughter of Levi," namely, his own daughter Miriam, who urged him to take Jochebed back. This explanation may, however, be a somewhat more sophisticated reworking of a simpler tradition, to the effect that the verbs "went out" and "took" in Exod. 2:1 seem to hint at two different, even contrary, actions.

> All the other people did likewise. Then his daughter [Miriam] said to him, "Father, your decision is still harsher than Pharaoh's. For Pharaoh's decree was only against male babies, but your decree is against the males and the females [that is, now no children shall survive since none will be born] . . . He [Amram] forthwith took his wife back, and all the others did so too.
>
> —b. *Soṭah* 12a

> [The Israelites said:] "Let us set up rules for ourselves so that a man should not approach his wife lest their [female] offspring be defiled [by Egyptians] and our descendants end up as idolators. It is better for us to die without children, until we know what God may do." But Amram answered, saying: ". . . Now, therefore, I shall not abide by what you have established, but I shall go in and **take** my wife and bring forth children, so that we shall multiply on earth."[17] —Pseudo-Philo, *Book of Biblical Antiquities* 9:2, 4

The idea that Moses' father had divorced his wife to avoid bringing forth children for slaughter obviously has much in common with the one seen earlier in this chapter, to the effect that Pharaoh's decree of hard labor was actually designed to prevent the Israelites from having marital relations and increasing their numbers. Like that one, so this one seems to have been motivated (at least in part) by a desire among ancient interpreters to establish some clear connection between Pharaoh's decrees and his stated wish to reduce the Israelite population, since neither hard labor nor killing off, specifically, Israelite *boys* seemed, on the face of it, the most effective way to reduce their numbers. It was therefore necessary to find some evidence in the Bible itself that killing off the boys had, at least for a time, discouraged the Israelites from having *any* children. Amram's "going out" from the house of Levi provided just such evidence.

Incidentally, the words used by Miriam in b. *Soṭah* cited above ("For Pharaoh's decree was only against male babies, but your decree is against the males and the females") are strikingly similar to those of the *Passover Haggadah* concerning Laban, Jacob's uncle: "Pharaoh's decree was only against the males, but Laban sought to destroy them all." It is clear, as Daniel Goldschmidt has argued (*Passover Haggadah,* 38–39), that the Haggadah here borrowed—rather crudely!—from our midrash. This borrowing may be, as Goldschmidt asserts, a late addition to the Haggadah text, but as Pseudo-Philo makes clear, the exegetical tradition behind it is certainly ancient. As for Miriam's role in changing her father's mind, this may ultimately be connected to the motif "Miriam the Prophetess" (Chapter 18, *OR*).

17. In Pseudo-Philo's version, Amram thus speaks out against this plan. Apparently, this is a somewhat garbled version of the same exegetical expansion of Exod. 2:1 as witnessed in b. *Soṭah* 12a; although the latter version is later in date, it clearly represents the correct form of the exegetical expansion of Exod. 2:1. Here, the Latin *ingrediens accipiam mulierem meam* seems to represent something like *wĕ'ābô' wĕ'eqqaḥ 'et 'ištî* in the Hebrew original. If so, the clear implication is that Amram already has a wife whom he has left somewhere; indeed, the *ingrediens* may be meant to contrast with the "going forth from" in Exod. 2:1. Note that in Josephus, too, Amram fears "lest the entire people be destroyed by the lack of a new generation" and prays a special prayer to God to prevent the coming extinction (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:210–211).

What a Beautiful Baby! Scripture states that, after Moses' birth, his mother "saw the boy, that he was good, and she hid him for three months" (Exod. 2:2). What might this verse mean by saying that she saw that her baby was "good"? Apparently, it must have been talking about some visible sort of goodness, since she could *see* it. The Septuagint translators therefore concluded that what was meant was physical beauty: they said that she saw that he was "fair" or "fine" *(asteios)*, and this understanding is reflected among other ancient writers:

> . . . that he was handsome . . . —Symmachus, Peshitta Exod. 2:2

> His son was Moses, who was distinguished by physical beauty, along with the wisdom that he inherited from his father.
> —Pompeius Trogus, *Historia Philippica* 36.2.11

> Thus the newborn boy seemed from the start finer in appearance than is usual. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:9

> Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful. —Heb. 11:23

Still, does not almost every parent consider his or her baby good-looking? Why should Scripture have bothered to say something we might have assumed to be so in any case? A number of interpreters therefore sought to find some special significance in these words:

> Now the child himself [Moses] had been born in the covenant of God and the covenant of his flesh [that is, circumcised].
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:13

> At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God.[18]
> —Acts 7:20

> [God reveals to Amram that his son Moses is destined to save Israel:] Then they [Moses' parents] were fearful not only for the child himself, but for the greatness and good fortune for which he was destined.[19]
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:217

> *"And she saw that he was goodly"*: . . . R. Nehemiah said, [she saw prophetically] that he was worthy of the office of prophet. Others say that [he was "goodly" means] he was born already circumcised. —b. *Soṭah* 12a

18. Cf. "That which is said of Moses, that he was handsome to see and perfect in all of his members, ought to be understood as referring to the grace of God that was in him—for otherwise, who is the little child, however awful looking, that would not be handsome and perfect in the eyes of his own mother?" (Isho'dad of Merv, cited in Tonneau, "Moise dans la tradition syrienne," 257).

19. It seems that underlying Josephus' words here is the idea that Moses' mother saw that he was "good" in the sense that it was divinely revealed to her after his birth that Moses would be a prophet and great leader of Israel (as in the exegetical tradition cited by R. Nehemiah in b. *Soṭah* 12a, below). And so, seeing that he was, in this sense, "good," she then feared for two separate reasons, not only for the survival of her son, but for the fulfillment of the great mission for which he was destined, and it was this

Pharaoh's Barren Daughter: Pharaoh's daughter is not named in the Exodus narrative, but ancient interpreters frequently supplied names lacking in the biblical original. Thus, *Jubilees* 47:5 refers to her as Tharmuth, a name that reappears in Josephus as Thermuthis (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:224). Artapanus calls her Merris. Rabbinic exegetes identified her with the "Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh" referred to in 1 Chron. 4:17, since that verse says that Bithiah was the mother of Miriam (the name of Moses' sister).

Because of her good deed in adopting Moses, Pharaoh's daughter was held in high esteem by ancient interpreters, who elaborated on her virtue. On the basis of 1 Chron. 4:15–17, she was said to have married Caleb and to have received divine reward for her piety (see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:270–271). At the same time, her decision to adopt a foundling still demanded explanation. It seemed to many only reasonable that she did so, at least in part, because she herself had no children:

> Since she was barren, she adopted the child of one of the Jews and named it Moses. —Artapanus, Fragment 3 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.3)

> The king of the country had a beloved daughter, an only child. It is said that she had been married a long time without being able to have a child. But she had her heart set on one, most particularly on a male heir who might receive the munificent inheritance of her father's kingdom—an inheritance that would otherwise be in danger of going to someone else by reason of her barrenness. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:13

> She had not been fated to have offspring of her own.
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:232

No Handmaid, Twin Handmaids: According to the Bible, when Pharaoh's daughter sees the box containing Moses floating in the Nile, "she sent her handmaid and she took it" (Exod. 2:5). The same understanding appears in the Septuagint. However, the word "handmaid" here can, by a strange coincidence, also mean "arm's length" or simply "arm." It was thus possible to understand this same verse otherwise:

> . . . and she stretched forth her arm and she took it.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 2:5

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combination of factors that caused her to take the risky step of trying to hide her newborn son from the authorities. This motif, in other words, seeks to explain not only what Scripture means by saying that Moses' mother saw that he was good, but the connection between that perception and what follows it, her hiding the boy for three months. Thus, the motif of Moses' mother or father receiving a divine revelation about their future child (perhaps present as well in Acts 7:20) is an elaboration of Exod. 2:2. (Note, incidentally, that the Septuagint asserts that "they"—both parents—saw that he was fair.) The motif may likewise have been influenced by what is probably a still earlier tradition, that Miriam "the prophet" had foretold of her extraordinary brother-to-be; see Chapter 18, *OR*, "Miriam the Prophetess."

This same interpretation seems to be reflected earlier:

> The sovereign's daughter, with her maidens, then
> came down to bathe her limbs, as was her wont.
> **And straightway seeing me, she took me up:**
> she knew that I was of the Hebrew race.
>
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 19–22

One of the paintings in the Dura Europos synagogue likewise may portray Pharaoh's daughter as performing the action alone, though the evidence is hardly as unequivocal as suggested by Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis"; the figure in the river might just as well be that of her handmaid (see below). See also Maori, *Peshitta Version*, 68.

It is interesting in this connection to observe that one Exodus text from Qumran has a somewhat different version of what happened when Moses was first put into his basket:

> And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him a basket . . . and she put the child in it and **she said to her handmaid, "Go!"** and she put him on the river's bank. —*4Q Exod.*^{b} Exod. 2:3

It seems that the editor or copyist of this text was anxious that Moses' natural mother be no less honored than his adoptive mother: if (according to the traditional Hebrew text and the Septuagint) the latter had a handmaid whom she sent to pick up the basket, then the former ought likewise to have had a handmaid to deposit it on the shore of the Nile. See further Rofe, "Moses' Mother and Her Servant according to an Exodus Scroll from Qumran"; Rofe also suggests that this

Pharaoh's daughter stretches out her hand.

text may introduce the figure of the servant "in order to take away from the mother the actual act of abandoning her child to his fate on the banks of the Nile." The Bible's stipulation that Moses' sister "stood at a distance in order to know what would happen to him" (Exod. 2:4) might also have contributed to this view, for if his mother was not watching, the apparent reason was that she had not been the one to bring Moses to the Nile in the first place. Finally, it is to be noted that the Dura Europos panel depicting the infancy of Moses clearly represents *two* women bringing the baby to the Nile; though these are probably—on the basis of the rest of the panel—to be identified as Moses' mother and sister, they might arguably represent Miriam and the handmaid.

Why "Moses"? The Bible explains that Pharaoh's daughter named the baby Moses, "because I have drawn him up [from Hebrew *māšâ*] from the water." But why would Pharaoh's daughter give a Hebrew name to her baby? Why would she even know the Hebrew language? For this reason, both Philo (*Life of Moses* 1:17) and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:228) explain the name Moses as deriving from the ancient Egyptian word for "water," *mōu*. A Syriac tradition suggests on the contrary that "she called him by this name [Moses] in order that he remember that he was a Hebrew, and [remember] the great mercy that had been shown to him" (Syriac *Traditions of the Greeks,* cited in Tonneau, "Moise dans la tradition syrienne," 258). Another tradition, reading *mōšeh* as an apparently active verb, suggests that Moses was so called because "he drew himself up," that is, his virtue was what had caused him to be saved: see *Midrash ha-Gadol* Exod. 2:10.

As we glimpsed briefly, Artapanus identified Moses with a legendary Greek figure associated with Orpheus whose name happened to be Musaeus (in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.3–4). This identification was followed by some later writers, including Christian apologists (like Eusebius himself) who liked to believe that all of Greek wisdom, science, and philosophy had been "stolen" from the ancient Israelites.

As with Jethro (see below), rabbinic exegetes suggested that Moses had other names as well—in fact, ten in all—partly on the basis of (once again!) 1 Chron. 4:17–18. *Leviticus Rabba* 1:2–3 argues that of all his names, the pagan name given to him by Bithiah, "Moses," was the one most beloved to God. (In context, this appears to be an argument that converts to Judaism should keep their old pagan names.)

Schooled in Every Wisdom: This motif may have been echoed by Josephus as well:

> His [Moses'] growth in understanding was not in line with his growth in stature, but far outran the measure of his years: its maturer excellence was **displayed in his games,** and his actions then gave promise of the greater deeds to be done by him on reaching manhood.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:230

The word translated as "games" *(paidiais)* might instead be "educational activities" *(paideiais)*—this is the reading of Nodet, *Antiquités juives.* If so, then it would seem that, for Josephus as well, Moses was educated in Pharaoh's court.

The sources seen in connection with this motif all mention that Moses had been instructed by others. But there was another approach that stressed Moses' own native gifts. Given these, Moses could not help but develop on his own all manner of inventions and new lines of thought. Indeed, perhaps his reputation for wisdom was due not to his having learned from others at all, but to his own homegrown talents:

> This Musaeus [Moses] was the teacher of Orpheus. When he was grown, he bestowed many useful contributions on mankind, for he invented boats and devices for stone construction and the Egyptian weapons and instruments for drawing water and for warfare, and philosophy. Further, he divided the state into thirty-six jurisdictions and stipulated for each of the jurisdictions the god to be worshiped (and for the priests, the hieroglyphs) and that they [the gods?] should be cats and dogs and ibises.
>
> —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.4)

> Eupolemus says that Moses was the **first** wise man, that he first taught the alphabet to the Jews and the Phoenicians received it from the Jews, and the Greeks received it from the Phoenicians.
>
> —Eupolemus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.26.1)

> Teachers at once arrived from different parts, some unbidden from the neighboring countries and the provinces of Egypt, others summoned from Greece under promise of high reward. But in a short time, he [Moses] **advanced beyond their capacities**; his gifted nature forestalled their instruction, so that his seemed a case rather of recollection than of learning, and he himself devised and propounded problems which they could not easily solve. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:21

Moses' Speech Defect: The tray presented to Moses, on which rest a burning coal and a diamond or some other object of value, may itself be imported from another topos, that of the choice confronting all human beings in life:

> Before you are **fire** and water—**reach out for whichever you wish.**
> Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him.
>
> —Sir. 15:16–17

See further Chapter 25, "A Choice of Two Paths."

It is noteworthy that Origen, like earlier interpreters, maintained that Moses was indeed instructed in wisdom and thus an eloquent man. It was only when he began to hear the voice of God that he found his own speech to be feeble by comparison: "It was then that he announced that he could not speak" (*Homilies in Exodus* 3).

Jealous of Moses: Jealousy is specifically connected to Moses' flight in *1 Clement* as well, but here it is apparently the jealousy of a fellow Hebrew:

> Jealousy caused Moses to flee from Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, when he heard one of his countrymen say, "Who made you a judge or ruler over us? Do you wish to kill me the same way that you killed the Egyptian yesterday?"
>
> — *1 Clement* 4:10

This passage comes in a catalog of jealousy's ill effects in the Bible and is thus probably quite unrelated to the motif of *Pharaoh*'s jealousy charted earlier.

Moses and the Ethiopians: Num. 12:1 refers to Moses' "Cushite [Ethiopian] wife"; as discussed earlier, some interpreters held that this "Cushite" was none other than Zipporah. (For more on the passage in Ezekiel's *Exagōgē* as well as Demetrius the Chronographer, *Fragment* 3.3, see Jacobson, *Exagoge,* 85–87; see also below, "Zipporah the Hebrew.") Others, however, believed that the text truly meant to indicate that Moses in fact had two wives, one Midianite (Zipporah) and one Cushite (unnamed). And where might Moses have acquired this other wife if not in Ethiopia itself (that is, the land just south of ancient Egypt)? Perhaps he married her when he first fled Egypt, before he got to Midian:

> And Moses and Aaron spoke unworthily against Moses on account of the Cushite woman whom the Cushites had married to Moses when he fled from Pharaoh, and whom he [subsequently] estranged from himself, for they had married the queen of Cush [Ethiopia] to him, and he was estranged from her. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Num. 12:1

(Their "estrangement" might explain, inter alia, why the biblical genealogies do not mention any children resulting from this union.)

But Ethiopia is not on the way to Midian! And since, in fleeing to Midian, Moses was leaving the African continent entirely (and would return later only for the specific purpose of leading the Israelites out of Egypt), other interpreters came to the conclusion that Moses must have acquired this Ethiopian wife earlier in life, sometime in his youth, during a stay in Ethiopia not directly reported in the biblical account.

Thus apparently was born a legend according to which Moses led a military campaign in Ethiopia on behalf of Pharaoh. According to this story—which first appears in Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.7–10) and later, in a slightly different version, in Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:238–253)—Moses is put in charge of the Egyptian army fighting the Ethiopians as part of a royal plot, for the king has become jealous of Moses. But Moses triumphs after an arduous campaign and even wins the hearts of the Ethiopians and (in Josephus' version) marries the daughter of the Ethiopian king. Later Jewish and Christian sources—*Chronicles of Moses, Sefer ha-Yashar, Yalqut Shimoni, Chronicles of Yeraḥme'el,* the *Paleya*—elaborate on Moses' stay in Ethiopia; see Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:407–410; Schwartzbaum, "Prolegomenon," 55–56; Rajak, "Moses in Ethiopia"; Shinan, "Moses and the Ethiopian Woman." The legend of Moses and his Ethiopian wife came to be further elaborated by later commentators; see Brock, "Some Syriac Legends," 237–255.

The Many Names of Moses' Father-in-Law: When Moses arrives in Midian and marries Zipporah, the text identifies her father, the "priest of Midian" (Exod. 2:16), as Reuel (Exod. 2:18). Shortly afterward, however, Scripture notes that Moses "was keeping the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian" (Exod. 3:1). Was his name thus Reuel or Jethro? To make matters worse, the book of Judges at one point observes: "Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of *Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses*" (Judg. 4:11). Apparently, then, the Bible gives three different names for the same father-in-law. At the same time, Num. 10:29 reads: "And Moses said to Hobab, the *son of Reuel* the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law . . ." If so, Hobab and Reuel cannot be two names for the same man but must be two different men, father and son. (Nor is it clear whether the phrase "Moses' father-in-law" in this verse is to be understood as referring back to Hobab or to Reuel.)

Contemplating these verses, ancient interpreters were anxious to establish the identity of Moses' father-in-law once and for all. Different Septuagint manuscripts insert the name Jethro in Exod. 2:16 or 18, apparently seeking to make clear from the start that Jethro was the man's principal name, even though the name Reuel also appears in Exod. 2:18. (Between these two names, "Jethro" probably seemed the more important one to ancient readers, since it was by this name that Moses' father-in-law is known in the longest narrative dealing with him, chapter 18 of Exodus.)

This approach notwithstanding, a number of Hellenistic writers refer to Moses' father-in-law as "Raguel" (= Reuel in the Septuagint). Artapanus does (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.19), as does Josephus, who seems to say that "Jethro" was some sort of nickname (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:264). Philo states that these two names were used for a single person in order to convey different messages, Jethro to denote the man's vanity and Reuel his piety (*On the Change of Names* 103–105).

None of this, however, addresses the problem of the third name, Hobab, and his identification as Moses' father-in-law in Judg. 4:11 and as Reuel's *son* in Num. 10:29. One ancient text that mentions all three names has already been glimpsed briefly above, in the genealogy of Zipporah presented by Demetrius the Chronographer:

> Moses fled into Midian and there he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, who was, as may be surmised from the names of those born from Keturah, of the stock of Abraham, for he [Jethro] was a descendant of Jokshan, who was born to Abraham by Keturah. And from Jokshan was born Dedan, and from Dedan, **Reuel, and from Reuel, Jethro and Hobab,** and from Jethro, Zipporah, whom Moses married.
>
> — Demetrius the Chronographer, Fragment 3, cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.29.1, 3

According to this, Reuel is the *father* of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. If so, when Scripture says that the daughters went "to their father Reuel" (Exod. 2:18), it must have meant that they went to *the house of* Reuel (their "father" in the sense of "ancestor" or specifically "grandfather," Gen. 31:42, 32:9; also Gen. 17:5, and so on)

where, presumably, they and their actual father Jethro also lived. Now, in this genealogy, Demetrius also mentions "Hobab," so he (or his source) is apparently trying to account as well for one or both of the other two verses mentioned above, Num. 10:29 and Judg. 4:10. However, it is not at all clear how his genealogy proposes to solve this problem. For Demetrius here claims that Hobab was the name of Jethro's *brother.* But for this to fit with Num. 10:29, "And Moses said to Hobab, the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law," it would be necessary for the word "father-in-law" *(ḥōtēn)* here to be read as *ḥatan,* a word that, apparently, can sometimes mean an unspecified relative by marriage, that is, "in-law" (see 2 Kings 8:27). Alternately, one can imagine that Demetrius (or his source) simply identified Hobab and Jethro as the same person, Moses' father-in-law and the son of Reuel. That would indeed reconcile all the biblical verses but, as noted, it is not what Demetrius (at least in this text) appears to be saying.

Later, rabbinic exegetes equated *all* the names mentioned with a single person and added a few more for good measure:

> He was known by seven different names: Jether,[20] Jethro, Hobab, Reuel, Heber,[21] Putiel,[22] and Keni.[23] — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Yitro* 1

Zipporah the Hebrew: The Septuagint version of Gen. 25:3 includes Reuel among the sons of Dedan; Reuel does not appear in the corresponding list in the traditional Hebrew text. It may be that an original list was expanded to include Reuel so as to place Zipporah among the direct descendants of the marriage of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:1). In marrying her, Moses was not really taking a foreign bride, but joining a distant relative equally descended from "Abram the Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13). The point is made specifically in a passage cited above:

> Moses fled into Midian and there he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, who was, as may be surmised from the names of those born from Keturah, of the stock of Abraham.
>
> — Demetrius the Chronographer, Fragment 3 (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.29.1)

20. This name (apparently a variant form of Jethro) appears in the Masoretic text of Exod. 4:18.

21. Mentioned in Judg. 4:11, which, for this purpose, is being read as if it said, "Now Heber the Kenite separated from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab; [he was] Moses' father-in-law."

22. Exod. 6:25 reads: "Eleazar, Aaron's son, took to wife one of the daughters of Putiel," implying that the existence of these "daughters of Putiel" was somehow already known to the reader. Since the only available "daughters" previously mentioned were the seven daughters of Reuel/Jethro, it seemed at this point only reasonable to assume that "Putiel" was yet another name of this person. But cf.: "He was called Pantil [Paltiel] because God had caused him to escape [*plṭ*] the punishment of Pharaoh. The proof is as Scripture says, 'Eleazar, Aaron's son, took to wife [one of the daughters of] Pantil,' who thus must have been the daughter of his father's brother [= Moses]," cited in Tonneau, "Moise dans la tradition syrienne," 258.

23. Apparently this name is also based on Judg. 4:11, where *haqqēnî* ("the Kenite") could also be read as the name of an individual, "Keni."

First an Angel, Then God: In a passage cited from Philo that describes the burning bush, there is another interpretive element not mentioned:

> Toward the very center of the flames was a form of extraordinary beauty, which was like nothing seen with the eye . . . and which one might suppose to have been an image of the One Who Is [God]. But let it rather be called an angel [that is, a herald], for, with a silence more eloquent than any sound, it heralded by means of a sublime vision things that were to happen later on.
>
> —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:66

Philo seeks here to explain an apparent inconsistency in the biblical text, which first says that an *angel* appeared to Moses "out of the midst of the bush" (Exod. 3:2), but then says that *God* "called to him out of the midst of the bush" (Exod. 3:4). Was it God or an angel? According to Philo's explanation, the word "angel" was used here since it means, in Greek, a herald or announcer, and the very appearance of this bush feeding on the fire that would consume it thus *announced* the triumph of Israel over its oppressors. (Note that, in Acts 7:30 and 35, this potential ambiguity is dealt with in straightforward fashion: it was an angel that appeared to Moses.)

Pseudo-Philo shows a similar sensitivity to the problem:

> [Moses recalls to God:] "And you knew that I was a shepherd and that I would graze my flock in the wilderness and I led them to your mountain, Horeb, and there I **at first** saw your angel afire from the bush. **It was you, however,** who called me from the bush, and I was afraid and hid my face."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:9

This difference likewise explains Moses' different reactions, wonderment and interest when he first sees the angel ("Let me turn aside and see . . ." Exod. 3:3) as opposed to fear and hiding (Exod. 3:6) when God directly addresses him.

Other interpreters came up with similar explanations:

> Trypho said: . . . He who was seen in a flame of fire was an angel, and He who conversed with Moses was God, so that both an angel and God, two together, were in that vision. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 60:1

> Moses, who was shepherding his flocks on Horeb, saw an angel in the fire of a burning bush. But when he came close to look at the bush which was not burned up by the fire, it was not merely the apparition of an angel that he saw, but God Himself, in the angel, appeared to him in a splendid vision . . . This bush, which did not deserve to become an image of dead gods [that is, its wood shaped into idolatrous images], instead represented God symbolically present in the fire. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 3:1

> At first, He only appeared to him as an angel standing in the midst of the bush, so as not to frighten him. —*Midrash Abkir,* in *Yalqut Shimoni* 167

God Spoke with Fire: We saw briefly that one ancient tradition held that the burning bush itself constituted a divine message, so that by looking at it Moses

immediately understood that God was summoning him to free the Israelites from Egypt:

> With a silence more eloquent than any sound, it heralded by means of a sublime vision things that were to happen later on. For the bush was a symbol of those who suffer the flames of injustice, just as the fire symbolized those responsible for it; but that which burned did not burn up, and those who suffered injustice were not to be destroyed by their oppressors.
>
> — Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:66–67

> God showed him a burning fire, yet it [the bush] was not consumed. He said to him: just as this bush is burning in the fire but is not consumed, so the Egyptians will be unable to destroy Israel. — *Exodus Rabba* 2:5

This theme of a verbal message from God being carried through some *sight* may be reflected in other ancient retellings:

> [God said to Moses:]
> the place on which you stand is holy ground,
> and from this bush God's **word shines forth** to you.
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 99

> Moses was terrified at this strange spectacle, but was amazed yet more when this **fire found a tongue,** addressed him by name, and communed with him.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:267

Understanding the burning bush as constituting a message in and of itself seems to derive directly from the biblical text: why did God bother with the burning bush instead of speaking directly at once to Moses, as He had with, for example, Abraham? Another possibility has been suggested, whereby these interpreters borrowed the theme of divine speech as sight from another biblical site, Exod. 20:18 ("Now all the people were seeing the thunderings [literally, "sounds" or "voices"])." The idea that God is "heard" through the sense of sight would have been particularly pleasing to those of Greek education, who held the sense of sight to be vastly superior to that of sound. See on this Amir, "The Decalogue According to Philo," 121–160.

God's Secret Name: There was another way of reading the exchange between God and Moses in Exod. 3:13–15: God's answer, "I am who I am," could indeed be taken as a polite refusal to reveal His name. If so, then what follows, the mention of the Tetragrammaton in Exod. 3:15, would have to be understood as part of this same refusal, as if God were saying to Moses, "You may tell the people that my name is YHWH—but I still will not have revealed my *real* name [or, perhaps, the *real* significance of this name]."

This passage, particularly if interpreted in this fashion, must have had an important role in supporting the idea that there is something *secret* about the name(s) of God. And indeed, God's "name" had frequently been spoken of in the Bible as a synonym for His presence, sometimes almost as His alter ego (Exod. 23:21,

Lev. 24:10–16, Num. 6:27, Deut. 12:11, and elsewhere). Was it not logical that this "name" was somehow a closely guarded secret, for it in itself had power? Or, as God's name ceased being uttered in day-to-day life in Israel, perhaps it was the secret pronunciation of its letters that was powerful.

> [Pharaoh] bade Moses to say the name of the god who had sent him, mocking him. But he bent forward and pronounced it into his ear. When the king heard it, he fell down speechless, but revived when taken hold of by Moses. —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.24–25)

> This [Satan] told Michael to show him the hidden Name, so that they might pronounce it in the oath, so that those who revealed all that was secret to the children of men might tremble before the Name and oath. —*1 Enoch* 69:14

(The former incident is also found, in somewhat different form, in Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies* 1.154.2.) See further Urbach, *The Sages,* 124–134; Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Ecriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie,* 58–62.

White But Not Leprous: Historians in ancient Egypt preserved the memory of the invasion of their land centuries earlier by foreigners (called, in some Egyptian sources, the Hyksos or the Syrians) who ruled over them for some time and were finally expelled. This tradition was certainly based on some real, historical occurrence. However, long after the events themselves, the foreigners who had thus been expelled came to be identified with the Jews, and ancient historians now claimed that the reason for their expulsion was that they were afflicted with leprosy or some other "uncleanness." The beginnings of this tradition are somewhat obscure; they may be seen in passages attributed to such early Greek writers as Manetho (early third century B.C.E.) and Lysimachus (second to first century B.C.E.). In any event, the story was repeated and elaborated by later writers, often out of undisguised hatred for the Jews:

> The ancestors of the Jews had been driven out of all Egypt as men who were impious and detested by the gods. For, by way of purging the country, all persons who had white or leprous marks on their bodies had been assembled and driven across the border, as being under a curse; the refugees [then] occupied the territory around Jerusalem, and, having organized the nation of the Jews, made their hatred of mankind into a tradition, and on this account introduced utterly outlandish laws: not to break bread with any other race, nor to show them any good will at all.
>
> —Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 34–35, 1.1–2

This "expulsion of the lepers" tradition apparently gained enough adherents in the Greco-Roman world that it seemed to require refutation; Josephus wrote an entire work in response to this and similar accusations, his *Against Apion.* See Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism,* 113–133. It is interesting to observe in this connection that the book of *Jubilees* had earlier stated (seeking to explain the phrase "and

they cringed [*wayyāqūṣû*] from before the Israelites," Exod. 1:12) that "the men of Egypt regarded the sons of Israel as defiled" (*Jubilees* 46:16).

The Exodus narrative did have one remote connection with leprosy. When, at the revelation of the burning bush, Moses was first instructed by God to return to Egypt, Moses was skeptical: "Behold, they [the people of Israel] will not believe me" (Exod. 4:1). God then gave Moses the means to prove that he was His messenger:

> Again the Lord said to him, "Put your hand into your bosom." And he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was **leprous,** as white as snow. —Exod. 4:6

In view of the "expulsion of the lepers" slander, it is not surprising that a number of ancient sources omitted the element of leprosy in retelling this incident:

> And he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, his hand **had become as snow.** —Septuagint Exod. 4:6

> [God said to Moses:] Put your hand in your bosom and take it out [again].
> [Moses:] There, it is done. It has become **white as snow.**
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exogōgē* 129–130

> And he put his hand into his bosom, and he took it out, and behold, his hand **was white as snow.** —*Targum Onqelos* Exod. 4:6

> Next, He bade him put his right hand into his bosom: he obeyed and drew it back **white, of a color resembling chalk.**
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:273

A Prenuptial Agreement: We saw earlier the tradition that explained the attempt on Moses' life in Exod. 4:24–26 as having been motivated by his failure to circumcise his son. But which son? The Bible states that he had two, Gershom and Eliezer (Exod. 4:20, 18:3). It must have seemed to interpreters only logical that, if Moses' life was threatened for his having failed to circumcise one of his sons, then that son must have been the younger one, Eliezer. For why would he have failed to circumcise the older, Gershom? Whatever the reason might originally have been—forgetfulness, neglect, incapacity, or the like—Moses certainly would have gone about rectifying his omission, at least at the time when his younger son was circumcised (if not before). And so, it seemed only reasonable that the son who was not yet circumcised at the time of the attack was Eliezer. Perhaps Eliezer was just eight days old on that particular day; perhaps Moses had, because of his journey, not gotten around to performing this important duty on time. Whatever the case, in one of the passages cited, it is specifically Eliezer who had not been circumcised:

> "And it happened that, at an inn along the way . . ." [Exod. 4:24]. Beloved indeed is circumcision [to God], for Moses was not allowed to defer it for the slightest while. And so, when, along the way, he sought to take care of their lodgings and as a consequence neglected the matter of circumcising

his son **Eliezer,** ". . . the Lord met him [Moses] and sought to kill him" [Exod. 4:24]. —*Exodus Rabba* 1:8

It is interesting, however, that this, the more "logical," tradition is attested here in a relatively late source. The tradition found in earlier sources (seen in the body of this chapter) maintained that Eliezer's older brother, Gershom, was the one who was not circumcised. Why did ancient interpreters choose the older brother, with all the further explaining that this choice would entail? It seems to me that the reason for this odd choice was the name Gershom itself. For, the Bible explains the reason for Moses' choosing this name in these terms:

She [Zipporah] bore a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner [*gēr*] in a foreign land." —Exod. 2:22

This mention of a foreign land in connection with the name of the *older* son suggested that, if either of the sons was not circumcised, it must have been the one whose very name evoked being in a foreign land (and not the second son, Eliezer, whose name is explained as meaning "my father's God was my aid" [Exod. 18:4]—surely *he* was not the uncircumcised one!). Indeed, the meaning of Gershom's name is further refined in the prelude to the passage (seen earlier in this chapter) describing a certain prenuptial agreement between Jethro and Moses:

"And her two sons, the first of whom was named Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land' (Exod. 18:3)." R. Joshua said: "foreign land" [*ereṣ nokhrîyyāh*] means exactly that. R. El'azar ha-Moda'i said: In the land where God is a foreigner [*ereṣ nokhrî yāh*].

—*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Yitro, Amaleq* 1

If God is unknown in Midian, then that might indeed explain Gershom's name, which not only contains the word for "sojourning" but is remarkable for its lack of any evocation of God's name.[24] And such a name would indeed be appropriate for one who, by the circumstances of his birth, could not undergo the rite of circumcision. The same text then goes on to introduce the "Prenuptial Agreement" motif seen earlier:

At the time that Moses had said to Jethro, "Give me Zipporah your daughter as a wife," Jethro said to him, "Accept this one condition that I will tell you and I will give her to you as a wife." He said: "What is it?" Jethro said to him: "The son that is born to you first will be given over to idolatry [and, hence, not circumcised], those [born] thereafter can be given to the worship of [your] God." He accepted this condition . . . For that reason did the angel

24. It should also be noted that the word for "sojourner" *(ger)* came to mean "convert to Judaism" in later Hebrew. Thus it might seem that this sentence, although spoken by Moses, was really a prediction put in the mouth of his newborn son, to the effect that he would be a convert to Judaism in a foreign land. But why should Gershom have to *convert* to Judaism? The answer was the prenuptial agreement: Jethro, as priest of Midian, had insisted that Moses' firstborn son be given over to idolatrous worship, presumably worship of the same gods of Midian whom Jethro himself served.

> seek to kill Moses at the inn, whereupon "Zipporah took a flint and cut the foreskin of her son." — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Yitro, Amaleq* 1

The prenuptial agreement thus solved two problems at once. First, it provided a credible reason for the attack at the inn. For Moses, having now left his father-in-law's house, no longer had any reason to keep his older son uncircumcised. He ought thus to have seen to this important duty as soon as he was on his way. His apparent neglect of it until his arrival at the inn resulted in the attack (and, naturally, as soon as Zipporah had set things aright by circumcising her son, the attack ceased). Second, the agreement between Jethro and Moses explained Gershom's unusual name.

Although this "older son" tradition appears in a relatively early source *(Mekhilta deR. Ishma'el),* it nonetheless seems likely that it in itself represents a refinement of what was the earliest form of this whole line of interpretation. *That* tradition did not bother to name the son in question at all.

> And Zipporah took a flint and cut off the foreskin of her son, and brought it near the feet of the destroyer and said, "The bridegroom [Moses] wanted to circumcise, but **his father-in-law did not allow him** to; and now may the blood of this circumcision atone for the sins of this bridegroom."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 4:25 (cf. *Fragment Targum*)

The son's identity was not mentioned because, at this stage at least, it really did not matter. This earliest line of interpretation was aimed at one thing alone, accounting for the attack at the inn. It did so by positing that, since Zipporah's circumcising her son fended off the attack, the fact that some son of Moses had not been circumcised until then must have been the reason for the attack in the first place. (Perhaps, from the standpoint of the story's own logic, the uncircumcised son ought, for the reason just seen, to have been the younger one, Eliezer; his circumcision had somehow been put off or neglected. But in this earliest phase, the identity of the son was not even considered.)

It is to be noted that the Mishnah's explanation seems likewise to go back to this earliest phase of our midrash:

> Great indeed is [the commandment of] circumcision, for there was not the slightest delay concerning it granted [even] to the righteous Moses.
>
> — m. *Nedarim* 3:11

This observation could not possibly be connected to the idea that Gershom had remained uncircumcised because of some prenuptial agreement, since the phrase "the slightest delay" could hardly apply to a circumcision that had been put off for months and perhaps years, enough time for Gershom's younger brother to be born and for Moses to set out on his return to Egypt. No, this formulation assumes that the uncircumcised one is a newborn whose circumcision has been delayed for just a short while—in point of fact, Eliezer, though the baby's identity is not even mentioned here since it is basically irrelevant.

Thus, out of this earliest form of the tradition only later developed the pre-

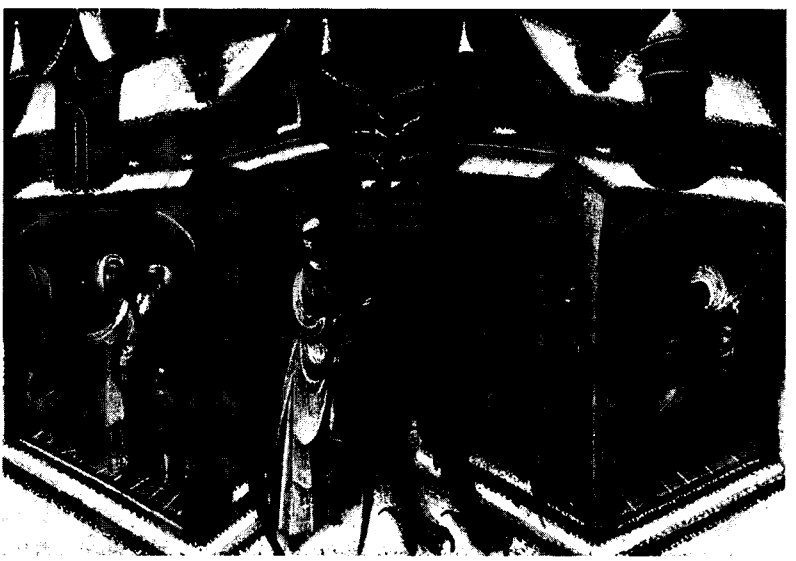
nuptial agreement between Jethro and Moses calling for "one out of every two" sons to become idolators (or the first son, at least, to be an idolator). This provision elegantly explained why the younger, but not the older, son had been circumcised and, therefore, accounted for Gershom's odd name. (The tradition had to hold that the younger son *was* circumcised, since Exodus 4 recounts the circumcision of only one son.) The version attested in *Exodus Rabba*—according to which Gershom was the circumcised one, and Eliezer was not—seems to represent either a recrudescence of the original form of the tradition or, perhaps, a later resimplification of the story. (Note that, in *Exodus Rabba,* this motif is introduced with the sentence from m. *Nedarim* 3:11, a sentence reflecting the earliest form of the tradition.) The prenuptial agreement did not, after all, reflect well on Moses, and if the price of eliminating it was the failure to explain Gershom's odd name, so be it. For other reflections on this midrash, see Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:423, n. 148; Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 68–69, 75. On some of its possible theological ramifications, see Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies,* 178–192; Lowy, *Samaritan Bible Exegesis,* 46–48. Note that in the passage from Ephraem cited earlier, he does not take a stand on which son was uncircumcised:

> He married Zipporah who bore him two sons: one he circumcised, but the other she did not let him circumcise. For she took pride in her father and brothers [who were uncircumcised], and although she had agreed to be Moses' wife, she did not wish to adopt his religion . . . She thus allowed one to continue on the circumcision of Abraham, while forbidding the other [to be circumcised], through whom her father's tradition of the foreskin would be preserved. — Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 2:8

17

The Exodus from Egypt

(EXODUS 5–12)



The tenth plague, death of the firstborn: divine punishment of the Egyptians.

The Exodus from Egypt

(EXODUS 5–12)

❖ ❖ ❖

Back in Egypt, Moses and his brother Aaron now asked Pharaoh to free the Israelites, but he refused and even increased their burdens. As instructed by God, Moses and Aaron then performed a miracle before Pharaoh and his magicians: Aaron's staff turned into a snake, and when the magicians duplicated this feat, Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. Still, Pharaoh refused to free the people, so God brought down a series of plagues on Egypt: the Nile turned to blood; frogs covered the land; gnats or lice afflicted the people, and their houses were filled with swarming hordes; a plague struck the Egyptian cattle and flocks; boils appeared on the skin of man and beast; hail destroyed much of the Egyptian crop, then locusts ate up the rest; a thick darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days. Despite all these, Pharaoh remained obdurate, for God had "hardened his heart." At last, Moses announced a tenth and final plague from God: every Egyptian firstborn in the land would be killed, after which the Israelites would be allowed to go. He further instructed the people to put lambs' blood on their doorposts and lintels as a sign, and to commemorate their going out of Egypt with a special feast each year. The Israelites requested valuables from the Egyptians, so that they might leave the country with riches.

A Godlike Man

When God sent Moses to meet with Pharaoh, he again objected that he was not a man of words and thus ill-suited for the job. God's reply struck interpreters as particularly significant:

> And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I make you a God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet." —Exod. 7:1

The apparent meaning of these words is: "It does not matter if you are not a man of words; Aaron will speak on your behalf, just as a prophet speaks on behalf of God." Still, that is not exactly what the text says: God actually tells Moses that He is making him a *God* to Pharaoh. This turn of phrase seemed particularly striking in view of the fact that God had said something similar the last time Moses had claimed that he could not speak to Pharaoh: "He [Aaron] shall be a mouth for you, you shall be to him *as God*" (Exod. 4:16). Surely the fact that Moses had twice been compared to God was no coincidence.

Beloved of God and men was Moses (may his mention bring good),
And **He honored him as God**, and kept him strong in the heavens.[1]

—Sir. 45:1–2

Some even concluded, on the basis of this verse (and certain others), that there was indeed something Godlike about Moses, that he was like no other human being on earth:

[Moses has a prophetic dream:]
On Sinai's peak I saw what seemed a throne
so great in size it touched the clouds of heaven.
Upon it sat a "man"[2] of noble mien,
becrowned, and with a scepter in one hand,
while with the other He did beckon me.
I made approach and stood before the throne.
He handed o'er the scepter and He bade
me mount the throne, and gave to me the crown;
then He himself withdrew from off the throne.
I gazed upon the whole earth round about:
things under it and high above the skies.

—Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē 68–78*

I propose to write the life-history of Moses . . . the greatest and most perfect man . . . And did not he [Moses] enjoy an even greater partnership with the Father and Creator of all things, having been found worthy of [being called by] the same form of address? For he was named God and king of the entire nation.[3]

—Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:1, 158

And He made him as God over the mighty ones, and as a cause of reeling to Pharaoh.

—(4Q374) *Apocryphon of Moses* A

And so that law-giving [of the Torah], being believed to come from God, has caused this man to be ranked **higher than his own [human] nature.**

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:320

He said, "Moses, Moses." He revealed to him that he was to wear **divinity** and prophecy . . . He said [to Moses]: I am the God of your fathers. **Take divinity from Me**, and with it make your prophecy strong.

—*Tibat Marqa* 4b, 5b

1. Ben Sira apparently connects God's calling Moses a "God to Pharaoh" with the tradition of Moses' ascent to heaven at Mt. Sinai (see Chapter 20, "Celestial Sinai"), for he immediately adds, "and kept him strong in the heavens." In other words, his "Godlikeness" was confirmed by his heavenly ascent.

2. The Greek word *phōs* here means "man," but the clear suggestion is that the occupant of this heavenly throne is God.

3. That Moses was also proclaimed "king" is derived from Deut. 33:5, "Then he became king in Jeshurun," on which see Chapter 25.

The idea that Moses was Godlike may seem strange nowadays. Why should interpreters have gone out of their way to find evidence of it in the Bible? Certainly one motivating factor was the very prominence of the Torah (Pentateuch), which Moses delivered to Israel: it was not just *a* prophetic book, but *the* book, the central revelation given to humankind. That made Moses different—not only from ordinary human beings, but even from the other prophets and chosen servants of God. The Bible itself said as much, noting specifically that none of the other prophets could compare to Moses (Num. 12:6–8, Deut. 34:10). Did not all this, as well as some of the specific events that occurred when Moses climbed to the top of Mt. Sinai (see Chapter 20, "Heavenly Moses"), suggest that he was, or became, superhuman, halfway between God and humanity? Of special importance, in this latter context, was the fact that God there told Moses to "come up the mountain to Me" (Exod. 24:12):

> The peace of the Lord be on Moses, the man who arrived at a level to which no other man attained . . . And when God said to him, "Come up the mountain to Me" [Exod. 24:12] and he went up to Him and the cloud covered him for six days [Exod. 24:16]; his body became holy and yet holier, and he went up from the domain of humanity to the domain of the angels . . . A holy prophet that went up from the level of men to the level of God.
>
> — *Tibat Marqa*, "And Moses Died" 265b, 91b

Perhaps in reaction to this tendency, other interpreters were at pains to insist that, in calling Moses a "God to Pharaoh," God really meant not that Moses was a divine being but only that he was Pharaoh's superior. Indeed, perhaps God was simply paying Moses a compliment:

> Behold I have appointed you Pharaoh's **master**, and Aaron your brother will be your **interpreter**. — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 7:1

> What is the meaning of [the assertion] "The Lord of Hosts, He is the king of glory" [Ps. 24]? It means that [as the one who rules over all glory] He can assign part of his glory to those that fear Him. Thus, He is called "God," yet He called Moses "God," as it says, "Behold, I have made you a God to Pharaoh." — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Beha'alotekha* 9

> God said to Moses: Wicked Pharaoh has made himself into a god, as it is said, "[Pharaoh declares:] The Nile is mine, I made [it] myself" [Ezek. 29:3], therefore, let him see you and say that you are indeed a god [by comparison, that is, when you bring the plagues on Egypt]. — *Exodus Rabba* 8:1

No Mere Magician's Trick

In any case, God dispatched Moses to Pharaoh's court where, as instructed, he and Aaron performed the miracle with Aaron's staff to show Pharaoh the power of God. Yet interpreters were puzzled by a number of details in the narrative. Why did Moses and Aaron have to resort to what looked like a magician's trick—indeed, why

bother "proving" God's power in the first place? Moreover, did not the fact that Pharaoh's magicians managed to duplicate the feat, turning *their* staffs into snakes, seem to imply some basic similarity between God's power and that of pagan deities? This was hardly the sort of lesson the Bible would wish to impart. Finally, was having Aaron's staff-snake swallow those of Pharaoh's magicians really a sufficiently miraculous demonstration of God's superiority?

That such issues concerned ancient interpreters is evident from some of the additions that they introduced in retelling these same events:

> [God and Moses speak as in Exod. 4:2:]
> "Say, what is this you hold within your hand?"
> "A staff, the **chastener of beasts and men.**"[4]
> "Now cast it on the ground and move away;
> a fearful serpent you in awe shall see."
> "See, there I cast it down—be gracious, Lord!
> **How dreadful, huge!** Be merciful to me!"
>
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 120–125

> The **king said** to perform some sign for him. Moses threw down the staff which he was holding and made it a snake. When **all were terrified**, he seized its tail, picked it up, and made it a staff again.
>
> —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.27)

(Note that, according to Artapanus, the demonstration comes at Pharaoh's request, rather than, as in the Bible, at the initiative of Moses and Aaron.[5] Still more striking, there is not even any mention here of Pharaoh's wizards duplicating Moses and Aaron's feat, nor does Aaron's snake swallow anything. Sometime later, however, the text notes that, after Moses turned the Nile to blood, "they [the wizards] then, through some superstitious tricks and charms, *made a serpent* and changed the color of the river.")

> When all the potentates had been gathered at the palace, Moses' brother took his staff and, gesturing with it so that all could see, cast it down on the ground. At once the staff turned into a snake, and those standing around were aghast. Retreating in fear, they started to flee. However, all the so-called wise men and magicians that were present said to them, "What are you so astonished at? We are not exactly unpracticed in these matters—indeed, we can use our skill to do exactly the same things." With that, each of them cast down the staff that he was holding, and a group of snakes began wriggling around the first one. That snake, however, lifted himself above the others,

4. The fact that Moses and Aaron used a staff might, after such a description, seem less reminiscent of a magician using a wand; here, it appears only appropriate that a staff be used, since God's purpose is indeed to "chasten beasts and men" through this initial demonstration and the subsequent plagues that the rod summons down on the Egyptians.

5. It is true that, while Pharaoh makes no such request in the biblical narrative (Exod. 7:10), that he *would* do so may be implied in God's words (Exod. 7:9). Note further that in the Bible, but not in Artapanus, it is Aaron's staff.

> thrust out his breast, opened his mouth wide, and then, drawing in his breath, scooped up all those around him as fish are scooped up in a net, and drew them to himself. After he had swallowed them, he resumed his original nature and turned back into a staff. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:91–93

> They [Pharaoh's wizards] threw their staffs down, and they became snakes. But Moses, undaunted, said: "O King, I hardly disdain Egyptian wisdom, but I should say that the deeds that I do are superior to their magic and their skill in the same way that God's deeds are superior to ordinary human ones. And I shall now demonstrate that my deeds were not [done by] witchcraft or misleading true perception, but that they were miracles done through the providence and power of God." Saying these things, he cast his staff to the earth, commanding it to turn into a serpent. It obeyed and, surrounding the staffs of the Egyptians, which **looked as if** they were snakes, devoured them until they were all gobbled up. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:285–287

Pharaoh Didn't Realize

God could have freed the Israelites in any manner He chose. He could have instantaneously transported them back to their ancestral homeland, or struck Pharaoh dead as soon as he refused to let them go, or brought about their freedom in some other, immediate fashion. Instead, He took the slow route. Moses repeatedly demanded that Pharaoh free the people, and Pharaoh repeatedly refused, thus bringing down a series of plagues on himself and the Egyptian people. All this was part of the divine plan, the Bible says, for God had purposely "hardened Pharaoh's heart" and *made* him stubborn, causing him to refuse Moses.

Interpreters could not but wonder why God had chosen this course. True, the Bible mentions a number of reasons for God's "hardening Pharaoh's heart." The purpose was to make the Exodus itself a miraculous event, with "signs and wonders" (Exod. 7:3, 10:1); to show to the Egyptians, who worshiped idols, God's exclusive power (Exod. 7:5, 9:16; see also 3 Macc. 2:6); to make God's name great throughout the world (Exod. 9:16, Neh. 9:10); and to ensure that the Israelites might tell of the Exodus for generations to come (Exod. 10:2). Still, it hardly seemed fair for God to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart" and then to punish him and his people as a result.

Struggling with this problem, some concluded that hardening Pharaoh's heart did not actually mean causing him to be stubborn and "hard-hearted." Instead, it meant that God had caused Pharaoh to be (or, rather, remain)[6] undiscerning, preventing him from seeing the obvious, namely, that he was powerless against his real opponent, who was not Moses or the people of Israel, but their God, the one true God. There was good reason to understand the biblical expression "to make [a person's] heart hard [or "heavy"]" as meaning "to make undiscerning."[7] Such an understanding would also accord well with what Pharaoh himself says in Exod. 5:2,

6. Pharaoh's hardness of heart may have been his natural disposition in any case, so that God's action only reinforced this natural trait; see Exod. 3:19, 1 Sam. 6:6.

7. See in this sense Isa. 6:10.

"Who is the Lord, that I should heed His voice?" and it would fit as well with what Moses tells Pharaoh later on:

> As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. But as for you and your servants, I know that **you do not yet fear the Lord.** —Exod. 9:29–30

It is only much later, at the Red Sea, that the Egyptians at last seem to have understood that "the Lord is fighting for them [the Israelites] against the Egyptians" (Exod. 14:25).

In other words, God had not exactly compelled Pharaoh to refuse, but had only kept Pharaoh and his servants in a state of ignorance, not knowing that God rules the universe or believing that his actions passed unobserved:

> The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, **so that he did not know that his deeds were revealed to God.**
> His [God's] mercies are shown to all creatures, but His light and His darkness He apportioned to humanity.[8]
> —Sir. 16:15–16

> To escape from Your hand is impossible;[9] for the ungodly [Egyptians], who refused to recognize You, were scourged by the strength of Your arm.
> —Wisd. 16:15–16

> But God **hardened their** [the Egyptians'] **minds** and they did not perceive that they were entering the sea. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 10:6

> What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were **hardened**, as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day" [based on Isa. 29:10 and Deut. 29:4]. And David said, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever" [Ps. 69:22–23]. —Rom. 11:7–10

> But their [that is, the Israelites'] minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted. —2 Cor. 3:14

Divine Punishment of the Egyptians

There was another possibility, however: God hardened Pharaoh's heart and caused him to remain adamant in order to bring down upon him and the Egyptians a series of plagues—plagues that were sent as a punishment for the Egyptians' enslavement

8. This verse is somewhat obscure, and it may in any case be a later addition to the original text. The sense seems to be that God shows his mercy [that is, is merciful] to all beings [cf. Ps. 145:9–10], but He does not necessarily reveal His role to all—for example, He "hardened" Pharaoh's heart and kept the Egyptians in darkest ignorance. See also below.

9. Cf. Deut. 32:39, Tobit 13:2.

and mistreatment of the Israelites for so many years. In other words, the ten plagues did not result from Pharaoh's "hardness of heart" itself; on the contrary, that "hardness of heart" was simply the means for having the Egyptians continue to hold out until they had been fully punished for their earlier crimes:

> And everything happened according to your word, ten great and cruel judgments came upon the land of Egypt, **so that you might execute vengeance upon it** for Israel. And the Lord did everything on account of Israel and according to his covenant which he made with Abraham, that He would take vengeance upon them just as they had made them serve by force.
>
> —*Jubilees* 48:7–8 (cf. 18)

> Ten **punishments** afflicted the country—a perfect number for the **chastisement** of those who had sinned to perfection. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 96

> You, O Lord, did not ignore the Hebrews when they were being worn down by hard labor under the Egyptians, but, in keeping with the promises to the fathers, You saved them, having **punished** the Egyptians . . . You exacted **vengeance** on the Egyptians with ten plagues.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.24–26

Now, it is noteworthy that two of the above passages specifically connect this idea of punishing the Egyptians with the promise to Abraham or "promises to the fathers." For, in fact, the idea of the ten plagues as punishment is actually based on the precise wording of God's warning to Abraham about the enslavement of his descendants:

> The Lord said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years. But **I will bring judgment** on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions." —Gen. 15:13–14

The words "I will bring judgment" suggested to interpreters that the ten plagues were more than God's means of freeing the Israelites, or of showing his glory—they were a way of *punishing* the Egyptians. (To "judge" in Hebrew is not merely to determine the accused person's guilt or innocence, but also to condemn to a certain punishment or even, simply, to punish.) This verse in Genesis (see also Exod. 6:6, 7:4, and so on) thus allowed interpreters to view the whole narrative of the ten plagues in a way that better accorded with their idea of God's justice. So, similarly:

> "For I have hardened his heart and the heart of his people" [Exod. 10:1]—this teaches that he prevented them from repenting so as to exact payment from them. —*Midrash ha-Gadol* Exod. 10:1

All this notwithstanding, the fact that God had "hardened Pharaoh's heart" and then gone on to punish him and the other Egyptians still seemed problematical. Or was it simply an example of the supremacy of the divine will?

> Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" [Exod. 33:19]. So it depends not on man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" [Exod. 9:16]. So then He has mercy upon whomever He wills, and He hardens the heart of whomever He wills.
>
> —Rom. 9:14–18

Deservedly Punished by Water

As to the plagues themselves, was there not something to be learned from their very nature? For, surely, the fact that God had chosen to afflict the Egyptians by doing such things as turning the waters of the Nile to blood must have had some special, hidden significance. Some interpreters, as we have glimpsed briefly (Chapter 16, "Death by Water"), believed that the principle of "measure for measure" generally determined God's choice of punishment, and they did not have trouble finding this principle at work in the various plagues:

> [God afflicted the Nile, creating] an ever-flowing source of streaming water befouled with blood **as a reproach for the decree to kill the infants.**
>
> —Wisd. 11:6–7

Another possibility was that water had been struck first in the plagues because it—or, more specifically, the Nile—had a special place of honor among the Egyptians:

> Since the Egyptians accord special honor to water—for they believe it to have been the first element in the creation of the universe—He saw fit to summon the water to be punished first, as a lesson to those who believed it worthy of veneration. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:98

> Why did He bring the plague of [turning the Nile to] blood upon them first? Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians worshiped the Nile. God said to Moses: Go and strike their very gods in front of them.
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma* (ed. Buber), *Waera* 14

> God said to Moses: By the very thing about which he [Pharaoh] boasts—[that is, the Nile] as it is said, "Oh Pharaoh, king of Egypt, great monster that lies in the midst of its streams and says, 'My Nile is mine, I made [it] myself!' [Ezek. 29:3]"—by that very thing shall the afflictions start.
>
> —*Yalqut Shimoni* 182

A Dark Dungeon for Egypt

The plague of darkness, which made the Egyptians into prisoners in their own houses for three days (Exod. 10:23), likewise seemed a perfect punishment for those who had turned the Israelites into prisoners and forced laborers:

> For those men [the Egyptians] deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept your sons imprisoned, through whom the unextinguishable light of the Torah was later to be given to the world. —Wisd. 18:4

> They [the Egyptians] had planned to keep them [the Israelites] in prison, God brought upon them the [plague of] darkness, as it says, "And one man could not see his fellow, and no one could leave his place for three days" [Exod. 10:23]. —*Midrash Tanḥuma* (ed. Buber) 22a

Metaphorical Darkness

Apart from its role in making the Egyptians themselves prisoners, the darkness that struck the land of Egypt seemed to some to represent the whole Egyptian captivity itself. It was perhaps in thinking of this plague in particular—as well as the association of imprisonment with the dark dungeon—that the Psalmist had described the entire Exodus as a *going forth from darkness:*

> Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor, they fell down, with no one to help.
> Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress.
> He took them **out of darkness and deep shadows**, and snapped their chains.
>
> —Ps. 107:12-14

Little wonder, then, that ancient interpreters should employ the same imagery in their descriptions of, or allusions to, the Exodus:[10]

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. —1 Pet. 2:9

> Therefore we shall acknowledge and praise and sing and glorify and exalt . . . the One who performed for our ancestors—and for us—all these miracles: He took us out of slavery into freedom, and from suffering to joy, from mourning to celebration, and from darkness to great light.[11]
>
> —m. *Pesaḥim* 10:5

10. This theme may also be present in the verse in Ben Sira that, in one version, reads: "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he did not know that his deeds were revealed to God. His [God's] mercies are shown to all creatures, but his *light and his darkness* he apportioned to humanity" (Sir. 16:15–16).

11. Cf. Isa. 9:1: "The people that walked in darkness saw *a great light,* and light broke forth on those who dwelt in a land of deep shadow."

Justifiable Death for the Firstborn

The final plague, which brought death to the Egyptians' firstborn children and even to the firstborn of their cattle, was the most severe of all. Perhaps such a deadly plague was necessary for Pharaoh finally to realize the error of his ways:

> [God says:] Pharaoh won't be moved by what I say
> until his firstborn child lies as a corpse;
> then, moved with fear, he'll send the people forth.
>
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 147–150

Still, the very nature of this plague raised great questions for interpreters. Even if it was necessary to kill Pharaoh's firstborn, was it likewise required to kill the firstborn of all the other Egyptians, and even harmless beasts? True, some saw once more, in this plague, the principle of "measure for measure":

> When they [the Egyptians] had resolved to kill the infants of your holy ones (although one child [Moses] who had been [thus] exposed was saved) You took from them as punishment a host of their own children. —Wisd. 18:5

But other interpreters were apparently bothered by what happened to the Egyptians, and they sought to put the best face possible on this divine decree:

> After this there came the tenth and final judgment surpassing all the previous ones: [it was] not the killing of *all* the Egyptians—for God had not intended that the whole country be turned to a wasteland, only that it be admonished—nor even that of the majority of men and women of all ages. These others He permitted to live, and death was decreed only for the firstborn, starting with the eldest of the king's own sons and ending with that of the lowly grinder-woman. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:134

> ". . . from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the firstborn of the prisoner confined to the dungeon . . ." [Exod. 12:29]. Had the prisoners done anything wrong [to be so punished]? But it was [the fact] that they had rejoiced at Israel's troubles and had said, "We do not mind being prisoners, so long as Israel is suffering . . ." . . . But then why does the verse continue, ". . . and all the firstborn cattle" [Exod. 12:29]—even if these others [that is, the prisoners] had sinned, what did the cattle do? But it was [the fact] that cattle were worshiped by the Egyptians [as witnessed by Exod. 8:26]. [They were killed] so that the Egyptians should not therefore say, "Our [object of] worship is stronger, for it withstood the decrees of God."
>
> —*Midrash Wehizhir, Bo* p. 5

Egyptians Gave Willingly

After the last plague had befallen Egypt, Pharaoh finally relented and the Israelites were free to go. They did not, however, depart empty-handed. From the beginning,

God had intended that the Israelites leave with some of the Egyptians' own prize possessions. He had said as much to Abraham:

> The Lord said to Abram, "... I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with **great possessions.**"
>
> —Gen. 15:13–14

Surely these "great possessions" were not their own, for the Israelites were miserable slaves. Where would these riches come from? God had explained to Moses from the burning bush on Mt. Horeb:

> And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that when you go, you shall not go empty-handed, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of the woman who dwells in her house, jewelry of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; thus you shall **despoil** the Egyptians. —Exod. 3:21–22

There was something extremely troubling in this whole matter. To begin with, the verb translated as "ask" above is also the normal word for "borrow"—and borrowing, in context, seemed the more likely meaning. After all, would the Egyptian women give away their valuable silver and gold or clothing (which, in those days, was also a thing of great value) to the Israelites just because they had "asked" for them? It seemed, therefore, more likely that the Israelite women were to borrow these possessions. And was it not in that sense (since the possessions were never to be returned) that they were said to "despoil" the Egyptians?

God repeated these instructions to Moses just before the last plague:

> Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and gold.
>
> —Exod. 11:2

The timing of this reminder certainly seemed designed to fit a possible deception, for the items were to be requested *before* the last plague, that is, before it was clear that the Israelites were leaving for good. Moreover, the phrase "speak *in the hearing of* the people" literally means "in the ears of." Did this not suggest some sort of secret communication?

> Speak therefore **secretly** in the ears of the people. —Septuagint Exod. 11:2

Perhaps most condemning, though, is the Bible's description of the event after it had taken place:

> The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so they had **lent** to them. And they despoiled the Egyptians. —Exod. 12:35–36

Here, the Hebrew (and the Greek of the Septuagint, for that matter) seem to leave little doubt that the Egyptians had merely *lent* their valuables to their neighbors.

And so, the whole thing sounded highly questionable to interpreters, as if the Israelites indeed despoiled the Egyptians, and on God's instructions!

In considering these matters, many were no doubt troubled. There was, however, one small Scriptural warrant for viewing things in a more positive fashion. For the book of Psalms, in describing the same events, had said:

> Then He led forth Israel with silver and gold, and not one of His tribes gave way.
> Egypt was **glad** when they left, for fear of them had fallen upon it.
> —Ps. 105:37–38

If Egypt was glad when they left, then it could not have been the case that the Israelites had tricked the Egyptians into lending them their silver and gold, otherwise the Egyptians would have been quite distressed and angry when they found out the Israelites were going (or at least, certainly, not "glad"). Here, then, was proof, albeit somewhat slender, from the Bible itself that no fraud had occurred.

But then why had the Egyptians willingly parted with their valuables? Perhaps it was, as the Psalmist suggested, because the Egyptians wished to speed them on their way at any cost, or perhaps it was, as the mention of "neighbors" in Exod. 3:21 and 11:2 might suggest, because of some personal tie between individual Egyptians and Israelites. Indeed, it might have been a combination of both:

> They honored the Hebrews with gifts; some [did so] so that they [the Hebrews] might depart more quickly, others because of the neighborly relations that they had had with them. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:314

Fair Wages at Last

To other interpreters, however, another logic suggested itself: the Egyptians' gold and silver was not so much a gift as a repayment, compensation for the years of hard toil the Israelites had given Egypt without wages. After all, in the passage cited above, God had told Abraham,

> But I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. —Gen. 15:14

Did not this juxtaposition suggest that the "great possessions" were also part of God's "bringing judgment" on the Egyptians—that, as it were, the Egyptians had been sentenced by God to lose their gold and silver in compensation? Thus, if the text said the Israelites had "asked" for these valuables, then this request had been granted for the simple reason that the Egyptians knew full well that the money was owed to the Israelites in any case:

> But ere you go I'll grant the people favor;
> one woman from another shall receive
> fine vessels, jewels of silver and of gold

and clothing, things which one may carry off,[12]
so as to **compensate them for their deeds.**

— Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 162–166

They asked the Egyptians for vessels and garments, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of bronze,[13] in order to despoil the Egyptians in return for the bondage in which they had forced them to serve.

— *Jubilees* 48:18

She [Wisdom] entered the soul of a servant of the Lord [Moses], and withstood dread kings with signs and wonders. She gave to holy men the **reward for their labors** . . . Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly.

— Wisd. 10:16–17, 20

For they took with them great spoils . . . not out of any love of lucre, nor, as their accusers would have it, out of covetousness for the property of others (whence could one get such an idea?). But, first of all, they were thus simply receiving the wages owed to them for their service all that time; and, secondly, they were taking some revenge [on the Egyptians] for having been made into slaves—and in a lesser degree and not as would be fair, for who can compare mere monetary loss to the loss of one's freedom, when, for his freedom, any thinking man is prepared to sacrifice not merely his personal property, but life itself? — Philo, *Life of Moses* 141

The Egyptians [once lodged a complaint against the Jews centuries after the Exodus and] said: It is written in the Torah, "Let every woman ask of her neighbor jewelry of silver and gold . . ." [Exod. 11:2]. Now give us back what is ours! Gebiha replied: For four hundred and thirty years Israel was enslaved in your midst, six hundred thousand people [in all]: give each of them two hundred *zuz* per year, which totals eight million six hundred thousand *mina,* and then we will return to you what is yours!

— *Megillat Ta'anit* (ms. Oxford; cf. Lichtenstein, p. 330)

But why had Scripture so emphasized these treasures taken by the Israelites on their way out of Egypt? Certainly, the fact that the Israelites were later to use silver and gold and other precious things in the building of the tabernacle (see Chapter 21) demanded explanation: these valuables, it seemed, had come from the

12. This specification that the items were portable seems designed not to tell us anything about the nature of the gifts per se, but to supply another "proof" that the Israelites had not defrauded the Egyptians. For the Egyptians certainly knew that such valuables are easily walked off with; if they nonetheless gave them to the Israelites, it must have been in the knowledge that this was a true gift, and not a loan.

13. These "vessels of bronze" are nowhere mentioned in the biblical passages cited. They are apparently added here because, after the Israelites embark on their desert wanderings, they are instructed to build a tabernacle, many of whose parts are made of bronze (see Chapter 21). The Israelites presumably brought with them from Egypt that bronze, along with the silver and gold and other fine things mentioned in connection with the tabernacle.

Egyptian booty. But to those of an allegorical bent, this fact seemed in itself to contain a lesson about the relationship of ordinary, secular learning—corresponding to the Egyptians' goods—to the sacred learning found in Scripture. For secular learning was

> as poor as the store of gold and silver and clothing that the people of Israel brought with them out of Egypt in comparison with the riches they afterward attained in Jerusalem and reached their height in the reign of King Solomon. —Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.42.63

All such readings notwithstanding, some interpreters nevertheless took the text at face-value: not only did they conclude that the Israelites had indeed "borrowed" the Egyptians' goods, they even imagined the sort of excuse the Israelites might have come up with to make such a borrowing plausible:

> And the Lord said to Moses: Let not one of you go out empty-handed, but let a woman go to a neighbor-woman and request apparel, saying, Give [this] to me so that I may adorn myself before my God, and I will bring it back to you. And let the men do likewise[14] and take with them all the beauty of Egypt. —*Historical Paleya* (Popov p. 74)

The Symbolic Passover Laws

After Moses announced the tenth and last plague, he gave Israel its first collective commandments, namely, the various requirements connected with the observance of the first Passover (Exod. 12:1–28). Since, from this point on, the Pentateuch regularly contains all sorts of laws and instructions about various matters in daily life, this first speech was seen by interpreters as a particularly significant event.

To some, it was noteworthy that the Passover sacrifice was to be performed by everyone (Exod. 12:3)—not just the priests or members of one tribe, but all of Israel together:

> For . . . the devout children of good folk brought sacrifices and **with one accord** established the divine law, so that the holy people **shared all the same things**, both blessings and dangers. —Wisd. 18:9

> In this month, about the fourteenth day, when the moon is becoming full, is held the commemoration of the crossing, a public festival called in Hebrew *Pascha* . . . on which the **whole nation** acts as priest, each individual bringing what he offers on his own behalf and dealing with it with his own hands . . . On this occasion the whole nation performs the sacred rites and acts as priest. —Philo, *Moses* 2:224 (also *Special Laws* 2:145)

The other details of the procedure outlined struck readers as strange: the sacrificial lamb of each household was to be killed in the evening, then a bunch of hyssop was

14. The mention of the men brings Exod. 3:22, which speaks of women asking their (female) neighbors, in line with Exod. 11:2, which specifically includes men.

to be dipped into its blood and touched to the lintel and two doorposts (Exod. 12:7, 22). No bone of the sacrificial animal was to be broken (Exod. 12:46), and its meat was to be eaten with unleavened bread, that is, flat bread specially prepared without any yeast (Exod. 12:8, 15). All this was to be eaten with "your loins girded and your sandals on your feet" (Exod. 12:11). Certainly requirements such as these contained some hidden message:

> They shall roast it in fire without breaking any of its bones within it because no bone of the children of Israel will be broken. Therefore the Lord commanded the children of Israel to observe the Passover on its appointed day. And it is not fitting to break any bone from it because it is the day of the feast and it is the day of the command. —*Jubilees* 49:13–14

> "They baked their dough which they brought out of Egypt into unleavened cakes" [Exod. 12:39], that is, they kneaded the savage, untamed passion with the aid of reason that softened it as though it were food.
>
> —Philo, *Cain and Abel* 62

> That which is leavened and fermented rises, while that which is unleavened is low. Each of these is a symbol of types of soul, one being haughty and swollen with arrogance, the other being unchangeable and prudent, choosing the middle way rather than extremes because of a desire and zeal for equality. —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Exodus* 1.15

> That is why we have been commanded to "eat the unleavened bread with bitter herbs" [Exod. 12:8]—not as a relish, but because the mass of men . . . think that the unlearning of passion is a [source of] bitterness, though to a mind that welcomes effort it is really a joy and a feast.
>
> —Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 162

> Why does He command to place some of the blood upon the doorposts and upon the lintel of every house? . . . Since our soul is threefold, the heart is compared to the lintel, desire to the house, and reason to the two doorposts.
>
> —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Exodus* 1.13

> "And you shall take a bunch of hyssop . . ." [Exod. 12:22]: For they [the Israelites] had made themselves as lowly as the hyssop [see 1 Kings 4:33 (other texts, 5:13)] in repenting of their sins . . . "and daub it upon the lintel" [Exod. 12:22. This represents] Abraham . . . for just as the lintel is high up, so was he the greatest of the patriarchs; ". . . and on the two doorposts . . ." [Exod. 12:22. that is,] through the merit of Isaac and Jacob. All this teaches us that it was by virtue of these [ancestors] that they [the Israelites] left Egypt. —*Exodus Rabba* 1:36

The (Paschal) Lamb of Christianity

A central idea of early Christianity was that the crucifixion itself was comparable to a sacrificial offering—the ultimate sacrifice, after which none would be necessary.

Since the crucifixion took place at the time of the Passover holiday (Mark 14:12 and elsewhere), a special correspondence between the laws regarding the Passover sacrifice and the events recounted in the Gospels was assumed:

> But when they [the Roman soldiers] came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs . . . For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him [the Passover lamb] shall be broken." —John 19:33–36 (see also 1:29, Rev. 5:6–12, 6:1, etc.)

> For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. —1 Cor. 5:7–8

> **Gird up the loins** of your thinking, be sober, and set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ . . . You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a **lamb without blemish or spot.**
>
> —1 Pet. 1:13, 18–19

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: Moses was not merely God's chosen servant—he was made Godlike himself and surpassed all other human beings. The wonders that he and Aaron performed before Pharaoh were no mere feats of ordinary magic but truly supernatural events. Yet God "hardened Pharaoh's heart," preventing him from understanding the nature of his opponent, so that the Egyptians might be appropriately punished for all the evil that they had done to Israel. That punishment came in the form of ten plagues, which were designed to requite the Egyptians "measure for measure," fitting their punishments to their own sins or that which they had sought to do to the Israelites. Before the Israelites left, the Egyptians willingly gave them their gold and silver—for this was less than what was owed to the people of Israel for so many years of involuntary servitude. The laws of Passover contained symbolic messages about the true meaning of the narrative.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Exodus from Egypt

A Godlike Man: Another factor encouraging Moses' Godlike depiction is the reference to him as a "man of God" in Deut. 33:1 and Ps. 90:1. What exactly this name means is still disputed (see Holstein, "The Case of *'iš hā'ĕlōhīm* Reconsidered"), but it apparently suggested a sort of mediator (hence intermediate?) status to Philo:

> When he [Moses] prays and blesses the people, he is a Man of God . . . [since] to pray and bless is not for any chance person but for a man who has no eyes for his kinship to created being and has given himself to be the portion of Him who is ruler and father of all.
>
> —Philo, *Change of Names* 125–127

Note also that in Hebrew the genetive relationship of the two nouns is possible but not obligatory: the same phrase could be parsed as "Moses: a man, God." See Chapter 20, "Heavenly Moses." For more on Philo's reading, see Runia, "God and Men in Philo of Alexandria."

Another ancient writer held that Moses was a godlike man:

> On account of these things then Moses was loved by the masses, and was deemed worthy of godlike honor by the priests and called Hermes, on account of the interpretation of the sacred letters.
>
> —Artapanus, Fragment 3 (in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.6)

Scholars disagree, however, as to whether this passage really belongs with the exegetical tradition in question. See Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Kornitherbrief,* 147–151; Holladay, *Theios Anēr.* The overall topic of Moses as a Godlike being is intertwined with a number of related issues to be discussed below, in particular Moses' ascent into heaven (Chapter 20, "Heavenly Moses"), as well as his presentation in early sources as a (divinely appointed) king of Israel. See the discussion by Meeks, "Moses as God and King."

The passage cited from Ezekiel the Tragedian, which recounts Moses' report of a vision wherein he is invited to sit on a heavenly throne and given a divine scepter, likewise suggests the tradition of Moses' divinity, though others have interpreted differently. See Jacobson, *Exagoge,* 89–97; van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision," which also discusses resemblances between the portrayal of Moses here and Enoch in *3 Enoch;* Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* 2:439–440. (Note also van der Horst's critique of Jacobson in "Some Notes on the Exagoge of Ezekiel.") Grünwald has suggested the connection of Ezekiel's *Exagōgē* with the Jewish mystical tradition of the divine chariot, in *Apocalyptic and Merkavah* 127–129.

Beyond its direct connection with Moses' ascent into heaven at (or on) Mt. Sinai, Moses' Godlike nature is connected with another heavenly ascent, that implied by Deut. 34:1–3 (see Chapter 25, "Moses' Last Vision"). That ascent took place

at the end of Moses' life. In addition, however, at least one late text connects Moses' ascent to heaven with the theophany at the burning bush, a scenario roughly approximating that of Ezekiel the Tragedian:

> God said [to Moses]: You have humbled yourself by saying "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" [Exod. 3:11], therefore I will honor you, as it says "One who is humble in spirit will be honored" [Prov. 29:23] and I will give over all of the land of Egypt into your hands, and I will bring you up **next to My glorious throne** and I will show you the angels of heaven. And God commanded Metatron, His angel of the Presence, and said to him: "Go bring Moses with harps and pipes and drums and dancing, with joy and song and celebration." And Metatron answered: "Master of the Universe! Moses cannot ascend and see the angels, for there are angels of fire and he is only flesh and blood." And God said: "Go and change his flesh into fire [too]" . . . And Metatron changed Moses' tongue into a tongue of fire, and his eyes he made like the wheels of the chariot . . . and in this way was Moses carried up to heaven. — *The Greatness of Moses*

Pharaoh Didn't Realize: One ancient text may contain an interesting version of this motif.

> King Pharaoh shall suffer none of what I describe [that is, the plagues],
> until he holds his firstborn son dead.
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 149–150

The translation of this passage is contested (see Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 2:477), but if the above version is correct, Pharaoh was spared the brunt of the plagues and only in that way remained, as it were, in the dark about their divine origin. Similarly:

> When God sent plagues against the Egyptians, Pharaoh [at first] did not feel them, but when they touched his own body, then he felt them and cried out, "God is right and I and my people are guilty" (Exod. 9:27).
>
> — *Exodus Rabba* 15:10

This interpretation apparently concludes from the mention of "you and your people" (Exod. 9:15) that the ensuing plague, that of hail, was the first to affect Pharaoh personally, hence, "I and my people are guilty" (Exod. 9:27).

Elsewhere Ezekiel also speaks of "hard-heartedness," but not in a manner to elucidate his understanding of the concept:

> another plague shall come,
> and they shall die whose hearts are hardened.
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 139–140

The plague referred to here is apparently that of the livestock *(deber)* (Exod. 9:3–7). The problem, of course, is that Ezekiel does not mention livestock dying, but refers apparently to *people* "whose hearts are hardened." No convincing solution has been

proposed for this anomaly (despite Jacobson, *Exagoge,* 118). On Symmachus' (and others') tendency to stress Pharaoh's free will (and hence guilt) in his refusal to allow the Israelites to leave, see Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 71–72.

Aaron's Miraculous Staff: Because of the miracles that Aaron performed with his staff, not only at the time of the Exodus, but later on (Num. 17:1–10; see Chapter 23, "Aaron's Symbolic Staff"), a number of traditions grew up about its origin and ownership. One rabbinic tradition held that, along with nine other miraculous things (manna, Balaam's talking donkey, and so on), Aaron's staff had been specially created by God (and was not, therefore, an ordinary item that had *become* miraculous); these were the ten things created at the very end of the sixth day of creation. See m. *Abot* 5:6, *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Wayyassa'* 5 (Horovitz ed., p. 170). For the exegetical origins of this tradition, see Chapter 23, *OR,* "The Mouth of the Earth." The same staff was said to have belonged to Jacob, Judah (it was used to identify him in the story of Judah and Tamar, Genesis 38), Moses, and David, and to have been stored in the Temple and hidden away by Josiah. See Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:109, 6:106. Note further that Aaron's staff, being made of wood, was connected by Christians with the cross. See further Chapter 23, "Aaron's Symbolic Staff," and *OR* there.

Pharaoh's Sorcerers Had Help: In the biblical account, Pharaoh's sorcerers duplicate the feat done with Aaron's staff, and they are later said to match the first two plagues, turning the water to blood (Exod. 7:22) and bringing frogs on Egypt (Exod. 8:7). They also tried to match the third plague (Exod. 8:18)—and they may have tried to duplicate others as well, for it is only with the sixth plague, that of boils, that the text says, "And the Egyptians could not stand before Moses because of the boils" (Exod. 9:11). The implication is that they *could and did* "stand before Moses" on the previous occasions, perhaps trying to duplicate his feats.

But could such skill and courage originate simply from ordinary human beings? Some sources suggested otherwise:

> And the [Satanlike] prince Mastema stood up against you [Moses], and tried to make you fall into Pharaoh's power. He helped the Egyptian sorcerers, [so that] they would oppose you and perform in your presence.
>
> — *Jubilees* 48:9

Similarly, the demon Abezethibou later confesses to King Solomon:

> I was present at the time when Moses appeared before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, hardening his heart. I am the one whom Jannes and Jambres, those who opposed Moses in Egypt, called to their aid. I was the adversary of Moses in [performing] miracles and wonders.
>
> — *Testament of Solomon* 25:3–4

How Many Plagues? The plagues that afflicted Egypt are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible—notably, in Ps. 78:44–51 and Ps. 105:28–36—but there, the order of the plagues, and even their number and nature, are somewhat different. Perhaps this

discrepancy may explain why, in recounting the plagues, so many ancient interpreters apparently felt free to depart from the order or significance attributed to the plagues in Exodus. Thus, for example,

> Now these are the plagues: blood and frogs and all manner of beasts and hail and the death of cattle and locusts and gnats and darkness that could be felt and the death of the firstborn. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 10:1

This list omits the plague of boils (Exod. 9:8–12); of the remaining nine, the Bible's third plague is here presented in seventh position, the fourth in third position, and so forth. Similarly, Artapanus mentions a flood (not blood), "a certain winged creature" (gadflies?), a frog, locusts, lice, hail, and earthquakes. Ezekiel the Tragedian (*Exagōgē* 133–150) is somewhat closer to the list in Exodus but switches around four of the items. Even Josephus, who says "I shall set forth each of them" (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:293), somehow fails to mention the fifth one, the plague on the cattle.

Philo and various later commentators subdivide the ten into groups, both according to who initiated them (whether Moses, Aaron, the two together, or God alone) and, in Philo's case, according to the elements (earth, air, fire, and water) involved (*Life of Moses* 1:96). For more on different lists, see Pietersma, *Jannes and Jambres*, 160–161.

Hordes or Herds? There was occasional uncertainty among interpreters about the nature of some of the plagues—for example, the third plague, which is called in Hebrew *kinnim* (or *kinnām*). It was not clear from context what exactly this plague was, although it seems to have involved tiny insects; some translations therefore assert that it consisted of "gnats," while others say "lice." Philo clearly understands it to have been the former and describes them as tiny "flying" creatures (see *Life of Moses* 1:106–108), while Josephus says "lice," which—perhaps to make this a *plague* and not just an everyday nuisance—he then describes as fatal and impervious to normal treatment (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:300), which they are not in the biblical account.

This confusion is minor, however, by comparison with that of the fourth plague, which, according to some translators, consisted of "flies" and, according to others, of "wild animals." The Septuagint says "dog fly," and Philo (quite naturally) follows this translation. By contrast, Josephus describes this plague as "wild animals of all sorts and kinds" (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:303), an understanding reflected as well in numerous (though not all) rabbinic sources.

The trouble is that the Hebrew *'ārōb* is used nowhere else except in regard to this plague. What did it mean? The word might come from the root meaning "to mix," hence, apparently, Josephus' *mixture* of different kinds of animals (animals "of all sorts and kinds"). The word *pammixia* in Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 10:1 seems to refer to this understanding, as does *'irbuba* in *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 8:17 and 20; both thus belong in the "mixture of wild animals" camp. But perhaps *'ārōb* came from a homonymous root meaning "to darken," suggesting large swarms of insects. The Septuagint translation "dog fly" in itself may be an attempt to reconcile the idea of insects with the root meaning "mix," since (as Philo points out, *Life of*

Moses 130–131) the word "dog fly" itself suggests (in Greek as in English) a compound or *mixing* of the names of two different sorts of creatures, the dog and the fly. *Jubilees* 48:5 likewise has dog flies, but this may represent an insertion in the translation stage. Ezekiel the Tragedian speaks of "swarms of flies" (*Exagōgē*, line 138), while Artapanus mentions "a certain winged creature" (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.31).

In context, the fact that these creatures are said to "fill" the houses of the Egyptians (Exod. 8:17; some translations, 8:21) might make it more appropriate for them to be swarming insects of some kind. However, one psalm that refers to this plague maintains that the *'ārōb* actually "ate" the people (Ps. 78:45), and this verb (rather than, say, "sting" or "bite") might sound more appropriate to wild animals than mere flies. Yet again, Ps. 105:31 juxtaposes the *'ārōb* with the "gnats"/"lice" of the previous plague, perhaps implying that the *'ārōb*, too, was an insect pest.

Both opinions, therefore, had their pluses and minuses. It is interesting to note, however, that the Wisdom of Solomon (despite its composition in Greek at a time long after the Septuagint translation had been promulgated) seems to hold in one place that the plague in question consisted of a mixture of wild animals, and not insects. For this text, or the interpretive tradition on which it is based, sees a parallel between the Egyptians' worship of various animals and the fourth plague:

> And they [the Egyptians] worship the most hateful animals, which are worse than all the others when judged by their lack of intelligence; and even as animals they are not so beautiful in appearance that one would desire them, but they have escaped both the praise of God and his blessing. Therefore those men were deservedly punished through such creatures, and were tormented by **a multitude of animals.** —Wisd. 15:18–16:1

It seems clear that, despite the use of such general terms as "creatures" and "animals," the author of this text did not have insects in mind, for not only would insects not serve the parallel presented here, but they would not fit very well with what follows (Wisd. 16:2–4), the suggestion that Israel's being rewarded with animals—the quail of Exod. 16:9–13—was intended to contrast with the Egyptians' *punishment* by animals. Thus, the Wisdom of Solomon apparently holds here with the "wild animals" opinion and against the Septuagint and other Hellenistic sources. (If so, this would be but one, minor demonstration of how the Wisdom of Solomon is, to an extent not found in Philo's exegetical writings, dependent on traditions and approaches found in rabbinic and protorabbinic sources. Cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:427 n. 172, and 430, n. 188.)

Another passage in the Wisdom of Solomon may likewise be relevant to this question. Wisd. 11:15–19, like 15:18–16:1, connects the Egyptians' worship of animals to the punishment they received, and that punishment is here described as a "multitude of irrational creatures" (Wisd. 11:15), which certainly sounds like the "multitude of animals" seen above. Here, however, the text adds that divine power "did not lack the means to send upon them a multitude of bears, or bold lions, or newly created unknown beasts full of rage, or such as breathe out fiery breath." The implication seems to be that God did *not* send these although He could have. But if

not, then what did the "multitude of irrational creatures" consist of? Is the author here thinking of the Septuagint's interpretation of this plague as one of dog flies, or is he perhaps thinking of another plague entirely? In support of the latter possibility, it is to be observed that Philo uses a strikingly similar argument (and language) in connection with, specifically, the third plague of "gnats" (*Life of Moses* 1:106–110), so it is possible that that is the plague being alluded to here. A recently published Qumran text offers, alas, no help in the identification of these plagues: Tov, "The Exodus Section of 4Q422," 197–209.

God's Finger: After God brings the plague of gnats/lice on the Egyptians, the text notes that Pharaoh's wizards, having failed to rid Egypt of this plague by their own magic, cried out to Pharaoh, "It is the finger of God!" What they meant, clearly, was that this plague was the result of divine intervention rather than ordinary magic.

Still, this phrase must have been troubling. Did God really have fingers, hands, or other human organs? This question had bothered biblical interpreters from an early period:

> You, your Majesty, . . . asked why it is that, in our Torah, hands, arm, face, feet, and the ability to walk are connected to the Divine power . . . As to hands, then, clearly, they are thought of, even by us, in a more general way. For whenever you, as king, dispatch forces with the intention of accomplishing something, we say, "The king has a mighty hand." And those that hear this refer it to the power that you possess. Now Moses also indicates this through our Torah when he speaks to this effect: "God led you out of Egypt with a mighty hand," and again, "I will stretch out My hand," the Lord says to him, "and will strike the Egyptians."
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 2 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8:10:1, 7–8)

This stance ought perhaps to be connected to what a still earlier figure, Hecataeus of Abdera, has to say about aniconic worship:

> But he [Moses] had no images whatsoever of the gods made for them, being of the opinion that God is not in human form; rather, the Heaven that surrounds the earth is alone divine and rules the universe.
>
> —Hecataeus of Abdera (cited in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40.3)

(My thanks to Professor Carl Holladay for pointing out this connection.) Thus, the Bible's mention of human limbs or humanlike activity in connection with God are not, according to this line of argument, to be taken literally.

Quite apart from the matter of anthropomorphism, however, "the finger of God" was a most unusual phrase. Had not Scripture employed it, interpreters asked, to indicate that the hand of God (a far more common expression in the Bible, often translated as God's "might" or "power") was still greater and more terrible?

> Nevertheless, they [the gnats] grew so numerous that all of Egypt gave up and was forced to cry out, "It is the finger of God!" For the **hand of God** is

> such that the whole inhabited world, nay, the cosmos itself, could not stand up against it. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:112

> R. Yosi ha-Gelili said: How can we deduce that the Egyptians not only suffered ten plagues in Egypt, but fifty plagues at the Red Sea? With regard to [the plagues in] Egypt, what does the text say? "And the wizards said to Pharaoh, 'It is the finger of God!'" At the Red Sea, however, what does the text say? "And God saw the **mighty hand** which the Lord had used against the Egyptians . . ." [Exod. 14:31]. If, by the "finger of God" they had suffered ten plagues, one might conclude that at the Red Sea [where the "hand of God" appeared] they were stricken with fifty plagues!
>
> —*Passover Haggadah*

This Very Month: Chapter 12 of Exodus opens with instructions concerning Passover. This chapter marked an important moment in Scripture for later Jews since it was the point at which God began specifically to spell out the various laws and commandments that the Israelites were to observe. Up until Exodus 12, the Pentateuch was basically a collection of stories; from now on, these stories would be interspersed with commandments—the very heart and essence of the divine guidebook.

But what of the first of those commandments, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (Exod. 12:2)? As was observed earlier (Chapter 2, *OR*, "The Sun Stands Alone"), some Jews, including the author of the book of *Jubilees*, believed in a calendar based exclusively on the sun, that is, one in which (as in the modern calendar used in the West) the unit "month" is purely arbitrary and bears no relationship to the actual waxing and waning of the moon. Other Jews (including the forerunners of rabbinic Judaism) maintained, on the contrary, that months should be determined by the lunar cycle, each month beginning with the first sighting of the new moon and ending with the next sighting. This calendar disagreement had the broadest implications, since Jews with differing views on this issue could therefore not agree when the various religious festivals began and ended, and consequently when different sacrifices should be offered in the Temple. For this reason, it was an extremely volatile issue.

When God says, as He begins to instruct the Israelites about the laws of the Passover holiday, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (Exod. 12:2), the Bible might seem to be taking sides on this issue. How so? The apparent repetitiveness of this verse might be seen to imply that, in addition to saying that the month of Passover was to be the first month of the calendar year, God was imparting something about the *new moon* as well, since the word used here for "month" *(ḥōdeš)* can be understood in terms of its root sense of "new." Indeed, the fact that God starts off by saying "This *ḥōdeš* . . ."—without having named a particular month or alluded to it in any way—might be taken as an indication that He was not talking about a month at all, but indicating the moon itself. Not surprisingly, therefore, the book of *Jubilees* passes over this verse in silence; it had no need to mention a verse that might seem

to go against its strictly solar calendar. The same verse constituted a golden opportunity for those who believed that every month should start at the new moon. This opportunity was not, in any case, passed up by rabbinic interpreters:

> "This month shall be for you . . ." [Exod. 12:2]: Rabbi Ishmael said: Moses showed the new moon to Israel and said to them: In this way shall you observe and determine the new month forever more. R. Aqiba said: [the word *this* indicates that] God pointed it [the moon] out with his finger.
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Bo* 1

Incidentally, other ancient sources bear witness to the use of this moon-based (or, rather, luni-solar) calendar in Israel, and Ezekiel the Tragedian specifically ties such use to this same verse:

> [God instructs Moses:] This also say to all the Hebrew race:
> "This month shall be the first month of your years,
> In which I'll lead you to another land
> which to the Hebrew fathers I did swear."
> And say to all the people, "In this month,
> **on the full moon's eve,** the Paschal sacrifice to God present."
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 152–157

If Ezekiel specifies that the Passover sacrifice is to take place on the eve of the full moon (whereas in the Bible it merely says on the evening of the fourteenth of the month, Exod. 12:6), it must mean that, for him, the month in question always begins at the new moon, since the full moon comes fourteen days later. (See also Beckwith, "The Solar Calendar of Joseph and Aseneth," 90. Ezekiel may have believed that the day starts at dawn rather than sunset as in rabbinic reckoning: see Collins, "Ezekiel, the Author of the Exagoge," 201–211.)

Ben Sira seems likewise to take a stand on the calendar, stating at one point that the moon determines the start of months and, consequently, the date of festivals:

> By it [the moon] is [determined] festival and appointed times. — Sir. 43:7

(The text is not without its difficulties,[15] but all extant versions point to his support of the moon's role in calendric calculations.) See further Fore, "The Beginnings of Sects in Post-Exilic Judea."

On calendrical disputes in Judaism there is a vast scholarly literature. Some classic articles include Jaubert, "Le calendrier des Jubilés et de la secte de Qumran"; idem, *The Date of the Last Supper,* 31–52; Kutsch, "Der Kalender des Jubiläenbuches"; Talmon, "The Calendar Reckoning"; Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law,* 101–114; VanderKam, "Origin, Character, and Early History"; idem, "Temple Scroll and the Book of Jubilees"; Davies, "Calendrical Change and Qumran Origins"; Creyer, "The Interrelationship of Gen. 5:32, 11:10–11, and the Chronology of the Flood," 241–262.

15. On these see Segal, *Ben Sira,* 295; Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira,* 488–489.

Seven Commemorative Days: The feast of unleavened bread is to last for seven days (Exod. 12:15). But certainly one day would have been sufficient; why seven? Some interpreters came to the conclusion that the total amount of time from the beginning of Israel's departure until they reached the Red Sea must have taken this many days (although there is no biblical statement to that effect):

> Just as on that very morning on which you fled and from Egypt
> made your way for seven days.
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 168–169

> From Raameses to Succoth, from Succoth to Etham, from Etham to Pihahiroth—this makes [a total of] three days. On the fourth day "it was told to the king of Egypt [that the people had fled," Exod. 14:5]. On the fifth and sixth days "the Egyptians pursued them" [Exod. 14:9]. On the night before the seventh day, they [the Israelites] entered the [Red] Sea . . . In the morning they gave thanks with the song . . . It was the seventh day, the last day of the Passover. — *Seder Olam* 5

The same idea may underlie the following:

> [The Israelites will] bring its [the holiday's] sacrifice before the Lord on the altar of your God each day during those seven joyful days. For you celebrated this festival hastily when you were leaving Egypt until the time you crossed the sea into the wilderness of Sur, because you completed it on the seashore. — *Jubilees* 49:22–23

The implication seems to be that the Israelites' hasty departure not only prevented them from making leavened bread, but also prevented them from properly celebrating. Indeed, it was not until they crossed the Red Sea and sang their song of thanksgiving that the true celebration of their deliverance was complete. If the festival lasts seven days, then *Jubilees*' "because you completed it [the festival] on the seashore" would likewise seem to imply a seven-day journey.

Wine, Not Beer: The laws of the Passover festival stipulate that one is not to eat leavened bread, but it says nothing about any special drink. Eventually, it became the practice to require that wine be drunk at the festive meal:

> On Passover eve . . . let a person drink no fewer than four cups of wine, even if [the four cups have to be supplied] from the public trough.
>
> — m. *Pesaḥim* 10:1

This practice, while not attested in the Bible itself, was apparently known from early times:

> And all of Israel remained eating the meat of the Passover [sacrifice] and **drinking wine** and praising and blessing and glorifying the Lord the God of their fathers. — *Jubilees* 49:6

But what about other strong drink, specifically, beer? The difficulty posed by beer is that it is generally produced with fermented grain. Although the laws of Passover speak primarily of leavened *bread,* they also stipulate at one point:

> For seven days, no leaven shall be found in your houses; for if anyone eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel . . . You shall eat nothing leavened. —Exod. 12:19–20

Presumably, "nothing leavened" eliminated a beverage like beer as well. And so, although the Bible does not specifically mention it, beer and similar items came to be forbidden by later Jewish practice:

> These are [forbidden] on Passover: Babylonian *kutāḥ,* Persian beer, and Edomite vinegar [all three of which contain an admixture of grain products]. —m. *Pesaḥim* 3:1

How old is the prohibition of beer on Passover? A group of Aramaic papyri discovered at the beginning of this century on the island of Elephantine (Yev) in Egypt have revealed much about the life of a colony of Jews who lived there during the fifth century B.C.E. One document, the "Passover Letter," seems to allude to such a prohibition:

> . . . And from the 15th day to the 21st day of . . .
> . . . be pure and take heed: No work . . .
> . . . **do not drink,** and anything of leaven do not
> . . . sunset until the 21st of Nisa[n . . .
> . . . take into your rooms and seal up between the days of . . .
> —*Elephantine Papyri* (Cowley 21:4–8)

The holiday being referred to in this text is clearly Passover; the "feast of unleavened bread" is said to extend from the fifteenth to the twenty-first day of the first month (Nisan), according to Lev. 23:6. Unfortunately, the object of the imperative "do not drink" in the third line above is lost, but it certainly seems probable that the text here referred to some sort of fermented grain beverage like beer, which was produced in Egypt from barley with the addition of certain vegetable ingredients. See Arnold, "The Passover Papyrus from Elephantine." It may also be that the "sealing up" mentioned in the last line cited represents a way for leaven "not to be found in your houses" (Exod. 12:19).

Four Sons: One of the requirements of the Passover festival is for parents to explain its various requirements to their children. Thus:

> And when your children say to you, "What is this service to you?" you shall say, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt." —Exod. 12:26–27

The Pentateuch seems to repeat this exact same requirement twice more in the very next chapter:

> And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, "[This is] on account of what the Lord did for me when I went forth from Egypt." —Exod. 13:8

> And when, in time to come your son asks you, "What is this?" you shall say to him, "By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage." —Exod. 13:14

But that is not all. This commandment is repeated yet again in the book of Deuteronomy:

> When your son asks you one day, saying, "What are the statutes and the laws and the ordinances which the Lord our God commanded you?" then you shall say to your son, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord took us out of Egypt with a mighty hand." —Deut. 6:20–21

The underlying assumption of Scripture's economy seemed to be violated by this apparent fourfold repetition. In considering these verses, however, interpreters hit upon a crucial difference between the four passages: in each case the children's initial question was worded slightly differently (indeed, in Exod. 13:8 there was no initial question at all). The conclusion was obvious: Scripture was not repeating the same commandment four times but instructing parents how to tailor their explanations of the Passover rites to different kinds of children, one "wise" (the sort to ask the complicated question of Deut. 6:20), one "wicked" (the sort of questioner who excludes himself from the people of Israel, as is implied by the "to you" of Exod. 12:26), one "simple" (the sort to ask merely "What is this?" à la Exod. 13:14), and one who does not yet even know enough to ask (since Exod. 13:8 contains no question at all). This is the origin of the famous "Four Sons" midrash found in the Passover Haggadah; compare *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Bo* 18.

How Long, O Lord? God tells Abraham in Gen. 15:13 that his descendants will be sojourners "in a land not theirs" (that is, Egypt) and will be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years. At the time of the Exodus itself, the Bible notes that the people of Israel had sojourned in Egypt for exactly 430 years (Exod. 12:40). The slight contradiction between these two numbers might not have been troubling in itself—after all, the first might be simply an approximation of the more exact second figure.

But there was a far more serious chronological problem here. For Kohat, Moses' grandfather, is listed among those who went down to Egypt with Jacob, Kohat's grandfather (Gen. 46:11). Now, Kohat lived a total of 133 years (Exod. 6:18), and his son Amram lived 137 years (Exod. 6:20) and Amram's son Moses was 80 when he spoke to Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 7:7). Added all together, these figures total a mere 350 years—which means that, even if Kohat was born the very year that Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt, and even if Amram was born to Kohat in the last year of his life, and Moses similarly was born to Amram in the last year of *his* life, then the length of the Israelites' stay in Egypt (that is, the time from Jacob's 130th year to Moses' 80th) still could not have exceeded 350 years. (This is

pointed out specifically in *Seder Olam* 3.) This number was somewhat less than the 400 years spoken of in Gen. 15:13, or the 430 in Exod. 12:40. What is more, there was no reason to assume that Kohat had just been born at the time when he went down to Egypt, or that Amram was born to Kohat, and Moses to Amram, when their fathers were in their last year of life! In all likelihood, these men were considerably younger when their sons were born—so that the total time of the Israelite enslavement must have been still shorter than 350 or even 300 years. How, then, could all this square with the considerably higher numbers just seen, the 400 years of Gen. 15:13 and the 430 years of Exod. 12:40?

So it was that the tradition developed according to which the words spoken to Abraham in Gen. 15:13 ("Know of a surety that your *descendants* [literally, "your seed"] will sojourn in a land not theirs, and . . . will be oppressed for four hundred years") referred to the total amount of time from the birth of Abraham's first (true)[16] *descendant,* Isaac, who began this period of sojourning (as is said specifically in Gen. 26:3), until the Exodus. This tradition—or, at least, an awareness of its chronological problem—is witnessed in many sources:

> For the sojourning of the children of Israel, which they sojourned in Egypt and in **Canaan,** was four hundred and thirty years.[17]
>
> —Septuagint Exod. 12:40

> For the dwelling[-time] of the Israelites and their **ancestors** [literally, "fathers"] which they dwelt in the land of **Canaan** and the land of **Egypt** was four hundred and thirty years. —*Samaritan Pentateuch* Exod. 12:40

> From the time when Abraham was chosen from among the nations and migrated to Canaan, they [Abraham and Isaac and Jacob] dwelt in the land of Canaan . . . 215 years.[18]
>
> —Demetrius the Chronographer, Fragment 2, 16 (also, 2, 18)

16. See Gen. 21:12. Having this 400-year period start with the birth of Isaac had another advantage, for the Bible does not say how much time elapsed between God's words to Abraham in Gen. 15:13 and the birth of Isaac. If, however, one postulates that exactly 30 years separated the two events, then the discrepancy between 400 and 430 can be resolved: God said to Abraham that his *descendants* would be persecuted for 400 years, but the 430 years of persecution mentioned in Exod. 12:40 included the 30 years of Abraham's life between the time that God spoke to him and the time of Isaac's birth.

17. The words "and in Canaan" do not appear in the traditional Hebrew text. They may have been added here so as to include all the years spent by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Canaan within the total of 430. (The same words might also be seen to address the discrepancy between Exod. 12:40 and Gen. 15:13.) Note that mss. *Alexandrinus* and *Vindobonensis* of the Septuagint read "the sojourning of the children of Israel, which they sojourned in Egypt and in Canaan, *they and their fathers* . . ."; this version matches that of the *Samaritan Pentateuch.* Note further that Exod. 12:40 is one of the passages which, according to rabbinic texts, was specifically changed by the Septuagint translators. See further Geiger, *Hammiqra Vetargumayv,* 282; Tov, *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research,* 157 n.

18. In his subsequent calculations (Fragment 2.19), Demetrius reckons the total time from the descent into Egypt to the time of the Exodus to be likewise 215 years. Thus, the total time from God's covenant with Abraham until the Exodus was 430 years.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring . . . The [giving of] the Torah [just after the Exodus], which came four hundred and thirty years afterward . . . —Gal. 3:16–17

[Amram says to his fellow Israelites just before the birth of Moses, hence, 80 years before the Exodus:] And behold, from the time when the word of God that He spoke to Abraham was spoken [in Gen. 15:13], there are 350 years; from the time when we became slaves in Egypt, there are 130 years.[19]
—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:3

They [the Israelites] left Egypt . . . 430 years after the coming of our forefather Abraham to Canaan, Jacob's migration to Egypt having taken place 215 years later.[20] —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:318

"The time that they [Israel] dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years" [≅ Exod. 12:40]—This number is counted not from the time when Jacob entered [Egypt], but from the day when God made his covenant with Abraham. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 12:4

The time that the Israelites dwelt in Egypt was . . . 210 years, and the number 430 was from the time when God spoke to Abraham [at the covenant] between the pieces. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 12:40

There was another way of calculating the time of the Israelites' actual stay in Egypt. For, if the period of 400 years foretold to Abraham was to start with the birth of Isaac, and if the Bible says that Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born (Gen. 25:26), and Jacob was 130 when he and his sons moved to Egypt (Gen. 47:9), then 190 of the total 400 years had elapsed at the time when the move to Egypt took place. That left 210 years from the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt until the Exodus.

And [in the time of Joseph] they [the Israelites] went down into Egypt and dwelt there 210 years.[21] —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 8:14

Abraham our father was told at the covenant between the pieces, "Know of a surety that your descendants [literally, "seed"] will be sojourners . . . and they will be oppressed for four hundred years" [Gen. 15:13]; what "seed" is this but Isaac, as it is said, "for by 'Isaac' shall your seed be called" [Gen. 21:12]. Now, about Isaac it says, "And Isaac was sixty years old when she [Sarah] bore them" [Jacob and Esau; Gen. 25:26]. Our father Jacob [just

19. Adding the 80 years from the moment of Amram's speaking until the time of the Exodus, Pseudo-Philo obtains a total of 430 years from God's speaking to Abraham until the Exodus, of which 210 years were the period of actual enslavement.

20. Elsewhere, however, Josephus speaks of "four hundred years" of enslavement: *Jewish Antiquities* 2:204.

21. Note how this accords with Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:3 (cited above), for, adding the 80 years left until the Exodus to the 350 years mentioned there by Amram, one obtains 430 years, the total mentioned in Exod. 12:40; and adding the 80 years to the 130 years of enslavement mentioned by Amram, one obtains a total of 210, the same number cited here.

> before his death] said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty years" [Gen. 47:9]. [Added together,] this is one hundred and ninety years [from Isaac's birth], leaving two hundred and ten years [to make the total of four hundred]. — *Seder Olam* 3

Thus there developed the well-attested tradition that the Israelites' actual stay in Egypt lasted 210 years. It has been studied in detail by Joseph Heinemann, in his *Aggadah and Its Development* (Hebrew), 65–74; on *Seder Olam* here, see Milikowsky, "*Seder Olam* and the *Mekhilta of R. Šim'on b. Yoḥai* on the Enslavement of Israel in Egypt"; see also Larsson, "Chronology of the Pentateuch." Note, however, that Demetrius and Josephus (cited above) both maintain that the total time from Jacob's traveling down to Egypt until the Exodus was 215 years, and this tradition is found in later texts as well.

None of this seems to work very well with the dates presented in a fragmentary Qumran text, according to which Jacob

> . . . was] 65 ye[ars old when he fathered Levi . . .
> . . . And Levi was 3]4 [years old] when he [fathered Kohat . . .
> . . . And Kohat was 2]9 years old when he fathered Amram. And Amram [was . . .
>
> — (4Q559) *A Biblical Chronology* fragments 2 and 3

Working with these figures (and the others supplied by this text), it turns out that the Exodus took place some 381 years after the birth of Isaac—obviously an unacceptable calculation. Chaim Milikowsky has told me that he believes "65" in the first line cited above to be an improper restoration of the text, since no other chronology, rabbinic or otherwise, has Jacob this young even at the time of his meeting Rachel at the well (Gen. 29:10), long before Levi's birth.

According to another Qumran text, Amram, at the age of 136, summoned

> to him Miriam [his daughter and said: You are] thirty [years old . . .
>
> — (4Q543) *Visions of 'Amram* fragment 1

If so, then Amram was 106 when Miriam was born. Miriam was some years older than Moses—6, according to rabbinic tradition—so that Amram would have been roughly 112 when Moses was born. Since Moses was 80 at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 7:7), this meant that the events of the Exodus began some 192 years after Amram's birth. Now, according to the same Qumran text, Amram's death took place

> . . . in the year one hundred] and fifty-two of the ex[ile of Isra]el to Eg[ypt . . . — (4Q543) *Visions of 'Amram* fragment 1

which means that the exile in Egypt began 16 years before Amram's birth. Adding these 16 years to the 192 yields a total of 208 years from the start of the exile until the start of the Exodus. Allowing some time for the events of the Exodus to take place, as well as some fractions of years to have been included in the above genealogical calculations, we can probably conclude that this Qumran text also held that the

exile in Egypt lasted 210 years. (My thanks to Professor Milikowsky for help with these calculations.)

Lastly, there are the genealogies of the *Testament of Levi* 11–12 and the related *Aramaic Levi* (Cambridge fragments c, d). According to the latter text, Moses' mother and father, Jochebed and Amram, were both born when Levi was 64 years old. (The same age, by the way, may also have been intended in 4Q559 *A Biblical Chronology,* though it appears to say Levi was 63.) If so, their birth took place only shortly after the start of the Israelites' stay in Egypt (16 years after the start, according to *Aramaic Levi*). Since Moses was 80 years old at the time of the Exodus, that would mean that he was born when his parents were quite advanced in age (114 years old if the stay in Egypt lasted 210 years, or 119 if it lasted 215 years). Again, it is certainly relevant that 4Q559 *A Biblical Chronology* puts Amram's age at 110 at the time of Aaron's birth, a few years (3 by rabbinic reckoning) before Moses' birth.

Apparently disturbed by the advanced age of Moses' parents at the time of his birth, Pierre Grelot has suggested that the end point of this chronology ought not to be the time of the Exodus itself, but that of the Israelites' return to their homeland: see Grelot, "Quatre cent trente ans," and idem, "Quatre cents trente ans." However, this solution hardly fits the language of Exod. 12:40, which specifically refers to the time of the Israelites' "stay *in Egypt.*"

Remember Every Day: The Exodus took place near the beginning of Israel's history. Within the biblical period itself, it seems to have been something like *the* historical event. Frequently mentioned by later biblical prophets and historians,[22] it was given far more importance than any other event in Israel's early history. (There is, for example, no biblical holiday commemorating God's call to Abraham, or the conquest of the land, or the building of the Temple in Jerusalem; only the Exodus is, according to the Torah, to be not only commemorated but recounted and explained to subsequent generations.) In fact, one verse speaks of remembering "the day of your going out of Egypt *all the days of your life*" (Deut. 16:3), and this was taken as a divine commandment to remember the Exodus each and every day—if not more often than that.

> And you, **remember this day all of the days of your life,** and you shall [also] celebrate it from year to year all the days of your life, once per year on its day according to all of its law. —*Jubilees* 49:7

> Said R. El'azar b. Azariah: I am now indeed seventy years old, yet up until now I had not understood why we [are required to] mention the Exodus [as part of the *Shema* not only once a day, but also] every night, until I heard Ben Zoma's explanation of the verse, "You shall remember the day of your going out of Egypt *all* the days of your life" (Deut. 16:3): If it had simply said

22. A notable exception is the book of Chronicles, which sometimes quite consciously expunges mention of the Exodus from its sources. Compare, for example, 2 Sam. 7:6 and 1 Chron. 17:5, 1 Kings 8:21 and 2 Chron. 6:11, etc. (for additional examples, see Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles,* 379–386).

> "the days of your life," I would have understood [that mentioning the Exodus] **once a day** [would be enough]; but since it says "*all* the days," this "all" must mean [the *entire* day, including, therefore] the nights as well.
>
> —m. *Berakhot* 1:5

Typology of the Exodus: This emphasis on the Exodus no doubt derived in part from the nature of God's dramatic intervention into human history. The supernatural events surrounding the Exodus—not only the ten plagues, but the parting of the Red Sea—seemed to contain incontrovertible proof that life is not a succession of accidents. For, although human history may indeed have its ups and downs, in this one historical event God heard Israel's "cry" (Exod. 3:7) and came in the most palpable fashion to its rescue. Was not the story of the Exodus therefore also an *example,* an instance of the sort of divine intervention that might come about at any time?

And so it was that, from an early period, the departure from Egypt loomed large as a *type* or model of God's loving ways with his people. It represented, first of all, a time of closeness between Israel and its God, when the people had followed God into the wilderness like a newlywed wife following her husband into an uncertain future. Perhaps this time of closeness would be restored:

> Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and lead her back into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her . . . And there she shall sing as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.
>
> —Hos. 2:14–15

> Thus says the Lord: I remember to your credit the love of your younger days, and your devotion as a bride—how you followed Me into the wilderness, into a land without crops. —Jer. 2:2

In particular, however, the return of the people from Egypt back to their homeland seemed to contain the hope for a similar return after the Assyrian conquest of Israel and the exile of the northern tribes:

> In that day, they shall come to you from Assyria and fortified cities . . . As in the days of your going forth from the land of Egypt, I will show forth miracles. —Mic. 7:12, 15

> And there will be a highway for the remnant which is left of His people from Assyria, just as there was one for Israel, when they came up from the land of Egypt. —Isa. 11:16

> Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when men shall no longer say, "As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt . . ." but "As the Lord lives who brought up and led back the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country" and out of the countries where I had driven them, so that they might dwell in their own land. —Jer. 23:7–8

Likewise, the same events in Egypt long ago seemed to hold out the hope for a return of the Jewish people to their homeland after they had been conquered and exiled by the Babylonians:

> Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea into a path for the redeemed to pass over? [So, similarly] those who have been ransomed by the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing. —Isa. 51:10–11

> As I live, says the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out . . . As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I enter into judgment with you, says the Lord God.
> —Ezek. 20:33–36

No doubt in part because of this tendency already apparent in Israel's prophetic writings ancient interpreters of the Bible continued in similar fashion to view the Exodus typologically. Indeed, such prophetic passages as those cited above may have served as a model and legitimization of this whole approach to interpreting past events. Thus, for example, when *4 Ezra* describes the fate of the exiles from the northern tribes, it is certainly no accident that it presents God as having stopped up the Euphrates so that they could cross it, like the Red Sea of old, on dry land:

> But they [the Northern exiles] formed this plan for themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the nations and go to a more distant region, where no human race had ever lived, so that there at least they might keep their statutes which they had not kept in their own land. And they went in by the narrow passages of the Euphrates river. For at that time the Most High performed wonders for them, and **stopped the springs of the river**[23] until they had passed over. —*4 Ezra* 13:41–44

Similarly, early Christians not only connected the crucifixion with aspects of the paschal sacrifice, but they read the whole story of the Exodus as a foreshadowing. As one, rather later, Christian summary puts it:

> At Passover, the Jews escaped the slavery of Pharaoh; we [Christians] were liberated from Satan's thrall on the day of the crucifixion. They sacrificed a lamb and were saved from the destroyer by his blood; we were saved from the corrupt deeds which we had done by the blood of the beloved Son; they had Moses as a guide, we have Jesus as chief and savior.
> —Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 12.8

It is striking, moreover, that in the visionary world of the New Testament book of Revelation, the plagues of Egypt seem to occur once again—albeit in somewhat different order and character:

23. Cf. Josh. 3:16–17

> So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon men who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image . . . The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the water, and they became blood . . . The fifth angel poured his bowl on the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness. —Rev. 16:2, 4, 10

Although typology is not generally characteristic of rabbinic approaches to Scripture, there are even hints of such a typological view of the Exodus here and there in rabbinic texts:

> In each and every generation a person should regard himself as if he himself had gone out of Egypt, as it is said, "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, '[This is] because of what the Lord did for *me* when *I* departed from Egypt.'" —m. *Pesaḥim* 10:5

It is interesting to compare this typological approach to Scripture to the somewhat similar *allegorical* approach found in other Jewish and early Christian writers. Where typology treats earlier things as representing—and foreshadowing—later things, the allegorical reading understands concrete, specific, or physical entities in Scripture as standing for abstract, general, or spiritual things. Thus, for example, Philo understands the same story of the Exodus allegorically: for him, "Egypt" represents the passions, sensuality, and the pursuit of pleasure.[24] As a result, the story of Israel's going forth from Egypt was, in its most significant sense, a narration of the soul's struggle to liberate itself from its slavery to the senses and physical pleasure:

> When he led us out of Egypt, that is, out of our physical passions . . . —Philo, *The Posterity and Exile of Cain* 155

> But taking pity on our continuous cries, He who alone is merciful allows the suppliant souls to come in, while easily repelling and dispersing the onslaught of Egyptian passions. —Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 95

Pharaoh as Satan: In a passage cited earlier (as well as in numerous other works of early Christianity), Pharaoh is explicitly compared to the devil:

> At Passover, the Jews escaped the slavery of Pharaoh; we [Christians] were liberated from Satan's thrall on the day of the crucifixion. —Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 12.8

Similarly:

> When He comes in His majesty to judge the earth . . . He also shall destroy the true Pharaoh, that is, the devil, with "the breath of His mouth" [Exod. 15:8]. —Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 6

24. It is, incidentally, no coincidence that rabbinic exegetes likewise speak of the Egyptians as "plunged in wantonness." The biblical *locus classicus* for this idea was Ezek. 23:20, and this verse was frequently cited in rabbinic works; see, for example, Midrash *Tanḥuma Wayyesheb* 5.

