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EDITORIAL

John Wycliffe, the translator of the Bible into English (1384), was the first to describe the Bible as a system of "government of the people by the people and for the people." This is the most concise yet the most comprehensive definition of democracy. Throughout the centuries, lovers of the Bible have accepted that it illustrates the value of democracy through its teachings of human freedom, equality and justice.

Nevertheless, the observation is still shuffled around in some circles which questions the democratic character of the Bible, and far from bracketing the Scriptures with the democratic model, it is suggested that the Bible is really anti-democratic. Such a view is held not only by some Christian evangelists in relation to their Scriptures, and by Islamic fundamentalists in relation to the Koran, but is also heard in some extreme Orthodox Jewish groups. Occasionally the motivation is blatantly political, but we shall remark here only on the theological aspect of the issue, at least as it concerns Judaism.

First of all, even for literalists who hold that the words of the Bible are the very words of God, the biblical record emphasizes that Israel willingly accepted the Law as the terms of the Covenant between them and God. In so doing, the people made the Torah their very own; so ultimately it became their own Law expressing their own will (Ex. 24:1ff). The Law then is a form of "government *of* the people."

Secondly, there is even a stronger case for the Bible as a democratic document. This becomes clear when we recognize that the Bible is only a short-hand precis of Torah. In fact, Judaism does not rest on the Bible alone, but upon the Bible as it has been interpreted throughout history, and it was left to the interpreters to decide what the Law was. In this matter it is of great importance to note the outstanding fact that the rabbinic process of legal interpretation of the Bible was itself strongly democratic (See Bab.

Metz. 59b), and also that great attention was paid to the opinions and practices of the people as a whole (Ber. 45a; Bab. Bat. 60b). The Bible thus becomes "government *by* the people."

Thirdly, in a true democracy the entire goal of government is for the benefit of the people. Here it is noteworthy that the Bible is, in principle, anti-monarchical (Deut. 17:14ff; I Sam. 8). When David sins with Bathsheba he is rebuked by the prophet Nathan (II Sam. 12). When Ahab and Jezebel steal Naboth's vineyard and commit murder they are sternly chastized by Elijah (I Kg. 21). Saul and David's enthronement have to be confirmed by the people (I Sam. 10:17ff; II Sam. 5:1-4), and Rehoboam is rejected by the people (I Kg. 12:16). The same concern for the people is evidenced in the economic laws of the Bible. Slavery is made difficult by the burden of maintenance placed on the master; a runaway slave may not be returned to his master, and even in the best of conditions for the slave his term of service is strictly limited. The laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years were intended to level off the mountains of wealth and the valleys of poverty so that liberty be proclaimed to all the citizens of the land (Lev. 25:10). Biblical law thus illustrates a system of "government *for* the people." With a proper insight into the democratic character of the Bible, Heine wrote, "Freedom will be able to speak everywhere and its language will be biblical."

Chaim Pearl
Associate Editor

During much of his term as prime minister of Israel, Menachem Begin hosted a regular weekly Bible study evening at his official residence.

The following essay is an English translation of a paper given by Mr. Begin in the summer of 1983. The occasion was a gathering of guests associated with the International Adult Bible Contest who joined the regular members of the weekly Saturday night Bible study group.

THE PROPHET SAMUEL AND KING SAUL

MENACHEM BEGIN

DEUTERONOMY OR BOOK OF SAMUEL

It is difficult to reconcile Samuel's feelings concerning the crowning of a king and the laws of monarchy as set down in Deuteronomy. Let us refresh our memories and see what is written in Deuteronomy: *When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein; and shalt say: 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me'; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose; one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, who is not thy brother* (Deut. 17:14-15).

Following this "preface," there are a number of negative as well as positive precepts, such as that the king should not possess too many horses or women, and that the king shall keep a copy of the Law constantly with him from which he may learn to observe all the laws of God.