The idea that Pharaoh symbolically represents the devil may have been influenced (directly or otherwise) by the motif seen above, "Pharaoh's Sorcerers Had Help," particularly as depicted in *Jubilees:*

> And the prince Mastema stood up against you [Moses], and tried to make you fall into Pharaoh's power. He helped the Egyptian sorcerers, [so that] they would oppose you and perform in your presence . . . [Later,] despite all the signs and wonders, the prince Mastema was not put to shame [= discouraged], but he took heart and called to the Egyptians to pursue after you . . . And [after the drowning of the Egyptians at the Red Sea], the prince Mastema was bound and locked up behind the children of Israel so that he might not accuse them. — *Jubilees* 48:9–12, 15

A Special Night: The night of the first Passover, in Egypt, was held to be significant not only because of the Exodus itself. Jewish tradition had it that the very same night marked other significant events in history. Thus, the book of *Jubilees* maintained that Abraham's offering of his son Isaac upon an altar took place precisely on the same date as the first Passover, the fifteenth of the first month (*Jubilees* 17:15, 18:3, 17–19). Later sources expand this same tradition of the night's specialness:

> Indeed, there are four nights that are written in the Book of Records: the first night was when the Lord revealed Himself to the world in order to create it . . . and He called it the first night; the second night was when the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham, one hundred years old, and to his wife Sarah, aged ninety . . . and Isaac was thirty-seven years old when he was offered upon the altar: the heavens bowed down and Isaac saw their perfections . . . and He called it the second night; the third was when the Lord was revealed to the Egyptians at midnight, and His hand killed the Egyptians' firstborn but His right hand protected the firstborn of Israel . . . and He called it the third night; the fourth night is when the world will finish the period until its redemption . . . this is the night of the Passover for the name of the Lord, a night of watching, for it is already established for the redemption of all Israel's generations. — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 12:42

This same tradition certainly had a role in shaping Christian interpretations. See further Le Déaut, *La Nuit pascale.*

The (Paschal) Lamb of God: While the "Lamb of God" was a direct interpretation of the paschal lamb, it came to be associated as well with the ram of the binding of Isaac (above, Chapter 9, "Offering Foreshadowed Crucifixion"). See further Braun, "Le sacrifice d'Isaac dans le quatrième évangile d'après le Targum."

Nor were these two the only animal sacrifices to which the crucifixion was compared:

> For if the sprinkling of impure persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how

> much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. —Heb. 9:13–14

The chapter from which these words are taken is concerned not with the paschal sacrifice, but with the sacrifice offered on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) and the purification effected by the ashes of the red heifer (Num. 19:1–10).

18

The Red Sea

(EXODUS 13:1–15:21)

Egyptians drowned at the Red Sea: light and dark together.

The Red Sea

(EXODUS 13:1–15:21)

❖ ❖ ❖

After the tenth plague had befallen Egypt, Pharaoh at last relented and the Israelites started on their way out of the land of Egypt. As they journeyed, God led them with a pillar of cloud, which went before them during the day, and a pillar of fire at night to light their way. Soon after they had left, however, Pharaoh regretted his decision, and he dispatched his crack charioteers to pursue them. These came within sight when the Israelites were camped near the Red Sea.

When they saw the Egyptians approaching, the Israelites panicked, but Moses stretched his hand out over the Red Sea and the waters divided, forming a dry path on which the Israelites could cross to the other side. Pharaoh's charioteers tried to follow, but their chariots became bogged down in the mud. Then Moses stretched his hand over the sea once again, and the water returned to its prior condition, drowning Pharaoh's army. Safe on the other side, the Israelites sang a song of praise.

THE ISRAELITES did not just set out on their journey from Egypt on their own. Instead, they were guided on their way by supernatural means, the alternating presence of a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud:

> And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, to travel by day and by night. He did not remove the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. —Exod. 13:21–22

The pillar of fire certainly made sense, since fire could provide light for the journey at night, and a whole pillar of it would be easily seen. But why a pillar of *cloud* during the day? This seemed a strange choice of materials.

Pillar of Luminous Cloud

Some ancient interpreters concluded that the daytime pillar, no less than the nighttime one, served to light up the Israelites' path.[1] In other words, the pillar of cloud—whatever the role of its "cloudiness"—provided a brilliant source of light:

> Therefore you provided a flaming pillar of fire as a guide for their unknown journey, and a **harmless sun** for their glorious wandering. For those men

1. Because the Bible was transmitted without punctuation, one might conclude from Exod. 21:22 (cited above) that *both* pillars served "to give them light."

> [the Egyptians] deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept your sons imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world. —Wisd. 18:3–4

> Take note, most noble Moses, of this place
> which we have found near yonder airy glen . . .
> From thence a lustrous light **now** flashes forth,
> [which is,] by night, a sign, like to a fiery pillar.
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 243–247

> A cloud whose shape was like a tall pillar proceeded before the throng, **shining like the sun** during the day, and like fire at night, so that they would not go astray in their travels but would follow in the footsteps of an unerring guide. —Philo, *On Moses* 1:166

Similarly:

> "He did not remove the pillar of cloud by day" [Exod. 13:22]—[in the sense that] the light of the sun did not overcome it; "nor the pillar of fire by night" [Exod. 13:22]—[in the sense that] the light of the moon did not overcome it. —*Midrash ha-Gadol* Exod. 13:22

Alternately, it was possible to interpret the light of the pillar(s) as a figure of God's mercy:

> Pharaoh, the former ruler of this Egypt, with his multitude of chariots, high and mighty in his lawless insolence and boastful tongue, you destroyed in the depths of the sea with his proud host, Father, causing the light of your mercy to shine upon the people of Israel. —3 Macc. 6:4

Protective Covering

But if the pillar of cloud was a source of light, then why "cloud" at all? Could not the same pillar of fire have traveled before the Israelites both day and night? The presence of two kinds of pillars suggested that this pillar of cloud had a further function—and indeed, the book of Psalms seemed to say as much:

> He spread a cloud for **covering**, and fire to give light by night. —Ps. 105:39

Another verse in the psalms likewise suggested that, quite apart from the Exodus, it was in general God's nature to provide illumination and shelter at the same time:

> For the Lord God is a sun and a shield. —Ps. 84:11

Moreover, the prophet Isaiah, in foreseeing a similar twofold manifestation of God over Mt. Zion, had also specified that a divine cloud would be provided for protection:

> And God will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and her assemblies a cloud by day and smoke and the brilliance of burning fire by night . . . It

> will be for a **shade** by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a **shelter** from the storm and rain. —Isa. 4:5–6

Fortified by such evidence, numerous interpreters thus asserted that the purpose of the pillar of cloud was also to provide shade and protection from the blazing desert heat:

> She [Wisdom] gave to holy men the reward for their labors; she guided them along a marvelous way, and became shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night. —Wisd. 10:17

> You comforted them with a pillar of fire at night, for light, and a pillar of cloud by day, for shade.
>
> —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.26

> And for you water sprang forth from a rock, and a cloud was following for shade from the heat and protection from the frost, yielding tidings of the fashion and promise of another new heaven.
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 131:6

> He gave them a pillar of fire by night for light and guidance, and a cloud by day for a covering. —*Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 23

An Angel in the Cloud

There was, however, another matter that seems to have influenced early ideas about the nature of this pillar of cloud. For in several places the Bible suggests that the Israelites were in fact led out of Egypt by an angel:

> Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them. —Exod. 14:19

> [God tells the Israelites:] Behold, I am sending an angel before you, to guard you on the journey and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.
>
> —Exod. 23:20–21

> [Moses later tells the Edomites:] The Egyptians dealt harshly with us, and with our fathers; and when we cried to the Lord, He heard our voice, and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. —Num. 20:15–16

Who was this angel? The Bible does not say, nor does it ever actually represent the angel in the act of doing what the two above passages suggest, namely, leading the Israelites on their journey. But there was one verse that strongly implied that such an angel was indeed present during the crucial events at the Red Sea, *hidden* inside the pillar of cloud:

> And the angel of God who was going before the Israelite camp moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them. —Exod. 14:19

The angel moved and the pillar of cloud moved. Was it not thus obvious that the angel was inside the cloud?

> And perhaps, concealed within the [pillar of] cloud, one of the deputies of the great King, an unseen angel, went as a pathfinder, whom physical eyes were not permitted to behold. —Philo, *On Moses* 1:166

Perhaps this angel was to be identified with divine Wisdom:

> [Wisdom speaks:]
> I went forth from the mouth of the Most High, and like a mist I covered the earth;
> I dwell in highest heaven, and my throne is in a pillar of cloud.
> —Sir. 24:3–4

> She [Wisdom] . . . guided them along a marvelous way, and became shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night. —Wisd. 10:17

This idea of the pillar concealing an angel or divine Wisdom may have played an additional role in ancient interpretation. For, yet another biblical description of the pillars of cloud and fire appears, this time in the book of Nehemiah:

> [Ezra prays:] But You in Your great mercy did not abandon them in the desert. The pillar of cloud did not depart from above them during the day to indicate the path for them, nor did the pillar of fire at night, to light for them the path on which they should proceed. And Your **good spirit** You provided to instruct them. —Neh. 9:19–20

What was this additional source of instruction, the "good spirit" that God provided? Since (as with the "angel" just examined), this "good spirit" is not actually represented as taking part in the Exodus itself, an interpreter might naturally conclude that it was likewise hidden (indeed, perhaps it was to be identified with the mysterious angel sent by God, since the word "spirit" was often taken to mean "angel"). And since, in the above passage, the verse preceding this mention of the "good spirit" speaks of the two pillars, it likewise must have seemed reasonable to conclude that, in one or both of these two pillars, God had also provided his good spirit—or divine Wisdom—to instruct the people.

There may be a hint of such an understanding in the New Testament:

> I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses **in the cloud** and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. —1 Cor. 10:1–4

This text seems to suggest that "immersion" in the cloud, no less than immersion in water, was a kind of baptism or initiation—perhaps a sort of *spiritual* baptism, since no actual water was required (see also Acts 11:15 and [1QS] *Community Rule* col. 4:20–21). If so, then the cloud was no ordinary cloud, but a spiritual, purifying mass.

Final Payment

The Israelites continued their march out of Egypt. But then the Egyptians, who had at first asked them to leave Egypt (Exod.12:31–33), suddenly decided to pursue them and bring them back. Why? Surely the Egyptians should have realized they would only bring more trouble on themselves. The Bible says that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" and led him to this decision (Exod. 14:4). Some interpreters suggested that God did this so that the Egyptians might finally pay off their full debt for having enslaved and ill-treated the Israelites:

> And it [the hardening of Pharaoh's heart] was conceived of by the Lord our God so that He might smite the Egyptians and throw them into the midst of the sea. —*Jubilees* 48:17

> For the fate they deserved drew them on to this end, and made them forget what happened, in order that they might fill up the punishment which their torments still lacked. —Wisd. 19:4–5

In particular, by drowning the Egyptian army at the Red Sea, God was punishing them for having ordered the Israelite babies drowned in the Nile. (See Chapter 16, "Death by Water.")

Get Back Our Goods!

Other interpreters noticed that the words that came just before the pursuit, "What have *we* done to free Israel from serving *us?*" (Exod. 14:5) were in the plural. Was this not a hint that Pharaoh was no longer the only one whose heart was hardened?

> Pharaoh and his army and all the rulers of Egypt, the chariots and their riders, were plunged into the Red Sea and perished, for no other reason than that **their** foolish hearts were hardened after the signs and wonders had been accomplished in the land of Egypt by Moses, the servant of God. —*1 Clement* 51:5

What could have caused the Egyptian people to urge a pursuit of the Israelites? The answer seemed obvious: they must have had second thoughts about the silver and gold they had given the Israelites before their departure:

> They came to Pharaoh and said, "What is it that we have done in sending forth Israel? Arise, ready your chariots and we will all give chase with you until we return them to our service. After all, they were our slaves and our fathers' slaves before us. Why did we ever let them leave Egypt? Perhaps we can even get back the things that they borrowed from us, leaving us with nothing." —*Tibat Marqa* 54a

> [The people said:] "We have freed the Hebrews after they have taken our riches and our clothes. It would be better to die than that the Hebrews put the Egyptian kingdom to shame." —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 14:1

Rebellion at the Sea

When the Israelites turned and suddenly saw the Egyptians closing on them, they found themselves trapped between the Red Sea and the arriving army. Panicked, they cried out to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you took us into the wilderness to die?" (Exod. 14:11). Moses, however, reassured them, and the Red Sea split in two, creating a path of dry land for the Israelites to walk on.

Psalm 106 contains a brief retelling of these events of the Exodus, but with one puzzling addition:

> Our fathers in Egypt did not understand your miracles, they did not recall your many mercies, and they **rebelled at the sea, at the Red Sea.**
>
> —Ps. 106:7

The highlighted words seemed particularly difficult: what "rebellion" is meant here? (Furthermore, why the repetitive "at the sea, at the Red Sea" in the traditional Hebrew text?)[2]

Out of this verse developed a tradition that elaborated the Israelites' brief complaint to Moses in Exod. 14:11–12 into a full-scale revolt. According to this tradition, it is not only (as the Bible says there) that the Israelites, seeing the approaching Egyptians, complained to Moses; in addition, forgetting God's previous miracles, they now rebelled at the Red Sea:

> And now they forgot all those miracles done by God [an allusion to Ps. 106:7] in order to free them, and they turned against Moses, so much so that in their faithlessness they wished to stone the prophet[3] even as he urged them on and promised them that they would be saved, and they resolved to surrender to the Egyptians. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:327

But a close reading of Moses' precise words to the rebels in Exod. 14:13–14 reveals that even they were not of one mind:

> And the Israelites formed four groups at the time they were standing at the Red Sea; one said, "Let us fall into the sea"; another said, "Let us return to Egypt"; another said, "Let us make battle formations against them," and another said, "Let us cry out in their direction and confuse them." To the group that said "Let us fall into the sea" Moses said, "Do not fear, **stand up** [that is, don't fall] and see the salvation of the Lord that He will do for you today" [Exod. 14:13]. To the group that said "Let us return to Egypt" Moses said, ". . . For, in the manner in which you see the Egyptians today [that is, as their slaves], do not ever again see them **in slavery** anymore" [≅ Exod. 14:13]. To the group that said, "Let us make battle formations against them," Moses said, ". . . The Lord is the one who will fight for you" [Exod. 14:14]. And to the group that said "Let us cry out in their direction and confuse

2. Some ancient (e.g., the Vulgate) and modern translators read not *'al yām*, "at the sea," but *'elyôn*, "the Most High." The Septuagint translators read *'olîm*, "going up." The traditional Hebrew text's version might suggest that they rebelled *concerning* the sea.

3. The idea of "stoning" Moses comes from a later verse, Exod. 17:4, as well as Ps. 68:28.

them" Moses said, "Be silent" [Exod. 14:14, so that later, in Exod. 15:1, you may] "give glory and praise and exalt God."

— *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 14:13–14

Some thought that the most miserable death would be a welcome blessing, while others, believing it to be better to perish by the elements of nature than to become a laughing-stock to their enemies, planned to throw themselves into the sea and, loaded with some heavy substances, sat waiting by the shore so that when they saw the foe near at hand they might leap down and easily sink into the depths. — Philo, *Moses* 2:249

Then, in considering the fearful situation of the moment, the sons of Israel were split in their opinions according to three strategies. For the tribes of Reuben, Issachar, Zebulun, and Simeon said: "Come, let us cast ourselves into the sea. For it is better for us to die in the water than to be killed by our enemies." But the tribes of Gad, Asher, Dan, and Naphtali said: "No, but let us go back with them . . ." But the tribes of Levi, Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin said: "No, but let us take up our weapons and fight them . . ." And when Moses [cried out], God rebuked the sea [Ps. 106:9] and the sea was dried up. — Pseudo-Philo, *Book of Biblical Antiquities* 10:3–5

At the [Red] Sea they were divided into three groups and each group spoke its peace, and the great prophet Moses replied to each. The first group said: "Let us return and let us serve them [as slaves,] for it is better for us [to do thus] than to die in the desert" [≅ Exod. 14:12]. To them the great prophet Moses said: "You shall not see them ever again" [Exod. 14:13]. The second group said: "Let us flee from the Egyptians into the midst of the desert." To them the great prophet Moses said: "Stand up and see the salvation of the Lord that He will do for you today" [Exod. 14:13]. The third group said: "Let us go and fight with the Egyptians." To them the great prophet Moses said: ". . .The Lord is the one who will fight for you—and you be silent" [Exod. 14:14]. — *Tibat Marqa* 217a

More than One Miracle

God split the Red Sea in two—here, surely, was a miracle. And yet, interpreters were inclined to suppose that more than one miracle had occurred. To begin with, another account of the Exodus in the book of Psalms seemed to say that all of nature was thrown into turmoil in the event:

You redeemed Your people with Your mighty arm, the children of Jacob and Joseph.
The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You and trembled, the very depths shook.
The clouds poured out water and the heavens thundered, Your lightning-darts flashed about.
The crash of Your thunder was in the whirlwind, lightning lit up the land, the earth trembled and shook.

You made Your path through the sea, Your way through the watery
depths, though Your traces were not seen.
You led your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.
—Ps. 77:15–20

Interpreters were spurred by such passages to view the crossing of the sea itself as fraught with the supernatural. Indeed, more than once the Bible implied that several different miracles were involved:

. . . And the **signs** [miracles] and deeds that He did within Egypt, to Pharaoh the Egyptian king and to all the land, and which He did **to the army of Egypt,** its horses and chariotry, over whom He caused the waters of the Red Sea to flood as they pursued you, and the Lord destroyed them to this very day. —Deut. 11:3–4

Read in a certain way, this text might be held to suggest that God's signs (in the plural) were actually done in two places, "within Egypt" and again at the Red Sea. Similarly:

And You saw our fathers' oppression in Egypt, and You heard their cry at the Red Sea. **Then you performed signs and wonders** against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of the land, for you knew that they had ill-treated them; and so You made for yourself a name, as it is to this day. And You split the sea before them, and they crossed on dry land amidst the sea. —Neh. 9:9–11

If one takes seriously the sequence of actions presented here, it seems that God performed "signs and wonders" for Israel *after* having heard their cry at the Red Sea. If so, these signs and wonders—again in the plural—were performed in addition to the signs and wonders that constituted the ten plagues. Still more explicitly:

[Later, the Israelites] forgot God their savior, who had done
marvelous things in Egypt,
wonders in the land of Ham, **miracles** [in the plural] **at the Red Sea.**
—Ps. 106:21–22

It may thus be no accident that some interpreters referred to a plurality of miracles at the Red Sea.

Those protected by Your hand passed through [the Red Sea] as one nation, after gazing on marvelous wonders. —Wisd. 19:8

More explicitly:

Ten miracles were done for our ancestors in Egypt, and ten more on the Sea.
—m. *Abot* 5:4

R. Yose ha-Gelili said: How can we deduce that the Egyptians not only suffered ten plagues in Egypt, but fifty plagues at the Red Sea? With regard to [the plagues in] Egypt, what does the text say? "And the wizards said to Pharaoh, 'It is the finger of God!'" At the Red Sea, however, what does the

> text say? "And God saw the mighty hand which the Lord had used against the Egyptians . . ." [Exod. 14:31]. If, by the "finger of God" they had suffered ten plagues, one might conclude that at the Red Sea [where the "hand of God" appeared] they were stricken with fifty plagues!
>
> — *Passover Haggadah*

A Grassy Plain

One particular miracle seemed to be implied by the prophet Isaiah in regard to the crossing of the Red Sea.

> [God] led them [the Israelites] through the depths, like a horse in the desert they did not stumble, **like cattle going down into the valley.**
>
> — Isa. 63:13–14

Read in a certain way, these lines suggested to interpreters that the Red Sea had been made not only passable, but dry as a desert—or perhaps even turned into a grassy valley:

> For [at the Red Sea] the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with your commandments, so that your children might be kept unharmed. The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp, and dry land emerging where water had stood before, an unhindered way out of the Red Sea, and a **grassy plain** out of the raging waves. — Wisd. 19:6

> And the Israelites went on dry land through the water, and there came forth perfumed springs of water and fruit trees and greenery and fine morsels.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 15:19

Miraculous Timing

Despite such evidence of the miraculous, some people nevertheless were inclined to see the miracle as one of timing rather than a reversal of the natural order:

> Now the Memphites say that Moses was familiar with the countryside and watched for the ebb tide, and he conveyed the multitude across through the dry sea. But the Heliopolitans say that the king rushed down on them with a great force, together with the consecrated animals, since the Jews had acquired and were carrying off the property of the Egyptians. But a divine voice came to Moses to strike the sea with his rod and divide it. When Moses heard, he touched the water with the rod and thus the flowing water separated and the host went through a dry path.
>
> — Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.35–37)

> After the sun had set, there arose a particularly stormy southwind which caused the sea to retreat. While it was normally subject to the ebb-tide, now it was thrust back more than usual against the shore and sank as into a

chasm or a whirlpool . . . At God's command Moses struck the sea with his staff, and it was split and divided in two. —Philo, *Moses* 1:176–177

Each of these things I have recounted just as they are told in Sacred Scripture. And let no one wonder at the astonishing nature of this thing, that a road to safety was found through the sea itself—whether [this happened] by God's will or simply through happenstance—for an ancient people innocent of any wrongdoing. For indeed, it was but a short while ago that the Pamphilian Sea moved backwards for those who were accompanying Alexander, king of Macedonia, thus offering them a path through itself when no other way out existed, and so to overcome, as was God's will, the Persian empire. All those who have written down Alexander's doings are in agreement on this. However, each may decide on his own concerning such matters. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:347–248

If Looks Could Kill . . .

In the crucial sequence of actions that preceded the Egyptians' downfall, there was one additional strangeness to be accounted for:

And there was the cloud and **the darkness, and it lit up the night** . . . The Egyptians pursued, and followed them [the Israelites] into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And at the morning watch, the Lord looked out over the Egyptian camp in [or "with"] the **pillar of fire and cloud**, and discomfited[4] the Egyptian camp.

—Exod. 14:20, 23–24

Here was something indeed strange: a single pillar apparently made of fire and cloud simultaneously, and in it, or with it, God *looked* out over the Egyptians. Interpreters concluded that by "looking" God actually afflicted the Egyptians, and afflicted them by means of this twofold cloud:

He [Artapanus] says that when the Egyptians went in with them and pursued, fire shone out from in front of them and the sea again flooded the path. All the Egyptians were destroyed by both the fire and the flood.

—Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.35–37)

The cloud was watching over them from behind, and in its midst was a divine sort of image, flashing forth with the brightness of fire.

—Philo, *Life of Moses* 2:254

And He cast upon them naphtha and fire and hailstones.

— *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 14:24

4. Like "discomfited," the Hebrew word it translates *(hāmam)* was not a particularly common one, and its meaning may not have been clear to all interpreters. Indeed, it may have sounded somewhat like a more common term meaning "heat."

> And God, looking out over the camp of the Egyptians through the columns of fire and cloud, **killed** their armies. — (Vulgate) Exod. 14:24

> The cloud turned the sea to mud, and the pillar of fire **made it boil** like pitch, so that the horses' hooves became detached . . . And they confounded *(wayyahom)*: This word means a plague, as it says "And He will throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed" [Deut. 7:23].
> — *Mekhilta deR. Shimon bar Yoḥai* 14:24

Light and Dark Together

Other interpreters noted that, just before this mention of God looking out on the Egyptians, the text says that the pillar "went in-between the Egyptian camp and the Israelite camp, and there was the *cloud and the darkness and it lit up the night*" (Exod. 14:20 in the traditional Hebrew text). They therefore concluded that the "fire" part of the twofold cloud had been for the purpose of illuminating the Israelite side, and the "cloud" part for darkening the Egyptians':

> A night of gloom and darkness overwhelmed them [the Egyptians].
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:344

> And there was the cloud, and it darkened the Egyptians, but for Israel it was light the whole night. — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 14:20

> The cloud was [half] darkness and half light. The darkness darkened the Egyptians, and the light [was] for Israel. — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 14:20

> The cloud was half light and half darkness: the light shined upon Israel and the darkness cast darkness on the Egyptians.
> — *Fragment Targum* (P) Exod. 14:20

Ups and Downs of the Egyptians

The waters of the Red Sea swept over the pursuing Egyptians, killing them to a man. The grateful hymn the Israelites sang after being saved (the "Song of the Sea") retells these same events—but with some interesting changes. For example, the song says that Egyptians "plunged to the depths like a stone" (Exod. 15:5) and "sank like lead in the mighty waters" (Exod. 15:10). Then what did the narrative mean by saying that the Israelites, after they reached safety on the opposite side, "saw the Egyptians dead *on the seashore*" (Exod. 14:30)? Where were the Egyptians—on the beach or at the bottom of the sea? Interpreters reasoned that the Egyptians must have first sunk to the bottom and later risen to the surface—either to prove to the Israelites that the Egyptian army was indeed destroyed, or perhaps to provide the Israelites with the Egyptian armor and weapons for the future:

> She brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through deep waters; but she drowned their enemies, and **spat them up** from the depth of the sea. Therefore the righteous **plundered** the ungodly. — Wisd. 10:18–20

> [Moses predicts:] I see [God's help] preparing for the fight and casting a noose around the necks of the enemy. It drags them down through the sea; they **sink like lead** into its depths. At present, you see them still alive, but I have a vision of them dead, and today, you too **will see their corpses.**
>
> —Philo, *Moses* 2:252

> [After the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea,] the sea and the land argued between themselves: the sea said to the land, "Take your children" [since they *were* land-dwellers and, in that sense, your "children"]. The land said to the sea, "Take your dead bodies" [that is, you are the one responsible for their death, *you* take them]. The sea did not want to take them and the land did not want to take them. —*Targum Neophyti* Exod. 15:12

Red Sea as Baptism

Early Christians found in the Old Testament foreshadowings of the New, as well as of later Christian doctrines and practices. The crossing of the Red Sea (like the flood in the narrative of Noah) was seen as a foreshadowing of the Christian sacrament of baptism:

> I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and **in the sea.** —1 Cor. 10:1–2

> And so, when the people, having been set free from Egypt and the power of the Egyptian king, escaped when it passed through water, that same king and all his forces were likewise killed by water. Could there be a more obvious prefiguring of the sacrament of baptism?
>
> —Tertullian, *On Baptism* 10

> The whole story of the exodus [is] a prefiguring [*tupos*] of the salvation acquired through baptism.
>
> —Didymus the Blind, *On the Trinity* 2:14 (*PG* 39.697 A)

> [Referring to 1 Cor. 10:1–4:] You may thus see how much Paul's way of reading differs from mere literalism. What the Jews consider to have been a crossing of the Red Sea, Paul calls baptism; what they believe to have been a cloud, he calls the Holy Spirit. —Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 5:1

How Did They Know the Words?

In introducing the "Song of the Sea," the Bible says, "Then sang Moses and the Israelites." But since the song is all about the events that had just taken place, it was obviously a brand new composition. Interpreters therefore wondered exactly how Moses and the Israelites could spontaneously all sing the same song. Perhaps, somehow, they just managed to do so:

They sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name, and praised **with one accord** your defending hand. —Wisd. 10:20

When the Israelites came up from the Red Sea, they sought to praise God, and the holy spirit came over them and they praised Him.[5]

—Tosefta *Soṭah* 6:2

To some, however, the song itself seemed to imply otherwise. Its first words were not (in the traditional Hebrew text) "*We* shall sing" but "*I* shall sing." As a matter of fact, the previous verse puts the verb "sing" in the singular, as if it really meant, "Then Moses sang this song, and along with him, the other Israelites." Both these points seemed to indicate that Moses sang first, and that the Israelites somehow joined in:

All the [Israelites] were persuaded by Moses to sing with hearts in accord[6] the same song . . . The prophet [Moses] . . . no longer able to contain his delight, led off the song, and those who heard him joined together in two choirs to sing with him the story of these same deeds. —Philo, *Moses* 2:257

They [the Israelites] passed the whole night in hymns and rejoicing, and **Moses himself composed** a song of praise to God in thanks for His kindness, and it was written in hexameters. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:346

"Moses and the Israelites" means that Moses sang the song on behalf of all the Israelites. —*Mekhilta Shirtah* 1

Rabbi Akiba explained: "Then sang Moses and the Israelites this song to the Lord, and they said, *saying* . . ." This [word "saying"] teaches that the Israelites would repeat each and every thing that Moses said, as those who recite the Hallel. Rabbi Nehemiah said: As those who recite the Shema, and not as those who recite the Hallel.[7] —m. *Soṭah* 5:4

Moses the prophet sang the song in sections, and when he would finish one section, he would be silent, and all the elders would answer with the words, "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, horse and his rider has He cast into the sea," and all of Israel would say, "My strength and my song, and He is become my salvation" until "the Lord is a hero in war, the Lord is His name." —*Tibat Marqa* 72b, 104a

Moses sang and all the people sang back after him.

—Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 15:1

5. Although in its present context these words are used to support the antiphonal recitation of the song, the phrase "the holy spirit came over them" may first have been used to maintain that Moses and the Israelites were all simultaneously inspired to sing the song.

6. The phrase "with hearts in accord" may be designed to explain why Exod. 15:1 refers to Moses and the Israelites singing as one.

7. The precise distinction presented here is in dispute. Cf. Tosefta *Soṭah* 6:2–3; *Mekhilta Shirta* 1; j. Talmud *Soṭah* 5:6; b. *Soṭah* 30b, b. *Sukkah* 38a–39a.

Other versions of the text did not present this contradiction between everyone singing and the words "*I* shall sing":

> Let us sing to the Lord, for He is greatly glorified.
>
> —Septuagint, *Targums* Exod. 15:1

> Sing [plural] to the Lord. —*Samaritan Pentateuch* Exod. 15:1

Seeing God at the Sea

There were some indications that the events at the Red Sea were more than a miraculous event in history; the Israelites themselves seem to have caught a glimpse of God's very being, as it were. After all, the Bible says that, at the time of the events, Israel "*saw* the mighty hand" with which God had defeated the Egyptians (Exod. 14:31). Was this just a manner of speaking, or did they really *see?* Later on, Moses recalls:

> And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great fear, and with signs and wonders.
>
> —(traditional Hebrew text of) Deut. 26:8

But the word for "fear" might be identified with the root meaning "see":

> And the Lord Himself brought us out of Egypt, with His great strength, and His mighty hand, and His high arm, and with **great visions**, and with signs and wonders. —Septuagint Deut. 26:8 (cf. Deut. 4:34)

> . . . with a great sight . . .
>
> —*Targums Onqelos, Peshitta, Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 26:8

> . . . with great sights . . . —*Targum Neophyti* Deut. 26:8

> . . . with fearsome visions . . .[8] —(Vulgate) Deut. 26:8

> "With great fear" [Deut. 26:8]: this refers to the revealing of God's very being [*Shekhinah*]. —*Passover Haggadah*

Many interpreters thus concluded that the Israelites actually saw God at the Red Sea. Indeed, this same idea seemed also to be reflected in the song itself. For here the Israelites said, "This is my God and I will glorify Him, the God of my father and I will exalt Him" (Exod. 15:2). Did not the word "this" also imply that the Israelites, when they uttered it, were actually seeing God before them, so vividly present that they could say "this"?

> R. Eli'ezer said: [from the word "this" we know] that the lowliest servant-girl at the Red Sea perceived what the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel had not.
>
> —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Shirtah* 3

8. This is apparently an attempt to harmonize the two traditions surrounding this word, "fear" and "vision."

Infants Sang Too

But if so, here was a problem. Granted, the Israelites might actually have seen God at the Red Sea and therefore said, "This is my God." But how could they tell, by looking at Him, that *this* was also "the God of my father" as the rest of Exod. 15:2 maintains? Certainly there was nothing about His appearance to indicate that He was also the God of Israel's ancestors.

To this question ancient interpreters apparently developed an ingenious answer: the words of the song, "This is my God and I will glorify Him, the God of my father and I will exalt Him," were actually sung by two different groups of singers: first the fathers in Israel sang "This is my God . . ."; then their children, down to the littlest newborn, sang in reply "The God of my father . . ."

> They sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name, and praised with one accord your defending hand; because wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the **tongues of babes** speak clearly. —Wisd. 10:20–21

> Said R. Yose the Galilean: when Israel came up from the Sea and saw that their enemies were now corpses stretched out on the shore, they all praised God. Even the newborn on his mother's knees and the suckling at his mother's breast, when they saw the presence of God the newborn lifted his neck and the suckling removed his mouth from his mother's breast, and all sang forth and said, "This is my God and I will praise Him [my father's God and I will exalt him]." —Tosefta *Soṭah* 6:4

Miriam's Separate Song

Exod. 15:20–21 reports that Aaron's sister Miriam sang a song along with all the women at the Red Sea. Much speculation surrounded this song. The only words cited from it, "Sing to the Lord, for He has acted gloriously, horse and rider has He cast into the sea," match almost perfectly the first line of the men's song. Did Miriam thus simply form a women's chorus to sing along with the men, yet separately? Such modest behavior seemed altogether praiseworthy, and a number of authors specifically mentioned it:

> They set up two choirs, one of men and one of women, on the beach, and sang hymns of thanksgiving to God. Over these two choirs Moses and his sister presided and led the hymns. —Philo, *Moses* 1:180

> The people were divided into two groups on that day, so that they might sing the wondrous hymn to Him who split the sea and drowned their oppressors on that day. Moses led the men in singing and Miriam the women. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 15:3

Or was that one choir?

> This wonderful sight and experience, an act transcending word and thought and hope, so filled with ecstasy both men and women that, forming a single

choir, they sang hymns of thanksgiving to God their Savior, the men led by the prophet Moses and the women by the prophetess Miriam.

—Philo, *The Contemplative Life* 87

At the same time, some ancient interpreters supposed that the Israelite women must have sung their own song, with different words, at the Red Sea. One text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls apparently contained the words of such a song attributed to Miriam. Unfortunately, only a fragment of it has survived:

You have put to shame . . .
For You are clothed [?] in majesty . . .
Great are You, savior are You . . .
The enemy's hope has perished, and he is forgotten . . .
They have been lost in the mighty water, the enemy . . .
Praise to the heights . . . You gave . . .
Who does gloriously.

—(4Q364) Reworked Pentateuch fragment 6, col. 2

A New Song

The rescue of the people of Israel from exile and foreign domination in Egypt gave hope to later generations. Perhaps later misfortunes would likewise be reversed, and just as the Israelites sang the "Song of the Sea," they would someday sing a new song:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and lead her back into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her . . . And there she shall sing as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

—Hos. 3:14–15

Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea into a path for the redeemed to pass over? [So, similarly] those who have been ransomed by the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing. —Isa. 51:10–11

In later times, too, this new song figured in visions of the future—or perhaps it was simply the "Song of the Sea" to be sung in new circumstances:

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, they sang a new song. —Rev. 5:8–9

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the **song of Moses**, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying "Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the ages." —Rev. 15:2–3

Perhaps also:

> And he [an archangel] was telling me [Enoch] all the deeds of the Lord, the earth and the sea, and all the elements and the courses and the life . . . and the Hebrew language, every kind of language of the **new song of the armed troops**, and everything that it is appropriate to learn. — *2 Enoch* (A) 23:1–2

Eventually there developed a traditional enumeration of songs that had marked important moments in Israel's past history—and one song, a "new" one, that would be sung at the final redemption:

> The tenth song [to be sung in Israel's history] is one for the time to come, as it is said, "Sing to the Lord a new song, let his praise reach to the ends of the earth" [Isa. 42:10], as elsewhere it says, "Sing to the Lord a new song, let His praise be in the multitude of the pious" [Ps. 149:1].
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Shirta* 1

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In short: On their way out of Egypt the Israelites were led during the day by a pillar of cloud that both gleamed brightly and yet sheltered them from the sun; inside it was an angel, or perhaps divine wisdom. The Egyptians as a group had resolved to pursue the Israelites to recover their possessions. Seeing them approach, the Israelites panicked and sought to rebel against Moses. They formed different groups, each with its own plan of action, but Moses soon put down their rebellion. Then the Red Sea split in two and the Israelites crossed to the other side. This crossing was accompanied by further miracles, and God finished off the Egyptian troops not merely by drowning them but by burning them with flashing fire. The Egyptians sank to the bottom of the sea, but later floated up to the shore. Seeing this, the Israelites broke into song, either singing simultaneously with Moses or repeating each verse after him. The words of their song attested that the Israelites actually caught sight of God at that moment. In similar fashion, a "new song," like the "Song of the Sea," will mark the coming of future redemption.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Red Sea

The Pillar of Luminous Cloud: We saw that ancient interpreters concluded that the purpose of the pillar of cloud, no less than that of the pillar of fire, was to light the Israelites' path. Certainly some of the justification for this conclusion derives from the biblical text itself. In part, it depended on how one read Exod. 13:21–22 (cited earlier). Since the Bible did not originally come with commas, colons, and periods, this verse, like so many others, was ambiguous. It could be read as:

> And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire; [this was in order] to give them light to travel by day and by night. He did not remove the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.
>
> —Exod. 13:21–22

If so, then the purpose of *both* the cloud and the fire is "to give them light to travel by day and by night." Indeed, another biblical description of these same events could be read the same way:

> And in a pillar of cloud you led them by day, and in a pillar of fire at night, to illuminate for them the path on which they should go. —Neh. 9:12

Since the Israelites were in fact traveling on "the path on which they should go" both during the day and at night, that path might well (according to this verse) have been illuminated both day and night.

Clouds of Glory: As we saw earlier, two pillars—fortified, as it were, by the presence of a guiding angel or God's "good spirit"—guided the Israelites out of Egypt. But were there only two pillars? Other biblical texts seemed to suggest otherwise:

> For You, O Lord, are in the midst of this people. For eye-to-eye You appear, O Lord, and your **cloud** stands above them, and in a **pillar of cloud** You go before them by day, and in a **pillar of fire** at night. —Num. 14:14

It seemed that the "cloud" mentioned here was different from the "pillar of cloud" mentioned next. The former is located *above* the Israelites, whereas both the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud *go in front* of the Israelites. One might thus easily conclude that, in addition to the two pillars mentioned in Exodus, there was at least one other "cloud" acting as some kind of roof over the Israelites' heads.

Indeed, elsewhere the Bible speaks of a cloud that covered the desert tabernacle, a cloud that took on the appearance of fire at night:

> And when the tabernacle was established, the **cloud** covered the tabernacle . . . and at evening it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire

> until morning. So it was that the cloud continually covered it, with the appearance of fire until morning. —Num. 9:15–16

Of course, one might assume this "cloud" was none other than the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites during their wanderings. But it need not be so. Perhaps, in addition to the pillar of cloud, there was another cloud that simply hovered over the Israelites' heads as they walked:

> And they traveled from the mountain of the Lord, a journey of three days . . . And the cloud of the Lord was **over them** by day as they traveled from the camp. —Num. 10:33–34

Indeed, perhaps the psalm verse seen above,

> He spread a cloud for **covering,** and fire to give light by night,
>
> —Ps. 105:39

was referring not to the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites on their way, but to this other cloud that hovered above them. If so, then there were really three of these pillars/clouds (or four, since the hovering cloud turned to hovering fire by night, Num. 9:15).

But perhaps there were still more than that. For, recalling later the period of Israel's desert wanderings, Moses was to make a curious assertion:

> And I led you for forty years in the desert: your clothes did not wear out from upon you, and your shoes have not worn out from upon your feet.
>
> —Deut. 29:5 (cf. Deut. 8:4)

Could such a statement possibly be taken literally? It would have to mean that Israel not only had extraordinarily durable clothing and footwear, but that the clothes and shoes of little children grew as they grew, for they did not "wear out from upon you" (that is, you wore the same clothes for forty years). Some interpreters suggested that that indeed had been the case (see below). Others, however, felt it more likely that "clothes" here was being used loosely to mean any *covering*—such as, in this case, the pillar of cloud, which, as we have just seen, was literally *upon*, above, the Israelites during their travels. If so, then it was this covering of clouds that did not "wear out from *upon* you." Indeed, perhaps what Moses meant was that this and yet *other* clouds had surrounded the Israelites on all sides, like clothing, during their wanderings:

> R. E'lazar b. R. Simeon asked his father-in-law, R. Simeon b. Yose b. Laqonya: What is the meaning of the verse, "Your clothing did not wear out upon you" [Deut. 8:4]—did the Israelites have weaving equipment accompanying them in the desert? He answered: The clouds of glory covered them. —*Pesiqta deR. Kahana* 11:21

> And I fulfilled My words and I made their enemies melt away and set the angels beneath their feet and placed the cloud as the covering for their head.
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 15:5

> And I brought them with their hand held high and led them through the Red Sea and put a cloud beneath their feet and brought them through the deep. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 23:10

> God gave to his sons seven clouds of glory in the desert, one to their right, one to their left, one before them, and one behind them, and one above their heads, and one as the Presence that was in their midst, and the pillar of cloud that went before them. —Tosefta *Soṭah* 4:2

> And the Lord went before them by day: You must conclude that there were seven clouds: the Lord went before them [is one]; and your cloud stood above them [is two]; and in a pillar of cloud [Num. 14:14] [is three]; and as the cloud stayed [Num. 9:19] [is four]; and when the cloud lifted up . . . and if the cloud would not rise . . . for the cloud of God was on the tabernacle [Exod. 40:36–38] [is three more = seven]. Thus there were seven clouds, four for the four directions, one above and one below and one that went before them. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Beshallaḥ*

Another biblical verse connected to the "clouds of glory" motif was Lev. 23:43, ". . . that your generations might know that I caused the Israelites to dwell *in booths* when I took them out of Egypt." This was rendered:

> . . . that your generations might know that I caused the Israelites to dwell **in booths of clouds** when I took them out of Egypt.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Lev. 23:43

> . . . that your generations might know that I caused the Israelites to dwell **in clouds of the glory of My presence**—in the form of booths—when I rescued them from Egypt. — *Targum Neophyti* Lev. 23:43

It seems likely, however, that this evocation of the "Clouds of Glory" motif is secondary and does not represent the motif's point of origin.

Clothes That Grow On You: Sometimes the idea that Israel's indestructible clothes were actually the clouds of glory coexisted with a rather contrary motif, to the effect that the Israelites did indeed have real clothes in the desert that grew along with them during their forty years of wandering. Thus, the above-cited passage from *Pesiqta deR. Kahana* continues:

> Did these [the Israelites' clothes] not wear out? He said: "Your clothing did not wear out upon you." Does this also mean that the people did not grow? He replied: [Their clothes were like the casing of] a snail, however big he grows, his casing grows too. —*Pesiqta deR. Kahana* 11:21

Similarly:

> And the thongs of your sandals were not broken, nor did the sandals themselves grow old, nor were your clothes worn thin, but then **those of your young people grew along with them.**
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 131:6

Moses Alone Took the Bones: At the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph had asked his brothers to make sure that his bones would be transported back to his homeland when "God surely remembers you and takes you out of this land" (Gen. 50:24), that is, at the time of the Exodus. Sure enough, the Bible notes that, at the time of the Exodus, Moses "took Joseph's bones with him, for Joseph had caused the Israelites to swear a solemn oath" that they would take his bones with them (Exod. 13:19).

The mention of the removal of Joseph's bones twice in the Pentateuch must have struck interpreters as unusual in itself; but the matter is even mentioned a third time, in Josh. 24:32. Perhaps this emphasis was a measure of what a great man Joseph had been:

> No man like Joseph has been born; for indeed, his remains were remembered. —Sir. 49:15

At the same time, the fact that Exod. 13:19 says that *Moses* personally took Joseph's bones suggested that the Bible might be singling out Moses for praise:

> It was Moses who was found worthy of taking care of Joseph's bones, for there was no one in Israel greater than him [Moses]. —m. *Soṭah* 1:9

> This is to show Moses' wisdom and faithfulness, for while all of Israel was occupied with the riches [taken from Egypt], Moses alone took care of removing Joseph's bones. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Beshallaḥ* 1

The latter motif may have been known to Ephraem, since he too juxtaposes the Egyptian spoils and Joseph's bones:

> The people took the riches of the Egyptians, while Moses took Joseph's bones. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 13:1

The Bones and the Pillar: Other interpreters noticed that right after this verse about Moses' taking Joseph's bones, the Bible mentions for the first time the pillar of cloud: "And they moved on from Succoth . . . and the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them" (Exod. 13:20–21). Perhaps there was some connection between taking Joseph's bones and the pillar of cloud:

> [When the Israelites began the Exodus], they went to Succoth. But when they tried to leave, they could not: the pillar of cloud and fire had stopped in front of them, so that they could not leave the border of Succoth. Moses and Aaron saw and were afraid . . . Then Serah, the daughter of Asher, went

> hurrying out to them. "There is nothing evil in your midst," she said. "Behold, I will reveal to you what this secret is . . . Had not the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire stood still, you would have gone and [Joseph's bones] would have been left in Egypt." — *Tibat Marqa* (Ben-Hayyim ed., pp. 98–101)

In other words, the pillar had suddenly stopped in Succoth and refused to move as a way of reminding the Israelites of the oath they had sworn about taking Joseph's bones with them.

Incidentally, this text mentions Serah, the daughter of Asher, as someone who could give this wise counsel because she was thought to be very old—indeed, she had been around at the time of Joseph's death hundreds of years earlier. The reason is that Serah is mentioned twice in the Pentateuch: first in Gen. 46:17, in the list of those who went down to Egypt with Jacob and his sons, and then again in Num. 26:46, after the Exodus had taken place. Interpreters deduced that Serah was still alive after the Exodus.

> Serah the daughter of Asher was among those who entered Egypt and among those who entered the Land [of Israel], as it says, "And the name of Asher's daughter was Serah" [Num. 26:46]. — *Seder Olam* 9

No wonder she was uniquely qualified to remind Moses about Joseph's bones! For other versions and elaborations of this story, see Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 125–155.

The Re[e]d Sea: The name of the body of water usually spoken of in English as the Red Sea actually means "Sea of Reeds" in Hebrew. The translation "Red Sea" goes back at least to the time of the Septuagint. The ancient Greeks had used the expression "Red Sea" to designate a large body of water in that region, one which sometimes included not only the Gulf of Aden but also the Persian Gulf and even the Indian Ocean; the Septuagint translators identified the Sea of Reeds as (or as part of) this Red Sea, and this identification was passed on to later translators and commentators. The actual nature and location of the original Sea of Reeds is still the subject of scholarly debate.

Rebellion at the Sea: This motif was studied by Heinemann, *Aggadot and Their Development,* 78–84, who saw it originating in Ps. 68:28. There is no doubt that this verse was ultimately worked into the tradition—it was cited in rabbinic sources—but I hardly believe that it was at the origin of things, all the more so because Ps. 68:28 is, by Heinemann's own account, "extremely opaque" and in itself gives no indication (nor do its immediate surroundings!) that the crossing of the Red Sea is even the subject of this verse. I have therefore given a somewhat different account of this motif's development. See also Chernus, "The Rebellion," 45–52; Olyan, "The Israelites Debate," 59–74.

If Looks Could Kill: The sources cited for this motif all state or imply that the fire was emitted by God from the midst of the pillar, in keeping with Exod. 14:24. But it is likely that this motif came to be connected with another biblical site:

When the waters saw You, God, when the waters saw You they were afraid,
the depths trembled.
The clouds streamed forth water, the skies resounded, yea, Your **darts**
went all about.
The crash of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; **lightning** lit up the
world.

—Ps. 77:16–18

This psalm seems to connect the crossing of the Red Sea with a great rainstorm. If so, then the flashes and fire must have come from heaven:

[An Egyptian soldier recalls:]
From the heavens a great light, as of fire,
appeared to us. As far as we could tell, God
was coming to their aid.

—Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 234–236

When, therefore, the entire army of the Egyptians was once within it, back poured the sea, enveloping and with swelling, windswept billows descending upon the Egyptians: rain fell in torrents from heaven, crashing thunder accompanied the flash of lightning, aye and thunderbolts were hurled.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:343

In connection with this same motif, it is noteworthy that part of *1 Enoch* presents the history of Israel as an allegory of wolves (the Egyptians) and sheep (the Israelites). The confrontation at the Red Sea is described in these terms:

Then the pool of water was rent asunder, and the water stood apart on this and on that side in front of them, and their Lord, their leader, stood between them [the Israelite sheep] and the wolves. Those wolves were still not able to see the sheep, and [the sheep] walked through that pool of water; then the wolves followed the sheep and ran after them into that pool of water. Then, when they saw the Lord of the sheep, they turned in order to flee from His face. But that pool of water gathered itself together and immediately returned to its normal state . . . until it covered those wolves.

—*1 Enoch* 89:24–26

Here, God's act of "looking out" over the Egyptians (Exod. 14:24) is not exactly the fatal gesture presented by other ancient sources. Instead, it seems that, at first, the darkness connected with the pillar of cloud (Exod. 14:20) prevented the Egyptians from seeing what was happening; the "Lord of the sheep" blocked their view via the interposed pillar. But after the Israelites crossed, God revealed Himself from amidst the pillar ("they saw the Lord of the sheep") and they fled in panic; this is what is meant by his "discomfiting" the Egyptians (Exod. 14:24). Finally, this text seems troubled by the Egyptians' statement in the Bible "Let us flee from before *Israel*" (Exod. 14:25). After all, Israel is not chasing the Egyptians but just the opposite. The normal idiom in Hebrew is to flee "from before" something, but the same words can mean to flee "from the face" of something. Perhaps this author felt that the

"face" of Israel ought to be understood as an oblique reference to God for the verse to make sense. He therefore says, "they turned in order to flee *from His face.*"

Strike the Sea: As the Egyptians approached the frightened Israelites at the Red Sea, God told Moses:

> "Lift up your **staff** and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the people of Israel may go on dry land through the sea" . . . Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. —Exod. 14:16, 21

Interpreters could not help but wonder why God had mentioned Moses' lifting up his staff. After all, the subsequent account mentions Moses' stretching out his *hand* but it says nothing of his staff. Elsewhere, however, Moses does use his staff to strike things. Particularly noteworthy was the following:

> And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt . . .'" Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile.
>
> —Exod. 7:19–20

If, in this case, the commandment to "take your staff and stretch out your hand" was properly carried out by Moses, who lifted up his staff and *struck* the water, then perhaps the same was true at the Red Sea. If so, then the crossing narrative acquired a dramatic new touch: Moses struck the water, and in response the sea immediately split:

> Then Moses, their leader, taking
> The staff of God with which he had previously
> Poured out awful signs and wonders upon Egypt,
> Struck the surface of the Red Sea and split it deep
> In the middle.
>
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 224–228

> The divine voice came to Moses instructing him to strike the sea with his staff and divide it. When Moses heard this, he touched the water lightly with his rod and the stream divided and the multitude passed through the dry channel.
>
> —Artapanus, Fragment 3 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9:27.36)

> Moses now, at God's command, struck the sea with his staff, and as he did so it broke and parted in two. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:177

> And God said, "Since you have cried out to me, take up your staff and strike the sea so that it becomes dry." And Moses did all these things.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 10:5

> After this solemn appeal to God, he [Moses] struck the sea with his staff. At that stroke it recoiled and, retreating into itself, left bare the soil, affording passage and flight to the Hebrews. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:338

> Moses took his staff and struck the sea so that it was made into little hollows, as it is said, "You hollowed with his staff the top of his splits" [≅ Hab. 3:14].[9] —*Abot deR. Natan* (A) 33

The Leap to Kingship: When the sea split in two, did the Israelites immediately walk through the path thereby created? Some interpreters said yes:

> [Moses] struck the surface of the Red Sea and split it deep
> In the middle, and the whole host mightily
> Rushed forward in full force through the path of the salty sea.
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 227–229

> [After the Israelites saw that the sea had split,] they, without further ado, sped forth with zest, assured of God's attendant presence; whereupon the Egyptians at first thought them insane. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:340

Others, thinking about the same moment, supposed that there must have been a brave soul who led the way. But who? While the Bible did not say directly, it may have given a broad hint at the beginning of Psalm 114:

> When Israel went forth from Egypt, the House of Jacob from harsh toil,
> [The tribe of] Judah became His holy one, Israel his dominions.
> The Sea looked and fled.
> —Ps. 114:1–3

These verses seemed to imply that the first one into the breach was from the tribe of Judah—otherwise, why would this tribe have been specifically mentioned? In fact, given the sequence presented here—first the tribe of Judah does whatever it does, and only then does the sea "look and flee"—it would appear that this tribe's heroic action actually preceded the splitting of the sea. (The same idea might have been alluded to by the prophet Hosea when he said, "Judah *went down* with God" [Hos. 12:1; some Bibles, 11:12]—could this not mean "going down" to the sea at the time of the Exodus?)

What is more, the verses cited from Psalm 114 seemed to be answering another question, namely, why did the hereditary kingship end up being awarded to the tribe of Judah (see Chapter 15, "Reuben Lost His Inheritance")? If a Judahite had led the way across the Red Sea, perhaps that was why this tribe later came to lead the people by supplying it with kings from David on. Indeed, was not that the meaning of the second verse cited above—Judah became God's "holy one," singled out for divinely granted kingship, and "Israel" (that is, the other tribes) came to be *Judah's* dominions, subject to his rule?

9. The meaning of the traditional Hebrew text is somewhat obscure, but the overall context indicated to interpreters that the subject was the crossing of the Red Sea. If so, the mention of "staff[s]" here seemed further to indicate that Moses' staff actually made contact with the water.

It remained only to identify which member of the tribe of Judah actually took the plunge. It was logical that the individual in question be no other than the head of the tribe of Judah (and Aaron's brother-in-law), Nahshon, the son of Amminadab (Exod. 6:23, Num. 1:7):

> When all the tribes were massed on the seashore, this one said, "I won't be the one to go down first," and that one said, "Well I certainly won't be" (as it is written: "[The tribe of] Ephraim has surrounded Me with refusals, and the house of Israel with falsehood; but Judah went down [to the sea] with God, and he is faithful with the holy ones" [Hos. 12:1; some Bibles, 11:12]). While the tribes were thus all debating with each other, Nahshon the son of Amminadab jumped down into the waves, and his whole tribe followed him. Therefore did he [that is, his tribe] receive the kingship, as it is said, "When Israel went forth from Egypt, the House of Jacob from heavy toil, [the tribe of] Judah became His holy one, Israel his dominions" (Ps. 114:1–2) . . . God said to them: Let the one who has demonstrated his faith in Me at the sea be entitled to rule over the people of Israel.
>
> —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Wayhi* 5

(On different versions of this midrash, see Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshuto, Berakhot,* 70–71.) The theme of Nahshon's daring eventually coincided with the "Rebellion at the Red Sea" motif discussed in this chapter, and came to include as well the Exodus reference in 2 Sam. 7:23. See Chernus, "The Rebellion," 45–52. Despite the midrashic celebration of Nahshon and the tribe of Judah, other interpreters posited that the first tribe into the Red Sea was that of Benjamin (on the basis of Ps. 68:28; see *Mekhilta Wayhi* 5). Josephus held that Moses led the way (*Jewish Antiquities* 2:339). See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 6:6.

New Creation at the Sea: A passage seen earlier seems to associate the miracle at the Red Sea with the creation of the world:

> For [at the Red Sea] the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with your commandments, so that your children might be kept unharmed. The cloud was seen **overshadowing** the camp, and **dry land emerging where water had stood before,** an unhindered way out of the Red Sea, and a **grassy plain** out of the raging waves, where those protected by your hand passed through as one nation, after gazing on marvelous **wonders.**
>
> —Wisd. 19:6–8

This author is clearly thinking of the creation account in Genesis 1 ("the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew"), and so presents the pillar of cloud as "overshadowing" the camp as the "spirit of God" overshadows the waters in Gen. 1:2; similarly, the dry land emerges as in Gen. 1:9, and the grass appears as in Gen. 1:11–12. In a similar vein:

> I commanded the sea, and when the depths split apart in front of them, walls of water stood up. Nothing similar to this thing had been done from

> the day when I had said: "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place" [Gen. 1:9]. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 15:6

Somewhat similarly:

> Moses said to God: "Now you are telling me to split the sea and turn it to dry land? But is it not written, 'I have placed the sand as the sea's border, a perpetual barrier which it cannot cross' [Jer. 5:22]?" . . . God said to him, "You did not read from the beginning of the Torah. What is written there? 'And God said, "Let the waters be gathered . . ." [Gen. 1:9]' I am the one who established it as a condition [*htnyty*] with it [the sea] from the beginning [of its creation] that I would [one day] split it, and so it says, 'And the sea returned to its strength [*'ytnw*] when morning appeared' [Exod. 14:27. This means that the water returned] to the condition [*tn'y*] that I established with it from the beginning." —*Exodus Rabba* 21:6

The connection of the splitting of the sea with the acts of creation may have been further stimulated by Deut. 4:32–34. See Enns, *Exodus Retold,* 112–123.

Ups and Downs of the Egyptians: Another ancient text, although it does not mention the Egyptians being "spit up" by the sea, seems to presume such a scenario in asserting that the Israelites ended up with the Egyptians' weapons:

> It appears . . . that those who had not been drowned [the Israelites] made use of the others' arms.
>
> —Demetrius the Chronographer (cited in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.29.16)

In the same vein:

> They themselves escaped from danger and, what is more, they saw their enemies punished as none before had been in human memory . . . The next day, the tide and wind, which was blowing with great force, brought the Egyptians' **weapons** up to the Hebrews' camp. Moses thought that this as well had come about as a result of God's providence, so that they should not be lacking in weapons. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:346, 349

Red Sea as Baptism: The purifying function of the crossing of the sea is found earlier than Christianity:

> But to those who are accustomed to turn literal facts into allegories, the Crossing-festival [of Passover, marking the crossing of the Red Sea] suggests the purification of the soul. They say that the lover of wisdom is occupied solely in crossing from the body and the passions, each of which overwhelms him like a torrent, unless the rushing current be dammed and held back by the principles of virtue. —Philo, *Special Laws* 2:147

Here too, the crossing of the sea is a spiritual transition and cleansing, the "purification of the soul." However, for Philo, the waters of the Red Sea have a negative role,

they are the "body and the passions" that must be restrained if the transition is to be made.

Stop That Singing! Exod. 14:19 observes that when, on the night preceding the crossing of the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud moved from in front of the Israelites to in back of them, then "they did not come close to one another the whole night." The reference seems to be to the two camps, the Israelites' and the Egyptians'. However, the text does not actually mention these two by name, and only says, literally, "this one did not come close to that one." This wording suggested another famous reference to "this one" and "that one," namely, Isa. 6:3, which, in describing the angels before the heavenly throne, states: "And one called to another [literally, "this one called to that one"] and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." If, therefore, Scripture says that at the Red Sea "this one did not come close to that one," perhaps it means that the angels in heaven did not call to one another as they usually did, because they had, in the stress of this dramatic moment, given up their daily singing. (Such a hypothesis was only strengthened by the observation that "to come close" [*qārôb*] is reminiscent of the word for a hymnic prayer [*qĕrōba*]. Exod. 14:19 might thus seem to be saying that the angels did not make such hymns the whole night.)

> While Israel was encamped along the Sea, the ministering angels came to sing God's praises but God did not allow them, as it is said, "they did not come close to one another the whole night," whereas it says elsewhere [of these angels], "And one called to another and said, Holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts . . ." [Isa. 6:3]. God said to them: My children are in distress and you wish to *sing* to Me? —*Midrash Tanḥuma* Buber ed., *Bešallaḥ* 13

Later, this same motif was transferred to the time of the crossing of the Red Sea itself. Now, it was not the potential death of the Israelites, but the actual death of the Egyptians, that was held to have caused God grief:

> But does God rejoice at the downfall of the wicked? . . . Said R. Yoḥanan: Why is it written, "they did not come close to one another"? The ministering angels wished to sing God's praises [at the Egyptians' downfall], but God said to them: My own creatures are drowning in the sea, and yet you would *sing*?! —b. *Megillah* 10b

(See on this Heinemann, "My Creatures Are Drowning.")

Pharaoh Died at the Sea: The Exodus narrative does not actually say anything about what happened to Pharaoh himself. It might seem unlikely that a mighty king would have actually entered into the fray with his troops. But at least one biblical text did hint that Pharaoh may have been killed along with the other Egyptians in the Red Sea:

> Who overthrew[10] Pharaoh and all his army in the Red Sea . . . —Ps. 136:15

10. The same Hebrew word appears in Exod. 14:27 where, however, its object is "Egypt" without any specific mention of Pharaoh.

> Who shook off Pharaoh and all his army in the Red Sea . . .
>
> —Septuagint Ps. 136:15

Perhaps fortified by this verse, a number of ancient texts state outright that Pharaoh was killed:

> Pharaoh, the former ruler of this Egypt, with his multitude of chariots, high and mighty in his lawless insolence and boastful tongue, You destroyed in the depths of the sea with his proud host, father, causing the light of your mercy to shine upon the people of Israel. —3 Macc. 6:4

> I struck down Pharaoh with his servants and all his army. —*4 Ezra* 1:10

> I made Pharaoh and all his captains be drowned; hell is his abode.
>
> —*Coptic Jeremiah Apocryphon* (Kuhn, p. 108)

The same may be implied elsewhere:

> You [God] will treat them [Your enemies] **like Pharaoh,** like the officers of his chariots at the Red Sea. —(1QM) *War Scroll* 11:9–10

The Dumb Sing: One ancient text seen earlier held that in the "Song at the Sea," those who had previously been speechless now sang:

> Wisdom opened the mouth of the **dumb,** and made the tongues of babes speak clearly. —Wisd. 10:21

Some commentators have suggested that this idea derived from Isa. 35:6 ("and the tongue of the dumb shall sing for joy") or possibly Isa. 32:4 ("and the tongue of the stammerers will speak distinctly"). But neither of these seems to have any connection with the Exodus. One recent commentator more reasonably connects these words with Moses' words to the Israelites after they bemoan their fate: "Do not fear . . . The Lord will fight for you, and as for you—be quiet!" (Exod. 14:13–14). The next words the Israelites utter are the "Song of the Sea." In that sense, indeed, the singers had previously been "dumb." See Enns, *Exodus Retold,* 82–88. One other source cited previously seems to have made the same connection:

> Moses said, "Be silent" [Exod. 14:14, so that later, in Exod. 15:1, you may] "give glory and praise and exalt God." —*Targum Neophyti* Exod. 14:13–14

Miriam the Prophetess: In Exod. 15:20 Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, is described as a "prophetess." Yet nowhere in Scripture is there any mention of her prophetic activity. Why was she so called? Interpreters supposed that, since Miriam is mentioned in connection with the story of Moses' infancy (Exod. 2:4), perhaps she had done something prophetlike at that time:

> And Amram of the tribe of Levi went out and took a wife from his own tribe . . . And this man had one son and one daughter; their names were Aaron and Miriam. And the spirit of God came upon her one night, and she saw a dream and told it to her parents in the morning, saying, "I have seen this

> night and behold, a man in a linen garment stood and said to me, 'Go and say to your parents, "Behold, he who will be born from you will be cast forth into the water; likewise through him will the water be dried up." And I will work signs through him and save my people, and he will exercise leadership always.'" And when Miriam told of her dream, her parents did not believe her. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9:9–10

> Said R. Amram in the name of Rab: Miriam prophesied and said: My mother is destined to give birth to a son who will save Israel. When he was born the whole house was filled with light. Her father went and kissed her on the head and said to her: My daughter, your prophecy has come true.
> —*Exodus Rabba* 1:22

> "Puah" [the midwife mentioned in Exod. 1:15] was Miriam—and why was she called Puah? Because she cried out [*po'ah*] through divine inspiration and said: my mother is destined to give birth to a son who will save Israel."
> —*b. Soṭah* 11b

The idea that Miriam prophetically predicted Moses' birth and future life was likewise bound up with Exod. 2:4, "And his sister stood at a distance, to *know what would be done to him.*" This last phrase could equally well be translated: to know what would be done *by* him. That possibility in turn suggested that Miriam foresaw not only Moses' birth but all his future greatness—as is indeed stated by the sources cited above.

The description of Miriam as a "prophetess" eventually came to be connected as well to Exod. 2:1, where the Levite father "took" a Levite daughter, later explained as taking the advice of a Levite daughter, namely, his own daughter Miriam. (See Chapter 16, *OR*, "Amram's Divorce.") This advice—to return to his first wife—may have been based on her prophetic dream concerning Moses. (See *Mekhilta* ad loc., b. *Soṭah* 12b, b. *Megillah* 14a. *Midrash ha-Gadol* ad loc. adds specifically that Miriam at that time predicts the birth of Moses as savior.) Finally, it may have been that the title "prophetess" was entirely honorific:

> In what way did she exercise the function of prophetess? Either she was like the wife of Isaiah, who was honored with the name of prophet even though she was not one [Isa. 8:3], or because she was a righteous woman.
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 15:2

The New Song: One thing that contributed to the idea that Israel would some day in the future sing a "new song" like the "Song of the Sea" was a peculiarity in Exod. 15:1, the verse that introduces that song. The opening part of the verse is usually translated, "Then *sang* Moses and the Israelites." But the verb "sang" here is in the form usually used to describe actions in the present or future, rather than in the past; hence, it might be translated, "Then [sometime in the future] Moses and the Israelites *will sing.*" This possibility was highly suggestive for ancient interpreters:

> It does not say Moses and the Israelites *sang,* but Moses and the Israelites *will sing.* Thus we conclude that [the doctrine of] the resurrection of the dead is found in the Torah. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Širah* 1

The same idea probably contributed to the development of the idea that significant songs marked various turning points in Israelite history; the last of these songs is the eschatological "new song." This tradition of the "Ten [or "Seven"] Songs" is attested in numerous rabbinic works as well as in the writings of Origen and later Christian authors. See Kugel, "Is There But One Song?" Perhaps the motif of the eschatological "new song" is to be connected with a Qumran text, where, however, the element of "newness" is not specifically stated:

> And when they [the "sons of light"] have left the slain [that is, in the final battle] to enter the camp, they will all sing the **song of return.**
>
> —(1QM) *War Scroll* col. 14:2

19

Into the Wilderness

(EXODUS 15:22–18:27)

The symbolic hands of Moses: was he praying?

Into the Wilderness

(EXODUS 15:22–18:27)

❖ ❖ ❖

The Israelites' rejoicing at the Red Sea was short-lived. No sooner had they escaped the Egyptian army than new troubles began: now there was not enough fresh water to drink or food to eat. Once again, God intervened. At Marah, Moses was able to make the bitter waters drinkable by means of a tree that God had shown him. Later, as the Israelites were making their way to Sinai, God provided an edible substance called "manna" which the people could collect from the wilderness floor.

When they reached Rephidim, the Israelites were attacked by a desert-dwelling tribe, the Amalekites. In the ensuing battle, the Israelites triumphed, curiously, because Moses held his hands in the air while he watched the battle. Afterwards, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, paid a brief visit to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Water, Water . . .

The fact that, as soon as the Egyptians had been drowned, God miraculously intervened to provide the Israelites with drinking water (Exod. 15:22–25) seemed to confirm that the different appearances of water in the Exodus story were no coincidence:

> For by those very things through which their enemies were punished, they [the Israelites] benefited in [time of] need. Instead of an ever-flowing source of streaming water befouled with blood as a reproach for the decree to kill the infants [an allusion to the waters of the Nile, which were turned to blood (Exod. 7:20)], You gave the Israelites an abundant source of water when it was not expected. —Wisd. 11:5–7

> God's way of healing is not man's way. In human healing, that which is used for hurting is not used for healing—one strikes with a knife and heals with a bandage. Not so with God: The very means by which He strikes He also heals. —*Mekhilta Wayhi* 5

A Symbolic Tree

Apart from this general principle of correspondence, however, some of the details connected with God's providing water for the Israelites called out for explanation.

At Marah, for example, Moses made the bitter water drinkable by casting into its midst a certain divinely indicated tree (or some piece of wood taken from it). The Bible then says:

> There He gave them [Israel] law and statute and there He tested them. And He said to them, "If you are careful to obey the Lord your God, and do what is right in His eyes, and heed His commandments and keep all His statutes, then I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer." —Exod. 15:25–26

Why did Moses have to use a special tree to make the water drinkable? And what could the words just cited, about heeding divine commandments and statutes, possibly have to do with this tree or the bitter waters? To more than one interpreter it seemed as if the tree in the story must have really been some kind of symbol:

> [God] showed him [Moses] the **tree of life** from which He cut [a piece] and he received it and cast it into Marah, and the waters of Marah became drinkable. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:15

> And Moses prayed to God and He showed him a "tree" and . . . took from it a **teaching of the Torah** and cast it into the waters and the waters became drinkable; [and so] there He gave [Israel] laws and statutes and there [Israel] tested Him." —*Targum Neophyti* Exod. 15:25

> Similarly, water was healed of its bitterness and changed into fresh, drinkable water by the staff[1] of Moses. This wood was the Messiah, transforming by himself waters which were previously bitter and poison into those most salutary **waters of baptism**. —Tertullian, *On Baptism* 9

> The ancient interpreters [*dôrĕšê rĕšûmôt*] said: He showed him [Moses] words of divine teaching [Torah] which Scripture compares to wood, as it is said "[The Torah] is a tree of life for those who cling to it . . ." [Prov. 3:10]. —*Mekhilta Wayyassa'* 1

The Water Was Divine Wisdom

Beyond this, however, another connection seemed possible. After all, divine teachings were themselves sometimes compared to water, and the search for God's presence or instruction likened to a kind of thirst:

> [God says:] Oh, all you who thirst, come to the waters . . . incline your ear, and come to Me. —Isa. 55:1, 3

> They have abandoned Me, the spring of flowing waters. —Jer. 2:13

1. The Hebrew word used in Exod. 15:25 can mean either "tree" or "wood." The Septuagint translators used the word *xulon,* which means almost exclusively the latter. Many interpreters who knew the Bible only in Greek or Latin therefore assumed that the "wood" in question was none other than Moses' staff, identified typologically with the cross.

For with You is the fountain of life. —Ps. 36:9

The fountain of wisdom is a flowing stream. —Prov. 18:4

In keeping with such passages, some interpreters came to think of water in general—and, in particular, the water that the Israelites thirsted for in the desert—as symbolizing divine wisdom or the Torah:

. . . until God send forth the flowing waters of His supernal wisdom and so provide drink of unfailing healthfulness to the wandering soul.
—Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 2:86

The fountain of divine wisdom runs sometimes with a gentler and more quiet stream, at other times more swiftly and with a fuller and stronger current. —Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 117

. . . to distort, by [giving] false teachings to your people, the Torah which you have taught me in my heart, and so to deprive the thirsty of the drink of **knowledge** [cf. Isa. 32:6]. —(1QH) *Thanksgiving Hymns* 4:11

The well [dug in the desert, Num. 21:16–18] is the Torah.
—*Damascus Document* 6:3

The ancient interpreters [*dôrĕšê rĕšûmôt*] said "And they did not find water . . ." refers to divine teachings, which are compared to water [in Isa. 55:1]. And since they [the Israelites] were [by this interpretation] separated from "water" for three days and thereupon rebelled, for this reason did the prophets and sages make it a rule that the Torah is to be read publicly on the Sabbath [Saturday], on Monday, and on Thursday [so that Israel would never again be deprived of "water" three days in a row].
—*Mekhilta Wayyassa'* 1

And they went for three days in the desert in idleness from the divine commandments. —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 15:22

The Food of Angels

But God gave the people more than water (symbolic or otherwise). During their desert wanderings, Israel was fed by God with the special food called "manna," which first appeared as the people journeyed from Elim to Sinai (Exod. 16:1–4). It was hard for interpreters to tell exactly what this manna was. On the one hand, it was sometimes described as "bread" (though the Hebrew word can also simply mean "food"):

I will rain bread from heaven. —Exod. 16:4

They asked, and He brought them quails, and He gave them bread from heaven in abundance.
—Ps. 105:40

Yet surely "bread *from heaven*" was different from ordinary bread. Perhaps it was "from heaven" not just in the sense that it came down from the sky, but because it was truly heavenly food not normally intended for mortals:

> But those who honor the true eternal God
> inherit life, dwelling in the luxuriant garden
> of Paradise for the time of eternity,
> feasting on sweet bread from starry heaven.
>
> —Fragment 3 from *Sibylline Oracles* (cited in Theophylus, *To Autolycus* 2:46–49)

Perhaps, more precisely, it was the bread eaten by the inhabitants of heaven, the angels. Indeed, another verse from Scripture seemed to say as much:

> Yet He commanded the skies above, and opened the door of Heaven; and he rained down upon them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven.
> Man ate the **bread of the mighty**, he sent them food in abundance.
>
> —Ps. 78:23–25

> He rained down upon them manna to eat, and gave them the bread of heaven.
> Man ate the bread of **angels.**
>
> —Septuagint Ps. 78 (77):24–25

> You fed your people the food of angels and funished them bread from heaven. —Wisd. 16:20

> [Moses says to the Israelites:] Know that you have eaten the bread of angels for forty years. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:5

> I pitied your groanings and gave you manna for food; you ate the bread of angels. —*4 Ezra* 1:19

> "The bread of the mighty" [in Ps. 78:25 means that] they ate the bread that the ministering angels eat, according to R. Aqiba. —b. *Yoma* 75b

Heavenly Grain

There was good reason to believe that manna actually took the form of little grains or particles. After all, it *rained* down from heaven, presumably in drops or flakelike pieces, and a number of other biblical verses seemed to support this hypothesis:

> And when the dew had risen, there was on the surface of the wilderness something thin and scratchy, thin as frost on the ground. —Exod. 16:14

> Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, and ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, and boiled it in pots, and made cakes of it.
>
> —Num. 11:7–8

Therefore, a number of interpreters understood that the manna falling to earth must have resembled some form of precipitation. The mention of manna's whiteness, its comparison to frost, and the fact that it seemed to melt, all suggested to some that manna was like snow. Others, however, believed it was more like rain, or dew, or none of these.

> God rained for them meal like millet, very similar in color to snow.
> —Artapanus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.37)

> A strange, extraordinary rain, not water, nor hail, nor snow, nor ice, such as are produced by changes in the clouds at the winter solstice, but of grains exceedingly small and white, which, poured down in a continuous flow, lay in heaps in front of the tents. —Philo, *Moses* 1:200

> For, while Moses raised his hands in prayer, a **dew** descended and, as this congealed about his hands, Moses, surmising that this too was a nutriment come to them from God, tasted it and was delighted; and, whereas the multitude in their ignorance took this for **snow** and attributed the phenomenon to the season of the year, he instructed them that this heaven-descending dew was not as they supposed but was sent for their salvation and sustenance. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:26–28

> The ministering angels ground up the manna and it would then fall upon the Israelites and they would eat it. —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Beshallaḥ* 22

Adapted to Any Taste

As for its taste, here too, the biblical evidence was mixed:

> Now the house of Israel called its name manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. —Exod. 16:31

> The taste of it was like the taste of oil-extract. —Num. 11:8

Understandably, some interpreters came to the conclusion that the Bible was describing not so much the taste of manna itself as the people's reaction to it; its taste thus must have changed depending on who was eating it:

> [The manna was] ready to eat without toil, providing every enjoyment and suitable for every taste. For this sustenance of Yours demonstrated your sweetness toward your children; complying with the wishes of the one who was eating it, it adapted itself to suit each person's desires.
> —Wisd. 16:20–21

> They said to him [Moses]: This manna that God has given us, we can taste in it the taste of bread, the taste of meat, the taste of fish, the taste of locusts, the taste of all the delicacies in the world. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Amaleq* 1

R. Joshua said: Anyone who wanted something baked, it would come baked for him, and anyone who wanted it boiled, it would be boiled for him. R. El'azar ha-Moda'i said: Anyone who wanted to eat something baked would taste in it [the manna] all the baked goods of the world, and anyone who wanted to eat something boiled would taste in it all the boiled dishes in the world. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Shirtah* 4

And the fact that it says that it [manna] was "like coriander and its taste was as honey" [Exod. 16:31] is intended to show that the manna was pleasing to any taste. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 16:3

Spiritual Sustenance

But the Bible did not answer unequivocally even the most basic question about this substance—was it good to eat or wasn't it? "Bread of angels" sounded pretty good, as did "wafers made with honey." Similarly:

You did not withhold your manna from their mouths . . . For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness and they did not lack a thing [see also Deut. 2:7]. —Neh. 9:20–21

On the other hand, the Israelites seem to have gotten tired of manna; they say "Our throats are dry and there is nothing to eat, the only thing that we see is manna" (Num. 11:5), and again, "There is no bread and there is no water, and our throats are tired of this *low-grade food*" (Num. 21:5). Recalling these times, Moses says:

[God] fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, in order to humble you and test you. —Deut. 8:16

Then it would seem that the manna really wasn't very tasty after all. How could these contradictions be resolved? Perhaps the most satisfactory explanation was that manna was really some kind of spiritual sustenance and not a food at all:

He calls it manna, that is, the divine word [*logos*], oldest of beings [cf. Prov. 8:22]. —Philo, *Worse Attack the Better* 118

The food of the soul is not earthly but heavenly, as we shall find abundantly demonstrated in Scripture. "Behold, I rain upon you bread out of heaven . . ." [Exod. 16:4]—you see that the soul is fed not with things of earth, which are perishable, but with such **words** as God shall have poured like rain out of that supernal and pure region of life to which the prophet has given the title of "heaven." —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 3:162

Let all those who are perfect of path praise Him.
Let them open their mouths [in thanksgiving] for God's kindnesses
with the lyre of salvation.
Let them seek out His **manna**.

—(4Q511) *Songs of the Sage*[b]

All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same **spiritual** food and all drank the same spiritual drink. —1 Cor. 10:2–4

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe in you. What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." —John 6:30–33 (also 6:41–49)

[God said at the Exodus:] If I bring Israel to the[ir] land right away, every man will be taking possession of his field and vineyard and they will neglect the Torah. Therefore I will send them around the desert for forty years so that they will eat manna and drink the water of the well and thus the **Torah** will be incorporated into their bodies. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Wayhi* 1

The Traveling Rock

The Israelites continued their journey into the wilderness and eventually came to a place called Rephidim. Once again, there was no water to drink, and the people fell to complaining. God then ordered Moses to strike a certain rock so that water would gush out of it for the people to drink. The Bible notes that Moses "called the place Massah and Meribah" ("testing" and "contention" in Hebrew).

The Israelites moved on. But what happened to the gushing rock? Ancient interpreters found some indication that the rock did not stay at Rephidim, for, some time later, in a different place—Kadesh—a similar thing happened: water was miraculously produced when Moses struck a rock with his staff (Num. 20:7–12). The text then adds, "These were the waters of Meribah" (Num. 20:13). If *these* were the "waters of Meribah," then they must somehow have moved from Rephidim to Kadesh. And that is just what interpreters concluded. They deduced that the gushing rock had traveled with the Israelites from Rephidim to Kadesh, indeed, that it went on to accompany them during all their subsequent wanderings—a traveling water supply.

Now He led His people out into the wilderness; for forty years He rained down for them bread from Heaven, and brought quail to them from the sea and brought forth a well of water to **follow** them.

And it [the water] followed them in the wilderness forty years and went up to the mountains with them and went down into the plains.

—Pseudo-Philo, *Book of Biblical Antiquities* 10:7, 11:15

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and . . . all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which **followed** them.

—1 Cor. 10:1–4

> And so the well that was with Israel in the desert was like a rock the size of a large container, gushing upwards as if from a narrow-neck flask, **going** up **with them** to the mountains and going down with them to the valleys.
>
> —Tosefta *Sukkah* 3:11

Such a conclusion could only be reinforced by the observation that, although the Israelites were in the desert for forty years, from the time of that first incident at Rephidim, shortly after they left Egypt, until near the end of their travels at the end of the book of Numbers, there is no mention of the people lacking water to drink. Here, then, was another indication that water had been miraculously supplied to them for all those years—by this same traveling fountain.

Miriam's Well

Interpreters noticed something else: this second mention of the Israelites not having water to drink takes place right after the death of Miriam, Moses' sister (Num. 20:1). They therefore concluded that the death of Miriam was in fact the cause of the Israelites' not having water. Perhaps the gushing rock that had followed them all those years had done so only because of Miriam, so that after she died, the rock no longer supplied them with water. (And indeed, there is some indication that, after Miriam's death, the Israelites were now suddenly *plagued* with a water shortage—this shortage is mentioned not only in Num. 20:2 but again at Num. 20:19 and 21:5.) Hence it appeared that the gushing rock (or "moveable well") should be chalked up to the virtue of Miriam. It came to be known as the Well of Miriam.

> And these are the three things that God gave to his people on account of three persons; that is, the well of the water of Marah for Miriam and the pillar of cloud for Aaron and the manna for Moses. And when these came to their end [i.e., died], these three things were taken away from them.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 20:8

> And the king of Arad heard . . . that Miriam the prophetess had died, thanks to whose merit the well had sprung up, and that the well was hidden away.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 21:1

> And there was no water there for the people of the assembly, because Miriam the prophetess had died and the well had been hidden away.
>
> — *Fragment Targum* Num. 20:1

> There arose three great leaders for Israel, and these are they: Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam. And three great gifts were given by them to Israel, namely, the well and the pillar of cloud and the manna. When Miriam died, the well departed, but it returned to them because of the merit of Moses and Aaron.
>
> — *Seder Olam* 10 (see also 9)

> When Miriam died, the well departed.
>
> — *Mekhilta Wayyassa'* 5 (end)

Amalek Destroyed at the End-Time

While the Israelites were camped at Rephidim, the tribe of Amalek came and attacked them. The Amalekites must have been particularly blameworthy, since, of all of the Israelites' enemies, they were the only ones whose name God promised to "blot out from under heaven" (Exod. 17:14). Indeed, long after the attack at Rephidim, Israel itself was commanded to destroy the Amalekites—"Blot out the name of Amalek! Do not forget!" (Deut. 25:19).

What made the Amalekites so evil? As we have seen (Chapter 11, "Esau the Wicked"), they were descended from Esau, who was himself thought by interpreters to be a wicked schemer. But what is more, God's commandment to destroy the Amalekites was not fulfilled in Moses' time and, as a result, they continued to cause Israel trouble during much of later history. It was the Amalekite king Agag who caused King Saul's downfall (1 Samuel 15), and Agag's descendant Haman (Est. 3:1) later hatched a plan to destroy all the Jews of his own day.

Reflecting on the evil Amalekites, interpreters found one verse that seemed to explain much of what was to happen. In telling the story of the soothsayer Balaam, the Bible reported:

> Then he [Balaam] saw Amalek, and took up his discourse, and said, "Amalek was the first of nations, but his **end** will be destroyed."
>
> —Num. 24:20

The word "end" here probably means "descendants." (The Septuagint had translated it "seed.") But for some interpreters, "end" suggested the "end of days," the time when God would bring present-day reality to a close and reestablish the divine order. They therefore saw in Balaam's words a prediction that God's commandment to destroy Amalek would only finally be fulfilled in the "end of days"—indeed, that Amalek's ultimate destruction had a lot to do with setting the world aright:

> Then the seed of Canaan will perish, and there will not be a remnant to Amalek . . . Then the whole earth will rest from trouble, and all of it under heaven from war. — *Testament of Simeon* 6:3–4

> Then he [Balaam] saw the Amalekite, and he took up his prophetic parable and he said: The first of the nations to take up arms against Israel was of the house of Amalek, and in the **final end of days** they will take up arms against them once again; but they will eventually be destroyed, and their destruction shall be forever. — *Fragment Targum* Num. 24:20

> For the son of God shall destroy by the roots the whole house of Amalek in the end of days. — *Letter of Barnabas* 12:9

Because of all this, Amalek was sometimes understood not only as evil, but as a representation of the devil.

The Symbolic Hands of Moses

The actual defeat of the Amalekites at Rephidim was accomplished in an extraordinary fashion. Whenever Moses lifted his hands in the air, the Israelites seemed to prevail—almost as if his hands had some magical property about them. Needless to say, such an idea was utterly abhorrent to most ancient interpreters. If Israel won the battle, they reasoned, it was not because of any magic, but because God so willed. They therefore felt there must have been some other explanation for the role of Moses' hands in the story:

> But when they were about to engage in the fight, his hands were affected in a most marvelous way. They became alternately very light and very heavy, and whenever they were in the former condition and rose aloft, [Israel] was strong and distinguished itself by its valor, but whenever his hands were weighed down, the enemy prevailed. Thus, by **symbols**, God showed that earth and the lowest regions of the universe were the portion assigned to the one party, and the ethereal, the holiest region, to the other; and that, just as Heaven holds kingship in the universe and is superior to earth, so this nation [Israel] would be victorious over its opponents in war. — Philo, *Moses* 1:217

> But did Moses' hands actually make Israel win, and was it they that crushed Amalek? Rather [this text means that] when Moses lifted his hands toward Heaven, Israel would look upon him and put their trust in Him who ordered Moses to do so; then God would perform miracles and wonders for them. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Amaleq* 1 (see also m. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 3:5)

> And it happened that, whenever Moses would raise his hands in prayer, the Israelites would prevail and be victorious, but when he would withhold his hands from prayer, the Amalekites prevailed. — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 17:11

The Christian Battle with Amalek

Later, for Christians, the symbolism of Moses' hands changed somewhat (though the idea that they were symbolic remained). Outstretched, they became a symbol of the crucifixion. What is more, Joshua, since his name in the Greek Bible was identical with that of Jesus, became an important figure in the overall story: it was he who enabled the defeat of Amalek, now identified with the devil.

> The Spirit, speaking to the heart of Moses, [tells him] to make a representation of the cross and of him who was to suffer upon it . . . So Moses placed one shield upon the other in the midst of the fight, and standing there, raised above them all, kept stretching out his hands, and so Israel again began to be victorious; then, whenever he let them drop they began to perish. Why? So that they might know that they cannot be saved if they do not hope in him. — *Letter of Barnabas* 12:2–3

> When the people waged war with Amalek, and the son of Nave [Nun], by the name of Jesus [the Greek form of Joshua] led the fight, Moses himself prayed to God stretching out both hands, and Hur with Aaron supported them the whole day, so that they might not hang down when he became weary. For if he gave up any part of this sign, which was an imitation of the cross, the people were beaten, as is recorded in the writings of Moses; but if he remained in this form, Amalek was proportionally defeated, and he who prevailed did so by the cross. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 110

> While Joshua was fighting Amalek, Moses was praying, seated, his hands extended, because wherever the Lord fought against the devil [that is, Amalek], the form of the cross was necessary—the cross by which Jesus was to win the victory. —Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3:18

> Moses prefigured him [Christ], stretching out his holy arms,
> conquering Amalek by faith so that the people might know
> that he is elect and precious with God his father.
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 8:251–253

Jethro the Polytheist

After their victory over Amalek, the Israelites were visited briefly by Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Jethro was a somewhat puzzling figure for interpreters. On the one hand, he is described as a "priest of Midian" (Exod. 3:1, 18:1), and this certainly meant that he worshiped other gods. On the other hand, no sooner did he arrive to visit Moses than he said: "Blessed be the Lord who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh. Now I know that *the Lord is greater than all gods*" (Exod. 18:10–11). These words certainly seemed to suggest that Jethro repudiated other gods, or at least believed that the Lord was greater than them.

Faced with this somewhat mixed picture, interpreters characteristically adopted one extreme or the other. Some saw Jethro as a totally negative figure and suggested that even these intended words of praise for the God of Israel were mere hypocrisy:

> For when he wants to draw attention to his own piety and says, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods," he instead convicts himself of impiety for those who know how to judge such matters. They will say to him, "Blasphemer! . . . You stand nonetheless proven guilty of dissembling when you compare two incomparables and say that you know that the greatness of the One Who Is is 'beyond' all gods. For if you truly knew what IS, you would not have thought that any other god has any power of his own." —Philo, *On Drunkenness* 3:341

Similarly:

> They said: There was not any form of idol-worship that Jethro had not tried out in the whole world, [otherwise he could not have said that God is greater] "than **all** the gods." —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Amaleq* 1

Jethro the Good

Others, however, saw in Jethro a positive figure, and one whose religious orientation was not different from that of Moses:

> [Jethro says to Moses:]
> God gave you this sign for good.
> Would that I might live to see these things transpire.
> — Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 83–84

In support of the positive view of Jethro was his statement about the Lord being "greater than all the gods"—indeed, perhaps that statement could be interpreted as an out-and-out rejection of other gods:

> Now I know that the Lord is great, and there is none beside Him.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 18:11

In addition, Jethro had proposed to Moses a better way for administering justice, a suggestion that Moses adopted (Exod. 18:13–26). This certainly implied that Jethro was a good man. What is still more, in the course of making this suggestion, Jethro had said to Moses, "God be with you!" (Exod. 18:19)—again implying that he believed in the same God as Moses.

But if so, how could this God-fearing man have been a "priest of Midian"? Perhaps the title really didn't mean "priest":

> And Jethro, the priest of Midian . . . — Exod. 18:1

> And Jethro, the priest of Midian . . . — Septuagint Exod. 18:1

> And Jethro, the **ruler** of Midian . . .
> — *Targums Onqelos, Neophyti, Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 18:1

Alternately, it may have been that Jethro had indeed once worshiped other gods and served as "priest of Midian," but at some point had seen the folly of his ways and converted to the true religion. Perhaps this was what he meant by "Now I know that the Lord is greater" (Exod. 18:11). Indeed, the reason for his visit to Moses may have been his desire to convert:

> Jethro was a priest of idolatry but he saw that it was worthless and so rejected it and and planned to repent [i.e., convert] even before Moses came. — *Exodus Rabba* 1:32

> And he said to Moses, "I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming to you in order to be converted." — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 18:6

> [Jethro's] name was [also] Ḥobab [Num. 10:29] because he loved [*ḥibbeb*] the Torah, and amongst all the **converts** there was none who loved the Torah as Jethro did. — *Sifrei Numbers* 78

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In short: At Marah, God slaked the Israelites' thirst for divine learning or Torah, represented by water. The "tree" with which this was accomplished was likewise the Torah, which is called the "tree of life." As for manna, it was indeed the "bread of angels," a food whose taste changed to suit the desires of whoever ate it, since it was in any case a wholly spiritual food. Throughout their wanderings, the Israelites were followed by a rock that gushed water; this was the Well of Miriam, so called because it was given to Israel on account of Miriam's merits.

The Amalekites who attacked the Israelites at Rephidim were the embodiment of evil itself; they will only be destroyed in the end of days. Moses won the battle against them by raising his hands toward heaven, a wholly symbolic gesture. As for Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, he was a good man who had come to reject the worship of other gods: he now believed only in God.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Into the Wilderness

Heal Thyself: We have seen that, just after Moses casts the "tree" (or part of it) into the waters of Marah to make them drinkable, God says to the Israelites, "I am the Lord your healer" (Exod. 15:26). What did the matter of healing have to do with casting a tree into the water? One idea was that God, "your healer," was thereby encouraging people to seek cures for their ailments from the natural world—from trees and other natural substances:

> The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a man of understanding will not spurn them.
> Was it not **by means of a tree** that waters were made drinkable, in order that its power might be made known?
> And He gave understanding to man, so that He might be glorified by his exploits.
>
> —Sir. 38:4–6

(On this verse, see Kister, "A Contribution to the Interpretation of Ben Sira," 342–343.)

Taught a Tree: One thing that aided in the interpretation of this tree as the Torah was the fact that the traditional Hebrew text of Exod. 15:25 does not literally say that God *showed* Moses a tree but "taught him a tree." The words are quite similar in Hebrew, and some translations (Septuagint, some targums) do indeed render it as "showed." However, *Targum Onqelos* and one manuscript of the *Fragment Targum* read here "*taught* him a tree." Combining this with the end of the same verse, "there He gave [Israel] law and statute," it must have seemed obvious to some that the tree in question was indeed the tree of life, the Torah. See also Boyarin, "The *Dôrĕšê Rĕšûmôt* Said . . ."; idem, "Inner Biblical Ambiguity, Intertextuality, and the Dialectic of Midrash"; Marcus, "Tree of Life in Proverbs." On the theme of the divine grant of water in general, see Bienaimé, *Moïse et le don de l'eau.*

But what were the "law and statute" that He taught him in Exod. 15:25? The great revelation of law at Sinai had not yet occurred—yet here the Bible seems to be asserting that *some* laws were taught just before the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai. Perhaps they were laws so basic that they could not wait; or perhaps these laws were intended as a preview or preliminary sample to prepare the Israelites for the greater revelation to come:

> "There He put to them law and statute" [Exod. 15:25]: "Law" refers to the sabbath, and "statute" to the honoring of father and mother—this is the opinion of R. Joshua. R. El'azar ha-Moda'i said: "law" refers to the prohibited sexual unions, and "statute" to damages, fines, and injuries.
>
> —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Wayyassa'* 2

Somewhat different is the interpretation of Pseudo-Philo, who projects this whole incident forward to the Sinai revelation, clearly mingling phrases from both passages together:

> All the people stood at a distance [at Mt. Sinai], but Moses went up to the cloud, knowing that God was there [≅ Exod. 20:21]. Then God said to him his judgments and his statutes [≅ Exod. 15:25], and He kept him with Him forty days and forty nights. And there He commanded him many things and He showed him the tree of life from which He cut [a piece] and he received it and cast it into Marah, and the waters of Marah were made sweet [≅ Exod. 15:25]. And it followed them in the wilderness for forty years . . . And He commanded him concerning the tabernacle and the ark of the Lord and the sacrifice of whole burnt offerings and of incense.
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:15

In other words, for Pseudo-Philo, the tree at Marah is nothing less than the Torah, the tree of life (referred to as such in Prov. 3:18). If the Bible says that "there He *taught* him a tree" the reference must be to Mt. Sinai, where God taught Moses the whole Torah. For that reason, Pseudo-Philo concludes that this tree's being cast into the waters at Exod. 15:25 has nothing to do with anything that happened *on the way* to Sinai but refers to the great Sinai revelation itself. The "waters" of this revelation then accompanied the Israelites thereafter in their wanderings (on which see below). It may be that an additional element aiding Pseudo-Philo to conflate these two passages was the little word "there" *(šam)*. If the text emphatically states that "*there* He taught him a tree," perhaps it means to imply *there at Sinai* and not here at Marah. What is more, the same word "there" appears in Exod. 20:18: "But the people stood at a distance, and Moses approached the deep darkness where God was *there*." For later, rabbinic exegetes (and Pseudo-Philo frequently seems not too distant from them), this common and apparently unnecessary term in the two verses would certainly seal the case.

The Water Was Divine Wisdom: The theme of divine wisdom as water exists elsewhere in Second Temple texts. Ben Sira compared the divine wisdom to the four rivers of paradise (plus the Jordan and the Nile!) in Sir. 25:25–27 (on this passage see Chapter 3, *OR*, "Eden Was Wisdom"), adding for good measure:

> For her [Wisdom's] thought is more abundant than the sea, and her counsel deeper than the great abyss. — Sir. 24:29

Note also that the *Odes of Solomon* repeatedly presents divine wisdom or truth as a flowing stream; see especially 6:8–18, 11:6–7, 12:2, 30:1–7. With regard to the equation of wisdom and water in, specifically, the *Damascus Document*, see Wieder, "The 'Law Interpreter' of the Sect"; note also Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:44; Fishbane, "Well of Living Water."

Poor Waters of Elim? When the Israelites camped briefly at Elim, the only thing said about this stop is that "there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm

trees." Why did Scripture bother to mention this apparently inconsequential watering hole? Some interpreters supposed that Elim must have been a particularly lush spot, virtually miraculous, and that was why it was mentioned:

> And there we found a meadow shaded o'er
> and splashing streams; a place profuse and rich
> which draws **from one rocky ledge twelve springs.**
>
> —Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagōgē* 248–250

Others, on the contrary, surmised that Elim must have been a place poor in water. If so, it was mentioned to account for the Israelites' complaining immediately after they left the place (they were already parched and hungry) or, alternately, because a minor miracle had happened at Elim as well:

> The palms, numbering no more than seventy, were dwarfed and stunted through lack of water, the whole place being sandy. For from the springs which existed, to the number of twelve, there oozed no liquid sufficient to water them . . . So they [the Israelites] fell to accusing and denouncing [Moses]. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:9–11

> R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai said to them [the Sadducees]: "From where [in the Torah] can you establish this [claim]?" But they did not know how to bring proofs from the Torah; one [of their number] offered him this lame answer: "Well, since Moses loved [his brother] Aaron, he said [in establishing this law] 'Let him [Aaron, that is, the priest] not eat flour alone, but let him eat flour and meat together . . .'" [In reply,] Rabban Yoḥanan quoted to him [the verse] "And they came to Elim, and there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees." He [the Sadducee] said to him, "You are making fun of us [that is, what does this verse have to do with what we were talking about?]!"[2] —*Megillat Ta'anit* (ms. Parma, cf. Lichtenstein, p. 338)

> There were twelve springs of water and they only sufficed to give water for seventy palm-trees. Nevertheless, when the Israelites came and camped there six hundred thousand strong, the water not only supplied them enough to drink once, but a second and third time.
>
> —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Wayyassa'* 1

Many interpreters, however, saw the specific mention of the *twelve* springs and *seventy* palm trees as somehow symbolic:

> They then arrived at a second halting-place, one well wooded and well watered, called Elim, irrigated by twelve springs beside which rose young palm trees, fine and luxuriant, to the number of seventy. Anyone who has the gift of keen mental sight may see in this clear signs and tokens of the

2. The apparent answer to the Sadducee's question is that if Moses had decided such things on the basis of his personal likes and dislikes, he never would have led the people of Israel to such a poor watering hole as Elim! The fact that he did only indicates that he did so at the dictate of God; so similarly with the sacrificial offering under discussion.

> national blessings. For the nation has twelve tribes, each of which, in virtue of its piety, will be represented by the well which supplies piety in perennial streams and noble actions unceasingly, while the heads of the whole nation are seventy, who may properly be compared to the palm, the noblest of trees. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:189

> R. El'azar ha-Moda'i said: When God created his world, he created there twelve sources of water corresponding to the twelve tribes of Jacob, and seventy date palms corresponding to the seventy elders. And why does Scripture say, "and they camped there upon the water"? This is to teach that they busied themselves with the words of Torah [symbolized by water] which were given to them at Marah. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Wayyassa'* 1

> [As for] the twelve springs and the seventy palm trees . . . the Lord chose twelve disciples to preach the Gospel. The seventy palm trees are those who are sent after the twelve disciples into the whole world [Luke 10:1], and whose number was the same as that of the palm trees.
> —Gregory of Nyssa (*PG* 44:365 C)

For Origen, this passage, much like 2 Cor. 3:6, suggested a distinction between two covenants and, ultimately, ways of reading Scripture:

> First the people are led to the letter of the Law. They cannot withdraw from this while they remain in its bitterness. But when the Law has been made sweet by the "tree of life" [= the cross] and has begun to be understood spiritually, then they pass over from the old covenant to the new and come to the twelve apostolic springs. Seventy palm trees will be found there as well. For not only did the twelve apostles preach the faith of Christ, but also the seventy others who were sent to preach the word of God are mentioned.
> —Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 7

On this subject see Danielou, *Sacramentum Futuri,* 147–149.

Spiritual Sustenance: The manna in this motif became, in John's gospel, identified with Christ. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the continuation of John 6 picks up on the same imagery of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness:

> Then the Jews **murmured** [complained] at him [Jesus] because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not **murmur** among yourselves." —John 6:41–43 (cf. 6:61)

The "murmuring" mentioned here recalls the Israelites' complaining that led to the gift of manna in the first place:

> And the whole congregation of the people of Israel **murmured** against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness and said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to satiety." —Exod. 16:2–3

See further Le Déaut,"Une aggadah targumique et les 'murmures' de Jean 6." Various aspects of the manna tradition have been the object of recent study. See Prijs, *Septuaginta,* 29; Borgen, *Bread from Heaven;* Malina, *Palestinian Manna Tradition.* Also, Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4:462–466.

The Traveling Rock: The rock that gushed water at Rephidim and Kadesh is mentioned often in Scripture: causing water to flow out of a rock was certainly a great miracle, and later biblical books alluded to this miracle frequently.[3] Of course, they did not say that the gushing rock *moved*—this was a conclusion of ancient interpreters. But once such an idea had been arrived at, there were a few biblical verses that might seem to support it. For example:

> He opened the rock, and water flowed forth; it **went in the desert** as a river.
>
> —Ps. 105:41

The words in question might be interpreted in two different ways. They might mean, simply, that when Moses struck the rock, the water was so abundant that it flowed forth like a river in the middle of the desert. But "went in the desert" might also mean that the water actually *moved,* that it went forth into the desert to accompany the Israelites on their wanderings. And indeed, why should the psalmist have said, "*went* in the desert"—a verb that clearly indicates movement from one place to another—rather than "gushed," "flooded," "caused to drink," or the like? On reflection, it must have seemed that this verse likewise was suggesting that the miraculous source of water actually moved from place to place in the desert.

On the traveling rock/well, see further Chapter 24, *OR,* "Blood and Water."

The Christian Rock: The passage cited from 1 Cor. 10:14 concerning the traveling rock goes on to identify this rock with Christ:

> I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and . . . all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.
>
> —1 Cor. 10:1–4

This association seems to derive from the Christian identification of the "stone" mentioned in Ps. 118:22 ("The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone") with Jesus; see Matt. 21:42, Acts 4:11, and 1 Pet. 2:7. That the traveling rock that sustained the Israelites during their wanderings was likewise a prefiguring of Jesus seemed only natural. As Justin Martyr was to say, "That Christ was proclaimed in figure [that is, typologically] as a stone by many passages of Scripture we have likewise proved" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 86:3).

Hidden Hand: After the defeat of Amalek, Moses is said to build an altar and call it "The Lord is my banner [*nissî*]" (Exod. 17:15). This name is apparently explained in the next verse, but the traditional Hebrew text is somewhat obscure: "A hand upon the throne [*kēs*] of the Lord, war with Amalek from generation to genera-

3. See, for example, Deut. 8:15, 32:13; Isa. 41:18, 43:20, 48:21, 49:10; Ps. 78:16, 20, 114:8.

Moses makes the sign of the cross.

tion."[4] No doubt struggling with such difficulties as these, the Septuagint translators came up with a radically different translation:

> For with a **hidden** [in Hebrew, *kĕsuyyāh*] hand the Lord makes war against Amalek from generation to generation. —Septuagint Exod. 17:16

However the verse in question may have been understood, the phrase "from generation to generation" certainly supported the hypothesis that Amalek represents some sort of archenemy of God whose final defeat will come only at the end of time. But the "hidden hand" was particularly suggestive in this regard, as if God was waging a *secret* war against Amalek, one that ordinary mortals could not see. This idea was taken up by Justin:

> For the Lord is said to fight **with hidden hand** against Amalek. Now, you will not deny that Amalek fell [in Exodus 17]. But [then] . . . what kind of fruit [that is, fulfillment] can that word of Scripture have which says that God fights with Amalek with a hidden hand? You can perceive that some hidden power of God belonged to Christ in his crucifixion, at whom even the demons tremble. —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 49:7

4. This verse has been conjecturally amended to read: "For they will know as the Lord's miracle [*nēs*] the war with Amalek, from generation to generation."

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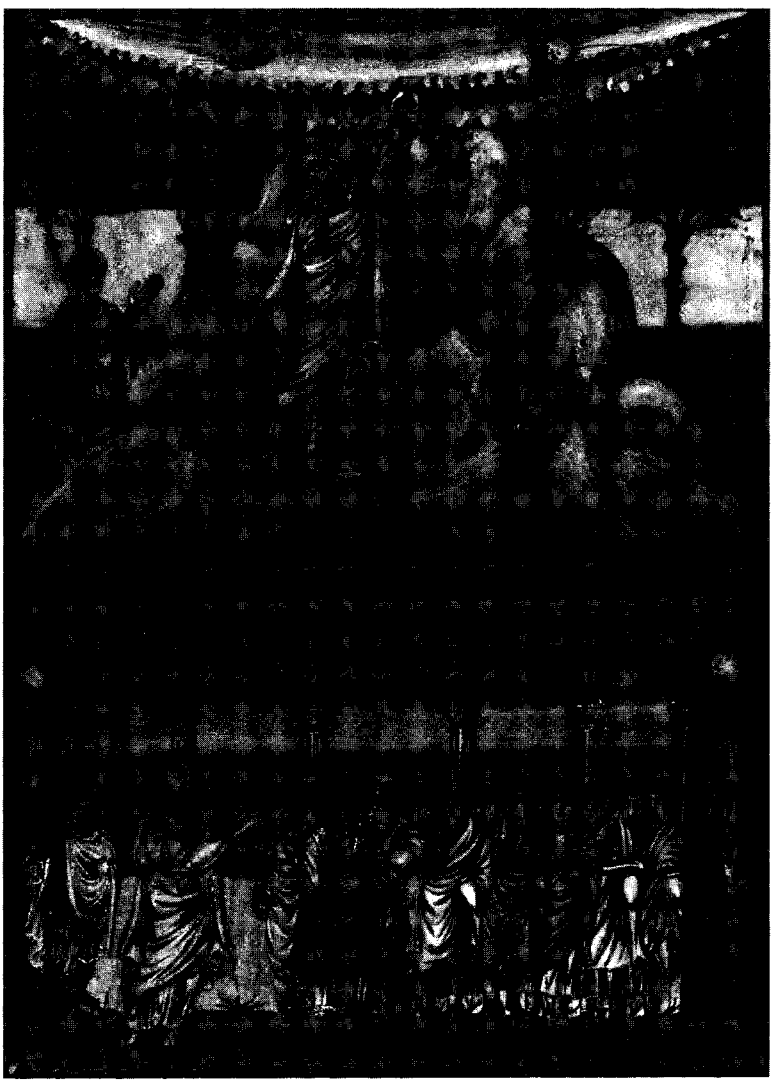
At Mt. Sinai

(EXODUS 19–24)



(top) Moses ascends to heaven on a smoky mountain to receive the Torah, with Joshua in background; later (bottom) he instructs the people.

At Mt. Sinai

(EXODUS 19–24)

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The Israelites were now camped in the wilderness of Sinai, at the "mountain of God." Moses climbed up the mountain and God told him that Israel would become His "special people" if they agreed to obey Him and keep His covenant. The people agreed and purified themselves in preparation for what was to follow. On the third day, amid thunder and lightning, God came down in fire upon the mountain and spoke the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue).

In addition to the Decalogue, God gave the Israelites numerous other laws at Mt. Sinai. Some of these had to do with relations between one person and another, others with relations between human beings and God. The people accepted all these requirements enthusiastically. Moses entered the cloud where God was and stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

AT MT. SINAI, God made His great covenant (an agreement or compact) with Israel, by which they became His special people. For ancient interpreters, this was a most—perhaps *the* most—significant event in the whole Hebrew Bible. Not only did it establish a unique relationship between one people and the Lord of all, but the laws and commandments that God gave to Israel became a central preoccupation for Jews ever afterward. They tried to arrange every detail of their lives to accord with these divine laws, and the laws themselves were studied down to their tiniest particulars.

Heaven on Earth

But what exactly happened on the day in question? The events themselves appeared elusive. On the one hand, it seemed that God had, as it were, gone down to meet Moses on top of the mountain: the Bible says specifically "And the Lord went down upon the mountain" (Exod. 19:20) and elsewhere reports that God "called to him [Moses] from the mountain" (Exod. 19:3). On the other hand, God later says, "You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you *from heaven*" (Exod. 20:21), and still later Moses recalls, "*Out of heaven* He caused you to hear His voice" (Deut. 4:36). So where was God really? The book of Nehemiah summed up the paradox:

> You went down upon Mount Sinai, and You spoke with them from the heavens. —Neh. 9:13

There was, however, another biblical passage that likewise seemed to refer to the events at Mt. Sinai, and here interpreters found a possible solution to the problem:

He **bowed down the heavens** and came down; thick darkness was
under His feet . . .
The Lord also **thundered in the heavens**, and the Most High made
his voice heard, hailstones and coals of fire.

— Ps. 18:9, 13

Taken at face value, this passage suggests that God brought part of heaven with Him, "bowing" or bending it down to the mountain. If so, then this might explain how He could simultaneously be on Mt. Sinai and yet "thunder in the heavens." A number of ancient interpreters therefore specifically alluded to this "bending down" of heaven when they retold the events at Sinai:

You **bent down** the heavens and shook the earth, and moved the world, and made the depths to tremble, and troubled the times. And your glory passed through the four gates of fire and earthquake and wind and ice, to give the law to the descendants of Jacob, and your commandments to the posterity of Israel. — *4 Ezra* 3:18–19

And I brought them to the foot of Mt. Sinai, and I **bowed** the heavens and came down and congealed the flame of fire and stopped up the channels of the abyss and impeded the course of the stars and muffled the sounds of thunder and quenched the fullness of the wind and rebuked the many clouds and stayed their movements and interrupted the storm of the heavenly hosts so as not to break my covenant. For all things were set in motion when I came down, and everything was brought to life when I arrived.

— Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 23:10

R. Akiba said: One verse says, "For I have spoken to you from the heavens" [Exod. 20:21] while another says "And the Lord descended upon the mountain" [Exod. 19:20]. This teaches that God must have bent the highest parts of heaven down to [touch] the top of the mountain and then spoken with them there—from the heavens! And so it is written "And he bent the heavens and went down, and there was darkness under His feet" [Ps. 18:10].

— *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 9

Celestial Sinai

Another possibility existed, however: instead of heaven coming down to the mountain, the mountain might have ascended into heaven.

Beloved of God and men was Moses (may his mention bring good),
And He honored him as God, and kept him strong in the **heavens.**[1]

— Sir. 45:1

1. God "kept him strong" in the sense that Moses did not eat or drink for forty days (Exod. 24:18), but the point is that Ben Sira says that this happened "in the heavens" whereas the Bible merely says that Moses was "on the mountain." (The Greek text of Sirach reads "kept him strong *in the fears*," but this appears to be an error in the transmission of the Hebrew original.)

> The Torah is not in heaven, that one should say, "Who will **go** up to heaven for us like the prophet Moses and take it down for us and teach us its laws so that we could do them?" — *Targum Neophyti* (marginal gloss) Deut. 30:12

> "And they [the Israelites] stood at the foot of the mountain . . ." [Exod. 19:17]. This teaches that the mountain was actually uprooted from its place, and then they came close and stood underneath it, as it is said, "They came close and stood at the foot of [literally, "underneath"] the mountain" [Deut. 4:11]. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 3

> Mt. Sinai was uprooted from its place and the heavens opened and the top of the mountain went into the heavens and the darkness covered the mountain. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 41

Heavenly Moses

If the mountain actually ascended into heaven, and Moses with it, then surely Moses was transformed in the process: one cannot ascend into heaven and remain an ordinary human being. Indeed, Scripture seemed to imply as much when it had God say, "Come up *to Me* on the mountain" (Exod. 24:12). Did not Moses' ascent into heaven mean that he himself became, as it were, divine?[2]

> What is the meaning of the words, "Come up to Me to the mountain and be there . . ." [Exod. 24:12]? This signifies that a holy soul is made divine by ascending not to the air or to the ether or to heaven [which is] higher than all, but to [a region] above the heavens. And beyond the world there is no place but God. — Philo, *Questions and Answers in Exodus* 2:40

> At the time when God said to him "Come up to me on the mountain . . ." and he went up to Him, then the "cloud covered him for six days" [Exod. 24:16] his body was made holy and yet holier still, and he ascended from the level of human beings to the level of the angels. — *Tibat Marqa* 265b

> ". . . Moses, the man of God" [Deut. 33:1] [This phrase can be also be read "Moses, a man, God"]: a man when he [first] ascended on high, God when he [later] descended below. — *Pesiqta deR. Kahana, Zot ha-berakhah* 1

God Spoke All Ten

On the morning of the third day, amid thunder and lightning, God spoke the words of the Decalogue to all the people. Or did He? Ancient interpreters noticed an interesting thing: in the Ten Commandments, God starts speaking in the first person, "I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me . . . I am a jealous God," and so forth. But then, after the first two commandments, the text suddenly switches to the third person:

2. See also Chapter 17, "A Godlike Man."

> You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the **Lord** will not hold him guiltless who takes **His** name in vain. —Exod. 20:7

From here on, all references to God are in the third person, as if someone else were talking *about* God rather than God Himself talking directly to the Israelites. But was this the case—and if so, why?

A number of ancient interpreters seem to go out of their way to say that (despite such evidence) God in fact spoke *all* the words of the Decalogue Himself:

> The ten "words" or "oracles"—in truth, laws or statutes—were **delivered by** the father of all when the nation, men and women alike, were assembled together.
>
> The Ten Commandments which **God Himself** uttered in a manner befitting His holiness. —Philo, *The Decalogue* 32, 175
>
> You gave to them a law, ten oracles uttered by Your voice and engraved by Your hand. —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.33.4
>
> And then the Lord spoke **to His people** all these words, saying . . . — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:6
>
> And all heard a voice which reached the ears of all from on high, in such a way that not one of those ten words escaped them . . . The people, having thus heard from the very mouth of God that of which Moses had told them, rejoicing in these commandments dispersed from the assembly. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:90, 93
>
> And they said to Moses: "You be the one to speak with us so that we can hear . . ." This teaches that they did not have the strength to receive [directly] more than the Ten Commandments, as it says [*after* the Decalogue is given, Deut. 5:6–18], "If we continue to hear the voice of the Lord we shall die" [Deut. 5:22]. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 9

God Spoke Only Two

Such assertions notwithstanding, there was good reason to suppose that, in fact, God had not spoken the entire Decalogue directly to Israel. After all, in retelling these events, Moses said:

> The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, while I stood between the Lord and you at that time to **declare to you** the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said, "I am the Lord your God . . ." —Deut. 5:4–6

This passage clearly presents Moses as restating to the Israelites what God Himself had said. Indeed, one might conclude from this that the Israelites actually heard nothing directly from God. But somewhat later on, Moses states that, on the day in

question, the Israelites had said: "Let me *hear no more the voice* of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die" (Deut. 18:16). The implication is that the Israelites did indeed hear the divine voice directly—at least for a little while. Putting this conclusion together with the observed switch from the first-person singular to the third person within the Decalogue, an interpreter might conclude that God had spoken to the Israelites directly at first and then, at their insistence, had stopped:

> Rabbi Joshua said: The Israelites heard only two commandments directly from God: "I am the Lord your God . . ." and "There shall be no other gods beside Me . . ."
>
> — *Song of Songs Rabba* 1:2, *Pesiqta Rabbati Ten Commandments* 2

The Ten Were All

The Decalogue obviously occupies a special position in the Bible. These "ten words" are listed as a unit (Exod. 20:1–17), and afterward the narrative resumes, having highlighted, so it seems, these ten commandments in particular. Elsewhere the Bible speaks of God having given Moses two "tables of stone" on which laws are written (Exod. 24:12, 31:18, 32:15–16, 34:1–4). One might think that *all* the laws of the Pentateuch were written on these two tables, but the Bible specifies that they contained specifically the "ten words":

> He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten words. — Exod. 34:28

> [Moses recalls:] And He declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, the ten words; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone.
>
> And He wrote on the tables, as at the first writing, the ten words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain. — Deut. 4:13, 10:4

But the very specialness with which these ten commandments are treated was a problem—and a major one at that. After all, the Pentateuch certainly contained far more commandments than these ten: numerous other statutes and rules and laws were likewise given by God to Israel, at Mt. Sinai as well as afterward (613 in all, according to a later tradition). What was so special about these ten that they in particular should have been written on the two tables?

Some people apparently claimed that *only* these commandments truly came from God. This view is attributed in rabbinic literature to the "sectarians" or "heretics" (*mînîm*); specifically, it was evoked to explain why the public reading of the Decalogue, which at one point figured prominently in the liturgy of the Jerusalem Temple, came to be discontinued in later liturgical practice:

> [Before this change came about:] The one in charge [of the priestly course in the Jerusalem Temple] would say to them [the priests]: Make the bene-

> diction (and then they did); read the Ten Commandments; recite the *Shema'* [Deut. 6:4–9]. —m. *Tamid* 5:1

> R. Matna and R. Samuel b. Naḥman both said: The Ten Commandments ought by right [still] to be read [publicly] every day. Why are they not so read? Because of the contention of the heretics [to the effect] that these ten **alone** were given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. —j. *Berakhot* 1:8

The same idea—that the totality of God's laws consisted of the "ten words" written on the two tables—may be hinted at elsewhere as well:

> But when he [Moses] came,
> leading this people, which God led from Egypt
> to the mountain, Sinai, God also gave forth
> the Law from heaven, having written all just ordinances on two tables
> and enjoining them to perform it.
>
> — *Sibylline Oracles* 3:254–258

No doubt this notion was connected to the idea (seen above) that God had spoken the Decalogue *directly* to the Israelites. For, if these ten commandments had been singled out in this way—and further singled out by being written down as a group on the two tables—then these facts alone highlighted the specialness of the Decalogue and deserved particular mention:

> You gave them a law, ten oracles uttered by Your voice, and engraved by Your hand. —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.36.4

If they were not the *only* laws given by God, why had He so singled them out?

The Decalogue Epitomizes

Some interpreters reasoned that, if God had indeed given Israel many other laws besides the Decalogue, then perhaps the Decalogue had been specially singled out because it constituted some kind of a summary or *epitome* of these other laws as well. After all, a body of more than six hundred rules and regulations—governing all sorts of matters both sacred and profane—might not be the sort of thing an ordinary person could memorize and keep constantly in mind. At a relatively early point, therefore, interpreters theorized that the Decalogue had been given because it in itself constituted not only ten particular commandments, but a list of ten general categories of laws, a précis from which all the other laws might be derived:

> Those [laws] which were uttered by Him personally and by Him alone [that is, the Decalogue] were [at the same time] laws and **general legal categories**, while those which were uttered through the prophet [Moses] were all [merely] the former. —Philo, *The Decalogue* 19

That the Decalogue was some sort of epitome or précis may also underlie the following:

> And a ruler asked him: "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, ". . . **You know the commandments:** Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother . . ."
>
> — Luke 18:19–20 (cf. Matt. 19:16–19, Mark 10:17–19)

> And God said to Moses, "Climb up the mountain to My presence and stay there and I will give you the stone tables on which are intimated the rest of the words of the Torah and the six hundred and thirteen commandments which I have written down to instruct them."[3]
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 24:12

Even without claiming that the Decalogue was an exact summary or set of general headings of divine law, some interpreters seemed to see in it the essence of Torah:

> On the verse "In the path of righteousness I [Wisdom, that is, the Torah] walk, in the midst of paths of statute[s]" [Prov. 8:20] R. Ḥuna said: [This is comparable] to the bodyguards of a noblewoman who, when she passes through a [crowded] street, take out their swords and weapons both in front of her and in back. So is it with the Torah, there are regulations in front of her and in back of her. In front of her, as it says, "there He gave them law and statute" [Exod. 15:25], and in back of her, as it says, "These are the laws which you shall place before them . . ." [Exod. 21:1].[4]
>
> — *Midrash ha-Gadol Mishpaṭim* 21:1 (see also *Pesiqta deR. Kahana* 12:8)

Five and Five

As noted in passing, the Bible repeatedly states that the Decalogue was written down on two stone tables:

> [Moses recalls:] And He declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, the ten words; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone.
>
> — Deut. 4:13

Why should there have been two? Surely the whole Decalogue could have fit on a single table if that were desired. (Indeed, archaeologists have discovered numerous tablets of clay and other materials from the ancient Near East; on a single one of these, many more words than those of the Decalogue are usually fitted.)

Ancient interpreters reasoned that if the Ten Commandments were written on two stone tables instead of one, the purpose must have been to highlight a funda-

3. Since Exod. 24:12 itself says, "and I will give you the stone tables *and* the Torah *and* the commandments which I have written to instruct them," it might seem to follow that the "Torah and commandments" mentioned are being given *in addition* to the stone tables and what is actually written on them; hence they are "intimated" there, perhaps because they are suggested by the words of the Decalogue itself.

4. From this excerpt it would follow that the Torah consists only of that which is between the two passages cited, namely, the Decalogue.

mental division within the Decalogue itself: it seemed to break down into two groups of five. This was most evident in the second group of five, which consisted exclusively of "Thou shalt nots." Looking closer, interpreters further noticed that these prohibitions all concerned relations among human beings, while the first five, by contrast, seemed to deal largely with matters between man and God. The distinction was not absolutely clear-cut—honoring one's father and mother was on the "man and God" side—but perhaps some explanation even for that could be found (see below). After all, the Bible itself mentions repeatedly that these commandments were written on *two* tables; it seemed reasonable to suppose that the division into two groups was fundamental.

> We find that He divided the ten into two sets of five which He engraved on two tables, and the first five obtained the first place, while the other was awarded the second . . . One set of enactments begins with God the father and maker of all, and ends with parents, who copy His nature by begetting particular persons. The other set contains all the prohibitions, namely, adultery, murder, theft, false witness, [and] covetousness.
>
> — Philo, *The Decalogue* 50–51

Another striking difference between the first and second fives was that, while the name of God is evoked frequently in the former, it appears nowhere in the latter. Perhaps this, too, was no coincidence:

> [The Roman emperor Hadrian said to R. Joshua b. Ḥannaniah:] "Come and travel with me to [my] provinces." Everywhere that he brought him he saw his [the emperor's] portrait had been put up. He said: "What is that?" He answered, "My portrait." Finally he [the emperor] took him to an outhouse. He said to him, "Your Majesty, I can see that you are the ruler of this whole province, and that your portrait is put up everywhere, but in this place it is not put up." He said to him: "Are you supposed to be the sage of the Jews? Would it be an honor for a king to have his portrait put up in such a lowly place as this, in such a filthy and despised place?" He answered: "So [with regard to the last five commandments,] would it be to God's glory to have His name connected with murderers and adulterers and thieves?"
>
> — *Pesiqta Rabbati* 21

Which Ten Commandments?

That God gave Israel ten commandments or "words" is quite clear (Exod. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, 10:4). But how they were to be divided up is far from clear: the Bible does not actually assign them numbers indicating where each begins and ends—neither when they were first given to Moses (Exodus 20) nor when Moses later repeated them (Deuteronomy 5). As a result, different systems developed for numbering the commandments.[5]

5. What is more, even the verse numbers differ in different editions of the Bible.

Some interpreters saw the first-person statement about God in Exod. 20:2 ("I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage") as the first commandment—a commandment to recognize the existence of God and His role in history. The second commandment would then be the prohibition of worshiping any other god, having "other gods before [or "beside"] Me" (Exod. 20:3); the prohibition of making graven images (Exod. 20:4) that follows next was, according to this system, considered to be a continuation of the same idea, hence, part and parcel of the second commandment:[6]

> The **first** commandment that went forth from the mouth of God was . . . "My people, children of Israel, I am the Lord your God, who redeemed and brought you redeemed out of the Egyptian servitude . . ." The **second** commandment that went forth from the mouth of God was . . . "My people, children of Israel, you shall have no other God beside Me."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 20:2–3

Another system of numbering the commandments kept the words of Exod. 20:2 ("I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage") as a kind of prologue or annex to what follows, the prohibition of having other gods. Considered in this fashion, the first commandment thus became the requirement to believe in and worship one God alone. The prohibition of making graven images (Exod. 20:4) was then considered to be a separate commandment, the second:

> The first set of five [commandments] is concerned with: [1] the rulership of a single One, by which [rulership] the world is governed; [2] statues and idols and, in general, images made by human hands . . .
>
> —Philo, *The Decalogue* 51

> The first word [commandment] teaches us that God is one and that He only must be worshiped. The second commands us to make no image of any living creature for adoration. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:91

Nor did the possible variations end there. Some interpreters saw the two parts of Exod. 20:17 (20:14 in some Bibles)—"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife"—as two separate commandments, while others saw only one. What is more surprising, even the order of the commandments was not invariable. The traditional Hebrew text first prohibits murder (Exod. 20:13), then adultery (Exod. 20:14), then stealing (Exod. 20:15), and this order is found as well in the Samaritan Pentateuch and other ancient witnesses. The Septuagint tradition preserves a different order, nay two![7] In Exodus, these prohibitions are first adultery, then stealing, and then murder, while at the repetition of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5, the order is adultery, murder, stealing. This last ordering also appears prominently in other sources:

6. This system of numbering is the one adopted by rabbinic Judaism.
7. In some manuscripts; others follow the traditional Hebrew text.

> You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder . . .
>
> — *Nash Papyrus* (Hebrew manuscript, second century B.C.E.)

> The other set of five contains all the prohibitions: adultery, murder, stealing, false witness, covetousness. — Philo, *The Decalogue* 51

> You shall not commit adultery, for your enemies [the Egyptians] did not commit adultery with you, but you went out "with hand held high" [Exod. 14:8]; You shall not murder, in that your enemies gained power over you in order to kill you, yet you saw their death. You shall not be a false witness against your fellow.[8] — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:10–13

> The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet . . ." — Rom. 13:9 (see also James 2:11)

> And Jesus said to him, ". . . You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother . . ."
>
> — Luke 18:19–20 (contrast: Matt. 19:16–19, Mark 10:17–19)

These confusions were only augmented by two allusions to the Decalogue found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, verses that presented two more variations on the order of these commandments:

> There is no faithfulness or kindness or obedience to God in the land, [but only] swearing and lying, **murder and stealing and adultery** . . .
>
> — Hos. 4:1–2

> Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you **steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely** . . .? — Jer. 7:8–9

The last order is reflected in at least one later retelling:

> [God says:] "I said to them to honor father and mother, and they promised they would do it. And I ordered them not to steal, and they agreed. And I told them not to commit murder, and they held it as agreed that they would not do it. And I commanded them not to commit adultery, and they did not reject this." — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 44:6

It was one thing to receive commandments from God, quite another to carry them out. For, carrying them out inevitably required getting into the little details of things, specifics not necessarily mentioned in the general law. This was especially true of the Decalogue, whose blanket prohibitions seemed to call out for further explanation. When it said, for example, "You shall not murder" (in some translations, "kill"), was the Decalogue referring only to fellow human beings, or might the prohibition also extend to animals? With regard to human beings, did the Bible mean that taking another human life was forbidden under *any* circumstances?

8. In this source, the prohibition of stealing is inexplicably omitted.

What about killing someone who is trying to kill you? And did this same prohibition apply to warfare? Capital punishment?

Such questions had to be answered—there could hardly not have been a time in which at least some people had to confront them in their daily lives. One way to try to answer them was to look elsewhere in the Bible: perhaps something could be found in other chapters that went beyond the general prohibition "You shall not murder." In this case, in fact, further information was not lacking. Since, for example, God had specifically told Noah, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; as I gave you green plants, I give you everything" (Gen. 9:3), it seemed that killing animals for food—or for sacrifices to God, for that matter—was clearly permitted. (True, the Bible went on to forbid eating certain kinds of animals because of their "uncleanness"—see Leviticus 11—but this only supported the overall idea that killing animals for food was itself permitted.) Similarly, warfare (Deuteronomy 20) and capital punishment (Gen. 9:6, Exod. 21:12–17, and frequently thereafter) seemed clearly to be countenanced by the Bible.

But often, the information found elsewhere in the Bible seemed inconclusive. Take, for example, the Decalogue's commandment concerning the Sabbath:

> Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son or your daughter, your manservant or your maidservant, or your cattle or the sojourner who is within your gates. —Exod. 20:8–10

Here, a host of questions arose. What did "you shall not do any work" mean? Certainly one could not perform one's usual profession on the Sabbath—a farmer could not farm, a roofer could not fix roofs. But could one do work that was not one's usual profession—could a roofer putter around his garden on the Sabbath, planting and weeding and harvesting? Could a farmer climb up on his roof to fix a leak? And if *all* work was forbidden, did that also include things like cooking or cleaning? Presumably, such tasks might be the regular profession of "your manservant or your maidservant." If this is what they normally did for you, since *they* were forbidden to work as well, did that mean that no cooking or cleaning whatsoever was to be done? Or were you allowed to cook and clean but not they? As for not working with one's cattle, did this mean that it was forbidden to milk the cows on the Sabbath? Would that not bring them pain instead of rest?

Elsewhere the Bible also discusses the law of the Sabbath, but these further provisions do not necessarily answer the above questions. For example, Exod. 34:21 states: "Six days shall you work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in *plowing time* and in *harvest time* you shall rest." Was the mention of these agricultural seasons intended merely to stress that, no matter how pressing the need for intensive labor might be, the Sabbath was to be strictly observed? Or was their mention intended to tell us something about what *kinds* of work were forbidden (and, by implication, what other kinds of work were permitted)? Jer. 17:21–22 further says that even carrying burdens on the Sabbath is forbidden: "Let them not take out a

burden from their houses on the Sabbath."[9] But what was a "burden"—a sack of grain? A book? Moreover, this verse seemed to imply that going out of one's house *without* a burden certainly was permitted. Yet Exod. 16:29 says, "Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." Which was correct? The book of Isaiah further says that God will reward Israel

> . . . if you turn back your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight and the holy [day] of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or **speaking a word** . . . — Isa. 58:13

Here was further information, but hardly clarification. On the contrary, such passages only raised more questions: What did "doing your pleasure on My holy day" include? Did the mention of not "speaking a word" mean that one had to pass the entire day in silence?

One might suppose that all such questions ought to be resolved by each person separately, as a matter of individual conscience. But such an answer was not acceptable in ancient Israel. To begin with, the Bible itself requires that the Sabbath law be enforced, prescribing the death penalty for anyone who works on the Sabbath (Exod. 35:2). How could the courts decide who had violated this law unless what was forbidden was spelled out in all its particulars? Indeed, how could ordinary people know what might subject them to the death penalty and what not? Moreover, quite apart from the question of punishment, how could a person's own conscience reach a decision about the proper way to keep the Sabbath if what the Bible had to say on the subject seemed at times contradictory or even incomprehensible? Finally, conscience or not, ought there not to be some agreed standard of observance? If all people were free to determine the law for themselves, could the law truly be said to exist?

For all these reasons, the Sabbath laws, indeed, *all* biblical laws were the object of particular interpretive scrutiny. From a very early period, no doubt, a body of authoritative interpretations accompanied the various legal prescriptions given by God to Israel, and these are reflected here and there in the Bible itself as well as in contemporaneous and subsequent Jewish and Christian writings. The ten laws of the Decalogue alone gave rise to an impressive body of interpretation.

No Talk of Weekday Matters

About the Sabbath itself, the Decalogue's curt "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" was subject to a host of applications and elaborations. Not all of these could even be called "interpretations." Further practices and traditions—in the form of numerous specific do's and don'ts—soon characterized the Jewish observance of this special day of celebration and devotion to God, and some of these had no apparent connection to what the Bible said about the Sabbath:

9. See also Neh. 13:15–16.

> The *halakhot* [established practices] of the Sabbath are like mountains hanging by a hair—there is little that is written [in the Bible] but numerous *halakhot*. —m. *Ḥagigah* 1:8

But many Sabbath practices did indeed come from Scripture—or, rather, from the interpretation of Scripture. Thus, as quoted above, the book of Isaiah suggested that God would reward the people of Israel if, on the Sabbath day, they would take care to "honor it [the Sabbath], not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or *speaking a word*" (Isa. 58:13). If this last phrase did not refer to refraining utterly from speaking, then what did it mean?

Interpreters came to the conclusion that the forbidden "word" in question referred to speaking about things *connected with working*. In other words, when God forbade "work" on the Sabbath, He forbade not only doing the work itself, but even planning it, talking about it, or arranging it on the Sabbath:

> The man who does any work on it [the Sabbath] is to die. Any man who desecrates this day; who lies with a woman; who **says anything about work on it**—that he is to set out on a trip on it, or about any selling or buying—or who on it draws water which he had not prepared for himself on the sixth day; or who lifts any load to bring it outside his tent or his house is to die. —*Jubilees* 50:8

> And on the sabbath day, let no one speak a vain or empty word, nor press his fellow about any debt, nor let him judge concerning wealth or profit. Let him not speak concerning matters of craft or work **to be done the next morning**. —*Damascus Document* 10:17–18

> A man may not hire workers on the sabbath [to work the next day], nor even instruct his fellow to hire workers for him. —m. *Shabbat* 23:3

Guard the Sabbath Borders

When does the Sabbath begin? At dawn? On the preceding midnight? Even earlier? The Bible does not provide a clear answer. But this was obviously an important question: if people were to do no work on the Sabbath, they had to know at what hour of the day this prohibition came into effect each week.

There is good evidence that, even within biblical times, the normal Jewish practice was to start the Sabbath not on Saturday morning, but at or near sunset on Friday. (This is still the Jewish practice today.)

> [Nehemiah recalls:] Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day? . . ." And so, **when it began to be dark** at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I ordered that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they not be opened until after the sabbath. —Neh. 13:17–19

In the light of this passage, then, work was to be stopped before the beginning of the Sabbath in the evening. But how much before? A number of texts suggest that

the time to stop working came some time before the arrival of the Sabbath—perhaps even in the middle of Friday afternoon—lest some circumstance arise that might compel people to violate the deadline.

> After pursuing them for some distance, they were obliged to return because the hour was late. For it was the **day before the sabbath**, and for that reason they did not continue their pursuit. —2 Macc. 8:25–26

> Caesar Augustus, Pontifex Maximus with tribunician power, decrees as follows: . . .The Jews may follow their own customs in accordance with the law of their fathers . . . that they need not give bond [to appear in court] on the sabbath or on the day of preparation for it after the ninth hour [of the day, roughly, 3:00 P.M.]. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 16:162–163

But if Jews ceased work as early as the middle of Friday afternoon, was this not one of those practices that really had no Scriptural justification, one of those "mountains suspended by a hair"? Some ancient interpreters thought otherwise. For they noticed that, when the Decalogue is repeated in Deuteronomy 5, the wording of the Sabbath law is slightly different: among other things, instead of saying "*Remember* the sabbath day" as in Exod. 20:8, there the text says to "keep" or "guard" it (Deut. 5:12). Perhaps this was not an innocent variation; perhaps the word "keep" or "guard" had been used in the repetition to introduce a new idea, that the Sabbath's holiness had to be *safeguarded* by having people cease work well before the Sabbath's entry:

> No one shall do work on Friday from the time when the sphere of the sun is distant from the gate [by] its [the sun's] full size, for this is why it is said, "**Guard** the Sabbath day to sanctify it" [Deut. 5:12].
>
> —*Damascus Document* 10:14–17

Other interpreters explained the practice somewhat differently:

> Shammai the elder said: "Remember" it [the Sabbath] from the time before it has entered, and "guard" it from that time forward.
>
> —*Mekhilta deR. Shimon b. Yoḥai* p. 148

> "Remember" and "guard"—*remember* before [the Sabbath starts] and *guard* it after [the Sabbath is over]. From this it was deduced that one is to add [time] from the profane [that is, from the rest of the week] to the sacred [that is, the Sabbath]. —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Yitro* 7

Do Not Go Out Too Far

Exod. 16:29 says, "Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." This commandment comes in the midst of the account of the manna that God gave to the Israelites during their desert wanderings: a person was not to "go out of his place" on the Sabbath in search of manna, and—in order to compensate—a double portion of manna would be distributed to the people of Israel on the sixth day.

Theoretically, then, this commandment not to leave one's "place" might well be understood to have applied only during the time of the wilderness wanderings, and to have been given specifically with regard to manna. However, that is not how ancient interpreters saw it: this law applied to *them* as well. But then, what did it mean not to leave one's "place"? Most ancient interpreters felt that "place" must not be limited to one's own actual house or grounds—that would be too narrow a construction. Instead, the sense of the restriction must be not to travel too far from one's home, for example, not to set out on a journey.

> Any man who does work; who goes on a **trip;** who works farmland, whether at his home or in any other place . . . a man who does any of these things on the sabbath is to die. —*Jubilees* 50:12

> We are not permitted to travel either on the sabbath or on a festival. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13:252 (also 14:227)

At some point, however, a further question arose: what constitutes going on a trip? Certainly if one moved about within one's own town or village, that was not traveling; but could one, for example, go beyond the walls of a city? Here Scripture offered some help, for, in describing the establishment of cities for the Levites, the Bible said:

> The pasture lands of the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall reach from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. And you shall measure, outside the city, for the east side two thousand cubits, and for the south side two thousand cubits, and for the west side two thousand cubits, and for the north side two thousand cubits, the city being in the middle; this shall belong to them as pasture land for their cities. —Num. 35:4–5

This passage seemed definitely to establish that the territory belonging to a city extended even beyond its walls. How far was not exactly clear: the passage first speaks of a thousand cubits (between a quarter and a third of a mile) and then of two thousand. But one or the other must have been the permitted distance beyond the city walls.

> [On the Sabbath] let no one walk about outside his city more than a thousand cubits. —*Damascus Document* 10:21 (see also 11:5–6)

> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.[10] —Acts 1:12

> There was a great courtyard in Jerusalem called Beit Ya'zeq, and that was where witnesses [testifying about the new month] would go . . . At first [the practice was that] they would not budge from there the whole day [if it was the Sabbath; later] Rabban Gamli'el the Elder decreed that they could travel

10. The actual distance involved here is apparently a little more than half a mile, that is, two thousand cubits.

up to **two thousand cubits** in any direction. And not only these [witnesses], but likewise a midwife on her way to assist in childbirth, or someone on his way to save a person from a fire, or from an enemy soldier, or from [drowning in] a river, or from a cave-in—all these are like townsmen of the city, and they may [therefore travel] **two thousand cubits** in any direction.

—m. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 2:5

On that same day R. Akiba interpreted: "And you shall measure, outside the city, for the east side two thousand cubits" [Num. 35:5] while earlier it says "from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around" [Num. 35:5]. One cannot say [that it means] a thousand cubits, since it [also] says two thousand, and one cannot say [that it means] two thousand, since it already said one thousand. How can these be reconciled? A thousand cubits of open land, and two thousand is the sabbath limit. —m. *Soṭah* 5:3

Do Not Take Vain Oaths

Quite apart from the commandment about the Sabbath, there were other laws in the Decalogue that, on close inspection, likewise seemed puzzling. Take, for example, the prohibition that comes just before the Sabbath commandment:

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not acquit anyone who takes His name in vain. —Exod. 20:7

What, in concrete terms, is being forbidden here? Mentioning God's name needlessly? Under *any* circumstances? From an early point, this commandment was explained as referring specifically to the taking of oaths using God's name. Many interpreters understood it as a prohibition of taking such oaths when they were not necessary:

Do not accustom your mouth to **oaths**, and do not habitually utter the name of the Holy One;
for as a servant who is continually under scrutiny will not lack bruises, so also the man who always swears and utters the name will **not be cleansed** from sin.[11]

—Sir. 23:9–10

The [Decalogue] forbids us to take God's name in vain: the good man's word, it means, should itself be an **oath**—firm, unswerving, utterly free from falsehood, securely planted on truth. And if indeed circumstances

11. The overall sense of this puzzling verse seems to rest on the comparison between the "servant who is continually under scrutiny" and the person who needlessly swears oaths by the name of God. Just as the former is, by the nature of his situation, bound to be punished sooner or later, so does the one who swears needlessly put himself in harm's way: ultimately he too will have (divinely inflicted) bruises, for the Lord will not "cleanse him" from the sin of a vain oath. The word "cleanse" here alludes to the end of Exod. 20:7, which more literally says that the Lord will not cleanse anyone who takes His name in vain.

> should require us to swear, then the oath should be made by father and mother . . . for parents are likenesses and copies of the divine power.
>
> —Philo, *Special Laws* 2:2

> The first word [commandment] teaches us that God is one and that He only must be worshiped. The second commands us to make no image of any living creature for adoration, the third not to swear by God on any frivolous matter. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:91

Elsewhere the taking of needless oaths is likewise condemned, though without specific allusion to the Decalogue:

> [Whoe]ver attests to a thing by the divine name for any [. . . shall be punished]. —(1QS) *Community Rule* 6:27

> If someone sins against you, speak to him peacefully . . . and if he confesses and repents, forgive him. But if he denies, do not dispute with him, **lest he take an oath** and you thereby sin doubly. — *Testament of Gad* 6:3–4

> Again, you have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn." But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool [Isa. 66:1], or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King [Ps. 48:2] . . . Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one. —Matt. 5:33–37

> But above all, brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation. —James 5:12

> For I am swearing to you, my children—but look! I am not swearing by any oath at all, neither by heaven nor by earth nor by any other creature which the Lord created. —2 *Enoch* (J) 49:1

> It says [in Scripture]: "And if you swear, 'As the Lord lives' in truth, in justice, and in uprightness . . ." [Jer. 4:2]. God said to Israel: Do not think that it is permissible for you to swear by My name, even if it is a true oath; you may not swear by My name unless you have all these traits [that is, truth, justice, and uprightness], as it is [also] written, "Fear God and serve Him and cling to Him and by His name shall you swear" [Deut. 10:20].[12]
>
> — *Midrash Tanḥuma, Mattot* 1

No False Oaths

If some interpreters understood Exod. 20:7 as referring to vain oaths, others apparently associated this commandment specifically with taking a *false* oath:

12. This last verse is similarly being interpreted to mean that only if you fear God and serve Him and cling to Him may you swear by His name.

> You shall not swear by the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not find innocent anyone who swears by His name **falsely.**
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 20:7

> My people, my people, house of Israel: You shall not swear in vain by the name of the Lord your God, and you shall not take an **oath** by My name **and lie**, for I, the Lord your great God call [people] to account, and I will call to account anyone who lies by my name.
>
> — *Fragment Targum* (P) Exod. 20:7

> "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain . . .": Do not hasten to take a **false** oath and let not an oath be habitual in your mouth, for great is the punishment thereof. — *Midrash of the Ten Commandments* 3

This interpretation might seem strange, since the commandment itself says nothing about falsehood and only refers to taking God's name in vain. But the word "vain" in Hebrew is sometimes synonymous with "false," especially with regard to speech.[13] Indeed, the connection of these two terms is particularly evident elsewhere in the Decalogue, in the prohibition regarding testimony against one's neighbor. For in fact this commandment appears in two different forms in the traditional Hebrew text:

> You shall not bear witness **falsely** against your neighbor. — Exod. 20:16

> You shall not bear witness **in vain** against your neighbor. — Deut. 5:20

The apparent interchangeability of the words "falsely" and "in vain" in these two versions of the same law may have convinced ancient interpreters that, in Exod. 20:7 as well, "in vain" means "falsely."

Honor Your Heavenly and Earthly Fathers

Why should the Decalogue have said, "Honor your father and your mother"? Murder, adultery, theft, false witness, even coveting another's property—prohibitions such as these were, arguably, necessary if society was to function at all. As for the laws that began the Decalogue—recognizing God as the only God and outlawing idolatry, not taking God's name in vain, and keeping the Sabbath—these seemed fundamental matters for Israel in particular, the people whom God had chosen as His own. But between these two groups of laws came the strange provision about honoring parents. Surely *this* was not a fundamental requirement for a well-ordered society. Parents did not need to be honored, however nice a thing it might be; indeed, perhaps some parents did not deserve to be honored. And if the intention behind this commandment was simply to make sure that children take care of their parents in their old age, when they might no longer be able to provide for themselves, then let the law state that!

Faced with these questions, ancient interpreters sought to understand this

13. See Exod. 23:1; Ps. 12:3, 24:4, 41:7, 144:8; Prov. 30:8; Ezek. 12:24, 13:6, 21:34, etc.

commandment with reference to its position within the laws of the Decalogue. Surely it was no accident that it came where it did; perhaps its very existence was to be explained by the similarity between honoring parents and honoring God. (This would also serve to maintain the five-and-five division discussed above.)

> They [the Jews] honor only the Immortal who always rules, and then their parents. — *Sibylline Oracles* 3:593–594

> After giving the commandment concerning the seventh day, he gives a fifth commandment concerning the honoring of parents, putting it on the borderline between the two sets of five. For it is the last of the first set, in which laws of the sacred are given, and yet it is connected as well to the second set, which deals with the duties of man to man. I believe the reason to be this: the very nature of parenthood places it on the borderline between the immortal and the mortal, the mortal because they [that is, parents] belong to [the class of] men and other animals through the perishability of the body; the immortal because the act of generation assimilates them to God, the parent of all.
>
> — Philo, *Decalogue* 106–107 (also *Who Is Heir* 171–172; *Special Laws* 2:225)

> Honor God foremost, and afterward your parents.
>
> — Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sentences* 8

> The Torah ranks the honoring of parents second only to that of God . . . It requires respect to be paid by the young to all their elders because God is the most ancient of all. — Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:206

> It says "Honor your father and mother," while elsewhere it says "Honor the Lord with your wealth" [Prov. 3:9]. Honoring one's father [and mother] is thus equated with honoring God. — *Mekhilta deR. Shimon b. Yoḥai* p. 152

Perhaps influenced by the same motif:

> Whoever fears the Lord will honor his father and will serve his parents as masters. — Sir. 3:7 (from Greek and Old Latin texts)

> . . .] Honor Him as a father [. . .
>
> — (4Q415) *Sapiential Work A* fragment 2, col. 2

> I had said to them to love father and mother, yet they did not honor Me, their creator. — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 44:7

A Mishap to the Baby

Beyond the Decalogue lay further laws and commandments, indeed, nearly the whole of the next three chapters (Exodus 21–23) consists of additional legal instructions given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai (nor do God's laws end there!). Many of these additional laws concern ordinary features of daily life; some have to do with legal disputes between human beings, cases involving negligence and damages and

the like; others belong to the sphere of criminal law; and yet others are in the domain of cultic law—sacrifices, sacred festivals, and other matters having to do with the service of God.

Interpreters investigated each of these laws with great care. It could hardly have been otherwise, since God had demanded their proper and complete observance. But, as with the laws of the Decalogue, even the simplest prescription can sometimes create ambiguities. And some of the laws that come after the Decalogue are anything but simple. Take, for example, the following:

> When men strive together and hurt a pregnant woman so that her offspring come out, and there is no mishap, he [the one who struck her] shall be punished in accordance with what her husband shall impose upon him, and it will be given over to adjudication. But if there is a mishap, then you shall give a life for a life [literally, "a soul for a soul"]—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise. —Exod. 21:22–25

This law comes in the midst of a series of statutes concerned with liability for personal injury. This particular case involves a pregnant woman, apparently an innocent bystander at a fight, who is struck by one of the fighters in such a way that she miscarries.[14] The above translation is an attempt to duplicate some of the difficulties of the law as it appears in the traditional Hebrew text. And difficulties there certainly are. What, for example, does the text mean by saying "and there is no mishap" when the case itself describes a mishap? Apparently, the mishap mentioned refers to something other than, still more severe than, a miscarriage. Or is it the case that the "mishap" applies to *some* kinds of miscarriages but not all? Then there is the apparent contradiction in the penalty described when there is no "mishap": on the one hand, the guilty party seems to have to pay whatever the husband demands (he "shall be punished in accordance with what her husband shall impose upon him"), while on the other hand the matter "will be given over to adjudication"—so that perhaps he *won't* be punished in accordance with the husband's demands at all, but will be subject to the judges' decision. And beyond this question is that of the general principle that follows, "An eye for an eye." How does this principle relate to the previous case? And how is such a general principle to be enforced in other cases?

These difficulties are apparent even in ancient attempts to translate or restate this law:

> If two men are fighting, and a pregnant woman is struck in her belly, and her child comes out **not fully formed**, he shall pay a fine. As the woman's husband shall impose, he shall pay it with a valuation. But if it is fully formed, he shall give a soul for a soul. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, a burning for a burning, a wound for a wound, a stripe for a stripe. —Septuagint Exod. 21:22–25

14. The Hebrew expression seems to refer to miscarriage, although it might arguably refer to the provoking of spontaneous labor.

The Septuagint's interpretation (for it has apparently deviated from direct translation here) holds that the "mishap" in question is the death of a baby at a relatively advanced state of development, that is, one that was "fully formed" in the womb. If the accident happens *before* the baby is fully formed, then the guilty party is merely fined; but if the baby is fully formed, then the man who struck her is liable to the death penalty. Among other things, this interpretation seems to imply that the unformed fetus is not yet a "soul" for whom the principle of "a soul for a soul" may be implied.

> If a man comes to blows with a pregnant woman and strikes her on the belly and she miscarries, then, if the result of the miscarriage is unshaped and undeveloped, he must be fined both for the outrage and for obstructing the artist Nature in her creative work of bringing into life the fairest of living creatures, man. But if the offspring is already shaped and all the limbs have their proper qualities and places in the system, he must die, for that which answers to this description is a human being, which he has destroyed in the workshop of Nature, who had decided [only] that the hour was not yet right for bringing it [the baby] out into the light, like a statue lying in a studio requiring nothing more than to be carried outside and released from confinement. —Philo, *Special Laws* 3:108–109

Here Philo basically follows the Septuagint: the "mishap" occurs in the case when a fully formed human being has been killed. Indeed, Philo's image of the completed statue implies, still more clearly than the Septuagint, that the baby in question was just about to be born. Philo also adds a more explicit version of the Septuagint's rather obscure phrase, "he shall pay it with a valuation." For Philo, this phrase apparently refers to two separate payments (or assessments), one for the act itself against the pregnant woman ("the outrage") and the second for the damage done in destroying a fetus before its time. Finally, it is to be noted that here Philo distorts somewhat the initial situation: there is no mention of the men fighting and, hence, no hint (as there certainly might be in the Bible) that the damage was accidental.[15]

A Mishap to the Mother

Jerome translated the same passage in markedly different fashion:

> If men were fighting and someone struck a pregnant woman and she miscarried but she herself lived, he will be subject to a fine, as much as the woman's husband shall request and as the judges decree. If, however, her death shall follow, let him pay a soul for a soul, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, a burning for a burning, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise. —(Vulgate) Exod. 21:22–25

15. Philo treats the same law elsewhere, *Preliminary Studies* 137, where, however, he more accurately reflects the situation described in the biblical text.

According to Jerome's understanding, the "mishap" in question has nothing to do with the fetus's stage of development, but relates to the life of the mother. If the mother's life is unharmed, then the offender simply pays a fine—otherwise, it is a "soul for a soul." Not surprisingly, the Vulgate here is in consonance with rabbinic interpreters:

> "And there is no mishap . . ." that is, to the woman.
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Neziqin* 8

As for the fine itself, Jerome accurately duplicates, without deciding, the ambiguity of the traditional Hebrew text: "as much as the woman's husband shall request and as the judges decree" does not really say who, in the end, will determine the amount of the fine.

The same line of interpretation is attested earlier, in rabbinic texts as well as in Josephus' restatement. Note, however, what the latter adds:

> He who kicks [!] a pregnant woman, if the woman miscarries, he shall be fined **by the judges** for having, by the destruction of the fruit of her womb, diminished the population, and a sum is also to be given by him to the woman's husband. If she should **die** by the blow, then he likewise shall die, the law deeming it fit that a soul be paid for a soul . . .
>
> One who maims someone will suffer the same, being deprived of that which he deprived the other, unless the one who was maimed is willing to accept money [instead]. For the law permits the victim to establish damages for the incident, unless he wishes to be particularly severe.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:278–280

Here again, as in the *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael* and the Vulgate, it is the life of the mother, and not the state of the fetus, that defines whether a "mishap" has occurred. At the same time, there are a number of common points with Philo's interpretation. Like Philo, Josephus deletes the "men fighting" and presents the case as a direct and apparently intentional injury to the mother; and as Philo states, if there is no "mishap," then *two* fines are to be paid. Indeed, Josephus offers his own rationale for the two fines: one is paid for the damage to society as a whole, since the offender "by the destruction of the fruit of her womb, diminished the population," while the second is paid to the family of the injured party.

Somewhat different is the interpretation of this fine offered in an early rabbinic source:

> "In accordance with what her husband shall impose upon him"—I might think this means as much as he [the husband] should want [to impose]; that is why the text says "and it will be given over to adjudication"—this means that he shall pay only what the judges say.
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Neziqin* 8

Money for an Eye

Josephus also offers a striking interpretation of the famous biblical injunction "an eye for an eye." This law, calling for the offender to suffer as a penalty the same offense that he himself has inflicted, is paralleled in many other legal codes outside the Bible, where it is sometimes referred to as the "law of the talion" (*lex* or *ius talionis*). Some biblical interpreters stoutly defended the principle:

> Our law exhorts us to equality when it ordains that the penalties inflicted on offenders should correspond to their actions, that their property should suffer if the wrongdoing affected their neighbor's property, and their bodies if the offence was a bodily injury, the penalty being determined according to the limb, part, or sense affected, while if his malice extended to taking another's life, his own life should be the forfeit. To tolerate a system in which the crime and punishment do not correspond, have no common ground, and belong to different categories, is to subvert rather than uphold legality.
>
> —Philo, *Special Laws* 3:182

> The Boethusians[16] had a book of decrees that said: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" [means that] if someone knocked out his fellow's tooth, he should knock out his tooth [in return], if he blinded his fellow's eye, he should blind *his* eye, [so that] both of them are the same.
>
> —*Megillat Ta'anit* [ms. Oxford, compare Lichtenstein p. 331]

Josephus, however, seems to know of another interpretation, according to which "an eye for an eye" does not necessarily always mean that. Instead, at least in cases of injury (rather than death), he asserts that "the law permits the victim to establish damages for the incident."[17]

The same principle was stated still more strongly elsewhere:

> Does not Scripture say an eye for an eye? Why not take this literally to mean the [offender's] eye [is to recompense the victim's]? Let this not even enter your mind! . . . R. Dosthai b. Yehudah said: An eye for an eye means monetary compensation. But could not actual retaliation be meant? What then would you say if the eye of one was big and the eye of the other was little—how in such a case will an [actual] eye for an eye [be just]? . . . R. Simeon b. Yoḥai said: . . . What can you say in the case of a blind man who put out the eye of someone, or of a maimed person [without arms] who

16. A certain Jewish group in late antiquity is usually referred to by this name in rabbinic texts. However, in some of the most reliable manuscripts this name is written as two words, *bêt sîn;* it has been proposed that the name be understood not as "Boethusians" but as "the house [or "academy"] of the [Es]senes."

17. How indeed could the law of "an eye for an eye" work in the case of the man who struck a pregnant woman and caused her to miscarry? Josephus' statement that "the law permits the victim to establish damages for the incident" implies that he understands the words of Exod. 21:23, "he will be subject to a fine, as much as the woman's husband shall request," as extending to other cases of injury or "maiming."

caused someone else's hand to be cut off, or of a lame person [without legs] who caused someone else's leg to be broken? How can I uphold the principle of an eye for an eye in such cases? —b. *Baba Qamma* 83b–84a

Traditions of the Elders

Jewish observance of the laws in the Torah was sometimes at odds with what appeared to be required by the biblical text itself. Sometimes a particular practice seemed to be a very stringent interpretation (or expansion) of what the Bible demanded (for example, ceasing all work on Friday afternoon). At other times actual practice looked more lenient (accepting payment in lieu of "an eye for an eye"). Most of the time, the Bible's prescriptions were made more *specific* in everyday practice; general strictures were understood as applying in this case but not that case, in this fashion but not that. Moreover, there were all manner of things not mentioned in the Bible at all about which, nevertheless, religious regulations and strictures existed.

In short, accepted practices in the observance of religious law—what people actually did in their daily lives—seemed to depend on far more than what was written in the Decalogue or any other legislation in the Bible. Rabbinic Judaism, we have seen, was candid about these "mountains suspended by a hair" not being explicitly rooted in the biblical text. Indeed, some such practices were, from the same standpoint, not even "suspended by a hair" but frankly "floating in the air" (m. *Ḥagigah* 1:8).

A question then naturally arose: by whose authority were these other practices and stipulations established? The practices themselves were frequently spoken of as the "traditions of the elders," and this in itself gave them a certain authority. If they had been handed down by the *elders* (or "fathers") since ancient times, was not this fact alone sufficient to guarantee their validity?

But I will tell the story[18] of Moses as I have learned it, both from the sacred books, those wonderful monuments of his wisdom which he has left behind him, and from some of the **elders of the nation**, for I have always interwoven **what I was told** with what I read. —Philo, *Moses* 1:4

Besides these [laws] there is a host of other things which belong to **unwritten customs and institutions** or are contained in the laws themselves.[19] —Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:6

18. Here Philo may mean not only the story of Moses' life, but the explanation of the laws he promulgated, since it is particularly in the latter area that he seems most to depend on the traditions of the "elders of the nation."

19. Philo likewise says elsewhere that Jews are trained by "the sacred laws *and the unwritten customs* to acknowledge one God who is the Father and Maker of the world" (*Embassy to Gaius* 115); the indicated phrase similarly suggests that Philo conceives of authoritative teaching as falling into two categories, that which is written in Scripture and that which has been transmitted in unwritten form. This conception is quite distinct from the concept of "unwritten law" in Philo, which is hardly to be equated with the "oral Torah" of later rabbinic literature. See also *Special Laws* 4:149–150.

> Why has Israel been given over to the Gentiles as a reproach? Why has the people whom You have loved been given over to godless tribes, and the **law of our fathers** made of no effect, and the **written arrangements** [*dispositiones*] no longer existent?[20] —*4 Ezra* 4:23

> For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I had advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for **the traditions of my fathers.**
>
> —Gal. 1:13–14 (also Phil. 3:5–6)

> Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him [Jesus], with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the **tradition of the elders**; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.
>
> —Mark 7:4–5 (also Matt. 15:1–20)

> The Pharisees had passed on to the people certain ordinances handed down by the fathers and not written in the laws of Moses, for which reason they are rejected by the sect of the Sadducees, who hold that only those ordinances should be considered valid which were written down, and those which had been handed down by the fathers need not be observed.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13:297 (see also 13:408, 17:41)

> [Baruch writes to his exiled brethren:] "And give this letter and the traditions of the Torah to your children after you, as also your fathers handed down to you." —*2 Baruch* 84:9

Moses Was Given More than the Torah

But the authority of orally transmitted traditions—even traditions that had been handed down by the elders from ages past—was nonetheless open to question. If such teachings were not written down in one of the sacred books, who could guarantee that they *had* to be observed? Indeed, if they were so important, why didn't they appear in the Bible itself? A famous edict of Justinian I, emperor of the Eastern Roman empire between 527 and 565 C.E., later forbade the teachings handed down by the elders precisely on the grounds that they have no divine authority:

> But that which is called by them [the Jews] *deuterosis* [apparently, Mishnah] we forbid completely, because it is **not included among the sacred books**

20. The expression "law of our fathers" here (also in 2 Macc. 6:1, 7:37) appears in conjunction with the "written arrangements" and it may be that this juxtaposition is intended to include both Scripture and the "traditions of the elders" that accompanied the biblical text.

> **and has not been transmitted to us by the prophets** . . . they add unwritten prattle derived from the outside and devised to corrupt ordinary men.
>
> —Justinian, *Novella* 146 (553 C.E.)

Long before this time, however, another answer to the question of the authority of such teachings had been put forward. *These nonbiblical teachings also stemmed from Moses.* After all, it hardly seemed reasonable that, at the time of the great revelation at Mt. Sinai, God would give Moses a law forbidding work on the Sabbath without also telling him what the word "work" does or does not include and at what time of day one has to stop working. If such things were not actually spelled out in the Bible itself, Moses must nonetheless have asked about them; presumably, the answers that he received must have been passed on to the people in some form other than the Pentateuch.

Oral Teachings from Moses

Some interpreters thus asserted that the chain of teachings referred to above as the "traditions of the elders" had begun with Moses himself. He had indeed learned specific rules and applications beyond what was included in the Pentateuch, and these further teachings he had passed on to the Israelites orally. Ever after, such oral teachings had been transmitted from generation to generation. (This idea of authoritative, orally transmitted teachings was characteristic of the school that was to become rabbinic Judaism.) Since, according to this line of thought, these oral teachings had originally come from God through Moses, they of course had authority equal to what was written in the Pentateuch. Some rabbinic texts even speak of *two* Torahs, the oral and the written, both going back to the Sinai revelation:

> And Aaron said to them: "Be patient, For Moses will come [down from Mt. Sinai], and he will bring judgment near to us and will illuminate the law for us and will **explain from his own mouth** the law of God and set up rules for our race."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:2

> The people, having thus heard from God Himself that of which Moses had told them, rejoicing in these commandments, dispersed from the assembly. But later on, they continually went to his tent, to ask him also to provide laws from God. And he both established laws and, in after times, **indicated how they should act in all circumstances.**
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:93–94

> Moses received the Torah at Mt. Sinai and passed it on [orally] to Joshua and Joshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets and the prophets passed it on to the men of the Great Assembly.
>
> —m. *Abot* 1:1 (see also m. *Pe'ah* 2:6, *'Eduyyot* 8:7, *Yadayim* 4:3)

> It happened that some stood before Shammai and said to him, "Rabbi, how many *torahs* do you have?" He said, "Two, one that is written and one that is oral."
>
> —*Abot deR. Natan* (A) 15

> "These are the statutes and the ordinances and the laws [literally, *torahs,* in the plural] which the Lord made between Him and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai by Moses" [Lev. 26:46] . . . [The phrase] *and the laws* indicates that two *torah*s were given to Israel, one in writing and one orally.
>
> —*Sifra Beḥuqqotai* 8

> Said R. Shimon b. Resh Laqish: "And I will give you the tables of stone, the Torah and the commandments, which I have written to teach them" [Exod. 24:12]: the *tables* refers to the ten commandments, the *Torah* to the Pentateuch [as a whole], the *commandments* to the Mishnah; *which I have written*—these are the prophets and the writings [that is, the rest of Scripture, and] *to teach them*—this is the Talmud. All of these were given to Moses at Mt. Sinai.
>
> —b. *Berakhot* 5a

In an elaboration of this idea, even teachings clearly ascribed not to Moses, but to later figures—biblical prophets or even postbiblical sages and interpreters—were sometimes asserted to have been part of the same great revelation at Mt. Sinai:

> That which the prophets were later to prophesy in every subsequent age, they received here at Mount Sinai. For thus did Moses report to Israel [Deut. 29:13–14] "Not with you alone do I make this covenant . . . but with those who are standing here among us today, and with those who are not here among us today." Now [the last clause] is not worded as "not *standing* among us today," but only "not among us today," for these are the souls that were yet to be created, who have no substance, and of whom "standing" could not be said. For though they did not exist at the time, every one of these received his portion . . . And [so,] not only did all the prophets receive their prophecies from Sinai, **but also the sages** who were to arise in every generation—each one of them received his [teaching] from Sinai, as it is written, "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly on the mountain amid the fire, the cloud, and the darkness, with great voice, and He will not add" [Deut. 5:19].[21]
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Yitro* 11

A Hidden Torah

At the same time, the provisions of these orally transmitted teachings were, where possible, asserted to be interpretations of things actually found in the written text rather than totally independent of it. This idea, present in rabbinic writings, is found as well in the writings of the Qumran community, which speak of "hidden things" and "revealed things" in the Torah, the former apparently esoteric interpretations of the "revealed" text. These interpretations were hidden in the sense that they were not immediately obvious but had to be searched out and understood between the lines:

21. These last words are interpreted to mean that God added nothing in later times to what had been imparted at Sinai. Note that others translate the verse: "And He did not cease."

> They [that is, those "evil men who walk in the path of wickedness"] are not counted among [the members of] His covenant, since they do not search out or interpret his statutes in order to learn the **hidden things** [that is, hidden interpretations]; because [of their ignorance of these things] they have gone astray and incurred guilt. And [furthermore,] with regard to the **revealed things**, they have acted high-handedly [that is, they have intentionally violated the laws whose interpretation is well known].
>
> — (1QS) *Community Rule* 5:10–11

What is more, these laws were hidden in the sense that they were to be kept secret from those outside the community; members were thus urged to separate themselves from

> the Men of the Pit, and to keep hidden the [secret] counsel of the Torah from among the men of perversion; but to reproach [only] those who choose the Way with true knowledge and right judgment, each according to his spirit and what is proper for the time, to guide them in knowledge and so to introduce them to wonderful and true secrets within members of the community. — (1QS) *Community Rule* 9:16–18

Moses' Secret Book

There existed, however, another explanation for practices and laws not specifically contained in the Pentateuch. Like the "oral-tradition" explanation, this one likewise went back to Mt. Sinai: Moses had indeed received far more information there than what he had written in the Pentateuch. However, these further teachings were not passed on orally but written down *in another book,* one that was to remain secret for a time.[22] Indeed, such a secret book might have contained all manner of other divine revelations, not only applications of divine law (which included such vital issues as the proper calendar by which to calculate feasts and holidays, or the particulars of cultic purity or uncleanness), but revelations concerning the past or future history of Israel:

> Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights while the Lord showed him what [was] beforehand as well as what was to come. He related to him the divisions of all the times, both of the Torah and of the "testimony." He said to him: . . . "Now you write this entire message which I am telling you today . . . then this **testimony** will serve as evidence."[23]
>
> — *Jubilees* 1:4–8

22. This claim was not created merely to solve the problem mentioned, namely, that of justifying legal practices not found in the Bible itself. In general, the claim that this or that biblical figure had written a secret book was very common in Second Temple times: it was a way for later authors to attribute to a biblical figure their own ideas about various subjects—the natural world, biblical history, the end of days. Such pseudepigrapha (falsely ascribed works) make up much of the surviving literature of the period.

23. The "*Torah* and the testimony" is a phrase that occurs in Isa. 8:20. The author of *Jubilees* liked it because it suited well his own purpose: he took "Torah" to be a reference to the written text of the

> [God says to Moses:] "Let them not become unclean in these things which I am commanding you upon this mountain."[24] — *Temple Scroll* 51:6–7

> Then He [God] said to me [Ezra], "I revealed myself in a bush and spoke to Moses, when my people were in bondage in Egypt; and I sent him and I led my people out of Egypt and I led him up to Mt. Sinai. And I kept him with me many days. And I told him many wondrous things, and showed him the secrets of the times and declared to him the end of the times. Then I commanded him, saying, "These words you shall publish openly, and these you shall keep secret." — *4 Ezra* 14:3–6 (also 14:37–47)

Other passages refer to esoteric teachings that were transmitted to Moses without, however, specifying that they had been written down in a book:

> The Heavens which are under the throne of Mighty One were severely shaken when He [God] took Moses with him [on Mt. Sinai]. For He showed him many warnings together with the ways of the Law and the end of time, as also . . . the likeness of Zion with its measurements, which was to be made after the likeness of the present sanctuary. He also showed him [other things]. — *2 Baruch* 59:4–5

> The narrative and life of Adam and Eve, the first-made, revealed by God to Moses his servant when he received the tables of the law of the covenant from the hand of the Lord, after he had been taught by the archangel Michael. — *Apocalypse of Moses* 1:1

A Book before Moses

Indeed, the secret book need not necessarily have been revealed to Moses (or to Moses alone); some other ancient worthy might likewise serve as the conduit for authoritative legal (and other) teachings:

> [Enoch says:] And now, my son Methuselah, all these things I recount to you and write down for you . . . Blessed are all the righteous, blessed are all those who walk in the way of righteousness and do not sin like the sinners in the numbering all their days in which the sun journeys in heaven . . . for men go wrong in respect of them and do not know them exactly . . . The year is completed in three hundred and sixty-four days. — *1 Enoch* 82:1–6

> [Abraham instructs Isaac:] Eat its [the sacrifice's] meat during that day and on the next day; but the sun is not to set on it on the next day until it is eaten . . . because this is the way I found [it] written in the books of my ancestors, in the words of Enoch and the words of Noah. — *Jubilees* 21:10

Pentateuch, and used "testimony" (he actually understood this word more in the sense of "solemn warning") to refer to his own book. *Jubilees* was presented as the solemn warning that God's angel had delivered to Moses on Mt. Sinai, a warning about, among other things, the dire consequences of failing to observe the proper calendar ("the divisions of all the times").

24. That is to say, all the words of this text, the *Temple Scroll*, were likewise asserted to have been dictated to Moses at the time of the Sinai revelation.

[Jacob's son Levi recalls:] For thus my [fore]father Abraham commanded me, for thus he found in the writings of the book of Noah concerning the blood. —*Aramaic Levi Document* 57

Children of the Chosen

In the biblical narrative, the laws given to Moses on Mt. Sinai are presented as part of an agreement or covenant: if the Israelites agree to obey these laws, then they will be God's special people. The Israelites accept this offer, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient" (Exod. 24:7).

Yet ancient interpreters could not help wondering why God had chosen Israel to receive this divine offer. After all, these same laws, and this same agreement, could have been proposed to other peoples, indeed, to all of humanity. Why did the Lord of All make this offer to one particular people—and a rather small people at that?

Elsewhere, the Bible indicates that God's special relationship with Israel did not come about simply because, on the day in question, they accepted the laws at Sinai. Instead, the Israelites' special status went back at least to the time of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Indeed, it was only because these ancestors had, by their devotion to God, pleased Him in days of yore that God continued to care for their offspring:

[Moses tells the Israelites:] The Lord took delight in your ancestors and loved them; [hence it was that] He chose their descendants after them, you yourselves, from all other peoples, as it is to this day. —Deut. 10:15

Some interpreters therefore felt that this distinguished ancestry was what caused God to make Israel His special people (and, presumably, therefore to offer them the covenant at Mt. Sinai): Israel had been set apart, as it were, long before Mt. Sinai.

[Ezra prays:] "You made with him [Abraham] an everlasting covenant, and promised him that You would never forsake his descendants, and You gave him Isaac, and to Isaac You gave Jacob and Esau. And You set Jacob apart for Yourself, but Esau You did reject; and Jacob became a great multitude."
—*4 Ezra* 3:15–16

Singled Out from the Start

In another place, the Bible suggested that Israel had been singled out as God's future possession even earlier, at the time when humanity was first being divided up into different nations and peoples:

When the Most High was apportioning out nations, at the time that He separated humanity [into different peoples],
He established the boundaries of peoples according to the number of the sons of God.[25]
But God's own portion is His people, Jacob his allotted heritage.
—Deut. 32:8–9

25. The traditional Hebrew text reads, "sons of Israel."

This seemed to mean that God had decided to take personal charge over Israel, whereas the fortunes of other peoples were given over to heavenly subordinates, angels (the "sons of God") or other powers:

> He [God] chose Israel to be His people. He made them holy and gathered them apart from all mankind. For there are many nations and many peoples, and all belong to Him. He made spirits [that is, angels] rule over all in order to lead them astray from following Him. But over Israel He made no angel or spirit rule because He alone is their ruler. — *Jubilees* 15:30–32

> For every nation He appointed an angel, but Israel is the Lord's own portion.
>
> — Sir. 17:17

> [At the time of the tower of Babel] God called out to the seventy angels that surround his throne of glory and said to them: "Come and let us confuse their speech." And whence do we know that God called out to them? It is said "Come let us go down" [Gen. 11:7]; it does not say "Let Me go down" but "Let *us* . . ." And whence do we know that He cast lots among them [the angels]? It says "When the Most High was apportioning [that is, allotting] nations . . ." [Deut. 32:8], and His lot fell upon Abraham and his household, as it says "But God's own portion is His people, Jacob his allotted heritage."
>
> — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 24

Indeed, according to another text, Israel was singled out even earlier, at the time of the creation of the world:

> [At the conclusion of the creation:] He [God] said to us [angels]: "I will now separate off a people for Myself from among My nations. They too will keep the sabbath. I will make the people holy to Me, and I will bless them, just as I [blessed and] made holy the sabbath day. I will make them holy to Me [and] in this way I will bless them: they will become My people and I will be their God. I have chosen [for this role] the sons of Jacob among all of those whom I have seen. I have recorded them as my firstborn son and have made them holy to Me throughout the ages of eternity. — *Jubilees* 2:19–20

Although the time of the occurrence is not specified, it seems that God may likewise have already decided at the time of the creation of the world that Wisdom (that is, the Torah and its laws) was to dwell with this small people:

> [Wisdom speaks:] Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me [Wisdom] assigned a place for my tent.
> And He said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance."
> From eternity, in the beginning, He created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist.
> In the holy tabernacle I ministered before Him, and so I was established in Zion.
>
> — Sir. 24:8–10

Other Nations Knew Anyway

Perhaps, then, the special relationship implied by the Sinai covenant was based on an earlier decision or commitment of God's: Israel became God's "own possession" because of its meritorious ancestors or some even earlier feature of history. Still, was this a reason for God to promulgate His laws among only one people? Quite apart from their role in the covenant with Israel, were not these laws a potentially valuable thing for *all* nations to know? Would not all derive benefit from a divinely crafted set of statutes?

To this question ancient interpreters gave different answers. On the one hand, the idea that all of humanity had received some set of laws after the flood (see Gen. 9:1–7) seemed to resolve at least part of the difficulty: the statutes given to Israel at Mt. Sinai were perhaps more detailed, but all human beings had in any case been given a basic legal code long before. Philo in more than one place suggested a basic identity between God's laws and nature itself, so that any virtuous individual would end up doing what God's laws required even without being specifically acquainted with them. That explained why, for example, Israel's illustrious ancestors could have behaved in conformity with the laws long before Mt. Sinai:

> The first generations, before any at all of the particular statutes was set in writing, followed the unwritten law with perfect ease, so that one might properly say that the enacted laws are nothing else than memorials of the life of the ancients, preserving for a later generation their actual words and deeds. For they were not scholars or pupils of others, nor did they learn under teachers what was right to say or do; they listened to no voice or instruction but their own; they gladly accepted conformity with **nature**, holding that nature itself was, as indeed it is, the most venerable of statutes, and thus their whole life was one of happy obedience to law.
>
> —Philo, *Abraham* 4–5

Similarly:

> When Gentiles, who do not have the law [that is, the Torah], do **by nature** what the law requires, they are a law by themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness [warns them] and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them. —Rom. 2:14–15

Other Nations at Fault

On the other hand, a number of ancient sources implied that if the other nations of the world did not possess and observe the laws of the Bible, it must be their own fault. Perhaps they had been too proud to accept these laws as their own, or simply had not bothered to learn them:

> For each of the inhabitants of the earth knew when he acted unrighteously, and they did not know My law because of their pride. —*2 Baruch* 48:40

> [God says to Moses at Mt. Sinai:] "For I have given an everlasting Law into your hands, and by it I will judge **the whole world**. For this will be a warning. For if men say, 'We did not know You, that is why we did not serve You,' I will nonetheless make a claim upon them, because they have not learned My law." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:2

The same idea may be present in *4 Ezra,* although it is not clear whether this text is speaking of all of humanity or whether "those who came into the world"[26] might refer specifically to Israel:

> Let many perish who are now living, rather than that the law of God which is set before them be disregarded. For God strictly commanded those who came into the world, when they came, what they should do to live and what they should observe to avoid punishment. Nevertheless they were not obedient, and they spoke against Him; they devised for themselves vain plans.
> —*4 Ezra* 7:20–22

A similar theme in rabbinic literature suggests, more radically, that the covenant offered to Israel at Mt. Sinai had indeed been offered to the other nations of the world, but that these had turned it down:

> The nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah, and this [was done] so as not to give them grounds for saying [to God], "If we had been offered [the Torah] then of course we would have accepted it upon ourselves." So they *were* offered it and did not accept it upon themselves, for it says [with reference to the Sinai revelation], "The Lord came from Sinai and [earlier had] dawned from [Mt.] Seir [home of the Edomites] upon them, He shone forth from Mt. Paran [home of the Ishmaelites, Gen. 21:21], He proceeded from ten thousand holy ones, with the fire of law in His right hand to them.Yea, He favored peoples . . ." [traditional Hebrew text of Deut. 33:1–3]. [This indicated that] He revealed Himself to the descendants of the wicked Esau [that is, the Edomites] and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah upon yourselves?" They said: "What is written in it?" He said to them: "You shall not murder." They said to Him, "But this is the inheritance that our ancestor [Esau] bequeathed to us, as it is said 'And by your sword shall you live' [Gen. 27:40]." He then appeared to the Ammonites and Moabites and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah upon yourselves?" They said: "What is written in it?" He said to them: "You shall not commit adultery." They said to Him: "But we are all of us [the product of] adultery, as it is written 'And Lot's two daughters became pregnant from their father' [Gen. 19:36]—so how can we accept it?" He revealed Himself to the Ishmaelites and said to them: "Will you accept the Torah upon yourselves?" They said: "What is written in it?" He said to them: "You shall not steal." They said to Him: "But this is the blessing by which our ancestor was blessed, 'And he will be a wild ass of a man, his hand against all . . .'[Gen. 16:12], and it

26. The same phrase apparently refers to all of humanity in m. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:2.

> [likewise] is written 'For I have been stolen from the land of the Hebrews' [Gen. 40:15, implying that the Ishmaelites stole Joseph and sold him subsequently]" But when [at length] He came to the people of Israel, "the fire of law from His right hand [was given] to them" [Deut. 33:2]. They exclaimed with one voice: "Everything God has spoken we will do and obey" [Exod. 24:7]. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 5

One Christian answer to the same question held that the divine laws were a temporary measure designed for Israel, a "custodian"[27] into whose care this people had been placed for a time:

> Why then the law [Torah]? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made . . . Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian. — Gal. 3:19–25

Remember This Blood

When Moses wished, finally, to seal Israel's acceptance of God's laws and covenant, he did so in a rather strange way:

> And Moses took half of the blood [of the sacrifices offered at Mt. Sinai] and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar . . . And Moses took the blood [in the basins] and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with these words." — Exod. 24:6–8

This gesture of sprinkling the blood *on the people* had no ready correspondent in later Temple practice and certainly must have seemed strange to interpreters. Some suggested that the phrase "on the people" in this passage really meant "on account of the people," for the people's sake:

> And Moses took the blood [in the basins] and threw it **on the altar** to atone for the people. — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 24:8

> "And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people"—on the altar in the name of the people. — *Midrash Tanna'im* p. 57

The book of *Jubilees* offers a rather clever rationale for this gesture. The author begins by explaining the biblical holiday known as Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost).[28] This holiday is first explicitly mentioned by Moses at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 34:22), but (as is his wont with biblical holidays) the author of *Jubilees* claims that this day was

27. In Greek, *paidagōgos*, a child's tutor or supervisor.

28. See Exod. 34:22, Lev. 23:15–21; in Hebrew the name of this holiday is written *šb'wt*, which means both "weeks" and "oaths." The latter is quite irrelevant to the name of the holiday, but the author of *Jubilees* found a connection.

actually set aside long before Moses proclaimed it a holiday at Mt. Sinai: it was observed by Noah after the flood, at the time when God forbade the eating of an animal's blood with its flesh (Gen. 9:4). For the author of *Jubilees,* this was a central prohibition, and this book therefore specifies something that does not appear in the biblical text itself:

> And Noah and his sons **swore an oath** that they would not eat any blood which was in any flesh. And he made a covenant before the Lord God forever in all generations of the earth in that month. —*Jubilees* 6:10

The reason for this oath is that the expression "Feast of Weeks" in Hebrew could also be translated "Feast of Oaths." For the author of *Jubilees,* that is why this holiday was first established, to commemorate the oath of Noah and his sons never to eat any blood.

> Therefore it is ordained and written in the heavenly tablets that they should observe the Feast of Weeks [or Oaths] in this month, once per year, in order to renew the covenant in all respects, year by year . . . And from the day of the death of Noah, his sons corrupted it [the feast] until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham alone kept it. And Isaac and Jacob and his sons kept it until your days, [Moses,] but in your days the children of Israel forgot it until you renewed it for them on this mountain [Sinai]. —*Jubilees* 6:17–19

What is the connection between all this and the blood Moses sprinkled on the people at Mt. Sinai? According to *Jubilees,* the Sinai revelation took place precisely at the time of the Feast of Weeks (*Jubilees* 1:1). For that reason, Moses took the occasion to "renew" the covenant originally made between God and Noah, and to reinaugurate that covenant's stipulation not to eat any blood. Therefore, the Bible's description of Moses sprinkling blood onto the people took on a new significance. It was a not-too-subtle reminder of the prohibition that, for *Jubilees,* stood at the heart of the covenant: "Do not eat any blood!"

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: God "bowed down" the heavens onto Mt. Sinai and was thus simultaneously in the heavens and on the mountain. Nevertheless, in ascending "up to God" Moses was changed and became, as it were, divine himself. When God uttered the Decalogue He may have uttered all ten commandments, or perhaps only two; the Decalogue in any case was something of an epitome of all the laws to be given to Israel and so had been specially transmitted. Among its provisions was the commandment to keep the Sabbath, with many provisions not specifically stated as such in the Bible; a prohibition of using God's name in the taking of false or vain oaths; and a commandment to honor one's parents because of their likeness to the divine Creator. In addition to the Decalogue, many other laws were given, such as the famous principle "an eye for an eye," which really meant "payment of the value of an eye for an eye."

Moses was also given further information on Mt. Sinai, both about the application of biblical laws to daily life and about the future of the people of Israel. He passed this information on to the people but did not include it in the Pentateuch itself. God gave these laws to Israel as part of His special covenant with them, a covenant that was offered to them because of things that had happened centuries earlier. Nevertheless, the other nations of the earth would be held accountable for not having heeded these laws or having turned down God's covenant themselves.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for At Mt. Sinai

Heralded by Angels: The biblical narrative does not mention an angel directly in connection with the Sinai covenant, but (as discussed in Chapter 18, "An Angel in the Cloud") an angel is said elsewhere to have accompanied the Israelites on their wanderings. More important, in his last words to the people, Moses alludes to the events at Sinai in these terms:

> The Lord came from Sinai and dawned upon them from Seir,
> He shone forth from Mount Paran,
> He proceeded from **ten thousand holy ones,** with the fire of law in His right hand.
> Yea, He loved peoples, all those **sanctified ones** in Your hand.
> — (traditional Hebrew text of) Deut. 33:2–3

This passage had many obscurities in it, and interpreters disagreed as to its precise meaning, but one thing was clear: the "ten thousand holy ones" and "sanctified ones" implied that at the time when "the Lord came from Sinai," He was not alone but accompanied by myriads of angels. So, similarly:

> With tens of thousands of Kadesh, from His right hand **angels with Him.**
> — Septuagint Deut. 33:2

> From Sinai He was revealed and His glory shone forth from Seir, He appeared to us in His might from Mount Paran, and **with Him ten thousand holy ones,** He gave us the Torah, which His right hand had written from amidst the fire. — *Targum Onqelos* Deut. 33:2

> . . . with Him tens of thousands of holy angels . . .
> — *Targums Neophyti, Fragment Targum, Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 33:2

> **With Him** thousands of holy ones, in His right hand the fiery law . . .
> — (Vulgate) Deut. 33:2

The same idea seemed to be present elsewhere in the Bible:

> God's chariotry, twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, the Lord **among** [literally, "in"] **them,** Sinai in holiness . . . — Ps. 68:17

What was the function of these angels at Sinai? Ancient interpreters were of course familiar with the pageantry of kings and emperors in their own day, who appeared in public surrounded by myriads of officials, attendants, and pages. It must have seemed plausible that God had appeared on Mt. Sinai in similar fashion. Beyond this, however, some concluded that such a *multitude* of angels must have had another purpose, that of punishing the wicked:

> [Enoch prophesies:] "And the eternal God will tread from there upon Mt. Sinai, and he will appear with his host, and will appear in the strength of his

> power from heaven . . . And behold! He comes with ten thousand holy ones to **execute judgment** upon them, and to destroy the impious, and to contend with all flesh concerning everything which the sinners and the impious have done and wrought against Him. —*1 Enoch* 1:4, 9

> It was of these [sinners] also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy tenhousands, to execute judgment on all." —Jude 14

Other interpreters spoke of angels being present at Mt. Sinai for the purpose of delivering or proclaiming God's laws:

> Why then the law? . . . It was ordained by angels through an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one. —Gal. 3:19

> [Moses] is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us.[29]

> . . . You who received the law as delivered by angels . . . —Acts 7:38, 53

> If the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how could we escape . . .? —Heb. 2:2

A Kingdom of Priests: When God first proposed His covenant to the Israelites, He said that they would be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). This verse must have presented a problem for some ancient readers: what exactly was a "kingdom of priests"? Did the verse mean that priests would be crowned kings? But elsewhere in the Bible kingship and priesthood appear to be quite separate offices: indeed, kingship was said to have been granted in perpetuity to the descendants of David (2 Sam. 7:11–16), who belonged to the tribe of Judah (see also Gen. 49:10 and Chapter 15 above), while the priesthood belonged to another tribe, Levi.

The verse might be understood to mean that all of Israel, the whole future kingdom, was destined to be a "holy nation" and *in that sense* a "kingdom of priests." This may be the import of a later passage from the book of Isaiah:

> Foreigners shall go and feed your flocks, and strangers shall be your farmers and vinedressers; but you shall be considered priests of the Lord, and described as servants of our God. —Isa. 61:5

Eventually, the day-to-day work of ordinary sustenance will be performed by foreigners, and Israel will be given over entirely to God. This verse might seem to support a similar understanding of God's words to Moses in Exod. 19:6. It is not that all Israelites will literally *be* priests, but, by being freed of everyday concerns and

29. This is the same scenario as that underlying the book of *Jubilees.*

hence able to devote themselves entirely to God, they will be "called" or considered priests.

Nevertheless, the phrase "kingdom of priests" must still have stuck in the throat of many interpreters. Long after the time of Moses, prophets and sages had continued to say that king and priest were separate, nay, complementary, offices (Jer. 33:17–18, 21; Zech. 4:14 [cf. 6:9–13]; Sir. 45:25, 49:11–12). If so, how could there be a "kingdom of priests" in the sense of priests who are also kings?

History was to provide its own answer with the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty, which followed the successful Jewish revolt against the Seleucids in 168–164 B.C.E. The Hasmoneans were descended from a priestly family (1 Macc. 2:1)—indeed, ultimately from Phinehas according to 1 Macc. 2:54 (see below, Chapter 24 and *OR*, "A Leader among Priests"). By midcentury, Jonathan (brother of Judah Maccabee, leader of the revolt) had established himself as both temporal leader and high priest. This Hasmonean concentration of the priesthood and political leadership in a single ruler endured for a time, although it eventually met up with opposition from various groups.

We cannot know for sure how, and in what stages, the interpretation of Exod. 19:6 was influenced by these considerations, especially because existing texts touching on this sensitive topic may well have been modified later to fit a new set of circumstances or ideology. In any case, it is striking that the phrase "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" sometimes was transformed so as to refer to three clearly separate entities:

> And you shall be to me a palace, a priesthood [or "kingly priesthood"],[30] and a holy nation. —Septuagint Exod. 19:6

> And you shall be before Me kings, priests and a holy nation.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 19:6

> And you shall be before Me kings and priests and a holy nation.
> — *Targum Neophyti* and *Fragment Targum* Exod. 19:6

> And you shall be to Me a kingdom and priests and a holy people.
> —Peshitta Exod. 19:6

> And you shall be before Me kings wreathed with crowns and priests who serve [in the Temple] and a holy nation.
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 19:6

> All of the descendants of his [Abraham's] sons would become nations, and would be counted with the nations. But one of Isaac's sons would become a holy seed and he would not be counted among the nations,[31] because he

30. In Greek this is *basileion hierateuma kai ethnos hagion.* The first two words are (perhaps purposely) ambiguous: they could be taken as an adjective followed by its noun, that is, a "kingly priesthood," "a royal priesthood." But they could also be taken as two nouns in succession, "a kingship, [or "palace"], a priesthood"—that is, Israel is here promised to become, or to contain, a kingship and a priesthood and also a holy nation.

31. Based on Num. 23:9, where Balaam describes Israel as "a people dwelling alone, and not counted among the nations."

> would become the portion of the Most High [Deut. 32:8–9], and all his descendants would fall into that [share] which God owns, so that they would become a people whom the Lord possesses out of all the nations; and they would become a kingdom and priesthood and a holy people.[32]
>
> —*Jubilees* 16:17–18

> It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance [the national homeland] to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the sanctification [i.e., the making holy] as He promised through the law [= Torah]. —2 Macc. 2:18[33]

> But the Scriptures referred to [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] as fathers of a single race, which it called a "kingship and priesthood and a holy nation."
>
> —Philo, *On Abraham* 56

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood [the Septuagint's ambiguous phrase], a holy nation, God's own people. —1 Pet. 2:9 (cf. 2:5)

> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you . . . [who] have made them a kingdom and priests to our God." —Rev. 5:9–10 (also Rev. 1:6, 20:6)

> Some shall be kings, some shall be priests, and all shall be holy [set apart] from the impurities of the nations. —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 19:1

Note, however:

> And you shall be to Me a priestly kingdom. —(Vulgate) Exod. 19:6

One text from Qumran may have connected this expression to God's angels:

> [The "holy ones"] shall be priests, His holy people, His army and His servants, the angels of His glory. —(4Q506) *Words of the Luminaries*

However the combination of kingship and priesthood in Exod. 19:6 was construed, the message for some was that Israel's overall priestly and "holy" status was an expression of its special connection with God. This seems to be the case with 1 Pet. 2:9 (above) as well as in the following:

> Israel is a holy people for the Lord its God. It is the nation which He possesses; it is a priestly nation; it is a priestly kingdom; it is what He owns.
>
> —*Jubilees* 33:20

In several places Philo seems to interpret this phrase as indicating that Israel is, properly speaking, a *people of priests,* one that functions as the priesthood of the whole world:

32. The Latin text here has *regnum sacerdotale* ("priestly kingdom"), but the Ethiopic text has (similar to some translations of Exod. 19:6) "a kingdom and priesthood and a holy nation." See further VanderKam, *Jubilees,* 98, as well as *Jubilees* 33:20 and its textual problem, VanderKam, *Jubilees,* 224.

33. Jonathan Goldstein has proposed to amend the text ("in order to give it good Greek syntax") to "God, Who saved His entire people and restored the heritage to us all, *will also restore* the kingdom and the priesthood and the sanctification." Goldstein, *II Maccabees,* 187.

> [Of Israel] the oracles say that they are "the palace[34] and priesthood of God" [= Exod. 19:6], thus following in due sequence the thought originated in Shem, in whose houses it was prayed that God might dwell [Gen. 9:27]. For surely by "palace" is meant the [heavenly] King's house, which is indeed holy and the only inviolable sanctuary. —Philo, *On Sobriety* 66

> The Jewish nation is to the whole inhabited world what the priest is to the State. —Philo, *Special Laws* 2:163

> [Israel is] a nation destined to be consecrated above all others to offer prayers forever on behalf of the human race that it may be delivered from evil and participate in what is good.
> —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:149 (see also 2:224–225)

Note that, as in 1 Pet. 2:9, Christians came to apply this phrase to the church:

> But you are the catholic, most holy Church, a royal priesthood, a holy multitude. —*Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 8

See also Scott, "A Kingdom of Priests"; Muñoz-León, "Un reino de sacerdotes." A Qumran fragment similarly asserts that

> God will sanctify to Himself a sanctuary of eternity and purity among those who are cleansed, and they shall be **priests, his righteous people,** his host, and ministering [with] His glorious angels.
> —(4Q511) *Songs of a Sage*[b] fragment 35

Connected with Exod. 19:6 (among other verses) is another issue, that of the belief in two messiahs, one to come from the (priestly) tribe of Levi and one from (kingly) Judah—and more generally the leadership role attributed to these two tribes in particular—in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and in various other texts. See on this Ginzberg, *An Unknown Jewish Sect,* 227–232; Liver, "Doctrine of the Two Messiahs," 149–185; Hultgård, *L'eschatologie,* 1:58–79; see also Chapter 24.

The Symbolic Fire at Sinai: In describing the Sinai revelation, the Bible says that God had gone down on top of the mountain in the form of some sort of fire:

> And Mt. Sinai was altogether smoke, because the Lord had descended onto it **in fire,** and this smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace and the mountain trembled greatly. —Exod. 19:18

Understandably, this "descent" struck some interpreters as too anthropomorphic an action and was consequently somewhat modified:

> And Mt. Sinai was altogether smoke, because the Lord had been **revealed** upon it in fire, and this smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace and the mountain trembled greatly. —*Targum Onqelos* Exod. 19:18

34. Philo reads the Greek *basileion* as the noun for "palace."

However, there remained the question of the fire itself: what was it there for? The presence of the fire is repeatedly stressed in the retelling of these same events in Deuteronomy, where God speaks "from the midst of the fire" (Deut. 9:10, 10:4, 18:16, and so on). Elsewhere God Himself is described as a "consuming fire" (Exod. 24:17; Deut. 4:24, 9:3). Yet how could Moses speak with God or enter into His presence if He came down in the form of a consuming fire? To some it therefore seemed that the fire spoken of here was not like ordinary fire—perhaps it was intended to impart some lesson about God's power, or was otherwise to be understood symbolically:

> It is said in the book of the Law that there was a descent of God upon the mountain, at the time when He was giving the Law . . . [But] the descent was not local, for God is everywhere. Rather he [the lawgiver] showed that the power of fire, which is marvelous beyond all things because it consumes all things, blazes without substances and consumes nothing, unless the power from God [to consume] is added to it. For although the regions were blazing mightily, it [the fire] consumed nothing of the growing things throughout the mountain, but the foliage of all of them remained untouched by fire.[35] Therefore, it is clear that the divine descent occurred . . . in order that the viewers might comprehend each of these things in a revelatory way—not that the fire consumed nothing, as has been said . . . but that God, without any aid, manifested his own majesty, which is throughout all things.
>
> —Aristobulus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8.10.12–17)

> Admirable too, and worthy of God, is the saying that the voice proceeded from the fire, for the oracles of God have been refined and assayed as gold is by fire [an apparent allusion to Ps. 18:30]. And it conveys too, **symbolically,** some such meaning as this: since it is the nature of fire both to give light and to burn, those who resolve to be obedient to the divine utterances will live forever as in unclouded light with the laws themselves as stars illuminating their souls, while all who are rebellious will continue to be burnt . . . by their inward lusts. —Philo, *The Decalogue* 48

> [An angel explains Baruch's vision:] And the fourth bright waters which you have seen, this is the coming of Moses and of Aaron . . . For at that time the **lamp of the eternal law** which exists forever and ever illuminated all those who sat in darkness. This [lamp] will announce to believers the promise of their reward, and to nay-sayers [it will announce] the punishment of the **fire** which is kept for them. —*2 Baruch* 59:1–2

Understanding the fire as representing the Torah would accord well with the traditional Hebrew text of Deut. 33:2, which describes God as coming "from Sinai . . . with a fiery law for them in His right hand":

> He gave us the Torah, which His right hand had written from amidst the fire. —*Targum Onqelos* Deut. 33:2

35. This is reminiscent of the motif "Miraculously Burning Bush" treated above in Chapter 16.

> He extended His hand from the midst of the fiery flames and gave the Torah to His people. — *Targum Neophyti* Deut. 33:2

> . . . a fiery law . . . — Aquila, Symmachus, Vulgate Deut. 33:2

See also Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 171; Maori, *Peshitta Version,* 278.

Seeing the Voices: According to Exod. 20:15, the people standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai "saw the thunderings and the flashes, and the sound of the trumpet and the smoking mountain." Although the text says that they *saw,* the fact that the object of this verb includes things heard and seen together suggests that "seeing" here might mean more generally "perceiving" (and so indeed the verb is translated in some modern translations).

However, to ancient readers, this was not necessarily the text's true meaning. To begin with, the word translated as "thunderings" means literally "sounds" or "voices." It was specifically in that sense that some ancient versions took it:

> And all the people **saw the sound** and the torches. — Septuagint Exod. 20:18

> And all the people **saw the sounds** and the torches. — Vulgate Exod. 20:18

But how can one see sounds or voices? Ancient interpreters took this phrase quite literally—it meant that the Israelites actually *saw* the sounds:

> The flame became articulated speech in the language familiar to the audience, and so clearly and distinctly were the words formed by it that they seemed to see rather than hear them. All the people "saw the voice," a phrase fraught with much meaning, for it is the case that the voice of men is audible, but the voice of God is truly visible. How so? Because whatever God says is not words but deed, which are judged by the eyes rather than the ears. — Philo, *The Decalogue* 46–47

> They saw what was visible and heard what was audible—so said R. Ishmael. But Rabbi Akiba said: they saw and heard what was visible, that is, they saw a word made out of fire coming out of the mouth of the Almighty and being engraved on the tablets. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 9

> The first commandment that went forth from the mouth of God like flashes and lightning and fiery lamps—a fiery lamp to His left and a flaming lamp to His right—flew up and glided aloft in the air and then came back, and all [the people] of Israel saw it and were afraid, it came back and was engraved on the two tablets. — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 20:2

> R. Judah said: When a person speaks with his fellow, he himself is seen but his voice is not seen. But Israel both heard God's voice and saw the voice going forth from His mouth, and lightning and thunder, as it says, "And all the people saw the voices." — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 41

Some interpreters may have found a "precedent" for seeing speech in what had happened earlier to Moses, at the time of the burning bush, since there, too, God had apparently communicated a verbal message visually. See Chapter 16, *OR*, "God Spoke with Fire." Note with regard to Philo's understanding that the Septuagint translation reads *voice* in the singular: Philo understood this to be (as the above passage indicates, also *Migration of Abraham* 47–48) God's own voice, whose very visibility betokens the difference between divine and human language. See also Niehoff, "Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language."

God Spoke Only Two: We saw that the switch from the first- to the third-person singular within the Decalogue caused ancient interpreters to conclude that God had spoken only the first two commandments directly to Israel. This conclusion was supported by a verse in the Psalms,

> One [time] has God spoken, two did I hear . . . —Ps. 62:11

Rabbinic interpreters understood this as meaning, "on one occasion did God speak [directly to us]; two commandments did I hear." In addition, later commentators noticed that the numerical value *(gematria)* of the word "Torah" in Hebrew is 611. Since the traditional number of divine commandments in the Pentateuch was 613, then the statement in Deut. 33:4 "Moses commanded us the Torah" was understood as "Moses commanded us 611" commandments. That left two to have been given directly by God. See *Song of Songs Rabba* 1:2 (end), *Midrash on Psalms* 17.

The Ten Were All: In connection with this theme note should be taken of the central claim of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* concerning the Decalogue and the laws immediately following it (called by this text the "judgments," apparently the same word translated as "ordinances" in Exod. 21:1; the judgments are thus the whole corpus of laws in Exod. 20:22–23:33). The *Didascalia* refers to the Decalogue and the "judgments" collectively as the "First Law" (or sometimes simply the "Law"). This First Law, it says, is valid for Christians, whereas the other laws of the Pentateuch (called by the *Didascalia* the "Second Legislation" = *deuterosis*) have no standing:

> Yet when you read the Law [= Pentateuch], beware of the Second Legislation, so that you merely read it. But keep far away from the commandments and warnings that are found within it . . . For the First Law is that which the Lord God spoke before the people had made the [golden] calf and served idols, which consists of the Decalogue and the judgments. However, those things which He rightly commanded *them* after the idolatry and imposed upon *them* as laws, do not draw these bonds upon yourself, for our Savior came for no other reason than to fulfill the law and to loose the bonds of the Second Legislation . . .
>
> The Law therefore cannot be destroyed, whereas the Second Legislation is temporary and may be abrogated . . . The Law then is the Decalogue and the judgments, which the Lord spoke before the people made the calf and committed idolatry . . . This is the simple and light law, containing no

> burdensome preparations of foods or sacrifices or burnt offerings. In this law He speaks as well about the church and the [needlessness of circumcising the] foreskin, for the dispensation that He [gives] speaks [not] only concerning sacrifices [when it says] thusly: "If you make me an altar you shall make it of earth; if, however, you make it of stones, you shall not make it of cut stones, for if you have set down an iron tool upon it, it is profaned" [≅ Exod. 20:25]. It is speaking not about the axe, but about the hand-instrument, namely, the physician's iron, which circumcises the foreskin.
>
> For the Second Legislation was imposed for the making of the calf and for idolatry. But you through baptism have been set free from idolatry and from the Second Legislation. — *Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 2, 26

See further Connolly, *Didascalia,* xxxiv, lxvi–lxvii.

With regard to the motif "The Ten Were All" and the public recitation of the Decalogue, the passage cited from m. *Tamid* 5:1 mentioned that the latter was a feature of the service in the Jerusalem Temple. The earliest attestation of this practice is perhaps to be found in the writings of Hecataeus of Abdera, c. 300 B.C.E.:

> It is [the Jewish high priest], we are told, who in their assemblies and other gatherings announces **what has been ordained,** and the Jews are so docile in such matters that straightaway they fall to the ground and do reverence to the high priest when he expounds **the commandments** to them. And at the end of their laws there is even appended the statement: "These are the words that Moses heard from God and declared to the Jews."
>
> — Hecataeus of Abdera, in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40:3:6

It is far from clear to what this passage may refer (the last citation might be a restatement of Deut. 33:4), but the Decalogue is certainly a possibility; for others, see Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,* 32.

While the public reading of the Decalogue was ultimately banned from the synagogue service in virtually all other congregations, it seems to have been retained in the Eretz-Israel rite of prayer as attested by documents found in the Cairo Genizah. See Fleischer, *Eretz-Israel Prayer,* 259–274. Various attempts were made elsewhere to revive the custom in the synagogue service: see Urbach, "The Decalogue in Jewish Worship," 161–189.

In connection with the public recitation of the Decalogue, we also saw the claim—attributed to "sectarians" or "heretics" in j. *Berakhot* 1:8—that the Decalogue alone constituted the sum total of laws given to Israel by God, all the rest presumably having originated with Moses. Further light may be shed on this claim by the *Nash Papyrus,* an ancient manuscript possibly dating from around 150 B.C.E. This brief text contains the Decalogue followed by the beginning of the Shema (Deut. 6:4–9). The two passages may have been written together in this text because they were intended to be recited together as part of the public liturgy, just as specified in m. *Tamid* 5:1. It is noteworthy, in any case, that separating the Decalogue and the Shema in this text there appear the following words:

> These are the statutes and the laws which Moses commanded the Israelites in the wilderness when they went out of Egypt. —*Nash Papyrus* 22–23

Interestingly, the same words appear in the Septuagint at Deut. 6:4—but with one important change:

> These are the statutes and the laws which **the Lord** commanded the Israelites in the wilderness when they went out of Egypt. —Septuagint Deut. 6:4

These words do not make very good sense in their broader context in the Septuagint.[36] It seems likely that they were inserted by the Septuagint translators because they were an established part of the liturgy, something people were used to hearing just after the Decalogue and before the Shema. It may well be that these words were originally introduced into the liturgy as a conclusion to the Decalogue reading rather than as an introduction to the Shema (since the Shema itself could hardly be described as "statutes and laws"). But if the original version of this sentence is that preserved in the Septuagint (that is, that the Decalogue constituted "the statutes and the laws which *the Lord* commanded"), then this sentence might likewise seem to embody the belief that the Decalogue *alone* constituted the sum total of laws "which the Lord commanded the Israelites in the wilderness when they went out of Egypt"—precisely the claim that rabbinic texts attribute to the "sectarians" or "heretics."[37] See also Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies,* 169–170; Urbach, "Role of the Ten Commandments," 163–164.

The Decalogue Epitomizes: The idea that the Decalogue constitutes a précis or series of general headings for all the commandments of the Torah was, as we have seen briefly, well attested in Philo: it in fact became the basis for his exposition of all the laws. (See on this Amir, "Decalogue.") However, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which this idea might have been promulgated by his predecessors or contemporaries elsewhere. To begin with, the claim by "heretics" that the Decalogue *alone* was revealed by God to Moses certainly must have had a chilling effect on rabbinic celebration of its specialness (quite apart from the discontinuation of the regular liturgical reading of the Decalogue discussed above).

Nevertheless, a number of passages from rabbinic and postrabbinic writings seem to suggest that the view of the Decalogue as the epitome of all laws had not entirely died, or else came to be revived after a time. This does not appear to be the case with one rabbinic text frequently cited in this regard:

> Ḥananyah the son of the brother of R. Joshua [said]: Just as at the sea, between one big wave and the next big wave come little waves, so between

36. Moses had just said in Deut. 6:1: "Now these are the commandments and the statutes and the laws which the Lord God commanded."

37. Indeed, the *Nash Papyrus* version ("the statutes and the laws which *Moses* commanded . . .") may be a reformulation intended precisely to negate the Septuagint version's implication that the Decalogue laws were God's and all the rest belonged to Moses.

> each and every commandment [of the Decalogue] came clarifications and specifications of the Torah. —j. *Sheqalim* 6:1

At first glance this passage might indeed seem to provide a nice rabbinic parallel to Philo's notion of the Decalogue as "headings." However, it is far from clear that the "little waves" are other, ordinary commandments; the wording seems to suggest that, on the contrary, after each and every commandment of the Decalogue came further details about how the commandment was to be carried out in practice. This in turn seems to be aimed at the larger exegetical question of why it took *two* stone tables to write down only ten commandments. This question indeed is the same as that being addressed by the other opinions cited in the Jerusalem Talmud in proximity to Ḥananyah's, namely, that the Decalogue appeared in its entirety on each stone table, nay, was written twice or four times on each table, and so forth. All are designed to explain why so much room was needed for relatively little material. (On related matters, see Urbach, *The Sages,* 360–361.)

Many scholars have pointed out the similarity between Philo's "headings" and part of the *'Azharot* of R. Sa'adya Ga'on in the tenth century. Again, it is difficult to know whether there is "a chain of tradition, the links of which are not available to us" (Amir, "Decalogue," 128) connecting Sa'adya and Philo, or whether this is a case of later reinvention (Urbach, *The Sages,* 362); see also Winston, "Philo's *Nachleben* in Judaism," 103–110; Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature,* 15–16. The same doubt surrounds a similar notion present in later midrashic collections; see *Numbers Rabba* 13:16 (end), *Bereshit Rabbati* (H. Albeck ed.) 8; *Yalqut Shimoni, Qoraḥ,* 247. See further Cohen, "Jewish Dimension," 165–186; Urbach, "The Role of the Ten Commandments in Jewish Worship," 172–179.

A Singular Set of Laws: The Decalogue was delivered to all of Israel assembled at Mt. Sinai. Nevertheless, the laws themselves are all couched in the second-person *singular—thou* shalt and *thou* shalt not—rather than in the plural "you." To ancient interpreters, this form seemed to call out for explanation. Some simply assumed that although the singular was used, its intended meaning was in the plural:

> He said: My people, children of Israel, I am **your** [in the plural] God who redeemed and brought **you** [plural] out of the Egyptian servitude.
> — *Targum Neophyti* (etc.) Exod. 20:2

Another possibility was that Israel was being addressed as a unity, one single entity. This explanation may be reflected as well in the targumic tradition, which, along with the switch to the plural forms, nonetheless seems to stress that the people as a whole are being addressed:

> He said: **My people, children of Israel,** I am your [in the plural] God who redeemed and brought you [plural] out of the Egyptian servitude.
> — *Targum Neophyti* (etc.) Exod. 20:2

> And the Lord spoke **to His people** all these words, saying: "I am the Lord your God." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:6

But other answers were also put forward:

> [Why did God,] in proclaiming His ten oracles, see fit to address [each individual] not collectively but as one [person]? . . . One answer that must be given is that He wishes to teach the readers of the Sacred Scriptures a most excellent lesson, namely, that each single person, when he is law-abiding and obedient to God, is equal in worth to a whole nation, even the most populous, or rather to all nations, and if we may go still farther, even to the whole world . . . A second reason is that, while a speaker who harangues a multitude in general does not necessarily talk to any one person, if he addresses his commands or prohibitions as though to each individual separately, the practical instructions given in the course of his speech are at once held to apply to the whole body in common also.
>
> —Philo, *The Decalogue* 36–39

> When God was speaking to Israel, each and every Israelite said: With me is the divine voice speaking, since it does not say "I am the Lord your [in the plural] God [that is, of many *you's*]," but "I am the Lord your [in the singular] God." —*Pesiqta deR. Kahana* 12

> Why were the Ten Commandments spoken in the singular? Because [later on,] single individuals violated them: "I am the Lord your God" was violated by Micah [see Judg. 18:24, 31],[38] "You shall have no other gods" was violated by Jeroboam [1 Kings 12:28], "You shall not take the name of the Lord . . ." was violated by the blasphemer [Lev. 24:11]. —*Pesiqta Rabbati* 21

> Sometimes God speaks with them as if He is speaking with many people, and sometimes as if He is speaking with a single person. It is out of the love that He feels for them and the joy by which He rejoices in them that He speaks with them as if with a single person.
>
> —*Yalqut Shimoni, Wa'eṯḥanan* 829

See also Ginzberg, *Legends,* 6:40, 60; Bamberger, "Philo and the Aggadah," 172.

Five and Five: We saw earlier that one explanation for the special treatment of the Ten Commandments was that they constituted some sort of summary or epitome of *all* the commandments. The division into five and five suggested a further refinement: the first five constituted the epitome of all the laws governing relations between man and God, while the second five did the same with regard to relations between human beings.

38. For a similar treatment of Micah, see Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* ch. 44.

> Further, the ten words on them . . . are divided equally into two sets of five, the former comprising duties to God, and the other duties to men.
>
> — Philo, *Who Is Heir* 168

It may be that such a schema underlies the saying cited earlier from the Gospels:

> And a [man] asked him: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, ". . .You know the commandments: Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother . . ."
>
> — Mark 10:17–19 (see also Luke 18:18–20, Matt. 19:16–19)

The list given basically corresponds to the second five commandments of the Decalogue (in the order of the Septuagint tradition) save that the very last, instead of being the prohibition of coveting, is the injunction to honor one's father and mother (out of order!). Perhaps the original list did indeed consist solely of the last five commandments but later the commandment to honor one's father and mother was substituted for the prohibition of coveting, since the former is both somewhat more concrete and more seemly.

But why would the questioner be given a list only of the last five? It may be that, since he was a "ruler" and (presumably) not a Jew, only the "interhuman" commandments were required of him. The same idea seems to underlie a somewhat later text:

> God accorded great honor to the nations of the world [in the Decalogue]. In the first five commandments, which God gave to Israel [exclusively], His name appears, [as if to say] that if Israel sinned He would make complaint against them; in the latter five commandments, which He [also] gave to the nations of the world, His name does not appear in them, [as if to say] that if the nations of the world sinned he would not complain against them.
>
> — *Pesiqta Rabbati* 21

Here, too, the first five commandments are given to Israel, and the last five to the nations of the world (as well).

With regard to Luke 18:18–20 and parallels, David Flusser has suggested that there existed in late antiquity a standard sermon based upon the last five of the Ten Commandments, connecting them to the verse "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) or, possibly, the Golden Rule (compare R. Akiba in *Sifra Qedoshim* 9:12). The starting point of such a sermon, according to Flusser, would be the idea discussed above, namely, that all the commandments of the Torah are epitomized in the Decalogue, and that the last five concern relations "between man and his fellow." These last five might in turn have been epitomized via the one commandment to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18), while the first five might have been epitomized by the words of the Shema concerning relations between man and God, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). Both these commandments, Lev. 19:18 and

Deut. 6:5, begin with "And you shall love . . ." *(wĕ'āhabtā).* Flusser relates this putative twofold epitome to Philo:

> But among the vast number of particular truths and principles there studied, there stand out practically high above the others two main heads: one of duty to God, as shown by piety and holiness, one of duty to men, as shown by humanity and justice. —Philo, *Special Laws* 2:63

See Flusser, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," 219–246. Significant in this connection is a verse in Ben Sira:

> And He said to them [humanity], "Beware of all evil," and he commanded them each **concerning his neighbor.** —Sir. 17:14

This verse appears to be some sort of shorthand reference to all commandments concerning interhuman relations such as those epitomized in the second half of the Decalogue or Lev. 19:17. See further Chapter 22, "Love As You Would Be Loved" and *OR,* "The Whole Torah."

Which Ten Commandments? The *Nash Papyrus* further muddies the waters on the question of what exactly constituted the Ten Commandments, since it seems to contain a blend of elements from the two (slightly different) versions of the Decalogue found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 in the traditional Hebrew text and other witnesses; compare Exodus 20 in the Septuagint. Interestingly, its ordering of the prohibitions is like that seen above in one Septuagint tradition of the Deuteronomy Decalogue (and later sources): adultery, murder, and stealing. A Deuteronomy manuscript from Qumran ($4QDt^n$) similarly seems to blend elements known from the traditions cited. See White, "All Souls Deuteronomy," 193–206.

Beyond this and all the other possible sources of confusion in the numbering and ordering of the ten commandments, the Samaritan tradition inserted just before the end of the commandments an expanded version of Deut. 27:2–8 (specifying that "all the words of this Torah" be written on stones "on Mt. Gerizim"); this presumably was the tenth commandment in their numbering. A final source of confusion is to be mentioned: largely as a consequence of the variations cited, the verses of the Decalogue are numbered differently today in the Bibles of Jews, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and various Protestant denominations.

Omnium Malorum Radix: Connected with the above is the tendency among Jewish and Christian writers to use the Decalogue, and in particular the last five commandments thereof, as the framework or starting point for a catalog of human sins. The tendency to evoke the Decalogue itself as part of an overall indictment is witnessed even among Israel's ancient prophets:

> There is no faithfulness or kindness or obedience to God in the land, [but only] swearing and lying, **murder and stealing and adultery;** they have broken [all] bounds and blood has spilled over to blood. —Hos. 4:1–2

> Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you **steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely,** burn incense to Ba'al, and go after **other gods** that you have not known? —Jer. 7:8–9

The same sort of Decalogue-based catalog of sins is found among ancient interpreters (indeed, it may ultimately be connected to the motif "The Decalogue Epitomizes"):

> All the righteous
> will be saved, but the impious will then be destroyed
> for all ages, as many as formerly did evil
> or committed **murders,** and as many as are accomplices,
> liars, and crafty **thieves,** and dread destroyers of **houses,**
> parasites, and **adulterers,** who pour out slander,
> terrible violent men, and lawless ones, and **idol worshipers;**
> as many as **abandoned the great immortal God**
> and became **blasphemers** and ravagers of the pious.
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 2:253–261

> Phocylides, the wisest of men, sets forth
> these counsels of God by his holy judgments, gifts of blessing.
> Neither commit **adultery** nor rouse homosexual passion.
> Neither devise treachery nor **stain your hands with blood.**
> Do not **become rich unjustly,** but live from honorable means.
> Be content with what you have and **abstain from what is another's.**
> **Do not tell lies,** but always speak the truth.
> Honor God foremost, and afterward your **parents.**
> —Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sentences* 1–8

> For out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, **murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness,** slander. These are what defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.
> —Matt. 15:19–20 (cf. Mark 7:21–23)

> But the second commandment of the teaching [to love one's neighbor as oneself, includes] this: "You shall not **murder**; you shall not commit **adultery,** you shall not commit sodomy; you shall not commit fornication; you shall not **steal**; you shall not use magic; you shall not use potions [probably, to prevent or terminate pregnancy], you shall not cause a miscarriage nor kill the infant once born; you shall not **covet** what belongs to your neighbor; you shall not commit **perjury**; you shall not bear **false witness,** or speak evil, or bear a grudge; you shall not be "two-minded" [apparently, saying one thing and thinking another] or "two-tongued" [saying one thing to X and another to Y], for to be "two-tongued" is a death trap.
>
> But the path of death is this: First of all, it is evil and full of cursing; **murders, adulteries,** lusts, **fornications, thefts, idolatries,** witchcrafts, charms, robberies, **false witness,** hypocrisies, a double heart, fraud, pride,

> malice, stubbornness, **covetousness,** foul speech, jealousy, impudence, haughtiness, boastfulness. —*Didache* 2:1–4; 5:1

(Note that an "expanded Decalogue" like that of the *Didache* here also appears in the *Letter of Barnabas* 19 and the *Doctrina Apostolorum.*)

Indeed, the same sort of attempt to epitomize the Decalogue itself may stand behind the following passage, in which, specifically, *idolatry* becomes the root of all evils:

> And this [the worship of idols] became a hidden trap for mankind. For men, in bondage to misfortune or to royal authority, bestowed on objects of stone or wood **the name that ought not to be shared.** Afterward, it was not enough for them to **err about the knowledge of God,** but they live in great strife due to ignorance, and they call such great evils peace. For whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold frenzied revels with strange customs, they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously **kill** one another, or grieve one another by **adultery,** and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, **theft and deceit,** corruption, faithlessness, tumult, **perjury,** confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, pollution of souls, sex perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil.
>
> —Wisd. 14:21–27

Obviously, the various evils named in this (somewhat repetitive) list go well beyond the Decalogue. Yet the Decalogue among other things seems to be on this author's mind, since the items highlighted above appear to correspond to the commandments concerning (in order of appearance) taking the name of God in vain (here in the somewhat different sense of calling by the name "God" that which is not divine), recognizing God's exclusive sovereignty, and then disregarding the prohibitions of murder, adultery, theft (and perhaps deceit as part of theft), and false witness (perjury).

The author of *3 Baruch,* by contrast, attributes most of the ills contained in the "between man and his fellow" part of the Decalogue to alcoholic consumption:

> For those who drink excessively do these things: Brother does not have mercy on brother, nor father on son, **nor children on parents,** but by means of the Fall through wine come forth all [these]: **murder, adultery, fornication, perjury, theft,** and similar things. And nothing good is accomplished through it. —*3 Baruch* (Greek) 4:17

Note also the theme that the Decalogue's "covetousness" is the source of all evil in *Apocalypse of Moses* 19:3; cf. Rom. 7:7 and James 1:15.

The last five prohibitions of the Decalogue also feature prominently in a rabbinic midrash cited earlier:

> The nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah, and this [was done] so as not to give them grounds for saying [to God], "If we had been

offered [the Torah] then of course we would have accepted it upon ourselves." So they *were* offered it and did not accept it upon themselves, for it says [with reference to the Sinai revelation], "The Lord came from Sinai and [earlier had] dawned from [Mt.] Seir [home of the Edomites] upon them, He shone forth from Mt. Paran [home of the Ishmaelites, Gen. 21:21], He proceeded from ten thousand holy ones, with the fire of law in His right hand to them.Yea, He favored peoples . . ." [traditional Hebrew text of Deut. 33:1–3]. [This indicated that] He revealed Himself to the descendants of the wicked Esau [that is, the Edomites] and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah upon yourselves?" They said: "What is written in it?" He said to them: "**You shall not murder.**" They said to Him, "But this is the inheritance that our ancestor [Esau] bequeathed to us, as it is said 'And by your sword shall you live' [Gen. 27:40]." He then appeared to the Ammonites and Moabites and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah upon yourselves?" They said: "What is written in it?" He said to them: "**You shall not commit adultery.**" They said to Him: "But we are all of us [the product of] adultery, as it is written 'And Lot's two daughters became pregnant from their father' [Gen. 19:36]—so how can we accept it?" He revealed Himself to the Ishmaelites and said to them: "Will you accept the Torah upon yourselves?" They said: "What is written in it?" He said to them: "**You shall not steal.**" They said to Him: "But this is the blessing by which our ancestor was blessed, 'And he will be a wild ass of a man, his hand in all . . .' [Gen. 16:12], and it [likewise] is written 'For I have been stolen from the land of the Hebrews' [Gen. 40:15, implying that the Ishmaelites stole Joseph and sold him subsequently]." But when [at length] he came to the people of Israel, "the fire of law from His right hand [was given] to them" [Deut. 33:2]. They exclaimed with one voice: "Everything God has spoken we will do and obey" [Exod. 24:7].

—*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 5

Here again there is an obvious attempt to tailor things to the Decalogue's prohibitions. For certainly the most obvious law violated by Lot in sleeping with his daughters was not the prohibition of adultery, but that of incest [Lev. 18:7]. If, nevertheless, this text speaks of adultery, it does so to mention another prohibition found in the Decalogue. It should, however, be noted that Lot may have also been guilty of adultery in sleeping with his daughters, since in Gen. 19:14 Lot addresses "his sons-in-law, those who were to marry his daughters." From this interpreters justifiably concluded that Lot's two daughters were married, or engaged (or both—see *Genesis Rabba* 50:9). Even if these men were subsequently killed in the destruction of Sodom, another man would not be free to marry the widows unless proof of their husbands' demise had been produced.

Guard the Sabbath Borders: On this motif, see further Gilat, "On the Antiquity of Some Sabbath Prohibitions," 104–106. Jth. 8:6 says that Judith fasted "all the days of her widowhood, save for the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself," and this too would give evidence of a "guarding of the sabbath border." See Grintz, *Judith*, 187.

In one text the reference to the precise time of day involved is somewhat puzzling:

> No one shall do work on Friday from the time **when the sphere of the sun is distant from the gate [by] its [the sun's] full size,** for this is why it is said, "Guard the Sabbath day to sanctify it" [Deut. 5:12].
>
> — *Damascus Document* 10:14–17

The above translation is far from certain, and in any case the "gate" in question is not identified. The idea seems to be that work must cease when the disk of the sun is its own diameter away from the horizon. Yigael Yadin has suggested that this passage may refer to a primitive kind of sun clock; see his discussion of the "dial of Ahaz" referred to in 2 Kings 20:8–11, Isa. 38:7–8 (Yadin, "The Dial of Ahaz"; also, Sloley, "Primitive Methods of Measuring Time," 172–173). Israel Ta-Shema, "Tosefet Shabbat," points out that, since such sun clocks are inaccurate in the early morning and late afternoon, Neh. 13:19 must indicate that the gates were shut some considerable time before sunset.

"Remember" and "Keep" Together: When the Decalogue is repeated in Deuteronomy 5, the wording of the Sabbath law differs from that of Exodus 20: among other things, instead of saying "*Remember* the sabbath day" as in Exod. 20:8, there the text says to "keep" or "guard" it (Deut. 5:12). Although this apparent contradiction came to be connected to the theme of "guarding the sabbath's borders," it suggested to yet other interpreters a different lesson, that divine speech is unlike human speech: if both words appear, it must have been that God had uttered both simultaneously! And, just as in this case God had said two different things at once, so other apparently contradictory utterances in Scripture were nonetheless capable of being uttered by a single God:

> "Remember" and "keep"—these two words were said [by God] in a single word. [So similarly:] "Those who profane it [the Sabbath] will be put to death" [Exod. 31:14] and "And on the Sabbath day two male lambs . . ." [Num. 28:9], both these things were uttered in a single word . . . as it is said, "One [thing] has God spoken, two have I heard" [Ps. 62:12].[39]
>
> — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Yitro* 7

No Fasting on Sabbath: As was just seen, Jth. 8:6 says that Judith refrained from fasting on "the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself," and this constitutes another Sabbath stricture not found in the Sabbath laws of the Bible itself. Such a regulation is mirrored in *Jubilees* 50:12, *Damascus Document* 11:4–5, and numerous rabbinic texts. However, many Greco-Latin sources say that Jews do fast on the Sabbath: Pompeius Trogus (see Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,* 1:335–337); Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum, Divus Augustus,* 67; and, by inference, Petronius (Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,* 1:444) and Martial (Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,*

39. That is, the sacrificing of two male lambs—or any animals—on the Sabbath would be deemed a violation of the Sabbath laws, were it not that this sacrifice had been ordained by God Himself. See also Matt. 12:5.

1:523–524). Yehoshua Gilat has argued that these passages are not, as they have been considered, mistakes, but that some Jewish ascetics did indeed fast on the Sabbath, and that this practice is attested even into post-Talmudic times: Gilat, "Fasting on the Sabbath"; Gartner, "Fasting on Rosh ha-Shanah." It may also be that fasting on the Sabbath is what is envisaged in *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:15–22, since this text asserts that God created the fast "from the time when He created the heavens."

Note, however, that this custom of fasting seems to have been unknown to the author of the *Didascalia Apostolorum,* otherwise he surely would have invoked it in his attempt specifically to associate Jewish observance of the Sabbath with mourning:

> But let us observe and see, brethren, that most men in their mourning imitate the Sabbath; and they likewise who keep Sabbath imitate mourning. For he that mourns kindles no light; neither do the People on the Sabbath, because of the commandment of Moses, for so it was commanded them by him. He that mourns takes no bath; nor yet the People on the Sabbath. He that mourns does not prepare a table; neither do the People on the Sabbath, **but prepare and lay for themselves the evening before;** because they have a presentiment of mourning, seeing that they were to lay hands on Jesus.
>
> — *Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 21

Don't Talk about Weekday Matters: It was seen that a number of ancient sources maintained, apparently on the basis of Isa. 58:13, that even *talking* about weekday matters is forbidden on the Sabbath. One of the sources cited was the *Damascus Document:*

> And on the sabbath day, let no one speak a vain or empty word, nor press his fellow about any debt, nor let him judge concerning wealth or profit. Let him not speak concerning matters ["words"] of craft or work to be done the next morning. — *Damascus Document* 10:17–18

The last sentence clearly states this rule, and its use of the word "words" seems designed to allude to the "word" in Isa. 58:13. But it is to be noted that, in fact, all of the preceding provisions cited are likewise based on Isaiah's interdiction. Indeed, each of the things mentioned seems to be based on another biblical verse that uses the word "word" in defining its subject: an "empty word"—in the sense of something trivial, nonessential—appears in Deut. 32:47; the "matter [literally, "word"] of the release: . . . every creditor who has an outstanding debt" appears in Deut. 15:2; and the "matter [literally, "word"] for judgment" appears in Deut. 17:8. See on this Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding of the Exegesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls," 3–15; Ginzberg, *An Unknown Jewish Sect,* 108–109; Schiffman, *Halakhah at Qumran,* 87–90; cf. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 129–143.

Another attestation of this exegesis may be found in Philo:

> Let us not abrogate the laws laid down for its [the Sabbath's] observance and light fires or till the ground or carry loads or **institute proceedings in court**

> **or act as jurors or demand the restoration of deposits or recover loans,** or do all else that we are permitted to do on days that are not festival seasons. —Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 91

The highlighted phrases refer to actions nowhere forbidden in the Bible for the Sabbath day. They seem likewise to derive from an explanation of Isa. 58:13 in the light of Deut. 15:2 and 17:8.

Another allusion to the prohibited "word" of Isa. 58:13 has likewise passed unnoticed:

> For this reason every sabbath You permitted Israel not to work, so that no one would wish to **send forth from his mouth a single word in anger** on the sabbath day. —Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.36.5

Here, the prohibited word is any word spoken in anger. And why should it be that *angry* words are what was intended by Isa. 58:13? Perhaps the author of this interpretation reasoned as follows: Since work itself, however necessary to human survival, often leads to disputes and conflict, it follows that the sort of word forbidden on the Sabbath was precisely that kind of speech that the prohibition of work rendered unnecessary, namely, angry words. Therefore, the word prohibited in Isaiah is an angry word—indeed, the above passage appears so bold as to suggest that work was forbidden *so that* (among other things) angry words would be avoided.

Finally, notice should be taken of a Qumran fragment identified as belonging to some sort of community rule:

>]the book of [. . .] when he writes on the day of [
>] and learn from them. Let a man not consider[
>]in all **matters** of work or wealth or [profit (?)
>]on the day of the sa[bba]th and let him not **speak** save to [
>]let him [sp]eak to bless God. However, let him speak to eat or dr[ink.
> —(4Q264) *Community Rule*[z]

The two highlighted words both represent the Hebrew root *dbr*, the "word" of Isa. 58:13. It is difficult to be sure in such a fragmentary text, but the mention of "matters of work" *(dibrê 'ăbôdāh)* may indeed represent a prohibition of speech having to do directly with working similar to that seen above in the *Damascus Document* 10:18, where the phrase "wealth or profit" likewise occurs (see also 11:15). The last two lines of this fragment may seek to focus speech on the three activities connected with the Sabbath according to *Jubilees:*

> In this way He made a sign on it [the Sabbath] by which they [the Israelites] too would keep the sabbath with us [angels] on the seventh day to **eat, drink, and bless**[40] the creator of all. —*Jubilees* 2:21

40. Pseudo-Philo likewise states in recapitulating the Decalogue that "you are not to do any work on it [the Sabbath] . . . save that you praise the Lord on it in the assembly of elders and glorify the Mighty One in the place where the old men are gathered" (*Biblical Antiquities* 11:8).

The very beginning of this fragment is more difficult to explain, but it might have had something to do with another sort of forbidden "word," namely, the writing (copying) of texts on the Sabbath (see m. *Shabbat* 12:3).

Vain and False Oaths: We saw that the Decalogue's "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain" was understood as applying specifically to oaths, indeed, *false* oaths in the opinion of some interpreters. Why so? Did not these words imply that any unnecessary invocation of the divine name (and not just oaths) was to be avoided? The Decalogue may certainly have *seemed* to some interpreters to be saying this. However, such a claim would run into difficulties since, later in the Pentateuch, God gives another law that came to be interpreted as if *it* was a prohibition against needlessly invoking the divine name:

> He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death.
>
> —Lev. 24:16

In context, "blaspheme" seems to be the correct understanding, for the same passage speaks of a man "cursing his God" (Lev. 24:15). But the word translated as "blaspheme" can actually mean something like "specify" or "name," as in Laban's words to Jacob, "*Name* your wages and I will give it" (Gen. 30:28). Many interpreters therefore concluded that what was being forbidden in Lev. 24:16 was the (unnecessary) *naming,* invocation, of God's name, specifically, the Tetragrammaton (the name YHWH):

> One who **names** the name of the Lord shall be put to death.
>
> —Septuagint Lev. 24:16

> But if anyone—I will not say "blasphemes" the Lord of men and gods, but even dares to articulate the [divine] name when it is not called for, let him suffer the penalty of death. —Philo, *Life of Moses* 2:206

> Then God revealed to him [Moses] His name, which had not previously reached mankind['s hearing], and concerning which I myself am not permitted to speak. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 2:276

> He who **pronounces** the name of the Lord shall be put to death.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Lev. 24:16

As a matter of fact, it had apparently been customary for Jews to avoid using the Tetragrammaton under most circumstances from a very early period. This practice is clearly evidenced in the later books of the Bible itself; it became the practice to substitute the word "my Lord" *('ădônāy)* for the Tetragrammaton, and this substitution is reflected as well in the present Septuagint, where *kurios* ("lord") is regularly used to render God's name into Greek. (See also m. *Soṭah* 7:6 and the discussion in Albeck, *Mishnah, Nashim,* 387.) The same avoidance is evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Indeed, at Qumran even the use of the substitute "my Lord"—as well as that of the more "generic" name *ĕlōhîm* ("God")—was apparently restricted:

> [He will not s]wear, nor by *'alef* and *lamed* nor by *'alef* and *dalet* but by the oath of the youths [?], by the curses of the covenant.
>
> — *Damascus Document* 15:1–2

The passage is somewhat obscure, but the phrases "*'alef* and *lamed*" and "*'alef* and *dalet*" clearly refer to the Hebrew for "God" and "Lord," respectively; the use of these names (at least insofar as oaths are concerned) thus seems to be restricted here as well. Similarly:

> [If someone swears] "by the heavens and the earth" [he is] not liable; by *'alef dalet* or by *yod hei* [= the Tetragrammaton] . . . these are liable.
>
> — m. *Shebuot* 4:14

See further Schiffman, *Sectarian Law,* 133–154; Urbach, *The Sages,* 124–134. Note also Duling, "By Jerusalem." Similarly, in 1 Maccabees the word "heaven" is prominently substituted for any divine name (1 Macc. 3:18, 60; 4:10; 12:15, and elsewhere), and various other substitutions are likewise found in rabbinic texts.