What is meant by . . . *thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee*? In my opinion, this is not a command, but an option: if the nation chooses to appoint a king and lets its desire be known, then it

is permitted to do so. The only pre-condition is that the proposed king must be *from your brethren.*

Yet the Book of Samuel offers a different view of monarchy. The elders of Israel come to the prophet Samuel and say unto him: *'Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; now make us a king* to judge us like all the nations'* (I Sam. 8:4-5).

The reaction to this request is characteristic of the rest of the narrative:

But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed unto the Lord (8:6).

Afterwards Samuel turns to God, and is told: *'Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee.'* However, God Himself also takes the people to task: *'for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me'* (8:6).

Then follows the description of the ways of the future king. His behavior toward his people is not in consonance with the spirit of the precepts contained in Deuteronomy 17:17. In order to frighten the children of Israel, the people are told in I Samuel 8 that the king will enslave their sons and daughters and will confiscate their property. Yet in spite of this:

The people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said: 'Nay, but there shall be a king over us; that we may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles' (8:19-20).

Ultimately Samuel gives in and anoints a king.

* A remark about the etymology of the Hebrew word "king." In English, the word is derived from the German *Koenig* which is related to the idea of being "capable," or a "capable person." In Hebrew the root of the word connotes "to lead," and indeed this is what is written quite explicitly in the Bible, *and go out before us and fight our battles* (I Sam. 8:20). This idea is very similar to our modern notion in Israel of "after me," meaning the commander goes first and his soldiers follow after him.

WHY WAS SAMUEL DISPLEASED?

Many ingenious interpretations have been put forward to reconcile the conflict between the express permission to anoint a king as set forth in Deuteronomy and the rejection of monarchy on the part of Samuel. I have come to the conclusion that Samuel's behavior toward Saul is dictated by personal factors. The Bible does not depict individuals in angelic terms: ordinary traits characterize them all. This is true even of prophets, as I hope to demonstrate.

It is written: *But the thing displeased Samuel.* What exactly displeased him? Was it the request to be like all other nations? In Deuteronomy it states quite clearly, *I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me,* so what is new or wrong with their request? They are simply asking for something written in the Torah. However, they say, *make us a king to* ***judge*** *us.* It was because the people asked for someone to judge them that he was displeased.

This is a perfectly human reaction. Samuel was not only a prophet. He was also a judge. And the people came to him and asked for a new judge. This obviously greatly angered Samuel.

The people also add that this king/judge '*go out before us and fight our battles. . . Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he spoke them in the ears of the Lord* (8:20-21) as though appealing to God to thwart the people's desire. What did the Lord say? '*Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king*' (8:22), whereupon Samuel returns to the people and tells them, *Go ye every man unto his city* (8:22). There is no other option. Even the Lord told him to listen to the people. Samuel must anoint Saul.

Yet, even after God commands him to anoint a king, and after he does anoint him, Samuel remains angry. In his bitterness he says: *Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you out of the hand of . . . all the kingdoms that oppressed you. But ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saveth you out of all your calamities and your distresses; and ye*

have said unto Him: Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands (8:18-19).

After this address he does anoint a king for them — yet he still remains angry. He claims they have forsaken God. I ask: How? By fulfilling that which is commanded in the book of Deuteronomy?

SAUL SAVES ISRAEL

From I Samuel 11 we learn that because of Saul's prowess the children of Israel were saved. *Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash: 'Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.' And Nahash the Ammonite said unto them: 'On this condition will I make it with you, that all your right eyes be put out; and I will lay it for a reproach upon all Israel'* (Ibid. 11:1-2).

Nahash the Ammonite was indeed a *nahash* (snake). He was willing to make a covenant with the people of Jabesh-gilead on the condition they blind themselves in one eye. They certainly could not accept this condition, and so sent messengers out to their Israelite brethren, ultimately reaching Saul:

> *And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. And the spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard those words, and his anger was kindled greatly* (11:5-6).