Now, while such evidence clearly shows that the use of the Tetragrammaton (and, eventually, other divine names as well) came to be restricted, it is far from clear whether this practice sprang from the scriptural prohibition or whether Scripture later came to be interpreted in conformity to an existing practice. Nor, for that matter, is it clear that Lev. 24:16 was the original scriptural site for this prohibition. It may be that at an earlier stage, the prohibition was associated with the Decalogue's "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain"—or indeed with some other scriptural prohibition. The passage cited earlier from Ben Sira is noteworthy in this regard:

> Do not accustom your mouth to oaths, and do not habitually utter the name of the Holy One;
> for as a servant who is continually under scrutiny will not lack bruises, so also the man who always swears and utters the name will not be cleansed from sin.
>
> — Sir. 23:9–10

Though it is hardly certain, perhaps the phrases "habitually utter the name" and "utters the name" are mentioned *in addition to swearing* to suggest that even outside the context of oaths the habitual invocation of the divine name will lead to punishment. Note also that the "Noahide laws," even in their *Jubilees* incarnation, include "blessing" (that is, cursing) God, which may mean cursing with the *name* of God; see Chapter 5, *OR,* "The Laws of Noah's Sons (Noahide Laws)." Cursing with the name of God might well be a special category of offense on its own, or it might be a subspecies of invoking the divine name in vain. See Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 242 n. 11. Jerome seems clearly to have interpreted taking the Lord's name "in vain" as referring to any vain use of the name, and not necessarily in connection with oaths:

> You shall not make use of the name of the Lord in vain, for he will not go unpunished who takes up His name **concerning some vain matter.**
>
> — (Vulgate) Deut. 5:11

It seems unlikely, however, that he is reflecting some *halakhic* tradition known to him concerning the meaning of this verse.

Finally, it should be noted that the tradition of associating the taking of the Lord's name in vain (Exod. 20:7) with, specifically, *false* oaths posed a problem of its own, since swearing false oaths by God's name is prohibited as such elsewhere in Scripture:

> You shall not swear a **false oath by My name,** and [so] profane the name of God; I am the Lord. —Lev. 19:12

Unfulfilled oaths were also covered elsewhere in the Pentateuch:

> Or if anyone utter an oath with his lips, whether to do evil or to do good, any sort of thing which a man utters by an oath which becomes hidden from him, when he comes to know of it he shall be judged guilty of one of these. —Lev. 5:4

See on this *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Yitro* 7 (beginning).

Honor Your Heavenly and Earthly Fathers: The connection between honoring God and honoring parents, while it was evoked to explain the arrangement of commandments in the Decalogue, had a prior existence, particularly in the Hellenistic world. See Bohlen, *Die Ehrung der Eltern bei Ben Sira,* 82–139.

A recently published text from the Dead Sea Scrolls reads:

> Honor your father in your poverty and your mother in your difficulties, for as God is to a man, so is his father [to him], and as a lord to a fellow, so is his mother. For they are the smelting pot of your conception.
> —(4Q416) *Sapiential Work A* fragment 2, col. 3:15–17

Honoring father and mother included, of course, providing for their welfare in their old age. The point of this text would thus appear to be that, even in times of poverty or financial hardship, one is nonetheless required to provide for one's parents—precisely on the analogy of human parents to the divine parent: just as one owes unstinting fealty to God in good times and bad, so too with one's parents.

It may be quite significant that this same text goes on to discuss the duties owed by a man to his wife:

> . . . And if you are poor as [
> without apportioning. [vacat] A wife [vacat] whom you have taken in your poverty, take from her [?
> from the "created mystery" [*rz nhyh*] when you are joined together; go about with the helpmate of your flesh [as it says, "Therefore shall a man leave]
> his father and his mother [and . . . cling to his wife and they shall be the two of them as one flesh"]
> He has given you rule over her and you shall[. . . To her father]

He did not give dominion over her, and He separated her from her
mother, and to you [is her desire, and she shall be . . .]
to you as one flesh.

—(4Q416) *Sapiential Work A* fragment 2, col. 3:19–21, and col. 4:1–4

If this passage appears to address the issue of a man's duty to support his wife, then its apparent citation of Gen. 2:24 ("Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife, and they shall be as one flesh") may have a *halakhic* purpose. That is, having established that the Decalogue requires one to support one's parents even in time of poverty, the text apparently then goes on to assert that, in times of the most extreme want, a man's first duty is nonetheless toward his wife—that is the intended meaning of Gen. 2:24, that under such circumstances a man must "leave" (abandon) his parents and cling to his wife.

A Mishap for the Baby: One factor that may have shaped the interpretation of this law was the relative rarity of the word translated "mishap" *('āsôn)*. It occurs only in this law in Exodus 21 and in the story of Joseph (Gen. 42:4, 38 and 44:29). The latter appearances of the word all come with regard to Jacob's fears about the fate of his son Benjamin. Thus:

But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "lest a **mishap** befall him." —Gen. 42:4

The Septuagint translates the word here as *malakia,* "illness" or "weakness." According to the Septuagint, Jacob is worried that, if he does not keep Benjamin safely at home, he might fall into ill health or some other accident of fate. But the same sentence had a graver ring to other ears:

But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "lest **death** befall him." —*Targum Onqelos, Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 42:4

Here, it is no mere illness or even mishap that Jacob fears, but his son's death. Now, if one applies these two different understandings of *'āsôn* to the law of the pregnant woman, some of the divergences may become clearer. Onqelos himself had translated the law in a manner quite consistent with his translation in the Joseph story (or vice versa):

When men strive together and hurt a pregnant woman so that her offspring come out, but there is no **death** . . . —Exod. 21:22

Onqelos does not say whose death is meant, since the text that he is translating does not say. But if, in his view, *'āsôn* does mean specifically "death," then it certainly seems that the death in question must be that of the mother. After all, the only other possibility would be that the text is referring here to the death of the offspring. But if that is so, then why should there nonetheless be a penalty to pay when "there is no death" (to the offspring)? In that case, all would have apparently turned out well in the end—mother and baby would both be fine, and the only thing that the blow to the mother would have caused was a precipitated delivery. It is of course not impossible that the Bible in such a case might nonetheless insist on penalizing the

offender for having (apparently accidentally) struck the woman, but this seems rather unlikely. And so, if *'āsôn* unequivocally means "death," then it is apparently the mother's death that is in question.

By contrast, if *'āsôn* means (as the Septuagint maintains in Gen. 42:4) "illness" or "weakness," what could this law mean? Nothing really works in that case. If there is *no* "illness" or "weakness," the offender nonetheless has to pay a fine—but for what? And if there *is* an "illness" or "weakness," then the offender has to pay "soul for soul." But no soul is lost in the case of an illness or weakness! And so, it is not surprising that here the Septuagint does not use the word *malakia* it had in Gen. 42:4—"illness" or "weakness" just will not fit the facts of the case.[41]

But what will? Without any real clue from the word *'āsôn* itself, translators had to make sense of the law from its overall context. "Soul for soul" certainly indicated that a death was involved when there was an *'āsôn,* even if *'āsôn* itself did not necessarily *mean* "death." And so, translators concluded that the *'āsôn* spoken of involved the death *of the fetus.* After all, if the death of the mother were being spoken of, there were more direct ways of referring to it than "but if there is an *'āsôn.*" Let the text say directly, "but if the mother dies"! Thus, the assumption that the text is speaking about the death of the fetus actually seems rather reasonable. But then, what of the case where there is no *'āsôn?* This could hardly refer to the situation where the fetus is spontaneously aborted but lives—for, once again, what is the (apparently accidental) offender being fined for? The baby lived, the mother lived. It is for this reason, apparently, that the Septuagint translators concluded that the case in which there was no *'āsôn* was one in which the fetus did not live but for which the principle of "soul for soul" somehow did not apply. Their conclusion was that such a case must involve a fetus who is not yet developed enough to require a human life to be paid for its own loss—a fetus, in other words, who is "not fully formed." And, apparently for the same reason, the Bible had used the periphrastic "if there is an *'āsôn*" instead of saying (more directly) "if the fetus should die": in both cases the fetus dies, but only in the case of a fully formed fetus is it an *'āsôn,* that is, a death requiring payment of "soul for soul."

It is interesting that the discussion of this law in one *tannaitic* text at least raises the possibility of something like the Septuagint's interpretation:

> Why does the text say, "When men strive together [and hurt a pregnant woman so that her offspring come out, but there is no **mishap**]"? Because elsewhere it says, "And when a man strikes *any human soul* . . ." [Lev. 24:17]. I might understand this to mean that even a fetus of eight [months, deemed unviable] is included [in that law]. That is why the Bible says [that is, gives

41. Nor, for that matter, would some translation like "mishap" seem specific enough for this law. For, as observed earlier, the whole case describes a mishap! What is more, how can the Bible require the death penalty for the causing of something so vague as a "mishap"? Any exegete would naturally conclude that *'āsôn* is essentially a euphemism for something—death, according to Onqelos, and something still more specific according to the Septuagint. Note that to the "mishap" school belong the translations of Aquila, *Targum Neophyti,* and the *Samaritan Targum;* see Salvesen, *Symmachus,* 54–55.

> us the law of] "When men strive together . . ."—this is to tell us that a person cannot be found guilty [of death] unless he has killed a viable child.
>
> —*Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Neziqin* 8

This explanation runs counter to the understanding—found in this very same rabbinic text—that the *'āsôn* in question is the death of the mother. (On the basis of all this, Abraham Geiger suggested long ago that the "old *halakhah,*" represented by the Septuagint, Philo, and the above passage from the *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael,* came to be replaced by the view found elsewhere in rabbinic sources—as well as in Josephus and Jerome—to the effect that the *'āsôn* was the death of the mother. See his *Hammiqra Vetargumayv,* 343–344, and Urbach, *The Sages,* 794 n. 95. Moshe Weinfeld, "Killing an Embryo," argued that the conflict is essentially between the "native"—and liberal—Jewish view that did not regard the unborn fetus, even fully formed, as a human life, and a more stringent attitude ultimately of Greco-Roman origin. However, this does not appear to square with the latest evidence from Qumran; see below.) The same interpretation seems to underlie Ephraem's explanation:

> ". . . and there is no mishap"—that is, the fetus had not yet been fully formed and its parts were still joined together—then he [who struck her] shall [nonetheless] pay dearly. If, however, it was fully formed, "he shall give a soul for a soul."
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 21.3

Nor does this exhaust the complications in understanding this law. For of course no divine law could be understood in isolation: each was part of an entire corpus and needed to be understood in relation to other laws. This is apparently the reason for Philo's and Josephus' deletion of the "men fighting" and its apparent implication that the injury was inflicted accidentally. For, on the one hand, elsewhere in the Pentateuch someone who kills accidentally is exempted from the death penalty (Num. 35:22–25; Deut. 19:4–10). If that is so, should not the same principle apply in this case? On the other hand, the Pentateuch elsewhere also decrees the death penalty in the case of someone who intentionally murders (Lev. 24:17, 21). If the *'āsôn* in the case above is the death of the mother, what need was there of a special law covering the death of a pregnant woman who was intentionally murdered—wasn't she part of the larger class of murder victims?

A Limb of the Mother: This law had unexpected implications for another concerning sacrificial animals:

> When a bull or a sheep or a goat is first born, it shall remain with its mother for seven days; but from the eighth day onward, it shall be deemed acceptable as an offering to the Lord. And **you shall not slaughter a bull or a sheep along with its offspring** in a single day.
>
> —Lev. 22:27–28

A question naturally arose in connection with this prohibition: What happens if a cow is slaughtered and is subsequently discovered to have been pregnant? Is the one who slaughtered her deemed guilty of having violated the above law, or was this law

addressing two separate acts of slaughter, that is, a mother and her already born (indeed, perhaps fully grown) young? This question really turns on another: Is the unborn calf in the cow's womb deemed to be a separate life or merely part of the mother? Obviously, this law is talking about animals and Exod. 20:22–23 about human beings. Still, ancient interpreters (like all legal interpreters) wished to be consistent; they therefore had to decide whether an unborn offspring *in general* is deemed to be a separate life. Indeed, the two matters are collocated in a fragmentary text from Qumran:

> And he who reveals a secret of his people to the nations, or curses or [. . . etc.] or slaughters an animal carrying a live fetus, [or] a pregnant woman [. . .] —(4Q270) *Damascus Document* fragment 9, col. 2:13–15

Rabbinic interpreters ultimately came to the position that "a fetus is [like] a limb of its mother," and this interpretation is quite consistent with the rabbinic interpretation seen earlier in the case of the pregnant woman: the *'āsôn* refers only to the death of the mother. But it is interesting that signs of an earlier controversy still seem to survive in rabbinic literature:

> If someone slaughters an animal and finds in her . . . a living, viable [literally: nine-month-old] fetus . . . he is liable for [having violated "You shall not slaughter] it with its offspring in a single day" (Lev. 22:28); this is according to R. Meir. —m. *Ḥullin* 4:5

This interpretation holds that a living, fully formed fetus is indeed a separate life—precisely the position the Septuagint had taken with regard to the law of the pregnant woman. It will be recalled that Philo followed this same interpretation in that case. It is not surprising, therefore, that he adopts the same position in regard to the sacrificial animal:

> But observe that the law also banishes from the sacred precincts [that is, the Temple] all pregnant animals and does not permit them to be sacrificed until they have been delivered, thus counting what is still in the depths of the womb as on the same footing as what has already been brought to birth. —Philo, *Virtues* 137

One might judge simply from the generalizing sweep of this last sentence that Philo considered this principle to have important implications—and so he did!

> So Moses then, as I have said, implicitly and indirectly forbade the exposure of children [a form of infanticide] when he pronounced the sentence of death against those who cause the miscarriage of mothers in cases where the foetus is fully formed . . . For when the child has [already] been brought to birth it is [certainly] separated from the organism with which it was identified [earlier], and being isolated and self-contained becomes a living animal, lacking none of the complements needed to make a human being. And therefore infanticide undoubtedly is murder. —Philo, *Special Laws* 3:117–118

This opinion was shared by others:

> [The Torah] orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause an abortion or to [otherwise] kill the foetus;[42] a woman convicted of this is regarded as an infanticide, because she destroys a soul and diminishes the race. — Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:202

> But the second commandment of the teaching [to love one's neighbor as oneself, includes] this: "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery . . . You shall not use potions [probably, to prevent or terminate pregnancy], you shall not cause a miscarriage nor kill the infant once born.
> — *Didache* 2:1–2

On the same question of slaughtering a pregnant animal, a recently published text from Qumran likewise takes the more stringent position: an unborn fetus is nevertheless a separate being. In presenting its position, this text apparently seeks specifically to contrast its (Sadducean/Boethusian) view with that of its (apparently Pharasaic) opponents, addressed as "you" in the text:

> [And concerning pregnant animals we are of the opinion that one may not slaughter the] mother and the fetus on the same day. [And concerning the one who eats w]e are of the opinion that the fetus [found in its mother's womb may be eaten (only) after it has been slaughtered. And you know that it is] so, namely, that the ruling [of Lev. 22:28] refers to a pregnant animal.
> — (4Q396) *Halakhic Letter* 36–37

Although Lev. 22:28 does not specifically *say* that it is talking about a pregnant animal, the author of this text interprets the verse as at least including such a case: the "mother and the *fetus*" may not be slaughtered on the same day. What is more, if a fetus is found alive within a pregnant animal that has been slaughtered, it—since it was a separate entity even in its mother's womb—requires separate slaughter.

A similar, though not necessarily identical, view is attested in another text found at Qumran:

> And you shall not sacrifice to Me a cow or a sheep or a goat when they are pregnant, for they are an abomination to Me. And you shall not slaughter a cow or a sheep, it and its young, on the same day and you shall not kill the mother with its young. — *Temple Scroll* 52:5–7

The phrase "a cow or a sheep or a goat" is a direct citation from Lev. 22:27. The first sentence above thus may seek to explain *this* verse as implying that the unborn fetus cannot be harmed until eight days after its birth. (The reasoning seems to be that if, even *after* it is born, the offspring shall "be with its mother for seven days," then certainly it may not be harmed *before* its birth.) If so, then the following verse, Lev. 22:28, would have to impart a different principle, namely, that whereas after seven

42. Presumably the distinction is between physical intervention and the use of drugs; cf. *Didache* 2:2, cited below.

days, the young may be slaughtered, it may not be slaughtered with its parent in a single day.[43] The phrase "and you shall not kill the mother with its young" is an evocation of a different law, Deut. 22:6; perhaps its role is to clarify that Lev. 22:28 deals strictly with the "mother and its young" while Lev. 22:27 has to do with not slaughtering the unborn or recently born young.

The issue of whether an unborn fetus is considered a being separate from its mother had still further legal implications. For example, a dead body was deemed by the Bible to transmit impurity to anyone who came in contact with it. But what of a fetus that dies in utero? If (as rabbinic law held) the fetus was a "limb of the mother," then no impurity was imparted to her—the fetus was simply part of her own body. If, however, the fetus is a separate being, then presumably she would become impure as a result:

> And if a woman is pregnant and her child dies in her womb, all the time that he is dead within her, she will be as impure as the grave itself. Any house that she enters will become unclean, it and all its vessels for seven days.
>
> — *Temple Scroll* 50:10–12

Nor did the legal implications end there, for these cases in turn had their own ramifications. Was it permitted to save the life of a woman in difficult labor by killing the unborn child? Could a death sentence be carried out on a woman who was pregnant? (See on these m. *Oholot* 7:6, m. *Arakhin* 1:4.) On the subject in general, see Prijs, *Jüdische Tradition in der Septuaginta,* 101; Aptowitzer, "The State of the Embryo"; Urbach, *The Sages,* 242–246; also, Geiger, *Hammiqra Vetargumayv,* 343–344; Albeck, *Mishnah, Qodašim,* 377 n; Weinfeld, "Killing the Fetus"; Zussman, "Study of the History of Halakhah," 33, 35; Isser, "Two Traditions: The Law of Exodus 21:22–23 Revisited."

Moses Was Given More Than the Torah: We saw earlier that the *Temple Scroll* was apparently a pseudepigraphic work presented as part of the Sinai revelation given to Moses.

> [God says to Moses:] "Let them not become unclean in these things which I am commanding you upon this mountain." — *Temple Scroll* 51:6–7

Indeed, elsewhere the text is at pains to restate in the first person laws from the Pentateuch that contain third-person references to God. Thus:

> You will do what is good and proper in the eyes of the Lord your God.
>
> — Deut. 12:28

43. It is not clear if this law applies simply to the mother or to both parents. The biblical law actually refers to the male and says "bull" rather than "cow," though this should probably be understood as meaning both "bovines." In reproducing this expression, the *Temple Scroll* thus says, literally, "And you shall not sacrifice to Me a bull, a sheep, or a goat *when they are pregnant.*" See further Milgrom, "The Qumran Cult," 171.

> You will do what is good and proper **before Me; I am** the Lord your God.
>
> — *Temple Scroll* 53:8

But this is only true of *part* of the *Temple Scroll;* elsewhere there are third-person references to God and the text speaks in the second-person *plural,* since the presumed addressee is the whole people of Israel and not specifically Moses. This has led some scholars to believe that the *Temple Scroll* itself is a composite work. See Wilson and Wills, "Literary Sources of the Temple Scroll"; Weinfeld, "God versus Moses in the Temple Scroll."

Another deliberate alteration of Deuteronomy in the *Temple Scroll* is most informative about the matter of the Pharasaic "traditions of the fathers." In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people:

> If a case arises [of a conflict of laws], any case within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go to the place which the Lord your God will choose, to the levitical priests and to the judge who will be in those days . . . and you shall do in according with the thing that they shall tell you from that place which the Lord will choose, and you shall take care to act according to everything that they teach you. — Deut. 17:8–10

Apparently, this wording was troublesome to the author of the *Temple Scroll,* since it seemed to imply that the priests and judges were free to decide such cases on the basis of their own discretion—perhaps combined with their knowledge of oral tradition. For that reason, this author introduced some changes:

> And you shall do in accordance with **the Torah** which they shall tell you, and in accordance with the thing that they shall say to you **from the book of the Torah** and tell you in truth. — *Temple Scroll* 56.3–4

Underlying this change is the idea that teachings *must be preserved in writing* if they are to be considered authoritative. This principled stand—perhaps developed as a polemic against the "traditions of the fathers"—thus played a central role in the creation of much Second Temple literature. It is stated outright in a passage from Josephus already seen:

> The Pharisees had passed on to the people certain ordinances handed down by the fathers and not written in the laws of Moses, for which reason they are rejected by the sect of the Sadducees, who hold that only those ordinances should be considered valid which were **written down,** and those which had been handed down by the fathers need not be observed.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13:297

See further Baumgarten, "Recent Qumran Discoveries and the Halakhah"; Garcia Martinez, "Las Tablas Celestas en el Libro de los Jubileos"; Wacholder, *The Dawn of Qumran,* esp. ch. 1; idem, "The 'Sealed' Torah vs. the Revealed Torah." A passage seen earlier also refers to the Boethusian "Book of Decrees," which apparently was intended to supplement or interpret biblical laws:

> The Boethusians[44] had a Book of Decrees that said: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" [means that] if someone knocked out his fellow's tooth, he should knock out his tooth [in return], if he blinded his fellow's eye, he should blind *his* eye, [so that] both of them are the same.
>
> —*Megillat Ta'anit* (ms. Oxford, cf. Lichtenstein p. 331)

Another passage in Deuteronomy similar to Deut. 17:8–10, cited above, is noteworthy, in this connection:

> [Moses recalls how he told the Israelites:] "How can I bear alone your heavy weight, your burden and your strife? Choose wise, understanding, and experienced men, according to your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads . . ." And you answered me, "The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do." So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you . . . And I charged your judges at that time, saying, "Hear the cases between your brothers." —Deut. 1:12–16

Here, too, Moses seems to be talking about the naming of judges who would decide matters among the people. But one fragmentary text found at Qumran radically rewrites this passage—apparently in a manner somewhat different from the *Temple Scroll*'s rewording of Deut. 17:8–10:

> How can [I bear alone] your heavy weight, [your burden and your stri]fe? [When I have finished estab]lishing the covenant and setting out the path [on which you are] to walk, [choose for yourselves wise men who] will explain [to you and your so]ns all the words of this Torah.
>
> —(1Q22) *Sayings of Moses* 2:6

Moses seems to specify that the wise men referred to in Deut. 1:13 are not to function merely as leaders and judges, but to serve as interpreters of the Torah—though the text does not say on what their interpretations would be based.

On this same topic, various ancient sources stressed the role of nonscriptural laws or customs in Jewish observance. (See, again, *Jewish Antiquities* 13:297, just cited, where this is a matter of disagreement between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.) Such nonscriptural practices were also criticized in the New Testament (Mark 7:1–13; Matt. 15:1–7; and elsewhere) and taken up by later writers. On the subject of such orally transmitted teachings there is a vast critical literature. For an overview and some further references, see Epstein, *Prolegomena,* 15–18; Heinemann, "Die Lehre von Ungeschriebenen Gesetz im Jüdischen Schrifttum"; Urbach, *The Sages,* 286–314; idem, *The Halkahah;* Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine;* Baumgarten, "Unwritten Law"; idem, "The Pharasaic *Paradosis*"; Weiss-ha-Livni, *Mishna, Midrash, and Gemara;* Sussman, "Study of the History of Halakhah"; Safrai, *The Literature of the Sages,* 35–119; Cohen, "*Agraphos Nomos* in Philo's

44. A certain Jewish group in late antiquity is usually referred to by this name in rabbinic texts. However, in some of the most reliable manuscripts this name is written as two words, *bêt sîn;* it has therefore been proposed that the name be understood not as "Boethusians" but as "the house [or "academy"] of the [Es]senes."

Writings"; idem, "The Jewish Dimension of Philo's Judaism"; Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief*, 421–448. See also below.

Singled Out from the Start: As discussed, the motif "Singled Out from the Start" derives first and foremost from a certain passage in Deuteronomy:

> When the Most High was apportioning out nations, at the time that
> He separated humanity [into different peoples],
> He established the boundaries of peoples according to the number of the
> sons of God.
> But God's own portion is His people, Jacob his allotted heritage.
>
> —Deut. 32:8–9

Ben Sira bluntly stated the apparent point of these words:

> For every nation He appointed an angel, but Israel is the Lord's own portion. —Sir. 17:17

Yet here was a problem. For elsewhere, Jews maintained that numerous angels were in charge of various aspects of daily life, and that Israel itself had an angelic supervisor or representative—the angel Michael, or Sariel, or Israel (see Chapter 12, *OR*, "Israel the Angel"). Similarly:

> In the hand of the [angelic] Prince of Lights is the rule over all the sons of righteousness, that they should walk in the paths of righteousness, and in the hand of the angel of darkness is the whole rule over the sons of wickedness. —(1QS) *Community Rule* 3:20–21

How could such beliefs be reconciled with the apparent meaning of Deut. 32:8–9? One text from Qumran seems to take cognizance of the problem:

> You [cre]ated [us] for Yourself, an eternal people, and You have granted us the lot of light, in keeping with your faithfulness. [But] from of old You appointed the [angelic] Prince of Light to help us, and in [. . .] and all the spirits [that is, angels] of truth are under his rule.
>
> —(1QM) *War Scroll* col. 13:9–10

In other words, God did indeed create Israel *for* Himself but nonetheless also created from the start an angelic "Prince of Light" to help its people in day-to-day affairs.

Another passage seen in connection with "Singled Out from the Start" associates the election of Israel with the time of the creation:

> [At the conclusion of the creation:] He [God] said to us [angels]: "I will now separate off a people for Myself from among My nations. They too will keep the sabbath. I will make the people holy to Me, and I will bless them, just as I [blessed and] made holy the sabbath day. I will make them holy to Me [and] in this way I will bless them: they will become My people and I will be their God. I have chosen [for this role] the sons of Jacob among all of those

whom I have seen. I have recorded them as my firstborn son and have made them holy to Me throughout the ages of eternity. —*Jubilees* 2:19–20

This is the theme of "God's Firstborn, Israel" (see Chapter 2, *OR*), which seeks to explain Exod. 4:22: "Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn."[45] *Jubilees'* answer, as we have seen, was that Israel's creation was conceived, as it were, in God's mind at the time of the first Sabbath. (*Jubilees* goes on to bolster this assertion by pointing out that the twenty-two things created in the first six days correspond to the twenty-two generations between Adam and Jacob, Israel's founder.) The fact, then, that one people alone will observe this heavenly institution proves, for the author of *Jubilees,* that Israel is *different in kind* from all other peoples, a heavenly race whom God has "separated off" from other peoples and "made holy." This in turn explains why, for this author, any sexual union between Jew and non-Jew is so grievous: it is a form of mixing unlike species. (See further Chapter 13; also Kugel, "The Holiness of Israel and Its Land in Second Temple Times.")

Another recently published text from Qumran seems to grapple with these same issues. (It has, to my mind, wrongly been identified both as a "prayer of Enosh" and a "messianic" text: Attridge, Strugnell, et al., *Qumran Cave 4 VIII,* 355, 358–359; Evans, "A Note on the 'First-Born Son' of 4Q369.")

You set off his hereditary property in order to cause Your name to dwell there[. . .
It is Your glorious earthly domain and upon it . . . [. . .
Your eye is upon it[46] and Your glory will be seen there forever [. . .
To his [that is, Jacob's] seed for the ages as an eternal possession, and al[l . . .
And Your good statutes You made clear to him t[o . . .
In eternal illumination and You established him as a **firstborn son for Yourself** [. . .
Like him as a prince and ruler in Your whole earthly domain [. . .
With [. . .] and ethereal glory You supported[47] him [. . .
—(4Q369) *Prayer of Enosh* 1:2, 4–8

There can be little doubt that the "he" spoken of in this text is Jacob (Israel), whose "hereditary property," the land of Israel, became the place where God "caused his name to dwell" (Deut. 12:11, 14, and so on) and whom God called his "firstborn son" (Exod. 4:22). If so, it is interesting that Israel's acquisition of that title seems to be adjacent—and perhaps causally connected—to its having God's divine statutes

45. Similarly, Jer. 2:3 asserts that "Israel is [not "was," as many translations have it!] holy to the Lord, the *first fruits* of his harvest."

46. An allusion to Deut. 11:12, and not, as the editors suggest, 1 Kings 8:29 or 2 Chron. 6:20.

47. In Hebrew, *smkt[]:* It seems most unlikely to me that this verb was used in the sense of placing an object on something (it is used in the sense only of placing the hands on something or someone), hence the conjectural restoration "the crown of the heavens and the glory of the clouds you have set upon him" is probably wrong. The verb *smk* appears here in the sense of "support" and may have been chosen specifically with Gen. 27:37—another blessing of Israel—in mind.

"made clear" to its people. (This would be particularly likely if the phrase "eternal illumination" [*'ôr 'ôlāmîm*] referred to the manner or effect of elucidating the divine statutes, on which see below.) In any case, the point of this text is that God chose Israel from the start (à la Deut. 32:9), apportioning to Israel its wonderful land and causing His own name to dwell therein. In keeping with its special status, Israel was given other perquisites: the "making clear" of divine laws, and the title "firstborn son." This title, our text seems to be saying, was a token of Israel's preferred status and has nothing to do with the "birth order" of nations.[48]

Incidentally, this text's combination of the revelation of divine law in "eternal illumination" with the mention of Israel's firstborn status is found in another Second Temple text relevant to this subject, namely, the version of Sir. 17:17–18 attested in some textual witnesses (see Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach,* 203):

> When He apportioned out all the nations of the earth, for each nation
> He established a [heavenly] ruler, but Israel is the Lord's portion.
> Whom, being His **firstborn,** He brought up with discipline, and allotting
> to him **the light of His love,** He did not abandon him.
>
> —(some Greek mss. of) Sir. 17:17–18

The sense of the second sentence (it is hardly a "gloss": Skehan and DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira,* 283) is as follows: since Israel was indeed God's firstborn, "he" had to be brought up "with discipline" (Greek *paideia* = Hebrew *mûsar*), hence he was given the Torah, which was granted with "the light of His love" (Exod. 20:18, cf. Prov. 6:23), so that, despite Israel's frowardness, "He did not abandon him." See further Kugel, "(4Q369) Prayer of Enosh."

Other Nations Knew Anyway: We saw earlier that Philo and Paul both seem to suggest that, although God gave His laws specifically to Israel, these same laws (or at least part of them) were known to other nations of the world because they could be known "by nature." This idea, rooted in Stoic philosophy, is repeated elsewhere by Philo:

> Those in whom anger or desire or any other passion, or again any insidious vice holds sway, are entirely enslaved, while those whose life is regulated by law are free. And right reason is an infallible law, engraved not by this mortal or that and, therefore, perishable as he, nor on parchments or slabs and, therefore, soulless as these, but by immortal **nature** on the immortal mind, never to perish. —Philo, *Every Good Man Is Free* 45–46

If so, then it is quite proper that Gentiles be held accountable for sins even though they did not have the benefit of the laws revealed at Sinai. This is the broader context of the words of Paul cited earlier:

> **All who have sinned without the law** [= Torah] **will likewise perish without the law,** and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by

48. Indeed, the phrase "You *established him as* a firstborn son *for* Yourself" duplicates the language of this same reference to Jacob's new status (previous note), Gen. 27:37.

> the law. For it is not the hearers [= those who have heard] of the law who are righteous before God, but those who *do* the law who will be justified. When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature what the law requires, they are a law by themselves, even though they do not have the law.
>
> —Rom. 2:12–14

Note the discussion of these verses in Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 310–311. On the overall subject there is a considerable scholarly literature; see, inter alia, Heinemann, "Die Lehre vom ungeschriebenen Gesetz im jüdischen Schrifttum"; Dodd, "Natural Law in the New Testament"; McKenzie, "Natural Law in the New Testament"; Westerholm, "Torah, Nomos, and Law."

Law as Custodian: We saw that Paul in one place suggested that the law (Torah) was "our custodian until Christ came" (Gal. 3:24). The word Paul used in Greek was *paidagōgos,* related to our word "pedagogue." A *paidagōgos* in ancient Greece was a household slave whose job it was to accompany the master's children to school and on other trips outside the house; he was also himself something of a teacher, in charge of the children's moral education as well as physical well-being, and often had the reputation of a strict disciplinarian. Paul's intention, in using this word, was probably to highlight the temporary or preliminary nature of the Torah's tutelage, that is, until the time of Christianity. See further Lull, "The Law Was Our Pedagogue."

A survey of Paul's views on law is certainly not within the scope of the present volume, whose subject is in any case ancient interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. But it certainly would be misleading to suggest that Paul presented only one answer, the "pedagogue-custodian" one, to the question posed by God's gift of His laws to only one people. Elsewhere, particularly in the Letter to the Romans, Paul's longest meditation on the subject of law and faith, are other, at times less positive, assessments of the role of law and the Sinai revelation. Thus, Paul suggests at one point that the law sometimes serves to bring about sin (and that, by implication, Israel was not particularly privileged by its having been given these laws):

> If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. —Rom. 7:7–8

What is more, the very fact that the people of Israel were given the Torah meant that they were thenceforth to be held accountable to it, and this too might seem to be a less than positive development:

> For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.
>
> Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given [at Mt. Sinai], but sin is not counted where there is no law. —Rom. 4:15, 5:13

This latter statement is bound up in the whole issue of intentionality and sin; cf. Luke 23:34; Heb. 10:26–27. On this issue, see Anderson, "Status of Torah," 1–29. For further bibliography on Paul and law, see Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 161–164.

Torah Kept by the Patriarchs: One tradition held that the other nations of the world were not given the Torah because some legal framework was already available to them ("Other Nations Knew Anyway"). This theme is connected to others examined in previous chapters, particularly that of preexistent wisdom (= Torah) by whom the world was created (Chapter 2) and the Noahide laws (Chapter 5). These are in turn tied to another motif widespread among ancient interpreters, namely, that *Israel's* ancestors had received some revelation of laws before Sinai, or even that (in the extreme formulation of this motif) they had observed *all* the laws of the Torah before it was revealed at Sinai.

This motif is presented in connection with a great many different biblical sites—so many that it would be difficult to determine which of them came first. Nor is this, of course, a narrowly *exegetical* matter: there were other considerations (not particularly connected to the interpretation of one or another biblical text) which led ancient interpreters to claim that Israel's ancestors had received some of the laws of the Torah before it was promulgated at Sinai. After all, the Bible itself frequently asserts the continuity between the religion of Moses and that of the patriarchs—it was the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" who first appeared to Moses on Horeb (Sinai) in Exod. 4:15 and who later revealed His laws on the same spot. Was it not reasonable to suppose that this God had given at least some of the Torah's guidance to these three ancestors? Indeed, would God have even considered leaving them without a basic code of behavior specifying which actions are acceptable and which not?

Nor was there any lack of biblical evidence to support this claim. For example, when Joseph refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife, he says, "How then can I do this great wickedness and *sin against God?*" (Gen. 39:9). Interpreters were naturally curious as to how Joseph knew that adultery was a sin. They concluded that he must have learned this from his father, Jacob, who in turn must have been the recipient of some sort of divine teaching:

> And he [Joseph] did not surrender himself but remembered the Lord and the words which Jacob, his father, used to read, which were from the words of Abraham, that there is no man who [may] fornicate with a woman who has a husband [and] that there is a judgment of death which is decreed for him in heaven before the Lord Most High. —*Jubilees* 39:6

> [Joseph explains to Potiphar's wife:] "We children of the Hebrews follow laws and customs which are especially our own. Other nations are permitted after the fourteenth year to deal without interference with harlots and strumpets and all those who make a traffic of their bodies, but with us a courtesan is not even permitted." —Philo, *On Joseph* 43

> But I recalled my father's words, went weeping into my quarters, and prayed to the Lord. —*Testament of Joseph* 3:3

> For all the wives and daughters of the noblemen and satraps of the whole land of Egypt used to molest him [Joseph] to sleep with him . . . But Joseph despised them, and the messengers whom they sent to him with gold and silver and valuable presents Joseph sent back with threats and insults,

> because Joseph said, "I will not sin before the Lord God of my father Israel." For Joseph always had the face of his father Jacob before his eyes, and he remembered his father's commandments. — *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:3–5

> And he [Joseph] overcame his desires from [because of] the mighty teaching which he had received from Jacob.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 49:24

(See on these Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 99–101.)

But if Joseph had learned the commandments from Jacob, from whom had Jacob learned them? We saw earlier (Chapter 11) the motif "Jacob the Scholar," which explained the phrase "dwelling in tents" (Gen. 25:27) as indicating that Jacob had studied the Torah in an academy or house of study while Esau was out in the fields. At the same time, as *Jubilees* 39:6 (above) attests, other interpreters maintained that Jacob's Torah learning had been passed on to him by his grandfather Abraham. After all, God had said about Abraham that he "obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5). The very multiplication of legal categories here seemed to indicate that Abraham had received a thorough grounding in divine law long before Sinai. (Indeed, the fact that the word "laws" here—*tôrotāy*, literally, "my Torahs"—appears in the plural, in the Septuagint as well as in the Masoretic text, indicated to some interpreters that Abraham had been instructed in the provisions of the future oral Torah as well as the written):

> And he [Abraham] took his father's books—and they were written in Hebrew—and he copied them. And he began studying them thereafter. And I [the angel of the presence] caused him to know everything which he was unable [to understand]. — *Jubilees* 12:27

> [Abraham] kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with Him. — Sir. 44:20

> Our father Abraham kept the entire Torah even before it was given [at Mt. Sinai], as it is said, ". . . inasmuch as Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandment, My statutes, and My laws" [Gen. 26:5].
>
> — m. *Qiddushin* 14

> ". . . inasmuch as Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandment, My statutes, and My laws" [Gen. 26:5]: . . . Abraham even knew the regulations concerning carrying from courtyard to courtyard.
>
> — *Genesis Rabba* 64:4

> [God said about Abraham:] "For I know him, that he may charge his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice . . ." [Gen. 18:19] . . . Said R. Simeon: His father did not teach him [the Torah], he had no rabbi to teach him—whence did Abraham learn the Torah? God had arranged for his two kidneys to be as two rabbis to him, and they taught him wisdom [= Torah], as it is written,

"I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel, even by night my kidneys have instructed me" [Ps. 16:6]. — *Genesis Rabba* 61:1

But the chain did not necessarily begin with Abraham: many ancient interpreters traced it back still further, to the time of Enoch. The idea that Enoch had been instructed in divine wisdom is found in *1 Enoch*; Enoch is likewise presented in the book of *Jubilees* as having bequeathed to humanity a divinely imparted set of written instructions by which human beings were to govern their affairs:

And he [the angel] said to me: O Enoch, look at the book of the tablets of heaven and read what is written upon them and note every individual fact. And I [Enoch] looked at everything in the tablets of heaven and I read everything which was written and I noted everything.

And now, my son Methuselah, all these things I recount to you and write down for you; I have revealed everything to you and have given you books about all these things. Keep, my son Methuselah, the books from the hand of your father, that you may pass [them] on to the generations of eternity.
— *1 Enoch* 81:1–2, 82:1

The son of Enoch was Methuselah. He learned everything through the angels of God, and so knowledge came to us.
— (Pseudo-)Eupolemus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17.9)

And he [Enoch] wrote in a book the signs of the heavens according to the order of their months, so that the sons of man might know the [appointed] times of the years according to their order. — *Jubilees* 4:17

He [Enoch] was the first of mankind born on earth who learned writing and instruction and wisdom . . . He testified to [that is, warned] mankind in the generations of the earth: the weeks of the jubilees he related, and made known the days of the years; the months he arranged, and related the sabbaths of the years, as we [angels] had told him . . . And he was therefore with the angels of God six jubilees of years, and they showed him everything which is on earth and in the heavens, and the rule of the sun, and he wrote down everything. — *Jubilees* 4:17–18, 21

[Noah says:] For this is how Enoch, your father's father, commanded his son Methuselah; then Methuselah his son Lamech; and Lamech commanded me everything that his fathers had commanded him. Now I am commanding you, my children. — *Jubilees* 7:38

He [Noah] gave all the books that he had written to his oldest son, Shem, because he loved him much more than all his [other] sons. — *Jubilees* 10:14

And he [Abraham] took his father's books—and they were written in Hebrew—and he copied them. And he began studying them thereafter. And I [the angel of the presence] caused him to know everything which he was unable [to understand]. — *Jubilees* 12:27

This same tradition was to appear among later writers:

> and now I [Enoch] say to you . . . and to you I make known in truth [
> Go, say to Lamech, your son [
> And when Methuselah heard [— *Genesis Apocryphon* 5:9–10, 24

> And I [Abraham] read before them the writing of the words of Enoch [. . .] about the famine. — *Genesis Apocryphon* 19:25–26

> [Zebulon asserts, long before the Sinai revelation:] Therefore it is written in the writing of the law of Enoch that whosoever does not want to raise up offspring to his brother, his sandal should be pulled off his foot and he should be spat upon on the face [= Deut. 25:5–10].
>
> — *Testament of Zebulun* 3:4

> For I have seen in writings of Enoch that your sons will be destroyed with you in impurity and will do harm to Levi with the sword, but they will not prevail against Levi. — *Testament of Simeon* 5:4–5

There are echoes of this motif in rabbinic writings as well:

> "And he [Moses] took the book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people . . ." [Exod. 24:7]. But we have no [authoritative] teaching [concerning] from *what* he was reading in their hearing . . . Rabbi said: the commandments which Adam had been commanded, and the commandments which Noah's sons had been commanded, and the commandments which they had been commanded in Egypt, and at Marah, and all the other commandments as well. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Baḥodesh* 3

> [In the beginning,] God [determined when to] intercalate the year and afterward passed [this knowledge] on to Adam in the garden of Eden, as it is said, "This is the book of the generations of man" [Gen. 5:1]—an eternal numbering for all the generations of man.[49] Adam passed it on to Enoch, and entered into the "secret of intercalation"[50] and intercalated the year, as it is said, "And Enoch walked with God" [Gen. 5:24] [this means] Enoch acted in keeping with the methods of calculation that God had given to Adam. And Enoch passed on the secret of intercalation to [Methuselah and Methuselah to] Noah and he intercalated the year and said, "Yet all the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest and cold and warm, and summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" [Gen. 8:22]. *Seedtime* refers to the *tequfah* [the beginning point of each of the four seasons] of *Tishrei*

49. That is, if a book seems to be mentioned here, then there is a problem. The Bible must not be referring to itself (that is, "Herewith begins the book of . . .")—such a rubric might belong earlier, but certainly not long after the story of the first humans has been related. Instead, therefore, this interpretation reads not "this is the book [*sēfer*]" but "this is the *one who counts* [*sōfer*]," restated as "an eternal numbering for all the generations of man."

50. See for this phrase R. David Luria's commentary to *Pirqei deR. Eliezer,* ch. 7 (p. 18a); cf. *b. Sukkah* 54b.

> [≅ September], *harvest* refers to that of *Nisan* [≅ March], *cold* to that of *Tebet* [≅ December], *warm* refers to that of *Tammuz* [≅ June], and [by thus intercalating properly, the] *summer* [months] will be in the proper time and the *winter* [months] in the proper time, the numbering according to the sun during the *day* and the numbering according to the moon at *night* will not be made invalid. Noah passed it on to Shem . . . and Shem passed it on to Abraham. — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 8

Other interpreters maintained that the patriarchs had observed the "unwritten law" in one sense or another:

> The first generations, before any at all of the particular statutes was set in writing, followed the **unwritten law** with perfect ease, so that one might properly say that the enacted laws are nothing else than memorials of the life of the ancients, preserving for a later generation their actual words and deeds. For they were not scholars or pupils of others, nor did they learn under teachers what was right to say or do; they listened to no voice or instruction but their own; they gladly accepted conformity with nature, holding that nature itself was, as indeed it is, the most venerable of statutes, and thus their whole life was one of happy obedience to law.
>
> — Philo, *On Abraham* 5–6 (see also 276)

> [An angel tells Baruch:] "And after these you [Baruch] saw the bright waters; that is the fountain of Abraham and his generation, and the coming of his son [Isaac], and the son of son [Jacob], and of those who are like them. For at that time the **unwritten law** was in force among them, and the works of the commandments were accomplished at that time, and the belief in the coming judgment was brought about, and the hope of the world which will be renewed was built at that time, and the promise of the life that will come later was planted." — *2 Baruch* 57:1–2

See also: Urbach, *The Sages,* 318; Urbach, "Ten Commandments," 162 n; Anderson, "Status of Torah," 1–29. On Philo's evocation of "unwritten law" elsewhere in conformity with nature, see Heinemann, "Die Lehre vom ungeschriebenen Gesetz im jüdischen Schrifttum." On the above passage in Philo, see Sandmel, *Philo's Place,* 107–109.

Blood of the New Covenant: We saw earlier that Moses' sprinkling of the blood on the people was a curious gesture that required special justification (or alteration) by ancient interpreters. Early Christians, by contrast, found in this gesture a typological correspondence between the old covenant joining God and Israel and the new covenant of Christianity. For Jesus himself was reported to have spoken of his own blood as sealing a covenant:

> And he [Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." — Mark 14:23–24; Matt. 26:26–28

Elsewhere the typological correspondence is explicit:

> Hence, even the first covenant was not ratified without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet, wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you."
>
> —Heb. 9:18–20

21

The Golden Calf

(EXODUS 25–34)

Moses grew horns.

The Golden Calf

(EXODUS 25–34)

❖ ❖ ❖

Standing on Mt. Sinai, Moses was instructed by God for forty days and forty nights. God told him to build a special tent, or "tabernacle," which would serve as a divine sanctuary in the midst of the Israelite camp. God described the details of the tabernacle's dimensions and construction, as well as everything concerning the priests who were to serve in it, in great detail.

When God had finished, He gave Moses the two stone tables of law to take down the mountain. But the people of Israel had gone astray. During Moses' absence, they had commissioned his brother, Aaron, to make a great golden image of a calf, and they had worshiped it and brought offerings. Seeing this, God now wished to destroy the people, but Moses prayed at once for their forgiveness, and God relented.

When he reached the Israelite camp and saw for himself what had happened, Moses threw the stone tables from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Later, he sought God's assurance that He would still be with the people, and asked to see God's glory. Moses then prepared two new stone tables and went back up the mountain; he stayed there for another forty days and nights, and came down again with the inscribed stone tables. At last he assembled the people and they together built the tabernacle as God had planned.

THE BUILDING of the tabernacle, a movable sanctuary that the Israelites could take with them during their wanderings, was a subject of great interest. After all, God had said: "Let them build Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst" (Exod. 25:9). The tabernacle, in other words, was to be nothing less than God's home on earth.

Its construction was not, however, simply ordered in such general terms. Every spar and plank and beam that was to go into the structure was detailed in God's lengthy instructions. In fact, when God commanded Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle, Moses was not simply *told* what its dimensions were to be and what materials were to be used. Apparently, he was actually shown a model or plan of the future tabernacle:

> [God says to Moses:] "According to all that **I am showing you**—the pattern [*tabnît*] of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its accoutrements—so you shall make it . . . And see that you make them according to their pattern, which is being **shown** to you on the mountain.

> And you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it which has been **shown** to you on the mountain." —Exod. 25:9, 40; 26:30

Ancient interpreters found this a remarkable idea—one that sounded even more remarkable in the Septuagint, where the (somewhat ambiguous) word translated above as "pattern" came out rather less ambiguously as "model" or "prototype." It seemed, in other words, as if God had shown Moses some actual thing after which the tabernacle was to be shaped.

A Celestial Sanctuary

But what could that thing have been? It was unlikely that God had brought down to Mt. Sinai a miniature scale-model of the future tabernacle. However, long-established tradition held that somewhere in heaven—to which, according to one understanding, Moses had ascended on Mt. Sinai—was a great, celestial sanctuary. This idea, as already mentioned, had ancient roots. The prophet Isaiah had seen in a vision God "sitting upon a throne high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1), and this may indeed refer to God's throne in the heavenly sanctuary. The very stars in the sky, according to this same ancient conceit, are actually part of an angelic choir or cadre of heavenly priests who serve God in the celestial sanctuary.

Later writers sometimes bear witness to these same ideas:

> [Enoch reports on his vision:] And in everything, it [the heavenly sanctuary] so excelled in glory and splendor and size that I am unable to describe to you its glory and its size. And its floor [was] fire, and above [were] lightning and the path of the stars, and its roof also [was] a burning fire. And I looked and I saw in it a high throne, and its appearance [was] like ice and its surroundings like the shining sun. —*1 Enoch* 14:16–18

> [Isaac says to Levi:] "May He make you and your descendants [alone] out of all humanity approach Him to serve in His temple [on earth] like the angels of the presence and the holy ones [in heaven]." —*Jubilees* 31:14

> [Levi says:] And the angel opened to me the gates of heaven, and I saw the holy temple and the Most High upon a throne of glory.
> —*Testament of Levi* 5:1–2

> And those men lifted me up from there, and they carried me up to the seventh heaven. And I saw there an exceptionally great light, and all the fiery armies of the archangels, and the incorporeal forces and the . . . cherubim and the seraphim and the many-eyed thrones . . . And then they went to their places in joy and merriment and in immeasurable light, singing songs with soft and gentle voices, while presenting the liturgy to Him gloriously.
> —*2 Enoch* (J) 20:1–4

> We [Christians] have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord. —Heb. 8:1–2

> After this I looked and lo, in heaven an open door! . . . At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with One seated on the throne . . . And round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind . . . And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty, who was and is and is to come" [based on Isa. 6:3].
>
> —Rev. 4:1–2, 6, 8 (also 21:10–27, the heavenly Jerusalem)

What was the nature of this heavenly sanctuary? Most ancient readers assumed that it was a fixed structure, a temple. But some sources referred to it as a "tabernacle," as if it were a holy tent that God had created in the skies:[1]

> [Wisdom says:] Of old, from the beginning, God created me, and
> for eternity I shall not cease.
> In the holy tabernacle[2] I ministered before Him, and so I was
> established in Zion.
>
> —Sir. 24:9–10

> And the tabernacle of highest loftiness, the glory of His kingdom,
> the shrine . . .
>
> —(4Q 403) *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* 1.2.10

> . . . a minister in the sanctuary and the **true tent** which is set up not by man but by the Lord. —Heb. 8:1–2

Copied from Heaven

Whether the heavenly sanctuary was a temple or a tent, ancient interpreters asserted in any case that the earthly tabernacle built by Moses, or the temple built by Solomon, was nothing but a copy of this heavenly structure:

> [Solomon says:] You commanded me to build a temple on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city of your abode, a copy of the sacred tabernacle which you prepared from the very first. —Wisd. 9:8

> [The true temple] is not this building that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed, with Me, that was already prepared from the moment I decided to create paradise. I showed it . . . to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed him the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels.
>
> —*2 Baruch* 4:3, 5

1. Some support for this idea may be found in Isa. 40:22, "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; it is He who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and stretches them out like a tent to dwell in."

2. This reference is somewhat ambiguous: it may refer to the earthly tabernacle carried by the Israelites in the wilderness, or it may refer to a heavenly one in which Wisdom served.

> They [the priests in Jerusalem] serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tabernacle, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mountain" [Exod. 25:40].
>
> —Heb. 8:5 (also 9:24)

Rabbinic tradition likewise saw a correspondence between the two sanctuaries:

> Said R. Phinehas: The sanctuary on earth is located precisely in correspondence to the heavenly sanctuary, as it is said, "You have made an abode to dwell in, O Lord, the sanctuary of the Lord that Your hands have established" [Exod. 15:17]. "Abode" [*makon*] here [should be understood as] "situated in correspondence to" [*mekuwwan keneged*] your dwelling place.
>
> —j. *Berakhot* 4:5

> [Jacob said:] "This is the house of God, and this the gate of heaven" [Gen. 28:17] . . . R. Simeon b. Yoḥai said: The heavenly sanctuary [referred to here by Jacob as "the gate of heaven"] is eighteen miles above the earthly one, since [the numerical value of the words] "and this" is eighteen.
>
> —*Genesis Rabba* 69:7

A Likeness of the Universe

The details of the tabernacle given to Moses on Mt. Sinai thus corresponded to those of the heavenly sanctuary. No wonder, then, that God had described the making of the tabernacle in such detail; in building it, the Israelites were, in a sense, recreating what was heavenly on earth.

But what about the other things connected with the tabernacle? God's instructions included detailed specifications for the clothes that the priests should wear. Much later, after the Temple in Jerusalem had been built, the priestly clothing was held to be one of the most striking things to be seen there. Indeed, eyewitnesses were so moved by the sight of the priests' garments that they went to great lengths to describe them:

> The Holy One exalted like Himself [that is, in holiness] Aaron of the tribe of Levi, and He made [this] an everlasting law [that is, that the priesthood should belong to his descendants].
> He placed splendor upon him, so that he might serve Him in glory.
> He girded him with mighty apparel, and clothed him with bells.
> He crowned him wholly in honor, and honored him in glory and strength, with breeches, robes and cloak.
> Then he encircled him with bells, with pomegranates round about, to make melody as he walked,
> to make their ringing heard in the temple, as a [continuous] token of the sons of his people.
> With a holy garment, of gold and blue and purple, the work of an embroiderer;

with the breastpiece of judgment, the ephod and the belt; with twisted scarlet, the work of a craftsman;
with precious stones on the breastpiece, engraved as signet in their settings,
every stone a glorious one, as a reminder, in engraved letters, of the number of Israel's tribes;
with a gold crown, cloak, and turban, and a diadem enscribed like a signet with "Holiness,"
Glorious splendor and stunning appearance, a delight to the eyes, the height of beauty.
Before his time there never were such things.

—Sir. 45:6–13

How glorious was he [the high priest] looking forth from the tent, and when he went forth from the place of curtain.
Like a brilliant star shining from amidst the clouds, like the full moon at festival-time;
Like a dazzling sun in the kingly Temple, or the rainbow's colors seen with the clouds;
Like a budding flower on a bough in springtime, or a lily sprung up along watercourses,
Like a northern flower in the summer heat, or the glowing coal of the incense offering;
Like a blossoming olive tree, vigorous, and whose branches abound in fruit—
[Such was the high priest] when he donned his glorious vestments and put on his garments of splendor.

—Sir. 50:5–11

It was an occasion of great amazement to us when we saw Eleazar engaged in his ministry, and all the glorious vestments, including the wearing of the garment with precious stones upon it in which he is vested . . . Their [the priests'] appearance makes one awestruck and dumbfounded. A man would think he had come out of this world into another. I emphatically assert that every man who comes near the spectacle of what I have described will experience astonishment and amazement beyond words, his very being transformed by the hallowed arrangement on every single detail.

— *Letter of Aristeas* 96, 99

Why were these garments so striking? To some observers it seemed that the priests' clothing, no less than the tabernacle itself, had a significance far greater than might first appear. They were a representation or likeness of the universe itself:

On his [Aaron's] full-length robe [that is, the ephod] there was a representation of the entire cosmos, and glories of the fathers upon his four rows of carved stones, and Your splendor on the diadem upon his head.

—Wisd. 18:24

> The high priest is bidden to put on a similar dress when he enters the inner shrine to offer incense . . . and also to wear another, the formation of which is very complicated. In this it would seem to be a likeness and copy of the universe. —Philo, *Special Laws* 1:84 (also *Moses* 2:117)

> If one reflects on the construction of the tabernacle and looks at the vestments of the priest and the vessels which we use for the sacred ministry, he will discover that . . . every one of these objects is intended to recall and represent the universe. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:180

Aaron Tried to Stop Them

Having received his final instructions about building the tabernacle and making the priestly garments, Moses was ready to go back down the mountain—when God reported to him the astounding news: the people had "gone astray" in his absence and made for themselves a golden calf to worship. Unbelievable as this might appear, still more incredible was the fact that the Bible attributes to Aaron, Moses' own brother, a central role in the incident:

> The people saw that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain, and they complained to Aaron and said to him: "Come, make gods for us that will go before us; for this Moses fellow who brought us out of Egypt—we do not know what has become of him." And Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he took [them] from their hands and shaped [them] with a carver and made [them] into a molten calf. And they said: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." —Exod. 32:2–4

These verses make it seem as if Aaron had quite willingly supplied the people with an idol to worship—in fact, he even seems to have taken the initiative after hearing the people's complaint. But why? Had not Moses left Aaron (along with Hur) in charge of things during his absence (Exod. 24:14)? He hardly ought to have gone along with a rebellion against the very man who had left him in charge. Moreover, God was later to appoint Aaron and his descendants as His special servants, priests for all eternity. It seemed to interpreters most unlikely that God should select someone who had willingly encouraged the people to idolatry. For all such reasons, interpreters theorized that Aaron had not taken the initiative in the golden calf incident, nor even simply submitted to the people's request. He must have done something first to try to stop them, and if the Bible did not say so specifically, perhaps it was simply because his opposition proved ineffective:

> And while he was on the mountain, the mind of the people became corrupt, and they gathered together against Aaron, saying, "Make gods for us whom we may serve, in the same way as the other nations have, because that Moses through whom wonders were done before our eyes has been taken away

from us." And Aaron said to them: "Be calm. For Moses will come, and he will bring judgment near to us and will explain the law to us and will set forth from his own mouth the law of God and establish rules for our people." And though he was speaking, they did not pay attention to him.

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:2

[Aaron said:] "Behold, did he not go up the mountain in your own sight? Were you not there when he went into the cloud? Go up the mountain yourselves, then, and if if you do not find him and Joshua still there, then do whatever it pleases you to do. But if you have manna, and if you have quail, and the pillar [of cloud] and the clouds [of glory], how could he not be there? For everything that you have, you have because of him."

—Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 32:1

Aaron Feared for His Life

A detail in the biblical text, however, suggested to interpreters another reason for Aaron's apparent encouragement of idolatry:

And he took [them] from their hands and shaped [them] with a carver and made [them] into a molten calf. And they said: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." **And Aaron saw**; and he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." —Exod. 32:4–5

What did Aaron see? It must have been something rather frightening, since it was apparently this *seeing* that led him to take the next and fateful step of building an altar in front of the calf so that it could be worshiped.

By an interesting coincidence, the same Hebrew letters translated as "saw" could be read as if they spelled "was afraid." Some interpreters therefore concluded that Aaron had not so much *seen*—after all, the text should really have said that he *heard* the people proclaiming "These are your gods . . ."—as *taken fright,* and it was this sudden fear that had impelled him to do what he did. Perhaps he had been afraid from the start that the rabble, being numerous and powerful, might harm him if he did not make them an idol and an altar with which to worship it.

But Aaron, **fearful** because the people were very strong, said to them, "Bring us the earrings of your wives." . . . And they put them into the fire, and they were fashioned into a shape, and out came a molten calf.

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:3

And Aaron was afraid and and built an altar in front of them.

—Peshitta, *Samaritan Targum of Pentateuch* (ms. J) Exod. 32:5

Hur Murdered by the Rabble

Along with this understanding of the Hebrew verb as "feared" was another, which held that Aaron had indeed *seen* something. However, what he saw was not spelled

out in the biblical text. (As noted, "These are your gods . . ." was something that Aaron heard, not saw.) Interpreters therefore felt free to deduce on their own what it was that he saw. Indeed, combining the sense of "feared" and "saw," some specified that he saw something that caused him to take fright:

> And Aaron **saw** Hur [slaughtered] before it and **was afraid**; and he built an altar in front of it.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* (with marginal note), *Fragment Targum* Exod. 32:5

> But when he thus argued with them, Aaron saw that they wished to stone him as they had [done to] Hur. For it was to Hur that Moses, when he climbed up the mountain, had ordered the elders to bring their disputes [see Exod. 24:14]; yet when Moses went down again, there is no [further] mention of him [in the Bible], and for this reason it is said that he was killed in the rebellion which broke out against Aaron over the making of the calf, because he had rebuked them [for idolatry]. Lest, therefore, they now kill Aaron himself and so become guilty of this crime, or lest they make for themselves many calves, and not just one; or lest they go back to Egypt (even if they should not actually enter it), he cunningly ordered that they bring the earrings of their wives, [hoping that] it might come about that these [women] would stop their husbands from making the calf so as to keep their earrings untouched. — Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 32:2

> When the people of Israel started to do that deed [of the golden calf], they first went to Hur and said to him, "Come, make a god for us," since he did not do as they said they went and killed him . . . Afterward they went to Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god." When Aaron heard he **took fright**, as it is said "And Aaron **was afraid** and he built an altar in front of it."
>
> — *Leviticus Rabba* 10:3

The Letters Flew Off

Seeing the people bowing down to an idol was too much: Moses took the stone tables that God had given him and threw them to the ground. No doubt he was right to be angry. Still, it disturbed many that his anger should express itself in the destruction of the two stone tables. After all, these had been given to Moses by God and were "written by the finger of God" (Exod. 31:18). There could hardly be a more sacred object in the whole world.

Some interpreters supposed that Moses could not have allowed himself to destroy the divine writing. And there was the thinnest of justifications for such a conclusion. For, in retelling these same events later on, Moses says:

> "I seized the two tables and cast them from off my two hands and broke them **before your eyes**." — Deut. 9:17

The expression "before your eyes" must have seemed a bit unusual here. After all, if the meaning of this phrase was simply that everyone had seen Moses break the tables, well, so what? Why should Moses apparently stress that relatively trivial circumstance in retelling the story? If, therefore, Moses said that everything

had happened "before your eyes," was this not an indication that what had happened was something altogether remarkable, something that the human eye would not normally get to see? Perhaps bolstered by this consideration, some interpreters concluded that a miracle must have accompanied this act: the letters first flew off the stone tables, leaving them empty—for it was only under such circumstances that Moses would have allowed himself to break the tables in the first place:

> And Moses hurried down and saw the calf. And he looked at the tables and saw that the **writing was gone**, and he hurried to break them.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:5

> He [Moses] looked at them [the tables] and saw that the writing had flown off of them. He said: How can I give Israel tables that are worthless? I will instead take them and break them, as it is said, "I took the two tables and cast them from my two hands and broke them in your sight" [Deut. 9:17].
>
> —*Abot deR. Natan* (A) 2

> And he [Moses] threw the tables from his hand and broke them on the side of the mountain, but the holy writing that was on them flew off and ascended to the heavenly ether, where it cried out: Woe to the people who have heard at Sinai from God's own mouth [the commandment], "You shall not make for yourselves an image or a statue or any picture," and yet within forty days they made for themselves a molten calf which has no real substance.
>
> —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 32:19

Tables Became Too Heavy

Reading the same biblical verse, it seemed to other interpreters that Moses might have been having trouble holding on to the two tables:

> "I seized the two tables and cast them from off my two hands and broke them before your eyes."
>
> —Deut. 9:17

Why did Moses say he seized the tables—wasn't he holding them already? The word "seized" therefore implied that Moses had struggled with them: they had started to slip from his hands and he seized them, trying to hold on, but they got away from him and he ended up casting them "from off my two hands" (another phrase that implied more falling than being thrown down on purpose) and shattering them into pieces. If so, then there was really nothing blameworthy in his breaking the tables: it was all an accident.

But why should the tables suddenly be too heavy? Had not Moses carried them all the way down the mountain? Putting this observation about the word "seized" together with the tradition of the flying writing, interpreters concluded that the letters had helped to support the tables, actually making them lighter in Moses' hand. Once they flew off, the tables suddenly became much heavier.

> And his hands were opened, and he became like a woman bearing her firstborn who, when she is in labor, her hands are upon her chest and she has no strength to help herself bring forth.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:5

> The tables weighed forty *seah* each, but the writing buoyed them up [and allowed Moses to carry them]. When the writing flew off, they [suddenly] became too heavy for Moses' hands and they fell and were broken.
>
> —j. *Ta'anit* 4:5

Divine Traits of Character

When Moses climbed back up Mt. Sinai to be given the second set of inscribed tables, God once again came down in the cloud. But this time the subject was not the laws which the Israelites were to observe but, instead, God's own nature:

> The Lord passed before him and He said: "The Lord,[3] the Lord, a God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear [guilt], visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." —Exod. 34:6–7

This revelation was altogether extraordinary: nowhere else had God's traits of character, as it were, been set forth as such. It was as if, in response to an earlier request of Moses—"I pray You, show me Your glory" (Exod. 33:18)—God now revealed to His prophet something of His very nature.

From earliest times this self-revelation was deemed to have the highest importance. Moses himself alludes to it somewhat later in the Pentateuch:

> [Moses says:] "And now, I pray you, let the power of the Lord be great, as You promised, saying, 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.' Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray You, according to the greatness of your steadfast love." —Num. 14:17–19

What is more, in numerous later biblical verses, this same revelation of God's nature and characteristics is repeated or alluded to, and in the same order. It seems that, from a very early period, the qualities of divine mercy and compassion mentioned in this verse, along with God's assertion of his faithfulness to Israel and

3. It is not clear from the traditional Hebrew text if this first "the Lord" should be part of the quotation or be the subject of the previous verb. If the latter is the case, then the text should be translated: "The Lord passed before him and the Lord said: 'The Lord, a God merciful and compassionate . . .'" If the former understanding is adopted, then it is furthermore unclear who speaks the words that follow, whether God (that is, "and He said . . .") or Moses (in which case, "and he said . . ."). Some Septuagint texts have only one "the Lord."

willingness to forgive sins, became central items in the Israelites' thinking about God, ideas that were returned to again and again. Here are but some of the more obvious references:

> Return to God, for He is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from [inflicting] evil.
>
> —Joel 2:13

> I know that You are compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from [inflicting] evil. —Jon. 4:2

> Who is like You, O God, forgiving sin and passing over transgression for the remnant of his people, not holding on to anger forever, for He takes delight in steadfast love. He will once again be merciful and overcome our faults and cast all our sins to the depths of the sea. May You give faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as You once swore to our ancestors of old. —Mic. 7:18–20

> And You, O lord, merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness
>
> —Ps. 86:15

> He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel:
> Merciful and compassionate is the Lord, slow to angerand abounding in steadfast love.
> He will not chide forever, nor keep His anger for all time.
> He does not deal with us as befits our sins, and has not requited us in keeping with our transgressions.
>
> —Ps. 103:7–10

> He has left a remembrance of His miracles, compassionate and merciful is the Lord.
>
> —Ps. 111:4

> Light shines for the righteous amidst darkness, [God is] merciful and compassionate and good.
>
> —Ps. 112:4

> Compassionate and righteous is the Lord, and our God is merciful.
>
> —Ps. 116:5

> Compassionate and merciful is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
>
> —Ps. 145:8

> But You are a God ready to forgive, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and You did not forsake them.
>
> —Neh. 9:17 (also 9:31)

For compassionate and merciful is the Lord your God; He will not turn His face from you if you return to Him. —2 Chron. 30:9

It is not surprising, therefore, that these same traits continued to be recited or evoked by later writers. They had become a famous catalog of divine traits:

Consider the ancient generations and see: who ever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame?
Or who ever persevered in the fear of the Lord and was forsaken?
Or who ever called upon him and was overlooked?
For the Lord is compassionate and merciful, He forgives sins and saves in time of affliction.

—Sir. 2:10–11

[And You purify] Your servant from all his sins [through your great m]ercies. [As You a]nnounced through Moses [that You would forgive iniquity] and transgression and sin atoning fo[r guilt] and faithlessness.

—(1QH) *Thanksgiving Hymns* 29, col. 17:12–13

And You, my God, are [a merciful and compassionate God] slow to anger, bountiful in favor, foundation of tr[uth]. —(4Q511) *Songs of a Sage*[b]

[Ezra says:] "I know, O Lord, that the Most High [**God**] is now called **merciful**, because He has mercy on those who have not yet come into the world; and **compassionate**, because He is compassionate to those who turn in repentance to his Torah; and **patient** ["slow to anger"], because He shows patience toward those who have sinned, since they are His own works; and bountiful, because He would rather give than take away; and **abounding in compassion** ["abounding in steadfast love"], because He makes His compassions abound more and more to those now living and to those who are gone, and to those yet to come, for if He did not make his compassions abound, the world with those who inhabit it would not have life; and giver, because if He did not give out of His goodness, so that those who have committed iniquities might be absolved of them, not **one ten-thousandth** of mankind could live ["keeping steadfast love for thousands"]; and judge, because if He did not pardon those who were created by His word and blot out the multitude of their sins, there would be left only very few of the innumerable multitude." —*4 Ezra* 7:132–140

For He is **merciful** whom you honor, and **compassionate** in whom you hope, and **true** [or "faithful"] so that He will do good to you and not evil.

—*2 Baruch* 77:7

[Moses prays:] May Your **mercy** be made strong with Your people, and Your **compassion** with Your inheritance, Lord, and may Your **long-sufferingness** toward the people of Your choice [be] in Your place, for You have delighted in them above all [others]. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:8

Steadfast Love for Thousands of Generations

If this catalog of traits was deemed of central importance, it nevertheless contained some points in need of further clarification. For example, what did it mean to say that God kept "steadfast love for thousands"? In context, it seemed that "thousands" meant *thousands of generations.* After all, the text continues:

> . . . keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear [guilt], visiting the iniquity of the fathers **upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth** [generations]. —Exod. 34:7

The idea seems to be that God maintains His loving protection for thousands of generations even for those who sin, since it is His nature to forgive "iniquity and transgression and sin." However, this is no blank check, since He also punishes sin, indeed, visits the iniquity of sinful fathers upon the children, grandchildren, and even on to the fourth generation (although the text literally says, "to the 'thirds' and 'fourths'").

That generations were meant seemed to be confirmed by a similar passage in the Decalogue:

> For I, the Lord your God, am a zealous God, visiting the sin of the fathers on the sons, on the "thirds" and on the "fourths" of those who hate Me, but acting with steadfast love toward the thousands, for those who love Me and keep My commandments. —Exod. 20:5–6

Here again the Bible seems to be talking about generations, with the "thirds" and "fourths" following the second generation, that is, the "sons." Not surprisingly, then, ancient interpreters explicitly referred this passage's various numbers to generations:

> . . . requiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and the fourth **generation** for those who hate Me, and granting mercy to the thousands for those who love Me and keep my statutes.
> —Septuagint Exod. 20:5–6

> . . . to the third and the fourth **generation** . . . mercy to a thousand **generations.** — *Targums Onqelos, Neophyti,* etc., Exod. 20:5

> For I am the Lord your God, a zealous God, and visiting the sins of the sleeping [the dead] sinners upon the[ir] living sons if they walk in the paths of their parents, up until the third and fourth **generation**, but showing mercy **for a thousand generations** to those who love Me and keep my commandments. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:6

That a thousand generations was also meant in Exod. 34:7 seemed to be confirmed by yet another verse in the Pentateuch:

> And you shall know that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps his covenant and his steadfast love for a thousand generations for those who are faithful to Him and keep his commandments.
>
> —Deut. 7:9

Following the lead of such texts, many later interpreters specified that "thousands" in Exod. 34:7 meant thousands of generations:

> Keeping goodness for thousands of generations, forgiving transgressions and rebellion . . . —*Targum Onqelos* Exod. 34:7

But such an understanding, unless modified, ran into difficulties. For, after all, if God kept his steadfast love "for thousands of generations," then how could He likewise visit the sins of fathers on their children, grandchildren, and so forth? The two actions seemed to contradict each other. Perhaps "keeping steadfast love" (since "keeping"—or "saving up"—steadfast love seemed a strange word to use here) really implied a combination or balance of opposites:

> Keeping [strict] justice and acting mercifully for thousands . . .
>
> —Septuagint Exod. 34:7

> Do not say "I have sinned, but nothing can befall me, for the Lord is slow to anger."
> Do not depend on forgiveness [so that you] add one sin to another.
> Do not say, "The Lord is merciful, and He will erase all my sins," nor say "His mercies are many, so my many sins He will forgive."
> For with Him are **both mercy and anger.**
>
> —Sir. 5:4–6

Along the same lines, it might be that, while the interests of strict justice were suspended, they were not utterly forgotten:

> Keeping steadfast love and goodness for thousands of generations, forgiving and remitting sins and passing over rebellions and atoning for transgressions and acquitting; but He will not acquit **on the great day of judgment**, recalling the sins of wicked fathers upon rebellious sons and grandsons, until the third and fourth generation. —*Targum Neophyti* Exod. 34:7

No Pardon for the Wicked

Indeed, it could be that in speaking here simultaneously of "steadfast love for thousands" along with punishments visited upon the third and fourth generations, the Bible was intentionally distinguishing between two classes of sinners. That is, the "thousands" mentioned by God were the "good" sinners, people who, although they sinned, were sorry and sought to repent; such people did indeed gain God's forgiveness. After all, such a distinction was virtually stated in the passages cited earlier, which spoke of God

> visiting the sin of the fathers on the sons, on the "thirds" and on the "fourths" of those who **hate Me,** but acting with steadfast love toward the thousands, for those who **love Me** and keep My commandments.
>
> —Exod. 20:5–6

> And you shall know that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps his covenant and his steadfast love for a thousand generations for those who are **faithful** to Him and keep his commandments. —Deut. 7:9

So too, in regard to Exod. 34:6–7, it seemed that God's mercy "for the thousands" was intended for the "good" sinners. The truly wicked did not repent; it was of them that God had said that He visits the "iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children":

> Keeping goodness for thousands of generations, forgiving transgressions and rebellion and pardoning sins for those who **return to His Torah**; but to those who do not return, He does not pardon, visiting the sins of the fathers on rebellious children, and on their children's children to the third and fourth generations. — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 34:7

There may be a hint of such an understanding as well in the continuation of the passage from Ben Sira cited earlier:

> For with Him is both mercy and anger, and His wrath will rest upon the **wicked.**
> So do not delay in returning to Him [that is, **repenting**], and do not dawdle from day to day; for His wrath will come forth in a flash, and you will perish on a day of punishment.
>
> —Sir. 5:6–7

It is noteworthy that the phrase "for a thousand generations" (in Deut. 7:9) was also interpreted as a promise to keep alive those whom God loves for a thousand generations:

> . . . is a guarantee for them to keep them alive for a thousand generations, as it is written, "who keeps his covenant and his steadfast love for a thousand generations" [Deut. 7:9]. — *Damascus Document* 19:1–2

Thousands of Sins Forgiven

Another solution to the same problem was to understand "thousands" in this passage as referring to *thousands of sins.* In that case, the sentence in Exod. 34:6–7 ought perhaps to be redivided as follows: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; keeping steadfast love; for [or "by"] thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . ." The assertion that God forgives "for" or "by" thousands would then appear to mean that God does not count up or reckon each and every sin, but forgives them by the thousands, without strict accounting:

> O **merciful** and **compassionate**, forgive us our **iniquities** and **unrighteousness**, and **transgressions**, and shortcomings. **Reckon not every sin** of your servants and handmaidens, but cleanse us with the cleansing of your truth.
> —*1 Clement* 60:1–2

> And after these things you will remember the Lord and repent and He will bring you back, because He is **merciful** and **compassionate, not reckoning** evil to the sons of men, since they are flesh and the spirits of deceit deceive them in all their actions. —*Testament of Zebulon* 9:7

The same interpretation may also underlie this:

> For You are the Lord Most High [God], of great compassion, slow to anger, and very merciful, and repent over the evils of men. You, O Lord, according to your great goodness have promised repentance and forgiveness to those who have sinned against You, and in the multitude of your mercies you have appointed repentance for sinners that they may be saved . . . For the sins I have committed are more in number than the sand of the sea; **my transgressions are multiplied**, O Lord, they are multiplied. —Pr. of Man. 7–9

Moses' Face Beamed Light

When Moses came down the mountain for the second time, his face was somehow changed because of his having spoken with God (Exod. 34:29). Most modern translations suggest that his face "beamed" or "shone." However, the precise meaning of the Hebrew word is far from clear, and even today, scholars are divided as to what its true significance might be. Some have suggested that rather than beaming, Moses' face had become rough or disfigured as a result of his prolonged exposure to God's presence. Whatever the case, when the people saw him they were at first afraid to come near. Moses therefore put on a veil and wore it over his face whenever he spoke to the people, and took it off again when he went in before God.

But what really happened to Moses' face? Many ancient interpreters were apparently influenced by the fact that the word "skin" in Hebrew sounds very much like the word for "light"; this similarity, along with other factors, to be sure, led them to suggest that Moses' face actually "beamed" in the sense of giving forth light:

> Now, when Moses went down from the mountain—and the two tables were in Moses' hands—as he was going down from the mountain Moses did not know that the appearance of the skin of his face had **become glorious** when He had been speaking with him. —Septuagint Exod. 34:29

> Then, after the said forty days had passed, he went down and his appearance was far more beautiful than when he had gone up, so that those who saw him were filled with awe and amazement; their eyes could not continue to stand the dazzling brightness that flashed from him like the brilliance of the sun. —Philo, *Moses* 2:70

> And Moses came down. And when he had been bathed with invisible light, he went down to the place where the light of the sun and the moon are; and the light of his face surpassed the splendor of the sun and the moon, and he did not even know this. And when he came down to the sons of Israel, they saw him but did not recognize him. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:1

> Moses did not know how great was the glorious splendor of his face.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 34:29

> Moses did not know that the glorious splendor of his face was shining.
> — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 34:29

> The Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness.
> —2 Cor. 3:7

It may be that this same motif was in the back of Ben Sira's mind when he wrote:

> Anyone who acts fairly will be rewarded, and every man will find his due.
> The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he did not know that his deeds were revealed to God.
> His mercies are apparent to all creatures, and His **light** and His praise he shared with man.
> —Sir. 16:14–16

This last verse is somewhat obscure, and it and the preceding one may in any case be later additions to the original text. It seems, however, that in juxtaposing to the mention of Pharaoh's hard-heartedness with the assertion that God's merciful deeds are (normally) apparent to all, the author had in mind the miracles of the Exodus, which indeed would have been apparent even to Pharaoh, had not God "hardened his heart." If Ben Sira then added immediately that God "shared His light and His praise" with mankind, he probably meant specifically with a single man, Moses, whose face shone (Exod. 34:29) and who was called a "God to Pharaoh" (Exod. 7:1).

Moses Grew Horns

Most ancient translators and interpreters thus understood Moses' face to have beamed with light. However, one significant exception is Jerome's translation of the verse in question:

> When Moses went down from Mount Sinai, he was holding the two tables of the testimony, and he did not know that **his face was horned** as a result of his speaking with God. —(Vulgate) Exod. 34:29

This translation was apparently based on the apparent connection of the word "beam" with "horn" in Hebrew: not only did this make good philological sense, but horns elsewhere were sometimes an ornament in headgear and a sign of distinction. The implications of Jerome's translation were not witnessed at once, but starting in

the late Middle Ages, Western sculptors and painters frequently represented Moses as having horns.

❖ ❖ ❖

In short: The tabernacle built by the Israelites was modeled on God's sanctuary in heaven, and the priests' clothing similarly bore the likeness of the universe. Although Aaron participated in the sin of the Golden Calf, he was an unwilling participant: he was afraid for his own life, having seen the rabble murder Hur. Moses cast down the stone tables but did not destroy the divine writing on them, since the letters had already flown off. Indeed, their flight may have caused the tables suddenly to grow heavier and thus to fall from Moses' hands. Later, when Moses sought divine reassurance after the people's sin, God told him that He keeps His steadfast love for thousands of generations of repentant sinners, while visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon their descendants in the case of those who were unrepentant. When Moses descended once again from the mountain, his face beamed light or, possibly, sprouted horns.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Golden Calf

Copied from Heaven: A number of ancient sources seen earlier suggest that the earthly sanctuary—the tabernacle or the later Temple in Jerusalem—was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. The word for "pattern" *(tabnît)* used in Exod. 25:9 had a particular role in this motif. The book of Chronicles maintains that David gave his son Solomon a "plan" *(tabnît)* of the Jerusalem Temple that he was to build (1 Chron. 28:11), including details of the size of the vessels. The account ends:

> He [David] informed him [Solomon] of everything in writing by the **hand of the Lord,** all the work of [that is, set out in] the pattern [*tabnît*].
>
> —1 Chron. 28:19

It would not be difficult to conclude from this that the divine pattern first shown to Moses in Exod. 25:9 had subsequently been passed down in writing from him to subsequent generations until it reached David and, ultimately, Solomon, the actual builder of the Temple. That Temple, in other words, was not merely extrapolated from the details of the tabernacle in Exodus but derived from a divinely given plan passed on from generation to generation. See further Yadin, *The Temple Scroll,* 1:83; Kampen, "The Eschatological Temple(s) of 11QT"; Wilcox, "According to the Pattern."

In this connection it is certainly significant that the same word used to describe the "plan" or "image" of the tabernacle shown to Moses on Mt. Sinai was used in Qumran as a name for the heavenly temple:

> The appearance of the glorious structure [*tabnît*] to the chiefs of the spiritual dominions . . .
> The chiefs of God's structure [*tabnît*], and they praise Him in His holy shrine.
>
> —(4Q403) *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* 1.2.3, 16

(For further discussion, see Newsom, *Sabbath Sacrifice,* 40, 60.) If *tabnît* referred here to the heavenly sanctuary,[4] then to the members of this sect God's words in Exodus 25 about showing Moses the *tabnît* would even more directly imply that Moses had been shown the actual heavenly sanctuary and then told to copy it for the earthly tabernacle.

Philo characteristically saw the *tabnît* in Exod. 25:9 as an ideal form:

> He saw with the soul's eye the immaterial forms of the material objects about to be made, and these forms had to be reproduced in copies perceived by the senses, taken from the original draft, so to speak, and from patterns conceived in the mind.
>
> —Philo, *On Moses* 2:74 (also *Questions and Answers in Exodus* 2:52)

4. The word does appear elsewhere in the same group of texts as a reference to the *likeness* of the chariot throne or of the angels; see 4Q405 20–21–22, 8 11QShirShabb 5–6, 2.

> Through the "pattern" He again indicates the incorporeal heaven, the archetype of the sense-perceptible. —Philo, *Questions and Answers in Exodus* 2:82

As for his assertions concerning the cosmic symbolism of the high priest's vestments, these are to be viewed in the broader context of his notion of the high priest Logos: see Laporte, "The High Priest in Philo of Alexandria." Note finally that Pseudo-Philo's description (*Biblical Antiquities* 11:15) closely follows the biblical text, so that this author specifies that God showed Moses a "likeness" *(similitudo)* and "model" *(exemplar)* of the sanctuary and its accoutrements. At the end of his life, however, Moses visits heaven:

> And He showed him the measurements of the sanctuary and the number of the offerings and the signs by which they would begin to chart the skies . . . As for you, however, I will receive you from there and I will glorify you along with your ancestors [that is, in heaven], and I will give you rest in your sleep and I will bury you with peace. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:10, 12

This revelation of the sanctuary measurements seems to be in the wrong place—the tabernacle had already been built!—and may represent a transposition of the motif of the heavenly model already seen.

Aaron Tried to Stop Them: The apologetic line adopted by ancient interpreters concerning Aaron's role in the golden calf incident may have still more ancient roots than those discussed above. Consider the Pentateuch's account of the actual making of the golden calf:

> And he [Aaron] took [the jewelry] from their hands and shaped with a carving-tool and made it into a molten calf. And they said: "**These** are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." —Exod. 32:4

The formulation "These are . . ." seems altogether damning—not only did Aaron make a golden calf, but the people spoke of *gods* in the plural, as if even denying the Deity's singleness.[5] In briefly alluding to this incident, the book of Nehemiah presents some significant differences:

> Even when **they made for themselves** a molten calf and they said, "**This** is your God, O Israel who brought [singular form of the verb] you up from Egypt," and committed great blasphemies . . . —Neh. 9:18

Here it is no longer Aaron who makes the calf, but the people themselves. What is more, the plural "gods" is singular here—at least the polytheistic overtones are absent. The same glossing over of Aaron's role is evident elsewhere:

5. Their words are curiously prophetic, since the very same assertion was to be made centuries later, at the time of Jeroboam's revolt, when two golden calves are made: "And he said to them, 'You have done enough of going up to Jerusalem; here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt'" (1 Kings 12:28). In this later verse, however, since there are two calves, the plural seems more appropriate.

They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped a molten image.
They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.
They forgot their saving God who had done great things in Egypt,
wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea.
Therefore He said He would destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying them.

—Ps. 106:19–23

In discussing Exod. 32:4, Abraham Geiger went so far as to suggest that the original text of this verse read not "And they said" but "And he [Aaron] said," a reading reflected in the Septuagint version. Changing the text to "they said" would thus likewise have been intended to cast Aaron in a somewhat better light. (However, Geiger also claimed, in contrast to what was said above, that "This is your God" was the *original* reading of Exod. 32:4. He appears strangely unaware of the existence of the parallel to 1 Kings 12:28; see *Hammiqra Vetargumayv*, 184, 246. Note also Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 70.)

In any case, an apologetic approach to this incident does appear to manifest itself even within the Hebrew Bible. It is true that many Christian texts subsequently cite the incident in order to rebuke Israel or claim that its covenant with God has been annulled: see Acts 7:39–41, *Letter of Barnabas* 4:6–8, 14:2–5; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 19:5, 102:6, 132:1; *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.4.20; and Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2:74. However, Jewish apologetics began long before these Christian writers came along. Compare Smolar and Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature."

The Letters Flew Off: The connection of this tradition with the phrase "before your eyes" (in the sense of "in a miracle that you all saw") was presented in keeping with the explanation set forth by Rashi in his commentary on b. *Pesaḥim* 87b. But as early as the seventeenth century R. Samuel Eliezer Edels ("Maharsha") in his Talmudic commentary expressed dissatisfaction with Rashi's explanation. He went on to suggest that what was miraculous was that *everyone* saw, since at the time that this deed took place, Moses was standing on the same level as the other people, and there could be no way that 600,000 people could all observe something taking place on the ground. If, however, the letters flew upward, then they could indeed be seen by such a crowd.

Neither of these explanations, nor still later proposals, seems altogether convincing. Instead, the true origin of the motif "The Letters Flew Off" ought to be sought in the phrase "And I seized the two tables" (Deut. 9:17) and the apparent contradiction it contained (for was not Moses already holding on to the tables?). In the earliest stage of the development of this midrash, interpreters suggested that Moses had struggled to hold on to the tables because *they* were trying to fly away—presumably, this was a natural reaction on the part of tables containing a prohibition of idolatry when they were confronted with the spectacle of Israel worshiping the golden calf. This motif still exists in such a form:

> Said R. Yoḥanan in the name of R. Yose b. Abayye [Palestinian *amora* of the first generation]: The **tables** were trying to fly off and Moses was holding on to them, as it says, "And I seized the two tables" [Deut. 9:17].
>
> —j. *Ta'anit* 4:5

Here it is undisputably the *tables* that are struggling to flee. But there was a problem with this lovely midrash, and that is that Moses nonetheless eventually manages to break the tables. This not only seemed to imply that he was physically stronger than the (angelic or whatever) powers pulling in the other direction—a disquieting notion—but it also presented Moses as breaking the tables in direct opposition to what was apparently God's will (that the tables flee heavenward). Why should Moses have stubbornly opposed God's will and held on to the tables only so as to shatter them into pieces?

A solution was found. It was not the tables but the letters that "tried to fly up"; indeed, they did fly up, leaving Moses with empty tables that he could then cast down and break in good conscience. This solution certainly solved the problem, but in so doing it severed the motif from its exegetical matrix. For now there was no basis for saying that Moses' words "And I seized the two tables" implied some sort of struggle. If the letters separated themselves from the tables and began to fly upward, then there was no reason for Moses to hold on all the harder to the *tables*—that would have absolutely no effect on fleeing letters!

It is interesting that the original form of this motif, "The *Tables* Flew Upward," is cited above in the name of a first generation *amora,* since the presumably earlier Pseudo-Philo already knew the replacement motif, "The Letters Flew Upward." Certainly the two motifs may have coexisted for a time. There is furthermore an obvious connection between this motif and the story of the martyrdom of the second-century *tanna* R. Ḥanina (Ḥananiah) b. Teradion. R. Ḥanina was ordered by the Romans to be burned alive holding a Torah scroll.

> [As the flames extinguished R. Ḥanina's life,] his students asked him, "Rabbi, what do you see?" He answered: "The parchment [of the Torah scroll] is being burnt, but the letters are flying off." —b. *Abodah Zarah* 18a

The letters flying up from the Torah scroll are apparently an intended parallel to R. Ḥanina's own soul fleeing his body. But the idea of the letters flying up from this scroll may have been adopted from an earlier motif connected with the tables cast down at Mt. Sinai. Note that the version of R. Ḥanina's death as reported in the (earlier) *Sifrei Deuteronomy* (307) does not mention the letters flying off.

Stored with Other Things: When God instructed Moses to build a large wooden container for the sanctuary, its purpose was clear: this "ark" was to contain the two stone tables of laws:

> [God told Moses:] "And you shall put into the ark the 'testimony' [the written covenant and its laws] which I shall give you." —Exod. 25:16

After Moses had broken the first set of stone tables, God instructed him to prepare a new set and to put it into the ark:

> [Moses recalls:] " 'At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew two tables of stone like the first . . . and I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark' . . . And He wrote on the tables as at the first writing . . . then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tables in the ark which I had made."
>
> —Deut. 10:1–5 (also Exod. 40:20)

The Bible is later quite specific: the ark contained nothing but these two tables:

> There was nothing in the ark except the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb. —1 Kings 8:9

Herein lay a problem: what happened to the original, broken tables? In a sense, these first tables were even more valuable than the second set, for while the second set had been hewn by Moses, the first were entirely of divine provenance. Could it be that the shattered fragments of the first set had been unceremoniously left in the sand? Certainly not—they must have been preserved somewhere. Yet they were apparently not kept in the most logical place for them, the ark that Moses had originally built to contain them, since the second set of tables, as we have just seen, were said to be the only contents of the ark.

Wrestling with this problem, ancient interpreters noticed something strange about the passage cited partially above:

> [Moses recalls:] " 'At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew two tables of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain, **and make an ark of wood.** And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.' " —Deut. 10:1–2

God had already instructed Moses to make an ark *before he broke the tables* (Exod. 25:10–16). Yet, according to Moses' retelling of the events, God again ordered Moses to "make an ark of wood" *after* the first tables had been broken. Perhaps God was telling Moses to make a second ark, the first ark apparently being destined to house the first, broken, set of tables.

> It is taught: R. Yudah b. Laqish said: there were two arks that accompanied Israel in the wilderness. One was that in which the Torah[6] was deposited, and the other that in which the broken tables were placed.
>
> —*j. Sheqalim* 6:1 (49c)

The existence of such a second ark is never mentioned or even implied elsewhere in the Bible, however. Perhaps, then, the same biblical passage could be read differently. God was merely reminding Moses of the previous commandment to build an

6. It is not clear whether the "Torah" here mentioned was stored in the ark *in addition to* the unbroken tables, or whether it in itself was written on the tables. Deut. 31:24–26 was ambiguous, but some saw in it a reference to the first scenario (b. *Baba Batra* 14b). Note that *Damascus Document* 5:2–3 says that David "did not read from the sealed book of the Torah which was in the ark."

ark—a commandment that he had not yet had time to carry out—but adding the further specification that this single ark was now to contain both the broken and unbroken tablets:

> [Moses recalls:] " 'At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew two tables of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood [as I told you earlier]. And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke, and you shall put **them** in the ark.'"
>
> —Deut. 10:1–2

The word "them" in this sentence is ambiguous. Might it not refer to both sets of tables, the new ones and the broken old ones?

> There were four tables in it [the ark], two of them whole and two broken, as it is written "[the tables] which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark [that is, in addition to the unbroken ones]." —*j. Sheqalim* 6:1 (49d)

If that was so, then 1 Kings 8:9 might be interpreted as meaning that the ark contained "two [sets of] stone tables." Alternately, the curious wording of this verse—literally, "there was not [or "nothing"] in the ark, only the two tables of stone"—might be explained as a kind of double negative, that is, "there was in the ark not only the two tables of stone" (cf. b. *Baba Batra* 14a). This would imply that the ark contained other things as well.

It is thus apparently out of the necessity to account for the preservation of the broken set of tables that there arose the notion that the ark of the covenant contained them in addition to the two unbroken ones. Soon enough, other things were also alleged to have been stored in the same ark. The twelve precious stones deposited in the ark according to Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* are nonetheless difficult to account for; the ingenious connection of this narrative to Isa. 60:19 suggested by Madeleine Petit ("Le contenu de l'Arche de l'alliance") seems forced to me. The same article presents an otherwise irreproachable survey of sources. On Aaron's staff and Heb. 9:3–4, see Chapter 23, *OR*, "Aaron's Staff Preserved." A somewhat ambiguous passage from the *Damascus Document* refers to a sealed text that was stored in the ark:

> But David did not read from the **sealed book of the law** which was in the ark, for it had not been opened in Israel from the time of the death of Eleazar and Joshua. —*Damascus Document* 5:2–4

See further Wacholder, "The 'Sealed' Torah."

The Angel of the Exodus: As discussed in Chapter 18, "An Angel in the Cloud," the Bible sometimes speaks of an angel in connection with the Exodus (Exod. 14:19, 23:20–21, Num. 20:15–16, and elsewhere). Who was this angel, and what was his function?

Second Temple literature frequently speaks of different categories of angels. One name for the highest class of angel was "angel of the presence" (literally, "of the countenance," "of the face"); in *Jubilees* and elsewhere this name designates (along

with "angels of holiness") the most exalted group of angels in heaven.[7] What this particular title means, and where it comes from, is a matter of some dispute, but certainly one possibility is that "countenance" here means the divine face: the *mal'ak happānîm* is the angel who is privileged to "see the divine face," on the analogy to the privileged courtiers who are permitted to see the face of the king in a human court (see 2 Kings 25:19; Est. 1:10, 14). The idea that only the highest angels are privileged to see God's face is clearly implied in Tob. 12:15 ("I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the holy one").

As for the origin of the term, *mal'ak happānîm* appears in the Hebrew Bible only in Isa. 63:9, and there only in the traditional Hebrew text. Given the somewhat different parsing of this verse in the Septuagint, it is not clear if the concept of *mal'ak happānîm* actually derives from this Isaiah verse, or if it is a later invention whose subsequent popularity caused later Jews to "discover" it in the verse in question.

Whatever the real origin of the term *mal'ak happānîm,* another, exegetical factor should figure in any account of its later development, one that is connected with the incident of the golden calf. For, after the first set of tables were broken, Moses sought reassurance from God:

> Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Take up this people,' but You have not let me know whom You will send with me . . ." And He said, "My presence [literally, "My face"] will go with you, and I will give you rest."
>
> —Exod. 33:12–14

It was certainly tempting to see in God's words a restatement of His earlier assurance to Moses, "But now, go to the place of which I have spoken to you; behold my *angel* shall go before you" (Exod. 32:34; compare 33:2). If so, then in this restatement God would apparently be further telling Moses that the angel in question is no ordinary celestial being but a member of the highest class of angels, the "angels of the presence" ("face"). "My face," in other words, is simply a shorthand way of saying, "an angel of My face." (Indeed, one such angel might be the one called *Israel,* in the sense of "man [= angel] who saw God," who *sees* God on a regular basis; see Chapter 12, *OR,* "Israel the Angel," and Chapter 20 and *OR,* "Singled Out from the Start"). Read in this fashion, God's words would seem to have failed to reassure Moses, since he replies: "If Your presence [that is, Your "angel of the face"] does not go with me, do not take us up from here. But [quite apart from this angel accompanying us,] how shall it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your own going with us . . .?" (Exod. 33:15–16).

7. See *Jubilees* 1:27, 29; 2:1, 18; 15:27; 31:14; *Testament of Levi* 3:4–8; *Testament of Judah* 25:2; also, Ginzberg, *Legends,* vol. 6, s.v. "Angel of the Face." At Qumran, in keeping with a favorite theme of *Jubilees,* members of the sect were likened to the angels of the presence in their praise of God: "For You have granted Your glory to all those of Your counsel [i.e., members of the sect] in common with the angels of the presence" (1QH *Thanksgiving Hymns* 6:13). (On this see Licht, *Megillat ha-Hodayot,* 113, also Introduction, p. 49; cf. 1QSb 4:25–26.) See further Hollander and DeJonge, *Commentary,* 230 n; Davidson, *Angles at Qumran,* 194–196.

Moses Grew Horns: The iconography of this tradition has been studied by Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought.* The horned Moses, lawgiver of the Jews, eventually intersected with the horned Cain, slayer of Abel and therefore typologically identified by some Christians with the Jews (see above, Chapter 4; also, Mellinkoff, *Mark of Cain*); Cain's horns were generated by the attempt to explain the otherwise unexplained "sign" or "mark" that God gave to Cain to help him ward off potential attackers (Gen. 4:15). Horns thus came to be thought of as somehow characteristic of Jews, a not insignificant factor in the Christian demonization of Jews in later times.

The Metaphorical Veil: Because Moses' face "beamed," he covered it with a veil. Strange to tell, early Jewish sources largely neglected this veil's metaphorical possibilities. Paul, however, saw it as connected to the theme of two covenants, that of Moses and the new covenant of Christianity:

> Now, if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor? . . . Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor. But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. —2 Cor. 3:7, 12–15

Here, the purpose of the veil seems to be not to hide the splendor of Moses' face as such, but to hide the fact that that splendor was *fading.* At the same time, Paul says that "we are very bold" in the sense of "unveiled," since uncovering the head was a sign of supreme, even overweening, confidence at that time. Finally, Moses' veil becomes a symbolic barrier that is transferred from Moses to the Jews ("when they read the old covenant, the same veil remains unlifted").

This complex interpretation has been much studied, and some scholars have suggested a polemic underlying Paul's words. See further van Unnik, "With Unveiled Faces: An Exegesis of 2 Cor. 3:12–18"; McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch,* 168–182; Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians;* Schulz, "Die Decke des Moses"; Fitzmyer, "Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ (2 Cor. 3:7–4:6)"; Murphy-O'Connor, "*Pneumatikoi* and Judaizers in 2 Cor. 2:14–4:6"; Belleville, *Reflections of Glory.* On resemblances between Paul's reading of the episode and Philo's, see also Wan, "Charismatic Exegesis: Philo and Paul Compared."

The radiance of Moses' face is first mentioned in connection with this veil, and some interpreters consequently supposed that it was only the accumulated exposure of two periods of forty days that caused Moses' face to shine. However, an earlier tradition apparently held that the radiance appeared after the first exposure. Pseudo-Philo even connects the making of the veil with the first descent:

> And Moses came down [the mountain for the first time]. And when he had been bathed with invisible light, he went down to the place where the light of the sun and the moon are; and the light of his face surpassed the splendor of the sun and the moon, and he did not even know this . . . And afterward, when Moses realized that his face had become glorious, he made a veil for himself with which to cover his face. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 12:1

See further Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:61.

Mirrors of Modesty: In giving its account of the building of the tabernacle, the Bible mentions specifically the source of one material, the brass used for the making of a wash-basin:

> And he [Bezalel, artisan of the tabernacle] made the wash-basin of bronze and its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered at the door of the tent of meeting. —Exod. 38:8

Presumably the source of the bronze needed to be explained, apart from the general account found in Exod. 35:22–29. Still, the assertion that women's *mirrors* were the source of the sanctuary's wash-basin could not but raise a few eyebrows, since mirrors were generally associated with vanity and luxuriance. Was this a proper material to be used in building God's home on earth?

Making a virtue of a necessity, a tradition developed that treated *these* mirrors as an expression of the women's modesty and devotion:

> At the entrance there was a brass wash-basin, for the making of which the master did not take unworked material, as is usually done, but possessions already elaborately wrought for another purpose. These the women had brought, filled with fervent zeal, rivalling the men in piety, resolved to win the prize of high excellence, and eager to use the very power that they had that they might not be outstripped by them in holiness. For with spontaneous ardor at no other bidding than their own, they gave the mirrors which they used in adorning their comely persons, a truly fitting firstfruit offering of the **modesty** and **chastity** in marriage, and in fact of the beauty of soul. These the master thought good to take and, after melting them down, construct with them the wash-basin and nothing else . . . a symbol of a blameless life, of years of cleanliness employed in laudable actions and in straight travelling, not on the rough road or more properly pathless waste of vice. —Philo, *On Moses*, 2:136–138

It is noteworthy that here, Philo deviates from the text of the Septuagint.

> He made the bronze wash-basin, and its bronze base, out of the mirrors of the fasting women, who fasted by the doors of the tent of witness, on the day on which he set it up. —Septuagint Exod. 38:26

The difference between "ministering women, who had ministered" and "fasting women, who had fasted" is not great in Hebrew (*haṣṣōbĕ'ōt* versus *haṣṣāmōt*). Still,

it may be that the version reflected in the Septuagint represents an attempt specifically to underline the piety of these women and, hence, to make *their* mirrors a fit offering. In any case, Philo does not allude to any fasting on their part. Instead, his explanation seems more in line with that found in rabbinic sources:

> The basin was made from the women's mirrors, as it is said, "And he made the brass wash-basin . . . from the mirrors of the women" [Exod. 38:8]. Those women who had said, "God may testify concerning us that we were unsullied when we left Egypt," when Moses went to make the wash-basin, God said to him, "Make it from the very mirrors [of these women], since they were not made for the purpose of [encouraging] immorality."
>
> — *Numbers Rabba* 9:14

Thousands of Israelites: It was seen that the assertion that God "keeps steadfast love *for thousands*" was problematic, since its apparent meaning—that "thousands" refers to generations or years—seemed contradicted by what followed, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children." Some interpreters therefore suggested that the "thousands" referred to one class of sinners, those who repented, while the other class, the truly wicked, suffered God's visiting the "iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children."

Now, it might be that the word "thousands" refers to people in general, anyone who repents. Alternatively, "thousands" might, to a certain way of thinking, refer to Israel in particular. After all, this word is often found in the Bible in the phrase the "thousands of Israel."[8] Perhaps, then, the meaning is that, while God is merciful toward all peoples, He actually has promised to forgive the iniquity of one people in particular, the people of Israel. The ultimate reason for this assertion might be that only Israel has a special day, the Day of Atonement, on which its sins are forgiven: "And this shall be an everlasting statute for you, that atonement may be made *for the people of Israel* once a year because of all their sins" (Lev. 16:34).

> But You, our God, are good and true, slow to anger, and governing all with mercy. For even if **we** sin, **we are yours,** since we are cognizant of your might; but knowing that we are **reckoned** yours, we will not sin.
>
> — Wisd. 15:1–2

This author's "we" seems to refer to Israel in particular (rather than humanity in general); cf. Wisd. 12:19–22. The point thus seems to be that *we in particular,* even if we sin, are nonetheless especially tied to God. It is to be noted that the word "reckoned" in Wisd. 15:2 (in Greek as in English) has associations of counting or enumeration. Thus, this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon alludes to Exod. 34:6–7 not only with the phrase "good and true, slow to anger, and governing all with

8. Num. 1:16, 10:4, 36; Josh. 22:21, 30; cf. Deut. 33:17, 1 Sam. 23:23, Micah 5:1. (This Hebrew expression may also mean the "tribes of Israel.") Perhaps, as suggested earlier, the sentence in Exod. 34:6–7 ought in this case as well to be understood as "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; keeping steadfast love; for 'thousands' [that is, the "thousands of Israel"] forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

mercy," but in the mention of reckoning or counting, that is, the counting necessarily involved in dealing with the "thousands." (See also Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon,* 281.) This is in keeping with the motif seen above, "Thousands of Sins Forgiven." Along the same lines:

> ". . . acting with [steadfast love] for a thousand generations toward those who love Me and keep my commandments" [Exod. 20:6]—as indeed I have done for you [Moses] and for your people on account of your fathers [who are] of the house of Abraham and Isaac.
>
> —Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 20:1

Finally, it was noted that the phrase "for a thousand generations" in Deut. 7:9 was apparently interpreted at Qumran (*Damascus Document* 19:1–2) as a promise to keep alive those whom God loves for a thousand generations. Presumably this means that, in addition to punishing the descendants of sinners to the third and fourth generation, God hereby has undertaken to "keep alive" the descendants of those who love Him, to the thousandth generation. Alternatively, it might also be possible to interpret the phrase "keep them alive" *(lḥywtm)* as meaning "bring them back to life" after a thousand generations: see in this sense *Jubilees:*

> They [the righteous] will rise and see great peace. He [God] will expel His enemies. The righteous will see, offer praise, and be very happy forever and ever. They will see all their punishments and curses on their enemies. Their bones will rest in the earth and their spirits will be very happy. They will know that the Lord is one who executes judgment but **shows kindness to** hundreds and **thousands** and to all who love Him. —*Jubilees* 23:30–31

Here, too, the phrase "to hundreds and thousands" (presumably, *lm'wt wl'lpym*) might arguably refer to years; on the reading "to hundreds and thousands and to all who love Him," see VanderKam, *Jubilees,* 149 n. See also (4Q521) *Messianic Apocalypse* frag. 2, col. 2:12, and 5, col. 2:6.

Cleanses But Does Not Cleanse: If Exod. 34:7 was really an assertion that God forgives one group of sinners but not another, then the act of distinguishing between these two groups seemed for some interpreters to have come to a head in the phrase "but He will by no means clear [guilt]," since the Hebrew text here actually employs a doubled form of the verb: more literally it says, "cleanse He will not cleanse." From an early period, interpreters saw such doubled verbs as more than a merely emphatic form. If the same verbal root appears twice, it must have some twofold significance (Lee, *Lexical Study of the Septuagint,* 17; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 243 n. 21). For this reason, some ancient interpreters concluded that "cleanse He will not cleanse" meant that God does indeed forgive—"cleanses"—some sinners, but He does not cleanse others:

> R. Yose said: If a person sins twice or three times, he will be forgiven, but four [or more] he will not, as it is said, "forgiving iniquity and transgression

> and sin and *cleanse*"—thus far[9] will He cleanse; but from this point onward "He does not cleanse." —Tosefta *Yoma* 4:13

The idea that the first "cleanse" is independent of the following phrase "does not cleanse"—and that, as a consequence, this first "cleanse" is meant to indicate that God does indeed "cleanse" some sinners—may be reflected elsewhere:

> Blessed are You, God of **mercy** and **compassion.** In the **great**ness of Your goodness and **faithfulness** and the multitude of Your **steadfast love** and in all Your works, cause Your servant's soul to rejoice in Your **faithfulness,** and **purify** [that is, "cleanse"] me in Your righteousness, for I have yearned for Your goodness, and in Your steadfast love and Your forgiveness I hope.
>
> —(1QH) *Thanksgiving Hymns* 11:29–30

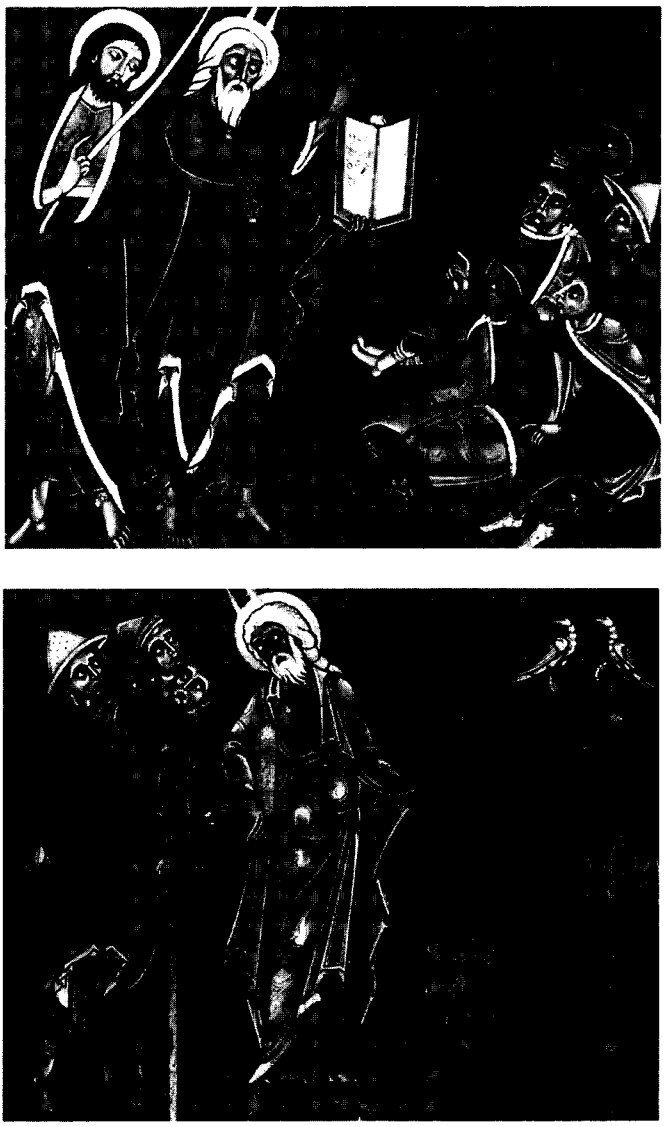
> O merciful and compassionate, forgive us our iniquities and unrighteousness, and transgressions, and shortcomings. Reckon not every sin of your servants and handmaids, but **cleanse** us with the cleansing of your truth.
>
> —*1 Clement* 60:1–2

9. That is, after having committed the three sins mentioned, iniquity, transgression, and sin.

22

Worship in the Wilderness

(LEVITICUS 1–NUMBERS 10)



(Horned) Moses teaches the meaning of the laws: gentle birds for gentle people.

Worship in the Wilderness

(LEVITICUS 1–NUMBERS 10)

❖ ❖ ❖

With the building of the tabernacle complete, God revealed to Moses further laws connected with worship: the different sorts of animal sacrifices and other offerings that could be made, and the proper procedure to be followed by priests. Then Moses' brother, Aaron, along with Aaron's sons, underwent consecration as priests. However, two of Aaron's sons—Nadab and Abihu—soon went astray: they brought an "unholy fire" before God and were burned to death.

God instructed Moses in many other matters connected to holiness: purity and impurity, the time and requirements of various festivals, and miscellaneous laws governing relations among neighbors and between man and God. To mark the dedication of the tabernacle's altar, each of the chiefs of Israel's twelve tribes brought an offering before God.

THE LAWS about sacrifices that begin the book of Leviticus were a necessary preliminary to inaugurating regular worship in the tabernacle. Once this information was imparted, Israel could begin to offer up the different sorts of sacrifices—burnt offerings, grain offerings, sin offerings, and so forth—that were to be the focus of worship not only during the forty years of desert wanderings, but for centuries and centuries afterward. Yet no sooner were the sacrifices explained and the priests—Aaron and his sons—consecrated and put to the task of making the first offerings, than there occurred the strange death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, burned by a fire from God.

An Error in Priestly Procedure

What was the sin of Nadab and Abihu? The Bible says that they had brought an "unholy" or "foreign" fire before God. What exactly was wrong with this offering is not specified, nor did God's words cited immediately afterward—"I will be sanctified among those who are close to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. 10:3)—seem to clarify matters much. However, to many interpreters it appeared that the two brothers certainly must have been guilty of violating proper priestly procedure (since the text did say that they had brought their offering "in such a way as He had not commanded them" [Lev. 10:1]):

> The two elder [sons of Aaron], Nadab and Abihu, did not bring [the kind of] incense as Moses had ordered, but the sort that they had used previously. They were burnt to death. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:209

> And Moses said, "This is what the Lord said to me at Sinai: When they come before Me, I will sanctify the tabernacle, so that if they are not careful in the sacrificial service, I will burn them with My own scorching fire, [and this is established] so that I may be glorified in the sight of all the people."
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Lev. 10:2–3

The fact that the incident is immediately followed by a divine commandment, issued to Aaron and his remaining sons, not to drink wine or strong drink when they enter the tent of meeting "lest you die" (Lev. 10:9) implied to others that Nadab and Abihu must have been drunk at the time they entered the tabernacle:

> R. Ishmael explained: Aaron's sons died because they entered [the tabernacle] drunk with wine. — *Leviticus Rabba* 12:1

A Holy Death

All this notwithstanding, some interpreters claimed that *no* sin had been committed, and that Nadab and Abihu's death was actually a form of exaltation. After all, God's words in Lev. 10:3 (cited above) seemed to refer to Nadab and Abihu as "those who are close to Me" (in the Septuagint, "who draw near to Me"), and this sounded like a virtue, not a fault. What is more, the two were said to have died "before the Lord" (Lev. 10:2); did not this phrase seem to imply that they had not actually died in the tabernacle, but had ascended to heaven and died there? If so, then their being "burnt" was really a necessary preliminary to their ascending into heaven like the smoke or vapor of a fire:

> [Nadab and Abihu] were not seized by a wild beast, but were taken up by a rush of fire unquenchable, by an undying splendor, since in sincerity they cast aside sloth and delay and consecrated their zeal, hot and fiery, flesh-consuming and swiftly moving, to piety. [This fire] was "foreign" [Lev. 10:1] to earthly existence, since it belonged to the realm of God . . . Wafted by a favorable breeze and carried to the heights of heaven, they there passed away, like a wholly burnt offering [from the tabernacle] into celestial splendor. — Philo, *On Dreams* 2:67

> It is thus that the priests Nadab and Abihu die in order that they might live, receiving an incorruptible life in exchange for mortal existence, and being transferred from the [domain of the] created to the uncreated. As an allusion to [this] immortality it is said in regard to them that they died "before the Lord" [Lev. 10:2], which means they [really] came to life, since a dead body may not come into God's presence. And [hence it says] "This is what the Lord has said, 'I will be sanctified in those who draw near to me'" [Septuagint Lev. 10:3]. — Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 59

> [On Mt. Sinai] God had said to Moses, "Moses, sometime in the future I will be made present to the people of Israel and will be sanctified *by them* in this house [the tabernacle], as it is said, 'There I will be made present to the

> people of Israel, and it [the tabernacle] will be sanctified with my glory [alternate reading, 'with my being honored']' [Exod. 29:43]." This divine statement was made to Moses on Mt. Sinai, but he himself did not understand it until the incident [of Nadab and Abihu] occurred. [When, just before that incident, God was made present to the people (Lev. 9:24),] Moses said to God: "Master of the Universe, who is there more beloved [to You] than me and my brother Aaron? [Are we not the ones] by whom this house will [now] be sanctified?" After Aaron's two sons entered to sacrifice and came out burnt, Moses [now understood and] said to Aaron, "Aaron my brother, your sons died for the sake of sanctifying God's name. That is what He meant by 'I will be made holy by those who are near [and dear] to me [that is, Nadab and Abihu] and [then, as a result] before all the people I will be honored' [Lev. 10:3]." —*Leviticus Rabba* 12:2

Such an interpretation was only strengthened by the Bible's description of Aaron as "silent" (Lev. 10:3) after Moses explained to him the significance of what had happened, and its instruction that Aaron and his remaining sons not mourn (Lev. 10:6). Did not all this further indicate that Nadab and Abihu had died a holy death?

> [Some people] are mourned as though they are dead, even though they are still alive, since the life that they live is worthy of lamentation and mourning . . . On the other hand, Moses does not allow Nadab [and Abihu], those holy principles, to be mourned. —Philo, *On Dreams* 2:66–67

> When Aaron heard [Moses' explanation] and understood that his sons were beloved [to God], he fell silent [and did not mourn their death] and was rewarded for his silence, which is why it says specifically "and Aaron was silent" [Lev. 10:3]. —*Leviticus Rabba* 12:2

Coats Not Burned

One related detail in the incident attracted interpreters' attention. After the burning, Moses ordered that the bodies of Aaron's two sons be removed:

> And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, Aaron's uncle, and said to them, "Draw near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." So they drew near, and carried them **in their coats** out of the camp, as Moses had said. —Lev. 10:4–5

Whose coats were used to remove the bodies? It hardly seemed likely that Mishael and Elzaphan would have used their own coats—after all, everyone knew that the wearing of priestly coats was an essential in the sanctuary (Exod. 28:40–43). Interpreters thus concluded that "their" coats meant Nadab's and Abihu's. But if these two brothers had been burned, how could their coats have survived? Here, then, was another indication that the "burning" did not mean that they were physically burned:

> Therefore, they did not lift them up in their own coats, but in those of Nadab and Abihu, who had been devoured by fire and taken up on high.
>
> —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* 2:57–58

Other interpreters seem to preserve a reminiscence of the same interpretation:

> They were burned to death: the fire shot forth onto them and started to burn their chests and faces, and no one could put it out.[1]
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:209

> And a flame of fire came forth from before the Lord with anger, and divided itself into four strands, and they entered their nostrils and burned their souls, but their bodies were not destroyed.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Lev. 10:2–3

> "And the fire consumed them . . ." [Lev. 10:3]: their souls were burned but not their garments, as it says "And they [their brothers] came near and lifted them up in their coats" [Lev. 10:5]—the garments of those being carried.
>
> — *Sifra, Shemini* 34

Control of Appetites

The account of the death of Nadab and Abihu is followed by additional laws, those concerned with matters of purity and impurity. Such laws were related to the general topic of sacrifices and the priestly service, since impurity (a state transmitted by touching, or being in proximity to, certain substances) made a person unfit for contact with the sanctuary and its service. Various requirements were established for people to be cleansed after becoming impure.

In presenting the overall topic of impurity, the Bible begins with a list of "impure" animals, fish, and birds, which may not be eaten, and sets out as well the permissible species (Leviticus 11; see also Deut. 14:3–20). For example, an animal that "parts the hoof and is cloven footed and chews the cud" (Lev. 11:3) is permitted for food. This means that beef and lamb, for example, can be eaten, but pork or ham cannot (since pigs do not chew the cud). Many ancient interpreters were puzzled by these requirements. If God created all animals, and if certainly many of the forbidden animals nonetheless made for a meal every bit as tasty and healthful as the permitted ones, then why were only some animals declared "pure" and permitted as food?

To some it seemed that the laws of pure food must serve a higher, moral purpose. Their aim was to teach mastery over one's bodily desires and appetites:

> All the animals of land, sea, or air which have the finest and fattest meat, thus titillating and exciting pleasure, he [Moses] sternly forbade them to eat, knowing that they set a trap for the most slavish of the senses, taste, and

1. By this wording Josephus apparently wishes to imply that the divine fire killed them almost instantly, perhaps by its fumes, after having only *started* to burn "their chests and faces." That would explain how their coats survived while they did not.

> produce gluttony, an evil very dangerous both to soul and body . . . Now among the different kinds of land animals there is none whose flesh is so delicious as the pig's, as all who eat it agree. — Philo, *Special Laws* 4:100–101

> When we are attracted to forbidden foods, how do we come to reject the pleasures to be gained from them? Is it not because reason has the power to control appetities? . . . Accordingly, when we crave seafood or fowl or the meat of four-legged beasts or any sort of food that is forbidden to us under the Law, it is through the mastery of reason that we abstain.
>
> — 4 Macc. 1:33–34 (also 4:16–27)

Similarly:

> Said R. El'azar b. 'Azariah: Whence do we know that a person should not say, "I have no desire to eat the meat of a pig" . . . ? On the contrary, [he should say:] "I do indeed so desire, but what can I do? My heavenly Father has so ordered me." This is the meaning of "I have separated you from [other] peoples, that you should be mine" [Lev. 20:26]. — *Yalqut Shimoni* 626

Ruminating with One's Mind

Still, such an explanation did not account for the particulars of the forbidden animals. Why, in particular, had the Bible stressed cloven hoofs and chewing the cud (ruminating) as requirements? To some it seemed that this specification was designed to teach that "rumination" in the mental sense—chewing things over in one's mind—was a crucial virtue:

> Everything pertaining to conduct permitted us toward these creatures and towards beasts has been set out symbolically . . . For example, all cloven-footed creatures and ruminants quite clearly express, to those who perceive it, the phenomenon of memory. Rumination is nothing but the recalling of life and constitution, life being usually constituted by nourishment.
>
> — *Letter of Aristeas* 150, 153–154

> He [Moses] adds a general method for proving and testing the ten kinds [of clean animals] based on two criteria, the parted hoof and the chewing of the cud. Now both of these are symbols . . . For just as a cud-chewing animal after biting through the food keeps it at rest in the gullet, again after a bit draws it up and chews it and then passes it on to the belly, so the student, after receiving from the teacher through his ears the principles and lore of wisdom, prolongs the process of learning, since he cannot at once comprehend and grasp them securely, until, by using memory to call up each thing that he has heard . . . he stamps a firm impression of them on his soul.
>
> — Philo, *Special Laws* 4:106–107

> Again, Moses said: "Eat any animal that is cloven-hooved and chews its cud . . ." [cf. Lev. 11:3]. What, then, does he mean? Be joined to people who fear the Lord, with people who mull over in their hearts the special meaning

of the teaching that they have received, be with those who speak of, and observe, the Lord's ordinances, with those who know that meditation is a joyful task and who ruminate on the word of the Lord.

— *Letter of Barnabas* 10:11

Gentle Birds for Gentle People

As for permitted and forbidden fowl, interpreters noticed that the latter category prominently included birds of prey and birds that feed on dead bodies, while the former featured grain-fed, domesticated birds. Surely here too was a symbolic message:

Do not take the contemptible view that Moses enacted this legislation because of an excessive preoccupation with mice and weasels or such creatures. The fact is that everything has been solemnly set in order for unblemished investigation and amendment of life for the sake of righteousness. The birds which we use are all domesticated and of exceptional cleanliness, their food consisting of wheat and pulse—such birds as pigeons, turtledoves, locusts, partridges, and in addition, geese and others of the same kind. As to the birds which are forbidden, you will find the wild and carnivorous kinds, as well as others which dominate by their own strength and who find their food at the expense of the forementioned domesticated birds, which is an injustice . . . By calling them pure, he [Moses] has thereby indicated that it is the solemn binding duty of those for whom the legislation has been established to **practice righteousness** and not lord it over anyone by relying on their own strength, nor to deprive a person of anything, but to govern their lives righteously in the manner of those gentle creatures among the birds who feed on plants that grow in the ground and who do not exercise a domination leading to the destruction of their fellow creatures.

— *Letter of Aristeas* 144–147

It might perhaps be considered only fair that all wild animals that feed on human flesh should [be ruled edible and so] suffer from humans what humans suffer from them. But Moses enjoined that we abstain from enjoying such animals, even though they do make for an appetizing and delectable meal. But he was considering what is suitable to a **gentle-mannered soul** . . . Of [the birds] he disqualified a vast number of species, in fact all those that prey on other birds or on men, creatures which are carnivorous and venomous and in general use their strength to attack others. But doves, pigeons, turtledoves, and the tribes of cranes, geese and the like he reckons as belonging to the tame and gentle class, and gives to any who wish full liberty to make use of them as food. —Philo, *Special Laws* 4:103, 117

"You shall not eat the eagle, nor the hawk, nor the kite, nor the crow" [Lev. 11:13–16]. You shall not, he [Moses] is saying, be joined or make yourself similar to those men who do not know how to provide food for themselves

> through toil and sweat, but in their wickedness plunder things that belong to others and lie in wait—[acting all the while] as if they were walking around quite innocently—looking around for someone to plunder in their greed, in quite the same way that these birds [mentioned above] do not provide food for themselves but sit around idly, looking for some way to eat the flesh of others. —*Letter of Barnabas* 10:4

Day of Repentance

In the midst of the other laws concerned with purity and holiness comes the Bible's description of a special day, the Day of Atonement, in which the people of Israel are cleansed of their sins and forgiven (Leviticus 16). The description of its rites is long and detailed, but certainly the most striking thing about it was its effect. Each year the people of Israel would be cleansed from their accumulated sins:

> [God said to Moses:] And it shall be a statute to you [Israelites] forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves [with fasting] and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you from all your sins; before the Lord you shall become clean. —Lev. 16:29–30

The idea that the most grievous sins could be, as it were, washed away simply by following the procedure of sacrifice and fasting prescribed for the Day of Atonement certainly sounded good—in fact, too good. Surely, interpreters reasoned, the intention was not to suggest that the Temple ceremony on its own could effect forgiveness: the sinner must have had to do something more than merely fast for a day. After all, the prophet Isaiah had railed against just such a mechanical notion of the efficacy of fasting:

> Behold, in the day of your fast you pursue your own affairs and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with the wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high . . . Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see him unclothed, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? —Isa. 58:3–7

Elsewhere, as well, Scripture made clear that sincere repentance—from the heart—was required by God:

> Let us lift up our hearts, not [merely] our hands to God in heaven; we have transgressed and rebelled, and You have not forgiven us.
>
> —(variant reading of) Lam. 3:41

And so, interpreters in general came to the conclusion that something more than mere fasting and sacrifices was required on the Day of Atonement (although, strikingly, the Bible itself had not so specified). Surely one could not simply sin in

the expectation that one's sins would be forgiven and then turn around and sin again. At the very least, one had to seek to abandon one's sinful ways for good:

> And about the Israelites it has been written and ordained [that, on the Day of Atonement] if they **repent** in righteousness, He will forgive all their transgressions and pardon all their sins. —*Jubilees* 5:17

> [On the Day of Atonement,] those who now have been purified by **conversion to a better way of life** will have washed away their old lawlessness through a **new adherence to law**. —Philo, *Special Laws* 1:188

> One who touches a dead body, bathes [in order to remove his impurity],
> and then touches it again, what good will his washing have done him?
> Such is a person who fasts for his sins and then goes and does them
> again.
>
> —Sir. 34:25–26

> So long as a person holds a source of impurity in his hand, then even if he washes in the [waters of] Siloam or in all the waters of Creation, he can never be purified. But if he casts the impurity from his hand, a bath of [the minimum measure] is sufficient to [purify] him. So [similarly] does it say, "He who confesses and abandons [his sin] will gain mercy" [Prov. 28:13].
>
> —Tosefta *Ta'aniyot* 1:8

> One who says, "I will sin and then I will repent, I will sin and I will repent," it will not be given to such a person to repent. [If he says,] "I will sin and the Day of Atonement will atone [for me]," the Day of Atonement will not atone. —m. *Yoma* 8:9

What may be the Jewish substratum of a later Christian text likewise stresses that fasting is only effective if one is pure and prays with a pure heart:

> Remember that from the time when He created the heavens, the Lord created the fast, for a benefit to men on account of the passions and desires which fight against you, so that evil will not inflame you. "But it is a pure fast that I have created," said the Lord . . . Let the pure one fast, but whenever the one who fasts is not pure, he has angered the Lord and also the angels. And he has grieved his soul, gathering up wrath for himself for the day of wrath. But a pure fast is what I created, [to be observed] with a pure heart and pure hands. It releases sin, it heals diseases, it casts out demons, it is effective up to the throne of God for an ointment and for a release from sin by means of a pure prayer. —*Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:15–22

The Day of Partial Atonement

If one did, however, sincerely repent of one's misdeeds, could *all* sins be atoned for? The Bible did indeed say "all your sins" in various formulations (Lev. 16:16, 21–22, 30, 34). Some interpreters took this "all" as inclusive:

> [On the Day of Atonement] men from morning to evening use their time in the offering of humble prayers by which they might appease God and ask for remission of their sins, **both intentional and unintentional**, hoping for a good outcome not by dint of themselves, but by the gracious nature of the One who prefers forgiveness to punishment. —Philo, *Special Laws* 2:196

Others, however, doubted that the Day of Atonement could be, in this sense, a blank check. Quite apart from the matter of repentance, perhaps the atonement spoken of here applied only to certain kinds of sins—for example, those committed by mistake—but not others:

> And about the Israelites it has been written and ordained [that, on the Day of Atonement] if they repent in righteousness, He will forgive all their transgressions and pardon all their sins. [But what does this "all" mean?] It is written and ordained that He will have mercy on all who repent of all their **errors** once a year. —*Jubilees* 5:17

> The righteous constantly searches his house to remove his unintentional sins. He atones for [sins of] ignorance by fasting and humbling his soul, and the Lord will cleanse every devout person and his house.
> —*Psalms of Solomon* 3:7–8

> But into the second, [inner, area] only the high priest goes, and he but once a year [that is, on the Day of Atonement], and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for **the errors** of the people.
> —Heb. 9:7 (also 5:2)

Or perhaps only sins committed against God were atoned for by the day alone:

> The Day of Atonement may atone for sins of a man toward God, but for sins committed against one's fellow, the Day of Atonement will not atone until the person himself seeks to assuage his fellow.
> —m. *Yoma* 8:9 (cf. m. *Shebu'ot* 1:6)

Hatred Means Hypocrisy

In addition to sacrificial worship, the food laws and other matters of purity and impurity, and the regulations of the Day of Atonement and other holidays, Leviticus also focuses on a number of issues connected with everyday morality. At first glance these might seem clear enough:

> You shall do no injustice in judging: you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the rich, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go about as a tale-bearer among your people, and you shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely reproach your fellow, and you shall bear no sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a

> grudge against your countrymen, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. —Lev. 19:15–18

And yet, laws such as these were, when one stopped to consider them, just as puzzling as the laws of pure and impure foods. For if they were indeed laws—divine commandments, and not just good advice—how could anyone be expected to obey them fully? How, in particular, could such a common thing as gossip or slander ("tale-bearing") be outlawed completely? How could the Bible forbid hatred or the bearing of a grudge—emotions that are perfectly natural in certain circumstances, and perhaps even laudable in some? Most puzzling of all, how could the Bible *command* us to love, to "love your neighbor as yourself"? Were there not at least some neighbors whom it was impossible to love (and who, in any case, did not seem to merit such love)?

With regard to the prohibition of hating one's brother "in your heart," interpreters saw this last phrase as a crucial qualification. Hatred in the heart, they reasoned, meant hatred that was unexpressed, that remained hidden inside. There was good reason to think this. After all, the book of Proverbs more than once suggested that hatred of this sort leads to hypocrisy and lying:

> He who hates **dissembles with his lips**, harboring treachery inside himself;
> Though he make his voice kindly, do not trust him, for there are seven abhorrences **in his heart**.
>
> —Prov. 26:24–25

> He who **conceals** hatred has lying lips, and he who utters slander is a fool.
>
> —Prov. 10:18

If hatred "in the heart" meant concealed hatred, then it seemed that the Bible was outlawing not hating per se, but hiding that hatred under a veil of hypocrisy and lying:

> [Gad confesses:] And now, my children, each of you love his brother and remove hatred **from your hearts**, and love one another in deed and word and thought. For in my father's presence I would **speak peaceably** to Joseph, but when I went out from him, the spirit of hatred darkened my mind and aroused my soul to kill him. — *Testament of Gad* 6:1–2

Reproach Prevents Hatred

If one is thus forbidden to hide hatred "in the heart," what is the alternative? Many interpreters found an answer in the words just following the prohibition of hidden hatred seen above in Lev. 19:17: "You shall surely reproach your fellow, and you shall bear no sin because of him." In other words, instead of hating in secret, one ought to tell the offending party openly of one's grievance, reproach him and so avoid committing any sin on his account.

> Reproach a friend **before getting angry,** and give place to the Torah of the Most High.
>
> —Sir. 19:17

> If anyone sins against you, speak to him peacefully, having banished the poison of hatred, and do not maintain treachery in your soul.
>
> — *Testament of Gad* 6:3

> You shall not hate any man, but some you shall reproach, others you shall pray for, and others you shall love more than your own life.[2]
>
> — *Didache* 2:7

Reproach Gently to Prevent Sin

It is not clear to what the phrase "and you shall bear no sin because of him" in Lev. 19:17 refers: the sin in question might be something done by the offended party if he does not reproach his fellow—hating him in his heart, or, as Ben Sira suggests above, "getting angry." Other interpreters, however, believed that the sin being referred to was some further sin that might be occasioned by the act of reproaching: too sharp a reproach might lead the other party to take a false oath in protesting his innocence, or to curse with the divine name. In any case, many therefore stressed that the act of reproaching was to be done in the gentlest manner, lest it in itself become the cause of further sin:

> Reproach each other in tru[th] and humility and in loving consideration to a man. Let one not speak to hi[m] in anger or contentiousness or stub[bornly or in a] mean spirit, and let him not hate him in [. . .] his heart, but on that very day let him reproach him and not bear sin because of him.
>
> — (1QS) *Community Rule* 5:24–6:1

> And if he confesses and repents, forgive him. But if he denies, do not dispute with him, **lest he swear** and you thereby sin doubly.
>
> — *Testament of Gad* 6:4

> "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely reproach your fellow . . ." Might you understand this to mean that you should reproach him even to the point of embarrassment? Scripture says, "You shall bear no sin because of him." — *Sifra* (*"Mekhilta de'arayot"*) *ad* Lev. 19:17

There may be a reminiscence of this same interpretation in the following:

> Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged . . . But above all, my brothers, do not swear . . . that you may not fall under condemnation. —James 5:9–12

2. That is, hatred is to be avoided in some cases by reproaching the offender; in others by praying on the offender's behalf (perhaps because he is incapable of accepting reproach, so "you shall bear no sin because of him," Lev. 19:17—see below); and in yet other cases by loving the offender "more than your own life," an allusion to Lev. 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself.*"

Reproach before Charging

A wholly different interpretation, however, likewise existed, this one based on an attempt to understand the law of reproach in its overall context in the Bible. For the paragraph of laws cited above starts with the words "You shall do no injustice *in judging:* you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the rich, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15). Was it not possible that the commandment to reproach one's fellow (along with the others in this passage) was connected specifically to the world of courts and lawsuits? If so, then perhaps "reproach your fellow" meant, originally, "don't rush to take him to court." In other words, one ought to try to settle disputes on one's own; only someone who hates his fellow in his heart will use the occasion of an infraction to haul him before the judges:

> If a brother stumbles, it [hatred] wants to report it forthwith to everyone, and is eager for him to be brought to trial for it and punished and put to death. — *Testament of Gad* 4:3

Soon enough, this line of interpretation led to the inclusion of "reproach" as a necessary preliminary to bringing official charges against someone. The offender had to be reproached—in fact, in the presence of witnesses—before he could be officially charged with a crime:

> Moreover, let a man not bring against his fellow a matter before the "Many" [a quasi-judicial body] which had no reproach before witnesses.
> — (1QS) *Community Rule* 6:1

> Any man from the members of the covenant [of the Qumran sect] who brings against his fellow a charge which has had no reproach before witnesses, but brings it out of anger, or tells it to his Elders in order to shame him, he is guilty of taking revenge and holding a grudge . . . His sin is upon him insofar as he did not carry out the commandment of God who said to him, "You shall surely reproach your fellow and shall bear no sin because of him." — *Damascus Document* 9:3–8

> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. — Matt. 18:15–16

> But someone [in the church] who is hard and froward and overreaching and blasphemous [and] a hypocrite . . . the Enemy [Satan] is at work in him. Reproach him, therefore, and rebuke him and upbraid him, and put him forth for correction; and afterwards, as we have already said, receive him back, so that he may not utterly perish. For when such people are corrected and reproached, you will not have many lawsuits.
> — *Didascalia Apostolorum* ch.11

Love As You Would Be Loved

Thus, the Bible was understood not to outlaw hatred per se, but hidden hatred, and to indicate that the way to prevent such hidden hatred was through open reproach (if only in the judicial sense). But what then of the law found in the very next verse, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18)? Did not this commandment go well beyond outlawing hatred, hidden or otherwise, and enjoin people to act lovingly toward one another under any circumstances?

The answer depended, of course, on how the words were understood. They might mean, to be sure: You shall love your neighbor *in the same way that* you love yourself.

> And among yourselves, my sons, be loving of your brothers as a man **loves himself**, with each man seeking for his brother what is good for him, and acting together on the earth, and loving each other as themselves.
>
> — *Jubilees* 36:4

Or even:

> You shall not hate any man, but some you shall reproach, others you shall pray for, and others you shall love more than your own life. — *Didache* 2:7

> You shall love your neighbor even above your own soul [life].
>
> — *Letter of Barnabas* 19:5

But this was hardly the only possible sense for ancient interpreters, perhaps not even the most likely. After all, loving one's neighbor every bit as much as one loves oneself—expending as much time and effort and worldly goods on him as on oneself, indeed, in time of danger not giving one's own life precedence over that of one's neighbor—seems like a tall order indeed, virtually an inhuman one. So perhaps the commandment was intended in some other sense, something like: You shall love your neighbor as you yourself *would be loved,* that is, treat your neighbor with love in the same way that you yourself would want to be treated:

> The way of life is this: First, you shall love the Lord your Maker, and secondly, your neighbor as yourself. And whatever you do not want to be done to you, you shall not do to anyone else.[3] — *Didache* 3:1–2

> Do not take revenge and do not hold onto hatred, and love your neighbor; for what is hateful to you yourself, do not do to him; I am the Lord.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Lev. 19:18

3. This last sentence thus seems, as in the next example as well, to be a kind of gloss, an explanation of what loving your neighbor "as yourself" entails. It may have been a standard gloss, adduced here somewhat in contradiction to the understanding that underlies *Didache* 2:7 (cited earlier). According to this understanding, the phrase "as yourself" is to be taken as a kind of shorthand: You shall love your neighbor *as you yourself would like to be loved,* that is, what is hateful to you do not do to him.

Love Only Your Neighbor

But there was a far more restrictive way of understanding this same verse. "Your neighbor" might not necessarily mean all human beings. This Hebrew word actually means something more like "your friend," and while it can simply mean "your fellow," it is basically used in this section of Leviticus interchangeably with "your brother" and "your kinsman." Thus, there were certainly grounds to claim that not all people are, in this sense, one's "neighbor." It was, in any case, a good question:

> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Torah? Have you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself,[4] said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" —Luke 10:25–29

This same question was no doubt posed by others as well, part of a lively debate about just how far, and to whom, the commandment to love one's "neighbor" extends.

This debate focused not only on the ambiguities of the word "neighbor," but as well on the fact that one could read the specific sequence of words in Lev. 19:18 as constituting a single phrase, "your-neighbor-as-yourself." If so, then perhaps the Bible was not at all saying that one ought to love *any* neighbor—however defined—as oneself, but rather that one had a duty to act lovingly only toward those neighbors who were "like yourself," who belonged to the same group or community or the like.

Such an interpretation seems to underlie numerous passages among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which sharply distinguish between members of that particular community—to whom were applied the various commandments of Leviticus 19 seen above—and all others. With others, there was no obligation to "love" in keeping with Lev. 19:18, or even not to "hate in your heart," à la Lev. 19:17 (nor, therefore, to reproach, as specified in the same verse). Indeed, if "neighbor," "brother," and "kinsman" in all these verses referred only to members of one's own group, then perhaps it was, on the contrary, a duty to hate outsiders:

> [Community members are ordered] not to reproach or enter into disputes with the Men of the Pit and to keep hidden the [secret] counsel of the Torah from among the men of perversion; but to reproach [only] those who choose the Way with true knowledge and right judgment [that is, fellow members of the community] . . . These are the indications of the path for the wise one in these times, both as to his loving and his hating: eternal hatred for the Men of the Pit, in the spirit of hiding.
>
> —(1QS) *Community Rule* 9:16–17, 21

4. That is, to justify a rather limited sense of who is to be included under the term "neighbor." Jesus' answer, the famous parable of the Good Samaritan, suggests another answer: even the despised Samaritans native to the land north of Judea were to be included under that rubric.

The idea that the commandments to reproach and love apply only to "friends" may also be echoed elsewhere:

> [The Torah] holds sway over relations **among friends**, [so that one] reproaches them for having acted badly. —4 Macc. 2:13

Indeed, it seems that such an interpretation as this of Lev. 19:17–18 underlies Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor **and hate your enemy**. . ." —Matt. 5:43

The Whole Torah

Understood in this fashion, "You shall not hate your *brother*. . . You shall love your *neighbor* as yourself" paradoxically became a summons to hate all those who were not in the category of "brother" or "neighbor"! Still, while such an interpretation did exist, many other interpreters understood this commandment in a broader way. Indeed, from an early period (as we have already glimpsed), Lev. 19:18 seems to have been exalted as a central principle and the epitome of all the Torah's laws concerning relations between human beings (just as the other "You shall love," Deut. 6:4, epitomized all laws concerning relations between man and God):

> And he [Abraham] commanded them [his descendants] that they should guard the way of the Lord so that they might do righteousness and each one might **love his neighbor** and that it should be thus among all men, so that each one might proceed to act justly and rightly toward them upon the earth. —*Jubilees* 20:2

> [Isaac says to his sons Jacob and Esau:] And I am commanding this, my sons, that you might perform righteousness and uprightness upon the earth, so that the Lord will bring that which the Lord said that He would do for Abraham and for his seed. And among yourselves, my sons, be **loving of your brothers** as a man loves himself, with each man seeking for his brother what is good for him, and acting together on the earth, and loving each other as themselves . . . And now I will make you swear by the great oath . . . that you will fear Him and worship Him, and that each one will love his brother with compassion and righteousness, and that neither will desire evil for his brother from now and forever all the days of your lives. —*Jubilees* 36:3–4, 7–8

> Throughout all your life love the Lord and one another with a true heart. —*Testament of Dan* 5:3

> Keep the Law of God, my children; achieve integrity; live without malice, not tinkering with God's commandments or your neighbor's affairs. Love the **Lord and your neighbor**.

> With every man in pain I joined in lament, and with a poor man I shared my bread, I did not eat alone. I did not move any boundary-mark. I did

deeds of piety and truth all my days. I loved the Lord with all my might; in the same fashion, I also loved every man as my own children.

— *Testament of Issachar* 7:5–6 (see also *Testament of Joseph* 11:1, *Testament of Zebulon* 5:1)

But among the vast number of particular truths and principles studied, two, one might almost say, stand out higher than all the rest, that of [relating] to God through piety and holiness, and that of [relating] to fellow men through a love of mankind and of righteousness. — Philo, *Special Laws* 2:63

The way of life is this: First, you shall love the Lord your Maker, and secondly, your neighbor as yourself. And whatever you do not want to be done to you, you shall not do to anyone else. — *Didache* 3:1–2

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." — Matt. 22:35–40

The commandments . . . are summed up in this one sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." — Rom. 13:9

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." — Gal. 5:14

If you really fulfill the **royal** law, according to the Scripture "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. — James 2:8

"And you shall love your neighbor as yourself"—R. Akiba said: This is the great general principle in the Torah. — *Sifra Qedoshim* 4

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In short: Nadab and Abihu may not have sinned at all but died a holy death and ascended to heaven. The divine fire burned them internally, so that their clothes and flesh were unhurt. Among the laws given to Israel after this incident, the laws governing pure food were intended to teach self-control and to impart moral guidance. The Day of Atonement service required sincere repentance in order to be effective, and even so not all sins were thereby atoned for. The sin of concealed hatred and its attendant hypocrisy was to be avoided by the practice of open reproach, which, however, might also serve as a required preliminary to judicial remedy. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" did not necessarily apply to all human beings; nevertheless, it was seen as a great general principle and the epitome of the Torah's commandments concerning relations among human beings.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Worship in the Wilderness

A Holy Death: Philo and *Leviticus Rabba* 12:2 both interpreted the death of Nadab and Abihu as a "holy death," an act of sacrifice for the sanctification of God. A somewhat ambiguous text from Qumran ought to be examined in this connection:

> The Head Priest will come near and stand before the battle line and strengthen their [the soldiers'] hearts [. . .] and say aloud: . . . And you—remember the judgment of [Nadab and Abi]hu, Aaron's sons, by whose judgment God was sanctified in the sight of [all the people. And El'azar] and Itamar He maintained for Himself for the covenant of eternal time.
>
> —(1QM) *War Scroll* 17:2

It might be that this evocation of the Nadab and Abihu incident was intended to frighten the troops into doing God's bidding precisely; see Van der Ploeg, *Le Rouleau de la Guerre*, 175; Licht, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light*, 354–355. But perhaps it is being invoked here instead in the sense of "holy death": just as Nadab and Abihu were willing to die for God's sanctification, so ought soldiers be prepared to sacrifice themselves for the same purpose.

Eating and Drinking Today: The sin of Nadab and Abihu (if sin there was) was explained by some ancient interpreters as connected with improper conduct in the tabernacle. Somewhat later, however, rabbinic interpreters sought to understand the incident in the light of an earlier mention of Nadab and Abihu in the book of Exodus. There, God commanded Moses to ascend to the top of Sinai along with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders (Exod. 24:1), then:

> And Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet was a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And against the chief men of the people of Israel He did not lay His hand; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank. —Exod. 24:9–11

Interpreters must have wondered how this crowd of people could have actually gazed upon God, when God Himself was to tell Moses elsewhere that even he as a single individual could not behold God head on, "for no man shall see Me and live" (Exod. 33:20). What then did the Bible mean by asserting in Exod. 24:9 that these seventy-four people had *seen* God and emerged unscathed? What is more, why did it say that they all "ate and drank" on Mt. Sinai? These were certainly strange circumstances in which to have a feast or banquet!

The Septuagint translators (or the text from which they translated), apparently disturbed at the idea of these mortals seeing God, presented a somewhat different picture:

> And they saw **the place** where God stood . . . and they were seen in the **place** of God, and they ate and drank. — Septuagint Exod. 24:10–11

Similarly:

> They saw by a **vision** the God of Israel. — Symmachus Exod. 24:10

> And they saw **the glory** of the God of Israel, and under His **glorious throne** was a stonework of precious stone.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 24:10–11 (see also *Neophyti, Pseudo-Jonathan*)

Another translator apparently set out to modify the equally disturbing idea of people eating and drinking under such circumstances:

> And to the nobles of the children of Israel no harm was done and they saw the glory of the Lord and they rejoiced in their sacrifices, in that they had been accepted, **as if** they were eating and drinking.
> — *Targum Onqelos* Exod. 24:11

However, other interpreters used the very problematic nature of the phrase "and they ate and drank" to explain the death of Nadab and Abihu in Lev. 10:1–3. After all, the text had specifically singled them out, leaving the names of the seventy elders unmentioned; was it not because they had some special role to play in the events described? Perhaps the vague phrase "the nobles of the children of Israel" meant specifically these two. Such a tradition is found elsewhere:

> And [He did no harm] to Nadab and Abihu, the handsome youths who had been appointed over the children of Israel.
> — *Targum Neophyti* (marginal gloss) Exod. 24:11

If the "nobles" consisted only of Nadab and Abihu, then they might likewise be the only ones who had gazed upon the divine likeness at Sinai. Such an act certainly deserved punishment by death, but that punishment was not administered until later, at the time of the "unholy fire" incident:

> And Nadab and Abihu lifted up their eyes and they saw the glory of the God of Israel . . . And to Nadab and Abihu, the handsome youths, He did not send forth His scourge at that time, but it [their punishment] was kept for them [until later]. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 24:10–11

Alternatively, the guilty may have included not only Nadab and Abihu but also the seventy elders:

> But could there really have been eating and drinking there?! Rather . . . it is that they acted in a frivolous and disrespectful manner [as they looked on], like people who are [merely] eating and drinking. And for this reason the seventy elders and Nadab and Abihu were liable for the punishment of [death by] burning at once, but since the giving of the Torah was a source of pleasure to God, He did not wish to strike them down at that time and so demoralize [all of Israel], and thus it is written here, "And to the leaders of

> Israel He did no harm . . ." (Exod. 24:11)—this implies *a priori* that they were [guilty of something and hence] liable to be harmed. But some time later, Nadab and Abihu were in fact burned [as a punishment for this] when they entered the Tent of Meeting, and even the elders were burned when they fell victim to their cravings [Num. 11:31–35], as it says, "Now the rabble [literally, "the gathered ones," *'asafsuf*] that was among them had a strong craving" [Num. 11:4]. What does the word "rabble" [*'asafsuf*] mean? . . . R. Neḥemiah said [it refers to the seventy elders], about whom the text had said: "Gather [*'esfah*] for me seventy men."
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma Beha'alotekha* 16

See further Bamberger, "Philo and the Aggadah," 173–175; Shinan, "The Sins of Nadab and Abihu"; Hecht, "Patterns of Exegesis in Philo's Interpretation of Leviticus"; Kirschner, "Rabbinic and Philonic Exegesis of the Nadab and Abihu Incident"; Flusser and Safrai, "Nadab and Abihu in the Midrash and in Philo's Writings"; Rokeach, "Philo of Alexandria, Midrash, and Ancient Halakhah."

Control of Appetites: The idea that the Bible's food laws were essentially designed to impart moral lessons, such as the control of all impulses and appetites, may betray a somewhat apologetic purpose; this notwithstanding, Jews in the Second Temple period clearly held these regulations in the highest esteem and suffered martyrdom rather than violate them. See, in particular, Jth. 12:2; Tob. 1:10–11; 1 Macc. 1:62–63; 2 Macc. 6:18, 7:2; Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2:152–153. While some of the apologetic motifs made their way (as we have seen) into Christian sources, for the most part Christianity was unsympathetic to pure food laws, since Jesus himself had said, "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:11). Similar views underlie other New Testament passages: Mark 7:14–19; Acts 10:10, 15:29; 1 Cor. 10:27–29; Gal. 2:11–12; Col. 2:21. Note that Origen has his own, unique explanation of the food laws:

> In his [Moses'] legislation about animals he said that all the animals which are regarded by the Egyptians and the rest of mankind as having prophetic powers are unclean, and that broadly speaking those that are not so regarded are clean. Among those which Moses calls unclean are the wolf, fox, serpent, eagle, hawk, and those like them. —Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:93

Day of Partial Atonement: We saw earlier that one tradition held that the Day of Atonement ritual effected atonement only for sins between man and God, but for those between man and man one had to seek to appease one's fellow (m. *Yoma* 8:9). The exegetical justification for this conclusion is given immediately afterward in the same passage:

> R. Eleazar b. Azariah derived this interpretation from the verse, "For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you from all your sins; before the Lord you shall become clean" [Lev. 16:30]. —m. *Yoma* 8:9

As usual, so much depends on the punctuation. To understand R. Eleazar's interpretation, it is necessary simply to move the semicolon forward a bit (which is of

course permissible, since such punctuation was not in any case represented in the ancient writing system). So doing would yield the following: "For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you *from all your sins before the Lord;* you shall become clean." In other words, "sins before the Lord," between man and God, could be atoned for by the Day of Atonement, but not sins between man and man.

But such was hardly the only way to understand the full implications of this verse. Indeed, another understanding is presented in the continuation of the same passage:

> R. Aqiba said: Happy are you, O Israel! Before Whom are you purified? Who [in other words] purifies you? Your Heavenly Father, as it is said: "And I [God] will cast upon you pure water, and you shall be purified" [Ezek. 36:25]. And it says elsewhere: "Israel's hope [*miqwēh*] is the Lord" [Jer. 17:13]. Just as a ritual bath [*miqweh*] purifies those who are impure, so does God purify Israel. —m. *Yoma* 8:9

R. Aqiba uses not only the verses from Ezekiel and (punningly) Jeremiah to justify his assertion, but his own reading of Lev. 16:30 as well. To understand it, however, one must know that the verb translated heretofore as a passive, "For on this day shall atonement *be made* for you" is actually active in form: the text literally says, "For on this day he *shall he make atonement* for you." To whom does *he* refer? Apparently, this is an impersonal verb whose meaning, therefore, is indeed the equivalent of a passive in English, "it shall be made." But R. Aqiba proposes to understand this verb as, quite literally, "he shall make atonement," and to identify its *he* in the light of the rest of the sentence, "before the Lord you shall be clean." This "before the Lord," R. Aqiba argues, should be understood not as "in front of the Lord" (for who is not "in front of the Lord" at all times?) but rather as "by means of" or "by" the Lord. That is why he rewords his own question, "Before Whom are you purified?" as "Who purifies you?" If the answer is indeed God, then the verb at the beginning of the sentence must likewise refer to God, "For on this day He *shall he make atonement* for you." In other words, it is not the ritual of the Day of Atonement itself that effects purification and forgiveness for Israel, but God Himself.

This interpretation was no dry, scholarly point for R. Aqiba. For he lived in the time following the Great Revolt against the Romans; the Jerusalem Temple stood in ruins, and the sacrifices and other Temple rituals—including those of the Day of Atonement—were now impossible. No doubt some Jews felt that, under such circumstances, the yearly forgiveness that had been Israel's birthright could no longer exist. In presenting his interpretation, Aqiba (who was nonetheless keen on overthrowing the Roman occupiers of his homeland and rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple) asserted the opposite: it was not the Temple ritual that effected atonement for Israel's sins, but God Himself.

The idea seen earlier that the Day of Atonement may cover only certain classes of sins but not others is connected to a far larger topic, that of the distinction between intentional and inadvertent sins. This distinction obtained not only in Judea but in Alexandria: see Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 86; *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.41.2; and Goodenough, *By Light, Light,* 333; also Anderson, "The Status of the

Torah before Sinai"; idem, "Intentional and Unintentional Sin in the Dead Sea Scrolls"; Qimron, "Terminology for Intention in Legal Texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls"; Kugel, "The Jubilees' Apocalypse." See also, on some of the passages cited earlier, Lieberman, *Tosefta Mo'ed,* 326 n; Albeck, *Mishnah Mo'ed,* 215–217 n; Urbach, *The Sages,* 345, 430–435, 465. It may be that this interpretation is predicated on the summary statements of Lev. 16:30 and 34, which specify atonement for all of Israel's "sins" [*ḥaṭṭō'têkem*], but not for their "transgressions" [*piš'êhem*] or "iniquities" ['*ăwōnōtāw*] (mentioned in Lev. 16:16 and 22). Perhaps this apparent distinction implied that certain sins, either intentional ones or some other class of infractions, were being excluded from the Bible's "blank check." Note that rabbinic tradition, represented by *Seder Olam* 6, associates the timing of the Day of Atonement with Moses' (second) descent from Mt. Sinai with the tables of law, whereas *Jubilees* connects it with Jacob's receiving the false report of Joseph's death (*Jubilees* 34:18).

Avert the Death Penalty: Since Scripture had hardly made it clear exactly which sins would be atoned for by the Day of Atonement, one source was emboldened to suggest that the purpose of the Day of Atonement fast was, specifically, to set aside a divinely decreed death penalty:

> [God said]: "At the beginning of those days [that is, on the first of the seventh month], when you present yourselves, I will declare the number of those who are to die and who are to be born. A fast of mercy you will fast for me [on the Day of Atonement] for your own souls [that is, to save your own lives], so that the promises made to our fathers may be fulfilled."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 13:6

This last phrase is apparently an allusion to the promise of a normal human lifetime of one hundred and twenty years that God established at the time of the flood, as this text goes on to say:

> Then He gave him [Moses] the commandment regarding the length of [human] lifetime of Noah, and He said to him, "These are the years that I ordained after the weeks [probably should be "according to the oaths" or "oath"] in which I afflicted the city [*'ir*] of men [probably should be "the Watchers—*'îrîm*—and the men"]." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 13:8

In other words, according to Pseudo-Philo, the original sentence setting one hundred and twenty years as the maximum life span in Gen. 6:3 came to be applied to mankind in general only at the time of Moses. Once it was in effect, however, the people of Israel could invoke this promise to ask that God not *judge* them strictly (as some interpreters understood the mysterious verb of Gen. 6:3) but spare their lives on the Day of Atonement, despite the year's accumulated sins. See Chapter 5, *OR,* "One Hundred and Twenty Years until Punishment," "A Lifespan of One Hundred and Twenty Years," "The Human Lifespan Shrank Twice."

Typological Goat: The rites of the Day of Atonement called for the high priest to cast lots upon two sacrificial goats, "one lot for the Lord and the other for Azazel"

(Lev. 16:8). The identity of Azazel is far from clear. Some texts list him as a (fallen) angel; see *1 Enoch* 8:1 and elsewhere; (4Q203) *Book of Giants*[a]; (4Q180–181) *Pesher of the Periods; Jubilees* 8:1, etc.; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:6–7, 14, 23:11, 31:5, etc.; compare *Sibylline Oracles* 2:215, as well as Milik, *Books of Enoch,* 251, 313, etc. The fate of Azazel the angel is presented at one point in terms somewhat reminiscent of that of the sacrificial goat:

> **Bind Azazel by his hands and feet, and throw him** into the darkness. And split open the **desert** which is in Dudael, and **throw** him there.
>
> —*1 Enoch* 10:4

> Then he [God?] punished not us but Azazel.
>
> —(4Q203) *Book of Giants*[a] 7:5–6

(For the latter reading, see Milik, *Books of Enoch,* 313 n, a restoration somewhat suspect in my opinion.)

The figure of 'Asael in *1 Enoch* is likewise in some ways reminiscent of Azazel (see Grabbe, "The Scapegoat Tradition"), and the two names were apparently confused (Knibb, *Ethiopic Book,* 71, 73, 79).

For some early Christians, on the contrary, the goat mentioned in Leviticus—upon whose head the high priest was to place "all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins . . . and send him into the wilderness" (Lev. 16:21)—seemed like a typological foreshadowing of Jesus:

> Note what was commanded: Take two goats, goodly and alike, and offer them, and let the priest take the one as a burnt offering for sins [cf. Lev. 16:7, 9]. But what are they to do to the other? "The other," it says, "is accursed" [cf. Lev. 16:21]. Note how the type of Jesus is manifest. And then you shall all spit upon it and pierce it through and bind the crimson wool about its head, and in this fashion let it be cast into the desert . . . See then the type of Jesus destined to suffer.
>
> —*Letter of Barnabas* 7:6–7, 10

Interestingly, the details of the goats being "equal" and the crimson wool around the goat's head do not come from the biblical description but are found in the Mishnah (*Yoma* 4:2, 6:1, 6). See Allon, "The Halakhah in Epistle of Barnabas"; Goldstein, "The Strip of Scarlet-Dyed Wool in the Day of Atonement Ritual"; Zani, "Tracce di un[a] . . . esegesi midrašica"; Grabbe, "The Scapegoat Tradition."

Don't Listen to Your Parents: Leviticus contains an unusual collocation of commandments:

> Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord. —Lev. 19:3

What was the connection between respecting one's parents and keeping the Sabbath? Some interpreters apparently understood the "and" connecting the two halves of this verse as a "but." In other words, one ought to do everything to respect

one's parents wishes, but when that respect came into conflict with other divine stipulations such as the laws of the Sabbath, these latter were to take precedence:

> For the law prevails even over affection for parent, so that virtue is not abandoned for their sakes. —4 Macc. 2:10

> It might happen that one's father or mother tells him to violate one of the commandments given in the Torah—should he obey them? The text says: [Respect your father and mother] **and keep my sabbaths,** for all of you [both parents and children] are obligated to honor me.
>
> —*Sifra* (ad Lev.) 19:3

Note that the Peshitta translates "and keep my sabbaths" as "and keep my *commandments,*" in line with the rabbinic interpretation (*Sifra Qedoshim* 1:10, b. *Baba Metsia* 32a, and elsewhere) that "sabbaths" here really represents all the commandments. See further Maori, "Methodological Criteria."

Reproach Prevents Hatred: I have discussed this topic in *In Potiphar's House,* 214–246. A few points might be added here. It was seen earlier that, at Qumran, reproach was actually a favor, a benefit owed only to those of one's own group:

> [Community members are ordered] not to reproach or enter into disputes with the Men of the Pit and to keep hidden the [secret] counsel of the Torah from among the men of perversion; but to reproach [only] those who choose the Way with true knowledge and right judgment [that is, fellow members of the community]. —(1QS) *Community Rule* 9:16–17

This same idea seems to have found expression elsewhere:

> In a dispute [with a friend], do not let some outsider hear your secret, lest he, hating you, become your enemy and commit a great sin against you. For [now] he will often address you guilefully, or chatter about you in wickedness, taking the poison from you. —*Testament of Gad* 6:5

About this passage one might well ask: how can someone who already hates you "become your enemy"? The answer seems to be that he will come to regard you as an "enemy" in the *legal sense,* that is, as someone who no longer has the right to open reproach or any of the other things due to a "friend," "brother," or "kinsman" in Lev. 19:15–18. And so this text specifies that, now that you are officially his enemy, he is free to address you guilefully, hypocritically, all the while hating you in his heart à la Lev. 19:17, or to "chatter about you in wickedness" as is forbidden to *kinsmen* in Lev. 19:16. You, the *Testament of Gad* is saying, are the ultimate cause of all this, since, in your dispute, you "let some outsider hear your *secret,*" the thing that was hidden in your heart, instead of revealing it directly to your "friend," the offending party. In revealing this hidden thing to an outsider, you also passed the hidden hatred on to him; that is what the passage means by its last phrase, "taking the poison from you." (This idea seems to be reflected as well in Prov. 25:9; see *In Potiphar's House,* 241 n. 4.)

With this background it is not hard to spot further reflexes of the same tradition:

> [The Torah] holds sway over relations **among friends,** [so that one] reproaches them for having acted badly. —4 Macc. 2:13

> The secrets of a friend must not be divulged in enmity.
> —Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:8

> [The Torah] allows us to conceal nothing from our friends, for there is no friendship without absolute confidence; in the event of subsequent estrangement, it forbids the disclosure of secrets. —Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:207

As for the legal boundary between "friends" and enemies, compare Matt. 18:17 (cited above), 2 Thess. 3:14–15, and *In Potiphar's House,* 234–240; also, Berger, *Die Gesetzauslegung Jesu;* Schiffman, *Sectarian Law,* 89–109; Smith, "Hate Thine Enemy," 71–73; Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliation, and Love," 345; Seitz, "Love Your Enemies." Also of interest is Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus in the Epistle of James." Note that the idea that Lev. 19:18 likewise applied only to members of the Qumran community may also be implied by the free rewording of this verse elsewhere:

> [Community members should be careful to] love each one **his brother** like himself. —*Damascus Document* 6:20–21

Here the substitution of "brother" for "neighbor" may reflect an attempt to state more explicitly that only the "brothers" of the community are included in this commandment.

A recently published liturgical poem written in Hebrew recounts, among other things, the story of Cain and Abel. At one point it observes:

> Anger's revenge and the storing up of wrath
> Were hidden in the heart chambers of a sinner from birth.
> —*Az Be'en Kol* 343–344

The "sinner from birth" is Cain (see Chapter 4, "Son of the Devil"). But whence does this author get the idea that Cain's murder of Abel was an act of revenge, or that his wrath was "stored up" for any length of time? On the contrary, according to the Bible Cain seems to have struck Abel down immediately after his sacrifice was rejected by God. Apparently, however, this author subscribed to the same continuous reading of Lev. 19:17–18 as that witnessed at Qumran: You shall not hate your brother in your heart, *but instead* you shall reproach him, *so that* you shall bear no sin because of him, *namely* (the next sin mentioned in Lev. 19:18), you shall not take revenge or hold a grudge. Since all these form a single unit, according to this interpretive line, then Cain, who hated his brother Abel in his heart, must have failed to reproach him but instead held a grudge ("the storing up of wrath"); the murder was thus an act of revenge against him, the final, fatal consequence of "hatred in the heart."

Finally, a passage in another Qumran text seems to contain further reference to the law of reproach:

bkl 't pn yšb'kh wkr̊ŵḥw dbr bw pn y[
blw' hwkḥ hkšr 'bwr lw whnqšr
wgm 't rwḥw l' tbl' ky' bdmmh dbrt[h
wtwkḥtw spr mhr w'l t'bwr 'lpš'ykh
— (4Q417) *Sapiential Work A* fragment 1, col. 1:1–4

This difficult and fragmentary passage might be rendered as follows:

[Speak to him without anger] at all times lest he cause you to swear an oath; but speak against him according to his [?], lest he [. . .]
without the proper act of reproach. [. . .?] And that which is bound, [?]
Yet his own disposition do not overpower, but in silence speak[. . .
And his reproach recount quickly, and do not pass over your own sins[. . .

It seems likely that the section just preceding our fragment, now missing, must have been talking about the law of reproach, making our fragment a continuation of that discussion. At first glance, one might think that the first line is saying something similar to what is said in *Testament of Gad* 6:4 (cited earlier), that is, too rough a reproach may lead to needless or false oaths. The present text is hardly identical, however, since here it is not the one being reproached who is in danger of taking an oath as in *Testament of Gad* 6:4; rather, the one being reproached might cause the *reproacher* to take an oath. Thus, the point must have been that "you," the reproacher, are not to lose your temper and end up taking an oath—perhaps swearing in anger while in the act of reproaching. Moreover, the line continues, you must speak against him *kr̊ŵḥw* lest something happen (here the line breaks off) "without proper reproach." The restoration *wkr̊ŵḥw* seems to me problematic, though it may be correct (I would prefer *bywmw,* but that is apparently not possible according to the manuscript). In any event, the sense is that "you" must accuse him *kr̊ŵhw* lest he later be brought to trial "without the proper reproach." The next two lines bring up another matter—signaled, as always, by the word *wgm,* "moreover,"—namely, that one ought to reproach gently. If so, then this text would seem to straddle the two originally separate interpretations of Lev. 19:17 that were yoked together as well in the *Testament of Gad* and the *Community Rule* 5:24–6:1. See further Kugel, *In Potiphar's House,* 226–229. The recently published 4Q266 fragment 18, col. 2:6–9 concerns gentle reproach.

The Whole Torah: Some interpreters asserted that Lev. 19:18 (sometimes along with Deut. 6:4) constitutes the "whole Torah," the great general teaching summing up the laws of the Pentateuch concerning human relations. But it is interesting that, in one gospel, Lev. 19:18 is paired at one point with the Decalogue's laws concerning relations among men:

And behold, one came up to him saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me what is good? One there is who is good. If you would like to enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear

> false witness, Honor your father and mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." —Matt. 19:16–19 (contrast Mark 10:17–20, Luke 18:18–21)

It may well be that this pairing represents an "epitome of an epitome." For if, as we saw in Chapter 20, the Decalogue was sometimes taken as an epitome of all the laws of the Pentateuch, the first half concerned with matters between man and God, the second between man and man, then the two commandments beginning "And you shall love," Lev. 19:17 and Deut. 6:4, may have been taken to epitomize the two halves of the Decalogue. Such is suggested, for example, by the following:

> Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." —Rom. 13:8–9

This idea is treated by Flusser, "The Decalogue in the New Testament." Note also *Didache,* chs. 1 and 2, where a similar pairing of Lev. 19:17 and the latter part of the Decalogue may be implied; Flusser, "There Are Two Ways"; and Chapter 25, "A Choice of Two Paths." There may be a hint of similar thinking underlying two passages in Ben Sira:

> And he said to them [humanity], "Beware of all evil," and He commanded them each concerning his neighbor.

> The compassion [or "love"] of man is for his neighbor, but the compassion [or "love"] of the Lord is for all living beings. —Sir. 17:14, 18:13

Interesting too is the catalog of laws seen earlier (Chapter 5, *OR,* "Noahide Laws") in the book of *Jubilees:*

> [After the flood] Noah began to prescribe for his grandsons the ordinances and the commandments, every statute which he knew. He testified to [that is, solemnly warned] his sons to do justice, and cover the shame of their bodies, bless their Creator, **honor father and mother, and love one another,** and keep themselves from fornication and uncleanness and all injustice.
> —*Jubilees* 7:20–21

Of the items mentioned, "blessing their Creator" seems to correspond to the interdiction of cursing with the divine name found in the rabbinic tradition of the Noahide laws. It is also, however, similar to the Decalogue's prohibition of taking the Lord's name "in vain." Likewise, honoring father and mother, avoiding fornication, and possibly also avoiding "injustice" correspond to other items in the Decalogue, while "love one another" represents Lev. 19:18.

The Golden Rule: Lev. 19:18 came to be paired with the Golden Rule, "Do unto others" (or, more precisely, its negative counterpart, "Do not do unto others"):

> The way of life is this: First, you shall love the Lord your Maker, and secondly, your neighbor as yourself. And whatever you do not want to be done to you, you shall not do to anyone else. — *Didache* 3:1–2

> Do not take revenge and do not hold onto hatred, and love your neighbor; for what is hateful to you yourself, do not do to him; I am the Lord.
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Lev. 19:18

The same may be implied elsewhere:

> Besides these [laws] there is a host of other things which belong to unwritten customs and institutions or are contained in the **laws themselves**: What a man would hate to suffer he must not do to others.
> — Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:6

Of course, the Golden Rule was a principle that had been around for quite a while and had come about quite separately from Lev. 19:18. But because of the wording "You shall love your neighbor *like yourself*," the Golden Rule came uniquely to be paired with this biblical verse. It was apparently because of this pairing that, when (as was seen) Lev. 19:18 came to be exalted as an epitome of all the commandments concerning interhuman relations, or all of the commandments in general, the Golden Rule was also sometimes exalted as an epitome of the whole Torah:

> Watch yourself, my son, in **everything** that you do, and be disciplined in **all** your behavior. And what you hate, do to no one. — Tob. 4:14–15

> So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; **for this is the Torah** and the prophets. — Matt. 7:12

> It happened that a certain non-Jew . . . came before Hillel [and said]: "Convert me." He said to him: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. **This is the whole Torah,** the rest are the specifications, go and learn them." — b. *Shabbat* 31a

> All the commandments that He gave to them are subsumed by this one word: That which is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor.
> — Ephraem, *Commentary on Exodus* 20:2

It may also be that one coupling of the "negative Golden Rule" with an apparent allusion to Lev. 19:17 is not altogether fortuitous:

> [The king asked:] "What does wisdom teach?" The next guest replied, "Insofar as you do not wish evils to come upon you, but to partake of every blessing, [it would be wisdom] if you **practice this with your subjects,** including [even] wrongdoers, and **if you admonished** [reproached] **mercifully the good and upright also.** — *Letter of Aristeas* 207

The Day after the Sabbath? One particularly puzzling passage is found within the list of festivals in Leviticus 23. That chapter begins by describing the feast of unleavened bread, which lasts for seven days in the spring, starting on the fifteenth

of the first month; after it comes a new ceremony, the waving of the Omer (a sheaf of grain):

> [God said to Moses:] "On the first day [of the feast of unleavened bread] you shall have a holy convocation . . . and on the seventh day a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work." And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel: When you come into the land which I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the Omer of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the Omer before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; **on the morrow after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it . . . And you shall count **from the morrow after the Sabbath,** from the day that you brought the Omer of the wave offering; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days **to the morrow after the seventh Sabbath**; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the Lord." —Lev. 23:7–16

According to this passage, the waving of the Omer is to begin "on the morrow of the Sabbath." But when was that: on the first Sabbath after the feast of unleavened bread? or on the Sabbath that occurs *within* the feast of unleavened bread (since that feast lasts for seven days, at least one of its days has to be a Sabbath)? Or perhaps the word "Sabbath" here really refers not to any actual Sabbath but to either the first or last day of the feast of unleavened bread. After all, both days were, like the Sabbath, days in which work was forbidden; perhaps the Bible was referring to these nonwork days by the word "Sabbath." (Elsewhere, the phrase "Sabbath of rest" is used by the Bible to refer to holy times other than the Sabbath: see Lev. 16:32, 23:32, 25:4.) Understanding "Sabbath" as actually meaning the first or last day of the festival had an argument in its favor: since the Bible is clearly dating the waving of the Omer *in relation to* the festival of unleavened bread, would it not make the most sense for it to date it as following either the very beginning or the very end of that festival rather than have it start on the day after some Sabbath within or following the holiday?

This minor issue of dating came to be the source of an ongoing controversy within the history of Judaism—not surprisingly, since not only the exact time of the waving of the Omer, but also the date of the next festival, the feast of weeks, which was scheduled to come exactly fifty days later, depended on it. It is noteworthy that the Sepuagint, for example, dates the waving to begin "on the morrow of the first [day]" (Lev. 23:11) and *not* "on the morrow of the Sabbath." Rabbinic Judaism similarly came to date the waving of the sheaf as starting on the day after the first day of the festival (see m. *Menaḥot* 10:3). This stood in contrast to the interpretation of other groups:

> The Sadducees [ms. Oxford: "Boethusians"] say that the feast of weeks [always comes] after the Sabbath.
>
> —*Megillat Ta'anit* (ms. Parma, cf. Lichtenstein p. 324)

The Samaritans and, later, the Karaites (a nonrabbinic Jewish group that flourished in medieval times) understood the "morrow of the Sabbath" to mean, quite simply, the Sunday after the Sabbath that must occur sometime during the seven

days of the feast of unleavened bread. And unlike all of these, the book of *Jubilees* and the Dead Sea Scrolls community understood the "morrow of the Sabbath" to refer to the Sabbath that occurred after the *end* of the feast of unleavened bread. Since they further stipulated that each year would consist of exactly 364 days, or 52 weeks, year after year the feast of weeks, occurring fifty days after the Sunday following the feast of unleavened bread, would always fall on the fifteenth day of the third month. (See further Talmon, "Calendar Reckoning of the Sect from the Judean Desert.") A recently published text makes this schedule explicit:

> The seventh of the third [month] is a Sabbath. The fourteenth of it is a Sabbath. The fifteenth of it is the Festival of Weeks.
>
> —(4Q394) *Halakhic Letter*

See also *Jubilees* 6:21; 14:10, 19–20; 15:1; 16:13; 29:7; 44:3–5. A tiny fragment from the fourth cave at Qumran seems to refer to the controversy surrounding this question of dating:

> . . .]the waving of the Omer[. . .
> . . .]except for the Sabbaths[. . .
> . . .]error of blindness[. . .
> . . .]not from the Torah of Moses[. . .

The phrase "except for the Sabbaths" (Lev. 23:38) is apparently being invoked here to assert that the Torah explicitly rules out a practice later adopted by rabbinic Judaism (m. *Menaḥot* 10:3), namely, that when the night of the harvesting of the Omer coincides with the start of the Sabbath, the harvesting must proceed apace, overriding the Sabbath. To override the Sabbath in such fashion, this text seems to maintain, is an "error of blindness [and] not from the Torah of Moses." See further Baumgarten, "Recent Qumran Discoveries."

May Your Heart Shine with Wisdom: The famous priestly blessing contained in Num. 6:24–6 served as a model for a blessing (as well as a later curse) set forth in the *Community Rule.* The blessing reads:

> May [the Lord] bless you with all good, and may He keep you from all evil. May He cause your heart to shine with the discernment of life, and may He be gracious toward you with eternal knowledge. May He lift up the countenance of graciousness toward you for eternal peace.
>
> —(1QS) *Community Rule* 2:2–4

This expanded version is clearly an exegesis of the biblical blessing. Thus, in seeking to bring out the nuances of the biblical "May the Lord bless you and keep you," this text suggests that "blessing" refers to the granting of good things, and "keeping" refers to protection from the bad. Moreover, the expanded version answers a question that might well occur to anyone familiar with the biblical text: how is God's causing His "countenance to shine" different from His "lifting up His countenance"? Here, the first reference to making the divine countenance *shine* is apparently being interpreted as the granting of divine wisdom, "discernment of

life." Such an interpretation of "causing the face to shine" in Hebrew has good biblical backing:

> A man's wisdom causes his face to shine. —Eccles. 8:1

Thus, if the biblical blessing asks that God cause His face to *shine* on us, might not this action be understood as that of, as it were, His activating divine wisdom (since, by the logic of Eccles. 8:1, God's wisdom likewise causes *His* face to shine) and causing the human recipient's heart to be illuminated with that same wisdom? Note the somewhat similar wording found elsewhere in the Qumran texts:

> I thank you, Lord, that you have caused my face to shine [that is, "given me understanding"] concerning your covenant.
>
> —(1QH) *Thanksgiving Scroll* 4:5 (also 4:27)

> And when He made his face to shine upon them for healing, they enlarged their minds still more, and knowledge. —(4Q374) *Apocryphon of Moses* A

This act of divine illumination is then complemented by the reference to His being gracious "with eternal knowledge," another act of granting of divine wisdom. (Note that the apparently down-to-earth "discernment of life" seems to be counterpointed to the "eternal knowledge" which is beyond that of day-to-day living.) If God's causing his countenance to shine refers to the granting of divine wisdom, then the biblical blessing's reference to God's "lifting up" His countenance must describe something else. The interpretation of *lifting up* the divine countenance as an act of granting *graciousness* likewise has good biblical justification, since the phrase "lift up the face" often has the connotation of acting graciously, showing mercy, and the like (Gen. 19:21, Lev. 19:15, Deut. 28:50, 1 Sam. 25:35, Job 42:9, and so on). So elsewhere:

> May the Lord lift his face toward you and the plea[sant] aroma [. . .] toward all the inhabitants of [. . .] —(1Q28b) *Rule of the Blessings* col. 3:1

The same text clearly had a highly expansive interpretation of the previous line of the priestly blessing in column 2, most of which, however, has been lost. For a somewhat different reading of the *Community Rule,* see Loader, "Model of the Priestly Blessing in IQS"; see also Licht, *Thanksgiving Hymns,* 91 n.

23

Trouble along the Way

(NUMBERS 11–17)

The spies return: whose bad idea?

Trouble along the Way

(NUMBERS 11–17)

❖ ❖ ❖

As they traveled from Egypt to their future homeland in Canaan, the Israelites bemoaned their state, and some of the rabble in their midst cried out for meat, saying that they were tired of the manna that God had supplied them. In response, God sent them an abundance of quails from the sea, but before these could be eaten, a great plague struck the people because of their craving. Still they did not stop their complaints, turning them now against their leader Moses. Moses' own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, spoke out against him because of his Cushite wife and moreover challenged his authority. God defended Moses and turned Miriam's skin "white as snow" as a punishment. Moses prayed for her and she recovered.

Next, Moses sent out spies to scout out the land of Canaan, which Israel was to conquer. When they returned, they reported that the land itself was fruitful, "flowing with milk and honey," but that its inhabitants were fearsome giants, too strong to be conquered. Only two of the twelve spies, Caleb and Joshua, dissented, urging the people to take heart and trust in God. But the people did not listen and again railed against their leaders, Moses and Aaron. In response, God decreed that the entire adult population of Israel would, because of their complaining, be condemned to die in the wilderness before entering the land: only the young (everyone under twenty) and the two dissenting spies, Joshua and Caleb, would live to enter the land.

No sooner had that incident passed than another rebellion occurred: a group led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram challenged Moses' authority, saying that he had exalted himself over everyone. In the ensuing confrontation, the earth opened up and swallowed the rebels. Subsequently a plague destroyed another group who had complained, and more than fourteen thousand people were killed. Finally, to show that Aaron's selection for the priesthood had been divinely sanctioned, a miracle occurred: from among twelve staffs, representing the twelve tribes, Aaron's alone budded overnight and bore fruit.

Quails Weren't for Grousing

The quails that God sent down for the complaining rabble seemed like a well-deserved punishment. After all, He had miraculously supplied them with manna in the desert, but instead of appreciating this munificence, these people actually dared to belittle it (Num. 11:6). No wonder God spoke of the quails as of a threat:

> Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall not eat one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you.
>
> —Num. 11:18–20

In fact, what happened was still worse: no sooner had the people picked up the quails and started to eat them than God's anger turned against them in a great plague that struck "while the meat was yet between their teeth" (Num. 11:33). The quails thus seemed to be part of this divine punishment for unbelief, and the fact that the site was called Kibroth-hattaavah (roughly, "Gourmets' Graveyard") only seemed to confirm that the quails and the plague came together to teach the Israelites to control their appetites.

Yet some interpreters were inclined to think otherwise. To begin with, it seemed a little strange that God should at the same time give the complainers what they asked for and also punish them for asking. If their request for meat was unjustified, then why had He bothered to send the quails at all? And there was another good reason to doubt that the quails were part of any divine punishment. For this was not the first time that quails had been mentioned in connection with the Israelites' wanderings. Earlier, just after the crossing of the Red Sea, the Bible had briefly alluded to the provision of quails along with the manna.

> And the Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" In the evening **quails** came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp [and with it, the manna]. —Exod. 16:11–13

Elsewhere as well, the quails were presented alongside the manna as twin manifestations of God's goodness:

> They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them bread from heaven in abundance. —Ps. 105:40

These passages essentially place the quails in the same miraculous category as manna. And indeed, was not quail a strangely dainty delicacy to be provided to desert wanderers? For all these reasons, God's sending of the quails seemed quite wondrous and beneficent. What is more, the quails mentioned in Numbers 11 were, for many interpreters, identical with, or at least a continuation of, the quails mentioned in Exod. 16:13. Since the quails in the Exodus passage were clearly a good thing, there was little reason to doubt that in the Numbers passage as well they were simply one more example of God's extraordinary kindness to His people.

As a result, interpreters sought to separate sharply God's provision of the quails in Numbers 11 from the subsequent plague that struck the Israelites (or to pass over the latter in silence). The plague was a punishment for complaining, but the quails were not part of that punishment:

> You exhibited **kindness** to your people and prepared for the satisfaction of their fierce craving **an exotic delicacy** of quail food; so that . . . your people, only briefly made to want, might partake of an exotic dish. —Wisd. 16:2–3

> [The Israelites] were supplied with the means of luxurious living, since God was pleased to provide to them abundantly, and more than abundantly, in the wilderness all the foods which are found in a rich and well-inhabited country. For in the evenings a continuous cloud of quails appeared from the sea and overshadowed the whole camp, flying close to the land, so as to be an easy prey. —Philo, *Moses* 1:209

> "God and I," [Moses] said, "even though vilified by you, will never cease our efforts on your behalf . . ." As he was speaking, the camp became filled with quails on every side, and they gathered round them and collected them. However God, not long **afterward**, chastised the Hebrews for their abusive insolence toward Him. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:298–299

> **As a reward** for the calf that Abraham had fed to the ministering angels, God gave Israel quail on two occasions. —*Seder Eliahu Rabba* p. 60

A Wife Related to Prophecy

The next instance of Israel's complaining started off strangely: Miriam and Aaron "spoke against Moses because of the Cushite [Ethiopian] woman whom he had married" (Num. 12:1). As discussed in Chapter 16 ("Zipporah the Ethiopian"), the identity of this Ethiopian woman posed a problem, since the only wife of Moses mentioned until now was Zipporah, who was a Midianite, not an Ethiopian. Beyond that problem, however, was that of the relevance of this Ethiopian wife to the rest of Miriam and Aaron's accusation—which had nothing to do with his wife or wives and concerned instead Moses' authority as a prophet:

> And they [Miriam and Aaron] said: "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" —Num. 12:2

Faced with this problem, interpreters sought some hidden connection between the subject of prophecy and Miriam and Aaron's mention of this other "wife":

> It was God Himself who married the Ethiopian woman to Moses; she stands for unchangeable resolve, intense and fixed . . . Just as in the eye the part that sees is black, so the soul's **power of vision** is called a woman of Ethiopia. —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2:67

In other words, in speaking against this Ethiopian wife, what Aaron and Miriam were really denouncing was Moses' extraordinary status as a visionary. Alternately, perhaps they had mentioned Moses' wife because he had separated from her[1] in order to devote himself exclusively to prophecy:

1. That such a separation had taken place is suggested by the precise wording of the verse: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married, *for he had*

"And they said, 'Is it only with Moses that the Lord has spoken?'" (Num. 12:2): Did He not also speak with the patriarchs? Yet *they* did not separate themselves from [the commandment of] being fruitful and multiplying. And did He not also speak with us? Yet we have not separated ourselves from [the commandment of] being fruitful and multiplying.

— *Sifrei Numbers* 99

Trusted Servant Par Excellence

To this question of Miriam and Aaron—"Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not also spoken through us?" (Num. 12:2)—God offered a striking response. Moses was indeed different from all others:

"If there is a prophet among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses: he is the one **trusted in My whole house**; with him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" — Num. 12:6–8

The idea that Moses was, like a trusted servant of a king, allowed in any room of the divine palace, caught the imagination of ancient interpreters, who therefore emphasized trustworthiness as one of Moses' outstanding virtues. Indeed, "trusted in the house" sometimes became a shorthand reference for Moses' exalted status:

In faithfulness and humility,[2] He singled him [Moses] out from all others.

— Sir. 45:4

[Moses was] that sacred spirit, worthy of the Lord, manifold and incomprehensible, master of words, **faithful** in all, the divine prophet of the whole earth, the perfect teacher in the world. — *Testament of Moses* 11:16

Only God Himself, and the one who is God's friend [that is, Abraham] is [called] faithful, just as Moses is [also] said to have been found "faithful in all His house" [Num. 12:7]. — Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3:204

And in this way You spoke to Moses, your faithful and holy servant, in the vision at the bush: I am the One Who Is, this is for Me an eternal name, and a remembrance to generations of generations.

— Hellenistic Synagogal Prayer, *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.33.6

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married an Ethiopian" (Num. 12:1). The emphasized words seem to have been written lest the fact of Moses' marriage to this woman otherwise be unknown; might this not be because the woman in question had subsequently been divorced or had separated from Moses, so that there was no current evidence of this marriage? Moreover, if the woman in question was indeed Zipporah, then there was a further indication that she and Moses had separated, namely, "Now Jethro, Moses' father in law, had taken Zipporah, Moses' wife, *after he had sent her away*" (Exod. 18:2).

2. "Faithfulness" in Hebrew is from the same root as "trusted" and is thus an apparent allusion to Num. 12:7; Moses' extraordinary humility was mentioned in the same episode, Num. 12:3.

> Now Moses was trusted in all of God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was trusted *over* God's house as son. —Heb. 3:5–6

> Moses rejoiced in his allotted portion, for "trusted servant" is what You called him. —Fragment of ancient *qerobah* incorporated in synagogue prayer

Since the Greek *pistos* can mean both trustworthy and trust*ing*, having faith, those who knew the Bible in Greek sometimes highlighted *faith* as one of Moses' virtues:

> Moses is attested to be foremost [in faith] since he is "faith-ful in all My house." —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3:228

> He [Jesus] was faithful to Him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful [trusted] in God's house. —Heb. 3:2

Whose Bad Idea?

When, following this incident, Moses sent out spies to scout the land, the result was catastrophe: because the spies came back with dire reports of the Canaanites' strength and size, the people lost heart, and God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Apparently, then, sending out the spies was not a particularly good idea.

But whose idea was it? The incident is introduced with these words:

> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Send out for yourself men to spy out the land of Canaan which I am giving to the people of Israel; send one man from each tribe." —Num. 13:1–2

Here it seems clear that God commanded Moses to send out the spies; the initiative was certainly not Moses'. Later on, however, Moses characterized the events in somewhat different fashion:

> [Moses recalls:] Then all of you [Israelites] came near me and said, "Let us send men before us, that they may explore the land for us, and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come." **The thing seemed good to me**, and I took twelve men of you, one man for each tribe, and they turned and went up. —Deut. 1:22–24

Here the decision to send the spies is made by Moses at the people's urging; God has no role in the decision.

So which was it? Some interpreters decided that the latter was most likely the case, for surely an omniscient God would not have ordered that the spies be sent only to become angry later at the reaction to their ill report:[3]

3. There is some support for this position in the text of Num. 13:2 itself, which reads "Send out *for yourself* men to spy out," perhaps implying that, in so saying, God was acceding to some request of Moses, or at least stating that the purpose of the mission was *for* Moses but not for God.

> After this battle he [Moses] came to the conclusion that . . . he ought to inspect the land in which the nation proposed to settle . . . He chose twelve men, corresponding to the number of tribes. —Philo, *Moses* 1:220–221

> [Moses tells the Israelites:] "Let us prepare for the task [of conquering Canaan]. For they [the Canaanites] will not give us their land without a fight, but will be deprived of it [only] with great struggle. So let us send out spies who can look over the land's riches and the strength of its [people's] forces." —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:301–302

> It was taught: Resh Laqish said: "[It says] Send *for yourself*" [Num. 13:2]—that is, in accordance with your own decision." —b. *Soṭah* 34b

Still, the wording of Num. 13:1 is quite clear on one point: God did tell Moses to send the men. Perhaps, then, what Moses meant in Deut. 1:22–24 was that he had approved the sending of spies in keeping with God's command:

> And Moses sent twelve men as spies to spy out the land, for so it had been commanded him. —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 15:1

> "And I said to you . . ." [Deut. 1:21]: He said to them: I am not telling you this on my own authority, but it is on God's authority that I am saying this to you . . . "The thing seemed good to me . . ." [Deut. 1:23] to me it seemed good, but not to God. —*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 19–21

Solemnly Warned

After hearing the spies' discouraging report, the people began to bemoan their fate and even proposed to return to Egypt (Num. 14:4). Joshua and Caleb tried to calm them and warned them not to rebel against God, but they would not listen. At length God told Moses that He intended to strike them down with pestilence (Num. 14:12). It was only after Moses pleaded on the people's behalf that this death sentence was rescinded.

To some it must have seemed that God's reaction was unwarranted. After all, the spies' report *was* discouraging: could the people really be blamed for panicking? And even if their conduct was not proper, was it worthy of punishment by death? Considering such matters, interpreters no doubt turned to the warning issued to the people by Caleb and Joshua, "Do not rebel against the Lord" (Num. 14:9). To anyone schooled in the ways of divine justice, these words not only indicated the gravity of the crime involved, but further showed that the people had subsequently acted willfully, proceeding with their rebellion even after having been solemnly warned:[4]

4. That a rebellion did take place is also implied by Deut. 9:23–24, Ps. 106:25.

So was it also with the six hundred thousand strong, who all perished for their willful wrongdoing [*zedon libbam*].
If so, then one who is stiff-necked, will it surely be astonishing if he is not punished.

—Sir. 16:10–11

Joshua, because he fulfilled the commandment, became a judge in Israel. Caleb, because he [officially] warned the assembly [apparently *he'îd bā'edāh*] received an inheritance in the land.[5] —1 Macc. 2:55–56

It was not with the lightness of men that God had been brought to this wrath against them, but He had deliberately passed sentence upon them.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:315

Perhaps the same was implied elsewhere:

[. . .] to them at Kadesh: "Arise, take possession of [. . .]"[6] their spirit and they did not heed their creator, the commandments of their teacher; they spoke rebelliously in their tents [Ps. 106:25, see also Deut. 1:27] and the wrath of God was kindled against their company. —*Damascus Document* 3:7–9

Tassels Set Off Revolt

Between the account of the spies' return and the next ill turn in Israel's fortunes, the revolt of Korah and his allies, came Moses' promulgation of the law of tassels. On God's instruction, Moses announced that the Israelites were to make tassels on the corners of their garments; upon each corner tassel was to be a special blue thread "so that you shall remember and do all My commandments" (Num. 16:37–41). Immediately after this announcement, the Bible begins its account of Korah's revolt.

Interpreters therefore could not help concluding that the promulgation of this law had something to do with Korah's revolt:

In that time He commanded that man [Moses] about the tassels. And then Korah and two hundred men with him rebelled and said, "Why is an unbearable law imposed upon us?" —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:1

What did Korah do [after hearing the law of tassels]? He went and made some garments that were completely dyed blue. Then he went to Moses and said: Moses our teacher, is a garment that is already completely blue nonetheless obliged to have the [blue corner] tassel? He said: It is . . . Whereupon

5. It is all the more striking that this "warning" is the reason given here for Caleb's reward, since everywhere else the reason is that Caleb "wholly followed" (*mille' 'aḥar-*) God: Num. 14:24, 32:13; Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:9, 14.

6. In both bracketed sections, the medieval copyist has apparently omitted something from the original text. The latter probably read something like: "And God said to them at Kadesh, 'Arise, take possession of the land which I have given you' [Deut. 9:23]. But they rebelled against His [!] spirit [see Ps. 106:33] and they did not heed."

> Korah said: the Torah is not of divine origin, and Moses is not a prophet and Aaron is not the high priest. —j. *Sanhedrin* 10:1

Moses Accused of Favoritism

In the biblical narrative, Korah complains to Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! For all the congregations are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3). It is not clear from this exactly what Korah's complaint was, but later Moses rebuked him and his followers:

> Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel . . . to do service in the tabernacle of the Lord [as Levites]? Would you now seek the priesthood also? —Num. 16:9–10

Apparently, then, Korah's complaint was that he was only a Levite (charged with lesser duties in the sanctuary) and not a full-fledged priest (compare Num. 16:40). But if so, what had he meant by accusing Aaron *and Moses* of "exalting yourselves above the assembly of the Lord"? Moses' descendants had not been given the hereditary priesthood—it was awarded to Aaron and his sons. The same question was posed more sharply by a brief recapitulation of the events in the book of Psalms:

> And they became jealous of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the Lord's holy one. —Ps. 106:16

Why were the would-be priests jealous of *Moses?*

Considering these matters, some interpreters concluded that Korah, in desiring the priesthood, ended up accusing Moses of favoritism, indeed, nepotism. Moses, he said, had chosen his own brother, Aaron, for the hereditary priesthood not on the basis of any divine dictate, but out of a corrupt desire to appoint his close relatives to this high position:[7]

> Then, conspiring with each other, and collecting in great numbers, [Korah and his followers] raised an outcry against the prophet [Moses], declaring that he had bestowed the priesthood on his brother and nephews because of their relation to him, and given a false account of their being chosen, which had not really been done under divine direction. —Philo, *Moses* 2:278

> [Korah said that] in defiance of the laws he [Moses] had given the priesthood to his brother Aaron, not by the common decree of the people but by his own vote. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:15

7. This motif is an elaboration of Moses' own words in Num. 16:28: "Hereby shall you know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has *not been of my own accord.*" In so saying Moses seems to be combating an unstated accusation that he acted on his own authority in some matter and not on God's.

> Whereupon Korah said: . . . Moses is not a prophet and Aaron is not the high priest. —j. *Sanhedrin* 10:1

> [Moses told Korah:] "This quarrel that you are stirring up is not with me but with God."[8] —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Qoraḥ* 6

Moses Was Polite

The charge of favoritism would no doubt make any leader angry, and Moses was no exception (Num. 16:15). How much more remarkable, then, that he did not seek at once to rally his forces against Korah for personal revenge, or even speak harshly to Korah and his allies. Instead, he addressed them politely and stressed their special status as Levites (Num. 16:8–10). Was not all this included in Scripture to impart a lesson, namely, the virtues of controlling one's anger?

> When Moses was angry at Dathan and Abiram, he did nothing against them in anger, but controlled his anger with reason. —4 Macc. 2:17

> At first very seriously, but without loss of temper, which was indeed alien to his nature, he [Moses] endeavored with words of admonition to bring them to a better mind and to refrain from transgressing the appointed limits or revolting against the sacred and hallowed institutions.
>
> —Philo, *Rewards and Punishments* 77

> "And Moses said to Korah: 'Please listen, you Levites . . .'" [Num. 16:8]: It is said that Moses sought to have Korah change his mind and so spoke to him politely and appeasingly . . . All these things Moses said to appease Korah, yet you do not find Korah saying anything back to him. For he [Korah] was clever in his wickedness. He said: If I answer him, I know that, since he is a great sage he will overwhelm me with his words and overcome me and I will end up making peace with him against my will.
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Qoraḥ* 6

Korah's Symbolic Death

In response to Korah's challenge to his authority, Moses had warned that the rebels would not "die the common death of all men"; they would be punished in some supernatural fashion so that "you shall know that the Lord has sent me [Moses] to do these things" (Num. 16:28). And so it was:

> And as he [Korah] finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. And all Israel that were round about them fled at their cry; for they

8. That is, the fact that Aaron is a priest and you are not is not my decision, but God's.

> said, "Lest the earth swallow us up!" And fire came forth from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.
>
> —Num. 16:31–35

Granted, Korah was guilty and deserved punishment, perhaps indeed death in some supernatural fashion. But to be swallowed up by the earth was certainly an unprecedented way to die. Perhaps the very fact that the earth was involved had some special significance:

> This too we should not fail to note, that the work of punishing the impious was shared by earth and heaven, the fundamental parts of the universe. For they had set the roots of their wickedness on earth, but let it grow so high that it rose up to the sky. Therefore each of the two elements supplied its punishment: the earth burst forth and parted asunder to drag down and swallow those who had then become a burden to it, while heaven poured down the strangest of rainstorms, a great stream of fire to blast them in its flames.[9]
>
> —Philo, *Moses* 2:285–286

> And God was angry and said: I commanded the earth, and it gave me Adam; and to him two sons were born at first, and the older rose up and killed the younger, and then the earth quickly swallowed his blood. But I drove Cain out and cursed the earth and spoke to the parched land, saying, "You will swallow up blood no more." But now the thoughts of men are very corrupt; behold, I command the earth, and it will swallow up body and soul together, and their dwelling place will be in darkness and the place of destruction, and they will not die but melt away until I remember the world and renew the earth.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:2–3

A Truly Dangerous Figure

For others, Korah's supernatural death seemed to indicate that the danger posed by him was greater than might first appear. After all, in the biblical story, Korah is simply a dissatisfied Levite who craves higher status and rallies to his support two hundred and fifty men. This was hardly a major revolt! But in reflecting on the Korah episode, interpreters came to the conclusion that far more must have been involved; the very nature of Korah's supernatural death, as well as the fact that the Bible had taken the trouble to recount the whole episode in detail, seemed to argue that Korah was a truly dangerous figure whose rebellion had almost led to destruction:

> Thus it was that a sedition, for which we know of no parallel whether among Greeks or barbarians, broke out among them: this sedition brought them all into peril of destruction.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:12

9. Technically, the "fire" that came down from heaven did not punish Korah but his followers (Num. 16:35).

> Woe to them [ungodly men]! For they walk in the way of Cain and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion. —Jude 11

> For the adherents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were made a monument and example of the destruction of schismatics; and everyone who imitates them shall perish even as they did. —*Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 23

Aaron's Symbolic Staff

Following Korah's rebellion, another incident demonstrated the legitimacy of the Aaronide priesthood. Numbers 17 recounts the story of Aaron's staff, which, alone among twelve staffs representing Israel's twelve tribes, miraculously budded and bore fruit overnight. In context, this miracle confirmed God's choice of Aaron and his sons. But interpreters noticed a difference between what God had said would happen—"And the staff of the man whom I choose *shall sprout*" (Num. 17:5)—and what actually did happen:

> And the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. —Num. 17:8

Having the staff bud as predicted certainly would have sufficed to confirm Aaron's choice for the priesthood. Why had God taken the additional step of having the staff bear fruit—and almonds at that?

Perhaps the actual outcome—that the staff would bear almonds—had been known to Moses all along. He simply had not told the Israelites in advance in order to avoid further dissension:

> And Moses took the staffs out, and the staff of Aaron was found not only to have budded, but also to be bearing fruit. What do you think, my beloved—that Moses did not know beforehand that this was going to happen? Of course he knew, but he acted in this way so that there should be no disorder in Israel. —*1 Clement* 43:5–6

To other interpreters, however, it seemed that the detail of the staff bearing almonds must contain some further teaching:

> Now, the fruits [which grew on Aaron's staff] were nuts, which in nature are the opposite of other fruits, for in most cases—the grape, the olive, the apple—there is a difference between the seed and the edible part, [and moreover] the edible part is on the outside and the seed is enclosed within. But with a nut, the seed and the edible part are identical, and [they are] inside, shielded and guarded . . . In this way, it [the nut] symbolizes perfect virtue. —Philo, *Moses* 2:180–181

> And the staff of Aaron sprouted and flowered and yielded seed of almonds. Now that which happened then was like what Israel [Jacob] did when he

was in Mesopotamia with Laban the Syrian when he took almond rods and put them at the cisterns of water; and the flocks came to drink and were divided among the peeled rods, and they brought forth white and specked and many-colored kids. So [in the case of Aaron's budding staff,] the assembly of the people was like the flock of sheep. And as the flocks brought forth according to the almond staff, so the priesthood was established through almond staffs. — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 17:2–4

For Christians, the budding rod of the Old Testament came to be identified with the cross in the New Testament:

There will again be one exceptional man from the sky
who stretched out his hands on the **fruit-bearing wood** . . .
divinely born, wealthy, sole-desired flower,
good light, **holy shoot, beloved plant.**

— *Sibylline Oracles* 5:256–258, 261–262

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In short: The quails sent by God to the Israelites were altogether good, part of God's beneficence to His people. As for Miriam and Aaron's complaints about Moses' Ethiopian wife, they really concerned his prophesying. God may not actually have ordered Moses to send out the spies, but His desire to kill the people after their cowardly reaction was based on the solemn warning that had been previously delivered to them. Korah used the law of the tassels as a means for fomenting revolt against Moses, whom he accused of favoritism in naming Aaron to the priesthood. Moses reacted without anger to Korah's accusations, but Korah's supernatural death testified to the gravity of his crimes. The almonds with which Aaron's rod budded contained a hidden lesson about God's ways.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for Trouble along the Way

Trusted Servant Par Excellence: One of the texts cited comes from the standard Sabbath service used in synagogues today:

> Moses rejoiced in his allotted portion, for "trusted servant" is what You called him.

This line is actually a survival from a now-lost *qĕrôbāh* (an alphabetical liturgical poem) apparently composed for one particular Sabbath service in the yearly cycle. See further Mirsky, "Beginnings of the Qerobah," 127. The actual phrase, "faithful of the house," became a standard poetic appellation *(kinnui)* throughout early Hebrew liturgical poetry; see Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages,* 104–107.

Miriam's Punishment: When Miriam speaks ill of Moses (Numbers 12), she is punished by being turned "leprous" (by all accounts not the leprosy known in modern times, but some temporary ailment that turned the skin white). Rabbinic interpreters took this as an indication of the seriousness of the crime of speaking ill of others; see Ginzberg, *Legends,* 3:214, 6:91. At the same time, they could not but see in the detail of the people's waiting seven days for Miriam's recovery (Num. 12:15) yet another instance of the divine principle of "measure for measure" (or, more accurately, disproportionate recompense in the case of a good deed):

> Miriam waited a short while for Moses, as it is said, "And his sister stood far off to find out what would happen to him" [Exod. 2:4], therefore, all of Israel tarried in the desert for seven days on her behalf, as it is said, "And the people did not travel until Miriam had been gathered back in" [Num. 12:15].
>
> —m. *Soṭah* 1:9

Korah's Wealth: What sort of a man was Korah? By the biblical account he was something of a rabble-rouser and a demagogue, and the rebellion that he fomented was one of the most serious episodes of dissent during the whole period of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. As to his actual circumstances and background, however, the Bible says little: he was, like Moses and Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, and apparently of distinguished rank. Many ancient interpreters asserted one more thing, however, saying that Korah was extraordinarily wealthy:

> Korah, one of the most eminent of the Hebrews by reason both of his birth and of his riches . . . —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:14 (cf. 4:26)

> There were two great wealthy men who arose in the world, Korah from the people of Israel and Haman from the other nations of the world.
>
> —*Midrash Tanḥuma* (Buber ed.), *Maṭṭot* 8 (p. 160)

The apparent source of this tradition is Psalm 49. This is one of the psalms connected to the "sons of Korah" (on whom see below). At one point, the psalm seems to allude to their father's death:

> Do not worry that a man becomes rich, that the wealth of his house grows great;
> For he will not take it all when he dies, his wealth will not **go down** after him . . .
> You shall enter his fathers' abode, **who will never more see the light.**
>
> —Ps. 49:17–19

The mention of the man "going down" to "never more see the light" sounded like an allusion to Korah's death, when the earth opened up and he and his allies "went down alive to Sheol and the earth closed over them" (Num. 16:33). If so, then it followed that Korah was the wealthy man referred to in the previous verse.

Tassels Set Off Revolt: We saw earlier that various sources connected Korah's rebellion with the law of tassels—it was Moses' announcement of this law that triggered the revolt. But why? Although the sources cited do not say specifically, Korah sought, in objecting to the law of tassels, to present an argument parallel to that adopted in his dispute about the priesthood. For, just as a garment that is entirely blue ought not, by Korah's logic, to have need of any special blue thread on its tassels, so the tribe of Levi, whose members "are holy, every one of them" (Num. 16:3), ought not to have any need of a special subgroup for the priesthood—let all of them be priests! In many versions of this tradition, Korah asks additional questions of similar import: Why should a room that is full of sacred books have need of special biblical passages affixed on its doorposts (in keeping with Deut. 6:9, 11:20)? See further *Midrash Tanḥuma, Qoraḥ* 1; Heinemann, *Methods of Aggadah,* 142.

It is interesting to speculate on the relationship of the passage cited from Pseudo-Philo to these later attestations of this tradition:

> In that time He commanded that man [Moses] about the tassels. And then Korah and two hundred men with him rebelled and said, "Why is an unbearable law imposed upon us?" —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:1

Pseudo-Philo is frequently elliptical, omitting important details in an exegetical motif either because they seem inappropriate to his capsule summary or, possibly, out of ignorance. In this case, however, it seems likely that Pseudo-Philo is accurately reflecting an early stage of an evolving tradition. For, his remark seeks to go no further than to explain the relationship of Scripture's abrupt opening statement in the Korah narrative with what immediately precedes it, the law of tassels. He therefore has the rebels complain that this law is "unbearable." Presumably, would-be rebels might make such a complaint against any law in the Pentateuch: it was only because the law of tassels came just before the Korah narrative that *it* was alleged to be the object of their ire. What is "unbearable" about the law is that it

requires people to do extra work, adding apparently unnecessary blue tassels to their garments. In other words, Pseudo-Philo apparently knew no further rationale for the rebels' distaste for this commandment; it is simply "unbearable." Such would seem to be the simplest and earliest form of a tradition seeking to connect the Korah narrative with the law that immediately precedes it in the Pentateuch.

But such a tradition, once launched, took on a life of its own. For how, interpreters must have wondered, could anger about the law of tassels be related to what turns out to be the rebels' real complaint, that they have been passed over for the priesthood (Num. 16:10)? True, one could simply say that both the law of tassels and the choice of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood were, in the rebels' view, twin examples of Moses' imperiousness, his "exalting himself" over his peers. But at some point a better explanation came along, the one that reworded the rebels' complaint as a query posed by Korah concerning a garment that was "completely blue"—a metaphorical question whose true object was Moses' singling out of some Levites over their equally "holy" brethren for the hereditary priesthood. Finally, to this metaphorical question about the law of tassels was added a parallel one, about the room full of sacred books, which, however, was addressed not to any law in the immediate biblical environs of Korah's revolt, but to a law that would not even be promulgated until Deut. 6:9! The addition of this law (and others) to Korah's list of complaints thus seems to represent yet a third stage in the evolution of this exegetical motif.

Jealous of Aaron Alone: The accusation by Korah and his band that Moses was "exalting" himself did not quite square with their apparent desire to be priests: Moses had not made himself or his direct descendants priests either. Faced with the same difficulty, Ben Sira simply took Moses out of the picture and made Aaron the sole object of their accusation:

> He [God] chose him [Aaron] out of all the living to offer sacrifice to the Lord . . .
> Then outsiders [nonpriests] became jealous of **him** [Aaron], and grew envious of him in the wilderness.
> The men of Dathan and Abiram, and the company of Korah in their presumption.
> The Lord saw and was angered, and destroyed them in his wrath.
> He brought against them a miraculous event, and consumed them in a sparkling fire.
>
> —Sir. 45:16, 18–19

Incidentally, the last line cited seems curiously reticent about the earth swallowing up Korah, in contrast not only to the account in Numbers 17 but also to Ps. 106:18. Korah's death is, however, mentioned in another ancient text:

>]Korah and his band [. . .] judgment [. . .] in the sight of the assembly
> [. . . the judg]ment like a sign [—(4Q491) *War Scroll*[a] frag. 1:1–2

If the phrase "judg]ment like a sign" does indeed refer to the Korah incident, then it appears to be an attempt to explain the unusual circumstances of Korah's death: it was intended by God as a *sign* (often used in the sense of an eternal reminder—see Chapter 10, "A Visible Reminder"). Such an explanation is a motif of the same order as that of "Korah's Symbolic Death" seen earlier.

The Mouth of the Earth: A widely disseminated rabbinic tradition held that, along with nine other miraculous things (Aaron's staff, manna, Balaam's talking donkey, and so forth), the "mouth of the earth" that swallowed up Korah and his followers was no figure of speech but an actual opening in the earth that had been specially created by God at the time of the creation. This "mouth," along with the other nine things, had been created at the very end of the sixth day of creation. See m. *Abot* 5:6, *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Wayyassa'* 5 (Horovitz ed. p. 170). It seems likely that the origin of this tradition lies in Moses' words spoken with regard to Korah and his followers:

> If these men die in the manner of other men or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. **But if the Lord creates a creation** and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord. —Num. 16:29–30

The words indicated were difficult. In context, they seem to mean "if God creates a miracle," some supernatural occurrence. Yet "creates a creation" smacked of the Bible's account of the six days of creation. The implication therefore was that the miraculous occurrence about to happen had in fact been prepared in advance, from the time of the original creation. And indeed, such an act would appear appropriate only for the first six days of creation; for, having created the earth on the first day, would not God during that same time period have fashioned a special "mouth" for it, a mouth that could be operated in the future to swallow up Korah and his band? However, it remained to deduce *when* in the six days this mouth could have been fashioned. There was no mention of the earth's "mouth" being created on the first day or any other day. The only spot remaining for the creation of this extra thing was the space of time between the sixth day and the start of the Sabbath (normally left vacant because it was "guarded" from work—see Chapter 20, "Guard the Sabbath Borders"). Therefore, into that space was fitted the creation of this actual "mouth" belonging to the earth, in just the right spot on earth so that at the time of Korah's revolt it might miraculously open. By analogy, another miraculous mouth, that of Balaam's donkey, was also created on the late afternoon of the sixth day, and soon enough other miraculous objects whose moment of use lay sometime in the future were also said to have been created then—in order to arrive at a total of the pedagogical number ten.

Korah's Virtuous Sons: The Bible mentions that although Korah was swallowed up by the earth, "Korah's sons did not die" (Num. 26:11). The same conclusion could

have been reached by any reader of the book of Psalms, where a number of psalms bear the heading "For the sons of Korah." The very fact of their survival, plus their connection with these psalms and their role in the Jerusalem Temple (1 Chron. 9:19, 31; 26:1, 19; 2 Chron. 20:19), seemed to suggest that they had been cut from a different cloth:

> [At the time of his proposed revolt, Korah's sons] answered him, saying: Just as a painter does not produce a work of art unless he has been instructed beforehand, so we have received the Law of the Most Powerful that teaches us His ways; and we will not enter them except to walk in them. Our father has begotten us, but the Most Powerful has formed us. And now, if we walk in his ways, we will be his sons. But if you are unbelieving go your own way.
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:5

In other words, it was no accident that they survived: they were virtuous and had refused to join their father in rebellion against divine authority.

Aaron's Staff Preserved: Aaron's staff, which miraculously budded and bore fruit, was alleged in rabbinic sources to have been another of ten things created at the very end of the sixth day of the creation. The budding staff was also identified in rabbinic texts with the staff that Aaron (and Moses) had used earlier in Egypt to perform miracles, as well as with the staff with which Jacob crossed the Jordan (Gen. 32:10) and with Judah's scepter (Gen. 49:10). See further Ginzberg, *Legends,* 5:106–107. Note that God's instructing Moses to put the budding staff "before the testimony" was understood by some to mean that it was preserved in the Holy of Holies:

> Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tables of the covenant. —Heb. 9:3–4

It was held to be hidden at the time of the destruction of the First Temple:

> At the time when the ark was hidden, the anointing oil, the urn of manna, and Aaron's staff with its almonds and blossoms were also hidden.
>
> —b. *Horayot* 12a

Jewish tradition maintained that the staff will be restored, along with these other things, at the time of the messiah. Christians not only identified Aaron's staff with the cross, as we have seen, but connected both of them with the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. See *Acta Pilati* 19; also, Kampers, *Mittelalterliche Sagen von dem Pardiesbaum;* Petit, "Le contenu de l'Arche de l'alliance." Because the Greek word *rabdos* was used for both Aaron's staff and the "shoot" (in Hebrew, *ḥōṭer*) that will arise from the "stump of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1), the word "staff" was itself construed as referring to a special instrument of the divine will as well as a messianic title (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 126:1). See Chapter 24, "A Ruler of the World"; also, Collins, *The Scepter and the Star.*

Red Heifer Just in Time: The interpretive connection seen earlier between the law of tassels and Korah's rebellion is only one example of how ancient interpreters sometimes sought to establish a thematic connection between adjacent items (what later rabbinic texts called *dārôš sĕmûkîn*). Another instance of this approach concerns the complicated purification rite of the red heifer (Numbers 19). Since this law just precedes the account of the death of Moses' sister Miriam (Num. 20:1), it seemed logical that the law should have been taught to the people by Moses at that particular time:

> And now it was that death overtook his [Moses'] sister Miriam . . . and when the people had mourned her for thirty days, they were purified [from contact with a dead body] in the following way. A heifer . . .
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:78

(Note that Josephus seems to reverse the sequence, as if promulgation of the law of the red heifer had followed, rather than preceded, Miriam's death.) In support of the idea that the law of the red heifer was specifically promulgated in connection with Miriam's impending death is the fact that it is spoken directly to Moses and Aaron (Miriam's two brothers) who are told to "tell the people of Israel to bring *for you* a red heifer" (Num. 19:2). This instruction notwithstanding, the juxtaposition of this law with Miriam's death was elsewhere held to show a somewhat different principle, that the death of the righteous, just as the red heifer, brings about atonement (b. *Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 28a).

Red Heifer's Symbolism: Beyond the timing of the law of the red heifer, however, intepreters were drawn to explain its particulars. The very fact that water alone did not suffice in this instance to effect purification, but that to the water must be added the ashes of an animal (and a rather peculiar animal at that, an unblemished, red heifer that had never been used for plowing) that had been burned along with some cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet—all this seemed to cry out for explanation.

> In almost all other cases [of purification], men use pure water for the sprinkling [on their bodies] . . . But [in this case,] Moses first provided ashes, the remnants of a sacred fire . . . be taken and thrown into a vessel and afterward have the water poured upon them . . . The reason for this may be aptly stated as follows: Moses wished to have those who come to serve Him-Who-Is first know themselves and of what substances these selves are made.
>
> —Philo, *Special Laws* 1:262–263

> But what do you think is prefigured by the fact that it was commanded to Israel that men in whom sin is complete bring forth a heifer and kill it and burn it, and then that boys take the ashes [of the burnt heifer] and put them into vessels and bind scarlet wool on wood (note again the foreshadowing of the cross and the [blood represented by the] scarlet wool), and that the boys then sprinkle the people one by one so that they be purified from their sins? Consider with what openness [Scripture] is speaking to you! For the

> calf is Jesus, and the sinful men who offer it are those who brought him to be slain. — *Letter of Barnabas* 8:1–2

On the latter passage, see Allon, "The Halakhah in Epistle of Barnabas."

Rabbinic literature records a dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees concerning the priest who burned the red heifer (m. *Parah* 3:7); this dispute has now been verified by publication of the Qumran text (4Q394–99) *Halakhic Letter.* See Baumgarten, "Recent Qumran Discoveries and Halakhah"; Schiffman, "Pharasaic and Sadducean Halakhah in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls." Baumgarten rightly points out that this is yet another instance in which the characterization of a Mishnaic text as the anachronistic creation of second-century rabbis has been resoundingly disproven. For that characterization, see Neusner, *History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities, Part 22,* 224–250; *Parah,* 223.

24

The Bronze Serpent, Balaam, and Phinehas

(NUMBERS 21–32)

God puts His word in Balaam's mouth.

The Bronze Serpent, Balaam, and Phinehas

(NUMBERS 21–32)

❖ ❖ ❖

When the people continued their complaining, God afflicted them further, this time with fiery serpents; many Israelites died. Moses prayed to God on the people's behalf, and God instructed him to fashion a serpent and place it on a pole, so that anyone who was bitten might look at the serpent and live. Moses then made a serpent out of bronze and this protected the people. Later, as they continued their travels, the Israelites came to Beer ("Well"), so called because of the well that was dug there and the song sung by the Israelites on that occasion.

When the Israelites arrived at the plains of Moab, the Moabite king, Balak, sent a delegation to the east to invite Balaam, a man specially endowed with the powers of cursing and blessing, to curse the Israelites and so stop their advance. Balaam set out on his donkey for the journey, but on the way the donkey suddenly balked, refusing to advance. When Balaam whipped her, the donkey began to speak, protesting the beating. An angel then appeared and told Balaam that his donkey had stopped because she had seen him (the angel), whereas Balaam had not. Chastened, Balaam resumed his journey.

Once in Moab, Balaam sought to oblige Balak but found himself unable to curse Israel—indeed, instead of cursing, he ended up blessing Israel, predicting in different oracles this people's glorious future. Balak dismissed Balaam in anger.

Afterward, the Israelites sinned with the Moabite daughters, sacrificing to their gods and yoking themselves to Baal Peor. Then one of the Israelites brought a Midianite woman to his brothers in the very presence of Moses and Aaron. When he saw this, Phinehas ran the couple through with his spear, thereby averting a plague from Israel. God rewarded Phinehas' zeal with a covenant of perpetual priesthood.

THE BRONZE SERPENT fashioned by Moses profoundly troubled ancient interpreters. After all, a man-made object that had the power to cure snakebites if one simply looked at it—did this not smack more of magic than proper belief? What was worse, this same bronze serpent was later said to have become an object of idolatry in itself:

> And he [Hezekiah] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father [ancestor] had done. He removed the high places,

> and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people in Israel had burned incense to it. —2 Kings 18:3–4

All of this made interpreters wonder why God had told Moses to make the bronze serpent in the first place. If He had wanted to heal the people, surely He could have done so directly.

Looking Didn't Cure

One thing, however, struck interpreters in the episode: God had ordered Moses not just to make the bronze serpent, but to "put it on a pole" (Num. 21:8). Why this additional specification? The word used for "pole" here (*nēs*) was sometimes used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for "sign," including the miraculous sense of "signs and wonders." Interestingly, the same was true of the word used by the Septuagint translators, *sēmeion,* which could also mean "sign" or even "omen," and the Aramaic *'āt* (used by *Targum Onqelos*). Thus, God's instruction to put the serpent "on a pole" might be understood, in the Hebrew Bible itself and in various translations, as meaning that the serpent was to be used as, or turned into, a symbol or signal of some sort, rather than directly curing the people:

> Even when fierce and furious snakes attacked the people and the bites of writhing serpents were spreading death, Your anger did not continue to the bitter end; their short trouble was sent to them as a lesson, and they were given a **sign** of salvation to remind them of the requirements of Your law. For any man who turned toward it was saved, not by the thing he looked upon, but by You, the savior of all. In this way You convinced our enemies that You are the deliverer from every evil. — Wisd. 16:5–8

> Now did this serpent actually kill people or heal people? Rather it means that when Moses did so, the Israelites looked at him [or "it"] and put their trust in Him who ordered Moses so to do; then God would send them healing. — *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael, Amaleq* 1

Alternately, it might be that the whole point of putting the serpent "on a pole" was to get the Israelites to look upward; this would remind them of the true source of their healing:

> "Make for yourself a fiery serpent and put it on a pole, and anyone who is bitten will see it and live" [Num. 21:8]. And was the [bronze] serpent capable of killing or bringing back to life? Rather, whenever Israel looked upward and subjugated their wills to that of their heavenly Father, they would be healed. — m. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 3:5

> And Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on an **elevated** [or "hanging"] place, and it happened that when a snake would bite a man, he would look upon the bronze serpent and direct his thoughts toward God and live.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Num. 21:9

Similarly:

> Everyone, then, "whom a serpent shall have bitten, when he looks on it shall live" [Num. 21:9]. This is quite true. For if the mind, when bitten by pleasure, the serpent of Eve, succeeds in beholding the beauty of self-mastery, [that is,] the serpent of Moses, and through **beholding this, behold God Himself**, he shall live; only let him look and mark well.
>
> —Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2:81

Serpent Was Like Moses' Hands

If indeed the purpose of this magic-like act of making a bronze serpent was really only to draw the Israelites' attention to God, then it was not very different from Moses' upraised hands during the battle at Rephidim (see Chapter 19). Some interpreters therefore specifically associated the two episodes:

> "And whenever Moses would lift up his hands, Israel would triumph . . ." [Exod. 17:11]. But were Moses' hands capable of making war or undermining war? Rather this is to tell you that whenever Israel looked upward and subjugated their wills to that of their heavenly Father, they would triumph; but if they did not, they would fall. A **similar** instance: "Make for yourself a fiery serpent and put it on a pole, and anyone who is bitten will see it and live" [Num. 21:8]. And was the [bronze] serpent capable of killing or bringing back to life? Rather, whenever Israel looked upward and subjugated their wills to that of their heavenly Father, they would be healed.
>
> —m. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 3:5

> And he says again to Moses—when Israel was being warred upon by strangers [Exodus 17]— . . . the Spirit, speaking to the heart of Moses, [tells him] to make a representation of the cross and of him who was to suffer upon it . . . So Moses placed one shield upon the other in the midst of the fight, and standing there, raised above them all, kept stretching out his hands, and so Israel again began to be victorious . . . [Later,] Moses made **another representation** of Jesus . . . for the Lord made every serpent to bite them, and they were perishing . . . Moses therefore made a graven serpent.
>
> —*Letter of Barnabas* 12:2, 5–6

> Shall then the serpent be thought to have saved the people at that time, which, as I have already said, God crushed at the first, and will slay with the great sword, as Isaiah cries aloud [Isa. 27:1]? And shall we accept such things so unintelligently . . . and not as symbols? And shall we not find a reference to the image of the crucified Jesus in the sign ["pole" in Num. 21:8], [just as] Moses, by stretching out his hands together with him who was surnamed by the name of Jesus [Joshua], caused your people to gain the day [at Rephidim]?
>
> —Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 112:2

Balaam the Wicked

Balaam was another somewhat ambiguous figure (like Lot or Esau) whose portrayal troubled ancient interpreters. On the one hand, he seemed unarguably *good.* He was a true prophet of God, a man who "knows the knowledge of the Most High" (Num. 24:16) and whose effectiveness at blessing and cursing (Num. 22:6) could hardly have existed without God's help. In the Bible, Balaam steadfastly refused to say anything not authorized by God, repeatedly scorning the pleadings of royalty and the promises of certain gain that stood behind them. What is more, Balaam's words were unequivocably favorable to Israel, and he even predicted the coming of their long-awaited messiah (see below). How could such a figure be thought of as anything but good?

On the other hand, the whole episode of Balaam's balking, talking donkey did not show him in a good light. It was as if Scripture wished to say that any dumb animal would make a better prophet than Balaam. What is more, the fact that Balaam *did* end up journeying to Moab did not speak well of him; why did he bother going if it was not to reap the material rewards promised by Balak's envoys? Moreover, there was good reason to believe that—despite his fulsome oracles—Balaam was indeed an enemy of Israel, one who eventually sought to harm them in some way other than cursing (see below).

Perhaps an objective evaluation of this conflicting evidence would nevertheless find that Balaam's positive characteristics outweighed his negative ones. Yet ancient interpreters by and large chose the opposite path: Balaam became "Balaam the Wicked," the prophet for hire who was only interested in his own material gain and self-aggrandizement:

> With his soothsayer's mock wisdom, he defaced the stamp of heaven-sent prophecy. —Philo, *On the Change of Names* 203

> [Balaam] was a sophist, an empty conglomeration of incompatible and discordant notions. It was his desire to do harm to the goodly by laying curses upon him, but he could not, for God turned his curses into a blessing in order that he might convict the unrighteous one of his villainy and at the same time make good His own life of virtue.
>
> —Philo, *Worse Attacks the Better* 71

> Woe to them [ungodly men]! For they walk in the way of Cain and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion. —Jude 11

> And the donkey said to Balaam: Where are you going, wicked Balaam? O foolish one! If you are unable to curse me, an unclean beast who will die in this world and will not enter the world to come, how much less are you capable of cursing the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for whose future merit the world was created and whose merit attaches to them?
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 22:30

> Anyone who possesses these three things is of the followers of our father Abraham, but he who possesses three others is of the followers of the wicked Balaam . . . [About the latter it is written:] "And you, O God, will bring them down to destruction, men of bloodshed and falsehood will not live out half their allotted time—but I shall trust in you" [Ps. 55:23]. —m. *Abot* 5:19

What caused most ancient interpreters to overlook Balaam's "good side" so completely? Among other factors, perhaps it was the treatment accorded Balaam elsewhere in Scripture that proved decisive. For his story is mentioned later on as well:

> [Moses explains God's law]: "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord . . . because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless the Lord your God would not hearken to Balaam but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you."
>
> —Deut. 23:3–5

> [God tells Israel:] "Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, rose and fought against Israel, and he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I delivered you out of his hand." —Josh. 24:9–10

These subsequent mentions of Balaam state outright what the Numbers narrative somehow does not, that Balaam actually *tried* to curse Israel, but that God "would not listen" or even changed Balaam's intended message, "turned the curse into a blessing." (In the Numbers account, on the contrary, Balaam consistently says from the outset that he will only speak what God orders.) Read in the light of these subsequent passages, the Numbers narrative took on a more sinister air. Somewhat sinister, too, was the Balaam mentioned by a later prophet:

> O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord. —Mic. 6:5

Although this text only hints, its evocation of God's "saving acts" after mentioning Balak and Balaam certainly seems to suggest that God had saved Israel from something these two men had devised (again, see below).

Finally, there was the matter of Balaam's death. It is mentioned twice in Scripture:

> They [the Israelites] slew the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Rea, the five kings of Midian; and they also slew Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. —Num. 31:8

> Balaam also, the son of Beor, the soothsayer, the people of Israel killed with the sword among the rest of their slain. —Josh. 13:22

If Balaam was such a benefactor of Israel, why did they kill him? Indeed, why would his killing be mentioned so prominently, featured alongside that of five enemy

kings as if it were an achievement of comparable importance, and then be mentioned again in the book of Joshua—why unless Balaam was indeed a wicked and dangerous enemy of Israel? Swayed by such considerations as these, most interpreters therefore presented the whole of Balaam's history in a negative light, so that even relatively innocent details took on a new coloring.

God Knew Who They Were

To convince Balaam, the famous soothsayer, to travel to Moab and curse Israel, the Moabite king Balak sent a delegation to Balaam's home. Balaam received the men and told them to spend the night so that he might consult with God:

> And God came to Balaam and said, "**Who are these men** with you?" And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Behold a people has come out of Egypt . . . come now, curse them for me.'" —Num. 22:9–11

God's question disturbed ancient interpreters: did He not know who the envoys were? There was nothing in Balaam's response to indicate that *he* understood the question as anything more than a request for information. And yet, interpreters reasoned, perhaps that was the whole point. Perhaps God's question was a test of Balaam's character:

> And God said to him by night: "Who are these men who have come to you?" [Num. 22:9]. And Balaam said, "For what purpose, Lord, do you **test** the human race? They cannot pass, for You knew what things were to happen in the world even before You founded it. And now, enlighten your servant if it be right that I set out with them." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:4

> God **tested** three and found them all [deficient, namely, Cain, Hezekiah, and Balaam]: When Balak sent for the wicked Balaam God said to him, "Who are these people with you?" Balaam should have said: "Master of the universe! Everything is revealed to You and there is not one thing that is hidden from You, yet you are asking *me?*" Instead, he said to Him: "Balak the son of Zippor has sent to me . . ." Said God: Since that is how you answer Me [although I obviously know the situation!], "You shall not curse the people" [Num. 22:12]. Said God: "O most wicked one! It is written about Israel that 'Whoever touches you is like one who touches the apple of His [God's] eye' [Zech. 2:8], yet you nevertheless are headed off to touch them and curse them, therefore let [your] eye fall out," as [Balaam is later described as] "the oracle of Balaam . . . whose eye is closed" [Num. 24:3].
> —*Numbers Rabba* 20:6

A Prophet for Hire

Balaam at first refused to go to Moab and curse Israel, but he changed his mind after Balak sent a new delegation, "more numerous and honored than the first" (Num.

22:15). Obviously, Scripture was seeking to make some point in narrating Balaam's turnaround. Perhaps this second delegation caused him to reconsider because its higher status appealed to Balaam's vanity. Or perhaps it was the message the delegation brought from Balak, "I will surely do you great honor," which might be understood as a somewhat polite way of saying, "I will pay you a lot of money." In either case, Balaam's willingness to receive this second delegation, and his ultimate decision to go back with them to Moab, did not speak well of his character. Although no actual sums are mentioned by the text, interpreters concluded that a great deal of money must have been involved. Was Balaam thus not an arrogant, greedy individual?

> The envoys then returned to the king without success, but others, selected from more highly reputed courtiers, were at once appointed for the same purpose who brought **more money** and promised **more abundant** gifts. Enticed by these present and prospective offers and impressed by the high rank of those who were inviting him, [Balaam] gave way, again dishonestly alleging a divine command. —Philo, *Moses* 1:267–268

> Balak wished to persuade the Almighty through gifts and to buy [His] decree through money [given to Balaam].
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:11

> Balak fumed and accused him [Balaam] of transgressing the agreement whereby, in exchange for **liberal gifts**, he had obtained his services.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 118

> Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, **who loved gain** from wrongdoing but was rebuked for his own transgression: a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. —2 Pet. 2:15–16

> Woe to them [ungodly men]! For they . . . abandon themselves **for the sake of gain** to Balaam's error. —Jude 11

> Anyone who possesses these three things is of the followers of our father Abraham, but he who possesses three others is of the followers of the wicked Balaam. A good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest appetite—such belong to the followers of our father Abraham. An evil eye,[1] **a haughty spirit, and a large appetite**—these belong to the followers of the wicked Balaam.
>
> —m. *Abot* 5:19

> [Commenting on the above part of the Mishnah:] "A haughty spirit"—whence do we know that this is characteristic of Balaam? From his saying "For the Lord refuses to allow me to go with you" [Num. 22:13]—[what he meant was:] "Do you really think you are the sort of people I would go with?! Shall I not [wait and] go with others of higher station?" For in the end

1. Presumably a reference to his mean-spiritedness.

what does the text say?—"And once more Balak sent officials, but more numerous and of higher station than those" [Num. 22:15]. And whence do we know that Balaam had a large appetite? From his saying, "Even if Balak were to give me a whole house full of silver and gold, I could not transgress the word of the Lord my God in the slightest detail" [that is, he would not have mentioned silver and gold if that were not what was really on his mind]. —*Abot deR. Nathan* (B) ch. 45

At first he was a holy man and a prophet of God, but afterward, through disobedience **and the desire for lucre**, when he tried to curse Israel, he was called by the Holy Writ a "soothsayer" [Josh. 13:22].

—Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 22:22

Balaam Foresaw the Messiah

Although he went to Moab with base motives, Balaam did indeed end up blessing instead of cursing Israel, foretelling a glowing future for this emerging nation. And his predictions proved true: Israel did become a great nation, at least for a time—although subsequent conquerors eventually deprived it of much of its territory and freedom.