Now there is a king, and he will come to the rescue. He literally enforces a total draft of the nation by cutting a pair of oxen into twelve parts, sending them to the tribes saying: If you do not come to battle, you will wind up like the piece of dissected meat sent to you. The draft succeeds and three hundred thousand men from northern Israel and another thirty thousand from the tribe of Judah are conscripted. Three hundred and thirty thousand men! It is not surprising that Saul wins a stunning victory and saves the day.

SAMUEL APPLIES PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE ON THE NATION

After the great victory, Saul demonstrates his largesse and refuses to put to death his detractors from amongst the children of Israel, saying: *'There shall not a man be put to death this day; for today the Lord hath wrought deliverance in Israel'* (11:13). Despite this, we still see traces of anger in Samuel in the very next chapter. *'Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you'* (12:1).

As if to say: You were indeed correct so I chose for you a good king. Unexpectedly, Samuel turns on the nation and asks them to testify before the Lord that he — Samuel — never committed any offense.

> *'Here I am; witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? or whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a ransom to blind my eyes therewith? and I will restore it to you' . . . And he said unto them: 'The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found aught in my hand.' And they said: 'He is witness.' And Samuel said unto the people: ' . . . Now therefore stand still, that I may plead with you before the Lord . . . .* [he recounts for them Israelite history from the Exodus through the story of Nahash the Ammonite] *ye said unto me: 'Nay but a king shall reign over us; when the Lord your God was your king'* (12:3-12).

Samuel heard their request for a king, responded and received the testimony that he never committed an offense, yet still in anger says *ye shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king* (12:17).

Observe what sophisticated psychological pressure Samuel applied to the nation. He convinced them after the fact that they were wicked when they asked for a king. Immediately after the miracle of the thunder and lightening during the time of the wheat harvest

(something unheard of in the Middle East), the people cry out: '*Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all sins this evil, to ask us a king*' (12:19).

SAMUEL AND SAUL AND THE BATTLE WITH AMALEK

Samuel gives no rest to Saul. This becomes apparent after Saul did not wait for the prophet to begin the sacrifice, prior to the battle with the Philistines, (13:8-15) and in the aftermath of his victorious battle against the Amalekites (Ch. 15).

In the story of Amalek, Saul essentially did what he was commanded to do. The soldiers took the sheep as booty when they were not supposed to, and therefore they were responsible for the sin, not Saul. Saul took nothing for himself, but nevertheless this incident leads to his downfall and dooms him to continual unrest.

What was the real sin of Saul? What can possibly explain Samuel's feelings toward him? Not only did Samuel nullify Saul's kingship; even more serious, while Saul is still alive, Samuel anoints David. This is an act of outright treason against the living king. Given the way he was treated, is it so hard to understand Saul's paranoia *vis-à-vis* David? As soon as David is anointed he can start his quest for the crown. What kind of king can Saul be when there is a new pretender to the throne? Generally, the two claimants to the throne fight against one another until one side can claim victory.

Given all this, I have come to the conclusion that the original request of the people for someone "to judge" them was the cause of Samuel's anger. It is not a question of a premature request for a king, but simply from the time they requested a 'judge,' Samuel does not forgive the nation. He does not forgive himself either. He is perpetually sorry for having acquiesced to the request of the nation. He will not forgive the man whom he anointed to replace him as 'judge.'

I want to state that this is a perfectly understandable human trait, and I believe that the Bible wants to emphasize this point. Even though Samuel is likened to Moses in many ways, we should not forget that he is human and simply cannot tolerate the request to have another ruler or 'judge' in his place. Therefore we have this entire story, up to the point where he tried to convince the people that they were mistaken in asking for a king, irrespective of what is written in Deuteronomy.

This is an all too human quality. Samuel was deeply offended by the nation's request and just could not get over it.