As we have already seen (Chapter 15, "Another King Will Come"), Jews in these later times were animated by the hope that they might once again live as in their heyday; they dreamt of a day when an anointed leader (Hebrew *māšiaḥ*, Greek transliteration *messiah*) would arise to restore their fortunes. In considering Balaam's oracles, some interpreters felt that, at one point, the eastern soothsayer had alluded as well to such far distant events as these. Peering far into the future, Balaam had glimpsed the rise of just this future leader:

I see it [or "him"], but not now; I behold it [or "him"], but not close:
a star shall proceed from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel,
and he shall crush the outskirts of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth,
and Edom shall be dispossessed, and Seir's enemies shall inherit her, yea, Israel shall triumph.
And he shall rule from Jacob, and destroy the city's survivor[s].

—Num. 24:17–19

Here indeed seemed to be a reference to some great leader in Israel's future. To begin with, Balaam's description of what he saw as in the *distant* future was significant for ancient interpreters. He was not talking about anything that was going to happen in his own day, such as Israel's conquest and settlement of the land, especially since he seemed to have referred to these in his previous oracles, apparently even alluding there to the establishment of kingship in Israel (Num. 24:7). What was "distant," therefore, must be well beyond such events. If so, then what Balaam was describing was a period of Israelite dominion such as had not been known since the highpoint of David's military might, a time when all of Israel's

enemies would fall before it and foreign nations would be ruled "from Jacob." Since these things had not happened *yet,* interpreters reasonably concluded that the person being spoken of had yet to come.

What is more, Balaam had prefaced these words by telling Balak that he would now set forth "what this people shall do to yours *in the end of days*" (Num. 24:14). This last phrase sometimes means only "in time to come" in the Bible, but it later acquired the meaning of "in the time of the end," that is, the great moment in the future when life as we know it will come to an end. Was it not obvious, therefore, that Balaam was talking about *the* future king or leader, the same one spoken of elsewhere in the Bible, who would at last set Israel's fortunes aright in the end-time?

Such a hypothesis could only seem to be confirmed by the curious similarity of Balaam's oracle to what Jacob had said earlier about the future king. For, in blessing his son Judah at the end of his life, Jacob had said:

> The **scepter** shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to Shiloh [or "until Shiloh comes"], and to him shall be the obedience of peoples. —Gen. 49:10

As noted earlier (Chapter 15), the "scepter" spoken of in these lines was taken by some interpreters as a reference to the future leader. Both prophecies were said to regard "the end of days" (Gen. 49:1, Num. 24:14). If so, then the fact that Balaam also spoke of a scepter arising from Israel could hardly be coincidental. Balaam and Jacob must have been talking about the same man. Indeed, that the scepter was a *man* and not merely a symbol of kingship seems to have been stressed by ancient translators:

> A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a **man** shall spring out of Israel.
> —Septuagint Num. 24:17

> When a king arises from Jacob and an anointed one [*mĕsîḥa'*] is installed . . .
> — *Targum Onkelos* Num. 24:17

> A king is destined to arise from the house of Jacob and a savior and ruler from the house of Israel. — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 24:17

> A star shines forth from Jacob and a leader from Israel.
> —Peshitta Num. 24:17

A Ruler of the World

There was a further striking congruence between Jacob's blessing and Balaam's oracle. Jacob said about the future leader, "and to him shall be the obedience of peoples," while Balaam asserted that, after subduing Israel's enemies, "he shall rule from Jacob." Taken together, these comments seem to imply that the future leader would rule not only Israel itself but the mass of humanity:

> Then the Lord will raise up a new priest, to whom all the words of the Lord will be revealed; and he will execute a **true judgment upon the earth** in the course of time. And **his star will arise** in heaven, as a king, lighting up the light of knowledge as by the sun of the day.[2] — *Testament of Levi* 18:3

> I see it, but it is not now, I observe it, but it is not near: when a king arises from Jacob and an anointed one [*mĕšîḥa'*] is installed, then he will kill the chiefs of Moab and will **rule over all mankind**.
>
> — *Targum Onkelos* Num. 24:17

At Qumran as well, Balaam's words were understood as a prediction of a coming war and subsequent domination by Israel (though without specific mention of a future leader):

> It is not our strength or might that triumphs, but Your strength and the force of Your great power, as You announced to us of old, saying "**a star shall march from Jacob**, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and he shall crush the outskirts of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth. And he shall rule from Jacob, and destroy the city's survivor. And the enemy shall be dispossessed, and Israel shall triumph." And by Your anointed ones, those who behold things to come, You have announced to us the times of the wars of [that is, "to be waged by"] Your hands, to fight against our enemies, striking down the legions of Belial, the seven "nothing" nations, by means of the downtrodden people redeemed by You.
>
> — (4QM) *War Scroll* 11:5–9

There was another verse connecting Balaam's oracles with this theme of a future, universal ruler. Somewhat earlier in the same chapter, Balaam said about Israel:

> How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! . . . Water shall flow from his [Israel's] buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, his king shall be higher than **Agag**, and his kingdom shall be exalted.
>
> — Num. 24:5, 7

Agag was the Amalakite king who lived in the time of King Saul (1 Samuel 15), Israel's first king, and the "exalted" kingdom of the next clause might arguably be David's. But perhaps not; perhaps the kingdom mentioned here was likewise well in the future, a kingdom "exalted" because it would be more powerful than Israel had ever been thus far.

Interestingly, the Septuagint text presented these verses in a strikingly different, and more openly imperial, version:

2. It is not clear if this passage represents the work of a Christian editor of the *Testaments* (who clearly added Christian references elsewhere) or if it is part of an earlier, Jewish document that referred to the figure of the Levitical Messiah known in the *Testaments* and other Second Temple texts. The latter seems to me more likely, however.

> There shall **go forth a man** from his [Israel's] seed and he shall **rule many nations**; and his kingdom **shall be exalted above Gog,** and his kingdom shall be magnified. — Septuagint Num. 24:7

The phrases "there shall go forth a man . . . and he shall rule many nations" certainly sounded to interpreters like the prediction of a future, universal ruler. What is more, the mention of Gog (here in place of the similar-sounding Agag above),[3] the mythic enemy to be defeated "in the end of days" (Ezek. 38:16), further suggested that the future ruler would preside over a great military victory, one that would bring about a kingdom of unprecedented greatness:

> For "there shall come forth a man," says the oracle, and leading his army into war he will subdue great and populous nations.
>
> — Philo, *Rewards and Punishments* 95

Similarly:

> The king will be mighty who is exalted over his sons and he will rule over mighty peoples and will be stronger than Agag his king.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Num. 24:7

> Their king shall arise from among them, and their savior will be from them; he shall gather their exiles from the lands of their enemies, and his sons shall rule over great nations. He will be stronger than Saul [who] spa[red] Agag, the Amalekites' king, and the messianic king's kingdom will be exalted.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 24:7

The Star Is the Messiah

And so, it was a great and universal leader that Balaam had seen rising in the distant future. This future figure seemed to be called two different names in Balaam's prophecy, the "star" of Jacob and Israel's "scepter" (the latter being the same word used of this king in Gen. 49:10). "Star" thus took its place, alongside "scepter," as a way of referring to the future leader of Israel, whose light would fill the heavens:

> And his **star** will arise in heaven, as a king, lighting up the light of knowledge as by the sun of the day. He will **shine** as the sun on the earth and will remove all darkness from under heaven, and there will be peace on earth.
>
> — *Testament of Levi* 18:3

> He [the eschatological priest] will atone for the members of his generation, and he will be sent to his countrymen. His word will be like the word of heaven, and his teaching conforms to the will of God. His eternal sun will **shine**, and his light will blaze in all the corners of the earth. Then darkness will disappear from the earth, and shadows from the dry land.
>
> — (4Q541) *Aaronic Text A* fragment 9

3. "Gog" also appears in the *Samaritan Pentateuch* version of this verse.

R. Aqiba interpreted, "A star shall proceed from Jacob" as "[Simon bar] Kosiba has come forth out of Jacob."[4] When R. Aqiba saw bar Kosiba he said, "This is the anointed king [that is, the messiah]."

—j. *Ta'anit* 4:8 (68d)

I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning **star**. —Rev. 22:16

Moses himself made it known beforehand that there was to arise a star, as it were, from the seed of Abraham when he said thusly: "A star shall arise from Jacob and a leader from Israel."

—Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 106:4 (also 126:1)

For God has established you [the "Chief of the Congregation" who is to come in the future] as the **scepter**. — (1QSb) *Scroll of Blessings* 5:27

[Judah predicts:] Then shall the **Scepter** of my kingdom shine forth, and from your [that is, Judah's descendants'] root shall arise a stem; and from it shall grow a rod of righteousness to the Gentiles, to judge and to save all that call on the Lord. — *Testament of Judah*, 24:5–6; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1:59

The Star Will Precede the Scepter

However, there was another way of understanding the words of Num. 24:17: "star" and "scepter" might not be synonymous at all. This same verse could be understood as saying that *when* a star proceeds from Jacob, *then* the scepter shall arise from Israel. If so, then the star and the scepter are hardly identical: the star precedes the scepter and perhaps even heralds his arrival. One text from Qumran clearly suggests that the star in question was indeed a known figure, the community's own "interpreter of the Torah." This leader's proceeding "from Jacob" was thus an event that had already taken place, an actual journey that this man had undertaken from the territory of Jacob to the land of Damascus; as for the scepter prophesied by Balaam, he had yet to arrive:

[Commenting on the verses "You shall bear the booth (*sukkat* instead of *Sikkuth*) of your king and the precise determination (*kiwwun* instead of *Kiyyun*) of your images (and) the **star** of your God, whom you established for yourselves; and I will send you into exile beyond **Damascus** . . ." (Amos 5:26–27):] The "star" is the Interpreter of the Torah **who entered Damascus**, in keeping with what is written, "A star shall proceed from [the land of] Jacob and a scepter arises from Israel" [Num. 24:17]. The "scepter" is the leader of the whole congregation, and when he arises he will "break down all the sons of Seth"—that is, those who escaped in the first period of visitation [punishment]. — *Damascus Document* 7:18–21

4. For this reason Simon bar Kosiba, leader of the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 133–135 C.E., came to be called bar Kokhba, "son of the star."

According to this reading, the star and the scepter are quite different figures: the star has, at the time of this text's writing, already arrived, while the scepter is still to come.

Alternately, the star referred to by Balaam might be a real star in the sky, one whose appearance precedes and announces the arrival of the scepter:

> Then the Lord will raise up a new priest, to whom all the words of the Lord will be revealed; and he will execute a true judgment upon the earth in the course of time. And **his star will arise in heaven, as a king,** lighting up the light of knowledge as by the sun of the day. — *Testament of Levi* 18:3

Perhaps in this sense as well:

> [Judah predicts:] And after these things a star will rise for you from Jacob in peace, and a man will arise from my seed like the sun of righteousness. — *Testament of Judah* 24:1

> Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have **seen his star** in the East and have come to worship him." — Matt. 2:1–2

> Moses himself made it known beforehand that there was to arise a **star, as it were, from the seed of Abraham** when he said thusly: "A star shall arise from Jacob and a leader from Israel." And another verse says: "Behold a man; the East [or "a Branch"][5] is his name." Accordingly, when a star arose in the sky at the time of his birth, as is recorded in the account of the apostles, the magi of Arabia, taking cognizance of the sign, went to worship him.[6] — Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 106:4

Balaam Counseled Seduction

Immediately after the Balaam episode, catastrophe occurred:

> While Israel dwelt in Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab; they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked itself to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. — Num. 25:1–3

5. The Greek noun *anatolē*—derived from the same root as "rise" used in the Septuagint version of Num. 24:17, "A star shall *rise* in Jacob"—is frequently used to mean "the East, Orient" (that is, the place where the sun *rises*). In the Septuagint, however, it also translates the Hebrew word *ṣeẘāḥ,* "bud," "branch."

6. Note that here Justin apparently seeks to reconcile the two distinct interpretations that we have been tracing, namely that "star" refers to a person and that the "star" is a real star whose appearance heralds that of the Messiah.

Given the fact that this incident of harlotry and idolatry occurred right after Balaam's departure, interpreters could not help thinking Balaam might have had something to do with it. Such suspicions could only be strengthened by what Moses said sometime later, when the Israelites spared the women and children in their attack against Midian:

> Moses said to them: "Have you let all the women live? Behold, these women were to Israel **in the matter of Balaam** [or "as Balaam said"], to act treacherously against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. —Num. 31:16

The precise meaning of Moses' words was not entirely clear, but it certainly sounded as if Balaam, although he was said to have already gone home (Num. 24:25), was nonetheless involved. Perhaps before leaving he had *counseled* Balak to use the women to lead Israel astray:

> Moses said to them: "Have you let all the women live? For they were to the Israelites in keeping with the word of Balaam **to turn astray**, to show contempt for the word of the Lord with regard to Peor, and a plague came upon the congregation of the Lord." —Septuagint Num. 31:16

> They were a **stumbling-block** to the Israelites at the advice of Balaam, to falsify in the name of the Lord in the matter of the idol of Peor.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 31:6

An ancient prophet's reference to Balaam, mentioned earlier, reinforced this interpretation:

> O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened **from Shittim to Gilgal,** that you may know the saving acts of the Lord. —Mic. 6:5

Since the same place-name, Shittim, was mentioned at the start of the Baal Peor incident (Num. 25:1), it seemed to interpreters that Micah was referring specifically to that incident. If so, Micah was saying that Balaam did indeed "answer" something to Balak that resulted in the sin of Baal Peor.

> Taking him by the right hand, he [Balaam] counseled him [Balak] in strict privacy as to the means by which, as far as might be, he should defend himself against the army of the enemy [Israel] . . . His advice was this. Knowing that the one way in which the Hebrews could be overthrown was disobedience, he set himself to lead them, through wantonness and licentiousness to sacrilege, [that is,] through a great sin to a still greater one, and put before them the bait of pleasure. "You have in your countrymen, king," he said, "women of outstanding beauty, and there is nothing to which a man more easily falls captive than a woman's beauty . . . But you must instruct them not to allow their wooers to enjoy their charms at once . . . One of those [women] should say, with a saucy air: 'You must not be permitted to

enjoy my favors until you have left the ways of your fathers and become a convert to honoring what I honor. That your conversion is sincere will be clearly proved to me if you are willing to take part in the libations and sacrifices which we offer to idols of stone and wood and other images.'"

—Philo, *Moses* 1:294–298

Then Balaam said to him: "Come, let us plan what you should do to them. Pick out the beautiful women who are among us and in Midian, and stand them naked and adorned with gold and precious stones before them. And it shall be, when they see them and lie with them, they will sin against their Lord and fall into your hands; for otherwise you cannot fight against them . . ." And afterward, the people were seduced after the daughters of Moab. For Balak did everything that Balaam had shown him.

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:13–14

[Balaam told Balak:] "If you yearn for some short-lived victory over them, you may achieve it as follows: Take from among your daughters the most beautiful and those most capable of overcoming, by means of their beauty, the chastity of those who behold them, and dress them in splendor to add to their beauty, and send them to the area of these [Israelites'] camp, and order them to have relations with their young men when they ask it."

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:129

But I have a few things against you: You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality. —Rev. 2:14

"They called to the people and offered sacrifices to their gods" [Num. 25:2] for they followed Balaam's advice . . . and set up tents and put prostitutes in them with all their finery . . . Whenever a Jew would pass by in the market place . . . a girl would come out in her adornments and her perfume and seduce him by saying, "Why is it that we love you and yet you hate us—here, take this piece of merchandise for free—after all, we are both descended from a single ancestor, Terah, the father of Abraham. Wouldn't you like to eat from our sacrificial offerings?" —*Midrash Tanḥuma, Balaq* 18

A Leader among Priests

For his part in punishing the offending couple, who had publicly flouted God's rule, Phinehas was given a special reward:

And the Lord said to Moses, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous [some translations, "zealous"] with my jealousy ["zeal"] among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy ["zeal"]. Therefore, say: 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace; and it shall be

> to him, and to his descendants after him, the covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous ["zealous"] for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'"
>
> —Num. 25:10–13

This certainly sounded like a fine reward, but interpreters were puzzled by one thing. Phinehas was the son of Eleazar, grandson of Aaron, hence already in line for the hereditary priesthood. What then could it mean for God to give him "the covenant of perpetual priesthood . . . to him, and to his descendants after him"? Perpetual priesthood was already his by birth! Indeed, the recent episode of Korah's rebellion, and the subsequent budding of Aaron's rod, had highlighted the fact that the priesthood was to be the exclusive property of the "descendants of Aaron" (Num. 16:40), including, of course, Phinehas. Was God thus giving a gift that already belonged to the recipient?

One possibility was that Phinehas was being singled out even among the priests. Perhaps what God was giving Phinehas as a reward for his zeal was the promise of a leadership role forever:

> And likewise Phinehas the son of Eleazar was [third?] in glory
> in his being zealous for the God of all, and he stood with Him in the breach:
> his heart spurred him to action, and he made atonement for the Israelites.
> Therefore for him as well He established a law, a covenant of peace to **uphold the sanctuary;**
> that the **high priesthood should be for him and his descendants forever.**
>
> —Sir. (Hebrew, ms. B) 45:24

> Phinehas the son of Eleazar is the third in glory, for he was zealous in the fear of the Lord;
> and he stood fast when the people turned away, in the ready goodness of his soul, and made atonement for Israel.
> Therefore a covenant of peace was established for him, **that he should be a leader of the sanctuary and of the people,**
> that he and his descendants should have the **greatness of** [perhaps "within"] **the priesthood forever.**
>
> —Sir. (Greek) 45:23–24

Phinehas the Immortal

But there was another possibility. Perhaps by "covenant of eternal priesthood" what Scripture meant was that Phinehas *himself* was to be a priest forever—that he would never die. Support for this idea was found in an allusion to this episode in the book of Psalms:

> Then they attached themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;
> they provoked the Lord to anger with their doings, and a plague broke out among them.
> Then Phinehas stood up and interposed, and the plague was stayed;
> and it was **reckoned to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever.**
>
> —Ps. 106:28–31

The phrase "reckoned to him as righteousness" had appeared with regard to Abraham in Gen. 15:6, where it seemed to mean that Abraham's faith had caused God to "find in his favor" (as in a trial), or at least that his faith would be remembered as a point in Abraham's favor. That seemed likewise to be the sense here in regard to Phinehas' zeal. But how could God keep on extending this act of reckoning Phinehas' zeal as righteousness "from generation to generation *forever*"? With a little imagination, the text might seem to imply that with each successive generation, Phinehas' zeal would argue in his favor and prevent him from dying. In other words, the meaning of this "covenant of eternal priesthood" was that Phinehas himself would always be a priest, "from generation to generation forever."

The Bible did offer some substantiation for this theory. For, long after the incident and long after everyone else, including Joshua, had died, Phinehas is nonetheless mentioned:

> [At the end of the period of the Judges,] the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, **ministered before it in those days**), saying . . . —Judg. 20:28

According to this text, Phinehas was still alive, functioning as a priest, at the time of the war against the Benjaminites in the book of Judges. If so, then perhaps he was destined for immortality—for at this point he was already endowed with extraordinary longevity.

Equally extraordinary, the Hebrew Bible contains no account of his death.[7] Certainly such an outstanding and revered leader would have been mourned by Israel; why was nothing said of his death and burial, when that of his contemporaries Aaron, Miriam, and Joshua had all been narrated? On the other hand, after the above mention in Judg. 20:28, Phinehas is not heard of again. Putting these two facts together, some interpreters concluded that Phinehas was indeed immortal. At some point after his last appearance in the Bible, he must have ascended into heaven, very much like Enoch and Elijah. In other words, his covenant of an "eternal priesthood" meant that he personally would continue to live forever:

> And in that time [at the end of the period of the Judges,] Phinehas laid himself down to die, and the Lord said to him, "Behold, you have passed the 120 years that have been established for every man. And now, rise up and go

7. Note that the Septuagint does contain a report of Phinehas' death in Josh. 24:33.

from here and dwell in Danaben on the mountain and dwell there many years . . . And afterward you will be lifted up into the place where those who were before you were lifted up, and **you will be there** until I remember the world. — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 48:1–2

". . . because he was jealous ["zealous"] for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel . . ." [Num. 25:13]. "Atoning" [*lkpr*] is not written here, but [*wykpr,* which can also mean] "and he will atone" for the people of Israel. For until this very time he has **not departed**, but still lives and makes atonement until the resurrection of the dead. — *Sifrei Numbers* 131

" . . . behold I am giving him [Phinehas] My covenant of peace"—that **he is still alive.** — *Numbers Rabba* 21:3

[God tells Moses:] "Swear to him with an oath in My name: Behold I am decreeing for him My covenant of peace. And I will make him the envoy of the covenant **and he shall live forever** to proclaim the news of redemption at the end of days." — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Num. 25:12–13

Phinehas Is Elijah

If the death of Phinehas was not mentioned, neither is the birth of Elijah, the great northern prophet who lived after the breakup of the United Monarchy. Phinehas and Elijah had a number of points in common, most prominently the fact that both were described, in very similar language, as being "jealous" (or "zealous") for the Lord (1 Kings 19:10, 14). It occurred to more than one interpreter that this might not be coincidental. After all, Elijah was also apparently immortal, having ascended into heaven alive (2 Kings 2:11). Moreover, Elijah's immortality was difficult to justify: he was not described (as Enoch had been) as one who "walked with God" and was extraordinarily righteous; and if he was a prophet, well, so were many others whose lives had nonetheless come to an end. How better to explain Elijah's zeal *and* immortality than to say that he was actually Phinehas in disguise? God had indeed granted Phinehas immortality because of his zealous good deed, a "covenant of eternal priesthood," and Phinehas had actually spent a nice stretch of his immortality on earth, living for many more years than one would expect from a normal human being. If, thereafter, his death is not reported in the Bible, it is because he never died. But the Bible said nothing about his ascending into heaven either. What must have happened, therefore, was that God simply ordered him to be hidden for a time on earth, until he suddenly reappeared as Elijah (1 Kings 17:1), under which guise he continued his mission on earth until his final ascent.

And in that time Phinehas laid himself down to die, and the Lord said to him, ". . . Now, rise up and go from here and dwell in Danaben on the mountain and dwell there many years, And I will command my eagle, and he will nourish you there [this is what happens to Elijah, 1 Kings 17:4], and you will not come down to mankind until the time arrives and you will be tested in that time; and you will shut up the heaven then, and by your mouth

it will be opened up [true of Elijah, not Phinehas: 1 Kings 17:1]. And afterward you will be lifted up into the place where those who were before you were lifted up [2 Kings 2:11], and you will be there until I remember the world. Then I will make you all come, and you will taste what is death." And Phinehas went up and did all that the Lord commanded him.

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 48:1–2

He [Kohat] lived until he saw Phinehas, **that is, Elijah the high priest**, who is to be sent to the exile of Israel in the end of days.

— *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 6:18

God said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [1 Kings 19:9] And he said, "I have been very zealous . . ." [1 Kings 19:10]. God said to him: "You are always being zealous! You were zealous at Shittim about forbidden sexual unions, as it says, 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, [son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel],' and here you are being zealous again." — *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* 29

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In short: God instructed Moses to make the bronze serpent not so that it would heal the Israelites, but as a symbol or a means to turn their thoughts to God. Although he may have seemed good at first, Balaam was a truly wicked individual, moved only by greed and vanity. He sought to harm the Israelites by cursing them, but God turned his curses to blessings. These blessings were true oracles, and in one or two in particular, Balaam foretold the coming of the Messiah. Frustrated in his attempt to curse Israel, Balaam counseled Balak to use beautiful women to lead Israel astray, and this led to the sin of Baal Peor. Phinehas, who acted zealously on God's behalf in that episode, was rewarded with eternal life; he is perhaps to be identified with Elijah.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Bronze Serpent, Balaam, and Phinehas

Blood and Water: When the people had no water to drink at Kadesh, God again instructed Moses to bring forth water from the rock, just as He had at Rephidim (see Chapter 19, "The Traveling Rock"). Moses did so, but apparently in the wrong way, since immediately afterward, God punished him by decreeing that he would not be the one to lead the Israelites into their land (Num. 20:12).

What did Moses do wrong? About this commentators have argued from late antiquity to modern times, and there is still no agreement. But one detail seemed to some interpreters significant: Moses is said to have struck the rock *twice* (Num. 20:11). Some interpreters suggested that this action indicated that Moses had been impatient or had lacked faith. Indeed, in retelling these same events, Ps. 78:20 reports: "He struck the rock and water oozed out, and streams poured forth." Oozing is not the same as pouring forth, so the first part of this verse is hardly saying the same thing as the second. Could it not mean that, after Moses struck the rock the first time, the water merely oozed? Then, in his impatience, Moses might have struck the rock a second time, thereby incurring the divine wrath.

> And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock once and the rock began oozing a little bit of water, as it is said, "He struck the rock and water oozed out" [Ps. 78:20] . . . They said to him, "Ben Amram [a disrespectful way of addressing Moses]! Is this water supposed to be for sucklings and little infants [since it only oozes]?" At once he became angry at them and struck the rock twice as it says, "And he struck the rock with his staff twice and water came forth abundantly" [Num. 20:11]. —*Midrash Tanḥuma Ḥuqqat* 9

In other words Psalm 78:20 (and a parallel verse, Ps. 105:41) might be used to support the idea that if the rock at first only oozed, then Moses struck it *twice* in anger.

But the word "ooze" in Hebrew is also used specifically to refer to the oozing of blood (Lev. 15:19, 25). A secondary tradition therefore developed, according to which the gushing rock first oozed blood and, only afterward, water.

> At the beginning, [the rock] sent forth blood and the mockers of that generation said, "Now should we go and hold our mouths out so that we can drink the blood?" But afterwards it brought forth water and a great quantity poured forth, as it is said, "streams poured forth" [Ps. 78:20].
>
> —*Midrash Tehillim* 105:12

> And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice, the first time blood oozed, and the second time ample water went forth.
>
> —*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Num. 20:11

There may be an echo of this tradition in the New Testament, John 19:34: "But one of the soldiers pierced his side, and at once there came out *blood and water.*" Since Jesus was elsewhere identified with the oozing rock (see Chapter 19, *OR*, "The Christian Rock"), the mixture of blood and water here may allude to that tradition.

The Serpent Symbolized Crucifixion: One likely reason that Christian interpreters associated the bronze serpent with the crucifixion was the translation of "put it on a pole" (Num. 21:8) that is attested somewhat later:

> And Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on an elevated [or "hanging"] place. — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 21:9

> And Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on an elevated [or "hanging"] place, and it happened that anyone who was bitten by a snake would turn his face in prayer toward his Father in Heaven and look upon the bronze serpent and live. — *Fragment Targum* Num. 21:9

The word "hanging" that appears here was used as well for crucifixion: thought of in these terms, the episode of the bronze serpent clearly seemed to be some kind of foreshadowing:

> And Moses made another **representation of Jesus,** showing that he must suffer and shall himself give life, though they will believe that he has been put to death . . . Moses therefore made a graven serpent, and placed it conspicuously and . . . said to them: "Whenever one of you is bitten, let him come to the serpent that is placed upon the tree, and let him hope in faith that it though dead is able to give life, and he shall be saved immediately." And so they did. In this also you have again the glory of Jesus.
> — *Letter of Barnabas* 12:5–7

> And shall we not find a reference to the **image of the crucified Jesus** in the sign [= "pole" in Num. 21:8]? — Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 112:2

> Why did Moses, after any form of representation had been forbidden, nevertheless set up as a salvation-bringing spectacle a bronze serpent set upon a piece of wood, like **a man who has been hanged**? Did he not wish to indicate thereby the power of the Lord's cross, by which the devil was revealed to be a serpent to all those who had been bitten by spiritual vipers, and who was at the same time proclaimed to be the cure for the bites of sin and salvation for whoever looked to the cross?
> — Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3:18 (347)

> The fatal bites of snakes (a just punishment for the people's sins) were cured by the sight of a bronze serpent erected on a wooden pole, and not only was relief brought to the afflicted people, but the destruction of death by a death was also signified by the image of a **crucified death.** This serpent was preserved as a memorial of the miracle. — Augustine, *City of God* 10.9

Alternately, the *raising up* of the bronze might represent the Resurrection:

> [Jesus said:] "No one has ascended into Heaven but he who descended from Heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes may have eternal life." — John 3:13–15

The Song of the Torah Well: Another significant passage for the tradition of the traveling rock was the brief song cited in Num. 21:17–18. This song also spoke of an apparently extraordinary source of water in the wilderness:

> Then Israel sang this song: "Rise up, o well—sing to it![8]—the well which the princes dug, which the nobles of the people delved, with the scepter, with their staves." And from the wilderness on to Mattanah, and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth, the valley lying in the region of Moab at the top of Pisgah which looks down upon the desert.
>
> —Num. 21:16–20

To some interpreters, this song appeared to be a reference to the same water-giving rock that had accompanied the Israelites thus far. Crucial for this identification were the place-names that follow the description of the well itself: "And from the wilderness on to Mattanah, and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth" (Num. 21:18–19). The location of these sites is unknown, but their names have apparent meanings in Hebrew: *mattānāh* is the usual word for "gift," while *naḥăli'ēl* sounds as if it means "God's streams," and *bāmôt* means "heights." Some interpreters thus concluded that these words were actually a continuation of the description of the traveling well, which was "a *gift* from the *wilderness,* and from the gift [that is, from the time it was given, it went with them] to *God's streams,* and from God's streams to the *heights.*"

> And from the wilderness it was given to them, and from the time that it was given to them, it went down with them to the valleys [where the streams are], and from the streams it went up with them to the heights.
>
> — *Targum Onqelos* Num. 21:18–19

A similar itinerary was reflected in two passages cited in Chapter 19:

> Now He led His people out into the wilderness; for forty years He rained down for them bread from Heaven, and brought quail to them from the sea and brought forth a well of water to follow them.
>
> And it [the water] followed them in the wilderness forty years and went **up to the mountains with them and went down into the plains.**
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 10:7, 11:15

> And so the well that was with Israel in the desert was like a rock the size of a large container, gushing upwards as if from a narrow-neck flask, **going up with them to the mountains and going down with them to the valleys.**
>
> —Tosefta *Sukkah* 3:11

Note that *Seder Olam* 9 and 10 (see Chapter 19) asserts that the well mentioned in Num. 21:16 was in fact the same traveling well that had followed the Israelites during

8. Or, "Then Israel sang this song about a well, they sang of it: 'Well which the princes dug . . .'"

their desert wanderings: it "came back to them" at that time. It departed forever on the day of Moses' death (*Seder Olam* 10).

Other interpreters saw in this well (in keeping with another exegetical tradition seen in Chapter 19) a symbol of divine wisdom or Torah.

> Again, Moses leads the song at the well, and this time his subject is not only the defeat of the emotions, but the unconquerable strength that can win that most beautiful of possessions, **wisdom, which he compares to a well.** For wisdom lies deep below the surface and gives off a sweet stream of true nobility for thirsty souls. — Philo, *On Drunkenness* 112

The Dead Sea Scrolls sect likewise understood the well to represent divine teaching, indeed, the "Song of the Well" in Num. 21:16–18 was understood by them to be a prophecy of the founding of their own group:

> The **well is the Torah,** and those who dug it are those of Israel who returned [in penitence] and left the land of Judah to dwell in the land of Damascus. God called all of them "princes"[9] because they beseeched Him and because their glory was never gainsaid by any man's mouth. The "scepter" is the expounder of the Torah . . . and the "nobles of the people" are those who came to dig the well with the staves with which the "scepter" had decreed to walk about. — *Damascus Document* 6:3–10

On this passage there is a substantial scholarly literature: see Davies, *Damascus Covenant,* 93–94, and works listed there. Note that the grammar of the last phrase cited has often been misconstrued. The biblical text says, "with the scepter, with their staves." Now this is somewhat troubling: if the scepter is a digging tool used by the princes, then the text ought really to have said, "with *their scepters,* with their staves." Instead, there is no "their" there, and the word "scepter" is in the singular. The *Damascus Document* takes advantage of this anomaly to claim "*the scepter* is the expounder of the Torah," that is, by its very form this word announces itself as a reference to the leader of the community, the "expounder of the Torah." What is more, the word *měḥôqēq* ("scepter") can likewise be construed as a verb, to "decree" or "make a law." If so, then the words *bimḥôqēq bĕmiš'ănōtām* might be understood as a single phrase, "when *he decreed* with their staves." Reading this as a gapped utterance, the author of the *Damascus Document* fills in the blanks as "when he [the "expounder of the Torah"] decreed *that they walk about* with their staves."

Balaam the Wicked: Geza Vermes has examined the interpretive history of Balaam in a classic study, *Scripture and Tradition,* 126–177, attempting to show that

9. Normally the word "princes" might mean just a few within a larger group; indeed, in the book of Numbers, it might seem to refer to heads of the tribes who are called "princes" (e.g., Num. 7:11). However, says the *Damascus Document,* in the case of Num. 21:17, the word "princes" refers to *all* of "those of Israel who returned [in penitence]," regardless of social station; the Torah had used the word "princes" here to indicate their merit ("because they beseeched Him") and the high esteem in which they were held ("their glory was never gainsaid by any man's mouth").

the roots of Balaam's transformation into "Balaam the Wicked" lie in the Pentateuch itself. It is to be noted, in this connection, that a rather more positive depiction of Balaam is to be found in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:100–158 and especially Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 18. E. E. Urbach has traced the role of Balaam in early Jewish anti-Christian polemic, where Balaam is sometimes polemically identified with Jesus: see Urbach, "Homilies of the Rabbis on the Prophets of the Nations and the Balaam Stories."

Balaam's Demotion: A passage cited earlier from Jerome contains an exegetical tradition about Balaam:

> Balaam the diviner, according to Jewish tradition, is called Elihu in the book of Job. At first he was a holy man and a prophet of God, but afterwards, through disobedience and the desire for lucre, when he tried to curse Israel, he was called by the Holy Writ a "soothsayer."
>
> —Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 22:22

The identification of Balaam and Elihu is found in rabbinic sources:

> R. Aqiba interpreted as follows the verse "Then Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite of the family of Ram, grew angry": [This] "Elihu" is Balaam. [He is called] "son of Barachel" because he sought to curse Israel but blessed them [*bērĕkan*] . . . [He is called] "the Buzite" because his prophecy was put to shame [*bĕzûyyāh*], as it says, "falling down, with eyes uncovered" [Num. 24:4, 16]. "Of the family of Ram" [as it says], "From Aram [sounds like "the Ram"] has Balak brought me" [Num. 23:7]. —*j. Soṭah* 5 (end) 20d

As for Jerome's main observation, that Balaam was demoted in title, it is based on the wording of a later verse:

> Balaam also, the son of Beor, the **soothsayer,** the people of Israel killed with the sword among the rest of their slain. —Josh. 13:22

The figure of the "soothsayer" certainly had negative associations—he appears in a list of those whose activities are forbidden in Deut. 18:10 (see also Mic. 3:7, Zech. 10:2). Especially if Balaam was the same person as Elihu, then his career really did take a turn for the worse, for Elihu is indeed presented as something like a prophet and divine spokesman in the book of Job, and at the end of the book God has no words of reproach for him (Job 42:7–9). While Balaam in the book of Numbers is, as we have seen, a somewhat enigmatic figure, both good and bad, Scripture's use of the word "soothsayer" for him after his death seemed to be the final verdict on his life. Note a somewhat similar tradition:

> Balaam communed with the Holy Spirit but then **went back to being a soothsayer** as before, as it says, "Balaam also, the son of Beor, the soothsayer." —*Numbers Rabba* 20:19

Here, apparently, Balaam started out as a soothsayer, then rose to prophet status—perhaps thanks to his truly prophetic words in Num. 24:4 and thereafter, or

24:17–19—but then returned to being a mere soothsayer by dint of his evil plan against Israel.

A Ruler of the World: The Philo passage cited in connection with the messiah's universal rule (*Rewards and Punishments* 95) is quite unique and has been the subject of much recent speculation. Philonists are divided as to whether it is to be connected to other "messianic" elements in the same treatise and whether it is in itself a prediction of some leader still in the future: see Hecht, "Philo and Messiah"; Mack, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic in Philo"; Borgen, "There Shall Come Forth a Man."

The Star Is the Messiah: Note that Num. 24:17 is cited (without any interpretation being offered) in a Qumran text, (4Q175) *Testimonia;* apparently the various texts cited are grouped together because they were all felt to have some bearing on the messiah and the end of days. See Fitzmyer, "4QTestimonia and the New Testament." The passage cited from *Damascus Document* 7:18–21 is in fact present only in manuscript A from the Cairo Genizah copies of this text, not in manuscript B; Sidnie White has convincingly reconstructed the chain of copyist errors leading up to this state of affairs: White, "A Comparison of the 'A' and 'B' Manuscripts of the Damascus Document."

The light imagery associated with the messianic "star" was, in some cases, doubtless aided by the association of "branch," "east," and the rising sun (see below). What is more, passages such as Isaiah 60, which was certainly understood in a messianic sense, also contributed to this imagery even though the verbal cues were lacking in Greek.

The Star Will Precede the Scepter: The idea that the "star" and the "scepter" in Num. 24:17 represent two distinct figures may be related to another notion familiar from the Dead Sea Scrolls and elsewhere, namely, that there will in fact be *two* different messiahs. The roots of this doctrine may go back earlier in the Second Temple period, where, for example, we find the two "sons of oil" (probably in the sense of anointed ones, messiahs) in Zech. 4:12, namely, the Davidic Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua. The somewhat ambiguous Qumran phrase "messiah of Aaron and Israel," along with the less ambiguous "*messiahs* of Aaron and Israel" ([1QS] *Community Rule* 9:11), seem to attest to the expectation of two future anointed leaders, one of priestly lineage and the other from nonpriestly (presumably, royal, that is, Judahite) stock. The Levi-Judah passages in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are of the same import. If so, then certainly Balaam's words in Num. 24:17 may at times be cited in the Dead Sea Scrolls specifically as an allusion to these two messianic figures:

> The "star" is the Interpreter of the Torah **who entered Damascus,** in keeping with what is written, "A star proceeds from [the land of] Jacob and a scepter arises from Israel" [Num. 24:17]. The "scepter" is the leader of the

> whole congregation, and when he arises he will "break down all the sons of Seth"—that is, those who escaped in the first period of visitation [= punishment]. —*Damascus Document* 7:18–21

It has been suggested that here, for example, the "Interpreter of the Torah" was indeed identified as the messiah of Aaron. See further Brooke, *Exegesis at Qumran,* 203–204, 302–304; idem, "Messiah of Aaron in the Damascus Document"; Knibb, "Interpretation of Damascus Document VII,9b-VII,2a and XIX.5b-14"; Collins, *Star and Scepter,* 74–101. None of the attempts thus far to account for this "binary messianism" is entirely convincing. Quite apart from this tradition is that of the "Messiah son of Joseph": Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim"; Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism."

Rising Greek Star: We saw earlier that the Septuagint translation of one of Balaam's prophecies was particularly significant, since it clearly asserted that Num. 24:17 was referring to a particular individual, a "man" who was to arise from Israel. Beyond this, however, the two Greek verbs used in this translation were in themselves of great interest:

> A star shall rise [*anatelei*] out of Jacob, a man shall spring out [*anastēsetai*] of Israel. —Num. 24:17

Both verbs suggested connections and nuances that were not present in the traditional Hebrew text. Thus, the verb *anatellō* can be used transitively ("to raise up") or intransitively ("rise," used of the sun, for example, hence also "shine forth"). Similarly, *anistēmi* can mean "raise up" in the transitive sense, and "rise up" (including "rise from the dead" and the like) in the intransitive. Both verbs had been used in the Old Greek translation of other biblical verses that were of particular importance to the whole subject of the messiah, thus:

> [Moses predicts:] The Lord your God will raise up [*anastēsei*] for you a prophet like me from among your brethren. —Septuagint Deut. 18:15

> The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall raise up [*anastēsō*] for David a righteous Branch. —Septuagint Jer. 23:5–6

> And I shall raise up [*anastēsō*] for them David their king. —Septuagint Jer. 37:9 [= MT Jer. 30:9]

> And I shall raise up [*anastēsō*] over them one shepherd and he shall shepherd them—my servant David—and he shall be their shepherd. —Septuagint Ezek. 34:23

> And there shall shine forth [*anatelei*] for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness. —Septuagint Mal. 3:20

As a result of such verses, "raising up," "rising," and "shining forth" came to be actions still more strongly associated with the messiah's coming:

> And now, my children, obey Levi, and through Judah you will be redeemed. And do not exalt yourselves against those two tribes, because from them the salvation of God will **arise** [*anatelei*] for you. — *Testament of Simeon* 7:1

> And after these things a star will arise [*anatelei*] to you from Jacob in peace, and a man will arise [*anastēsetei*] from my seed . . . **like the sun** of righteousness . . . Then the scepter of my kingdom will **shine.**
>
> — *Testament of Judah* 24:1, 5

> But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ ["anointed one"] should suffer, he thus fulfilled . . . Moses said, "The Lord will raise up [*anastēsei*] for you a prophet from your brethren" [Deut. 18:15].
>
> — Acts 3:22

> For it is evident that our Lord has **arisen** from Judah. — Heb. 7:14

But there was more. For Israel's prophets had spoken of the future Davidic ruler as a "shoot" or "branch" growing from the "stock" (or "stump") of David, that is, a fresh new plant rising out of an old one. The word "branch," Hebrew *ṣemaḥ,* was rendered into Greek by the word *anatolē,* a word connected to this same verb *anatellō.* (*Anatolē* also means "East" in Greek, the place where the sun rises and shines forth.)

> The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch [*Anatolē*]. — Septuagint Jer. 23:5–6

> For behold, I am bringing my servant, Branch [*Anatolē*].
>
> — Septuagint Zech. 3:8

> Behold, a man whose name is Branch [*Anatolē*], and he shall spring up [*anatelei*] beneath him. — Septuagint Zech. 6:12

> Nevertheless, I have also heard an oracle uttered by one of the followers of Moses that went as follows: Behold, a man whose name is "rising" [*Anatolē*] . . . For the Father of all raised him up [*anateile*] as an eldest son, whom he otherwise calls by the name of "firstborn." — Philo, *Confusion of Tongues* 63

> For the word of [Christ's] truth and wisdom burns brighter and gives more light than the rays of the sun . . . Hence Scripture also says, "His name shall rise above the sun" [Ps. 72:17]. And again Zechariah says, "His name is the East [that is, the place of the sun's rising]."
>
> — Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 121:2

The word *anastasis* was, as noted, likewise used of the resurrection of the dead, and is used in this sense in the New Testament for the Resurrection; obviously this cast the Septuagint's use of the same root in Num. 24:17 and elsewhere in a new light. See

further Danielou, *Les Symboles Chrétiens primitifs,* 109–130; Hollander and De-Jonge, *Commentary,* 126.

Finally, it should be recalled that the Septuagint translation of the messianic blessing by Jacob of his son Judah evoked both themes, "rising" and "sprout":

> A lion's whelp, O Judah! You have **risen up** [*anebēs*] **from a shoot.**
>
> —Septuagint Gen. 49:9

The word "shoot" *(blastos)* was the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew *ṭerep,* a word that commonly means "prey" or "food" (an understanding reflected in other ancient and modern translations of this verse and, in view of the larger context, most probably the intended sense) but that can also mean "branch" or "leaf," the apparent source of the Septuagint rendering.

Given all of the above, it is striking that Ben Sira's prayer for the final setting aright of Israel (Sir. 36:1–22) contains *no* allusions to any of the messianic passages mentioned and does not present the advent of this new age in terms of a personal messiah (compare Sir. 48:9–10). On messianism itself there is a vast literature, including such classics as Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel;* Mowinckel, *He That Cometh;* and Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism.* For an extensive bibliography, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People,* 2:488–554; also, recently, Herr, "Realistic Political Messianism and Cosmic Eschatological Messianism"; Neusner et al., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs;* Grünwald et al., *Messias and Christos;* Charlesworth, *The Messiah;* Collins, *The Scepter and the Star;* and the articles on messianism collected in *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2:2 (1995). Of particular importance to our material is Charlesworth, "The Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha."

The Star of Damascus: The "star" in *Damascus Document* 7:18–21 referred to a figure from the recent past of the Qumran community. On the much-debated significance of "Damascus" in this text, see Milikowsky, "Again: *Damascus* in Damascus Document."

Balaam Counseled Seduction: Further support for this theory came from the words Balaam speaks in introducing his last set of oracles:

> And now, I am going to my people. Here, **let me give you advice,** what this people will do to yours in the end of days. —Num. 24:14

The trouble is, Balaam doesn't give any advice—he paints a rosy picture of Israel's future but says nothing to Balak about how to change things. Interpreters reasonably concluded that the "advice" in question must have been Balaam's suggestion to try to defeat Israel through seduction; somehow the words were omitted from the biblical verse:

> And now I am going to my people. Here, let me give you advice, cause them to sin, for if not, you will never be able to rule over them.
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Num. 24:14

A Leader among Priests: Many have sought to explain the development of this motif in terms of the politics of Second Temple times. To begin with, there were the Hasmoneans, who apparently identified themselves as the direct descendants of Phinehas:

> [Mattathias, father of Judah Maccabee, recalls:] "Phinehas **our father,** because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood." —1 Macc. 2:54

Now, it was seen earlier that the Greek version of Sir. 45:24 is slightly different from the Hebrew version:

> Therefore for him [Phinehas] as well He established a decree, a covenant of peace to uphold the sanctuary,
> that the **high priesthood** should be for him and for his descendants forever . . .
>
> —Sir. (Hebrew, ms. B) 45:24

> Therefore a covenant of peace was established for him, **that he should be a leader of the sanctuary and of the people,**
> that he and his descendants should have the greatness of [that is, "within"] the priesthood forever.
>
> —Sir. (Greek) 45:23–24

It may be that the Greek version, a translation by Ben Sira's grandson, reflects the changed political situation in Judea, with the priestly Hasmoneans now quite literally "leader of the sanctuary *and the people.*" A similar political change may be reflected later in the Greek text, in Ben Sira's praise of Simeon the Just, high priest in his day. The original text made reference to Phinehas' covenant in connection with Simeon—

> May he keep strong His favor for Simeon, and establish for him the **covenant of Phinehas,** that he and his seed not be cut off like the days of heaven.
>
> —Sir. (Hebrew, ms. B) 50:24

However, this reference disappeared from the Greek version. Apparently, the intrigues against, and ultimately the assassination of, Simeon's son Onias III, who had served as high priest (see 2 Maccabees 3–4), brought to an end the connection of Simeon's line with the high priesthood. On these various connections of Hasmonean politics with this motif overall, see Aptowitzer, *Parteipolitik der Hasmonäerzeit,* 95; Hengel, *The Zealots;* Hayward, "Phinehas—the Same Is Elijah"; Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter,* 146–176. Spiro, "The Ascension of Phinehas," sought to explain not only Pseudo-Philo but Judg. 20:28 and Septuagint Josh. 24:33 in terms of an anti-Samaritan polemic. See also Halkin, "Samaritan Polemics against the Jews." Other proposed historical connections may be found in van der Woude, *Die messianischen Vorstellungen der Gemeinde von Qumran,* 55–57. For other aspects of Phineas' postbiblical life, see Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 48:2, 52:6; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 5:2:1; *Seder Olam* 20; Ginzberg, *Haggada bei den*

Kirchenvätern (1899), 76–80; idem, *Legends*, 6:185; Zeron, "Critical Note: The Martyrdom of Phineas-Elijah."

With regard to the death of Phinehas as reported in the Septuagint version of Josh. 24:33ff., A. Rofé ("The End of the Book of Joshua in the Septuagint") has noted that at least part of this passage (though not the death of Phinehas) seems to be reflected in the *Damascus Document* 5:3–5. See also idem, "The Editing of the Book of Joshua in the Light of 4QJosh[a]."

25

The Life of Torah

(DEUTERONOMY 1–34)

Moses' last vision: did he argue with the angel?

The Life of Torah

(DEUTERONOMY 1–34)

❖ ❖ ❖

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites arrived at last in the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan River prior to entering the land of Canaan. There Moses addressed them at length, discussing the lessons of all that had happened to them as well as reviewing many of the divine laws and statutes that had been given to them. He exhorted the people to obey faithfully all of these laws and to lead their lives in keeping with them, detailing the divine blessings that belong to all who adhere to God's ways and warning of the dire consequences of disobedience.

Moses himself, however, was not to enter the land with the people: God had instructed him to die in that place and to transfer leadership of the people to his servant Joshua. Thus, having taken leave of the people with a prophetic song and final blessing of the tribes, Moses died in Moab and was buried on the far side of the Jordan.

MUCH OF THE BOOK of Deuteronomy appears to go over matters discussed earlier, not only Israel's earlier history but many of the laws revealed to Moses in previous books. Yet there is also a good deal that is new. The laws reviewed in Deuteronomy are sometimes presented in somewhat different form, so that even such basics as the Decalogue (presented again in Deut. 5:6–18) contain new elements, from which interpreters sought to derive additional teachings (see, for example, Chapter 20, "Guard the Sabbath Borders"). Quite apart from such reviewed material, however, Deuteronomy has much that is altogether new. In particular, the Bible stresses here as nowhere before the importance of remaining faithful to the one true God and keeping His Torah.

The Great Teaching

Perhaps the most striking statement of this duty occurs toward the beginning of Moses' long address to the people:

> [Moses said:] "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." —Deut. 6:4–5

These verses came to be considered something like the "great teaching" of the Pentateuch. After all, by the time of the ancient interpreters, the Israelite doctrine of monotheism—that there is only one God in the universe—had long distin-

guished Israel from other peoples. It had come to be viewed as the hallmark of the Jewish religion, mentioned by any who spoke of, or in the name of, Israel's faith:

> There is an ancient saying about Him:
> "He is one"—self-completing, and all things completed by Him,
> In them He Himself circulates. But no one has seen Him
> With the souls that mortals have, He is seen by the mind.
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 4 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.5)

> There is one God, sole ruler, ineffable, who lives in heaven,
> self-begotten, invisible, who Himself sees all things . . .
> He Himself, eternal, revealed Himself
> as existing in the present, and previously, and in the future.
> For who, being mortal, could see God with eyes?
>
> — *Sibylline Oracles* 3:11–12, 15–17 (also Fragment One 7–11, 15–18)

True enough, the Bible's own laws envisaged the possibility that some people might *not* believe that there is only one God, and strict punishment was prescribed for renegade Israelites, either individual family members (Deut. 13:6) or whole cities (Deut. 13:15), who supported the worship of other, foreign gods. Eventually, however, the people of Israel came to be so identified with the belief in a single God that, to some, these laws seemed quite unnecessary:

> [Judith tells the elders of her city about the Jews:] "For never in our generation nor in these present days has there been any **tribe** or **family** of people or **city of ours** which worshiped gods made by [human] hands, as was done in days gone by (for that was why our fathers were handed over to the sword, and to be plundered, so that they suffered a great catastrophe before our enemies). But we know no other God but Him." —Jth. 8:18–20

In keeping with Israel's identification as *the* people of monotheism, the phrase in Deut. 6:4 translated above as "the Lord alone" (or, equally valid, "the Lord is one") was taken by many as a flat-out assertion that only one God exists, comparable to other assertions in the same book (see Deut. 4:35, 39). This affirmation, along with the commandment that followed it—namely, that this one single Deity in the universe is to be loved "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"—thus seemed to sum up all that the Pentateuch had to say about God. Indeed, along with another commandment that also began "And you shall love" (that is, the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, Lev. 19:18), this law in Deuteronomy was often held up as the epitome of all of divine teaching:

> Throughout all your life love the Lord and one another with a true heart.
>
> — *Testament of Dan* 5:3

> Keep the Law of God, my children; achieve integrity; live without malice, not tinkering with God's commandments or your neighbor's affairs. Love the Lord and your neighbor. — *Testament of Issachar* 5:1–2 (see also 7:6; *Testament of Joseph* 11:1; *Testament of Zebulon* 5:1)

> One of them, a lawyer, asked him [Jesus] a question to test him: "Teacher, what is the **great commandment** in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" [Deut. 6:5]. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself [Lev. 19:18]. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."
>
> —Matt. 22:35–40

> The way of life is this: First, you shall love the Lord your Maker, and secondly, your neighbor as yourself. And whatever you do not want to be done to you, you shall not do to anyone else. —*Didache* 3:1–2

> Be humble in heart, hate bitter power,
> and, above all, love your neighbor as yourself,
> and love God from the soul and serve him.
>
> —*Sibylline Oracles* 8:480–482 (ca. 175 C.E.)

These Words Twice a Day

One reason why this commandment in Deuteronomy to love God came to be so significant had to do with the verses that immediately followed it:

> [Moses said:] "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And let **these words** which I command you today be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you stay in your house or travel on the road, and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be a frontlet between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." —Deut. 6:4–9

In context, "these words" might refer to everything that Moses had said and was about to say "today," that is, the day of his final address to the Israelites—in other words, virtually the whole book of Deuteronomy. But if so, was it reasonable to expect the Israelites to keep an entire biblical book "upon your heart," indeed, to speak of it continually and write it on their doorposts and gates? On reflection, it seemed more likely to interpreters that "these words" must refer specifically to the words that Moses had just uttered, namely, "the Lord is our God, the Lord alone" and "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." *These* were the words that the people of Israel were to keep continuously in mind, to teach their children, and to write on their doorposts and gates. The very fact that Moses had singled out these words in particular was a clear indication of their overriding importance.

So it was that Deut. 6:4–5 (and soon enough, the whole paragraph of Deut. 6:4–9) came to occupy a special place in Judaism. Known as the Shema (from its opening word, *Šĕma'*, "Hear"), it was indeed learned by heart as well as copied and enclosed in special boxes affixed to doorposts (*mĕzuzôt*) or put into little cases (*tĕfillîn*, "phylacteries") worn upon head and heart as a form of piety. Moreover,

since the passage said "these words" were to be spoken of "when you lie down and when you rise up," Jews made a practice of doing just that, reciting them every morning and evening.

> Furthermore, in our clothes he has given us a distinguishing mark as a reminder [see Num. 15:37–41], and similarly **on our gates and doors** he has commanded us to set up the **words** so as to be a reminder of God. He also strictly commands that the sign shall be **worn on our hands**, clearly indicating that it is our duty to fulfill every activity with justice, having in mind our own condition, and above all the fear of God. **He also commands that "on going to bed and rising" men should meditate on the ordinances of God.**
>
> — *Letter of Aristeas* 158–160

> With the entrance of day and of night, I shall enter into the covenant of God, and with the going out of evening and of morning, I shall speak His laws.
>
> — (1QS) *Community Rule* 10:10

> [In the Jerusalem Temple the priests] would read aloud the Ten Commandments and [the paragraphs beginning] *Šĕma'* [Deut. 6:4–9], "And it shall come to pass if you hearken . . ." [Deut. 11:13–21], "And the Lord said . . ." (Num. 15:37–41), and they would bless the people with three blessings.[1]
>
> — m. *Tamid* 5:1

> Here then is the code of those laws of ours which touch our political constitution . . . Two times each day, **at dawn and when it is time to go to sleep**, let all acknowledge to God the gifts that He has bestowed upon them through their deliverance from the land of Egypt; the offering of thanks being by its nature praiseworthy, and something that is done both in response to past favors and so as to invite future ones. And let them likewise **inscribe on their doors** the great things that God has worked on their behalf . . . and **bear written texts of these things on their head and arms,** so that God's beneficence toward them may be seen on all sides.
>
> — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:212–213

> The School of Shammai maintain: at night everyone must [actually] lie down in order to recite the Shema, and in the morning must [actually] stand up [in order to recite it], since it says "And you shall speak of them . . . when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7). But the School of Hillel say: Let everyone recite it in his own way [in whatever position he

1. Deut. 11:13–21 apparently came to be connected with the Shema because of its strikingly similar wording, in particular its call to "love the Lord your God . . . with your whole heart and whole soul" (Deut. 11:13) as well as its commandments to put "these words upon your hearts and souls, and bind them upon your hands . . . speaking of them when you stay in your house or travel on the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 11:18–19). If it was a commandment to recite Deut. 6:4–9 daily, it could hardly be less of a requirement to recite Deut. 11:13–21. As for the law of tassels (Num. 15:37–41), it was apparently first connected with the recitation of these passages because of its stated purpose, "so that you will be reminded to perform all My commandments" (Num. 15:40).

> wishes], as it says [in that very same verse that you should speak of them] "As you travel on the road" [Deut. 6:7].[2] If so, then why does the text say "when you lie down and when you rise up"? [Only in order to indicate the time of day when the Shema is to be recited, both morning and night, that is,] *at the time* when people go to bed and *at the time* when people rise up.
>
> —m. *Berakhot* 1:3

A Particular Prophet

Beyond this basic teaching, Deuteronomy contains other new material as well. For example, in his final instructions to Israel, Moses at one point returned to a subject evoked earlier (Exod. 22:18, Lev. 19:31, 20:6, 27), the outlawing of practices of witchcraft, divination, and the like. This time, however, he connected this ban with the subject of prophecy:

> When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving to you, you shall not learn to do the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augurer, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer . . . For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do. **The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me** from among you, from your brethren; he is the one whom you shall heed. Just as you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die." And the Lord said to me, "They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them **a prophet like you** from among their brethren, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." —Deut. 18:9–18

This passage apparently explains why it is that Israel will not need such soothsayers as the Canaanites had; instead, God will raise up prophets who, as His direct representatives, will communicate God's wishes and plans to the people. But tangentially, this passage also addresses another issue, namely, why God will ever afterward speak to Israel through prophets rather than by addressing each and every Israelite directly. The text here explains that, on the day when all of Israel stood at Mt. Sinai, the people protested that they were afraid to hear the divine voice directly (see Exod. 20:18–19, Deut. 5:24–25, as well as Chapter 20, "God Spoke Only Two") and requested that Moses alone hear it. Ever afterward, this passage asserts, it will thus be God's practice to appoint prophets "like you [Moses]" to exercise this same function.

2. This phrase is understood as meaning, "as you proceed *in your way*," that is, whatever way you wish.

And yet, could there ever really be another prophet like Moses? Elsewhere the Bible gives a negative answer:

> And **there did not arise since in Israel a prophet like Moses**, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses did in the sight of all Israel. —Deut. 34:10–12

What then could God mean by speaking of another prophet "like you"? It occurred to some interpreters that the Bible here might not be speaking at all about those biblical prophets who followed Moses in subsequent centuries. Great as they were, they were not equal to Moses, to whom God spoke "mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8). Perhaps, instead, the text was talking about *a particular prophet* in the future, one who would indeed be Moses' equal (or perhaps Moses himself resurrected) and whose arrival would usher in a new age. After all, Deut. 18:9–18 had spoken of *a* prophet in the singular—"He is the one whom you shall heed . . . I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." Might this not mean that, sometime long in the future, a specific prophet would arise, one who would truly be "like" Moses? It was far from clear whether such a future prophet was to be identified with Israel's Messiah or whether he would accompany him or herald his arrival:[3]

> And they shall be governed by the instructions in which the members of the community were instructed at the start, until the **coming of the prophet** and of the anointed ones [messiahs] of Aaron and Israel.
> —(1QS) *Community Rule* 9:10–11

> . . . until the Most High send His salvation in the ministration of the unique **prophet**. —*Testament of Benjamin* 9:2

> [Peter said:] "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his messiah should suffer, he thus fulfilled . . . Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days." —Acts 3:17–24 (also 7:37)

> And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "**Are you the prophet**?" and he

3. The latter idea was connected with the return of the prophet Elijah predicted in Mal. 4:5; cf. Sir. 48:10.

> answered, "No." . . . They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the messiah, nor Elijah, nor **the prophet**?" —John 1:19–25

> When the people heard [Jesus'] words, some of the people said, "This is really the prophet." Others said, "This is the messiah."
>
> —John 7:40–41 (also 6:14, 7:52, 9:17)

> [The date of the Exodus from Egypt] is a night of guarding and it is arranged in advance for the redemption . . . when the world will reach the period of being redeemed, and the iron bars will be broken, and the generations of the wicked will be destroyed, and **Moses** will come up from the wilderness and the anointed king [Messiah] will come forth from Rome [or "from on high"].
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 12:42 (also *Fragment Targum* [ms. V] Exod. 12:42)

> "Every valley will be raised up" [Isa. 40:4]: [God said: In the time of the redemption] I will raise up Moses, the man who was buried in the valley, as it says, "And he was buried in the valley" [Deut. 34:6] . . . And the Messiah will come to redeem them and God will say to him: I swear that my sons will not be redeemed until Moses their teacher comes.
>
> — *Aggadat Bereshit* 67 (p. 133)

All this notwithstanding, some Jews specifically rejected the idea that a second Moses, or the first, was yet to come:

> "It is not in heaven": Moses said to them [the Israelites]: [I say this] lest you say that **another Moses is going to arise** and he will give us another Torah from the heavens—therefore as of now I am telling you that it [such a Torah] is not in heaven, that nothing of it remains in heaven.
>
> — *Deuteronomy Rabba* 8:6

Do Not Displace Old Practices

Among the subjects treated for the first time in Moses' final address was that of the boundary markers that divide one person's land from another's:

> In the inheritance [that is, the inherited land] which you will hold in the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess, you shall not displace your neighbor's boundary-mark which the men of old have set. —Deut. 19:14

The law certainly seemed straightforward enough: old boundary-marks were not to be shifted. Still, it seemed strange that such a law should have to be stated at all. On the one hand, it could hardly have been intended to forbid adding on to one's own property, since that certainly was permitted (within the constraints of other biblical provisions). And if, on the other hand, the Bible here meant to forbid the actual alteration or erasure of established property lines—well, certainly such a thing would fall under other, previously announced provisions, especially those con-

nected to the return to one's ancestral property in the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:13, 28) as well as the general prohibition of theft.

If it was strange that moving boundary-marks should be prohibited once in Deuteronomy, it was still stranger to see this matter appear there a second time:

> Cursed be he who displaces his neighbor's boundary-mark—and let all the people say "Amen." —Deut. 27:17

This verse comes amidst a list of things that are specially condemned;[4] the list was to be recited publicly after the Israelites entered the land given to them by God. But what was so important about displacing a boundary-mark that it should appear on this list?

Thus, there was some reason to suspect that this biblical law meant more than might appear at first. Indeed, was not displacing a boundary-mark mentioned elsewhere in the Bible in terms that seemed to suggest that this was a symbolic act standing for much more than changing physical boundaries?

> The princes of Judah have become like those who displace the boundary-mark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water. —Hos. 5:10

> Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will not esteem the wisdom of your utterances.
> Do not displace an ancient boundary-mark nor enter into the fields of orphans,
> for their Redeemer is strong, He will take up their cause against you.
> Apply your mind to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge.
> Do not withold discipline from a child.
>
> —Prov. 23:9–13

In the second passage cited, the prohibition of displacing a boundary-mark comes in a series of general maxims about life (rather than in a law code); did this context not prove that the injunction as well was really some kind of general advice, that the "boundary-mark" actually stood for a whole class of things that should not be disturbed? Indeed, the joining of this prohibition with that of entering the fields of (defenseless) orphans suggested that the real subject might be what these two actions had in common: both were examples of disrespect for limits established in the past, limits that could be breached only because those who established them were no longer alive. Seen in this light, displacing any such boundary-mark was indeed a heinous act of disrespect and exploitation. No wonder that Hosea, in the first passage, compared Judah's behavior in time of political crisis to that of such boundary-switchers.

Swayed by these considerations, some ancient interpreters thus came to the conclusion that the prohibition of Deut. 19:14 (and Deut. 27:17) actually referred to displacing long-established practices. Such an interpretation was only fortified by a closer examination of the law's wording. After all, if the purpose were merely to

4. The same is true of the list of wicked activities in Job 24:2–4: "displacing landmarks" is the first thing mentioned.

forbid the shifting of boundary stones, it would have been enough to say, "You shall not displace your neighbor's boundary-mark." If the text went on to add "which the men of old have set," was this not a further clue that the point was not the moving of actual stones, but the upsetting of *anything* established long ago? The point was clinched by one final appearance of the phrase:

> Do not displace the boundary-mark of old **set by your fathers.**
>
> —Prov. 22:28

Once again, the phrase "set by your fathers" puts the emphasis on the long-standing nature of that which was being overturned—indeed, "your fathers," even more than "men of old" (Deut. 19:14), seemed designed to evoke respect and honor. And so it was: "displacing a boundary-stone" became a prohibition of upsetting anything that had been established long ago:

> Another commandment of general value is "You shall not displace your neighbor's boundary-marks which your forerunners have set up" [Deut. 19:14]. Now this law, we may consider, applies not merely to allotments and boundaries of land in order to eliminate covetousness, but also to the safeguarding of ancient customs. For customs are unwritten laws, the decisions approved by men of old, not inscribed on monuments nor on leaves of paper which the moth destroys, but on the souls of those who are partners in the same citizenship. —Philo, *Special Laws* 4:149

> For, if you delight in [Ada, symbol of delight in worthless materialism], you will desire to twist everything and turn it around, shifting the boundaries that are fixed for things by nature. Moses, full of indignation at such people, pronounces a curse on them saying, "Cursed is he that shifts his neighbor's boundaries" [Deut. 27:17]. By "neighbor" or "nearby" is meant that which is good. —Philo, *The Posterity and Exile of Cain* 84

> When the man of scoffing arose, who poured out for Israel from the waters of falsehood and caused them to go astray in a trackless wilderness . . . to turn from the paths of righteousness and to uproot the boundary-mark which the men of old have set. —*Damascus Document* 1:14–16

> And in the time of the land's destruction there arose the "displacers of boundary-marks" and they caused Israel to go astray . . . for they urged disobedience to the commandments given by God through the hand of Moses. —*Damascus Document* 5:20–21 (also 19:13–16)

> Let it not be permitted to displace boundary-marks, whether of your own land or of the land of others with whom you are at peace; beware of uprooting, as it were, a stone laid firm by God's decree for eternity. For out of this come wars, seditions, even from that desire of the covetous to overstep their boundaries. In truth, those who displace a boundary **are not far from transgressing the [other] laws as well.**
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:225

> "Do not displace the boundary-mark of old set by your fathers" [Prov. 22:28]: Rabbi Simeon b. Yoḥai said: If you see a custom of your forefathers observed, do not reject it. — *Midrash on Proverbs* 22

> . . . those who fall into evil deeds, and who abandon the **eternal boundaries** and the path of the heavenly church.
>
> — Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 27:39–43

Necessary Paperwork

Does the Bible permit a man to divorce his wife? It certainly seemed so to some interpreters. Divorce, metaphorical and actual, is mentioned in numerous biblical texts (Ezek. 44:22, Hos. 2:4, Ezra 10:3, and so on), and the "divorced woman" is spoken of as an accepted fact in various laws promulgated in the Torah (Lev. 21:7, 14, 22:13; Num. 30:10; Deut. 22:19, 29). However, the Bible never spells out exactly *how* divorce should be accomplished. It comes closest in a rather complicated law dealing with another matter, remarriage:

> When a man takes a woman and makes her his wife, and it turns out that she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found an indecency of something about her, and he writes for her a **bill of divorce** and puts it into her hand and releases [divorces] her from his house, so that she departs from his house; if she then goes and becomes another man's, and the latter man [also] rejects her and writes a **bill of divorce** for her and puts it into her hand and releases her from his house—or if this latter man who had taken her to wife should [subsequently] die—her first husband, who had divorced her, cannot now take her back again as his wife after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. — Deut. 24:1–4

Quite apart from the matter of remarriage, which is its overt subject, this law seems to teach something "between the lines" on the subject of divorce. To begin with, the passage apparently holds that divorce is indeed an acceptable practice under certain circumstances. What is more, it seems to make mention of the actual procedure for divorce, since it says (not once but twice) that the husband is required to prepare some sort of document, a "bill of divorce," and to give it to his wife, indeed, to "put it into her hand." The same bill of divorce is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as well:

> Thus says the Lord: "Where is your mother's bill of divorce, if I have released [divorced] her?" — Isa. 50:1

> [God said to Jeremiah about Israel:] "And I released her and I gave her the bill of her divorce, yet her faithless sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot as well." — Jer. 3:8

What was the purpose of such a document? As put into practice in later times, the bill of divorce both certified that the divorced woman was officially available for

remarriage and, as well, secured her property rights as part of the first marriage's dissolution.

> The first day of Marḥešwan, in the sixth year, at Maṣadah. I, Joseph son of Naqsan of [. . .]h, resident of Maṣadah, this day divorce and separate of my own free will from you, Miriam, daughter of Jonathan of Hanablata, resident of Maṣadah, who have previously been my wife, so that you now may freely go out and be the wife of any other Jewish man whom you may wish. May this be to you as a bill of divorce and a certificate of separation.
>
> —*P. Murabba'at* 19 (bill of divorce discovered at Murabba'at in Judah, apparently written in 71 C.E.)

> The essential content of the bill of divorce [is]: "You are hereby permitted to [be married to] any man." R. Judah said: "May this be to you from me a bill of divorce and a writ of separation and a certificate of severance, [permitting you] to go and be married to any man whom you will."
>
> —m. *Giṭṭin* 9:3

No Divorce—Except for Indecency

Another thing emerged from a close reading of the law of remarriage. The text seemed as well to suggest the *circumstances* under which a husband was allowed to divorce his wife. It says specifically that he can do so if "it turns out that she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found an indecency of something about her." This certainly sounded to interpreters as if the Bible was defining the acceptable grounds for divorce.

Unfortunately, this definition clarified very little. What is "an indecency of something"? Elsewhere in the Bible, the word "indecency" (or "nakedness") frequently refers to prohibited sexual relations. A person's (or the land's—Gen. 42:9) "indecency" ought normally to be covered up; to uncover it was therefore to gain intimate knowledge of it. This being the case, some interpreters understood Deut. 24:1–4 to be stipulating that divorce could occur only when a husband had found his wife to have committed some (sexual) "indecency." Such an interpretation had the advantage of seeming to rule out frivolous divorces or divorces initiated because of mere lust. After all, elsewhere in the Bible divorce is strongly criticized as an institution—certainly it was not to be initiated lightly:

> You ask, Why does He not [accept your offerings]? Because the Lord was a [marriage] witness between you and the wife of your youth whom you have now betrayed, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant . . . So take heed, and let no one betray the wife of his youth. For [I] **hate divorcing**, says the Lord. —Mal. 2:14–16

If, in Deut. 24:1–4, the Bible specifically mentions "an indecency of something" as the grounds for a divorce, does this not imply that sexual indecency is the only proper ground for a divorce? The normal expectation would therefore be that a couple would remain married for life. Indeed, if the Bible elsewhere orders even the

king not to "multiply wives" (Deut. 17:17), does it not follow that ordinary people are certainly expected to remain in lifelong, monogamous marriages?

> And let him [the king] not marry a woman from all the daughters of the nations, but let him acquire a wife only from his father's clan, from his father's kin. And let him not take another woman in addition to her,[5] for she **alone** shall be with him **all the days of her life; but if she dies** he may marry another woman from his father's clan and kin.[6] — *Temple Scroll* 57:15–19

> They have been snared in two matters: in fornication, by marrying two women while both were still alive, whereas the principle of creation is "male and female created He them" [Gen. 1:27], and those who went into the ark "entered the ark two by two" [Gen. 7:9], and about the prince it is written "Let him not have many wives [that is, more than one]" [Deut. 17:17].[7]
>
> — *Damascus Document* 4:20–5:2

> When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit, and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. — Matt. 1:18–19

> "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce' [≅ Deut. 24:1]. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."
>
> — Matt. 5:31–32 (also 19:3–9, Mark 10:2–12)

> To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife. — 1 Cor. 7:10–11

> The School of Shammai said: Let not a man divorce his wife unless he found in her some matter of indecency [immorality] as it is said, "because he has found an **indecency** of something about her" [Deut. 24:1].
>
> — m. *Giṭṭin* 9:10

Any Old Reason Is Valid

And yet there was something troubling about such an interpretation. To begin with, the Bible elsewhere stipulates that if a married woman is found to have had

5. That is, the law of Deut. 17:17 forbidding the king to "multiply wives" is interpreted as meaning having a multiplicity of wives, more than one.

6. This passage not only outlaws polygamy for the king, but seems to imply, in the words highlighted, that divorce followed by remarriage is likewise not countenanced: death is the only circumstance in which remarriage can occur.

7. Here the overt prohibition is that of polygamy; however, the wording "while both were still alive" suggests—in keeping with the previously cited passage—that death is normally the only circumstance that would allow a man to marry two women even sequentially.

relations with another man, "both of them shall die" (Deut. 22:22); what need was there for a divorce under such circumstances? Moreover, the case of a wife merely suspected of unfaithfulness is likewise dealt with quite separately in the Bible (Num. 5:11–31), without any mention of divorce proceedings. It was difficult, therefore, to suppose that an act of proven or even suspected unfaithfulness was the only possible reason for divorce. What is more, the biblical laws governing the case of the slandering groom (Deut. 22:13–19) and that of a rapist or seducer of an unmarried woman (Deut. 22:28–29) both stipulate that the man in question "may not divorce her [the victim] all his life." It would seem strange for such a stipulation to have been made if divorce were in any case permitted only after infidelity: were these laws an invitation to the former victims of slander or rape subsequently to commit adultery with impunity? On the contrary, such a stipulation would only seem to make sense if, under normal circumstances, divorce was indeed something a husband might well consider if he were merely dissatisfied with his spouse. Finally, if unfaithfulness were the only valid reason for divorce, then the Bible's wording in Deut. 24:1–4 seems rather strange: why should it say, "if it turns out that she *does not find favor in his eyes* because he has found some indecency about her"? Certainly adultery is no trifle, not a matter of "finding favor" or not—it is a crime that is strictly prohibited! "Finding favor" seemed to suggest that lesser matters might be involved.[8]

In the light of all such considerations, some interpreters understood the Bible to be giving the broadest latitude with regard to divorce, allowing the husband to separate from his wife for almost any good reason:

> Another commandment is that if a woman, after being divorced from her husband **for any cause whatever**, marries another . . .
>
> —Philo, *Special Laws* 3:30 (restating Deut. 24:1–4)

> He who desires to be divorced **for any reason whatsoever** from the wife who is living with him—and with many mortals such may arise—must certify in writing that he will have no further relations with her, since in this way will the woman obtain the right to cohabit with another man.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:253

> The School of Shammai said: Let not a man divorce his wife unless he found in her some matter of indecency [immorality] as it is said, "because he has found an **indecency** of something about her" [Deut. 24:1]. But the School of Hillel say: Even if she [merely] spoiled his food, as it says, "because he has

8. What is more, the phrase translated "an indecency of something" ought really to have been worded differently in Hebrew if the intended meaning had been, specifically, adultery. The Bible ought to have said a "matter [or "instance"] of indecency" (*dĕbar 'erwāh*). As it stands, "an indecency of something" (*'erwat dābār*) at least suggests that the "indecency" might be metaphorical, an "indecency" of speech or of behavior rather than, specifically, *the* indecency of forbidden sexual relations. This seems to be the case with Deut. 23:14, the only other biblical occurrence of the phrase "an indecency of something," since here it certainly does not refer to infidelity in particular. Such observations as these stand behind the dispute between the schools of Hillel and Shammai in m. *Gittin* 9:10 (below).

found an indecency of **something** about her" [Deut. 24:1]. Rabbi Akiba says: Even if he found another woman prettier than her, as it says, "and it turns out that she does not find favor in his eyes" [Deut. 24:1].[9] —m. *Gittin* 9:10

Don't Muzzle Me

Moses' last address contained a number of divine commandments touching on the treatment of animals. Thus, for example, a stray ox or sheep or donkey had to be returned to its rightful owner (Deut. 22:1–4), a roosting or brooding mother bird had to be spared (Deut. 22:6–7), and so forth. Commandments such as these seemed to bear directly on *human* behavior—on relations with one's neighbor (to whom the stray animal, after all, belonged) or on the quality of mercy in general. But what of a commandment like:

You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. —Deut. 25:4

Clearly, it may be unkind to muzzle an ox while surrounding him with a tempting meal; but why should the Torah be concerned with such matters? As a matter of fact, if the ox is otherwise well fed and well cared for, why not muzzle it? Perhaps muzzling under such circumstances may even be wise, and certainly it would not be cruel. Considering these questions, some interpreters concluded that this law was intended for its larger implications—indeed, that it had been promulgated principally to apply to humans:

[Paul writes:] This is my defense to those who would interrogate me: Do we not have the right to our food and drink? . . . Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? [compare Deut. 20:6] . . . For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does He not speak entirely for our sake? . . . If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? —1 Cor. 9:3–11

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain," and "The laborer deserves his wages." —1 Tim. 5:17

The law could cut both ways, however. Perhaps the image of the unmuzzled ox was intended to caution against binging:

For the bishops ought to be nourished from the revenues of the Church, but not to devour them; for it is written, "You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out [the corn]." As then the ox which works unmuzzled in the threshing floor eats, indeed, but does not consume the whole, so you also who work

9. That is, it "turns out that," after seeing the prettier woman, "she does not [any longer] find favor in his eyes."

> in the threshing floor which is the Church of God, be nourished from the Church. —*Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 8

Rabbinic exegetes invoked the same law (albeit in the framework of an *a fortiori* argument) for purposes of a human analogy:

> If, in the case of an ox, whose life one is not commanded to preserve, one is nonetheless commanded [by Deut. 25:4] not to muzzle, does it not stand to reason that a human being, whose life one *is* commanded to preserve, ought not to be prevented from eating [in keeping with Deut. 23:25]?
>
> —b. *Baba Meṣi'a* 88b

Small Commandments as Important as Big

Among the laws that Moses transmitted in his final address were some whose importance and centrality were unmistakable, such as the commandments to love God (Deut. 6:5) or to pursue justice (Deut. 16:20). Some interpreters wondered, therefore, if commandments such as these were not inherently more important than others—like some of the animal laws just mentioned, or the prohibition of eating the meat of a buzzard (Deut. 14:13),[10] or the regulation forbidding the retrieval of a forgotten sheaf (Deut. 24:19). Could it be that all these laws were of equal weight in God's eyes?

The answer might seem surprising, but the Bible itself indicates in several places that even the slightest deviation from the divine laws is not to be countenanced:

> You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take away from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. —Deut. 4:2

> Lest his [the king's] heart be exalted above his kinsmen's and lest he depart from the commandment[s] to the right or left [that is, in the slightest way] . . . —Deut. 17:20

> [Joshua charged all of Israel:] Be exceedingly strong to keep and perform all that is written in the book of Moses' Torah without departing from it to the right or the left. —Josh. 23:6

Taking their clue from such verses, a number of ancient writers went out of their way to assert that the apparently small commandments were just as important as the others. They saw the Torah's laws as a system, each of whose parts (no matter how apparently minor) is crucial to the integrity of the whole:

> To transgress the law in matters either small or great is quite the same [to us], for in either case the law is being treated with disdain. —4 Macc. 5:20

> [Jesus said:] "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Anyone who

10. This bird, the *rā'āh,* is not mentioned in the similar list of forbidden birds in Lev. 11:13–19.

relaxes even one of **the least** of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

—Matt. 5:18–19

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. —James 2:10

Rabbi said: Be careful with a minor commandment as with a major one, for you do not know what reward is given for keeping one commandment or another.

Ben Azzai said: Run after a minor commandment just as after a major one.

—m. *Abot* 2:1, 4:2

Torah Refines (Like Fire)

Thinking along these same lines, some interpreters suggested that the ultimate purpose of the Torah's system of laws did not necessarily lie in the particulars themselves. Instead, God had set forth the specific requirements in order to ensure that people would devote themselves wholly, and in the minute details, to His service. Interpreters thus sometimes described the Torah as exercising a refining effect on those who hold true to its statutes and, in keeping an image common in the Psalms and elsewhere, depicted the Torah as a refining fire:

Do not take the contemptible view that Moses enacted this legislation because of an excessive preoccupation with mice or weasels or suchlike creatures. The fact is that everything has been solemnly set in order for unblemished investigation and amendment of life for the sake of righteousness . . . No ordinance has been made in Scripture without purpose or fancifully, but to the intent that through the **whole of our lives** we may also practice justice to all mankind in our acts, remembering the all-sovereign God. —*Letter of Aristeas* 146, 168

We, O Antiochus, who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law, think that there is no more important constraint than for us to remain obedient to the law . . . You sneer at our philosophy as if those who live by it do so without good reason, but it teaches us self-control, so that we rule over all our pleasures and desires, and trains us in courage, so that we willingly endure any suffering. It educates us in justice, in order that we be equitable in all our dealings, and it teaches us religiosity, so that we worship the one true God with proper reverence. —4 Macc. 5:16–24

Admirable too, and worthy of God, is the saying that the voice proceeded from the fire, for the oracles of God have been refined and assayed as gold is by fire [an apparent allusion to Ps. 12:7, 18:30, 119:140, or Prov. 30:5]. And it conveys too, symbolically, some such meaning as this: since it is the nature of fire both to give light and to burn, those who resolve to be obedient to the

> divine utterances will live forever as in unclouded **light** with the laws themselves as stars illuminating their souls, while all who are rebellious will continue to be burnt . . . by their inward lusts. —Philo, *The Decalogue* 48

> "The oracles of God are refined [as a metal]" [Psalm 18:30] . . . Rab said: the reason the commandments were given was to refine [as a metal] human beings.[11] For, what does it matter to God, [for example,] if an animal is slaughtered [by having its neck cut] at the gullet or at the windpipe, but the purpose [of divine commandments governing such things] is to refine human beings. —*Genesis Rabba* 44:1

The Gift of the Torah

In the biblical narrative, the laws given through Moses are presented as part of an overall agreement, the covenant between God and Israel. At Mt. Sinai, the Israelites had accepted God's offer to be His people on condition of keeping His commandments; they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient" (Exod. 24:7).

Reflecting back on these events at the end of Moses' life, however, the Bible presents the commandments as much more than a divine requirement. It describes them as constituting in themselves a source of great benefit and well-being, indeed, observing the Torah was, according to Moses' last address, to be associated or equated with the people's continued life in the land and all its blessings:

> And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them, **so that you may live**. —Deut. 4:1

> You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may **live**, and that it may go well with you, and that you may **live long** in the land which you shall possess. —Deut. 5:30 (some texts, 5:33)

> All the commandments which I command you this day you shall be careful to do, that you may **live and multiply.** —Deut. 8:1

> [If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God] which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and ordinances, then you shall **live and multiply**, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. —Deut. 30:15–16

> Lay to heart all the words which I enjoin upon you this day, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this Torah. For it is no trifle for you, **but it is your very life**, and

11. Ps. 18:30 might also be understood (in keeping with a rare but nonetheless attested active form of the verb in late and postbiblical Hebrew) as meaning that the "oracles of God do refine [as a metal]." Rab's explanation is apparently based on this understanding.

> thereby you shall live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess. —Deut. 32:46–47

Later generations followed and elaborated this line of thought. They too saw in the laws given by God more than a set of divine requirements. The laws constituted a recipe for well-being, a divinely given guidebook for the right way to live. By giving these laws to Moses on Mt. Sinai, God was in effect bestowing a great gift on Israel, and a source of great pleasure:

> The Torah of the Lord is perfect, it restores one's soul;
> The Lord's statutes are sure and make the simple wise . . .
> They are more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold,
> sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
>
> —Ps. 19:7–10

> My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times . . .
> Your laws were my songs inside my dwelling-place . . .
> How I love your Torah, I speak of it the whole day long!
>
> —Ps. 119:20, 54, 97

Ancient interpreters carried on this same theme. They held that adhering to the Torah was in itself a source of pleasure and that it provided many other benefits to all who kept its commandments.

> If you desire wisdom keep the commandments, and the Lord will bestow her upon you.
>
> —Sir. 1:26

> Nothing is better than the fear of the Lord,
> nothing is sweeter than obeying the commandments.
>
> —Sir. 23:27

> Whoever keeps the Torah preserves himself.
>
> —[Heb. ms. B] Sir. 35:24 (cf. Prov. 19:6)

> My children, be courageous and grow strong in the Torah, for by it you will gain honor. —1 Macc. 2:64

> She [Wisdom] is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever. All who hold fast to her will **live** [compare Prov. 3:18] and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward her shining light. Do not give your glory for another, or your advantages to a foreign people. **Happy are we,** O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God. —Bar. 4:1–4

> Therefore you also, children, be attentive to the commandments of the Lord . . . Keep the law of the Lord and do not be attentive to evil as to good, but concentrate on **what is truly good,** and hold fast to it in all the commandments of the Lord, being well versed in it and finding rest therein.
>
> — *Testament of Asher* 6:1–3

[Baruch prays:] Your law is life, and Your wisdom is the right way.

—*2 Baruch* 38:2

[Moses says:] It is God who **graces you** with these commandments, using me as an interpreter. May they become an object of veneration for you, fight for them more even than for your wives and children. For by following them you will gain a life of happiness, enjoying an earth that is fruitful and a sea that is untroubled, and children begotten in nature's way; and you will be feared by any enemy. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:87–88

This is the path of Torah: Bread and salt shall you eat, and drink water by measure; you shall sleep upon the ground, and live a life of privation, and in Torah shall be your work. And if you do thus, "You shall be happy, and it will be well with you" (Ps. 128:2)—*Happy* [refers to] this world, and *well* to the world to come.

Greatest is the Torah, for it gives life to those who perform it[s commandments] in this world and in the world to come, as it is said, "It is a tree of life to those who hold on to it, and all who maintain it are blessed" [Prov. 3:18].

—m. *Abot* 6:4, 7

Once the wicked regime [Rome] decreed that Jews be forbidden to study the Torah. Pappus b. Judah subsequently found R. Aqiba nonetheless convening groups in public for the study of Torah. "Aqiba," he said, "are you not afraid of the regime?" He said: "Let me answer you with a comparison: It is like a fox that was walking along the river-bank when he saw some fish moving in groups from place to place. He said to them: 'What are you fleeing from?' They said: 'From the nets that the human beings cast over us.' He said to them: 'Wouldn't you like to climb up onto the dry land so that you and I might live together as your ancestors and mine once did?' They said: 'Are you indeed the one who is alleged to be the cleverest of animals? You are not clever but foolish! For if there is danger in the place where we do live [that is, our natural environment], is it not all the more so in the place where we must die?' So is it with us now: for we sit and study Torah, about which it is said, 'For it is your life and your length of days' (Deut. 30:20); were we to abandon it, we would be in far greater danger." —b. *Berakhot* 61b

Not in Heaven Anymore

Moses had transmitted to the people the way of life prescribed by the Torah. Now it was up to them to live in accordance with it:

[Moses said:] "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the

> word is very near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." —Deut. 30:11–14

The meaning seemed clear enough: I have passed the Torah on to you, now go and do it! Still, if that were the case, interpreters had to wonder why the Bible mentioned going up to heaven or across the sea at all. Perhaps these words were a way of saying that, apart from what is written in the Torah, divine wisdom is quite inaccessible to humanity:

> Who has gone up into heaven and taken her [Wisdom], and brought her down from the clouds? Who has gone over the sea and found her, and will buy her for pure gold? No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her. But He who knows all things knows her, He found her by His understanding . . . This is our God: no other can be compared to him. He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom He loved. Afterward she appeared on earth and lived among men. She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever. —Bar. 3:29–32, 3:35–4:1

Rather different, however, was another interpretation that held Moses' words to mean that the Torah is *no longer* in heaven; that is, now that it has been given over to human beings, it is up to them to teach it and interpret it with no further recourse to prophetic intermediaries:

> The Torah is not in heaven, that one should say, "If only we had someone like the prophet Moses who might go up to heaven and take it down for us and teach us its laws so that we could do them."
>
> — *Targum Neophyti* Deut. 30:12

> It is not in Heaven, that one should say, "Who shall ascend to Heaven for us and take it and teach it to us so that we may do it?"; and it is not across the great sea, that one should say, "Who will cross the great sea for us and take it and teach it to us so that we may do it"; but the [divine] word is nearby to you, **in your study houses**—open your mouths in order to read them [the divine commandments], and purify your hearts so that you may do them.
>
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 30:11–14

> It is taught elsewhere [in the Mishnah, *Kelim* 10:5]: if someone divided [the oven widthwise] into strips and put sand between each strip, then according to R. Eliezer it [the oven] is ritually pure; according to the [majority of] scholars [that is, his colleagues] it is impure . . . On that day R. Eliezer answered every argument in the world [against his position], but still they [his colleagues] did not accept [it]. [Then] he said to them, "If my ruling is correct, let this carob tree so demonstrate." The carob tree thereupon was uprooted a hundred cubits out of its place (some say four hundred cubits). They answered: "One does not make proof with a carob tree." Then he said to them, "If my ruling is correct, let this watercourse demonstrate it," whereupon the watercourse began to flow backwards. They said: "One does

> not make proof with a watercourse." He said to them: "If my ruling is correct, let the walls of the study house demonstrate it," whereupon the walls started to fall. But R. Joshua rebuked them [the walls] and said, "When scholars are disputing with each other, by what right can you interfere?" For this reason they did not fall out of respect for R. Joshua, nor did they return to being straight, out of respect for R. Eliezer, and they are still standing in that position. Finally he said to them, "If my ruling is correct, let it be demonstrated from heaven [by God directly]." A heavenly voice went forth and said, "Why should you dispute with R. Eliezer, since his ruling is correct in all instances?" Whereupon R. Joshua stood up and said, "**It is not in heaven**." Now what does this [expression] "it is not in heaven" mean [in Deut. 30:12]? R. Jeremiah said, "Once the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, one is not to take a heavenly voice into consideration, since You have written at Mt. Sinai with regard to the Torah, 'to incline after the majority' [Exod. 23:2]." [Later,] R. Nathan encountered Elijah [temporarily descended from heaven]. He asked him: "What did God do after that happened?" [Elijah] said: "He laughed and said, 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.'" —b. *Baba Metzia* 59b

It is certainly against the common drift of such passages—that the true teaching and application of biblical laws are now in your midst, just waiting to be observed—that Paul's allusion to the same biblical verse ought to be understood. Paul's (polemical, in that case) claim is that the *presentness* spoken of in Deut. 30:11–14 does not apply to laws at all:

> Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness [religious observance] which is based on the Torah shall live by it. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into Heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend in the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and near your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach). —Rom. 10:6–8

A Choice for Each Person

As Moses' final charge to the Israelites was drawing to a close, he summed up his message in a striking formulation:

> See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil; in that I am commanding you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, laws and statutes, so that you live and multiply;[12] and so that the Lord your God bless you in the land which you are entering

12. Another form of the text, represented by the Septuagint, reads: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil; *if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day,* to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, laws and statutes, then you shall live and multiply."

> to inherit. But if your heart turns aside and you do not listen but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall perish, you shall not live long in the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness in warning you today: I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, so that you and your descendants may live.
>
> —(traditional Hebrew text of) Deut. 30:15–18

"Therefore, choose life"—here was a powerful summons. And yet . . . who would *not* choose life? Indeed, given the choice that Moses first delineates, between "life and good, death and evil," one would certainly have to be bent on self-destruction to opt for the latter pair. In what sense could these represent a *real* choice, two real alternatives?

It was not hard to see that by "choose life" Moses meant that Israel should resolve to keep the divine commandments, "to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, laws and statutes." This would result in "life" in the sense[13] of *the people's continued life for generations* in the promised land, "that you live and *multiply* . . . that you *and your descendants* may live." Choosing "death"—that is, being "drawn away to worship other gods and serve them"—would inevitably result in exile and banishment; in other words, death meant that "you shall not *live long* in the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess."

Such was the choice presented by Moses. But it was not a big jump to find in his words a still more elemental choice: between, on the one hand, each individual's dedication to the good, that is, living in accordance with God's will, and, on the other hand, the surrender to the evil lurking in every human heart. Put in those terms, the choice was not a collective, national one, but a choice facing each individual in his or her own lifetime. Choosing the good would (quite apart from Israel's continued life in its homeland) allow a person to enjoy the rewards that God normally grants to the righteous in their own individual lives, since God's all-seeing eye monitors the behavior of each human being:

> In the beginning God created man, but He put him in a despoiler's hands, He gave him over to his own inclination.
> If you so wish, you may keep the commandment[s], and [keep] faith in doing God's will.
> Before you are fire and water—reach out for whichever you wish.
> Before a man are **life and death,** and whichever he chooses will be given to him.
> Great is the Lord's wisdom, He has great power and sees all:
> God's eyes behold His creatures and He knows each man's deeds.
>
> —Sir. 15:14–19

> . . .]And He sets [before you . . .
> t[wo] paths, one good [and one bad . . .

13. Attested as well above in the passages cited in "The Gift of Torah."

and He will bless you, but if you go on the [bad] path[. . .
and f[all u]pon you and destroy you[. . .[14]

— (4Q473) *The Two Ways* 2–5

God has given two paths[15] to the sons of men, and two inclinations, and two ways of acting, and two forms of living, two ends. Thus, all things come in pairs, one corresponding to the other: two paths, of good and of evil, in [keeping with] which are the two inclinations within our breasts that choose between them. — *Testament of Asher* 1:3–5

And therefore we have an oracle of this kind recorded in Deuteronomy. "Behold, I have set before your face life and death, good and evil; choose life." So then in this way He puts before us both truths: first, that men have been made with a knowledge of both good and evil, its opposite; second, that it is their duty to choose the better rather than the worse.

— Philo, *The Unchangeableness of God* 50

A Choice of Two Paths

Thus, the choice being presented by Moses was really a choice between two ways of life, two paths. In restating this choice, many sources (as we have just seen in the *Testament of Asher*) therefore speak of two paths (or "ways," in the sense of paths or roads). Although the "path of life" and "path of death" do not appear as such in Deuteronomy, these terms do appear elsewhere:

And to this people shall you say: Thus says the Lord: Behold I put before you the path of life and the path of death. — Jer. 21:8

How natural, then, that Moses' words should be transformed by later writers into a reference to these two paths. (Indeed, the choice between two paths may at one point have been fleshed out into a now-lost standard list of do's and don'ts—based on the Decalogue and other material—that circulated widely under the name "The Two Ways"):

The path of life and the path of mortality have I given to you, and the curses: and you shall choose the path of life. — *Targum Neophyti* Deut. 30:19

See, I have put before you this day the path of life, which is the good path, and the path of mortality, which is the evil path.

— *Fragment Targum* (V) Deut. 30:15

There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and great is the difference between the two ways. — *Didache* 1:1

There are two ways of teaching and of power, the one of light and the one of darkness, and great is the difference between the two ways. Over the one

14. All the occurrences of "you" in this passage are in the second-person singular.

15. On the connection of these "two paths" with the choice stated by Moses, see below.

have been arrayed the light-bearing angels of God, but over the other the angels of Satan.

The way of light is this: if someone desire to go on the way to the appointed place, let him be zealous about what he does . . . [and] not be joined to those who walk on **the way of death.** — *Letter of Barnabas* 18:1–2, 19:2

[God says:] And I gave him [Adam] his free will and I pointed out to him the two ways, light and darkness. And I said to him, "This is good for you, but that is bad," so that I might come to know whether he has love toward me or abhorrence, and so that it might become plain who among his race loves me. — *2 Enoch* (J) 30:15

I myself proposed two ways, of life and death,
and proposed to the judgment to choose good life.
— *Sibylline Oracles* 8:399–400

And Moses [says], "I have set before your face the way of life and the way of death. Choose the good and walk in it." — Origen, *First Principles* 3.1.6

"Behold, I have set before your face the way of life and the path of death."
— *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.1.1

It is said,"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse" [Deut. 30:19]. Lest Israel should say, "Since God put before us **two paths**, the path of life and the path of death, let us go along whichever one we prefer," the text went on to say, "And you shall choose life" [Deut. 30:19].
— *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 53

Nice Road at First

If God confronts humanity with such a weighty choice, why is it that many people nevertheless choose wrongly, forsaking God's path for a life of selfishness and self-indulgence? Obviously, such people are deluded by the superficial attractiveness of a life without constraints. To some it occurred that, if the Bible presents the choice in terms of two paths, then each individual stands, as it were, at a fork in the road, looking down two rival routes. If many end up choosing the bad road, is it not because this road is, at first glance at least, more attractive?

And Abraham saw two roads. The first road was strait and narrow and the other broad and spacious . . . [The angel Michael then explained to Abraham:] "This strait gate is the gate of the righteous, which leads to life, and . . . the broad gate is the gate of the sinners."
— *Testament of Abraham* (A) 11:2, 10

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.
— Matt. 7:13–14

> This is like someone who was sitting at a crossroads and before him were two roads, one whose beginning was smooth but whose end was thistles, and the other whose beginning was thistles but whose end was smooth. So he would inform passers-by and say to them: "Do you see the road whose beginning is smooth? You will go on the smooth part for two or three steps, but eventually it turns into thistles. But do you see the road whose beginning is thistles? You will go in the thistles for two or three steps, but eventually it turns out smooth."
>
> — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 53 (continuation of passage cited above)

The Path to the Afterlife

If the Bible, in this passage, sets forth a basic choice confronting each individual—two different paths or ways of living—why does it call the one "life" and the other "death"? After all, all human beings die; all are, in that sense, on the path to death. Yet to some interpreters it seemed clear that the Bible's choice of words was no dramatic hyperbole. It must have meant by "life," life in the world to come. After all, Moses went on to tell the people to "therefore choose life, so that you . . . may live"; why tell people who are already living to do something so that they might live? (In Hebrew, as in English, there are other ways of saying "so that you might continue to live" or "so that you might live long.") What is more, other biblical texts speak of the "road of [or "to"] life" in such a way as to suggest that the "life" in question is the reward after death:

> Heeding instruction is the **road to life**, but one who neglects reproof leads astray. — Prov. 10:17

> The wise man's is the **road of life upward**, that he may turn from Sheol [the underworld] beneath. — Prov. 15:24

Seen in this light, Moses did indeed seem to be referring to life after death. His message was thus that by seeking to keep the commandments of the Torah an individual was indeed "choosing life," choosing to be among those righteous who would be rewarded after their death. Such an interpretation may underlie the targumist's use of the word "mortality" (instead of simply "death") as the opposite of life:

> The path of life and the path of **mortality** have I given to you, and the curses: and you shall choose the path of life. — *Targum Neophyti* Deut. 30:19

> See, I have put before you this day the path of life, which is the good path, and the path of **mortality**, which is the evil path.
>
> — *Fragment Targum* (V) Deut. 30:15

In any case, the interpretation of "life" as the reward of the righteous was stated outright elsewhere:

[Ezra asks an angel:] "What good is it to us, if an eternal age has been promised to us, but we have done deeds that bring death . . . For while we lived and committed iniquity we did not consider what we should suffer after death." He answered and said, "This is the meaning of the contest which every man who is born on earth shall wage, that if he is defeated he shall suffer what you have said, but if he is victorious he shall receive what I have said. For this is the way of which Moses, while he was alive, spoke to the people, saying, 'Choose for yourself life, that you may live.'"

— *4 Ezra* 7:119, 126–129

[The angel Michael then explained to Abraham:] "This strait gate is the gate of the righteous, which leads to life, and those who enter through it come into Paradise. And . . . the broad gate is the gate of the sinners, which leads to destruction [Gehenna, hell] and to eternal punishment."

— *Testament of Abraham* (A) 11:2, 10–11

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

— Matt. 7:13–14

See, I have arrayed before you this day the life of the world to come and the goodness of the garden of Eden, and the death which the wicked will die and the evils of Gehenna. — *Targum Neophyti* (marginal note) Deut. 30:15

Thus did Moses say to Israel: "Do you see the wicked who are prospering **in this world**? They prosper for two or three days, but eventually they regret it . . . Do you see the righteous who suffer in this world? They suffer for two or three days, but eventually they will rejoice [in the world to come]."

— *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 53 (continuation of passage cited above)

Consider Heaven and Earth

Moses concluded his final address to the Israelites with a song (Deut. 32:1–43) designed to warn them of the perils to come in later times. At the very beginning of this song, however, Moses did not address the Israelites directly. Instead, he spoke to the sky and the earth:

Give ear, O heavens, and I shall speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, as the gentle rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb.

— Deut. 32:1–2

Why should Moses have addressed his words to these impersonal bodies when, by the Bible's own account (Deut. 31:19–21, 28–30), the purpose of this song was to warn Israel? True enough, a later prophet was to begin his prophetic book in a similar manner:

> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken . . .
>
> — Isa. 1:2

But to observe this was only to reinforce the question: why should a prophet talk to heaven and earth rather than Israel? To make matters worse, Moses *did* soon turn his speech to Israel directly and unambiguously: "Do you requite this to the Lord, you foolish and senseless people?" (Deut. 32:6). If he eventually spoke *to* Israel, what sense could there be in addressing heaven and earth at all?

Now, it so happened that the same opening line of Moses' song could be read differently:

> **Give ear to the heavens** as I speak, and **let the earth be heard**[16] [in] the words of my mouth.

Although it is a little forced, reading the opening verse in this fashion would have the effect of indeed making Moses address the Israelites from the very start: he simply began by telling them to give ear to, to heed, the examples of the heaven and the earth. And why heaven and earth? Because they are eternal and unchanging and thus, along with the rain and dew that fall from heaven to earth (evoked in this song's opening as well), are an example of how God's laws are unceasingly obeyed and put into action. All this contrasted sharply with the picture of Israel's inconstancy in Moses' song:

> "Give ear, O heavens, and I shall speak . . ." [Deut. 32:1]—God said to Moses: Say to Israel, **Consider** the heavens that I created to serve you. Do you think that they have changed their behavior? Do you think the sun has said, "I will no longer rise in the east and give light to the whole world"? . . . "And let the earth hear the words of my mouth . . ." [Deut. 32:1]—And **consider** the earth that I created to serve you. Do you think that it has changed its behavior? Do you sow seeds in it and it does not flourish? Or do you even sow wheat in it and it gives back barley? — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 306

The same interpretation may be reflected in earlier writings:

> **Contemplate** all the events in heaven, how the lights in heaven do not change their courses, how each rises and sets in order, each at its proper time, and they do not transgress their law. **Consider** the earth, and understand from the work which is done upon it, from the beginning to the end, that no work of God changes as it becomes manifest. Consider the summer and the winter, how the whole earth is full of water, and clouds and dew and rain rest upon it . . . And understand in respect of everything and perceive how He who lives forever made all these things for you . . . but you have not persevered, nor observed the law of the Lord, but you have transgressed, and have spoken proud and hard words with your unclean mouth against His majesty. You hard of heart! — *1 Enoch* 2:1–5:4

16. Or, "hear [second-person singular] the earth."

Somewhat similarly:

> Sun and moon and stars do not change their order; so you also, do not change the law of God in the disorder of your doings.
>
> — *Testament of Naphtali* 3:2

Heaven and Earth Were Already Witnesses

But another answer to the same question existed, and this one as well depended on re-pronouncing the opening line of Moses' song in an unexpected way. For these same words could also be parsed as follows:

> The heavens **gave ear** while I spoke, and the earth **heard** the words of my mouth.

Read in this fashion, Moses' opening words seemed to refer to some earlier occasion when he had spoken. Interpreters had little difficulty determining what that occasion might have been. It must have been the time when, with the heavens ablaze with lightning and the earth in turmoil before him, Moses had stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai and solemnly transmitted to all of Israel the words of God's covenant. Since heaven and earth were present, they must have heard Israel's acceptance of the commandments, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod. 24:7). If so, the fact that the heavens gave ear and the earth heard at that time was being mentioned by Moses now because he wished to remind Israel that, although he himself was about to die, *they* could nevertheless testify against Israel in the future, after the people had abandoned those same commandments:

> And he [Moses] spoke to them, saying, "Behold I am going to sleep with my fathers and I am going to my ancestors. And I know that you shall go and abandon the words [that is, the divine commandments] that have been set forth for you by me, and God shall become angry with you and leave you and depart from your land . . . I, however, call heaven and earth to witness against you, **for heaven hear[d] and earth g[a]ve ear,** for God was revealing [at Mt. Sinai] the purpose of the world and He set out for you His supernalities, lighting within you the eternal lamp. And [as a result of their testifying,] you shall remember, O wicked ones, how I spoke to you and you answered, saying: 'All that God has spoken to us we will do and we will obey [Exod. 24:7]. But if however we disobey and go astray, then He shall call a witness against us and he will cut us off.'"
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:2–4

> [Moses said to Israel:] "The heavens **gave ear** as I spoke" [that is, an alternate understanding of Deut. 32:1], because the Torah was given out of heaven, as it is said, "You have seen that I have spoken with you from heaven" [Exod. 20:22]; "and the earth **heard** the words of my mouth" [Deut. 32:1] because Israel was standing on it at the time, and they said, "All that the

> Lord has spoken, we will do," **and it was heard** [an alternate understanding of Exod. 24:7]. — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 306

Moses Did Not Want to Die

At the end of the book of Deuteronomy, God instructed Moses:

> Ascend this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel as a possession; and die on the mount which you ascend and be gathered to your ancestors. — Deut. 32:49–50

Moses did as he was told: "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord" (Deut. 34:5). All this could not but strike readers as an example of obedience and courage in the face of the inevitable. And yet . . . this was not the first time that Moses had been told by God to die. Even before the end of the previous book, the book of Numbers, God is represented as telling Moses to accept his fate:

> The Lord said to Moses, "Go up onto this mountain of Abarim and see the land which I have given to the people of Israel. And when you have seen it, be gathered to your fathers [that is, die] as your brother Aaron was gathered." — Num. 27:12

Apparently, however, that one notice was not sufficient, for God has to repeat the same thing in Deut. 32:49–50—in fact, on several intervening occasions as well:

> And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold the time has come for you to die." — Deut. 31:14

> And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, now you will sleep with your fathers." — Deut. 31:16

What is more, on at least one occasion Moses appears to have protested God's decree that he die before entering the land of Canaan:

> [Moses recalls:] And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, "O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand . . . Let me go over, I pray, and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill country, and Lebanon." But the Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the Lord said to me, "Let it suffice you; speak no more to me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan." — Deut. 3:23–27

These, and yet other references, suggested to some interpreters that Moses might not in fact have been so eager to accept the divine decree. Perhaps, on the contrary, God's repeated instructions to Moses to die indicated that Moses was unwilling:

After these things, God spoke to him [Moses] **a third time**, saying, "Behold, you are going off now to sleep with your fathers."[17]

— Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:6

And so, when . . . the Lord said to him, "Go up into this mountain of Abarim, Mt. Nebo . . ." Moses thought to himself "Perhaps this ascent will be similar to the ascent of Mt. Sinai." Therefore he said, "Let me go and sanctify the people." The Lord said to him: "Not at all! Go up and behold the land which I am giving to Israel as a possession, and die on the mountain which you ascend and be gathered to your ancestors—just as your brother Aaron died on Mt. Hor and was gathered to his fathers." Whereupon Moses opened his mouth in prayer and said: "Master of the world, if you please, let me not be like the person who had an only son that was taken prisoner, and he went and redeemed him at great cost and taught him wisdom and skill and acquired a wife for him and set up a kingly gazebo for him [and so on] and just when the time came for him to celebrate with his son and daughter-in-law [at their wedding] . . . the person in question was suddenly summoned by the king to the law court and was sentenced to death, and they did not even allow him to enjoy his son's celebration. So similarly have I labored for this people . . . and now that the time has come for me to cross the Jordan and inherit the land, I am sentenced to die! Please, allow me to cross the Jordan and enjoy Israel's celebration, and after that I will die."

— *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 32:49–50

"And die upon the mountain which you ascend" [Deut. 32:50]. He said to Him: Master of the world! Why should I die? . . . Is it not better that people [be able to] say, "Here is Moses [still alive], the one who took us out of Egypt and split the sea for us and brought down the manna for us and performed miracles and wonders," rather than their saying "Moses *was* such-and-such" and "Moses *did* thus-and-so"?

— *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 339

A heavenly voice went forth and said to him [Moses], You only have an hour left to live in this world. He said to Him: O Master of the world! Let me [instead] go about like a bird, flying all over the world, gathering food on the earth and drinking water from streams and at night going back to his nest. God said to him: Enough! He said to him: Master of the world! [But You are called] "The rock whose deeds are perfect [for all His ways are just]" [Deut. 32:4]! And he began to weep, and he wept and said: To whom shall I go who can seek mercy on my behalf?

— *Petirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.125)

The theme of Moses' reluctance to die came to be lovingly elaborated in song and prayer:

17. This verse essentially parallels Deut. 31:16, save that there the text does not draw attention to the fact that Moses has already previously been told that it is time for him to die. The "third time" seems to be in addition to Deut. 31:14 and Num. 27:12.

Said the Lord from the midst of his Shekhinah [the divine Presence]:
"For what reason are you [Moses] afraid of death?
I have decreed it upon all creatures."
Moses grew faint when he heard this thing,
And at once he went to the great [city of] Hebron.
He cried out and summoned Adam from his grave.
"Tell me why you sinned in the Garden,
[Why] you tasted and ate from the tree of Knowledge.
You have given your sons over to weeping and wailing!
The whole garden was before you, yet you were not satisfied.
Oh why did you rebel against the Lord's commandment?"

— *Targumic Tosefta: Alphabetical Acrostic on the Death of Moses,* Oxford-Bodleian 2701/9 p. 64b

When, in the hearing of an humble one [Moses], it was said, "Die!"
He replied to the living God, "Must I?
If I can become Joshua's servant, serving him the same way,
Then I can continue living, being my servant's valet . . .
Oh, what a boon was given on the day that I was told:
Ascend the mountain to Me and stay there . . . [Exod. 24:12].

Likewise, what ill befell me on the day I was told
Ascend the mountain of Abarim and die there" [Deut. 32:49–50].

— Yannai, *Liturgical Poem for Deut. 31:14* (M. Zulay, *Piyyuṭei Yannai* 254–255)

The tradition of Moses' reluctance to obey God's decree may be related to another that held (without any apparent scriptural justification) that Moses wept just before his death:

How extraordinary was this outburst of weeping and wailing of the multitude may be conjectured from what next befell the lawgiver [Moses]. For he, who had ever been persuaded that men should not despond as the end approached, because this fate befell them in accordance with the will of God and by a law of nature, was yet by this conduct of the people reduced to tears. — Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:322

He said to them, "Happy are you, O Israel, who is like you? A people saved by the Lord . . ." [Deut. 33:29], and he went and blessed them and then lifted up his voice and wept . . . He departed from them with great weeping and Israel likewise wept and cried out with a great and bitter cry.

— *Peṭirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.126–127)

The whole congregation stood before him [Moses, as he ascended Mt. Nebo]. And his eyes sent forth tears like flowing rivers, not for himself, but for the congregation. — *Tibat Marqa* 258b

Moses Disputed with an Angel

If Moses was indeed reluctant to die, it occurred to some interpreters that there may have actually been a dispute between him and the angel dispatched to bring about his death (or to take charge of his soul after his death). Moses was, after all, no ordinary individual: he had spoken to God "face to face" (Deut. 34:10), and God had even conferred the title of "God" upon him (see Chapter 17, "A Godlike Man"). How could even an angel tell such a person what to do? Elsewhere the Bible spoke of God "rebuking" Satan (Zech. 3:2); would not Moses have similarly rebuked any angel sent to fetch his soul?

> At that time God ordered the angel of death: Go and bring Moses' soul to Me. Off he went and stood before him [Moses] and said to him: Moses, give me your soul. He said to him: You are not even authorized to stand in the place where I stand, yet you say to me "Give me your soul"? [And thus] he **rebuked** him and he went off shame-faced. — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 305

This tradition may be related to another, in which Satan apparently disputed with the angel Michael at the time of Moses' death:

> But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he [himself, that is, Michael] did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you" [Zech. 3:2]. — Jude 9

> A heavenly voice went forth and said to Moses: "How long will you continue to torture yourself? For you only have two hours left! [That is, accept your fate!]" Now Sammael, chief of the Satans [or "accusers"], was waiting in anticipation for the time when Moses would die, [so that] perhaps he would receive his soul like that of other people; he was waiting like someone expecting great happiness. When Michael, Israel's angel, saw Sammael the wicked angel waiting for Moses' death, he lifted up his voice and wept and Sammael the angel was joyful and laughing. Michael said to him: Wicked one! I am weeping and you are laughing?!
>
> — *Peṭirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.125)

Moses' Last Vision

When Moses finally ascended Mt. Nebo to die, the Bible relates that God showed him the land that was to be given to the people of Israel:

> And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the farthest sea, the Negeb and the Plain, the valley of Jericho the city of palms, as far as Zoar. And the Lord said to him: "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." — Deut. 34:1–4

That Moses could see all this from the top of a mountain, even a very high one, seemed most unlikely. It therefore occurred to more than one interpreter that Moses must in fact have ascended into heaven—or at least gotten close enough to peer inside:

> Then the Lord showed him the land and all the things that are in it and He said: "This is the land which I am giving to my people." And He showed him the place from which the clouds lift up the water for irrigating the whole land, and the place from which the river receives its watering, and the land of Egypt, and the place of the heaven from which the holy land alone drinks. And He showed him the place from which the manna rained down for the people, and as far as the paths [leading to] paradise. And He showed him the measurements of the sanctuary and and the number of the offerings and the signs by which they would begin to chart the skies. And He said: "These things are prohibited to the human race because they have sinned by them . . . As for you, however, I will receive you from there and I will glorify you along with your ancestors [that is, in heaven], and I will give you rest in your sleep and I will bury you with peace."
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:10–12

Given such a heavenly vista, it was certainly possible that Moses was also shown a view of the future, indeed, all of time until its very end:

> Do not read "until the farthest sea" [*'ad hayyām hā'aḥărôn,* Deut. 34:3] but "until the last day" [*'ad hayyôm hā'aḥărôn*]. This teaches that He showed him the whole world from the day of creation until the day when the dead will be brought back to life. — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 357

> [At Mt. Nebo Moses said:] I stand at the level of prophecy and behold the ages [to come] and what will happen in them and what is destined to be.
>
> — *Tibat Marqa* 254b

Buried by God (or the Angels)

When at last Moses' death came to pass, the Bible relates:

> So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth Peor, and no man knows his burial-place to this day.
>
> — Deut. 34:5–6

The phrase "he buried him" is really the biblical Hebrew equivalent of "they buried him" or even "he was buried." That is, an impersonal singular active verb is used—like the impersonal plural active in English, "they buried him"—as a way of saying that a certain action was accomplished without specifying who actually accomplished it. Still, if that is the meaning of "he buried him," then how could it be that "no man knows his burial-place to this day"? Certainly whoever did the burying would not willfully conceal Moses' burial place. And so some interpreters

concluded that this impersonal verb was not impersonal at all: "he buried him" really meant "He buried him," that is, God Himself had buried Moses' body on the mountain but kept its location hidden from the Israelites:

> [God said to Moses:] "As for you, however, I will receive you from there [the earth] and I will glorify you along with your ancestors [that is, in heaven], and I will give you rest in your sleep and I will **bury you** with peace." . . . And He buried him with His own hands on a high place and in the light of the world. — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:12, 16

> God Himself was the one who took care of [burying] him, as it is said, "And He buried him in the valley . . ." [Deut. 34:5]. — m. *Soṭah* 1:9

> He was buried by the hand of God on Mt. Nebo and "no man knows his burial-place until" the day of Vengeance. — *Tibat Marqa* 108a

Still, the idea of God performing a human action such as burial no doubt bothered more than one commentator. It was apparently for that reason that some implied or specifically included the angels in Moses' burial:

> He was buried with no one present, surely by no mortal hands but by **immortal powers.** — Philo, *Moses* 2:291

> The great prophet Moses went up Mt. Nebo in the sight of six hundred thousand Israelites and **all the angels** were arrayed to receive him . . . And he was buried there by God, as it says, "And he buried him in the valley." — *Tibat Marqa* 269a

> He [God] appeared above him [Moses] with His Memra, and legions of ministering angels were with Him; Michael and Gabriel laid out for him a golden couch . . . Metatron and Yophiel and Uriel and Yephephiyah, chiefs of wisdom, laid him upon it, and with His Memra he bore him four miles and buried him in the valley just opposite Beth Peor. — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 34:6

Buried under a Cloud

If God or the angels buried Moses, that still does not explain why his burial place should be unknown "to this day" (Deut. 34:6). Surely people could see at least the general area on Mt. Nebo where the burial took place. Perhaps, then, the true sense of the place being unknown "to this day" was that God had commanded that the location be kept secret (even though it may have been known at the time). That Mt. Nebo had been declared off-limits, a secret hiding place "to this day," may be suggested elsewhere:

> One finds in the records that Jeremiah the prophet . . . having received an oracle [following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple], ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance [that is, the land] of

> God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the incense altar and he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: "**The place shall be unknown** until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear." —2 Macc. 2:1, 4–8

If, however, Moses had indeed been buried by God or the angels, perhaps that fact alone was sufficient to explain why his burial place was unknown: the burial itself must have taken place under cover of a great cloud, just as had God's appearance on Mt. Sinai:

> And while he [Moses] said goodbye to Eleazar and Joshua and was still communing with them, a cloud suddenly descended upon him and he disappeared in a ravine. But he has written of himself in the sacred books that he died, for fear lest they should venture to say that by reason of his surpassing virtue he had gone back to the Deity.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:326

According to Josephus, Moses wrote the end of the Torah *before* his death, and specifically included an account of his own death lest people say that he never died. But Josephus leaves somewhat open the question of what really happened: a divinely sent cloud covered him and took him away. The same cloud is found elsewhere as well:

> At the time when Moses was about to die a luminous cloud surrounded the place of sepulcher and blinded the eyes of the bystanders. Therefore nobody could see either the dying lawgiver or the place where his body was buried.
>
> — *Catena* preserved by Fabricius in his *Codex Pseudoepigraphicus Veteris Testamenti* 2.121–122

> When he [Moses] got to the top of the mountain, a cloud came down and lifted him up from the sight of all the congregation of Israel.
>
> — *Tibat Marqa* 269a

Not Buried at All

Yet another possibility existed. Perhaps no one knew where Moses was buried because his burial at Mt. Nebo was only temporary: his true final resting place was in heaven.[18]

> Some say that Moses never died but is alive and serving on high: for it says here, "And Moses died *there*. . ." [Deut. 34:5] and it says elsewhere that "he [Moses] was *there* with the Lord" [Exod. 34:28]. Just as in this latter case [the

18. This understanding is somewhat akin to the idea mentioned by Josephus above, that some people might claim that Moses "had gone back to the Deity."

> word "there" was used when] he was alive and serving on high, so here as well [this word indicates that] he was alive and serving on high.
>
> —*Midrash ha-Gadol, Zot habberakhah* 4:5

Somewhat similarly:

> And therefore we are told that no man knows his grave. For who has powers such that he could perceive the passing of a perfect soul to Him that Is?
>
> —Philo, *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 10

> "No one knows his burial place to this day"—this you ought to understand in the sense of being borne on high rather than that of burial.
>
> —Ambrose, *On Cain and Abel* 1.2.8

Perhaps, indeed, the remark in Deut. 34:6 about Moses' burial place being unknown was intended to highlight the fact that the "spiritual" Moses was not buried at all:

> Joshua the son of Nun saw a double Moses being taken away, the one with the angels, the other deemed worthy of burial in the ravine.
>
> —Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 6.132.2

> It is said that two Moses were seen, one alive in spirit and the other dead in body.
>
> —Origen, *On Joshua* 2.2

The Supreme Philosopher

"And there never again arose in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom God knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). This is the Bible's closing tribute to Moses. Yet to some interpreters its very wording seemed to suggest a qualification: there never was another *prophet* like Moses, but there may have been other sorts of figures who *were* like Moses. For, certainly, his achievements extended into areas other than prophecy. Perhaps in these other domains Moses was merely one in a series of illustrious figures, to whom he was indeed comparable. This seemed particularly true in the area of philosophy.

> For our lawgiver Moses proclaims arrangements of nature and preparations for great events by expressing that which he wishes to say in many ways, by using words that refer to other matters (I mean matters relating to outward appearances). Therefore, those who are able to think well marvel at his wisdom and at the divine spirit, in accordance with which he has **also** been proclaimed a prophet.[19]
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 2 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8.10.3–4)

19. "Proclaimed a prophet" may be a reference to, specifically, Deut. 34:10. Beyond this, however, what is noteworthy is this passage's somewhat apologetic stance vis-à-vis the title of prophet. Aristobulus seems to be saying that Moses was first and foremost a great thinker who proclaimed "arrangements of nature" and whose wisdom was widely admired. If such is not apparent at first glance, this is because he often used metaphorical language. Similarly, if he was called a prophet, this was more a reflection of the divine spirit inspiring him than of the overall nature of his message.

> This Moses became the teacher of Orpheus. When he reached manhood, he bestowed on humanity many useful contributions, for he invented ships, machines for lifting stones, Egyptian weapons, devices for drawing water and fighting, and **philosophy**.
>
> —Artapanus, Fragment 3 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.4)

> As a general he had **few** to equal him, and as a prophet none, insomuch that in all his utterances one seemed to hear the speech of God Himself.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:329

> "And there never again arose in Israel a prophet like Moses": Among the prophets there never arose [one like him], but among the kings there did, [as it says] "And Koheleth [that is, King Solomon] sought to find pleasing words, rightly written, words of truth" [Eccles. 12:10].
>
> — *Yalqut Shimoni* 966

In general, it is striking that, while the Bible presents Moses as the greatest of the prophets, ancient interpreters frequently described him in other terms, as we have seen: "lawgiver," "king," "high priest," "sage," "interpreter," and "teacher." Perhaps at least part of this shift came about because—as may be implied by the last passage cited—the office of sage or wise man had come to rival or even overlap with that of prophet in later times.[20]

In keeping with this, Hellenistic writers sometimes presented Moses not only as a great thinker, but as one of the *earliest*, from whom later philosophers therefore must have learned much. (Although this is not an exegetical motif per se—that is, it was not specifically connected to Deut. 34:10 or to any other biblical verse—it certainly affected the way some interpreters approached the whole Pentateuch or assessed the significance of Moses' life and work.)

> Among [Moses' admirers] are the philosophers already mentioned and many others, including poets, who took significant material from him and are admired accordingly.
>
> It is evident that Plato imitated our legislation and that he had investigated thoroughly each of the elements in it . . . So it is very clear that [he] took many things [from it]. For he was very learned, as was Pythagoras, who transferred many of our doctrines and integrated them into his own system of beliefs.
>
> It seems to me that Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato with great care follow him [Moses] in all respects. They copy him when they say that they hear the voice of God, when they contemplate the arrangement of the universe, so carefully made and so unceasingly held together by God.
>
> —Aristobulus, Fragment 2.4, 3.1, and 4.4 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8.10.4, 13.12.1, 4)

20. See Chapter 1.

And concerning Moses the same author [Alexander Polyhistor] further adds many things. Of these it is worthwhile to hear the following: "And Eupolemus says that Moses was the **first wise man**, that he first taught the alphabet to the Jews, and the Phoenicians received it from the Jews."

—Eupolemus (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.26.1)

In regard to this, Heracleitus, taking law and opinions from Moses like a thief, says, "we live their death, and we die their life," intimating that the life of the body is the death of the soul. —Philo, *Questions in Genesis* 4.152

And therefore it seems that some Greek legislators did well when they copied from the most sacred tables of Moses the proposition that hearing is not accepted as evidence, meaning that what a man has seen is to be judged trustworthy, but what he has heard is not entirely reliable.

—Philo, *Special Laws* 4:61

He [Moses] represented Him as One, uncreated and immutable to all eternity; in beauty surpassing all mortal thought; made known to us by His power, although the nature of His real being passes knowledge. That the wisest of the Greeks learned to adopt these conceptions of God from principles with which Moses supplied them I am not now concerned to urge; but they have borne abundant witness to the excellence of these doctrines, and to their consonance with the nature and majesty of God. In fact, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, and the Stoics who succeeded him, and indeed nearly all the philosophers appear to have held similar views concerning the nature of God.

In two points, in particular, Plato **followed the example of our lawgiver:** He prescribed the primary duty of the citizens a study of their laws, which they must all learn word for word by heart. Again, he took precautions to prevent foreigners from mixing with them at random, and to keep the state pure and confined to law-abiding citizens.

Our **earliest imitators** were the Greek philosophers, who, though ostensibly observing the laws of their own countries, yet in their conduct and philosophy were Moses' disciples, holding similar views about God and advocating the simple life and friendly communion between man and man.

—Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:168, 257, 281

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In short: Among the things taught by Moses in his final address was the great teaching of the Shema, which Israel was to recite each morning and evening. Moses also spoke of numerous laws, including the prohibition of displacing old boundary-marks, by which were meant ancient practices. The procedure for divorce was likewise spelled out, along with the proper grounds for undertaking it. The law about not muzzling an ox really referred to human beings. In general, apparently small commandments in the Torah were to be observed as carefully as the great ones, since the Torah had been given as a single whole for the purpose of refining those who observe it and turning their hearts to the service of God. In this sense it was a great gift that God had given Israel, and it was now in Israel's hands to determine its application. Moses thus urged the people to "choose life," by which he meant that each individual should choose the "path of life," which would ultimately lead to rejoicing in the world to come. In his farewell song, Moses reminded the people that heaven and earth had heard their acceptance of the Torah at Mt. Sinai and told them of things to come.

When he was summoned by God to die, Moses pleaded to be allowed to continue living, but at last he ascended Mt. Nebo as God had commanded. From there he entered into heaven, or close to heaven, to contemplate not only all the land but future history as well. After his death, Moses was buried by God Himself or the angels. He was not only the greatest prophet, but the supreme philosopher and teacher, from whom the Jews and, indeed, all peoples had learned the truth about God and human life.

Other Readings and Additional Notes
for The Life of Torah

The Great Teaching: It is difficult to determine exactly when Deut. 6:4ff. came to be singled out as an especially important or epitomizing teaching. Impressive is the argument from silence found in the book of *Jubilees.* As was seen earlier (Chapter 22, "The Whole Torah"), the author of this text undoubtedly knew the tradition that held Lev. 19:18 as a great and central teaching of the Torah. All the more striking, then, is the fact that he fails to allude clearly to Deut. 6:4–5 in any of the "summation speeches" in which allusions to Lev. 19:18 appear—or anywhere else! True, he comes close sometimes:

> [Abraham says:] I solemnly warn you, my sons, **love the God of heaven** and hold fast to all of His commandments . . . Do not worship [other gods] and do not bow down to them, but worship the Most High God and bow down to Him continually . . . so that He might be pleased with you and grant you mercy and bring down rain for you morning and evening and bless all your works. — *Jubilees* 20:7–9

> [Isaac says to his sons Jacob and Esau:] And I am commanding this, my sons, that you might do what is right and just upon the earth, so that the Lord will bring that which the Lord said that He would do for Abraham and for his seed. And among yourselves, my sons, be loving of your brothers as a man loves himself, with each man seeking for his brother what is good for him, and acting together on the earth. May they love one another as themselves . . . And now I will make you swear by the great oath . . . that you will **fear Him and worship Him,** and that each one will love his brother with compassion and righteousness, and that neither will desire evil for his brother from now and forever all the days of your lives.
>
> — *Jubilees* 36:3–4, 7–8

But it is precisely such passages as these that suggest that the author of *Jubilees* did *not* hold Deut. 6:4 as a central statement of belief. For, how difficult would it have been, in the first of the two passages cited, for him to add the words "with all your heart" and so forth immediately after the exhortation to love God, and so make clear that, here as elsewhere, Abraham was passing along a teaching later to be given by God to Moses for promulgation? And would not the author of *Jubilees* have had the "great oath" required by Isaac of his sons speak not of *fearing* or *worshiping* God, but of *loving* Him, if Deut. 6:4–5 were somehow central to his religion? It thus seems to me most unlikely that this passage had any central role in the late third or early second century B.C.E. Indeed, the same silence on the subject characterizes the writing of other interpreters, notably Ben Sira. The reference to the oneness of God, as we saw, in an ancient Greek poem

> There is an ancient saying about Him:
> "He is one"—self-completing, and all things completed by Him,

> In them He Himself circulates. But no one has seen Him
> With the souls that mortals have, He is seen by the mind.
> — Aristobulus, Fragment 4 (cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.5)

is hardly to be taken as an allusion to Deut. 6:5 in particular, but instead recalls a doctrine for which Israel was justly famous in the Greco-Roman world. What *is* significant about the above passage, however, is that its opening line, "There is an ancient saying about Him," apparently was not found in the earliest extant version of this pseudo-Orphic verse. If it was added at some later date, does not this revision signal a change, a point at which Deut. 6:4 had become so famous that *any* statement resembling it had to, as it were, be connected with this "ancient saying" of Hebrew Scripture? (See further Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* vol. 4.)

However, this observation hardly tells us when that point occurred, the time by which Deut. 6:4ff. had become a central piece of doctrine and (a slightly different matter) its recitation had become a daily and central affirmation of faith. The latter certainly seems to underlie *Letter of Aristeas* 160 (cited earlier):

> He also commands that "on going to bed and rising" men should meditate on the ordinances of God. — *Letter of Aristeas* 158–160

There is no similar assertion in the writings of Philo, a fact that has caused more than one scholar to assert that this commandment was not known to him. See also Knohl, "A Parashah concerned with Accepting the Kingdom of Heaven"; Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief,* 195, and the rejoinder in Mendelson, "Did Philo Say the Shema?" Naomi Cohen has argued for a reflection of the Shema in Philo: "The Jewish Dimension of Philo's Judaism." Beyond these, is there not perhaps a hint elsewhere that Philo knew that Lev. 19:18 had a complement elsewhere in Scripture concerning fealty to God?

> But among the vast number of particular truths and principles studied, two, one might almost say, stand out higher than all the rest, that of [relating] to God through piety and holiness, and that of [relating] to fellow men through a love of mankind and of righteousness. — Philo, *Special Laws* 2:63

No Redundancy in the Great Teaching: Ancient interpreters assumed that Scripture was fundamentally perfect, containing nothing unnecessary or repetitious (see Chapter 1). If this was the case with Scripture in general, it certainly must have held true for the Shema, that "great teaching" which was held up as the epitome of Israelite belief. And yet . . .

> Why does it say, "The Lord is our God" [and then repeat the divine name a second time,] "the Lord alone"? . . . "The Lord is our God" means He is God over us, and "the Lord alone" means over all peoples. [Alternately:] "The Lord is our God" in this world, "the Lord alone" in the world to come.
> — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 31

Not surprisingly, there was among Christians a trinitarian answer to the same question:

> For this Trinity is one God, not that the Father is the same as the Son and the Holy Spirit, but that the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit, and that this trinity is one God, as it is written, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."[21]
>
> —Augustine, *On Faith and Creed* 9.16

Similarly, the commandment to love God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5) invited interpreters to explain the differences intended here. "With all your soul" seemed to mean "even at the cost of your very life," since "soul" in Hebrew often refers to the breath of life. But if so, what of "with all your might"—surely a call to give up one's life for the love of God should not be followed by *anything,* since a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice presupposes a willingness to make lesser ones.[22]

> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your strength" [≅ Deut. 6:5]. Now *strength* is your worldly substance.
>
> —*Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 9

> Rabbi Akiba said: If the verse says "with all your soul" then certainly this must include "all your might" too—why then should these words ["all your might," *bĕkol mĕ'ōdekā*] be added? It means: with whatever measuring-cup He measures out to you, whether good measure or ill, be thankful [*môdeh*] to Him for all. So similarly David says [in Ps. 116:13], "If I lift up the cup of triumph, then I call on the name of the Lord." [Yet in the same psalm it says,] "Should I find pain and sorrow, then I call on the name of the Lord" [vv. 3–4]. Similarly in the book of Job it says, "Whether the Lord gives or the Lord takes, let the name of Lord be blessed" [Job 1:21] . . . Thus "with all your might" means "[in all things] be thankful [*môdeh*] to Him."
>
> —*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 32

A well-known story in the Babylonian Talmud connects the same R. Akiba with another aspect of the Shema's interpretation:

> When the Romans brought Rabbi Akiba to be executed it was the time for the recital of the Shema, and as they tortured him with combs of iron, he nonetheless accepted the yoke of Heaven upon himself [by reciting the Shema]. Then his disciples said to him: "Rabbi, thus far?!" He replied: "All my life I have been troubled by the verse that says, 'And you shall love the Lord your God . . . with your whole soul' [which is explained to mean] 'even

21. Apparently, the threefold sequence "Lord . . . God . . . Lord" in Deut. 6:4 suggests the Trinity here.

22. Some suggested that "with all your might" might indeed mean "at any [worldly] expense"; if so, it was mentioned *after* "with all your soul" to cover the case of one to whom worldly possessions were more important than life itself (*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 32).

> if He take away your life.' I always wondered whether it would be given to me to fulfill this commandment; and now that I am given the chance, shall I not fulfill it?" He was drawing out the word *alone* when his spirit departed.
>
> —b. *Berakhot* 61b

Bind Them on Your Arm and Head: It was mentioned that the words of Deut. 6:8, "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be a frontlet between your eyes" were understood as a commandment to bind *these very words* on the arm and head. This interpretation stands behind the existence of *tefillin* or "phylacteries," a pair of small black boxes containing scriptural passages and worn by Jews at certain prayers and other times. (The *tefillin* are fastened to the upper arm and forehead by means of black leather straps.) In fact, the Pentateuch mentions this "sign" in several places—Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8, 11:18—and the paragraphs in which these verses occur are those traditionally enclosed in the *tefillin*. *Tefillin* are mentioned in the New Testament (Matt. 23:5) and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 4:213, cited above) as well as in an older passage cited earlier:

> He also strictly commands that the sign shall be **worn on our hands,** clearly indicating that it is our duty to fulfill every activity with justice, having in mind our own condition, and above all the fear of God.
>
> — *Letter of Aristeas* 158–160

(Note, however, that only the arm *tefillin* are mentioned here.) Ancient *tefillin* have also been found at Qumran and Murabba'at, confirming the antiquity of this practice: see Haberman, "Phylacteries in Antiquity"; Yadin, "Tefillin (Phylacteries) from Qumran"; Tigay, "On the Term Phylacteries (Matt. 23:5)."

Others, however, did not interpret "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand" and the other passages in such concrete fashion. The Samaritans, notably, took this mention of a sign upon the hand to be a general exhortation to moderation, especially in actions involving the hand, while "and they shall be a frontlet between your eyes" was understood as an exhortation to learning, specifically, "the duty to study the Hebrew language." See further Lowy, *Samaritan Bible Exegesis,* 308.

A Particular Prophet: On this topic see also (1Q28a) *Rule of the Congregation* 2:11–12; *Testament of Levi* 8:15. Note that (4Q175) *Testimonia* begins with the citation of Deut. 5:28–29 and 18:18–19, followed by Num. 24:15–17. Since the last passage was widely taken as a prediction concerning the Messiah (see Chapter 24, "Balaam Foresaw the Messiah"), it seems likely that Deut. 18:18–19 was here juxtaposed because it was also associated with the coming of the Messiah. In the *Samaritan Pentateuch,* the Decalogue is immediately followed by a pastiche of Deut. 27:2–7 and other verses (apparently because of their geographic connection with Samaria). This pastiche is followed by another, incorporating Deut. 18:18–19. The connection of this passage with Samaritan messianic *Taheb* (apparently meaning "the restorer" or the "one who returns") has been explored by numerous scholars, among them Haran, "The Conception of the 'Taheb' in the Samaritan Religion"; Kippenberg,

Garizim und Synagogue, 276–312; Dexinger, "Der Prophet 'Wie Mose' in Qumran und bei der Samaritanern." On the passage in *Targum Neophyti* Exod. 12:42, see Le Déaut, *La Nuit pascale.* On the "prophet" in John 7:40–41 and the Bethlehem connection in Mic. 5:1–3, see De Jonge, "Jewish Expectations about the 'Messiah' according to the Fourth Gospel." On the Deuteronomy passage itself, see Chiesa, "La Promessa di Una Profeta."

Do Not Displace Old Practices: The metaphorical understanding of Deut. 19:14 was hardly universal: some texts take it at face value, simply one law among many that attest to Israel's concern for justice:

> But they [the Jews] care for righteousness and virtue
> and not love of money, which begets innumerable evils
> for mortal men, war, and limitless famine.
> They have just measurements in fields and cities
> and they do not carry out robberies at night against each other
> nor drive off herds of oxen, sheep, or goats, **nor does neighbor move the boundaries of neighbor,**
> nor does a very rich man grieve a lesser man,
> nor oppress widows in any respect, but rather helps them,
> always going to their aid with grain, wine, and oil.
> Always a prosperous man among the people gives a share
> of the harvest to those who have nothing, but are poor,
> fulfilling the word of the great God, the hymn of the law,
> for the Heavenly One gave the earth in common to all.
>
> — *Sibylline Oracles* 3:234–247

It is not clear if the same prohibition is cited in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* in its "metaphorical" or literal senses:

> With every man in pain I joined in lament, and with a poor man I shared my bread, I did not eat alone. **I did not move any boundary-mark.** I did deeds of piety and truth all my days. I loved the Lord with all my might; in the same fashion, I also loved every man as my own children.
>
> — *Testament of Issachar* 7:5–6

The "metaphorical" sense is also intended in the recently published fragment 4Q266, fragment 1:4.

With regard to the reference to *uprooting* boundary-marks in *Damascus Document* 1:16, it seems the spelling *wlsy'* reflects the same text tradition underlying Deut. 19:14 in the Septuagint (although the Septuagint translators apparently misunderstood the meaning of the word): see Rofe, "Qumran Paraphrases, the Greek Deuteronomy, and the Late History of the Biblical *Nāsî.*" Menahem Kister has (to my mind, rightly) suggested that the allusion to Deut. 19:14 in the Qumran writings cited is polemical, an apparent attempt to turn a verse long used by the Pharisees in defense of their own, orally transmitted customs into a witness for the prosecution: Kister, "Some Aspects of Qumran Halakhah," 573–576. See also, Cohen, "The Jewish

Dimension of Philo's Judaism," and Chapter 20, *OR,* "Moses Was Given More Than the Torah." In m. *Pe'ah* 5:6, the reference seems to be to Prov. 23:10, specifically the continuation of the verse "Do not displace an ancient boundary-mark *nor enter into the fields of orphans,*" the latter phrase being interpreted as "gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and corners of fields" (Rashi). Finally, it is to be noted that the condemnation of moving boundary stones is likewise found elsewhere in the ancient Near East as well as in Plato, *Laws* 842e-843b.

With regard to Deut. 19:14, it is noteworthy that this verse has long been confused with Prov. 22:28. Thus, while Codex Alexandrinus reads "earlier ones" or "forebears" in keeping with the *ri'šōnîm* of the traditional Hebrew text, other Septuagint texts read "fathers," the word used in Prov. 22:28. So too in Philo, while *Special Laws* 4:149 speaks of "forebears," *Posterity and Exile of Cain* 89 reads "fathers." Moreover, the latter passage seems to presume *gĕbûl 'ôlām* of Prov. 22:28, since it asserts that

> These boundaries were fixed not by the creation to which we belong, but on principles which are divine and are older than we and all that belongs to earth. —Philo, *Posterity and Exile of Cain* 89

See further Cohen, "*'Al Taseg Gevul 'Olim* (Peah 5:6, 7:3)."

Crucified on a Tree: One of the laws in Deuteronomy was to prove particularly significant for Jews in the Second Temple period:

> And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain the night upon the tree, but you shall bury him on that day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance. —Deut. 21:22–23

The sequence of events described here is at least potentially ambiguous. According to later Jewish practice, execution by hanging or crucifixion was not authorized; the above text therefore was understood to be talking about hanging (that is, displaying) the body after execution had already taken place.

However, one of the texts found at Qumran seems to understand this law as indeed referring to a form of execution, one that was to be used only in certain specified cases:

> If it happens that a man informs against his people and betrays his people to a foreign nation and wrongs his people, then you shall hang him on the tree and [= so that] he shall die. By the testimony of two witnesses or of three witnesses he shall be killed and they shall be the ones to hang him [on] the tree. And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and flees to the nations and curses his people, the sons of Israel, then you shall hang him as well on the tree and he shall die. Do not let their bodies remain the night upon the tree but you shall bury them the same day, for of the

> accursed by God and men is one who is hanged on the tree, and you shall not pollute the earth which I give to you as an inheritance.
>
> —(11Q) *Temple Scroll* 64:6–13

Yigael Yadin, the modern scholar who first published the *Temple Scroll,* was of the opinion that the above passage indicated that the author of the scroll saw "hanging on the tree" (almost certainly crucifixion) as a fit punishment for the most dishonorable crimes, those of political traitors; see his "Pesher Nahum Reconsidered," 1–12. If so, then the somewhat ambiguous phrase of Deut. 21:23, "for a hanged man is accursed of God," was apparently interpreted by the author of the *Temple Scroll* as meaning "for it is [only] the accursed by God who is to be hanged," or, in the *Temple Scroll*'s words, "for of the accursed by God and men is one who is hanged on the tree." See also Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World,* 84–85. Early Christian references to Jesus being "hanged upon a tree" may consciously be alluding to this law's wording; see Acts 5:30, "Jesus whom you killed by hanging on a tree"; also Acts 10:39, Gal. 3:13. Note also that Mark 15:42–44 says that Jesus had to be taken down *because evening had come;* compare John 19:31–33. On *Temple Scroll* 64:6–13 and related passages there is an extensive scholarly literature: inter alia Baumgarten, "Does TLH in the *Temple Scroll* Refer to Crucifixion?"; idem, "Hanging and Treason in Qumran and Roman Law"; Wilcox, "Upon the Tree—Dt. 21:22–23 in the New Testament"; Fitzmyer, "Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament"; Rosso, "Deut. 21:22: Contributo del Rotolo del Tempio alla Valutazione di una Variante Medievale dei Settanta"; Halperin, "Crucifixion, the Nahum Pesher, and the Rabbinic Penalty of Strangulation."

As M. J. Bernstein has extensively documented ("Deut. 21:23: A Study in Early Jewish Exegesis"), the phrase translated above "accursed of God"—more literally "a curse of God"—is potentially ambiguous. It can mean an act of cursing God (such an understanding construes the phrase as what is called in classical grammars the "objective genitive," that is, God is the object of the cursing), or it can mean *God's* cursing of someone or something ("subjective genitive," since God is the subject, the one who curses). Both senses are widely attested:

> For cursed by God is everyone who is hanged on a tree.
>
> —Septuagint Deut. 21:23

> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a **curse for us**—for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree."
>
> —Gal. 3:13

> For cursed "before" [= "by"] God is everyone who is hanged.
>
> —*Targum Neophyti* Deut. 21:23

> For cursed by God is he who hangs in a tree. —(Vulgate) Deut. 21:23

> For on account of blasphemy [that is, the "cursing"] of God was he hanged.
>
> —Symmachus Deut. 21:23

> For a despiser of the glory of the Lord's Presence is the hanged one.
> — *Targum Neophyti* (marginal gloss) Deut. 21:23

> For he who blasphemes God is hanged. — Peshitta Deut. 21:23

> . . . since he cursed the divine name and as a result God's name was profaned. — m. *Sanhedrin* 6:4

> For it is a curse before [that is, "of"] God to hang a man.
> — *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 21:23

> R. Meir said: How can one explain the phrase "a curse of the Lord . . ."? This is comparable to the case of two twin brothers who resembled each other: one was king over the whole world while the other went off and became a robber. After a time the one who had become a robber was caught and they crucified him, and every passerby would say, "It looks as if the king has been crucified." Hence it says, "one who is hanged is a curse of the Lord" [that is, he "curses" God and brings His image into ill esteem, since humans were all created in the divine image]. — Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 9:7

Bernstein further suggests that the *Temple Scroll* text may be seeking to synthesize Deut. 21:23 with Exod. 22:27. Further examples of rabbinic interpretations in both the "objective" and "subjective" genitive senses are adduced by Maori, *The Peshitta Version*, 194–201. For the connection of Deut. 21:23 with Deut. 28:66, see Daniélou, *Études d'exégèse judéo-chrétienne*, 53–75.

Necessary Paperwork: Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, marriage contracts were commonplace, but they do not appear in the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible: the earliest mention of them in Jewish literature is in the book of Tobit 7:13. (To be sure, Jewish marriage contracts have been found at Elephantine and at Murabba'at, but the former betray Egyptian, or possibly Babylonian, influence, while the latter belong to a relatively late period.) Daniella Piattelli has argued that in biblical times Jews apparently felt no need to safeguard the property rights of the woman by means of a marriage contract; instead, a document was required only in case of divorce—the "bill of divorce"—which allowed the woman to leave the home with a dowry through which she might contract a new marriage. In contrast, there is no correspondent to the "bill of divorce" in the Code of Hammurabi or the Laws of Eshnunna. See further Piattelli, "The Marriage Contract and Bill of Divorce in Ancient Hebrew Law." Note that the phrase "bill of divorce" in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut. 24:1 is the same phrase as that used in *P. Murabba'at* 19 *(spr tyrwkyn)*, whereas *Targum Onqelos* reads *gṭ pyṭwryn;* both phrases appear in m. *Giṭṭin* 9:3.

No Divorce—Except for Indecency: On the New Testament material, see in general Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1:312–321; Schneider, "Jesu Wort über die Ehescheidung"; Berger, *Gesetzauslegung Jesu*, 512–520; Catchpole, "The Synoptic Divorce Material." Various interpretations have been advanced

for the phrase "except for a case of unchastity [*porneia*]" in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9. See Bonsirven, *Le divorce dans le Nouveau Testament;* Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence"; the equation of it here with, specifically, what is called in rabbinic writings *gillui 'arayot* seems to me unjustified: see Lövestam, "Divorce and Remarriage in the New Testament." On the *Temple Scroll* passage, see Yadin, *Temple Scroll,* 1:237, who takes this passage as forbidding divorce. On the text of m. *Gittin* 9:10, see Albeck, *Shisha Sidre Mishnah* 3:409–410. On the Philo passage, see Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law,* 229–231.

Can a Wife Divorce Her Husband? Most of the texts cited seem to share the presumption that a man can divorce his wife but a wife cannot divorce her husband. This is quite in keeping with rabbinic *halakhah:*

> The man who is divorcing is not like the woman who is being divorced, for while a woman can be divorced with her approval or without it, a man divorces only if he approves. —m. *Yebamot* 14:1

In Greek and Roman law, on the contrary, either partner may divorce the other, and this appears to be presumed not only in 1 Cor. 7:10–11 (cited earlier), but in the Markan parallel to Matt. 19:3–9:

> And the Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife . . ." [etc.]. And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; **and if she divorces her husband** and marries another, she commits adultery." —Mark 10:2, 10–12

Elsewhere, Josephus recounts:

> Some time afterwards Salome had occasion to quarrel with Costobarus and soon sent him a document dissolving their marriage, which is **not in accordance with Jewish law.** For it is the man who is permitted by us to do this, and not even a divorced woman may marry again on her own initiative unless her former husband consents. Salome, however, did not choose to follow her country's law. —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15:259

The Elephantine marriage contracts similarly show that the wife or husband has the right to dissolve the marriage. See further Rabello, "Divorce of Jews in the Roman Empire."

Were the Laws Really Divine? When ancient interpreters considered the laws of Deuteronomy as a whole, they were struck by a larger question, "interpretive" in the broadest sense: Did these laws come from God or from Moses? On this point the Bible was not entirely consistent. On the one hand, Moses speaks most of the book of Deuteronomy in the first person—unlike the previous books, which are given in the third person and attributed directly to God. In Deuteronomy Moses refers repeatedly to the "statutes and the ordinances *which I am teaching you*"

(Deut. 4:1) or the "commandments which *I command you* this day" (Deut. 8:1, 27:1, and so on). When he begins to impart the laws in sequence, he says:

> These are the statutes and ordinances which you shall be careful to do in the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live upon the earth. —Deut. 12:1

Here is no reference to Moses' having learned the laws from God—though it would have been easy enough for him to say so. God is indeed mentioned in this sentence, but as the one who gave Israel its *land,* not the laws that are to follow.

What is more, there were slight differences between the laws presented earlier in Exodus or Leviticus or Numbers and the version of some of these same laws presented in Deuteronomy.

> [God said to Moses:] "You shall have [for the Passover sacrifice] a young male animal, without blemish; you shall take it **from the sheep or from the goats** . . . And they [the Israelites] will eat the meat on that night, **roasted in fire.** Do not eat any of it raw or **boiled in water, but roasted,** its head with its legs and inner parts." —Exod. 12:5, 8–9

> [Moses said:] "And you shall sacrifice the Passover [sacrifice] to the Lord your God, **from the flocks or the herds** . . . and you shall **boil it** and eat it."[23] —Deut. 16:2, 7

> [God said to Moses:] "Now these are the ordinances which you shall set before them [the Israelites]. When you buy a [male] Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years, and in the seventh year he shall go out free, for nothing . . . When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as [that is, under the same conditions as] the male slaves do." —Exod. 21:1–2, 7

> [Moses said:] When your Hebrew brother **or sister** is sold to you [as a slave], he [or she] will serve you for six years, and in the seventh year you shall release him [or her] for free. —Deut. 15:12

Was God giving the same law in two different versions—differences that were surely not, as the above cases illustrate, merely a matter of style? Or—so it seemed to some—was the Deuteronomy version Moses' own, so that the differences contained within it constituted Moses' own *interpretation* or elaboration of the original law? If the latter, then it certainly was proper to think of him not only as the human being through whom God's laws were originally communicated, but as an *interpreter* in his own right:[24]

23. The term "herds" might seem to imply that cattle could also be used for this sacrifice. The word translated as "boil" certainly seems to contradict Exod. 12:8–9, though it might mean "boiled [that is, "cooked"] in fire," as is stated in 2 Chron. 35:13.

24. Artapanus asserts that Moses "was called Hermes because of his ability to interpret the sacred writings" (Fragment 3 in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27.6), but the mention of interpretation here seems designed to justify the identification with Hermes rather than vice versa. See further Holladay, *Fragments* 1.234 n. 55.

> I propose to write the life of Moses, whom some describe as the lawgiver [*nomothetēs*] of the Jews, others as the **interpreter** of the holy laws.
>
> —Philo, *Life of Moses* 1:1

Moreover, quite apart from new versions of previously given laws, Moses also ended up presenting many laws that were altogether new. Interpreters necessarily wondered why these laws, which had apparently not been given to Moses at Mt. Sinai, were now mingled together with laws that had been given there. If God had given Moses a new revelation of laws before his death, why were not these laws being presented separately as a revelation unto itself? Considering all such factors together, an ordinary reader might indeed conclude that at least some of the laws being presented by Moses in his final address to the people were laws or interpretations of his own devising rather than laws dictated exactly by God.

On the other hand, elsewhere in his closing address Moses states that the laws imparted were indeed from God:

> Therefore you shall keep **His** statutes and **His** commandments which I command you this day. —Deut. 4:40

> Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances, which **the Lord your God commanded me** to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it. —Deut. 6:1

> And if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all **His** commandments which I command you this day . . . —Deut. 28:1

> These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which he had made with them at Horeb. —Deut. 28:69 (some books, 29:1)[25]

In short, the signals given by the Bible itself were open to different interpretations. What is more, many writers—especially those steeped in Greco-Roman culture—were in any case reluctant to speak of the Jews' laws in general as *divine.* After all, in other societies the making of laws was viewed as a strictly human function. For this reason, and for all the others mentioned, a number of ancient writers expressed doubt, or showed an awareness of others' doubts, concerning the laws' divine origins:

> [Moses] did not fabricate any image of the gods because **he believed** that God was not anthropomorphic . . . **He** established sacrifices and a way of living different from those of other nations . . .
>
> It is [the Jewish high priest], we are told, who in their assemblies and other gatherings announces what is ordained, and the Jews are so docile in such matters that straightaway they fall to the ground and do reverence to

25. This difference in numbering reflects a particularly interesting question for our overall subject, for if the verse cited is the last verse of chapter 28, then the implication is that *what precedes it* constitutes the "words of the covenant," whereas if the verse is the first of chapter 29, then it could conceivably refer only to the material presented after it.

> the high priest when he expounds the commandments to them. And at the end of their laws there is **even** appended the statement: "These are the words that Moses heard from God and declared to the Jews."
>
> —Hecataeus of Abdera, in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40:3

> We, O Antiochus, who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law, think that there is no compulsion more powerful than our obedience to the law . . . Even if, as you suppose, our law were not truly divine and we had wrongly held it to be divine, not even so would it be right for us to invalidate our reputation for piety. —4 Macc. 5:16–17

> Do not take the contemptible view that **Moses enacted** this legislation because of an excessive preoccupation with mice or weasels or suchlike creatures. The fact is that everything has been solemnly set in order for unblemished investigation and amendment of life for the sake of righteousness. —*Letter of Aristeas* 146

> And so that law-giving [= of the Torah], **being believed to come from God,** has caused this man to be ranked higher than his own [human] nature.
>
> —Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:320

> At the very moment when leading men assume absolute and despotic power and accustom their subjects to a life of extreme lawlessness, he [Moses], on the contrary, having reached the commanding position, considered it incumbent on himself to live piously and to provide for his people an abundance of good laws, in the belief that this was the best means of insuring the lasting welfare of those who had made him their leader. With such noble aspirations and such a record of successful achievements, he had good reason for thinking that he had God for his guide and counsellor. **Having thus first persuaded himself** that God's will governed all his actions and all his thoughts, he regarded it as his primary duty to impress that idea upon the community; for to those who believe that their lives are under the eye of God all sin is intolerable. Such was our lawgiver: **no charlatan or imposter,** as slanderers unjustly call him, but one such as the Greeks boast of having had in Minos and later lawgivers. —Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:15–60

See also Gager, *Moses,* esp. 88–89 (on Galen). It is interesting, in this connection, that among the sins committed by various tribes in the time of Kenaz, according to Pseudo-Philo, was that of the tribe of Benjamin:

> [The people of Benjamin said:] "We wished in that time to look very carefully at the book of the Torah, [to see] whether God had really written the things that are in it, or whether Moses had taught them on his own."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 25:13

Of course, the opposite side of this argument is also well attested, so much so that only a few of those ancient texts that presume or specifically assert the divine origin of all the laws can be mentioned here. Thus, for example, the Septuagint version of the end of Deuteronomy interprets a somewhat ambiguous phrase to

mean that the Torah *(nomos)* commanded by Moses (presumably all of it) had come from God:

> And **he received from His words** the law which Moses commanded us, and inheritance to the assemblies of Jacob. —Septuagint Deut. 33:3–4

At roughly the same time, the book of *Jubilees* was asserting that the laws of the Pentateuch, indeed, apparently *all* of Scripture, as well as practices and interpretations not specifically contained in Scripture, had been written on the "heavenly tablets" long before (see Chapter 20, "A Book before Moses"; also, Garcia Martinez, "Las Tablas Celestes en el Libro de los Jubileos"). The whole theme of the preexistence of Wisdom or Torah attested in numerous early sources (Chapter 2, "Wisdom Came First") similarly presumes the divine origin of everything that is contained therein.

A more local and specific grappling with the issue is to be found in the *Temple Scroll.* This text, as seen earlier (Chapter 20) of course asserts that the laws that Moses was to promulgate came from God:

> [God says to Moses:] "Let them not become unclean in these things which **I am commanding** you upon this mountain." — *Temple Scroll* 51:6–7

But it went further, restating in the first person laws from the Pentateuch that contain third-person references to God. Thus:

> You will do what is good and proper in the eyes of the Lord your God. —Deut. 12:28

> You will do what is good and proper **before Me; I am** the Lord your God. — *Temple Scroll* 53:8

Is it not possible that such changes were polemically addressed to those who used Moses' first-person references in Deuteronomy in order to claim that *its* laws, at least, were Moses' own invention? See further Wilson and Wills, "Literary Sources of the *Temple Scroll*," 275–288; Weinfeld, "God versus Moses in the Temple Scroll," 175–180. Similarly, another text from Qumran freely rewrote Moses' words in Deut. 1:10–12 apparently so as to stress that the laws of Deuteronomy were indeed divinely given:

> Forty [years] have passed [from] the time of our going out of the land of [Egypt, and] today God, our G[od has uttered these wo]rds **from His mouth,** all His laws and all His [commandments]. —(1Q22) *Sayings of Moses* 2:6

Noteworthy in the same connection is Pseudo-Philo's description of Moses' last days:

> Then he began to make known to them the words of the law [= *dibrê tôrāh*] which God had spoken to them in Horeb. And he spoke to them, saying, "Behold I am going to sleep with my fathers." —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:1–2

In so saying, this text may simply be alluding to the fact that, in his final address, Moses covered again some of the material first revealed at Sinai or Horeb. But it may be that Pseudo-Philo seeks thereby to assimilate all of Deuteronomy's laws to the Sinai revelation, or to assert that in Moses' last address he "began to make known" *(cepit manifestare)* in the sense of *explain* or *clarify* what had been revealed earlier.

Torah Refines (Like Fire): It may be that the same motif is found in a Qumran text:

> "The utterances of the Lord are pure utterances, silver refined in a furnace on the ground" [Ps. 12:7 (some texts, 6)] . . . The interpretation of the word concerns purifying the hearts of the men of [the community . . .] in the last days. —(4Q177) *Catena*^{a}2

This text does not quite specify that it is the Torah that will purify the hearts of men in the last days, but the Psalms verse cited does speak of the "utterances of the Lord," presumably the Torah, as pure and—by the same grammatical ambiguity seen elsewhere—refining. What is more, the continuation of this text seems to suggest that it is specifically by matters of biblical interpretation that the community will be threatened and "refined."

Adam's Choice: The theme of the two paths or "ways" in life was attested in Sir. 15:14–17. In an insightful article ("The Two Ways and the Palestinian Targum," to which I am indebted for my entire discussion of the "two paths" theme), Sebastian Brock has pointed out that this passage in Ben Sira begins with an evocation of the creation of man:

> In the beginning God created man, but He put him in a despoiler's hands, He gave him over to his own inclination. —Sir. 15:14

Underlying this verse seems to be the notion that if indeed such an elemental choice between *two paths* exists for each individual, then it must have been presented first to Adam in the Garden of Eden. Such an idea occurs elsewhere as well:

> [God says:] And I gave him [Adam] his free will and I pointed out to him the two paths, light and darkness. And I said to him, "This is good for you, but that is bad," so that I might come to know whether he has love toward me or abhorrence, and so that it might become plain who among his race loves me. —*2 Enoch* (J) 30:15

> R. Akiba . . . said: [Gen. 3:22 means] that God put before him [Adam] two paths, life and death, and he chose the wrong one.
> — *Genesis Rabba* 21:5 (somewhat less explicitly, *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael Bešallaḥ* 6)

See also (by inference) Philo, *The Unchangeableness of God* 50 (cited earlier); Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1:44:1, as well as the discussion of (4Q473) *Two Ways* in Brooke, *DJD* 22, 289–294. As for Ben Sira's evocation of humanity's "inclination" to evil, the

theme of this inclination, indeed, of the two inclinations in humanity, likewise came to be connected to Deut. 30:15, 19 and has been much discussed in the light of the "two spirits" passage in (1QS) *Community Rule* 3:18–4:26. See further (inter alia) Murphy, "*Yeṣer* in Qumran Literature"; Seitz, "Two Spirits in Man"; Wernberg-Møller, "A Reconsideration of the Two Spirits in 1QS 3:13–4:26"; Charlesworth, *John and Qumran,* 76–89; Philonenko, "Philon d'Alexandrie et l'Instruction sur les Deux Esprits." The two spirits appear in *Testament of Judah* 20; cf. 1 John 4:6. Many scholars have also commented on the similarity between the *Community Rule's* mention of the "ways of light" and "ways of darkness" (3.20–21) and the presentation of the two paths as, specifically, those of light and darkness in *Doctrina Apostolorum* 1, *Letter of Barnabas* 18:1, and *2 Enoch* (J) 30:15. See also Flusser and Safrai, "Das Aposteldekret und die Noachitischen Gebote," and Brock, "The Two Ways," for further references. Finally, it should be observed that one ancient author was bothered by Moses' evocation of heaven and earth in Deut. 30:19, since this sounded like a strange way to adjure the Israelites, perhaps even like a vain oath. The reason, however, was that at the time Moses was acutely aware of his own mortality:

> [An angel tells Baruch:] Therefore he [Moses] appointed a covenant for them at that time and said, "Behold, I appoint for you life and death" [≅ Deut. 30:15] and he called heaven and earth as a witness against them [Deut. 30:19]. For he knew that his time was short, but that heaven and earth will stay forever. — *2 Baruch* 19:1–2

Consider Heaven and Earth: The reinterpretation of Deut. 32:1 on which this interpretation was based is somewhat problematic:

> **Give ear to the heavens** as I speak, and **hear the earth** [or "let the earth be heard"] [in] the words of my mouth.

It might be possible to account for the double direct object of the second verb as I have by the above translation, although the Hebrew text literally reads, ". . . hear the earth the words of my mouth." But there is another, even greater difficulty that is not apparent in the English: the first imperative, "Give ear," is in the second-person plural, whereas "hear" is in the second-person singular. If these imperatives are addressed to the people of Israel, why talk to them first in the plural and then in the singular?

I believe that this is precisely the point of a remark in *Sifrei Deuteronomy,* which otherwise scarcely makes sense:[26]

> Since the heavens are in the plural, he began speaking about them in the plural [that is, "Give ear (O Israel) . . ." in the plural]; but since the earth is in the singular he began speaking about it in the singular [that is, "and hear"—in the singular—"the earth"]. — *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 306

26. Reuven Hammer, in his translation *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy,* observes about this passage, "The meaning is unclear" (p. 491).

If, as some commentators have suggested, the point of this lemma is to explain why in Deut. 32:1 the heavens are being addressed in the plural and the earth in the singular—well, what's strange about that? Moses would simply be following our normal, grammatical expectations. For this remark to make any sense, it would have to be explaining why Moses addresses *the Israelites* first in the plural, "Give ear," and then in the singular, "hear."

Incidentally, a text from Qumran gives a slightly different answer to the question of Moses' addressing heaven and earth at the start of this song:

> [Call on] heaven and earth as witnesses, for they [the Israelites] will not like what I am charging them with, they and their so[ns . . .]
>
> —(1Q22) *Sayings of Moses* 1:5–6

Here, the calling of heaven and earth to witness is explained as reflecting the severity of God's words (rather than Moses' attempt to invoke heaven and earth's eternity, reliability, or any other quality). Presumably, the song's predictions were too harsh to be addressed directly to the Israelites themselves.

Heaven and Earth Forever: A passage cited earlier from Pseudo-Philo bears further comment:

> And he [Moses] spoke to them, saying . . . "I, however, call heaven and earth to witness against you, for heaven hear[d] and earth g[a]ve ear, for God was revealing [at Mt. Sinai] the purpose of the world and He set out for you his supernalities [*superexcelsa*], lighting within you the eternal lamp. And [as a result of their testifying,] you shall remember, O wicked ones, how I spoke to you and you answered, saying: 'All that God has spoken to us we will do and we will obey [Exod. 24:7]. But if however we disobey and go astray, then He shall call a witness against us and He will cut us off.'"
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:2–4

In this translation I have conjecturally emended the tense of the two verbs as indicated because I am otherwise unable to make any sense of the passage.[27] With this emendation the point seems to be this: since heaven and earth had been witnesses to the events at Sinai, Moses mentioned this fact to the Israelites in his song (that is, in Deut. 32:1) to remind them that, although he himself was about to die, there would nonetheless be witnesses to testify against them when, in the future, they were to violate the commandments given to them at Sinai. As for the role of heaven and earth in the Sinai revelation, it was not only mentioned elsewhere by Moses himself,

27. Daniel Harrington (*OTP* 2:327) translates: "Now I call to witness against you heaven and earth (for heaven will hear this, and earth will know with its ears) that God has revealed the end of the world so that he might establish his statutes with you and kindle among you an eternal light. And you will remember, you wicked ones, for when I spoke to you you answered, saying, '*All that God has said to us, we will do and hear.* But if we transgress or grow corrupt in our ways, you will recall this as a witness against us, and he will cut us off.'"

> [Recalling the Sinai revelation, Moses said to Israel:] "Out of **heaven** He let you hear His voice . . . and on **earth** He let you see His great fire,"
>
> —Deut. 4:36

but it was alluded to in various Psalms verses whose theophanic references were interpreted in connection with the Sinai revelation, such as:

> Earth quaked, yea, the heavens dripped [rain], in fear of the God of Sinai.
>
> —Ps. 68:9

Or:

> The Lord thundered forth from the heavens, and on high He made His voice heard. —2 Sam. 22:14 (= Ps. 18:14)

It likewise appears that, in citing Exod. 24:7, Pseudo-Philo proposed to read: "All that God has spoken we will do—*and it was heard.*" Such a reunderstanding of the text would resolve the old paradox associated with it—how can one agree first to obey and only second to hear?—and it would at the same time seem to buttress the contention that the earth was indeed a witness who could testify later to Israel's acceptance of the commandments. In any case, such an explanation of Exod. 24:7 more clearly underlies the use of it in the parallel rabbinic passage cited:

> ". . . and the earth **heard** the words of my mouth" [≅ Deut. 32:1] because Israel was standing on it at the time, and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do," **and it was heard** [≅ Exod. 24:7].
>
> —*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 306

Finally, it is to be observed that Pseudo-Philo elsewhere contains another motif justifying Moses' evocation of heaven and earth:

> And when he [Moses] died, He arranged a firmament for him and showed him then[ce] those witnesses whom we have, saying, "Let the **heavens, in which you have entered,** be a witness between Me and you and my people, and then let the earth, **on which you have walked** up until now."
>
> —Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 32:9

The Foolish Non-People: The song that Moses sings at the end of his life was commanded specially by God to serve as a warning of dire events that would befall the people of Israel in the future:

> [God told Moses:] "Then this people will go and play the harlot after strange gods of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break my covenant which I have made with them . . . Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the people of Israel." —Deut. 31:16, 19

While the song itself (Deut. 32:1–43) began with a review of Israel's history, it soon turned to those events that would bring God's wrath down upon the people. One key passage seemed to hint at the means by which God would punish His people:

> They [the Israelites] have provoked with a non-god, angered me with their vanities;
> So will I likewise provoke them with a non-people, with a foolish nation I will anger them.
>
> —Deut. 32:21

Logically, Moses ought to have been warning the people about the dire events of later times: how the northern part of the country would fall to the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C.E., or how, in the sixth century B.C.E., the Babylonians would conquer the southern kingdom and raze Jerusalem, its capital. Yet the words of the song did not quite seem to fit these events. The Assyrians and Babylonians were hardly *non-peoples,* and, whatever else might be said about them, they were not particularly foolish.

In any case, however awful those events were, the Jews survived them. As time went on, some people came to believe that Moses' warning applied (as in so many other instances in the Bible) not to events long past, but to things happening in their own times. One interpretation thus held that the "non-people" in question were none other than the Samaritans, the immediate northern neighbors of the Jews:

> Two nations I do despise, and a third **not even a people;**
> Those who dwell in Seir [the Edomites] and Philistia, and the **foolish nation** dwelling in Shechem [the Samaritan capital].
>
> —Sir. 50:25–26

On this interpretation and its expansion in the *Testament of Levi,* see Chapter 13, *OR,* "Shechem the Non-People." If the Samaritans were, in later times, a thorn in the side of the Jews, there was no wonder in this: it had all been predicted long before, in Moses' farewell song.

Not all interpreters understood Moses' words in this sense, however. Paul interpreted this same verse as a reference to the new church, which was not a "nation" like Israel but a conglomerate drawn from different peoples, and "foolish" in the sense that, to begin with, those Gentiles who were to become Christians had entertained all manner of erroneous beliefs. Yet, Paul says, they nonetheless arrived at understanding, while Israel did not:

> Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry . . ." [Deut. 32:21]. Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek Me [that is, the Gentiles], I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for me" [≅ Isa. 65:1–2].
>
> So I ask, have they [the Jews] stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel **jealous.**
>
> —Rom. 11:11

Reuben's Second Life: After his farewell song, Moses blessed each of the tribes in turn. It was seen earlier (Chapter 15, *OR,* "Reuben's Illness") that Moses' blessing

of Reuben was particularly interesting because of the phrase "Let Reuben live and not die"—had not Reuben died long before the time of Moses? For some interpreters, this became one of the rare hints within the Pentateuch that there was indeed the possibility of a second life—or death—in the world to come:

> Let Reuben live in this world and not die in the second death by which the wicked die in the world to come. — *Targum Neophyti* Deut. 33:6

See further McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch,* 118–122; Kugel, "Reuben's Sin with Bilhah."

Moses Did Not Want to Die: The elaboration of Moses' death continued on well into medieval times. See further Loewenstamm, "The Death of Moses"; Rosenfeld, *Der Midrasch Deuteronomium Rabba; Peṭirat Moshe* in Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch,* 1.115–29, 6.71–78; see also Wertheimer, *Battei Midrašot.* One tradition connected with this motif has Moses request to be transformed into a bird and so continue living:

> A heavenly voice went forth and said to him [Moses], You only have an hour left to live in this world. He said to Him: O Master of the world! Let me [instead] go about like a bird, flying all over the world, gathering food on the earth and drinking water from streams and at night going back to his nest. God said to him: Enough!
>
> — *Midrash Peṭirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.125)

It is difficult to imagine why God would allow Moses to continue living as a bird but not as a man: if death is decreed, it is decreed. Elsewhere Moses requests another option, that God let him live as a wild animal instead of dying (see *Deuteronomy Rabba Zo't Habberakhah* 10), but this may well be secondary (cf. Eccles. 9:4). Nor is there any evidence that the "bird" motif emerged out of such verses as Ps. 11:1 or 55:7. Instead, the idea of Moses requesting to be a bird seems to have originated in another motif entirely, one highlighting the (repeated) divine decree that Moses not "cross this Jordan [River]" (Deut. 3:27, 31:2):

> Moses said to God: Master of the world! If You are setting me aside [from the leadership by decreeing my death] out of consideration for my student [Joshua], then I will act as his student: he can be as the high priest and I will be as an ordinary priest, or he can be like the king and I like the slave. God said: But I have sworn . . . "You shall not cross the Jordan" [Deut. 3:27, 31:2]. Moses said: Master of the world! Just allow me and I will be like a bird flying in the air through the power of the Divine Name, or make me like a fish, so I can use my two arms like fins, and then smooth down my hair like scales, and in that way I can [swim the Jordan] and so see the land. God said: If I were to do thus I would be violating My oath.
>
> — *Peṭirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.125)

The whole point seems to be to avoid violating the divine "oath" that Moses not *cross* (in the sense of fording) the Jordan; as a bird or a fish he could nevertheless

get to the other side while leaving this oath intact. But if so, then it is easy to imagine how Moses' request to become a bird and so *see the land* could become transformed into one to become a bird and so not die.

Moses Disputed with an Angel: The background of Jude 9 has been the subject of much speculation. Origen asserts that this verse is alluding to an actual text, the *Ascension* (presumably, *Assumption*) *of Moses:*

> In the *Ascension of Moses,* a book which the apostle Jude mentions in his epistle, the archangel Michael, disputing with the devil over the body of Moses, says that the serpent was inspired by the devil and so became the cause of the transgression of Adam and Eve.
>
> — Origen, *On First Principles* 3.2.1

Such an incident might well have been part of the lost conclusion of the *Assumption of Moses.* See further Charles, *The Assumption of Moses,* 105–110; Tromp, *Assumption of Moses,* 275–285. In the same vein as this dispute, Amram sees two opposing angelic figures fighting over him in his vision, (4Q543, 545–546) *Testament of Amram.*

It seems likely, however, that in the case of Moses such an angelic dispute must logically be a development of an earlier motif, the dispute between Moses and the angel of death sent to "take his soul" (that is, bring about his death). Although this other motif is preserved only in rabbinic texts, it arises directly out of the biblical text's multiple summonses to Moses to die and Moses' disputing with *God* over his imminent death (Deut. 3:23–27), whereas a dispute between Satan and Michael over Moses' body has no biblical support whatsoever. It is easy to imagine how, once the motif of Moses' dispute with the angel got started, later transmitters of the tradition might have misunderstood it, assuming that a divine order to take Moses' *soul* could only have been issued after his body had died (the discussion in Tromp, *Assumption of Moses,* 282, bears witness to the potential ambiguity of this expression). If so, then the disputant with the angel could hardly have been Moses—he was already dead! The angel Michael was therefore enlisted to take his place. This seems to be the scenario behind a passage seen earlier:

> Now Sammael, chief of the Satans [or "accusers"], was waiting in anticipation **for the time when Moses would die,** [so that] perhaps he would receive his soul like that of other people; he was waiting like someone expecting great happiness. When Michael, Israel's angel, saw Sammael the wicked angel waiting for Moses' death, he lifted up his voice and wept and Sammael the angel was joyful and laughing.
>
> — *Peṭirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.125; also *Deuteronomy Rabba, Zot Habberakhah* 10)

The fact that, in Jude 9 and the Origen text cited, the dispute appears to be specifically over Moses' *body* may represent a further refinement, for certainly the argument between Michael and Satan could not have been over the worthiness of Moses' *soul* to enter heaven—he had already entered heaven bodily (above, "Moses' Last Vision") and was in any case "trusted in all My house" (Num. 12:7). The

disagreement therefore came to center on the final burial place of Moses' body and coincided with the speculation seen earlier. For if now "no man knows his burial-place to this day" (Deut. 34:6), it must have been because Moses was, in the end, not left buried in Moab, but his body had been transferred by God to its final destination in heaven.

Until That Particular Day: We saw earlier how the phrase "until the farthest sea" [*'ad hayyām hā'aḥărôn,* Deut. 34:3] came to be interpreted as "until the last day" [*'ad hayyôm hā'aḥărôn*], implying that Moses saw all of future history arrayed before him on Mt. Nebo. This motif is to be distinguished from another one that sought to read in the later assertion ". . . and no man knows his burial-place *to this day*" (Deut. 34:6) a further eschatological promise. For what could Moses, transmitter of the Pentateuch, have meant by "to this day" if the words were written before he was actually buried? He must have been alluding to a particular future day promised by God:

> None of the angels nor human beings will know your burial-place where you will first be buried, **until I visit the world.**
>
> — Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 19:12

> The great prophet Moses went up Mt. Nebo in the sight of six hundred thousand Israelites and all the angels were arrayed to receive him. When he got to the top of the mountain, a cloud came down and lifted him up from the sight of all the congregation of Israel. And he was buried there by God, as it says, "And he buried him in the valley." And no man knows his burial place to this day—what does "this day" mean? The day of vengeance.[28]
>
> — *Tibat Marqa* 269a

This motif also seems to underlie another passage seen earlier:

> When Jeremiah learned of [the fact that people were searching around Mt. Nebo], he rebuked them and declared: "The place shall be unknown **until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy.** And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear."
>
> — 2 Macc. 2:1, 4–8

Loewenstamm, "The Death of Moses," discusses this motif; however, the passage in *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 357 that he mentions belongs not to this but to the motif "Moses' Last Vision."

Buried by God (or the Angels): The *Samaritan Pentateuch* version of Deut. 34:6 reads "and *they* buried him in the valley." This may simply represent a revision in favor of the impersonal third-person plural (more the norm in later Hebrew); less likely, it may actually reflect the tradition of Moses' burial by the angels instead of by God. On the whole subject of Moses' death in ancient traditions, see Loewen-

28. *Tibat Marqa* uses this biblical phrase in the sense of the "day of resurrection," when good and evil are recompensed. See in this connection especially Isa. 61:2, 63:4.

stamm, "The Death of Moses" and "The Testament of Abraham and the Texts concerning Moses' Death." Esther Chazon has built on Loewenstamm's article to argue that the traditions surrounding the death of Moses (embodied in such texts as *Assumption of Moses* and *Petirat Moshe*) came to shape the account of the deaths of Abraham and Ezra in the *Apocalypse of Abraham, (Greek) Apocalypse of Ezra,* and the *Apocalypse of Sedrach:* Chazon, "Moses' Struggle for His Soul: A Prototype for the *Testament of Abraham.*"

Not Buried at All: On the passages from Clement and Origen cited and their relationship to the *Assumption* (or *Testament*) *of Moses,* see Tromp, *Assumption of Moses,* 270–285. Further discussion of the "double Moses" tradition (that is, one who was buried, the other who ascended into heaven) may be found in Jeremias s.v. Moyses in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* vol. 4, and Vermes, "La figure de Moïse au tournant des deux testaments."

The Supreme Philosopher: This theme continued to be pursued, especially within Christian circles in the works of Justin, Clement, and Eusebius.

> Numenius the Pythagorean philosopher says clearly: "What is Plato but Moses speaking Greek?" —Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1.150.4

See further Gager, *Moses,* 25–79.

26

Afterword

> For the swallows and storks that breed in Italy do not breed in all lands. Do you not know that those Syrian date palms that bear fruit in Judea cannot do so in Italy?
>
> Varro, *Res Rusticae* 2.1.27

I HOPE that readers surveying the preceding chapters will be surprised—as I admit I still am—at the extent to which ancient biblical interpretation has survived "between the lines," as it were, of books like *Jubilees,* the Wisdom of Solomon, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* and other writings from the period covered. These books give eloquent testimony to the central place accorded to the interpretation of the Bible during this period, as well as to the resourcefulness and even, occasionally, the brilliance of its interpreters. Many of the motifs discussed above survived into later Jewish or Christian writings and went on to accompany and illuminate the biblical text in later centuries; their importance can hardly be gainsaid. But to me it has seemed at least equally important to try to identify, and to understand the exegetical thinking behind, motifs that, for one reason or another, were passed over or misunderstood by later generations—motifs that, no less than their better-known fellows, attest to the rich store of biblical interpretation in ancient times.

None of this, of course, is to say that this book has exhausted, or even adequately treated, its subject. However central the Torah (Pentateuch) was to Jews *and* Christians in antiquity, however much the interpretation of, specifically, its verses and chapters form the bulk of ancient biblical interpretation, the first five books hardly account for the total of the Bible As It Was. A companion volume of, I am afraid, almost equal bulk could be assembled from ancient interpretations or elaborations of material found in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. And even with regard to the Pentateuch, much material has had to be passed over for reasons of economy. Still, it is my hope that the foregoing pages do represent at least a good bit of what the average Jew or Christian in those days knew of the Bible, what the Bible *was* for most people of the time.

To this hope is joined another: that this book may therefore help scholars and ordinary readers to have a somewhat different picture of the Bible as a whole from that generally presented in most high school or university courses as well as in textbooks, introductions, and biblical commentaries. I should make it clear that I have written this book not to substitute for those others but to supplement them, and this because of my own conviction that the Bible nowadays, whatever else it may be, is more intimately connected to its past history of interpretation than most

people as yet concede. I should like, in the following pages, to explain why—via a brief tour of the history of biblical interpretation after the period covered by the present volume.

The approach to Scripture—as well as many of the specific interpretations—documented in the preceding chapters proved to be decisive in the Bible's later history. As I have tried to indicate along the way, a great many of the specific motifs that first appeared in *Jubilees* or the Wisdom of Solomon or Philo were echoed in later Jewish or Christian writings of the second, third, or fourth centuries C.E. These same interpretations were then repeated, sometimes modified or elaborated but rarely abandoned, by commentators, homilists, legists, philosophers, cyclopedists, and others throughout the whole of the Middle Ages and beyond. It was especially in these later writings that the assumptions and results of ancient biblical interpretation achieved a status that might well be called canonical. Retold, cited (and alluded to more often than cited), preached, epitomized, represented physically in synagogue mosaics, church capitals, illuminated manuscripts, or stained glass windows, these interpretations essentially *became* the Bible, their message deemed to be immanent in texts which, only on the sort of pedantic examination that ordinary mortals rarely undertake, turned out not to be saying explicitly what interpreters had always said they said.

Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that biblical interpretation remained basically unchanged from the opening centuries of the common era through the end of the Middle Ages. Quite to the contrary, interpreting the Bible during this period was one of the most vibrant and dynamic fields of human endeavor. Both Jews and Christians developed existing forms and created whole new genres of scriptural exposition, and members of each group heightened the level of sophistication well beyond anything imagined by earlier interpreters. Rabbinic exegesis concentrated in particular on developing new ways of promoting all of Scripture (including, eventually, the Oral Law as well) to a single, wholly integrated, and unitary level of sanctity.[1] Christian biblical commentary, once it had regulated the doctrinal struggles and squabbles of its early centuries, came to focus on the multifarious *sensus spiritualis,* an approach that soon blossomed into the theoretical exploration (even if practical application was not always feasible) of the four senses of Scripture.[2] Still later, Jewish biblical interpretation had to wrestle with the impact of Islamic civilization. First in the East, then in medieval Spain, Arabic philosophy and grammatical and philological research had their effect on Jewish biblical *commentary* (now the principal interpretive genre). The Jewish Karaites during the same period challenged long-standing rabbinic doctrines and forced the

1. I mean by this specifically such genres as the *petiḥta'* and the *yelammedēnu* midrashim, both of which seek to assert (by acting out) the direct relationship of the Hagiographa or the Oral Law to this or that verse from the Pentateuch. This was certainly a rabbinic innovation; see my *In Potiphar's House,* 261–264.

2. DeLubac, *Exégèse Médiévale,* remains the master treatment of this subject.

defenders of the Rabbis to reckon with a host of new issues. Then, with the waning of the Middle Ages, Jewish mysticism created its own approach to interpreting Scripture.

Meanwhile, among Christians, the church's own internal development and, in particular, the rise of scholasticism along with the proliferation of monastic orders and the flowering of Christian scholarship within them, produced new needs in regard to Scripture and new ways of fulfilling them. Attempts to systematize Christian beliefs in the West, from their theoretical beginnings in Augustine and Boethius through Thomas Aquinas, had profound impact on the Bible's role within the church and, ultimately, on the daily life of Christians. What is more, the off-and-on encounter with Judaism (and, through it, with some of the same forces with which Judaism itself was then wrestling) was felt in Christian biblical interpretation particularly from the twelfth century onward. This encounter was hardly symmetrical from the standpoint of political power, and the Jews sometimes paid the price for speaking their minds; even when such was not directly the case, Christian reference to the *mendacia Iudaeorum* ("lies of the Jews") or, at the very least, their *fabulae,* is omnipresent in medieval Christian discourse about the Bible almost whenever the Jews are taken into account. And yet, the Jewish-Christian encounter as represented, in the high Middle Ages, at the Abbey of Saint-Victor or, somewhat later, in the *Postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra stand for something better, spots of creative interaction between two faiths that share a common Scripture.

In fact, a bird's-eye survey of these developments reveals so much variety and change that the basic elements of continuity may seem to be lost in the shuffle. They should not be. For all the dynamism of these centuries, much of the heritage of ancient biblical interpretation survived virtually unaltered. Quite apart from the welter of detail that endured from earlier times, it is important to point out that the basic attitude toward Scripture—specifically, the four assumptions charted in Chapter 1—remained altogether untouched by the developments briefly surveyed above. The Bible was still, and more than ever, fundamentally cryptic, relevant, and perfect, the inspired word of God. In presenting these assumptions earlier, I stressed that there was nothing obvious or inevitable about them and that they are hardly the assumptions that readers bring to bear when reading *other* texts. That they continued to accompany the reading of Scripture throughout the Middle Ages (indeed, that they have survived, despite the great sea change to be described presently, even to the present day) is tribute enough to the enduring influence of that band of largely anonymous interpreters of Scripture whose writings have been the object of this study.

Yet the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Renaissance do mark a new chapter in the history of biblical interpretation.[3] Why this should be so is difficult to say, but it is in any case true that this change was merely part of that great shift in human consciousness which was the Renaissance in general. The various specifics to which that shift is traditionally connected—the invention of the printing press, political changes on the Italian peninsula, and so forth—no doubt played a role, but

3. I have examined this subject in somewhat greater detail in "The Bible in the University."

it is difficult to believe that, in the end, factors such as these were decisive in the case of the Bible. Whatever the reasons, the fact of the change is obvious. Within the space of a century or so, biblical interpretation ceased being what it had been for so long previously, a matter of *auctoritas* and the creative elaboration of principles established for all time. Now those principles were themselves open to question—everything was open to question. Had Jerome correctly translated this verse? Had not Augustine contradicted himself here? And ought we not better understand this passage in the light of the biblical king's position at the time, or on the basis of the rules of Hebrew rhetoric, or thanks to this tradition that the Jews have passed along in their books?

Italy was the place where it began, but soon enough the new mentality and new methods of study spread elsewhere on the Continent. The names of the leading lights of this intellectual movement—Egidio Viterbo and Xanctes Pagninus, Conrad Pellican and Sebastian Münster, François Vatable, Jean LeMercier, G. G. Postel, Gilbert Genebrardus, the Scaligers, Francis Junius, Andreas Masius, B. Arias Montano, M. Flacius Illyricus, V. Schindler, and dozens more—are largely forgotten, but their way of thinking and of approaching the biblical text survive in the work of more modern biblical critics. Indeed, no modern scholar, I think, would have difficulty identifying his or her own activity with that of these men. Their interests ranged from the minutely philological (where they often had recourse to linguistic comparison, to cognates in "Chaldaic" and occasionally Arabic) to broader issues: the reliability of the Masoretic text, the system of Hebrew poetry, the authorship and unity of various books, the nature of prophecy and divine inspiration. At times they pointed out errors or impossibilities in the text; at times they proposed emendations. They referred to one another by name, and relatively frequently; references to more distant predecessors are far less common. None of this is particularly remarkable until it is juxtaposed to Christian biblical scholarship of just a century or two earlier, whose laconic, crabbed style and flat assertions (usually presented as if already known to the reader, or else bolstered by invocations of the hoariest authorities—even when, indeed, especially when, seeking slightly to modify or reinterpret the received wisdom) and whose (at times deceptively) static quality and utter submission to text and tradition all seem light years away from current notions of scholarly inquiry.

Scripture now became "ancient" and "Oriental." Both of these new perceptions were in a sense a logical extension of the activity with which the Renaissance proper had begun, namely, the learned study of and commentary on texts from ancient Greece and Rome. Following the ideas of these classicists, Renaissance biblicists too showed a concern for producing correct texts through manuscript comparison and emendation, and still more significantly, they took to heart the classicists' new appreciation of the gap between "us" and "the ancients," "our" Latin and "theirs." Israel too was an ancient people, indeed, the most ancient, so that even after all translations had been scrutinized and corrected in accordance with the most advanced information, if there nevertheless remained expressions, sentiments, or ideas that seemed foreign or even repugnant, Renaissance scholars were less likely to attribute the difficulties to the domain of "mysteries" or divine caprice. They no longer automatically believed, with Augustine, that anything that contradicts doc-

trine or simply does not concern right conduct or questions of faith must therefore be interpreted figuratively (*De Doctrina Christiana* 3.10.14). They were more likely to explain such deviations with reference to some feature native to the language or culture of Israel, for Israel was distant from themselves, distant in both time and space. The ancient and Oriental way of saying things was not necessarily their own way, and so the *Hebraismus,* the *proprietas* of that language, had to be appreciated for what it was. By extension, the ancient and Oriental way of telling a story, preaching a sermon, or even conceiving of things divine, was bound to be different from that of more modern non-Orientals, and this difference alone could account for much that had previously been inscrutable in Scripture.

With all this, the aim of biblical study imperceptibly began to change (again, spurred by the classical model) from learning *from* Scripture to learning *about* Scripture. Bible study increasingly became dependent on the tools of research and a knowledge of the Bible's origins and manner of composition, the historical circumstances in which it was created and transmitted; these subjects themselves became the curriculum. It did not happen all at once, and precisely because "from" and "about" were so easily commingled, even as it did happen this all-important change was not recognized for what it was.

And yet . . . few institutions are so resistant to change as the establishments of religion. One might well ask how so fundamental a shift, even if some of its far-reaching consequences were unperceived at first, could have been allowed to take place by those institutions which had theretofore championed so different a view of the Bible and its proper study. The answer, or at least part of the answer, is that a fundamental alliance had been forged from the very beginning between the new biblical scholarship and the Protestant Reformation.

Biblical scholarship had itself certainly played a role (still, my sense is, somewhat underappreciated) in precipitating the Reformation. For it was not merely a revulsion at the sale of indulgences and the like, but the growing conviction (fostered by the new science) that the Bible might not really mean what the church had been saying it meant all these years, that emboldened the Reformers to throw off the church's authority in all things. This perception, once embodied in diverse critical insights here and there into the biblical text, soon announced its own political potential. Scripture interpreted aright had a power of its own, one that might well topple that of entrenched but merely human authority. Luther's famous words before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521 are still eloquent in their opposing of these two:

> Unless I be convinced by evidence of Scripture or by plain reason—for I do not accept the authority of the Pope or the councils alone, since it is demonstrated that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for it is neither sage nor right to go against conscience. God help. Amen.

Here much is made apparent in few words: the enthronement of Scripture (along with "plain reason") as supreme authority; the pointed opposition of this authority to that of the pope; and finally, the suggestion that the latter's errors and contradic-

tions in, among other things, scriptural interpretation have ultimately invalidated the church's very authority. Almost from the start, the central issue was what Luther elsewhere called the pope's "right of interpreting Sacred Scripture by the sole virtue and majesty of his exalted office and power, against all intelligence and erudition"[4]—the latter two being, of course, the hallmarks of recent biblical scholarship.

If the modern movement of biblical scholarship helped to make the Reformers' stance more than that of mere malcontents or religious opportunists, the Protestant denominations that they founded subsequently provided biblical scholarship with its greatest ongoing sponsor. Surely it is no coincidence that biblical scholarship over the last two centuries in particular has been almost exclusively a Protestant activity, pursued in Germany, England, Scandinavia, and America, and only to a much lesser extent, and with far less impressive results, in the traditionally Catholic parts of Europe. This is of course not to say that the church from the beginning turned its back on the new learning. On the contrary, it is remarkable the extent to which, instead of just sticking to tradition and vehemently invoking the unbroken chain of church authority in all its force, Catholic scholars themselves sometimes argued as learned Hebraists, and their efforts as exegetes in the sixteenth century were sometimes indistinguishable from those of their Protestant contemporaries. A knowledge of Hebrew, to whatever ideology's service it was put, passed in that century from being the sign of a truly erudite scholar to being simply the *sine qua non* for undertaking serious Old Testament work. Indeed, it was in the sixteenth century that Hebrew entered the mainstream of education, and a solid trilingual foundation—in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew—was now at the heart of humanistic studies in the emerging institutions of higher learning in Europe.[5] With the passage of time, however, and the development of biblical scholarship's own internal dynamic, it became more and more of a distinctly Protestant enterprise, and this is obviously related to the institutional factors cited—or has been until the last half-century or so. In our own day biblical scholarship has lost most of its denominational coloring and, in North America at least, has recently moved its intellectual center from the seminary to the university's Department of Religious (or Near Eastern) Studies.

In any case, this whole course of events has dramatically affected the way the Bible is perceived, and taught, in our own day. It is certainly no accident that, as suggested earlier, only "half" of the Bible's story has generally been found worthy of study in universities, for example. Courses there—elsewhere as well—tend to be devoted exclusively to what, with some justification, might rather be called the "pre-Bible." Students are led backward through the stages of individual biblical books' composition, breaking things down to their putative original components, which can then be studied and explained in terms of the political or social history of the ancient Near East. None of this is particularly harmful, I think, but the fact

4. "Assertio Omnium Articulorum M. Lutheri per Bullam Leonis X, Novissimam Damnatorum" in his *Werke*, 7:96.

5. Goshen-Gottstein, "Humanism and the Flowering of Jewish Studies—From the Christian to the Jewish Renaissance."

that this is *all* most students are likely ever to know about the Bible certainly is. How difficult would it be for such courses to be reconfigured so as to complete the picture, moving from the "pre-Bible"—whether the subject be the Pentateuch or Isaiah or the Psalter—to the Bible proper, those same chapters or books as they were known to, *and interpreted by,* Jews and Christians in the formative centuries that are the focus of the present study?

That is, God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 is certainly illuminated by a knowledge of the conventions of covenants and treaties apparent in those that have survived from the ancient Near East; discussions of the historicity of the Exodus, the identity of the pharaoh in question, the participating tribes, and so forth likewise illuminate any treatment of the first half of the book of Exodus. However, for the reasons already outlined, it seems to me a terrible distortion to make these *all,* or even most, of what is said about those chapters. Certainly for most of the Bible's history what was important about Abraham and his covenant with God were precisely those things that such a treatment is likely to omit, namely—"Abraham the Monotheist" and "Abraham Saw a Dire Future," or, with regard to the Exodus, "Divine Punishment of the Egyptians," "Egyptians Gave Willingly," and "The (Paschal) Lamb of God." The point is not a subtle one, and yet, alas, it still needs to be made.

To be sure, the picture has begun to change. In part this change is due to recent developments in the study of the Bible's formative period itself. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls starting in the late 1940s has spurred a new interest in the closing centuries before the common era and the first century of the common era. Historians, archaeologists, linguists, and others have focused on this period as never before. Those scrolls contain not only biblical manuscripts and compositions specific to the community proper, but as well works like *Jubilees* and other biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. As a result, these fields too are currently enjoying unprecedented popularity. The study of the New Testament and other aspects of early Christianity have likewise been revitalized by these same events.

Among other things, these developments have helped to break down the barrier assumed to exist between, on the one hand, the Bible itself and, on the other, the postbiblical activity called interpretation. What numerous seminal studies in the last two decades have demonstrated is that biblical interpretation was an ongoing process that began well within the biblical period itself—in fact, rather early within the biblical period. Later writers interpreted earlier texts and elaborated them, modified them, sometimes extended them or simply rewrote them. This process, well in evidence in preexilic material in the Hebrew Bible, then built with growing force following the Babylonian exile until it reached the heights of energy and creativity documented in the very writings surveyed in this volume, some of which, at least, predate the composition of the last parts of the Hebrew Bible. In other words, modern scholarship, for its own reasons, has come to break down utterly the chronological separation between *writing,* seen as belonging to the biblical period, and *interpreting,* previously largely thought to be postbiblical.

With the disappearance of this barrier has come, I think, a new respect for those most ancient interpreters and interpolators and redactors, *verba* that are not *ipsis-*

sima, the theological "spin" put on ancient narratives and oracles by those anonymous figures who sought divine guidance in all the sacred writings that had survived from an earlier day. Their work, though perhaps less ambitious and far-reaching than that of later interpreters, is cut from the same cloth, suggesting a fundamental continuity between the Bible's own writers and compilers and those (only somewhat later) interpreters whose writings have been my subject.

In view especially of this most recent turn in the course of biblical scholarship, it has been, as I say, one of my hopes in compiling this book that ancient biblical interpretation might more commonly be studied side by side with the Bible itself. This may be a naive goal, but I believe not. Indeed, for one final reason now to be mentioned, I think that such study of ancient interpretation alongside that of the Bible itself may indeed find support "from another place" (Esth. 4:14).

I will be revealing no secrets in saying that the fruits of the modern scholarly movement surveyed above have ultimately been somewhat unsettling to traditional religious belief. The central role played by the Bible in Judaism and the various Christian denominations could not but be undermined by scholarship that has sought to demonstrate that books previously thought to be of unitary authorship are in fact the work of different hands and different periods, that narratives previously conceived to impart moral lessons are to be reunderstood as shabby political allegories, and that the revered prophecies of this or that honored figure should rather be explained as *vaticinia ex eventu.* All this, and much more, has been the legacy of the great change in the direction and tenor of biblical scholarship that the Renaissance inaugurated and the Reformation took up and made its own.

My purpose in surveying the history of modern biblical scholarship has hardly been to bemoan its rise, nor yet to indict specifically the Protestant movement for the disquieting effect that this scholarship has had on traditional beliefs. (However much the beginnings of this discipline were allied with the rise of the Protestant denominations, in the end the force that has driven biblical scholarship to its disturbing conclusions has been scarcely different from the force that drove Galileo or Darwin or Einstein to theirs.) But what I intend by raising the matter of modern biblical scholarship's disturbing conclusions is to suggest one final reason for which the material studied on the previous pages ought to be of interest to all readers of the Bible nowadays.

The pioneers of modern biblical scholarship did not, by and large, address themselves to the subject of ancient biblical interpretation, save of course to denounce its conclusions as fanciful and wrong-headed. But this fact alone is sufficient to indicate the extent to which these scholars failed to understand the mission upon which they were embarked. For them, the heritage of ancient biblical interpretation was no more than a source of obscurity, an obstacle to the proper appreciation of what, with a naïveté which from the perspective of the late twentieth century can only be described as touching, some biblical critics liked to refer to as the "real Bible." That Bible was just waiting to be discovered underneath the accumulated misconceptions of centuries of sermonizing and religious posturing. Not all, to be sure, shared in this illusion, but enough did—still driven by the

residue of that initial surge of Protestant energy—so that, even with the uncertainty or hesitations of more insightful biblicists, the "pre-Bible" nonetheless became the true one, a grail whose curative powers were sure to work their magic once its precise location could definitively be pinned down.

What is, as I say, naive about this view is its failure to take into account the crucial role played by ancient interpreters in the very emergence of the Bible. It was to them, and not, by and large, to the biblical texts themselves, that we owe each of the four assumptions described in Chapter 1; and it was these assumptions that made the Bible—more than most modern biblicists ever dreamed—*biblical.* Failing to understand this, what the modern critical movement set about doing was returning biblical texts to the state they were in before there was a Bible, which is to say, turning the unitary, seamless, Word of God into the contradictory, seamy, words of different men and schools and periods.

It is difficult not to sympathize with the thinking that led to this impasse. Was it not in the ear of Moses, Isaiah, or Jeremiah that the divine word had been whispered? These were the true prophets, and anything that was not theirs—the work of anonymous redactors or editors or scribes—ought simply to be done away with as lacking any standing or authority. (And so it was, and still largely is today.) How much less was the standing or authority of those who were not even bearers of the texts, but mere commentators, retellers, interpreters! Certainly their activity could be of no consequence to the real meaning of the Bible—for if it was, then the whole edifice of biblical authority, predicated on the direct whispering of the divine voice in those prophetic ears, threatened to topple in any case.

Given such a mentality, one can scarcely wonder that this scholarly movement, enlisting the considerable talents of European and American savants for more than three centuries, pursued so single-mindedly a goal that would ultimately prove so destructive to the object of their study. For what these scholars generally failed to realize was that the far-reaching consequence of their researches would be the separation of biblical texts from the great, fostering environment of ancient interpretation which had allowed the Bible to emerge in the first place, that is, which had allowed its diverse members to be combined into the great, unitary, sacred corpus that would occupy the central place that Scripture did occupy, and still does, in Judaism and Christianity.

To put it another way, the spindly sapling of texts that began to sprout even before the first millennium B.C.E. was only enabled to grow into the great date palm of Scripture thanks to the nourishing presence of the ancient interpretations, and interpretive *assumptions,* that soon enveloped and strengthened its roots. This vital soil, in itself endowed with all the nutrients of human piety, fortified with the heaven-sent, engendering liqueurs of rain and dew, and, let it be said, no stranger to the benefits of an occasional admixture of natural fertilizing agents—this soil was what allowed the tree to take root and flourish. The mission upon which modern biblical scholarship set out, then, without quite understanding it, was to uproot Scripture from that soil the better to study the whole plant and the plant alone. The result, seen from such a perspective, was altogether predictable, unavoidable even.

"After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" The fate of the Bible in the modern

world is certainly not the subject of the anthologist or compiler. I may, however, permit myself the parting observation that, if modern scholarship has been slow in recognizing the central role in the development of the Bible played by its earliest interpreters, this realization has now at last begun to make itself felt within the field of biblical theology proper. With it comes another kind of disquiet, for an awareness of the interpreter's crucial role inevitably leads to a hermeneutic of far less simple-minded appeal than the one that had prevailed for so many centuries. Such difficulty notwithstanding, it seems clear to me that, willy-nilly, the decisive part played by the anonymous biblical interpreters of the centuries just before and after the start of the common era must ultimately be recognized in any new disposition of biblical theology's forces. The activity of ancient biblical interpreters was a—perhaps *the*—striking instance of how interpretation is inevitably a kind of second authorship. It was *their* Bible, and no ragtag collection of ancient Near Eastern texts, that was canonized in the closing centuries of the Second Temple period, and their Bible is, to an extent with which all who love God's word must reckon, ours today.

Abbreviations

Terms and Sources

Bibliography

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Abbreviations

AB: Analecta Biblica
AJS Review: *Association for Jewish Studies Review*
ANRW: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
AOT: *Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984)
APAT: *Die Apocryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, ed. E. Kautsch (Tübingen: Mohr, 1900)
APOT: *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963)
ASE: *Annali di storia dell'esegesi*
AusBR: *Australian Biblical Review*
AUSS: Andrews University Seminar Studies
BASOR: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BI: *Bar Ilan (Annual)*
BJRL: *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
BO: *Bibbia e Oriente*
BS: *Biblia Sacra*
CBQ: *Catholic Bible Quarterly*
C.N.R.S.: Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques
CRJANT: Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CTJ: *Calvin Theological Journal*
DJD: *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*
DSD: *Dead Sea Discoveries*
EB: *Estudios Biblicos*
EJL: Early Jewish Literature (SBL series)
ETL: *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
EY: *Eretz Yisrael*
GCS: Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderten
HAR: *Hebrew Annual Review*
HSL: *Hebrew University Studies in Literature*
HSM: Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR: *Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA: *Hebrew Union College Annual*
IEJ: *Israel Exploration Journal*
Int: *Interpretation*
JAOS: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL: *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JEA: *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JJS: *Journal of Jewish Studies*
JLA: *Jewish Law Annual*
JNES: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

JQR: *Jewish Quarterly Review*
JR: *Journal of Religion*
JSJ: *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSNT: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSS: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP: *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JSQ: *Jewish Studies Quarterly*
JSS: *Journal of Semitic Studies*
JThS: *Journal of Theological Studies*
JTS: Jewish Theological Seminary
KI: *Kirche und Israel*
LCL: Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press)
MC: *Miscelanea Comillas*
MGWJ: *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
NRT: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*
NT: *Novum Testamentum*
NTS: *New Testament Studies*
OS: *Oudtestamentlische Studien*
OTP: *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2 vols., ed. J. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983–1985)
PAAJR: *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*
PG: *Patrologiae cursus completus: Patrologia Graeca-Latina,* ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857–1866)
PL: *Patrologiae cursus completus: Patrologia Latina,* ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857–1866)
QAY: *Qobeṣ 'al Yad*
RB: *Revue Biblique*
REJ: *Revue des Etudes Juives*
RHdR: *Revue de l'Histoire des Réligions*
RHR: *Revue d'Histoire Réligieuse*
RiB: *Rivista Biblica*
RQ: *Revue de Qumran*
RSR: *Revue des Sciences Réligieuses*
SBL: *Society of Biblical Literature*
SC: *The Second Century*
SCS: Septuagint and Cognate Studies (series of SBL)
SP: *Studia Philonica*
SPat: *Studia Patristica*
SR: *Studies in Religion*
ST: *Scripta Theologica*
STJD: Studies on the Texts from the Judaean Desert
TAPA: *Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TB: *Tyndale Bulletin*
TS: *Theological Studies*
VC: *Vigiliae Christianae*
VT: *Vetus Testamentum*
VTS: *Vetus Testamentum Supplements*
ZAW: *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW: *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Terms and Sources

An asterisk marks terms and sources for which there is a separate entry.

(4Q540–541) Aaronic Text A: One of the *Dead Sea Scrolls, this text was found at *Qumran and originally thought to be an independent composition centering on the biblical figure of Aaron, Moses' brother. More recently, it has been identified as possibly a part of the **Aramaic Levi Document,* fragments of which were discovered in the *Cairo Genizah as well as at Qumran, and itself related to the Levi section of the **Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.* See Puesch, "Fragments d'un apocryphe de Lévi."

Abot deR. Natan: A collection of elaborations and interpretation of biblical texts presented in the form of a commentary on the mishnaic tractate *Abot* (since this tractate is sometimes called in English "[Sayings of] the Fathers," *Abot deR. Natan* is sometimes referred to as *The Fathers according to R. Nathan*). The text is preserved in two versions, A and B, printed side by side in the edition of S. Schechter, *Abot de Rabbi Nathan.* (The two versions have been translated individually into English by J. Goldin and A. Saldarini respectively.) However, a recent study, M. Kister's "Avot de-Rabbi Nathan: Studies in Text, Redaction and Interpretation" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1993), has shown that version A in fact survives in two principal branches which are quite distinct from each other. Kister's study strongly asserts the need for a new critical edition of the texts. As to dating, Kister concludes that while the "origins" of this text may belong to the end of the tannaitic period (late second century C.E.), the extant versions themselves can hardly be dated earlier than the sixth century C.E. "at the very earliest." All translations mine.

Acts of Andrew: A New Testament apocryphon recounting the bravery of a Christian martyr condemned to death by crucifixion. Translation: James, *The Apocryphal New Testament.*

Acts of the Apostles: A New Testament book continuing the narrative of the gospel of Luke (the two were written by a single author); Acts recounts the story of the Christian movement and its various leaders, including a large section devoted to the life of *Paul. It has been dated to c. 80–85 C.E. Translation: Revised Standard Version, sometimes modified slightly.

Acts of Pilate: see **Gospel of Nicodemus*

(4Q370) Admonition on the Flood: This brief *Qumran text was published and translated by Newsom, "An Apocryphon on the Flood Narrative."

(4Q180–181) Ages of Creation: see **Pesher of the Periods*

aggadah: see **halakhah*

Aggadat Bereshit: A collection of twenty-eight homilies on Genesis and related readings in

the prophets and psalms. This text has been dated to the tenth century of the common era. Text: Buber, *Aggadat Bereshit.* All translations mine.

Ahiqar, (Aramaic) Sayings of: This very ancient text (perhaps mid-sixth century B.C.E.) circulated widely in the ancient Near East. It contains no biblical interpretation per se, but has been cited here once or twice because of certain parallels to themes found among ancient interpreters. Translation: Lindenberger in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:494–507.

al-Asaṭir (Kitāb): A Samaritan apocryphon that recounts and elaborates biblical history, focusing on the figures of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The book itself is ascribed to Moses but was actually composed in medieval times; however, it contains many earlier interpretive motifs. Text: Ben-Ḥayyim, "The Book of Asatir." All translations mine.

Alexander Polyhistor: Ancient historian cited by *Eusebius of Caesarea, *Jerome, and other interpreters. He was born c. 105 B.C.E. and wrote his history of the Jews, Samaritans, and other peoples sometime during the latter half of the first century B.C.E. His work in turn sometimes cites earlier sources, Jewish and Samaritan.

allegorical interpretation: A way of explaining Scripture whereby people, places, and events are held to stand for abstract or nonmaterial entities, such as temptation, the soul, and so forth. This form of interpretation, championed by *Philo of Alexandria and his Alexandrian Jewish predecessors and, among Christians, by *Clement of Alexandria and *Origen (and, to a lesser extent, by later figures as well) is to be distinguished from *typological interpretation.

Alphabet of Ben Sira: A composite Jewish text, part of it satirical, written in perhaps the ninth or tenth century C.E.; it contains an account of Ben Sira's conception and subsequent events, followed by a series of proverbs and commentaries. Edition: Yassif, *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle Ages,* identified here by page number. (On this edition, see Dan's review in *Qiryat Sefer.*) All translations mine.

Alphabet of R. Aqiba: see **'Otiyot deR. Aqiba*

Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397 C.E.): Bishop of Milan and an influential author, interpreter, and hymnist. Most citations from Ambrose herein are from McHugh, *Saint Ambrose.*

amora'im: see *Rabbis, the

'Amram, Visions of (or *Testament of*): see **Visions of 'Amram*

Ancient Synagogal Prayers: see *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers

Aphrahat (the Persian; also Aphraates): An early representative of Syriac Christianity, Aphrahat flourished in the mid-fourth century C.E. I have cited from this source relatively rarely, the connection of Aphrahat's writings to, specifically, biblical interpretation preserved in rabbinic texts having been amply demonstrated by Ginzberg, *Die Haggada* and *Legends,* as well as in Funk, *Die Haggadische Elemente in den Homilien des Aphraates.* All citations are taken from this last work.

apocalypse (in general): see *Pseudepigrapha

Apocalypse of Abraham: An account of Abraham's recognition of the folly of idol-worship and a subsequent revelation to him of heavenly secrets. (In my opinion this text may have been influenced by the **Ladder of Jacob,* with which it shares a number of common elements.) The text survives only in various Slavic translations; it was rendered into Slavonic either directly from Hebrew or through an intermediary Greek translation.

Principal text: the edition and manuscript variants found in Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en Vieux Slave;* also consulted: Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham,* and the two editions printed in Tikhonravov, *Pamyatniki,* 32–57. All translations mine.

Apocalypse of Adam: A gnostic treatise found in the *Nag Hammadi library in the form of a revelation given to Adam and communicated to his son Seth. The treatise may be among the earliest Nag Hammadi documents, perhaps going back to the first or second century C.E. Translation: MacRae in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:707–719.

Apocalypse of Elijah: In its present form a Christian treatise on various subjects. The final redaction of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* has been dated to the latter part of the third century C.E. However, its first section, at least, with its reference to "the fast" (that of the Day of Atonement), is evidently of Jewish origin, and the same is true of other sections as well. If these Jewish parts were, like the rest, originally composed in Greek, then Alexandria would seem to be a probable provenance for them and they would then likely not have been written after the first century C.E. Translation: Wintermute in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:721–753.

Apocalypse of Moses: See, for description, **Life of Adam and Eve.* Translation: Johnson in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:249–778, sometimes modified on the basis of the text in Bertrand, *La vie grecque d'Adam et Eve.*

Apocalypse of Paul: see **Revelation of Paul*

Apocalypse of Sedrach: A late Greek treatise of composite character; while its final form has been dated to the tenth or eleventh centuries C.E., some scholars have suggested that part of it is based on earlier materials going back to the opening centuries of the common era. Translation: Agourides in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:605–613.

Apocrypha (Greek: "hidden things," that is, things to be hidden away): A collection of writings, mostly from the end of the biblical period, that were accepted by early Christians as Scripture but that, because they were eventually excluded from the Jewish Bible, came to be regarded by many later Christians as belonging to a special category. They were included in the Bible of Western Christianity, but under the name "Apocrypha"; later, many Protestant churches excluded them in part or in toto from their canon. These books are, along with the *Pseudepigrapha, particularly interesting to biblical scholars, since many of them contain retellings of biblical stories or reflections on particular passages or people in the Bible, and thus can provide us with a snapshot of how parts of the Bible were being interpreted from the third century B.C.E. onward. Among the best known books of the Apocrypha are *Sira[ch], *Wisdom of Solomon, *Judith, *Baruch, the Letter of *Jeremiah, Susanna, 1 and 2 *Maccabees, and Tobit.

(11Q11) Apocryphal Psalms[a]: The remnant of what appears to have been a collection of pseudo-Davidic psalms concluding with a somewhat reworked version of Psalm 91. The manuscript, found at *Qumran, belongs to the late first century B.C.E.; the date of the psalms' composition is unknown. A theme in the surviving part of the manuscript is the opposition to devils and alien spirits. Text: Puech, "Les deux derniers psaumes davidiques du rituel d'exorcisme." All translations mine.

(4Q464) Apocryphon[b] (or *An Exposition on the Patriarchs*): a *Qumran text whose manuscript dates from the late first century B.C.E. (though the text itself may well have been

composed earlier). It is cited here from Stone and Eshel, "An Exposition on the Patriarchs (4Q464)," and Eshel and Stone, "The Holy Tongue at the End of Days."

Apocryphon of John (Secret Book of John): An important gnostic work dealing with the creation and highlighting the role of the (lower) creator-god Ialdabaoth. This treatise, found in the *Nag Hammadi library, may not have been known as such to *Irenaeus, but its main ideas are certainly reflected in his *Against the Heresies* and thus existed before 185 C.E. Translation: Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures,* 23–51; *The Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

(4Q372) Apocryphon of Joseph[b]*:* A brief narrative text that refers to biblical history: "Joseph" here is apparently a reference to the northern tribes and not to the hero of the narrative in the latter part of Genesis.

(4Q374) Apocryphon of Moses A: A very fragmentary *Qumran manuscript from the early Herodian period; it apparently retold or referred to biblical history, specifically the Egyptian exodus. The text seems not to have been composed by members of the Qumran community but to have been brought there from elsewhere. It was published by Newsom, "4Q374: A Discourse on the Exodus/Conquest Tradition." All translations mine.

Apostolic Constitutions: A composition of eight volumes written in the late fourth century C.E. The first six volumes are based in large measure on the **Didascalia Apostolorum;* scattered through the seventh and eighth are prayers, some of which appear to be remnants of ancient Jewish synagogal compositions of a considerably earlier period. See *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers.

Apuleius, Lucius (fl. 155 C.E.): Born in Madauros, Numidia, Apuleius is best known for his bawdy narrative *The Golden Ass;* he mentions Moses and "Johannes" (apparently, Jannes) as prominent magicians in *Apologia.* Translation: Butler, *The Apologia and Florida of Apuleius.*

Aquila, Symmachus, and *Theodotion:* The authors of three post-*Septuagint translations of the Bible into Greek. All three were included in *Origen's *Hexapla* (composed around 230–245), a work that presented for comparison the Hebrew text of the Bible, a transcription of that text into Greek letters, an edition of the Septuagint translation, and these three later Greek versions. Unfortunately, the *Hexapla* itself has been lost, perhaps a victim of its very bulk (it ran to nearly seven thousand pages); all that survives of these three versions are scattered fragments and citations here and there. The date and interrelationship of these three translations is in dispute, but they all seem to belong to the second century C.E. They themselves differ in translation "style," Aquila's being rather literal, Theodotion's and Symmachus' somewhat freer. As revisions of the Septuagint version, they shed light on the later development of interpretive traditions. An edition of most (but not all) surviving fragments was published by Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt.* All translations mine.

Aramaic Levi Document (The *Qumran fragments of this text were for a long while identified by the siglum "1Q and 4QTestLevi ar[a]" and so on, though the sigla [1Q21] *Aramaic Levi,* [4Q213] *Aramaic Levi*[a], and [4Q214] *Aramaic Levi*[b], etc., have begun to be used; [4Q540–41] *Aaronic Text A* may also be part of this same text): An Aramaic text, parts of which were first found in the *Cairo Genizah and later at *Qumran. It was at first taken to be the "original" version of which the Greek *Testament of Levi* was thought to be a translation (see **Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*); now scholars know the relationship of the two texts to be somewhat more complicated. The oldest Qumran copy has been

dated to the second century B.C.E.; if Milik's theory of a priestly "trilogy" is correct (see **Visions of 'Amram*), then this text may be considerably earlier, though probably not as early as Milik himself has suggested (third century B.C.E., "if not towards the end of the fourth"; *Books of Enoch* 24). On the relationship of this text to **Jubilees,* see Kugel, "Levi's Elevation." All translations mine.

Aristeas, Letter of: see **Letter of Aristeas*

Aristobulus: Sometimes described as the first known Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, Aristobulus lived in Ptolemaic Egypt, apparently in the mid-second century B.C.E. He is said to have written extensive, allegorical commentaries on Scripture, though only a few fragments of his writings have survived in citations from later, Christian, writers. Aristobulus argued that Greek wisdom had originally come from Jewish sages. In the cultural encounter between Judaism and Hellenism, he is thus less syncretistic than *Artapanus but somewhat less reactionary than, say, the author of the third Sibylline oracle. With regard to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, one might see a chain of tradition originating with Aristobulus and extending to the author of the **Letter of Aristeas,* the *Wisdom of Solomon, *Philo of Alexandria, *Clement of Alexandria, to *Origen and later writers. Text and translation consulted: Eusebius, *La Préparation Evangélique;* translation: Collins in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:831–842.

Armenian Apocrypha (of the Hebrew Bible): A number of exegetical motifs have survived in apocryphal writings preserved in Armenian. In this book I have included citations from two collections of Armenian apocrypha, Issaverdens, *Uncanonical Writings of the Old Testament,* and Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to the Patriarchs and Prophets.* Translations are by the respective authors of these collections and identified by author and page number.

Artapanus: A Hellenistic author cited by *Alexander Polyhistor and, subsequently, *Eusebius (and reflected as well in *Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies*). The three surviving fragments of Artapanus' work—which was apparently entitled *Concerning the Jews*—relate to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. This treatise may belong to the second century B.C.E., though even this broad dating is only approximate. Its heterodox and syncretistic character led some earlier scholars to suggest that its author was not Jewish, but most studies of Artapanus nowadays seem to reject this notion. Text and translation: Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* vol. 1; also Collins in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:897–903.

Assumption of Moses: A text, which survives in incomplete form and only in Latin, consisting largely of Moses' farewell speech to Joshua just before his death. Scholars have generally dated the original text's composition to the early first century C.E.; it was apparently cited by the author of the New Testament Epistle of Jude, 9. Text: Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses;* all translations mine. Tromp, while agreeing with other scholars that the Latin text is indeed a translation from a Greek version, casts doubt on the contention of most that this Greek text was in turn a rendering of a Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) original. On this matter, however, the common wisdom is most likely correct.

Athanasius (c. 296–377): Bishop of Alexandria, theologian, and the author of various treatises. Text and translation: Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Gentes.*

Augustine of Hippo (354–430): Highly influential Christian thinker and theologian; there is scarcely a more important figure in the history of Western Christianity. Born in North

Africa, Augustine adopted for a time the dualistic faith of Manichaeism before returning to Christianity (his mother's religion); he was baptized in 387. In seeking to combat the heresies of his day, Augustine gradually came to articulate his own understanding of Christian teaching in a number of separate works. In this book I have cited primarily from his magnum opus, *The City of God,* particularly books 14–16; though even this section of the work could hardly be described as merely one of biblical exegesis, the interpretations contained or presumed within it went on to play a highly significant role in subsequent understandings of Scripture in the West. Text and translation: Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans;* I have, however, retranslated a number of passages myself.

Azariah, Prayer of: see *Prayer of Azariah

Az Be'en Kol: An ancient liturgical poem (more precisely, a Day of Atonement 'Abodah) recently published by Yahalom, *Priestly Palestinian Poetry.* The poem is a highly midrashic retelling of biblical history, starting from the creation. Though relatively late (perhaps fifth century C.E.), it preserves many motifs otherwise unattested in the rabbinic corpus of writings.

b.: Appears in Hebrew or Aramaic names as an abbreviation for *ben* or *bar,* "son of"; also stands for *B(abylonian Talmud), just preceding the name of the tractate, thus b. *Pesaḥim* 34a.

B.C.E.: before the common era (="*B.C.*").

Babylonian Talmud: A massive compendium of Jewish learning and biblical exegesis redacted in Babylon in the fifth and early sixth centuries C.E. but containing a great deal of earlier material. Organized in the form of a digressive commentary on the *Mishnah, it ends up citing and explaining much of the Hebrew Bible and is thus a valuable collection of rabbinic biblical interpretation. All translations mine.

Barnabas, Letter of (or *Epistle of*): see **Letter of Barnabas*

Baruch, book of (or *1 Baruch*): The first of several works attributed to Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. It was probably composed sometime in the second century B.C.E., though its apparently composite character and ambiguous affiliations make dating quite difficult. Translation: Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha, sometimes modified slightly.

2 Baruch (or *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*): This book survives in a Syriac version of an apparently Greek text that itself may well be a translation of an originally Hebrew work. It purports to contain Baruch's account of the fall of Jerusalem and subsequent laments, divine revelations of the future, and discussions of divine justice. The text was apparently written in the wake of the Romans' destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and is therefore dated to the late first century C.E. It bears some affinities to **4 Ezra* and contains much material of interest to the history of ancient biblical interpretation. Translation: Klijn in Charles, *APOT* 1:615–652. Also consulted: Bogaert, *Apocalypse de Baruch.*

3 Baruch (also *Greek Apocalypse of Baruch*): This book survives in two forms, Slavonic and Greek; these may, but not necessarily do, stem from a text originally composed in a Semitic language. This brief text may have been written in the late first or second century C.E. Translation of both the Slavonic and Greek texts by Gaylord in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:653–679.

4 Baruch (or *Parale[i]pomena Ieremiou* or *Things Omitted from Jeremiah*): This book briefly recounts the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and subsequent events. The text was probably originally composed in Hebrew but survives in Greek and other languages. Some elements seem to connect it, or at least one form of the text, to the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt (Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 173–213), and it contains a few items of interest to the history of biblical interpretation. Text and translation (occasionally modified): Kraft and Purintun, *Paraleipomena Jeremiou.*

(4Q559) Biblical Chronology: A fragmentary Aramaic text from *Qumran that presents a genealogical chain which apparently stretched from Abraham through (at least) the period of the Judges. Translation mine.

Book of Adam: A book belonging to the "secondary Adam literature": see **Life of Adam and Eve.*

Book of the Bee: A late (thirteenth-century C.E.) retelling of biblical material containing many ancient interpretive expansions, some of these found as well in the **Cave of Treasures.* Syriac and Arabic texts with translation: Budge, *Book of the Bee.*

(1Q23, 4Q203, 530, 531, and 6Q8) Book of Giants: A group of Aramaic texts from *Qumran closely related to *1 Enoch,* but which J. T. Milik has suggested existed as a separate work identified as the *Book of Giants.* The existence of such a work had been known from a passing reference to it in the Gelasian Decree (sixth century C.E.); earlier this century W. B. Henning succeeded in reconstructing part of the book from fragments of a Manichaean version of it preserved in different middle Iranian manuscripts. (See further Henning, "The Book of Giants"; Milik, *Books of Enoch,* 298–339; Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony.*) Milik recognized that the Qumran Aramaic texts might indeed contain the original *Book of Giants.* The Qumran texts seem to date from as early as the last third of the first century B.C.E., but the time of the book's composition is conceivably still earlier. All translations mine.

C. E.: common era (="*A. D.*").

Cairo Genizah: The name conventionally given to a storeroom of old manuscripts located adjacent to a synagogue in Fostat (Old Cairo), Egypt. The existence of valuable literary treasures within this storeroom had been known to Western scholars since at least the eighteenth century, and a few fragments were taken from it before the Genizah came to the attention of Solomon Schechter, a young scholar at Cambridge University, in the late nineteenth century. In 1896 he negotiated the removal of a large quantity of its contents back to England; additional manuscripts were then removed by other scholars and collectors and deposited in various libraries around the world. Among the most sensational finds of the Cairo Genizah were manuscripts of the long-lost original Hebrew text of the book of Ben *Sira, the **Damascus Document,* numerous fragments of long-lost versions of the Palestinian *Targums, and previously unknown *piyyuṭim* (liturgical poetry) and other writings of numerous medieval Hebrew authors. The Genizah has also provided valuable material for the overall political, social, and intellectual history of the Jews in the medieval period, as well as insights into specific figures and incidents.

(4Q177) Catena A: A *Qumran text interweaving biblical verses from various psalms and prophetic texts and supplying their interpretation. It has been proposed that this text may be part of (4Q174) **Florilegium.* See Steudel, *Der Midrasch zur Eschatologie.*

Cave of Treasures: A collection of ancient traditions surrounding various figures and stories from the Bible, particularly the book of Genesis. (The cave in question is one in which Adam was said to have deposited the myrrh and incense that he took with him on his way out of the Garden of Eden, and which also served as a place of prayer and the burial place of Adam and other patriarchs; see also *Apocalypse of Moses* 29:3–6.) The book is apparently not a unitary document, and while its existence as such can be dated only to the Middle Ages, some scholars have speculated that an early form of the book may have been composed in the third or even second century C.E., it in turn having incorporated exegetical traditions from earlier sources. The book was at one time attributed to *Ephraem Syrus, but its true author is unknown; it was apparently originally composed in Syriac and exists in various forms in Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, Coptic, and Georgian. I have drawn on the editions and translations of Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle,* and Su-Min Ri, *La Caverne des trésors* (this edition distinguishes between the Western [W] and Eastern [E] Syriac traditions), as well as the translation of Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures.*

Chronicles of Moses (Dibrei ha-Yamim shel Mosheh): A late medieval work, which, like the book of Yashar, retells biblical history—adorned with many interpretive traditions—in biblical, rather than later, Hebrew style. Text: Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch,* 2:1–11; Shinan, *Dibrei ha-Yamim shel Mosheh.* All translations mine.

Chronicles of Yeraḥme'el (or *Jerahmeel*): A late (eleventh- to twelfth-century) retelling of much biblical and later material, incorporating material from far earlier sources, some of them now lost. Translation: Gaster, *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (reissued with an excellent bibliographical prolegomenon by Haim Schwarzbaum).

Chrysostom, John (c. 347–407 C.E.): An outstanding preacher (his name means "golden-mouthed" in Greek), John was an important biblical expositor, the author of a series of homilies on Genesis and other biblical books. Chrysostom was educated at Antioch and was an opponent of allegorical exegesis. Text: Homilies in *PG* vol. 53. All translations mine.

1 Clement (First Letter of Clement): An early Christian letter apparently authored by a certain Clement, (third) bishop of Rome. The letter was written in the late first century C.E. and contains some material bearing on the interpretation of figures from the Hebrew Bible. Text and translation consulted: Jaubert, *Clément de Rome, Epitre aux Corinthiens.* All translations mine.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215 C.E.): Christian theologian and interpreter, author of the massive *Miscellanies* (*Stromata* or *Stromateis*) and other works; he was an important conduit for the Alexandrian allegorizing approach to Scripture and was greatly influenced in particular by Philo's methods as well as much of the content of his commentaries. (See further van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo.*) Text: Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus,* vols. 2 and 3 (*GCS* 15 and 17); all translations mine.

Colossians, Letter to the: A New Testament letter attributed to Paul but thought by many scholars to have been written by one of his followers. If the latter is true, it was probably composed not long after the time of Paul's own letters, perhaps between 65 and 70 C.E. The letter attacks Judaizing and other disapproved practices and beliefs. See also *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

(4Q252) Commentary on Genesis[a]: see **Genesis Pesher*

(1QS; also 4Q255–264; 5Q11) Community Rule (a translation of the Hebrew name *Serekh ha-Yaḥad;* also called the *Manual of Discipline*): A book of community regulations found in various copies at *Qumran, it is among the most important of the *Dead Sea Scrolls. (It differs significantly from another rulebook associated with the Qumran community, the **Damascus Document;* perhaps, as some scholars have suggested, they were intended for different groups within this religious sect.) Written in Hebrew, this text provides much information about the interpretation of biblical laws at Qumran. All translations mine.

(4Q264) Community Rule[e]: This brief fragment from *Qumran has been identified as part of a community rule, though not apparently part of the (1QS) *Community Rule* described above. The apparent subject of this fragment is the prohibition of work on the Sabbath. Translation mine.

Concept of Our Great Power: A Christian gnostic apocalypse, one of the texts of the *Nag Hammadi library. Its original composition in Greek has been dated to before the late fourth century C.E. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

1 and 2 Corinthians (First and Second Letters to the Corinthians): Two letters found in the New Testament; they are believed to be authentic letters of Paul and articulate much of his theology. The first letter has been dated to around 54 C.E., and the bulk of the second to the following year. See also *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

Damascus Document (or *Covenant of Damascus* or *Damascus Covenant*): A Hebrew text that derives from the same community known to us via the *Dead Sea Scrolls but that—through means not entirely clear—ended up in the hands of at least two medieval scribes, one from the tenth and the other from the twelfth century C.E., who copied the text; their copies were eventually deposited in the storeroom of a Cairo synagogue (see *Cairo Genizah), where they were discovered by Solomon Schechter at the end of the nineteenth century. Schechter published the *Damascus Document* in 1910 under the title *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* and it has since been the object of much scholarly scrutiny. Although Schechter properly identified the text as stemming from a Jewish group living at the end of the biblical period, this identification was contested by other scholars, and in any case the text's full significance could not begin to be understood until the *Qumran documents began to appear some fifty years later, including further fragments of this text (4Q266–273; 5Q12, and 6Q15). The *Damascus Document*—so-called because of its mention of "the land of Damascus" (whether the actual city or some symbolic reference was intended is still debated) as the place of the making of a "new covenant"—contains laws of the community as well as exhortations, warnings, and not a little direct or indirect interpretation of biblical passages. It differs significantly from another rulebook associated with the Qumran community, the **Community Rule;* perhaps, as some scholars have suggested, the fact that the *Damascus Document* speaks of the "camps" and the "assembly of the towns of Israel" indicates that it was intended for people who espoused the same beliefs as the Qumran community but who did not actually live at Qumran. (The rather stricter *Community Rule* might then have been the rulebook of those who actually lived at Qumran.) Such a picture of a sect with many satellite communities scattered in different towns would accord well with *Josephus' description of the *Essenes in his *Jewish War* 2:124–127. Text: Qimron and Broshi, *Damascus Document Reconsidered.* All translations mine.

Day of Atonement 'Abodah: The *'Abodah* was a type of poem specially composed for the liturgy of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The oldest surviving example of this genre is the poetic prologue to the narrative "Seven Days Before the Day of Atonement," which is included in Zvi Malakhi's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The Yom Kippur 'Abodah," Hebrew University, 1974. Only slightly later is the poem **Az Be'en Kol,* perhaps written in the fifth century C.E. The anonymous *'Abodah* cited above in Chapter 6 is from a somewhat later period; it is reprinted from Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor leyamim nora'im,* "Introduction," p. 19. See Yahalom, *Priestly Palestinian Poetry,* 13–30.

Dead Sea Scrolls: This is the name popularly used for a group of manuscripts found in the general area of Khirbet *Qumran, a site along the shores of the Dead Sea, starting in 1947. Justly described as the greatest manuscript find in history, this collection of biblical manuscripts and other writings seems to have belonged to a group of ascetic Jews who retreated to this desert locale perhaps in the second century B.C.E. and who continued to exist there until 68 C.E. The group may be identified with the *Essenes, a religious sect described by *Philo of Alexandria, *Pliny the Elder, and *Josephus; these Essenes may in turn be the same sect as the "Boethusians" known from rabbinic literature.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have provided a wealth of information about the history and development of the biblical text itself, about first-century Judaism and the roots of Christianity, and about biblical interpretation as it existed just before and after the start of the C.E. Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls texts cited in this book include the (1Q20)**Genesis Apocryphon,* the (1QS)**Community Rule* (*Serekh Hayyaḥad*), the **Damascus Document,* the (11Q)**Temple Scroll,* (4Q252) **Genesis Pesher,* and (4Q394–399)* *Halakhic Letter* (or *Miqṣat Ma'asê Hattorah*). (The numbering system used by scholars to refer to Dead Sea Scrolls and related texts starts with the site at which the text was found. In the case of Qumran documents, "4Q" refers to the fourth cave at Qumran in which texts were discovered, "11Q" to the eleventh, and so forth.)