THE HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS OF JONAH

I will try and bring a proof for my interpretation of how Samuel felt from the Book of Jonah. The Lord commands Jonah to pronounce a prophecy on the city of Nineveh concerning the punishment that is to be meted out. Jonah flees to Tarshish. The story is well known: the storm, the big fish, and all the other elements. Finally he arrives in Nineveh and proclaims that in another forty days the city will be destroyed. What happened though? The people, even the animals, fast. God hears their prayers: *And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, which He said He would do unto them* (Jonah 3:10).

What should Jonah's reaction to the situation have been? He should have rejoiced at their repentance! They promised to reverse their evil ways, and God responded to their prayers. Jonah should have been elated. However, this is not what is written in the account. *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said: 'I pray Thee, O Lord . . . take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live'* (4:1-3).

What happened? If people were saved, why should he request to die? Because this was a very human reaction on the part of Jonah.

His prophecy was not fulfilled. Had he returned to Nineveh, the boys in the street would have run after him and shouted, "False prophet! You claimed the city would be destroyed, but here it is still standing." Presumably, this is the reason why he did not re-enter the city. When God asks, "*Are you greatly angry*?" what does Jonah do? He removes himself to outside the city precincts (4:5). He is afraid lest someone from the city should come to him and say, "What stories were you telling us? What kind of prophet are you?"

The continuation of the story is well known. A gourd plant grows over his head giving him shade, it dries up and dies, and Jonah, exposed to the heat of the sun, once more asks to die.

Why is he so unhappy? Once again God asks that same question, and once again Jonah replies in like fashion. This is simply proof of the human side of the prophet. Though he should have been happy that because of his warning no one died and the city was saved, he is despondent. His prophecy did not come true, and as a result he cannot still his troubled soul.

MAN LIKES TO CONTINUE WITH HIS APPOINTED TASK

In brief, it appears to me that the two cases are similar. Both Samuel and Jonah are motivated by personal, human traits. They like to continue in their appointed tasks (not only prime ministers) [laughter]. Samuel wants to continue as a judge. When they try to remove him from authority, it offends him greatly. He cannot forget it and therefore continues to bring it up again and again. In the same way, when a man prophesies, he expects his prophecy to come true. And if someone causes it not to come true, even if it be via repentance, people are likely to come to that prophet and tell him he was mistaken, that he is not a true prophet. Well, that makes him angry.

I think therein lies the greatness of the Bible, that it always tells the truth. The Bible is not afraid to tell us that Moses as well as the other prophets were men of flesh and blood.

I hope that this interpretation, which is based upon the rational assumption that natural human tendencies underlie the story, is an acceptable one.

SAUL RETURNED THE GLORY OF ISRAEL

Consider the period of the judges, from which Saul emerged as king. This is indeed an ugly period in biblical history. In numerous places in the Book of Judges it is stated: *In that time there was no king in Israel and every man did what he pleased.* Frequently, Israel falls into dire straits, and only occasionally a charismatic leader arises to rescue the people from their oppressors.

The defeat of Israel at the hand of the Philistines, when the ark is captured, is so grievous that it causes a mother to name her child "Ichabod" (without glory). Along comes Saul, who returns the glory of Israel and enables her to stand upright once again.

I believe therefore that today we should readjust the traditional disparagement of Saul. He was the first king of Israel. He was a brave fighter. He gave his life in defense of his nation. After three thousand years he deserves the recognition due to him.

CITING CHAPTER AND VERSE

RAV A. SOLOFF

Reading and re-reading the Bible always raises fresh questions. One of the exciting approaches of recent years is to pay close attention to its literary structure and narrative devices. Some translations, however, obscure aspects of the Hebrew biblical art. The Torah portion *Shemini* (Lev. 9:1-11:47), for example, includes four verses which dramatically illustrate a point made in the Preface to *Tanakh — The Holy Scriptures, The New Jewish Publication Society Translation*. On page XVIII of the Preface it says, "The chapter divisions, whose origin is neither ancient nor Jewish but medieval Christian, sometimes join or separate the wrong paragraphs, sentences, or even parts of sentences."

Consider the chapter division in Leviticus which separates the last two sentences of Chapter 9 from the first two of Chapter 10. In the Torah scroll itself, there is no division of any kind, all the way from 9:1 through 10:7. But some medieval Christian scribe put a chapter division in the middle of these four verses:

> (23) *Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of the Lord appeared to all the people.* (24) *And fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces.* (1) *Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the Lord alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them.* (2) *And*

Rav is a unique, personal name (after Rivka רבקה*). Rabbi Soloff (HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1951) is spiritual leader of Beth Shalom, Johnstown, Pa., where he has led a havura studying The Jewish Bible Quarterly (Dor LeDor) over the past decade. He earned a Ph.D. at Drew University, 1967.*

fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed them; thus they died before the Lord."

The first five Hebrew words of verse 24 are identical with the first five Hebrew words of verse 2; verse 23 tells what Moses and Aaron did, which was followed by a fiery manifestation of God's favor, and verse 1 tells what Nadab and Abihu did, which was followed by a fiery manifestation of God's wrath. How can there four verses not be read as a literary and theological unit?

Personally, I may sympathize with the one who divided them. These four verses taken as a whole speak out loud and clear against experimentation, innovation and any deviation from the revealed ritual. The priestly elders are exalted, but their heirs of the next generation are condemned for showing initiative. So, each pair of biblical texts deserves to be heard on its own.

Moreover, the traditional rabbinic criticisms of Nadab and Abihu have a clear scriptural basis when we contrast their actions with those of Moses and Aaron. Before the Presence of the Lord appeared to all the people, Moses and Aaron first retired to the Tent appointed for meeting with the Divine, then they came out and blessed the people. The consequent fire on the altar and the response of all the people were unanticipated.

In contrast, Nadab and Abihu acted after that fiery manifestation, and after the adulation of the people. They appear to have wanted to evoke the response given to Moses and Aaron, without the careful, humble, preparations of their elders, and before offering any blessing to the people. But the result was a divine fire which consumed them.

However, it is not difficult to see that the entire, unbroken Torah section from Leviticus 9:1 through 10:7 forms a literary unit. It relates Moses' instructions to Aaron and his sons on the eighth, final and climactic day of their exalted, sacred and dangerous rituals of initiation into the priesthood of the Lord. Before 9:1 (at the end of the preceding chapter), before the beginning of that unbroken Torah text, we read:

> (35) *You shall remain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, keeping the Lord's charge — that you may not die — for so have I been commanded.* (36) *And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord had commanded through Moses.*

At the end of that unbroken Torah text, in verse 7 of Chapter 10 we read:

> (7) *You must not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die, for the Lord's anointing oil is upon you. And they did as Moses had bidden.*

Why would anyone choose to insert a chapter division in the midst of these literary units when the Hebrew text suggests no break at that point?

One possibility is that the motive was polemical. Does this chapter division serve to separate the fatal sin of Nadab and Abihu and their explicit rebellion against Moses? The unity of 9:1 through 10:7 would stress the total superior authority of Moses over Aaron and his sons, with death as the penalty for any deviation from Moses' bidding, as stated in 10:7. Certainly, the division of 9:24 from 10:1 could weaken the impact of that message. If so, this would not be a unique case of a chapter division serving a polemical interest. Indeed, it would not even be the most obvious case.

A POLEMICAL CHAPTER DIVISION

Consider the first two chapters of Genesis. The structure of Chapter 1 is the familiar six days of Creation. The only reasonable conclusion to this narrative is, after telling about the seventh day, *Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created* (Gen. 2:4, or the end of 2:3, if you question the dividing of verse 4, which is so cogently justified by Harry M. Orlinsky).[1] Those who substituted

1 Harry M. Orlinsky, Editor, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), p. 59.

Sunday for the Jewish Sabbath, however, preferred to de-emphasize the biblical view that "rest" on the seventh day was the climax of Creation. For them, ending the first chapter of Genesis with the completed work and leaving the Sabbath almost as an afterthought, as the introduction to Chapter 2, served a polemical purpose.