Demetrius the Chronographer: A Greek-speaking Jewish historian who probably lived in Alexandria, Egypt, sometime near the end of the third century B.C.E.; he is thus arguably the earliest in a series of Jewish historians, poets, and philosophers who wrote in Greek in the closing centuries B.C.E., a list that also includes *Aristobulus, *Eupolemus, *Theodotus, *Artapanus, and others. Demetrius is called the "chronographer" because, in the few surviving fragments of what was apparently his history of biblical times, the dating of events and the reconciling of the ages of different biblical figures play a prominent role. Text and translation: Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* 1:51–92; Hanson in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:843–854.

Deuteronomy Rabba (also *Debarim Rabba*)**:** A collection of independent rabbinic sermons of the *Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu* type tied to various passages in Deuteronomy; see also **Midrash Tanḥuma.* The collection apparently originated in the land of Israel, probably sometime after the mid-fifth century C.E., but its date and history of redaction and transmission remain obscure. Texts used: *Midrash Rabba* (Vilna ed.); Lieberman, *Midrash Debarim Rabba.*

(4Q504) Dibrei hamme'orot: See **Words of the Luminaries*

Didache: "The Teaching [of the Twelve Apostles]" is a Christian manual of probably the mid-second century C.E. The Greek text was first discovered in Constantinople in 1873 and subsequently other copies and versions have been identified. It contains much

material apparently inherited from an earlier period; in particular, its doctrine of the two paths (or ways), paralleled in **Letter of Barnabas* 18–21, the **Doctrina Apostolorum,* and still earlier texts, seems to go back to a Jewish tradition that circulated widely in Second Temple times (see Chapter 25). Text and translation consulted: Rorsdorf and Tuilier, *La Doctrine des douze apôtres.* All translations mine.

Didascalia Apostolorum: An early Christian text presented as the teaching of twelve apostles but actually a pseudepigraphon. It contains legal and moral exhortations (including extensive sections on the functions of various church officials, bishops, deacons and deaconesses, as well as "widows"), along with extensive passages of biblical citation and interpretation. It was originally composed in Greek, probably somewhere in Syria or Palestine in the third century C.E. It survives in complete form in Syriac as well as in extensive Latin fragments. Translation: Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum.* In addition, fragments of the Greek original are recoverable from the **Apostolic Constitutions,* whose first six volumes are based in large measure on the *Didascalia.* Text: Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum.*

Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398 C.E.): Christian theologian and biblical commentator in Alexandria, author of *On the Trinity* and other works. Text: *PG* vol. 39. All translations mine.

Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.E.): Author of the *Bibliotheca Historica,* a work that includes a number of passages bearing on the Jews and their history (much of its information has been borrowed from still earlier sources). Text and translation: Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,* 1:169–189.

Doctrina Apostolorum: An early Christian text whose exhortation concerning the two ways (or paths) is reminiscent of those found in the **Didache* and the **Letter of Barnabas,* perhaps all three going back to a common source, an original, standard exhortation on the subject that existed in Judaism (see Chapter 25). Text (in Latin): Schlecht, *Doctrina XII Apostolorum.* All translations mine.

Ecclesiasticus, Book of: see *Sira(ch)

Elephantine Papyri: A group of Aramaic papyri discovered at the beginning of this century on the island of Elephantine (Yev) in Egypt. Many of them were written during the fifth century B.C.E. by members of a Jewish military colony stationed there and have revealed much about the life, legal practices, religion, and culture of this colony. (In addition to such texts, others, including fragments of the *(Aramaic) Sayings of *Aḥiqar,* were also found.)

1 Enoch (First Book of Enoch): There circulated in late antiquity a number of works attributed to Enoch, an antediluvian figure mentioned briefly in Gen. 5:21–24. The very fact that this biblical passage apparently asserted that Enoch had been "taken" by God while he was still alive seemed to imply that he continued to exist in heaven—indeed, that he exists there still. From such a vantage point, Enoch could presumably not only observe all that was happening on earth, but was privy to all the secrets of heaven, including the natural order and God's plans for humanity's future.

A number of anonymous writers who wished to discourse on such subjects attributed their writings to Enoch, and eventually a composite Book of Enoch—and then *Books* of Enoch—began to circulate. Our present *1 Enoch* comprises a number of different works. Most or all were apparently originally written in Aramaic, and parts of these Aramaic

texts have turned up among the *Dead Sea Scrolls. The most ancient manuscripts found—drawn from the "Book of Luminaries" (or "Astronomical Book") section (that is, chapters 72–82) of our present *1 Enoch,* and the "Book of the Watchers" (*1 Enoch* 1–36)—have been dated well back into the third century B.C.E. (However, the composite nature of even these subsections is clear. See: VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition,* esp. 110–130; Stone, "Enoch, Aramaic Levi, and Sectarian Origins.") Some have questioned the antiquity of the "Parables [or "Similitudes"] of Enoch" section (chapters 37–71), which is not attested in any of the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments, but their absence there may be due to chance: there is nothing in the contents of this section to justify a late date.

In short, the oldest parts of *1 Enoch* may well constitute the most ancient Jewish writings to have survived outside the Bible itself. Newer sections were eventually blended in with the old, and the entire Book of Enoch was subsequently translated into Greek and from Greek into ancient Ethiopic (Ge'ez), in which language alone the book survived in its entirety.

Scriptural interpretation was hardly the major concern of *1 Enoch.* The very figure of Enoch the sage in this book has been shown to have been influenced by Mesopotamian models, and the astronomical learning and other materials presented in this book likewise bespeak the transmission of ancient, eastern lore. Nevertheless, a number of figures and incidents associated with biblical narratives also appear, and in what is said about some of them it is possible to see the outline of some very ancient interpretation, in particular, a grappling with difficulties associated with the story of Noah and the flood. In citing from *1 Enoch,* I have generally used the text and translation of Knibb, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch.* Because the Ethiopic texts sometimes differ significantly from the Aramaic fragments of *1 Enoch* found at Qumran, I have also indicated where appropriate the parallel passages in these Aramaic fragments and related material (that is, 4Q201–02, 204–12) and relied upon them for specific points.

2 Enoch (Second Book of Enoch): This text recounts Enoch's heavenly journey and the things revealed to him, then turns to Enoch's successors, Methuselah and Nir, and ends with the story of Melchizedek. It survives only in Slavonic, in two recensions, both of which are represented in various manuscripts. The origins of *2 Enoch* are quite mysterious. The Slavonic texts certainly represent a translation from the Greek, which may indeed have been the original language of composition. As for its date, in view of some of the biblical interpretations found in this book, which are paralleled in ancient Jewish sources, it may well be that the earliest kernel of this text goes back (as some have suggested) to the beginning of the common era; on the other hand, the absence of any mention of it in Greek or Latin patristic writings is troubling. Text: Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d'Hénoch.* Translation: Andersen in *OTP* 1:102–221, identified as belonging either to version J or version A, that is, Library of the Academy of Sciences, Leningrad, mss. 13.3.25 and 45.13.4, respectively.

3 Enoch (Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch): The name *3 Enoch* was coined by H. Odeberg for his 1928 edition of this mystical Hebrew treatise; it is known elsewhere as the *Book of Hekhalot* ("Palaces"), the *Chapters of R. Ishmael,* and other names. The text itself, while an early landmark in the history of Jewish mysticism, is late within the context of the present study, belonging perhaps to the fifth or sixth century C.E. Translation: Alexander in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:223–315.

Ephesians, Letter to the: A New Testament letter attributed to Paul but more likely written by a disciple of his late in the first century C.E. See also: *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version.

Ephraem (sometimes written Ephrem or Efrem) *Syrus:* Outstanding poet and biblical commentator of Syriac Christianity. Ephraem was born in or around Nisibis c. 309 C.E. and eventually moved to Edessa, where he died in 373 C.E. His hymns and exegetical writings contain numerous parallels to, and developments of, earlier Jewish motifs attested both in contemporaneous rabbinic writings as well as in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. For his *Commentary on Genesis and Exodus* I have used the text of Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Comentarii.* Too late to be incorporated systematically (but nonetheless consulted here and there): Matthews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian.* For Ephraem's *Hymns* I have used the poetic renderings of McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian,* modified here and there in consultation with the original Syriac, and Kronhelm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem.*

Essenes: See the description of rival Jewish groups under *Rabbis, the; see also **Damascus Document.*

Eupolemus (active in mid-second century B.C.E.): A Greek-speaking Jewish historian, apparently the same "Eupolemus the son of John" referred to in 1 Macc. 8:17 as having been sent to Rome in 161 B.C.E. as part of a Jewish delegation (see also 2 Macc. 4:11; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12:415). Four fragments of his history of the Jews are cited by *Alexander Polyhistor and, subsequently, *Eusebius (and reflected as well in the writings of *Clement of Alexandria). A fifth fragment is found as well in Clement's *Miscellanies;* it is not clear whether Clement is citing via Polyhistor or some other source. In addition to these five fragments, all conceded to be authentically the work of Eupolemus, are two more fragments of an ancient historian. The first of these is attributed by Eusebius to Eupolemus, but scholars are divided about its provenance, many claiming that this passage is *not* the work of our Eupolemus; its author has therefore come to be known as Pseudo-Eupolemus. Recently, R. Doran has argued forcefully that the passage is indeed the work of the first Eupolemus; I have therefore designated that fragment herein as the work of [Pseudo-]Eupolemus. The last fragment is attributed in Eusebius not to Eupolemus at all but to "anonymous works"; some scholars nonetheless likewise attribute this fragment to Pseudo-Eupolemus. (See further Doran in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:873–878.) Text and translation: Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* 1:93–187; also Fallon and Doran in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:861–872, 873–882.

Eusebius (of Caesarea): Christian scholar, historian, and polemicist (c. 260-c. 340 C.E.). His *Ecclesiastical History* was a pioneering work that recounted the history of the church from the time of the Apostles to his own day. His *Preparation for the Gospel* (*Praeparatio Evangelica*) presented a spirited defense of Christianity against the background of Greek thought; in it he had occasion to cite from the writings of Hellenistic Jewish writers, including *Aristobulus, *Eupolemus, *Artapanus, *Demetrius the Chronographer, *Theodotus, and others. Text: Klostermann, *Eusebius Werke;* for *Praeparatio Evangelica* I also consulted the text and trans. by Guy Schroeder and Edouard des Places (*sources chrétiennes* 369) (Paris: Le Cerf, 1991). For fragments by Aristobulus and others, see those individual entries in this index.

exegesis: Interpretation, especially biblical interpretation.

exegetical motif: The underlying idea about how to explain a biblical text that becomes the basis, or part of the basis, for a *narrative expansion. Motifs tend to become more elaborate over time and often come to be joined with other motifs to form a new motif. A motif can thus exist in different variants or versions; the common source of two or more variants may be spoken of as the "basic motif." Motifs in this study are usually identified by the subheadings under which they are presented in each chapter, thus, "Wisdom Came First," "Death in a Day," and so forth.

(4Q) Exod.^{b}: An Exodus scroll found at *Qumran and published in Ulrich and Cross, *Qumran Cave 4:VII* (*DJD* 12). All translations mine.

Exodus Rabba (also *Shemot Rabba*): A composite medieval midrash on the book of Exodus, whose first part consists of rabbinic comments on verses from Exodus, chapters 1–10, while the second is a series of sermons on Exodus 12–40 of the *Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu* type (see **Midrash Tanḥuma*). Text: Shinan, *Midrash Shemot Rabba,* Chapters 1–14; *Midrash Rabba.* All translations mine.

(4Q464) Exposition on the Patriarchs: see (4Q464) **Apocryphon^{b}*

Ezechiel the Tragedian: This Greek-speaking Jew of the second century B.C.E. probably authored other dramatic works, but all that survives of his writings are fragments of a retelling of the Exodus narrative, the *Exagōgē* ("leading out"). As has been demonstrated by various modern scholars (and in particular Jacobson, *The "Exagoge" of Ezekiel),* Ezekiel's retelling abounds in interpretive traditions about Moses and the Exodus, many of which are paralleled in other ancient texts. Text and transla- tion: Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* 2:301–529; Robertson in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:803–819. (The latter translation is somewhat looser but I have generally favored it because of its attempt to reflect the metrical form of the original.)

4 Ezra (Fourth Book of Ezra): A recounting of various visions granted to Ezra (apparently Ezra the scribe of the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah—though *4 Ezra* 3:1 complicates the matter by identifying the author as "Salathiel, who am also called Ezra"). The visions, seven in all, contain much material relating to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and, more generally, to questions confronting Jews at the end of the Second Temple period. The book underwent a complicated history of transmission and came to be known by different names. The original version was apparently written in Hebrew, probably in the late first century C.E., but nothing of this Hebrew version survives; the text exists in Latin and other ancient versions. Translation: Stone, *Fourth Ezra,* with occasional slight modifications.

Fathers according to R. Nathan: see **Abot deR. Natan*

Firmicus Maternus (first half of fourth century C.E.): In his astronomical treatise *Mathesis,* written in Latin, Firmicus refers to the same tradition of "Abraham the Astrologer" found in **Pseudo-Orphica,* *Artapanus, and other earlier writings and writers. Text and translation: Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,* 2.493–494.

(4Q174) Florilegium: A fragmentary text from *Qumran that interweaves biblical citations and interpretations, presenting some of them in an implied or explicit messianic sense. This text was first published by John Allegro in the 1950s and has been the subject of much speculation since then. Annette Steudel has suggested that another Qumran fragment, (4Q177) *Catena A,* is actually part of the same document, calling them respectively

MidrEschat a and *b* (Steudel, *Der Midrasch zur Eschatologie aus der Qumrangemeinde*); while certainly possible, this hypothesis does not impose itself. All translations mine.

Galatians, Letter to the: A letter that is part of the New Testament, written around 53–54 C.E.; it is believed to be one of the authentic letters of Paul, which addresses in particular the issue of the Gentile Church, apparently in the face of pressure toward a more Judaizing Christianity (though the precise nature of Paul's opponents is still debated by scholars). See also: *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

(1Q20 or 1Q apGen ar) Genesis Apocryphon: An Aramaic text found at *Qumran. The text as it stands is incomplete (although new technology is now making available readings of previously illegible portions). In its original form, this composition apparently presented a series of first-person narratives spoken by different figures from the book of Genesis (of these the Abraham section is the best preserved). These narratives frequently contain interpretive motifs, some of which are paralleled in other Jewish writings of the period (*Jubilees,* for example) or in later, rabbinic texts. It is likely that the *Genesis Apocryphon* was composed sometime in the first century B.C.E. Text: Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer,* and Fitzmyer and Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts,* 102–127; Greenfield and Qimron, "The Genesis Apocryphon Col. XII," Morgenstern, "Hitherto Unpublished Columns." All translations mine.

(4Q252–254a) Genesis Pesher: A fragmentary Hebrew text found at *Qumran and commenting on a number of distinct interpretive cruxes in the book of Genesis. The name is something of a misnomer, since this is not a *pesher* of the sort known from elsewhere in the Qumran library; indeed, the text is remarkable for its down-to-earth explanations and commentary-like tone. All translations mine.

Genesis Rabba (also *Bereshit Rabba*): A rabbinic anthology of comments on verses from the book of Genesis. It was probably compiled at the end of the fourth or in the early fifth century C.E., although much of its exegesis certainly goes back to an earlier period. In this book I have relied primarily on the critical edition of Theodor and Albeck, *Midrasch Bereschit Rabba.* (As Albeck recognized before completing the project, the best manuscript among those used in this edition was not the one chosen by Theodor as the basic text [MS. British Museum Add. 27169], but Ms. Vat. Ebr. 30. Where significant differences exist, I have therefore generally relied on the readings of that text, as well as those found in Sokoloff, *Geniza Fragments of Bereshit Rabba.* (It is to be noted that another ancient manuscript of *Genesis Rabba,* Ms. Vat. Ebr. 60, was not used by Theodor-Albeck in their edition.) All translations mine.

Gospel of Nicodemus: A pseudepigraphon also called the "Acts of Pilate" that relates the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as his descent into hell, freeing the dead and seizing Satan. It was probably written in the third or fourth century C.E. Translation: Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha.*

Gospel of Philip (Gnostic): A Christian gnostic treatise and one of the texts of the *Nag Hammadi library. It was probably written in Syria in the second half of the third century C.E. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

Gospels, the Four New Testament (that is, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John): The word "gospel" comes from the Old English expression *gode spell* for "good news," corresponding to the Greek *euangelion.* In Paul's writings and elsewhere, the word refers

to the message of Christianity, but the term later came to be used specifically of narrative accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus; the "four Gospels" are the four canonical books of this type contained in the New Testament, in addition to which other, noncanonical writings also bear the name "gospel."

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are fundamentally similar, and much of New Testament scholarship has been devoted to unraveling their interrelationship as well as their possible dependence on other, still earlier, texts or traditions. Matthew was probably written around 90 C.E. by an unknown Christian living perhaps in the area of Antioch, Syria; Mark's gospel is earlier, closer to the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (70 C.E.), which he mentions (13:12). The author of Luke's gospel is also the author of *Acts; both were probably written around 80–85 C.E. Because these three gospels were at one point printed in parallel columns—an arrangement called a synopsis—in order to highlight their similarities and differences, they are sometimes called the synoptic Gospels. The gospel of John is of a different nature and some of its content stands in contrast to that of the first three gospels. It is generally dated later than the first three, no earlier than the end of the first century C.E. All four gospels contain frequent references (sometimes oblique) to texts from the Hebrew Bible; they often present or reflect interpretations of these biblical texts. Sometimes these interpretations, whether old or new, are only understandable fully by reference to the form in which the interpreted texts were transmitted in the *Targums or other bodies of ancient interpretation. Translation: Revised Standard Version, sometimes modified slightly.

Greatness of Moses: A Samaritan text of uncertain date translated by Moses Gaster in his *Studies and Texts*, 1:125–126.

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–395 C.E.): Bishop of Nyssa (in Cappodocia), theologian, and biblical commentator. Text: *PG* 44. All translations mine.

halakhah: A general term common in rabbinic and later writings that refers to the manner in which the laws of the Bible are observed, extended, and applied to daily life. Different systems of *halakhah* were championed by different groups in Second Temple times; see *Rabbis, the. *Halakhah* was thus a major concern of ancient Jewish interpreters; it is sometimes paired with *aggadah* ("narrative"), a term usually referring to the interpretation of nonlegal parts of the Bible.

(4Q394–399) Halakhic Letter (or *Miqṣat Ma'asê ha-Torah*): One of the most recently published, and important, of the *Dead Sea Scrolls. It seems to be a kind of literary letter or manifesto. It speaks in the first-person plural ("We believe . . ." and "Here are some of our rulings") while it addresses—as a letter might—another group of people in the second-person plural ("We have written to you . . ."); at the same time, the fact that the text has been found in multiple copies would appear to indicate that this text, even if it originally was a real letter, eventually became an important statement of doctrine for the *Qumran community, defining some of the principal matters in which its **halakhah* differed from that of the (apparently Pharisaic) group to which its words are addressed. Text: Qimron and Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4, V.* All translations mine.

halakhic midrashim: A group of individual rabbinic texts that interpret different books of the Pentateuch. The name reflects the fact that these books deal largely, though by no means exclusively, with matters of **halakhah,* the interpretation and application of biblical laws. (It is apparently because of their concern with *halakhah* that these texts were

compiled exclusively on the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; Genesis, because it contains little of an overtly legal character, was not included in the scope of the *halakhic midrashim.*) The *halakhic midrashim* include the **Mekhilta deR. Ishmael* and **Mekhilta deR. Shimon b. Yoḥai* (both on Exodus), **Sifra* (on Leviticus), **Sifrei Numbers* and **Sifrei Zutta* (both on Numbers) and **Sifrei Deuteronomy* and **Midrash Tanna'im* (both on Deuteronomy). Because of the apparent doubling of *halakhic midrashim* on different books, David Hoffman and later scholars have pursued the possibility that the two different "sets" of *halakhic midrashim* derive from two ancient schools of rabbinic interpreters, those of R. Aqiba and R. Ishmael. While clear differences in content, approach, rabbinic scholars cited, and *halakhic* terminology do indeed characterize the different sets, Hoffman's brilliant thesis has nonetheless been shown by later scholars to oversimplify matters somewhat: non-*halakhic* material in the two sets does not seem to derive from the same putative sources as the *halakhic* material, and it is far from clear, moreover, which characteristics in the two sets reflect differences fundamental to the texts themselves and which may merely reflect preferences of the texts' final editors. With regard to date, since the rabbis cited in them are generally *tanna'im* along with some first-generation *'amora'im* (see *rabbis, the), the *halakhic midrashim* are generally assumed to have been compiled sometime in the third century C.E. (though some scholars have questioned this assumption as well). If this dating is correct, the *halakhic midrashim* represent, after the Mishnah, Tosefta, and perhaps one or two other texts, the earliest stage of rabbinic writings.

Hebrews, Letter to the: An anonymous New Testament letter whose precise addressees are unknown. It appears to be in fact a sermon or exhortation (and not a letter) addressed to an early Christian community, treating a number of doctrinal issues, including the issue of priesthood. Here, Melchizedek figures prominently in the argument. Some have suggested that this letter was written in opposition to teachings associated with the *Qumran community or the Essenes. Translation: Revised Standard Version.

Hecataeus of Abdera: The passage cited from Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40:3 is attributed there to Hecataeus of Miletus, but scholars agree that the real author was the later (and lesser known) Hecataeus of Abdera, author of the *Aegyptiaca,* who lived in the third century B.C.E. See further Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism,* 26. Text and translation: Diodorus Siculus LCL. See also Gauger, "Zitate in der Jüdischen Apologetik."

Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers: The last two books of the **Apostolic Constitutions* contain Christian liturgical works, among which survive a number of ancient Jewish prayers apparently composed in Greek for use in synagogue and subsequently adapted for Christian worship. The ancient, Jewish origin of these prayers was first proposed by Kaufmann Kohler and his thesis was taken up by later scholars, notably E. R. Goodenough. The date of the original prayers is still far from certain: the second century C.E. may be a good guess. For an overview of scholarship, see "Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers: One Hundred Years of Discussion," *JSP* 5 (1989), 17–27. Translation: Goodenough, *By Light, Light;* Darnell in *OTP* 2:677–697.

Hermas, Shepherd of: see *Shepherd of Hermas

Historical [Istoricheskaya] Paleya / Interpretive [Tolkovaya] Paleya: The various *Palei* that exist are all basically expansions and elaborations of the biblical text. The oldest manuscripts themselves are, from a biblicist's standpoint, very late, originating (like all Slavonic

writings) well on in the Middle Ages; however, it is clear that behind these manuscripts themselves stand earlier Greek texts and arguably, in many instances, texts or traditions first formulated in Hebrew or Aramaic in the Second Temple period. Beyond this generalization there is little that can be said to characterize the whole of the *Paleya* literature, each text and manuscript tradition requiring its own treatment. (See further Istrin, *Ocherki istorii drevnorusskoy literatury;* Suminkova, *Izucheniye russkogo yazyka i istochnikovedeniye;* Tvorogov, *Drevnerusskiye khronografy.*)

For the purposes of this book I have cited from the printed editions of Popov, *Kniga Bytia Nebesi i Zemli (Paleya Istoricheskaya);* Tikhonravov, *Pamyatniki Starinnoy Russkoy Literatury;* Franko, *Apokrifi i Legendi;* and the Greek text of Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzintina.* All translations mine.

History of the Rechabites: A late (sixth-century C.E.?) Christian text, sections of which may, however, be based on an earlier Jewish work going back to before the second century C.E. (For more on this text, see Charlesworth, "A Study of the History of the Rechabites.") It survives in Syriac, Ethiopic, Greek, and other languages. Translation of the Syriac text: Charlesworth in *OTP* 2:443–461.

(1QH and 1Q35) Hodayot: see (1QH and 1Q35) **Thanksgiving Hymns*

(11QPs^{a}) Hymn to the Creator: A Hebrew hymn celebrating God's actions in creating the world. It was discovered in a psalms scroll from Cave 11 at *Qumran. Text: Sanders, *Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11* (*DJD* 4). Translation mine.

Hypostasis of the Archons: A treatise found in the gnostic *Nag Hammadi library containing an esoteric exposition of Genesis 1–6. The "archons" (rulers) in question are the enslaving authorities who hold temporary spiritual sway over all humanity. It may have been composed in the third century C.E. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c. 200): Theologian, bishop of Lyons, and the author of *Against All Heresies,* an important work for the history of gnosticism (see *Nag Hammadi library), one of the heresies prominently attacked therein. Although this treatise was written in Greek, it survives in Latin translation; all translations mine.

j.: Stands for *J(erusalem [or Palestinian] Talmud), just preceding the name of the tractate, thus j. *Pesaḥim.*

James, Letter of: A New Testament letter attributed to "James" (the English equivalent of the Hebrew name Jacob), possibly intended as a reference to the brother of Jesus; in fact the letter appears to be a collection of exhortations preserved by Christians living in the land of Israel and (hence) in close dialogue with Jewish ideas and practices. This letter's position on the performance of divine commandments (especially 2:18–26) seems to stand in contrast to the position articulated by Paul in *Romans. The date and circumstances of its composition are unknown. Translation: Revised Standard Version, sometimes modified slightly.

Jannes and Jambres: A book elaborating two figures identified as among Pharaoh's magicians or "wizards" at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. The text survives in fragmentary form: it appears to have been composed originally in Greek not later than the mid-third century C.E., though this composition may have been based on an earlier (Semitic) one on the same theme. Text and translation: Pietersma, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians.*

Jerahmeel, Chronicles of: see **Chronicles of Yeraḥme'el*

Jeremiah, Letter (or *Epistle*) *of:* see **Letter of Jeremiah*

Jerome: An outstanding scholar and altogether fascinating figure, Jerome (Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, c. 345–420) was one of the most influential biblical scholars of the early Christian world. He traveled widely, lived for several years as a hermit in the Syrian desert, and served as secretary to Pope Damasus in Rome. The latter commissioned Jerome to revise the "Old Latin" (**Vetus Latina*) version of the Bible, whose clumsy and occasionally ungrammatical prose had become a liability, particularly with regard to potential converts to Christianity. Jerome's mastery of classical style and his gift for languages made him an ideal translator. He began by seeking to revise the *Vetus Latina,* principally in the light of various Greek versions (the Septuagint and later translations). However, this work only led him to conclude that the Septuagint was itself corrupt: what was needed, he felt, was a new Latin version translated directly from the Hebrew. Jerome settled in Bethlehem and studied Hebrew and biblical interpretation with Jewish teachers, an act all the more remarkable when considered against the background of anti-Jewish polemics then popular among Christians. His translation of Scripture eventually supplanted the *Vetus Latina* and came to be called the Vulgate; Jerome referred to it proudly as a rendering of the *Hebraica Veritas* (the "Hebrew truth"). In addition to the interpretations embodied in the Vulgate itself, Jerome also transmitted much interpretive material in his *Hebrew Questions in Genesis,* his *Letters,* and his commentaries on various biblical books.

Texts: Vulgate: *Biblia Sacra Juxta Vulgatam Versionem; Quaestiones Hebraicae: PL* vol. 23; Antin, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina,* vol. 72. All translations mine. (Too late for inclusion in this volume is a new English translation and commentary: Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis.*)

Jerusalem Talmud: A compendium of Jewish learning and biblical exegesis compiled in the land of Israel in the late fourth or early fifth century C. E. Like the *Babylonian Talmud, it takes the form of a highly digressive commentary on the *Mishnah, but the Jerusalem Talmud is considerably shorter than the Babylonian. Because of the prestige and power of the Babylonian centers of Jewish learning (where the Babylonian Talmud was in use), the Jerusalem Talmud came to have less influence than the Babylonian within later Judaism. All translations mine.

John, Gospel of: see *Gospels

1, 2, and 3 John: Three New Testament letters traditionally attributed to John the son of Zebedee, who is also said to have written both the *gospel of John and the book of *Revelation. While the second and third are indeed formally letters, the first is not, and the salutations of 2 and 3 John refer to himself not as John but "the elder." The actual authorship and date of these texts is therefore disputed; arguably, they were written at the end of the first century C.E. or perhaps slightly later. Translation: Revised Standard Version, sometimes modified slightly.

(4Q371–373) Joseph Apocryphon: A brief text from *Qumran that mentions Joseph (apparently as a representative or embodiment of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and not as the biblical figure, the son of Jacob). Text: Schuller, "4Q 372: A Text about Joseph." All translations mine.

Joseph and Aseneth: A Greek romance elaborating the marriage of Joseph with Asenath

(mentioned in passing in Gen. 41:45) and related events. This text was composed originally in Greek, presumably in or around Alexandria sometime near the turn of the era. Translation: Burchard in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:202–247.

Josephus, Flavius (ca. 37 C.E.–C. 100 C.E.): Born of a priestly family in Jerusalem, Josephus was, by his own account, a gifted student who acquired a broad exposure to the different Jewish schools of thought existent in his own time. He served as a general in the great Jewish revolt against the Romans but was defeated and taken prisoner. (Josephus recounts that he prophesied that the Roman commander, Vespasian, would be made emperor; Vespasian spared Josephus' life and when, two years later, the prophecy came true, freed him.) After the war Josephus moved to Rome and composed, among other books, his multivolume *Jewish Antiquities.* The first four books of this massive work retell the events of the *Pentateuch with frequent additions and modifications that reflect the biblical interpretations he learned in his youth; they are a rich source of information about ancient exegesis. In addition, he wrote a lengthy account of the Jewish revolt against Rome (*The Jewish War*), a brief autobiography (*Life of Josephus*), and a spirited defense of Judaism (*Against Apion*). Texts and translations: Josephus, Works of, in LCL; Nodet, *Les Antiquités juives,* 1–3.

Jubilees: A book purporting to contain a revelation given to Moses by the "angel of the Presence," one of the angels closest to God, at the time of the Sinai revelation. It takes the form of a retelling of the book of Genesis and the first part of Exodus: the angel goes over the same material but fills in many details, sometimes shifting slightly the order of things, and occasionally skipping over elements in the narrative. The book was originally written in Hebrew, and fragments of it have been found among the *Dead Sea Scrolls. From Hebrew it was translated into Greek (parts of this translation still survive in quotations from Greek authors) and from Greek into Latin and Ge'ez. The (almost) complete text exists only in Ge'ez, though a substantial section is extant in Latin as well. Many scholars date the book to the middle of the second century B.C.E. or even later, but I favor an earlier date, perhaps at the beginning of the second century B.C.E. or even a decade or two before that.

The author of *Jubilees* was a bold, innovative interpreter in his own right—one might say, without exaggeration, something of a genius—and subsequent generations valued highly, even venerated, his book's insights into Scripture. In seeking to retell the book of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, this author had a definite program: he wished to claim that this initial part of the Pentateuch, although it consists mostly of stories and does not contain any law code as such, had nonetheless been designed to impart legal instruction no less binding than the overt law codes found in the rest of the Pentateuch. In other words, by reading the stories of Genesis carefully, one could figure out all kinds of binding commandments that God had, as it were, hidden in the narrative. Reading in this fashion, the author of *Jubilees* was able to find a set of rules strictly defining what is permitted and forbidden on the Sabbath, regulations forbidding marriage between Jews and non-Jews, strictures against various forms of "fornication," and other subjects dear to this writer's heart. One interesting feature of the book is that it maintains that the true calendar ordained by God consisted of exactly 52 Sabbaths (364 days) per year and that the moon, whose waxing and waning determined the months and festivals for other Jews, ought rightly to have no such role in the true calendar. The author sought to show that this calendar, too, was implied by the stories of Genesis.

Apart from these pet issues, *Jubilees'* author ended up presenting a good deal more in the way of biblical interpretation. Some of these interpretations may likewise have been of his own creation, but others were certainly widespread traditions at the time of his writing. One way or another, the book is a treasure of ancient thinking about the Bible. The Dead Sea Scrolls sect adopted the same calendar as that prescribed by *Jubilees,* and it is clear that the members of this group held this book in high esteem. Translations cited: (principally) VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees;* Wintermute in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:35–142; also consulted: Charles, *The Book of Jubilees, or, The Little Genesis.*

Jude, Letter of: A very brief New Testament "letter" (but really more of an exhortation) addressing various issues and invoking scriptural examples. Its date is unknown. Translation: Revised Standard Version.

Judith: One of the Old Testament *Apocrypha, a brief book that recounts the bravery of its fictional Jewish heroine in opposing the foreigners come to invade Judaea. It may well have come into existence in stages, an original tale going back to the early second century B.C.E. (or earlier) having undergone slight elaboration later on. Probably composed originally in Hebrew, it survives in Greek and other translations. While biblical interpretation is hardly a main item in the book, several passages do reflect an early stage of ancient biblical interpretation. Translation: Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha, occasionally modified; also consulted: Grintz, *The Book of Judith.*

Julian (that is, Flavius Claudius Julianus, called in some Christian sources Julian the Apostate; 332–363 C.E.): A nephew of the emperor Constantine—whose adoption of Christianity had changed the course of history—Julian was of a different mind; when he himself became emperor in 361, he set about undermining the recent gains of the church and instituted a series of anti-Christian measures. He is the author of a now-lost treatise *Against the Galileans* (that is, the Christians), part of which may be reconstructed from a refutation of it written by Cyril of Alexandria. Julian shows a striking acquaintance with Scripture as well as Jewish practices and beliefs, which he clearly prefers to those of Christianity; he apparently intended to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Text and translation in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors.*

Justin (Martyr) (c. 100-c.165 C.E.): Christian apologist and martyr, born in Flavia Neapolis (Shechem, Nablus) in Samaria. His *Dialogue with Trypho* consists of a lengthy debate with a certain learned Jew named Trypho (whom some have identified with R. Tarfon of the *Mishnah), in which the pair discuss numerous matters of biblical interpretation; the views of both discussants are most informative about the state of exegesis at this point. The dialogue is set in the wake of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 C.E.; see *Dialogue* 1:3 and 9:3) but was probably written around 150 C.E. Text: Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten.* Translation: Williams, *The Dialogue with Trypho.*

Ladder of Jacob: An expansive retelling of Jacob's dream vision at Bethel. Surviving only in Slavonic, this text was apparently first written in Hebrew (or, less likely, Aramaic), arguably sometime in the first century C.E. or even B.C.E. (See further Kugel, "Ladder of Jacob.") Texts consulted: *Tolkovaya Paleya* of 1477, published in facsimile in *Obščestvo lyubitelei drevnorusskoy pis'mennosti* vol. 93 (Petersburg, 1893); Pipyn in G. Kuševlev-Bezborodko, *Pamyatniki Starinnoy Russkoy Literatury;* Tikhonravov, *Pamyatniki Russkoy Literatury;* Franko, *Apokrifi i Legendi;* and several manuscript copies lent to me by Horace Lunt (see his "Ladder of Jacob" in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:402–403). All translations mine.

Lamentations Rabba (or *Eikha Rabbati* or *Rabba*): A rabbinic midrashic compilation on the book of Lamentations, probably to be dated to the late fourth or early fifth century C.E., though obviously containing much earlier material. Text: Buber, *Midrasch Ekhah Rabbah* (though this text does not reflect all manuscripts and fragments now available). All translations mine.

Letter (or *Epistle) of Aristeas:* An apologetic tract in defense of Judaism, written in Greek, probably in the late second or first century B.C.E. This treatise, in the form of a letter from a certain Aristeas to his brother Philocrates, is notable for its account of the origins of the *Septuagint, its description of the Jerusalem Temple and its service, and its justification of various biblical laws and Jewish practices. Translation: Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates,* Shutt in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:12–34.

Letter of Barnabas (or *Epistle of Barnabas*): A Christian work of the late first or early second century C.E. ascribed (probably falsely) to the disciple Barnabas. It was cited as Scripture by *Clement of Alexandria and *Origen. Despite a certain polemical, anti-Jewish character, the epistle frequently echoes Jewish traditions of biblical interpretation and contains other indications of close familiarity with Jewish practices and belief. Text and translation consulted: Prigent and Kraft, *l'Epître de Barnabé.* All translations mine.

Letter (or *Epistle) of Jeremiah:* A polemic against idolatry that was (or came to be) attributed to the biblical prophet Jeremiah. It is apparently referred to in 2 Macc. 2:2 and may thus be a rather ancient work, going back, according to some scholars, to the fourth century B.C.E. or earlier. It survives in Greek (including a Greek fragment found at *Qumran; see Baillet, *Petites grottes,* p. 143) but it may well have been translated from a Hebrew original. Text: Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha.

Leviticus Rabba (also *Vayyiqra [Wayyiqra] Rabba*): A homiletical midrash on the book of Leviticus, apparently redacted sometime in the fifth century C.E. in the land of Israel, but containing much earlier material. Text: Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah.* All translations mine.

Life of Adam and Eve: There exist in various languages and recensions different expansions of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis, all of which have certain common elements. Five principal versions of this narrative—the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses,* and the Latin, Armenian, Georgian, and Slavonic texts of the *Life of Adam and Eve*—have recently been presented synoptically in Anderson and Stone, *Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve.* As Anderson has demonstrated ("Penitence Narrative . . ."), the Armenian and Georgian versions of this text sometimes preserve more clearly than the others exegetical motifs from what was presumably the earliest form of this text; however, sometimes the opposite seems to be the case. In any event, I have indicated in citations herein from which of the various versions I am citing; for the more widely known Greek and Latin texts I have generally used Johnson's translations in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:249–295, though sometimes I have translated them myself. (The Greek text is referred to herein as the *Apocalypse of Moses,* while in citing the latter I have referred to, specifically, the Latin text or the *Vita.*)

The interrelationship of these texts in their various recensions remains an unresolved question. However, all these texts arguably trace their ancestry back to an original Hebrew or Aramaic text of perhaps the first century C.E., which was subsequently modified more than once in the process of transmission. These "primary Adam writings"

should be distinguished from the "secondary Adam literature," texts dealing with Adam and Eve that are generally of Christian authorship, though influenced by the primary Adam writings. This group includes, in Greek, the **Apocalypse of Adam, Penitence of Adam,* **Testament of Adam,* and the *Life of Adam,* as well as some of the Adam material contained in the Greek and Slavonic *Palei* and the Syriac **Cave of Treasures;* it also includes the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan,* a work extant in Ethiopic and Arabic, and yet other writings. See further Stone, *History of the Literature of Adam and Eve.*

Luke, gospel of: see *Gospels

LXX: see *Septuagint

m.: Designates a tractate of the *Mishnah, thus m. *Abot* 3:14.

MT: Masoretic text. See traditional Hebrew text.

Maccabees, book of: The name given to four different books: see below. Translations: Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha; also (for 3 and 4 Maccabees) Anderson in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:509–564.

1 Maccabees: This book recounts the successful Jewish revolt against the Hellenized Syrians ruling their homeland. The revolt, which began in 167 B.C.E., was led by a group known as the Maccabees. The same book also contains a further chronicle of events to the end of the second century B.C.E. This book was apparently intended not only to celebrate the military victory but, as well, to legitimate the Hasmonean dynasty that this victory inaugurated. It was probably written early in the first century B.C.E.

2 Maccabees: Essentially a greatly abridged (and somewhat garbled) version of a now lost history of the Maccabean revolt written by a certain "Jason of Cyrene" (otherwise unknown), this abridgement was probably completed in the first half of the first century B.C.E.

3 Maccabees: A historical romance, this book was originally written in Greek in the first century B.C.E. and set in the third century B.C.E.

4 Maccabees: This book is a treatise devoted to the theme of reason's domination of the passions. Written in Greek in the first century C.E., it uses biblical people and incidents to illustrate its ideas.

(1QS or 1Q28) Manual of Discipline: see **Community Rule*

Mark, gospel of: see *Gospels

Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A composite work whose first part (chapters 1–5) is now known as the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* (containing within it an independent unit, 3:13–4:22, which is sometimes called the *Testament of Hezekiah*); its second part, chapters 6–11, is called the *Vision of Isaiah.* The *Martyrdom* section (minus the *Testament of Hezekiah,* which appears to be a Christian interpolation) is the oldest part of the work, going back to the first century C.E. or earlier, arguably back even to the second century B.C.E. As for the *Testament of Hezekiah* section, it has been dated to the end of the first century C.E., while the *Vision of Isaiah* section may belong to the second or third century C.E. Translation: Knibb in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:143–176.

Masoretic text (MT): see *traditional Hebrew text

Matthew, gospel of: see *Gospels

(4Q303) Meditation on the Creation A and *(4Q304) Meditation on the Creation C:* Very fragmentary text or texts that refer to various aspects of God's creation of the world.

Megillat Ta'anit: A brief work written in Aramaic apparently about the time of the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. It is essentially a list of various holidays and remembrances established in Second Temple times and on which fasting and public mourning were forbidden. Some time after its composition, this text was supplemented by a scholion, written in Hebrew, explaining the contents of the list. The later date of the scholion notwithstanding, some of the information contained in it seems to be an accurate recording of ancient traditions. The text is, however, much in need of a new scholarly edition taking advantage of new manuscripts and linguistic information. An important new reckoning with this material is being made by Vered Noam, with some of her results already summarized in "The Scholion of *Megillat Ta'anit*—Toward an Understanding of its Stemma." She has argued that Lichtenstein's (eclectic) edition of the text is based on the false assumption that the two versions of it represented by mss. Parma and Oxford represent essentially a single work, the former being simply a shorter version of the latter. Noam's claim is that they were two quite different texts which were later supplemented by an expanded version that evolved in Europe in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries C.E. I have also used her unpublished Master's thesis (under the direction of Prof. Y. Sussman), "The Scholion to Megillat Ta'anit," Hebrew University, 1991. All translations mine. Edition: Hans Lichtenstein, "Die Fastenrolle," in the light of Noam, "The Scholion." Citations refer to page numbers in Lichtenstein's edition. See also Tabory, "When Was the Fast-Scroll Nullified?"

Mekhilta deR. Ishmael: A (rabbinic) collection of interpretations of verses in the book of Exodus. The *Mekhilta deR. Ishmael* is one of a group of texts known collectively as the **halakhic midrashim;* it would thus seem to belong to the third century C.E. In citing from the *Mekhilta deR. Rabbi Ishmael,* I have generally relied on the printed editions of Horovitz and Rabin, *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael,* and that of Lauterbach. However, neither of these editions take into account the Eastern textual tradition, and there is need for a new critical edition: see Kahane, "The Critical Edition of the Mekhilta deR. Ishmael in the Light of Geniza Fragments." All translations mine.

Mekhilta deR. Shimon b. Yoḥai: One of the **halakhic midrashim,* a collection of interpretations of verses in the book of Exodus. For various reasons, scholars have suggested that it may in fact be somewhat later than the other *halakhic midrashim,* belonging therefore to the fourth or even fifth century C.E. Text: Epstein and Melamed, *Mekhilta deR. Šim'on b. Yoḥai,* though this edition is in need of updating in the light of new material. All translations mine.

(11Q13) Melchizedek Text: A *Qumran document centering on the figure of Melchizedek; its date is somewhat difficult to fix, but most scholars set it in the first century B.C.E. Translations mine.

(4Q521) Messianic Apocalypse: A brief, fragmentary text from *Qumran that twice seems to assert a belief in the resurrection of the dead. Published by Puesch, "Une apocalypse méssianique."

midrash: A Hebrew term meaning interpretation or exegesis. The term is used nowadays to designate specifically the sort of exegesis practiced by the *Rabbis and contained in such works as the *Babylonian and *Jerusalem Talmuds as well as various collections of rabbinic exegesis, such as the **Mekhilta deR. Ishmael,* **Sifrei Deuteronomy,* **Genesis (Exodus, Leviticus,* etc.*) Rabba,* and dozens of others. *Midrash* is also often used as the title

of such collections of exegesis, such as *Midrash ha-Gadol, Midrash Tanḥuma,* and so forth.

Midrash Abkir: A midrashic collection, now lost save for scattered excerpts in **Yalqut Shimoni* and other works; a late medieval date appears likely. The name derives from the initial letters in the phrase "*Amen Beyamenu* [probably originally *Ba*] *Ken Yehi Raṣon*" ("He [the Messiah] is indeed coming, may it be [God's] will"), with which its homilies ended.

Midrash ha-Gadol: A late-medieval anthology of midrash on the Pentateuch. This collection, of Yemenite origin (generally attributed to David b. Amram of Aden, Yemen, who lived in the thirteenth or fourteenth century), often freely reworks its sources, sometimes interpolating material from Maimonides or other medieval scholars. At the same time, it also preserves much ancient material, some of it otherwise quite unattested or at least unknown in that particular form. Text: Margulies et al., *Midrash ha-Gadol.*

Midrash Konen: A midrash on the creation of the world, first printed in Venice, 1601. Text: Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrasch,* 2:23–39. All translations mine.

Midrash Leqaḥ Tob: A late midrashic compilation on the Pentateuch and the five scrolls; it is attributed to Tubiah b. Eli'ezer, who lived in Bulgaria in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Text: Buber, *Midrasch Lekach Tob.* All translations mine.

Midrash Petirat Moshe: see **Petirat Moshe*

Midrash on Proverbs: A midrash on the biblical book of Proverbs that most scholars agree to have been compiled after the *Babylonian Talmud, some suggesting a date as late as the ninth or tenth century C.E. Text: Visotzky, *Midrash Mishle.* All translations mine.

Midrash on Psalms (or *Midrash Šoḥer Ṭob, Midrash Tehillim*): A composite midrash on the book of Psalms whose core probably goes back at least to Talmudic times; it was apparently compiled in some form in the land of Israel. Text: Buber, *Midrasch Tehillim,* and the *Midrash Šoḥer Ṭob;* also consulted: Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms.* All translations mine.

Midrash Sekhel Tob: A late midrashic compilation on the Pentateuch (only the Genesis and Exodus sections survive) written in 1139 by Menaḥem b. Solomon, possibly in Italy. Text: Buber, *Sechel Tob.* All translations mine.

Midrash Šoḥer Ṭob: see **Midrash on Psalms*

Midrash Tanḥuma: An early medieval compilation of rabbinic midrash on the Torah extant in various forms. Because of a standard formula of opening, the midrashim in this collection are said to be of the *Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu* type, one found as well in other midrashic compilations and manuscripts including **Deuteronomy Rabba* and parts of **Exodus Rabba,* **Numbers Rabba,* **Pesiqta Rabbati,* and yet others. In addition to the standard ("printed") *Tanḥuma,* a significantly different text of this collection was published in the last century by Solomon Buber, who mistakenly believed his to be the "ancient" *Tanḥuma.* (This text is referred to herein as *Tanḥuma [Buber].*) Subsequently numerous *Tanḥuma* and *Tanḥuma*-like fragments have been published from manuscript. The various *Midrash Tanḥuma* texts and fragments may all stem back to a common type, but attempts to reconstruct any particular *Ur*-text have failed. Texts used herein: *Midrash Tanḥuma;* Buber, *Midrasch Tanḥuma;* fragments in Wertheimer, *Battei Midrašot, 1:139–170; Urbach, "Fragments of Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu."* All translations mine.

Midrash Tanna'im: A reconstruction, made in the early twentieth century by David Hoffmann, of a lost **halakhic midrash* on the book of Deuteronomy. Hoffmann derived most of his reconstruction from fragments preserved in **Midrash ha-Gadol* as well as from some *Cairo Genizah fragments (see *Sirach) of this work published by Solomon Schechter; however, the actual content of the original work is still in dispute and a new edition, reckoning with Hoffmann's selections in the light of new information, is much to be desired. Text: Hoffmann, *Midrash Tanna'im Lesepher Debarim.* All translations mine.

Midrash on the Ten Commandments (or *Midrash 'Aseret ha-Dibberot*): A compilation of narratives and other material loosely connected to the Decalogue (see further Dan, *The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages,* 79–85). Text: Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch,* 1:62–90.

Midrash Tehillim: see **Midrash on the Psalms*

Midrash Wayyissa'u: An account of the wars of Jacob's sons that parallels the narratives in *Jubilees* 34 and the *Testament of Judah;* the relationship between these texts remains obscure. Text: Hyman, Lerrer, and Shiloni, *Yalquṭ Šim'oni,* 2:691–694.

Midrash Wehizhir: A medieval midrashic collection on the biblical books of Exodus-Numbers. Text: Freimann, *Midrash Wehizhir.*

MidrEschat a and *b:* see (4Q174) *Florilegium

(4Q394–399) Miqṣat Ma'asei ha-Torah: see *(4Q394–399) *Halakhic Letter*

Mishnah: A codification of Jewish law and practice put into its final form around 200 C.E. It fleshes out the details of many things treated only cursorily in biblical law in addition to addressing a number of entirely new matters. For the "traditions of the elders" that it transmits, see in greater detail Chapter 20 above and also *Rabbis, the. Although not generally concerned with biblical interpretation as such, the Mishnah nonetheless contains much information about tannaitic and earlier Jewish biblical exegesis. All translations mine.

Moses, Armenian History of: See **Armenian Apocrypha.* This particular text is to be found in Issaverdens, *Uncanonical Writings of the Old Testament,* and Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha,* 109–116.

(1Q22) Moses, Words of (Dibrei Mosheh): see **Words of Moses*

motif: see *exegetical motif

Nag Hammadi library: A collection of gnostic religious texts first discovered in December 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. The texts are written in Coptic but were originally composed in Greek. Although the texts are of diverse character, gnosticism appears to be the unifying element of the collection. Among the Nag Hammadi texts cited herein are: the **Apocalypse of Adam,* **Apocryphon of John,* **Concept of Our Great Power,* **Hypostasis of the Archons,* **On the Origin of the World, Sophia of Jesus Christ, Teaching of Sylvanus,* **Tripartite Tractate,* and **Valentinian Exposition.*

(4Q169) Nahum Pesher: A fairly well preserved text from *Qumran that presents a commentary on selected verses from the biblical book of Nahum, seeking to find referents to the prophet's words in the events of the commentator's own era. Text: Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4:I* (*DJD* 5), 37–42; Strugnell, "Notes," 204–210. Translations mine.

narrative expansion: One of the most characteristic features of ancient biblical scholarship,

whereby all manner of "extras" not found in the biblical text itself—additional actions performed by someone in the biblical narrative or words spoken by him—are inserted in a retelling of the text by some later author or in a commentary upon it. Such narrative expansions are, by definition, *exegetical* because they are ultimately based on something that *is* in the text—an unusual word or turn of phrase that sets off the imagination or the exegete, or simply some problem in the plot that requires resolution. Narrative expansions may be said to be based upon one or more *exegetical motif.

(4Q462) Narrative Fragment: A text from *Qumran that refers to events in the book of Genesis and elsewhere; the manuscript seems to date from the first century B.C.E., though the text itself may have been composed earlier. Text: M. Smith, "4Q462 (Narrative) Fragment." All translations mine.

Nash Papyrus: An ancient Hebrew manuscript purchased from an Egyptian dealer by W. L. Nash in 1903. This brief text dates from around 150 B.C.E. and contains the Decalogue followed by the beginning of the Shema (Deut. 6:4–9). The two passages may have been written together because they were intended to be recited together as part of the public liturgy, as specified in m. *Tamid* 5:1.

(2Q24, 4Q554–555, 5Q15, 11Q18) New Jerusalem: An Aramaic work found at *Qumran that appears to contain a detailed, first-person, account of a (visionary) tour of the city of Jerusalem. The relationship of the various fragments remains to be clarified. Translations mine.

Noah, (Armenian) Story of: Many ancient interpretive texts and traditions have been preserved only in Armenian; this (along with others) is to be found in Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to the Patriarchs and Prophets.*

(4Q380 and 381) Non-Canonical Psalms: A number of manuscripts from *Qumran contain psalmlike compositions that are not found in the present Jewish biblical canon (see, for example, **Hymn to the Creator*). The manuscripts numbered 4Q380 and 381 are fragments of collections of such texts. The manuscripts themselves have been dated roughly to the end of the second century B.C.E.; the texts may have been composed then or as much as a century or two earlier. Text: Schuller, *Non-Canonical Psalms from Qumran.* All translations mine.

Numbers Rabba (also *Bemidbar Rabba*): A composite medieval midrash on the book of Numbers, whose first part comments extensively on Numbers chapters 1–7, while the second part is a form of **Midrash Tanḥuma* on the rest of Numbers. Text: *Midrash Rabba.* All translations mine.

Numenius (of Apamea, Syria; second half of second century C.E.): An author cited by *Clement of Alexandria, *Origen, *Eusebius, and others, he was an admirer of Judaism and spoke of Moses favorably. Passages attributed to him are assembled in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors,* 2:206–216.

Odes of Solomon: Much about these ancient hymnic compositions remains unresolved, including their original language (it seems to have been a Semitic one, though even this is not certain), the nature of the original community in which they were used (whether Jewish or Christian, and of what sort), and even whether the hymns represent a one-time composition or a later editorial reworking of earlier hymns. There are some striking similarities between them and the Qumran **Thanksgiving Hymns* (*Hodayot*), similarities

in language, style, and ideas. An approximate date of 100 C.E. has been suggested by Charlesworth (*OTP* 2:727), but given the ambiguities mentioned, such a date must be regarded as only a broad approximation. Translation: Charlesworth in his *OTP* 2:735–771; Emerton in Sparks, *AOT* 683–732.

On the Origin of the World: A gnostic treatise (whose true title is unknown, the current one having been assigned to it by modern scholars), one of the texts of the *Nag Hammadi library. It was probably written, according to its editors, in Alexandria in the late third or fourth century C.E. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

Origen: Born in Alexandria around 185 C.E. into a family of Christians (his father died a martyr's death for his beliefs when Origen was seventeen), Origen received a full classical as well as Christian education. He was an extraordinary prolific and influential writer, the author of a systematic exposition of Christian belief, *First Principles* (*De Principiis*), as well as a refutation of a learned attack on Christianity, *Contra Celsum,* plus a ten-volume book of *Miscellanies* (*Stromata*), numerous biblical commentaries covering nearly all of the Old and New Testaments, and smaller treatises on specific subjects. In addition to all this, he was also the compiler of the *Hexapla* (see *Aquila), a work of remarkable biblical scholarship. As a commentator Origen championed the Alexandrian style of allegorizing that went back to Philo and his predecessors. Text of "Commentary on Matthew" from Klostermann and Benz, *Origenes Werke,* vol. 11. Translation of *First Principles* by G. W. Butterworth; translation of *Contra Celsum* by Henry Chadwick.

Orphica: see **Pseudo-Orphica*

'Otiyot (or *Alphabet*) *deR. Aqiba:* A late Jewish mystical treatise written in Hebrew and of uncertain origin; it has been dated to around the seventh to ninth centuries C.E. Text: Wertheimer, *Battei Midrašot,* 2:333–477. All translations mine.

Paraleipomena Jeremiou (or *Things Omitted from Jeremiah*): see *4 *Baruch*

(4Q422) Paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus: This document (like the much longer 4Q364–367 *Reworked Pentateuch) paraphrases parts of the Pentateuch. The script of this manuscript belongs to the earlier part of the first century B.C.E. It was published by Elgvin and Tov in Attridge et al., *Qumran Cave 4:VIII* (*DJD 13*), 417–442. All translations mine.

Passover Haggadah: A composite text traditionally read in conjunction with the festive evening meal on the Jewish holiday of Passover (*Pesaḥ*). The oldest parts of this text may arguably go back to before the common era, but there are also many accretions from Talmudic and even later times; the existence of traditions underlying the present *Passover Haggadah* is attested in the *Mishnah, *Tosefta, and elsewhere. Text: Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah.* All translations mine.

Pastoral Letters (or *Pastoral Epistles*): Three New Testament letters, 1 and 2 *Timothy and the Letter to *Titus, are collectively known by this name because all three deal with matters of the congregation and pastoral care. The letters are attributed to Paul but this attribution is doubted by some scholars. Those who hold the latter view generally date them to the late first century C.E. See also *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version.

Paul (of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, which was a Roman province along the southern coast of Asia Minor) (c. 10 C.E.–c. 62 C.E.): The great apostle of Christianity, indeed, its "second founder," Paul is the author of a good portion of the letters (or "epistles") collected in the New Testament. Thirteen letters in all are ascribed to him there, but modern scholars

have generally concluded that some of these (*Ephesians, 1 and 2 *Timothy, and *Titus) were written by his followers, while the status of others (2 *Thessalonians, *Colossians) is in doubt. There is, however, general agreement that *Romans, 1 and 2 *Corinthians, *Galatians, *Philippians, 1 *Thessalonians, and *Philemon are authentically Paul's.

Paul was born, raised, and educated a Jew, "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). He studied with the Jewish scholar R. Gamaliel (Acts 22:3, see also 5:34) and his letters attest to his acquaintance with Jewish traditions of biblical interpretation. After his conversion to Christianity (around 34 or 35 C.E.), Paul devoted himself to preaching and working on behalf of the new faith: he traveled widely along the eastern Mediterranean and beyond and corresponded with the newly founded churches. He was imprisoned and attacked for his beliefs and is said to have died a martyr's death. His letters articulate his own understanding of Christian belief, and in so doing they frequently rely on bold, new interpretations of ancient Hebrew Scripture to make their case. There was hardly a more significant biblical interpreter in the early church. Translations of Paul's (and other) New Testament epistles: Revised Standard Version, occasionally modified slightly.

Pentateuch: The first five books of the Hebrew Bible—Genesis through Deuteronomy—also known by the Hebrew word *Torah (understood as "teaching").

Pentateuchal Paraphrase: see *Reworked Pentateuch

(4Q252) Pesher on Genesis: see **Genesis Pesher*

(4Q169) Pesher on Nahum: see **Nahum Pesher*

(4Q 180–181) Pesher of the Periods: (also *Ages of Creation*): A Hebrew text from *Qumran that (according to J. T. Milik) may originally have contained a lengthy account of the "seventy generations" of human history mentioned in *1 Enoch* 10:12. The text as it survives is quite fragmentary; all translations mine.

Peshitta (or *Pešiṭta*): The name given to the Syriac (a very close relative of Aramaic) translation of the Old Testament widely used by Syriac-speaking Christians, including *Aphrahat and *Ephraem. Its origins (apparently composite) are unknown; some scholars have suggested that it may have started as an adaptation of one or more Jewish targums, since a number of interpretations otherwise known from rabbinic literature are to be found within it. Others have nonetheless maintained that it was from the start a Christian translation. See further Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta." On the connection between the Peshitta and rabbinic exegesis, see also Maori, *The Peshitta Version;* this book appeared too late for systematic use in the present work. All translations mine.

Pesiqta deR. Kahana: A rabbinic collection of midrashic sermons designed for various Jewish festivals and other special occasions, apparently redacted sometime in the fifth century C.E. in the land of Israel, but containing much earlier material. Text: Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana.* All translations mine.

Pesiqta Rabbati: A rabbinic collection of midrashic sermons designed for various Jewish festivals and other special occasions. It is patently a composite of originally separate compositions; these were combined into the present work sometime in perhaps the sixth or seventh century, though such a date says little about the age of the material contained within this work. Establishing a textual basis for *Pesiqta Rabbati* is particularly difficult; in the absence of a critical edition, I have generally used M. Friedmann's standard edition,

comparing it with some of the extant manuscripts and duplicate passages in *Yalqut Shimoni,* as well as Braude, *Pesiqta Rabbati.* All translations mine.

1 and 2 Peter: Two New Testament letters ascribed to the apostle Peter but now generally agreed to be pseudonymous. Their dates are uncertain, but some time late in the first or early in the second century C.E. seems possible for both. Translation: Revised Standard Version.

Petirat Moshe: A medieval midrashic compilation dealing with the death of Moses, some of it based on much earlier material. Text cited from Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrasch,* 6:71–78. Translation mine.

Pharisees: see the description of rival Jewish groups under *Rabbis, the.

Philemon, Letter to: A brief (authentic) letter of Paul found in the New Testament. See also: *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

Philippians, Letter to the: A letter (or, possibly, a composite of two or three different letters) sent by Paul to the church in Philippi (Macedonia); it is part of the New Testament. Because of its possibly composite nature, its date is uncertain; see also: *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

Philo (of Alexandria; c. 20 B.C.E.–c. 40 or 50 C.E.): This Greek-speaking Egyptian Jew is the author of a multivolume series of commentaries on the Pentateuch. Philo was heir to an already existing tradition of interpreting the Bible allegorically, a tradition that appears to have flourished in Alexandria, Egypt. Philo championed this approach; for him, although biblical stories recounted historical events, they likewise had an "undermeaning" (*huponoia*) by which Abraham, Jacob, and other biblical figures were understood to represent abstractions or spiritual realities whose truth applied to all times and places. Philo explained many biblical texts in keeping with then-current Greek philosophical ideas.

Although Philo's allegorical explanations of Scripture were certainly widely known in the Jewish world, his works played almost no role in the later history of Jewish biblical interpretation. They were, however, extraordinarily important to Alexandrine Christianity, and through the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and other Christian scholars gained a place for his ideas and methods in much Christian biblical interpretation.

When citing from Philo, I have used the translated names of treatises as found in the (standard) English translation by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, rather than the Latin abbreviations more commonly used in scholarly reference, since these are generally not familiar to the nonspecialist. Translation: Colson and Whitaker in LCL, sometimes slightly modified; also, where indicated, translations taken from Winston, *Philo of Alexandria.* The Loeb edition does not quite include all of Philo's writings, and since its publication some new texts have come to light. Note the Greek fragments of Philo's *Questions on Genesis* 2:1–7 published in Paramelle, *Philon d'Alexandrie.*

Philo the Epic Poet: A Jewish writer who must have lived sometime before the mid-first century B.C.E., since his poetry is cited by *Alexander Polyhistor, whence it found its way into the writings of *Eusebius. It is difficult to be more precise about the date of Philo's work; as for his place of origin, although he does describe Jerusalem in some of the passages preserved, the fact that he chose to write Greek epic might more likely point to

the Greek city of Alexandria as his homeland. Translations: Attridge in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:780–784; Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 2:205–299.

Pirqei deR. Eliezer (or *Pirqei R. Eli'ezer*): A midrashic work, written in rabbinic Hebrew, that retells much of the Pentateuch and discourses on other themes. Its allusions to Islamic culture and to Arab rule over the land of Israel certainly suggest that this work was put into its final form after the Arab conquest—according to some, as late as the eighth or ninth century C.E. At the same time, the text preserves many ancient traditions, including quite a few known only from the biblical *Apocrypha and *Pseudepigrapha. At times these traditions are presented by *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* in a form that suggests that their author had read these pseudepigraphic texts not in the Greek or other translations through which these texts have survived in Christian churches, but in a Hebrew or Aramaic version now lost. The midrashic material presented in *Pirqei deR. Eliezer* overlaps a good deal with that found in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, but the precise relationship between these two texts remains the subject of conjecture. Text: *Pirqei deR. Eli'ezer*. All translations mine.

Pliny the Elder (23–24 C.E. – 79 C.E.): A Latin chronicler and geographer whose brief description of the *Essenes and their settlement has been connected with the site at *Qumran, home of the *Dead Sea Scrolls. Text: Pliny, *Natural History*, in LCL. Translation mine.

Pompeius Trogus (late first century B.C.E. to early first century C.E.): A classical historian whose *Historiae Philippicae* (a work that survived only via a later epitome) apparently focused on the history of the Macedonian-Hellenistic states, in the course of which he surveyed the history of the Jews and the geography of Judaea. Text and translation: Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:334–343.

Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men: Two compositions, both of which arguably had existed previously as independent works, that came to be inserted in the book of Daniel between vv. 3:23 and 3:24 of the present traditional Hebrew text. They are preserved in the old Greek (*Septuagint) version of that book. Their insertion doubtless represents an attempt to have the book of Daniel conform to the pattern evidenced elsewhere in the literature of the Second Temple period, according to which humans in distress first pray to God for help and then offer words of thanksgiving after being saved. Both compositions draw heavily on the language of the Psalms and other biblical models. They probably were originally composed in Hebrew, perhaps in the first or second century B.C.E. Translation: Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha.

(4Q369) Prayer of Enosh: This text, addressed to God, has, to my mind, wrongly been identified both as a "prayer of Enosh" and a "messianic" text; in fact it deals with the biblical Jacob. The manuscript has been dated to the end of the first century B.C.E. or early first century C.E. Text: Elgvin et al., *Qumran Cave 4:VIII (DJD 13)*, 353–362. All translations mine.

Prayer of Joseph: A fragmentary text bearing witness to the tradition that "Israel" was the name of the angel whose earthly correspondent was the patriarch Jacob. It was arguably written in the second, or possibly first, century C.E. Discussion and translation: Smith in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:699–714.

Prayer of Manasseh: A short, penitential prayer attributed to the biblical king Manasseh. The existence of the text of such a prayer is mentioned in 2 Chron. 33:18–19. It is most

unlikely, however, that our text is in fact the one being referred to in this passage; rather, the author of this text may have been inspired by 2 Chron. 33:18–19 to compose his own prayer and attribute it to Manasseh. (Alternately, our text may have merely been a stock liturgical piece that only later came to be attributed to Manasseh—a great sinner according to 2 Kings 21—because its anonymous speaker confesses to having committed sins that "are more in number than the sand of the sea; my transgressions are multiplied, O Lord, they are multiplied" [v. 9].) The text survives in Greek, Syriac, and other languages and is included among the *Apocrypha of the Hebrew Bible. The date of its composition is the subject of much speculation, but since the text appears to be a Jewish work without Christian embellishment, it may indeed have been a standard part of Jewish liturgy taken over unmodified into early Christian worship. If so, a date somewhere around the turn of the era would not be unreasonable. Text: Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha.

(4Q378–379) Psalms of Joshua (or *Joshua Apocryphon*): An apocryphal work found at *Qumran, parts of which were published in Newsom, "'Psalms of Joshua' from Qumran Cave 4." See also (4Q175) **Testimonia.*

Psalms of Solomon: These psalms are preserved in Greek and (partially) in Syriac, but most scholars agree that they were originally composed in Hebrew. They seem to reflect the political situation of the land of Israel, and at least some of them appear to refer to inner-Jewish strife; others refer as well to a conqueror who came "from the end of the earth" (8:15)—apparently the Roman emperor Pompey, who captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. (Further details seeming to support this interpretation are to be found in 2:1–2, 26–27; 8:16–21; and 17:12.) *Psalms of Solomon* 17 and 18 further reflect expectation of the Davidic messiah. All these would suggest a first-century B.C.E. date for the psalms, although they need not all have been composed at the same time. Translations: Wright in *OTP* 2:630–670, and Brock in Sparks, *AOT* 649–682, occasionally modified slightly.

Pseudepigrapha (of the Hebrew Bible): A somewhat loose term to describe a group of texts, mostly written between the third century B.C.E. and the second century C.E., which, although generally not attributed the same sanctity as the Bible, were nonetheless studied and preserved by early Jews and Christians. They are called "Pseudepigrapha" ("falsely ascribed" writings) because many of them purport to be the pronouncements of this or that ancient worthy known from the Hebrew Bible—Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, and so forth. A great many of these books retell biblical stories or seek to comment on incidents or figures known from the Bible, and they can thus tell us much about how the Bible was read and interpreted from the third century B.C.E. on.

Among the Pseudepigrapha are various apocalypses, or revelations, given to this or that ancient figure, often "foretelling" events belonging to the time in which the apocalypse in question was actually written (**Apocalypse of Abraham, *Apocalypse of Adam,* and so forth; see also **Sibylline Oracles*); testaments, that is, the "last words" or spiritual wills of biblical figures standing at the threshold of death and imparting advice and recollections to their children (**Testament of Adam, *Testament of Abraham, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,* and so forth); and interpretive retellings and expansions of biblical stories (the book of **Jubilees,* *Pseudo-Philo, *Book of Biblical Antiquities,* and so forth). Current anthologies of the Pseudepigrapha in English include: Charles, *APOT;* Charlesworth, *OTP;* and Sparks, *AOT.*

Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: This text, probably written in Syria or Palestine in the late

second century C.E., contains numerous allusions to exegetical traditions, many of which are paralleled in rabbinic texts. The text may have originated in an early Judeo-Christian community. (The *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* are a quite separate composition, probably written in the mid-fourth century C.E. in Palestine or Syria; they survive in the Latin translation of Rufinus.) See further Jones, "The Pseudo-Clementines: A History of Research." Text: Rehm and Strecker, *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien.* All translations mine.

(4Q243) Pseudo-Daniel: An Aramaic text that refers to Daniel and may have been part of a cycle of writings surrounding that biblical figure. The first fragment of this text apparently dealt with the Tower of Babel.

Pseudo-Eupolemus: see *Eupolemus

(4Q225–227) Pseudo-Jubilees: The name given to these fragments because, while they contain some features characteristic of the book of *Jubilees* (direct address by the text's speaker to "you, Moses," reference to the Satanic "Prince Mastema," and the reckoning of time by jubilees), they do not appear to be actual excerpts of that book. (The name *Pseudo-Jubilees* is somewhat unfortunate, since it might seem to imply a pseudepigraphon upon a pseudepigraphon, which is far from certain; indeed, even any direct connection with *Jubilees* is purely speculative.) The earliest copies at *Qumran belong to the late first century B.C.E.; the time of the texts' original composition is a matter of speculation. All translations mine.

(4Q390) Pseudo-Moses: The name given to a fragmentary text from *Qumran by D. Dimant in her preliminary edition of two large sections of it ("New Light from Qumran on the Jewish Pseudepigrapha"), but there is no clear indication that Moses is in fact its speaker; what is sure is that the text has something in common with the book of *Jubilees*—terminology and outlook—as well as other works discovered at Qumran. The manuscript has been dated to the end of the first century B.C.E. or so, but the text may well have been composed a century or so earlier. All translations mine.

Pseudo-Orphica: The name given to what appears to be original Greek poetry, attributed to the mythic figure Orpheus, which has undergone a complicated process of augmentation and editing. The poem cited is itself quite brief, forty-six lines in its longest form. It is presented as Orpheus' poetic instruction delivered to his son Musaeus. The poem survives in scattered quotations found among various early Christian writers, *Clement of Alexandria, *Eusebius of Caesarea, Pseudo-Justin, and others; using these passages, scholars have reconstructed what appear to be different recensions of the text. There is little agreement about how or when these recensions came into existence. In this volume I have followed the reconstruction of Carl Holladay. It seems likely to me that the earliest form of the poem (Recension A) goes back to the late third or second century B.C.E., while the second recension, with its Abraham material, may belong to the second or first century B.C.E., with recensions C and D belonging to still later times. Text and translation: Holladay, *Pseudo-Orphica* (forthcoming; vol. 4 of his *Fragments of Hellenistic Jewish Authors*); also LaFargue in *OTP* 2:799–801; Eusebius, *La Préparation Evangélique,* text and trans. Schroeder et des Places.

Pseudo-Philo: The author of the Latin *Book of Biblical Antiquities* was long presumed to be Philo of Alexandria; when it was demonstrated that Philo was not the author of this work, its anonymous creator came to be known as Pseudo-Philo. The book in question

is a retelling of much of biblical history, from Adam to the death of Saul. Probably originally composed in Hebrew sometime before the middle of the second century C.E., it was subsequently translated into Greek and from Greek into Latin. It not only retells biblical stories but adds a wealth of interpretations, explanations, fanciful details, poems, and songs. Some of its interpretations are strikingly similar to those found in rabbinic writings. Translations are mine, though I have frequently been guided by Harrington's rendering in Charlesworth, *OTP.* Text of the original: D. Harrington et al., *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités bibliques,* vol. 1.

Pseudo-Phocylides, Sentences of: A collection of metrical maxims and advice falsely attributed to the sixth-century B.C.E. proverbist Phocylides of Miletus; in fact this text was written sometime around the end of the first century B.C.E. by a Jewish poet bent on enshrining some of the laws and teachings of the Hebrew Bible—along with a certain amount of ancient biblical interpretation, as well as sage teaching not dependent on Jewish traditions—in Greek hexameters. Translation: Van der Horst in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:565–582.

Qumran (or *Khirbet Qumrān*): A site near the Dead Sea, about eight and a half miles from Jericho, where, starting in 1947, a collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts, the *Dead Sea Scrolls, were found hidden away in various caves. Qumran was apparently the home-base of an ascetic Jewish community, probably to be identified with the Essene sect known from the writings of *Josephus and others, which flourished just before and on into the common era.

Qur'an (Koran): The sacred Scripture of Islam. Held by Muslims to have been dictated by God to Muḥammad, it belongs to the seventh century C.E. and contains various reflections of ancient biblical interpretation.

R.: see next entry

Rabbi: An honorific title (often abbreviated "R.") that means "my teacher" or "my master." See *Rabbis, the.

Rabbinic Judaism: The tradition of Judaism championed by the *Rabbis, which has survived, albeit with numerous modifications and innovations, in today's Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism is itself a descendant of the Judaism of the Pharisees, a group that existed in Second Temple times with its own distinctive style of interpretation and **halakhah.*

Rabbis, the: A group of Jewish scholars that championed an approach to Scripture and to Judaism that came to bear their name (that is, *Rabbinic Judaism; see also *midrash). The Rabbis were so known because, starting in the first century C.E., the leaders and teachers of this group were addressed and spoken of as *"Rabbi" (that is, "my teacher," "my master"). A conventional distinction separates the Rabbis into two chronological groups: those before 200 C.E. (see *Mishnah) are called *tanna'im* and those after 200 C.E. are called *amora'im.* But as a school of exegetes and practitioners, the Rabbis are probably older than the use of their distinctive title might indicate: scholars of similar tendencies are known to us earlier as the "sages," "elders," *soferim* ("bookmen" or scribes), and Pharisees (possibly: "specifiers," "explainers"). The Pharisees are mentioned often in the New Testament, the writings of Josephus, the Mishnah, and elsewhere, but they are frequently presented as merely one of several rival Jewish groups that existed in Second Temple times. These groups disagreed on a number of fundamental issues; prominent among them was the matter of how and on what basis to interpret, extend, and apply

biblical laws—that is, their systems of **halakhah*. (See on this issue Chapter 20 above.) It is clear that the Pharisees' *halakhah* was markedly different from that of another group, the Sadducees. Their two systems of *halakhah* had deep roots, perhaps going back early in the *Second Temple period. (At the same time, the overall Sadducean stance seems, to my mind, somewhat polemical, as if it originated in protest against a still older, already elaborate, system of *halakhah*.) There is some indication that the *Dead Sea Scrolls community basically followed the *halakhah* of the Sadducees, though they themselves seem to be connected (on the basis of other accounts in ancient writings) with yet a third group, the Essenes, a strict, somewhat ascetic Jewish sect that flourished in the same period.

Revelation, book of (also Book of the Apocalypse): A visionary book that is the last part of the New Testament; it contains cryptic images and revelations of the future, including the new Jerusalem. The book is attributed to "John," and tradition identified this John with the author of the fourth *Gospel and the "elder" who is the author of 2 and 3 *John, but modern scholars find scant reason to assert more than what the text itself says, that a certain John wrote this revelation. It has been dated to the late first century C.E. Translation: Revised Standard Version.

Revelation of Paul (or *Apocalypse of Paul*): Not the gnostic "Apocalypse of Paul" known from the *Nag Hammadi library but a New Testament apocryphon preserved in Latin, Greek, Syriac, Slavonic, and other languages. Translation: Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:759–798.

Revised Standard Version: A popular modern translation of the Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha, and the New Testament undertaken under the sponsorship of the National Council of Churches. Because of its wide diffusion and familiarity I have tried to use this translation as much as possible, and I gratefully acknowledge its use. I have, however, more than occasionally diverged from it, usually to capture some particular nuance of the original text.

(4Q158 and 4Q364–367) Reworked Pentateuch (or *Pentateuchal Paraphrase*): The nature of these texts is still debated: Are they simply loose versions of the Pentateuch, which happen to change a word or two here or there but which only very rarely diverge from the biblical text for some purpose? Or are they instead explicative retellings that, while citing the text directly most of the time, nevertheless contain numerous slight deviations and additions intended to comment on or clarify the biblical text? In any case, some of those deviations and additions do seem to conform with interpretive motifs attested elsewhere. The first group of manuscripts listed all seem to belong to the mid-first century B.C.E. Text: Attridge et al., *Qumran Cave 4* (*DJD* 13), 187–353. 4Q158 was published in Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4: I* (*DJD* 5); see the remarks by Tov in *DJD 13*. All translations mine.

Romans, Letter to the: The longest and most important of Paul's authentic letters, this document systematically sets out much of Paul's theology. The letter was probably composed sometime between 55 and 58 C.E. See also: *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

(1Q28b) Rule of the Blessings: A collection of various blessings preserved as an appendix to the **Community Rule* found at *Qumran. All translations mine.

(1Q28a) Rule of the Congregation: A text appended to (1QS) **Community Rule*, it consists of two full columns setting forth the "rule of the congregation of Israel in the final days." All translations mine.

Sadducees: see the description of rival Jewish groups under *Rabbis, the

Samaritan Pentateuch: The Hebrew text of the Pentateuch as preserved by the *Samaritans is slightly different from other forms of the Pentateuch text, such as the one apparently used by the *Septuagint translators or the Pentateuch as preserved by the *traditional (Masoretic) Hebrew text. Many of its differences may be attributed to the fact that the Pentateuch appears to have circulated in slightly different "editions" in late antiquity. See also *Septuagint. Text: von Gall, *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner.* All translations mine.

Samaritan Targum: This targum exists in widely divergent forms produced and revised over many centuries. The oldest form goes back to before the fourth century C.E. (its Aramaic is similar to that found in the Palestinian *targums), but greater precision as to the date is impossible, at least on linguistic grounds. I have used the critical edition of Tal, *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch,* who suggests that the language of the earliest stratum of Samaritan targum texts may be "even older" than that of the Palestinian targums (vol. 3, p. 104). All translations mine.

Samaritans: Inhabitants of Samaria, a general name for the region north of biblical Judah or Judaea. When Samaria was conquered (along with the rest of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel) by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E., the Assyrian king exiled the old, Israelite, inhabitants of Samaria's cities and repopulated the area with a conglomeration of different nations (2 Kings 17:24–31). Relations between the Jews—that is, the inhabitants of Judah—and the Samaritans in the *Second Temple period were often strained, and most Jews apparently regarded them as foreigners, although both groups worshiped the God of Israel and shared the Pentateuch as sacred Scripture (though the **Samaritan Pentateuch* differs somewhat from the *traditional Hebrew text). In addition to the material preserved in the **Samaritan Targum,* ancient Samaritan traditions of biblical interpretation are to be found in abundance in **Tibat Marqa;* some scholars have suggested that *Theodotus, *(Pseudo)-Eupolemus, and the author of the **Aramaic Levi Document* were Samaritans rather than Jews, but these attributions remain speculative and strong counterarguments have been advanced to each of them.

(4Q185) Sapiential Work: A work in praise of divine wisdom found at *Qumran. Text: Allegro, *DJD* 5, 85–87. All translations mine.

(4Q415) Sapiential Work A: An entirely different text from the preceding: quite fragmentary, it may have certain wisdom connections, though its character requires further exploration. (It may or may not be part of the same composition as found in the fragments 4Q416 and 4Q417.) The text was published by Elgvin, "The Reconstruction of Sapiential Work A."

(4Q424) Sapiential Work C: Another composition of evident wisdom connections found at *Qumran; its advice is framed in a series of clauses beginning "*Do not . . .*"

(1Q22) Sayings of Moses (or *Dibrei Mosheh*): see **Words of Moses*

Second Temple period: The term basically referring to the entire span of history from the time of the Jews' return to their homeland after the Babylonian exile, starting in 538 B.C.E.—shortly after which (c. 520–515 B.C.E.) they rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple, which the Babylonians had destroyed—until the great revolt against the occupying Roman army in 66–70 C.E., at which time the Romans attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the

temple once again. Although this entire time is technically covered by the phrase "Second Temple period," most scholars use the term to refer to the last few centuries thereof, as a more religiously neutral way of designating what Christian scholars had often called the "intertestamental period," that is, the time falling between the history recounted in the Old and New Testaments.

Secret Book according to John: see **Apocryphon of John*

Seder Eliahu Rabba (or *Tanna deBei Eliahu*): A midrashic compilation of uncertain date, certainly going back to before the ninth century. If its core is to be identified with the *Tanna deBei Eliahu* mentioned in the *Babylonian Talmud, then it must have existed before the latter was redacted (late fifth to early sixth century C.E.); some have even proposed a third-century C.E. date. Text: Isch-Schalom (Friedmann), *Seder Eliahu Rabba.* All translations mine.

Seder Olam: An ancient Hebrew chronography, traditionally ascribed to the *tanna* R. Yose b. Ḥalafta (second century C.E.), which retells biblical history in compressed form and supplies dates for major events. A critical edition of this text was published as part of a doctoral dissertation by Chaim Milikowsky, "Seder Olam: A Rabbinic Chronography," who is currently preparing an extensive commentary on the chronography. Milikowsky has argued that R. Yose b. Ḥalafta is cited more than any other authority in the book because he in fact transmitted it, his own comments later being incorporated into the work by his students; however, the text is in essence still older and may arguably be a "prerabbinic" document, its composition predating the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. (See further Milikowsky, "*Seder Olam* and Jewish Chronography," 124.) Text: Milikowsky (above); all translations mine.

Sefer ha-Yashar: A midrashic compilation in the form of an expansive retelling of biblical stories; composed in biblical Hebrew style probably no earlier than the thirteenth century. Its author is unknown, the place of its composition seems to be Italy. Text: *Sefer ha-Yašar.* All translations mine.

Septuagint: Starting in the third century B.C.E., Hebrew Scripture began to be translated into Greek, apparently for the use of Greek-speaking Jews in Hellenistic centers like Alexandria, Egypt. A legend eventually sprang up about this translation to the effect that seventy, or seventy-two, Jewish elders were commissioned to do the translation of the Pentateuch (Torah), each in an isolated cell; when the translations were compared, they all agreed in every detail, for the translators had been divinely guided. As a result, this translation came to be known as the *Septuaginta* ("seventy"). (Subsequently, the name "Septuagint" also came to include the old Greek translation of the other books of the Hebrew Bible, a translation made in stages from the third to the first century B.C.E.)

Any translation by nature contains a good bit of interpretation: ambiguities in the original text can rarely be duplicated in translation and, as a result, the translator must take a stand and render the ambiguity one way or another. Moreover, translators aware of this or that traditional interpretation will sometimes incorporate it (consciously or otherwise) into their translation. For both these reasons, the Septuagint, although a fairly close rendering, can frequently provide information about how a particular verse or phrase or single word was understood by Jews as early as the third century B.C.E.

However, there are great difficulties in using evidence from the Septuagint in an overall study of ancient interpretation of the Bible. To begin with, the biblical texts that were

used by the Septuagint translators were often slightly, and in some cases, drastically, different from that of the *traditional Hebrew text; they bear witness to the coexistence of different text-forms of the Hebrew Bible in late antiquity. (The discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls has dramatically confirmed this fact.) No one of these text-forms can be said to be correct or "the best." Instead, there exists a whole branch of modern biblical scholarship, textual criticism, which is devoted to examining each and every verse of the Bible as preserved by various textual witnesses in order to understand the significance of any differences that might exist between different versions of that verse. Textual criticism is an art, not a science, and the conclusions of one textual critic are not necessarily shared by others. See further Jellicoe, *Septuagint and Modern Study;* Tov, *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint.*

All this is of some consequence to the whole matter of ancient biblical interpretation. For example, it is often far from clear whether a particular difference between the Septuagint and the MT (the *Masoretic text, that is, the traditional Hebrew text of the Bible preserved by Jews through the ages) represents a case of the Septuagint translators *interpreting* in some nonliteral fashion the same Hebrew text as that found in the MT, or whether the difference between the Septuagint and the MT represents a difference in two different forms of the Hebrew text that were in circulation in late antiquity, the one having been used by the Septuagint translators and the other preserved in the MT. (The same is true, by the way, of differences between the Septuagint and other textual witnesses such as the **Samaritan Pentateuch* or ancient biblical manuscripts from *Qumran.) Nor, for that matter, is it often easy to establish which of various forms of a biblical verse attested in different sources represents the "most original" form of the verse (and which others, therefore, might represent some secondary, often simplified or *interpreted,* form of the same verse). Further complicating matters is the fact that the Septuagint itself underwent a complicated process of transmission and revision, so that in fact there is no one, single "Septuagint" to refer to.

I have not wished to impose all these complications on a book whose primary concern lies elsewhere and so, for example, I have only rarely referred in the body of this book to particular manuscripts of the Septuagint. Moreover, since numerous studies exist that seek to compare even minute differences between the Septuagint and other versions, I have not made such comparisons a major focus of this study, seeking instead to concentrate only on differences that seemed both significant and related to interpretive traditions witnessed in other ancient sources. All translations from Septuagint texts are my own. See also *Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

Shepherd of Hermas: A Christian apocalypse of possibly composite character; if it is a composite work, the earliest part seems to belong to the early second century C.E., the rest only slightly later. This text was apparently written in Rome and composed in a Greek sometimes marked by Latinisms as well as Semitisms, the latter apparently the result of an imitation of *Septuagint style. Text: *Apostolischen Väter: Neubearbeitung der Funkschen Ausgabe.* All translations mine.

Sibylline Oracles: A collection of oracular texts written in Greek in poetic form (hexameters) over a long period of time, from about the second century B.C.E. to the early Middle Ages. While some were apparently written in Alexandria, Egypt, others appear to stem from Syria or other locations. The unifying element of these diverse writings is their alleged authorship: they are ascribed to a "sibyl" or an aged woman prophet who speaks

her metrical oracles (usual oracles of doom) in a state of ecstatic prophetic inspiration. Of the present collection of Sibylline books and fragments, some appear to have been written by Jews and to contain, in addition to various predictions and warnings, reflections of ideas and motifs found as well in the Hebrew Bible. The first three books of the *Sibylline Oracles,* which are those most frequently cited in the present work, are arguably ancient: book 3 seems to go back to the second century B.C.E.; books 1 and 2 may stem from a Jewish author living in the late first century B.C.E. or early in the common era, though this original text appears to have undergone augmentation by a Christian editor, possibly in the second century C.E. Translation: Collins in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:317–472.

Sifra (also *Sifra debei Rab, Torat Kohanim*): A midrashic collection on the book of Leviticus. It is one of the **halakhic midrashim* and thus assumed to have been put into some preliminary form in the third century C.E. However, our present *Sifra* is a composite text. Thus, the *Mekhilta de Milluim* section of the book is a later addition, as is the section known as *Mekhilta de'arayot,* which is entirely absent from the first printed edition of the book (Constantinople, 1523) and is printed as a separate unit in ms. Assemani; while most of *Sifra* belongs to one of the two "sets" of *halakhic midrashim* (the Aqiba school), these two added sections seem to stem from the other (Ishma'el) set. There are apparently still other additions. Texts: *Sifra;* Weiss, *Sifra;* Friedman, *Sifra;* Finkelstein, *Sifra on Leviticus according to Vatican Ms. Assemani 66.* All translations mine.

Sifrei Deuteronomy (or *Sifrei Debarim*): A (rabbinic) collection of interpretations of verses found in sections of the book of Deuteronomy. It is one of the **halakhic midrashim* and thus assumed to have been put into some preliminary form in the third century C.E., though it certainly contains later additions. In citing from this text, I have consulted both the eclectic text of Finkelstein, *Siphre ad Deuteronomium* and mss. Margoliouth 341 and Bodleian Neubauer 151. See further Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary,* xvii.

Sifrei Numbers (or *Sifrei Bemidbar, Sifrei deBei Rab*): A midrashic collection on the book of Numbers. It is one of the **halakhic midrashim* and thus assumed to have been put into some preliminary form in the third century C.E. *Sifrei* is apparently a composite text in its present form, and the sections numbered 78–106 and 134–141 in this text evidently derive from a different (though not necessarily later) source. Text: Horovitz, *Siphre d'Be Rab.* All translations mine.

Sifrei Zutta: A **halakhic midrash* on the book of Numbers which survived in fragments preserved in **Yalqut Shimoni,* **Midrash ha-Gadol,* **Numbers Rabba,* and various medieval quotations as well as manuscripts found in the Cairo *Genizah.

Sir. (abbreviation for Sira[ch]—see next entry)

Sira(ch): Yeshu'a ben El'azar ben Sira (or "Sirach," as his name appears in the Greek translation of his book) was a sage who wrote his book toward the beginning of the second century B.C.E., around the year 180 or so. From Hebrew the book was subsequently translated into Greek (by Ben Sira's own grandson) and became part of the Greek Bible of early Christianity; other ancient versions were made into Syriac and Latin (in which language it came to be known as "Ecclesiasticus"). Ben Sira's book was particularly beloved to the founders of rabbinic Judaism, but apparently because his identity was well known and the book was not attributed to some ancient worthy from the biblical past, they felt that it could not be included in the rabbinic canon of Scripture, and the original Hebrew version of it was therefore eventually lost.

Ben Sira saw in Scripture a great corpus of divine wisdom; he therefore made broad use of Scripture in writing his own book, including his lengthy catalog of biblical heroes mentioned earlier. But he was a conservative in all things—a "classicist," one might say—and this catalog contains relatively little that is not explicitly stated in Scripture itself. He certainly was aware of many interpretive traditions, which, for one reason or another, he chose not to include in his book. This notwithstanding, the book does contain a number of interpretations from a relatively early stage of development.

The textual problems connected with the book are notorious. Although composed in Hebrew, it was known for centuries only via its Greek and Syriac versions and secondary translations made from these. Medieval copies of portions of the Hebrew original were discovered at the end of last century in the *Cairo Genizah fragments, and these have been supplemented by further Hebrew finds at *Qumran and Masada, so that now slightly less than 70 percent of the Hebrew original is extant. Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that the original text-form in Hebrew was expanded at one point, and that both the original and expanded forms are represented in various manuscripts of the subsequent translations. To complicate matters further, the medieval copies of the Hebrew themselves frequently disagree or contain obvious errors; some scholars also suspect that the medieval Hebrew copyists may at times have sought to supplement their lacunary text(s) by retroverting from one of the ancient versions. I have been somewhat inconsistent in grappling with these difficulties. In cases where it seemed to matter little, I have simply reproduced (as with other books of the biblical apocrypha) the translation of the Revised Standard Version. Not infrequently, however, I have had to involve myself and the reader in the detailed work of textual criticism and reconstruction. I have generally given notice in such cases both in citing the work and, where appropriate, in explanatory footnotes. For such reconstructions I am frequently indebted to M. Z. Segal, *Complete Ben Sira* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1958); Ziegler, *Sapientia Jesu Filii Sirach;* Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira;* Wright, *No Small Difference.*

(4Q510–511) Songs of a Sage (or *Songs Against Demons*): A collection of psalmlike compositions that existed at *Qumran, they praise God and invoke His greatness to combat devils and alien spirits. The speaker refers to himself as a "sage" and his words have some connection to the world of biblical wisdom. Text: Baillet in *Qumran Grotte 4 III* (*DJD 7*), in 215–262. All translations mine.

(4Q400–407, 11Q17) Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A collection of liturgical texts from *Qumran and Masada edited and translated by Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice.* The texts are written in Hebrew; the oldest Qumran (Cave 4) material has been dated paleographically to the early or mid-first century B.C.E. See further E. Puech's review in *RB* 94 (1987), 604–608; idem, "Notes sur le manuscrit des Cantiques du Sacrifice du Sabbat." All translations mine.

Symmachus: see *Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion

Talmud, Babylonian and Jerusalem: see *Babylonian Talmud, *Jerusalem Talmud

Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu: see **Midrash Tanḥuma*

Tanna deBei Eliahu: see **Seder Eliahu Rabba*

tanna'im: see *Rabbis

Targum (in general): The name for a translation of the Hebrew Bible, or parts thereof, into

Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew and spoken widely throughout the ancient Near East from the eighth century B.C.E. onward. Targums are not only interpretations in the sense that all translations involve interpretive decisions; some targums, notably *Targum Neophyti,* the *Fragment Targum,* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (all targums of the Pentateuch), contain frequent exegetical expansions of the biblical text, from a few words to entire paragraphs, not found in the original.

The dating and interrelationship of our various targums has been the subject of numerous classic studies, including Geiger, *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel;* Kahle, *Masoreten des Westens* II; idem, *The Cairo Geniza*[2]; Le Déaut, *Introduction à la littérature targumique;* and more recent studies through, as of this writing, the essays collected in Beattie and McNamara, *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context.*

Despite the extensive research conducted over the last half-century in particular, scholars have still not reached consensus as to either the dating or interrelationship of the targums. Virtually all agree, however, that the process of translating biblical texts into Aramaic must have begun long before any of our extant targums was composed; such translation began perhaps as early as the time of the return from Babylonian exile. If so, then the various individual targum texts—*Onqelos, Neophyti,* and so forth—most likely do not represent the work of isolated translators "starting from scratch": their translations probably contain within them many translation *traditions* inherited from ages long past. In that sense, at least, any dating of a targum is likely to be misleading from the standpoint of ancient biblical interpretation, since at least some of the interpretations contained within that targum may go back to a period far earlier than the targum's own composition.

A particular affinity exists among the so-called Palestinian targums *Neophyti, Pseudo-Jonathan,* and the *Fragment Targums,* along with various snippets of targum texts discovered in the *Cairo Genizah, all of which arguably go back to a "Proto-Palestinian Targum." If, as some scholars have suggested, these various targums basically took shape late in the first or in the second century C.E., then their common ancestor should certainly be dated still earlier. Following is a brief description of the four main Jewish targums to the Pentateuch cited in this book: *Targum Onqelos, Targum Neophyti, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,* and *Fragment Targums.* See also *Peshitta, **Samaritan Targum.*

Targum Onqelos: This targum of the Pentateuch eventually acquired the status of *the* targum and was circulated widely in Jewish communities throughout the world. Some scholars now theorize that, although not descended from the "Proto-Palestinian Targum," *Targum Onqelos* was originally composed in the Land of Israel and subsequently transferred to the Jewish centers in Babylon, where its Aramaic underwent a process of "easternization." Onqelos, who was said to be a convert to Judaism (and whom some scholars have identified with *Aquila), translates the Torah in comparatively literal fashion, though frequently diverging from the literal in order to avoid anthropomorphisms or for other doctrinal reasons or when translating songs or highly metaphorical passages. Text: Hasid, *Sefer Keter Torah (ha-Tāj);* Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic.* All translations mine.

Targum Neophyti: By "Targum Neophyti" is meant the main targum text elsewhere called more precisely "Targum Neophyti [or "Neofiti"] 1." This manuscript also contains numerous marginal and interlinear glosses, some of which I have also had occasion to cite. The manuscript itself is dated to the sixteenth century, but its original editor argued

that the text it contains is one that goes back to pre-Christian times (Diez Macho, "The Recently Discovered Palestinian Targum"); however, this claim was soon disputed (York, "Dating of Targumic Literature"). The date and affiliations of *Targum Neophyti* have subsequently been much discussed and the arguments are too involved for review here; I agree with those who would fix its date roughly at the end of the first century C.E. On the relationship of this particular targum to others of the "Palestinian" tradition (and hence my preference for citing it over *Pseudo-Jonathan* and the *Fragment Targums*), see most recently Flesher, "Exploring the Sources of the Synoptic Targums to the Pentateuch." As is the case with other targums, this one obviously contains some material older than that, and despite the claims of some, the conflate character of this targum is not to be gainsaid. See further Kasher, "Targumic Conflations in Ms. Neofiti 1." Text: Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1: Targum Palestinense Ms. de la Biblioteca Vaticana.* All translations mine.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Because of a (relatively late) misunderstanding, this targum was for a while wrongly attributed to Jonathan b. Uzziel (first centuries B.C.E.–C.E.); its present scholarly name reflects the consensus that it is not Jonathan's targum but an anonymous compilation (it is sometimes also called *Targum Yerushalmi 1*). This targum apparently took shape over a long period of time: while it is clearly related to the other "Palestinian" targums, it likewise has obvious affinities to *Targum Onqelos*, so that it might best be described as a hybrid of these two traditions to which a great deal of further material from rabbinic midrash has been added. For this reason, assigning any date to this work is likely to be misleading. There is little doubt that, despite the few, obvious post-Islamic references found in it, *Pseudo-Jonathan*'s basis goes back far earlier. See (inter alia) Hayward, "The Date of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan"; Shinan, "Dating Targum Pseudo-Jonathan"; and Flesher, "Exploring the Sources," as well as the recent collection by Beattie and McNamara, *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context.* All translations mine.

Targum(s), Fragment: There are in fact several similar but distinct fragment targums, most of which have been collected in an edition by Michael Klein, *The Fragment Targums of the Pentateuch.* Moreover, it is clear that these fragment targums were *not* originally complete targums of which only fragments survive, but that they were created (for reasons not yet understood) to be incomplete, that is, they are collections of translations of specific, isolated verses in the Pentateuch. These translations bear a close affinity to other "Palestinian" targums, in particular, *Targum Neophyti.* Where important, I have referred to specific manuscripts by letter as listed in Klein's edition. Some modern scholars refer to the *Fragment Targum(s)* as *Targum Yerushalmi 2.* All translations mine.

Targumic Tosefta: Alphabetical Acrostic on the Death of Moses: This Aramaic poem (like others incorporated into the targum reading cycle; see Ginsberger, "Les introductions araméennes à la lecture du Targoum") brings together different interpretive motifs. It was first published by Kasher, "Two Targum Toseftas on the Death of Moses"; see also Klein, "Corrections to the Song 'The Lord said to Moses . . . ,'" 451–453. Its date is not known; on the basis of its language, a fifth- or sixth-century date would not be inappropriate.

Targumic Tosefta to Exod. 15:2: This Aramaic poem (like others incorporated into the targum reading cycle; see preceding entry) brings together different interpretive motifs. It is found in (Parma) Codex dei Rossi 2887 (736) and was published by Klein, "The Targumic Tosefta to Exod. 15:2."

(11Q) Temple Scroll: The longest document found at *Qumran, this text presents itself as God's words to Moses on Mt. Sinai: in it, a variety of biblical laws are restated, often modified slightly or accompanied by some new material. The laws involved cover a range of topics: the temple itself and its environs, the sacrifices to be offered within it and the calendar of its ritual observances, the temple's physical layout, matters of ritual purity in general, laws governing the king and other officials, laws of warfare and other military matters, miscellaneous matters of civil law, and a good deal more. The date of the *Temple Scroll*'s composition has been the subject of much speculation. The text has been preserved in copies by different hands, the oldest of which has been dated to the late second or early first century B.C.E., so that the actual composition of the work ought probably to be dated still earlier; some have sugggested a date in the third century B.C.E. or even earlier. Text: Yadin, *The Temple Scroll.* All translations mine.

Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225 C.E.): An early Church Father and the author of various doctrinal and polemical works. Raised in Carthage, Tertullian converted to Christianity and came to exercise considerable influence. Text: *Opera,* ed. Reifferscheid and Wissowa; all translations mine.

testament (in general): see *Pseudepigrapha

Testament of Abraham: A brief narrative of the events preceding Abraham's death, when he is visited by the archangel Michael. Like Moses (see above, Chapter 25), Abraham is reluctant to surrender his soul—indeed, this pseudepigraphon may have originated as a transference of the motif "Moses Did Not Want to Die" back to Abraham. (See further Loewenstamm, "The Testament of Abraham and the Texts concerning Moses' Death," and Chazon, "Moses' Struggle for His Soul.") Michael then takes Abraham on a tour of this world and the next. The text exists in Greek in two recensions, designated A and B; despite certain obvious Christian insertions, this text remains essentially what it was to begin with, a Jewish work; its original composition should probably be dated late in the first century C.E. Text: Schmidt, *Le Testament grec d'Abraham.* Translation: Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:871–902.

Testament of Adam: A brief, composite text apparently composed originally in Syriac. Part of it appears to be dependent on earlier Jewish traditions and perhaps texts, and these may go back to pre-Christian times; however, the final editing of the text has been dated to the middle or late third century C.E. Text and translation: Robinson, *The Testament of Adam.*

Testament of 'Amram: see **Visions of 'Amram*

Testament of Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Joseph, Judah, Levi, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, and Zebulon: see **Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*

Testament of Jacob: A testament that has survived in Coptic (Bohairic), Arabic, and Ethiopic. Its date and provenance are far from clear, these questions connected to that of its relationship to the **Testament of Abraham* and the *Testament of Isaac.* There is no direct evidence to suggest that the three were originally written as a trilogy, as some scholars have proposed; indeed, it may well be that the other two preceded the *Testament of Jacob* by some time, and that this last was consciously composed to fill out the picture with Israel's third and immediate ancestor. If the author of the *Testament of Jacob* was a Christian, he was certainly one acquainted with Jewish interpretive traditions, and not noticeably bent on turning Old Testament figures into advocates or forerunners of

Christianity. Translation: (Bohairic text) Kuhn in Sparks, *AOT* 423, and (eclectic text, mostly based on Arabic) Stinespring in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:913–918.

Testament of Job: This text, the pseudepigraphic "last words" of the biblical Job, was apparently composed originally in Greek; scholars disagree on whether its author was a Jew or a Christian, and hence on the time of its composition: dates from the first century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. have been proposed. Translation: Spittler in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:829–868; Thornhill in Sparks, *AOT* 617–648.

Testament of Kohath: see **Testament of Qahat*

Testament (or *Ascension*) *of Moses:* see **Assumption of Moses*

(4Q542) Testament of Qahat: An Aramaic text from *Qumran; it apparently presented itself as the last words of Levi's son Kohath (Qahat or *Qĕhāt*), since the speaker addresses "Amram my son" (2:9) and elsewhere refers to the "regulations of Abraham and the observances of Levi and myself" (1:8). The script of the manuscript has been dated to the end of the second century B.C.E. (though an accelerator mass spectrometry dating of the parchment has mysteriously yielded a considerably earlier date); the text's actual composition could conceivably be placed in the third century in keeping with Milik's suggestion that it is part of an early "trilogy" of priestly testaments (see Kugel, "Levi's Elevation," also **Vision of 'Amram*, **Aramaic Levi Document*). All translations mine.

Testament of Solomon: A text, apparently composed originally in Greek, that appears to be based on a kernel of Solomon traditions some of which are known from ancient Jewish sources. The text itself exists in several recensions, the earliest of which may go back to the late second or early third century C.E. Translation: Whittaker in Sparks, *AOT* 733–752, and Duling in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:935–987.

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A series of spiritual last wills and testaments delivered in turn by each of Jacob's twelve sons at the time of their deaths. In these "testaments" Jacob's sons give advice and warnings of future events to their own descendants: what they have to say frequently reflects their own portraits as presented in biblical narratives (particularly details found in the Joseph story as well as in Jacob's blessings in Genesis 49). The date and provenance of the *Testaments* has been a particularly vexing subject for scholars. They survive in Greek and other translations, and it has been the position of M. De Jonge, a veteran *Testaments* scholar, that the *Testaments* were composed by a Greek-speaking Christian, who, however, may have loosely based his book on earlier, Semitic sources. An earlier Semitic source certainly stands behind at least one of the *Testaments,* that of Levi, which bears a striking resemblance to an Aramaic text found both in the *Cairo Genizah (see *Sirach) and in some *Qumran fragments, (1Q21) *Aramaic Levi,* (4Q213) *Aramaic Levi*^{a} and (4Q214) *Aramaic Levi*^{b}, and so on. This Aramaic text (now known to some scholars as the **Aramaic Levi Document*) seems in one way or another to have supplied the Greek *Testament of Levi* with much of its material; however, the Greek text is not a straight translation of the Aramaic but represents a reworking and rearranging of its contents. What is more, the Greek *Testament of Levi* differs from the other testaments in some fundamental ways: it is a good hypothesis that, whoever first composed the twelve-testament book, he did not start from scratch but used an already-existing Levi text that he then modified and supplemented with eleven other testaments.

Many writers have expressed doubts about De Jonge's hypothesis that the Greek text of the *Testaments* is an original, Christian composition rather than merely a late, Christian

edition of an earlier Jewish text. Quite apart from the *Testament of Levi,* there is evidence elsewhere within the *Testaments* that the Greek text was created by someone who had a written, Semitic (that is, Aramaic and/or Hebrew) text in front of him. A Hebrew fragment found at Qumran and dealing with Naphtali (4Q215) further supports the hypothesis of an original, Semitic version of the *Testaments,* as do smaller Aramaic fragments tentatively identified as part of the testaments of Judah (3Q7, 4Q484, 4Q538) and Joseph (4Q539). (See Milik, "Écrits préesséniens de Qumran.") If so, it is likely that such a Hebrew, twelve-testament text was itself based on earlier, Semitic sources such as the *Aramaic Levi Document.* A Hebrew original of the *Testaments* might plausibly go back to before the common era, though the dependence of such a text on both the *Aramaic Levi Document* and the book of *Jubilees* does not allow too early a dating. Text of the Greek *Testaments:* De Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition.* Also consulted, translations of Hollander and De Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary,* and Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:775–828. All translations mine.

(4Q175) Testimonia: A chain of citations from biblical books (Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua) and apparently as well as from the apocryphal work (4Q378–379) **Psalms of Joshua.* First published in Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4: I (DJD* 5), 57–60; see also Strugnell, "Notes en marge," 225–229.

Testimony of Truth: This Christian gnostic treatise is one of the texts of the *Nag Hammadi library. Its original composition in Greek has been dated to either the late second or possibly the late third century C.E. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

(1QH and 1Q35) Thanksgiving Hymns (or *Hodayot*): A group of hymns found at *Qumran; they are so called because of their characteristic opening formula, "I thank You, O Lord . . ." Text: I have followed the order of Licht, *The Thanksgiving Scroll,* although Puech, "Quelques aspects," has proposed a new arrangement. All translations mine.

Theodoret (c. 393–c. 466 C.E.): Christian exegete, theologian, and polemicist, he served for a time as bishop of Cyrrhus, in Syria. Like other Syrian Christians, Theodoret avoided excessively allegorical interpretation in his exegetical writings. He was also the author of *Against the Heresies,* in which are reflected the church's battles against gnosticism and other condemned beliefs. All translations mine.

Theodotion: see *Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion

Theodotus: A Greek-speaking epic poet of the second century B.C.E. All that survives of Theodotus' poetry are eight fragments cited by *Eusebius of Caesarea (he quotes them from the writings of *Alexander Polyhistor). Because these fragments show a certain interest in Shechem, some scholars have suggested that Theodotus was a Samaritan, but there is little to justify such a conclusion; the fragments all seem to bear on the biblical story of Dinah (Genesis 34), which is set in Shechem. Theodotus' retelling of the story preserves many exegetical motifs otherwise found in ancient Jewish sources and has much in common in particular with the treatment of the story in the **Testament of Levi.* (See further Kugel, "Story of Dinah.") Text and translation: Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors,* 2:51–204, Fallon in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:785–794.

Theophilus of Antioch: Bishop of Antioch in the late second century C.E. and, along with Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian, and others, one of the Christian "apologists" who flourished between approximately 120 and 220 C.E. and who sought to present a rational

and attractive picture of Christianity to non-Christians. Theophilus' tract "To Autolycus" (cited here from *PG* vol. 92) is an important repository of early interpretive traditions. All translations mine.

1 and 2 Thessalonians: Two letters attributed to Paul found in the New Testament. The first is believed to be authentically Paul's and is thought to be the oldest of his letters (and, hence, the oldest New Testament text); it has been dated to 50 C.E. The second letter's authenticity is doubted by some scholars but maintained by others. See also: *Paul. Translation: Revised Standard Version, with occasional, slight modifications.

Tibat Marqa (or *Tibat Marqe;* also *Memar Marqa*): A Samaritan work commenting upon various biblical passages and principally concerned with the events of the life of Moses. The work is apparently a composite, the first two books datable on linguistic grounds to the third or fourth century C.E., the time of their reputed author Marqa, whereas the latter four books were either composed or edited at a later period. Text: Ben-Ḥayyim, *Tibat Marqe.* All translations mine.

1 and 2 Timothy: see *Pastoral Letters

Titus, Letter to: see *Pastoral Letters

Tobit, book of: A pious Jewish tale recounting the trials of its eponymous hero, his son Tobias, and his future daughter-in-law Sarah; all's well that ends well. This story, included among the *Apocrypha of the Hebrew Bible, may show some influence of the *(Aramaic) Sayings of *Ahiqar.* It was apparently originally composed in Aramaic, and fragments of the Aramaic text have been found at *Qumran. It survives in its entirety in ancient Greek, Latin, Syriac, and other versions. The date of its composition is difficult to fix, but it certainly preceded the revolt of the *Maccabees; a date in the third century B.C.E. seems a reasonable guess. Translation: Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha.

Torah (understood as "teaching"): A Hebrew word used in the Bible to describe, inter alia, a particular statute or procedure, or a collection thereof; the phrase "Torah of Moses" or "Torah of God" that appears in later biblical books may designate the contents of the *Pentateuch as a whole. In any case, the term *Torah* was used in postbiblical Hebrew to designate (1) the *Pentateuch (in this sense the word *torah* was translated into Greek as *nomos* [law, way of life] and appears in the New Testament phrase, "the Law and the Prophets," meaning [more or less] the Bible); (2) somewhat more loosely, the Bible as a whole; and (3) still more loosely, the entire corpus of rabbinic learning, including Bible, *Mishnah, *Talmud, *midrash.

Tosefta (also Tosephta): A rabbinic compilation of teachings apparently intended as a supplement (its name in fact means "supplement") to the *Mishnah and thus containing much that is relevant to the study of early *rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, particularly in the domain of **halakhah.* Presumably, its compilation dates back to the early third century C.E., though much of the material presented in it goes back to still earlier times. Texts: Zuckermandel, *Tosephta Based on the Erfurt and Vienna Codices;* Lieberman, *Tosefta.* All translations mine.

traditional Hebrew text (of the Hebrew Bible): I have generally used this expression instead of "Masoretic text" (the latter more accurate but generally unknown to nonspecialists). One form of the Hebrew text of the Bible, standardized in its basics sometime around 100 C.E., became *the* Bible for Jews and has been preserved and handed down by them from

generation to generation ever since. (Another, somewhat different, form of the Hebrew text has been preserved by the Samaritans; other Hebrew textual witnesses have been found at *Qumran and elsewhere.) In the Middle Ages, the Masoretes—a group of Jewish Bible scholars who gave this text-form its current scholarly name—pinned down and promulgated the last details of this form, having developed a sophisticated system of annotation and punctuation in order to preserve the subtlest nuances in the text's traditional pronunciation, meaning, and conventions of public reading.

Tripartite Tractate: The name given by scholars to a treatise found in the *Nag Hammadi library: it deals with the biblical account of the creation as well as the story of Adam and Eve, then moves to the subject of redemption. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

(4Q473) Two Ways, The: A brief fragment from *Qumran, so called because it evokes the theme of the two ways popular in Second Temple times. Translation mine.

typological interpretation (also *typology*): An approach to Scripture whereby earlier things are held to foreshadow or represent later ones. Although it has analogues in early Jewish exegesis, the typological reading of Scripture became particularly characteristic of early Christian interpreters, who saw in the Old Testament a host of "types" or "figures" (that is, foreshadowings) of New Testament people, events, and ideas. Thus Adam, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, etc., are all held to prefigure Jesus; the crossing of the Red Sea is a *type* of baptism; and so forth.

Valentinian Exposition: This gnostic treatise is one of the texts of the *Nag Hammadi library. It expounds the creation and process of redemption through Sophia, divine wisdom. Translation: *Coptic Nag Hammadi Library.*

Vettius Valens (fl. latter half of second century C.E.): In an astrological work written in Greek, this author refers to the same tradition of "Abraham the Astrologer" found in **Pseudo-Orphica,* *Artapanus, and other earlier writings and writers. Text and translation: Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors* 2:174–175

Vetus Latina ("Old Latin"): An early Latin Bible translation or group of different translations (it is not clear which) that was ultimately displaced by Jerome's Vulgate. This old translation, reconstructed by scholars from numerous citations and snippets in ancient manuscripts, was largely a rendering of the Septuagint into Latin rather than a translation made from a Hebrew text. Its awkward style, elegantly apologized for by *Augustine and other writers, was nevertheless a liability in the Roman church. Text: Fischer: *Vetus Latina.* All translations mine.

(4Q545–548) Visions of 'Amram (or *Testament of 'Amram*): An Aramaic text from *Qumran in which Amram, the father of Moses, recounts a vision he has had. J. T. Milik, who published part of it in his "4Q Visions de 'Amram et Une Citation d'Origène," suggested that it might well be a "testament" of Amram, part of a trilogy of priestly testaments along with the Aramaic **Testament of Qahat* and the **Aramaic Levi Document.* The Qumran fragments have been dated by Milik to the first half of the second century B.C.E., and he has suggested that the putative trilogy was composed still earlier. All translations mine.

Vulgate: see *Jerome

(1QM and 1Q33, 4Q491–496) War Scroll (or *War Rule*): A text found in multiple copies at *Qumran; the differences among the manuscripts indicate at the least that the text underwent considerable editing or rewriting in the course of its transmission. The text

recounts, or rather predicts, the great final conflict between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness," a great setting aright of Israel's fortunes and the final defeat of the Kittim (Romans). Along with this account are sections of divine praise, details concerning the battle formations and weapon to be used, descriptions of the role of priests and Levites, and so forth. All translations mine.

Wisd.: see *Wisdom of Solomon

Wisdom of Solomon: A book written in Greek, probably late in the first century B.C.E. or early in the first century C.E. by a Greek-speaking Jew from, most likely, Alexandria. The book presents itself as the wise writings of the biblical king Solomon; it contains a lengthy praise of, and exhortation to follow, the path of wisdom. It also summarizes a good bit of Scripture in brief, gnomic sentences that reflect many of the interpretive traditions then current. The author may have inhabited Egypt, but he was well versed in interpretive traditions otherwise known to us in Hebrew or Aramaic, traditions that seem to stem, in other words, from the Jewish homeland.

The Wisdom of Solomon, or Book of Wisdom, was part of the Greek Bible of early Christianity and has remained, along with Ben Sira, Judith, and other books, as part of the Old Testament in many churches (although these books are classified by some as biblical Apocrypha or "Deutero-canonical" works). Translations: Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha; also Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon.*

(1Q22) Words of Moses (or *Dibrei Mosheh*): A brief, fragmentary text from *Qumran, much of it a paraphrase of passages from Deuteronomy in which Moses speaks in the first person. Here and there elements of an explicative or expansive nature have been interwoven with the biblical citations. All translations mine.

(4Q504–506) Words of the Luminaries (Dibrei ha-Me'orot): One of several collections of regular prayers and other liturgical compositions from *Qumran. The three Qumran manuscripts of this text were published in Baillet, *Qumran Grotte 4 III* (*DJD 7*); the oldest, 4Q504, has been dated to the mid-second century B.C.E. A number of scholars have suggested that these prayers originated in a "proto-Qumranic group." All translations mine.

Yalquṭ Shimoni: A late (thirteenth-century?) medieval collection of midrashic material on the entire Hebrew Bible compiled by Shim'on ha-Darshan from earlier sources, many of them now lost. Text: Hyman, Lerrer, and Shiloni, *Yalquṭ Šim'oni; Yalquṭ Šim'oni* (Saloniki, 1526–27 edition).

Yannai: An early Hebrew liturgical poet, many of whose works have been recovered thanks to discoveries from the *Cairo Genizah. Yannai's precise time period and biographical data are unknown; dates from the fifth to seventh century C.E. have been proposed. Texts are cited from the editions of Zulay, *Piyyuṭ Yannai,* Rabinowicz, *Maḥzor Piyyuṭei Yannai lattorah velammo'adim.* All translations mine.

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