A NON-POLEMICAL CHAPTER DIVISION

By way of contrast, in one of the passages of the Bible most frequently used in Jewish-Christian polemics, the presently accepted chapter division does not reflect the presumed interest of a hypothetical medieval Christian scholar. Perhaps the Apostle Philip was the first Christian to win a convert by his interpretation of all or part of Isaiah 53, meaning the part which extends from 52:13 through 53:12, starting, *Behold, My servant shall prosper.* The end of Chapter 52 reads, *they shall see what has not been told them, shall behold what they never have heard*, and 53:1 picks up the last words of Chapter 52, *Who can believe what we have heard?* The rest of 53 includes phrases which Philip applied to Jesus, including 53:7, *He was maltreated, yet he was submissive*, and 53:8, *he was cut off from the land of the living through the sin of my people, who deserved the punishment.* It also includes 53:11, *righteous servant makes the many righteous, it is their punishment that he bears.*

In Acts 8:27-28 we read of Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch who had been reading Isaiah. By interpreting Isaiah 53:7-8 in terms of Jesus, Philip made the eunuch eager for baptism. Later Christian missionaries turned frequently to this chapter in the hope of a similar response from the non-Christians they found reading Isaiah, namely the Jews. Especially in Spain, from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, Christian evangelists insisted that only the wilful blindness of the rabbis prevented Jews from recognizing Jesus, the vicariously atoning Messiah, in Isaiah's prophecy, *Behold, My Servant shall prosper.* It appears counter-productive to the argument of those evangelists to have divided

52:13-15 from 53:1 ff., because that chapter division separates, *My Servant . . . marred was his appearance*, from *Our suffering that he endured*, and the other phrases which Philip applied to Jesus.

Indeed, the choice of that chapter division was neither originated by medieval Christians nor dictated by rabbinic, polemical interests. There are today, and have been concurrently for millennia, two Jewish traditions as to the proper division of the verses in question. The present chapter division separates 52:15 from 53:1; we also have a single prophetic reading portion beginning with Isaiah 52:13 and ending 53:12. The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll A begins a paragraph before the first words of 52:7, of 52:13, of 53:1, of 53:9 and of 54:1.[2] The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll B has no space before the first words of 52:13 and none before the first words of 53:1, making it appear, due to an open space in the middle of the line preceding 52:11 and an open space before 54:1, that 52:11-53:12 was a single unit.[3]

In the Hebrew Bible itself, Daniel 12:3 clearly reflects the wording of Isaiah 52:13 and 53:11. This indicates that the author of Daniel understood both verses as referring to the same servant(s) of the Lord, and as parts of the same prophetic statement.

In sum, no incontrovertible evidence establishes either the unity or the disunity of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as "original." The Dead Sea Isaiah Scrolls being in all probability pre-Christian, their divisions would rule out any likelihood that 52:13-15 was separated from 53:1-12 as an apologetic move by the rabbis reacting to Christian polemics.

2 Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery* (New Haven: The American Schools of Oriental Research, 1950), I, plate 43; Harry M. Orlinsky, *The So-Called "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah 53* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1964), p. 34. Note 14 cites H. Bardtke; this Orlinsky lecture with its copious notes is uniquely significant for evaluating Isaiah 53 in terms of the intention of the prophet himself, and most provocative in suggesting the development of exegesis or eisegesis of these verses.

3 E. L. Sukenik, *Otzar Hamegillot Hagenuzot* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1954), plate 10.

THE DECALOGUE

In the mid-1950s, the Jewish Community Council of Essex County, New Jersey, became aware of an effort to post plaques or posters of the Ten Commandments in a Newark public high school. To explain how variant divisions of the very same text created significant religious differences among the Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic versions, I start with a definition of terms.

Decalogue is a word derived from the Greek, corresponding to the biblical עשרת הדברות (the ten words). It is a piece of literature taken from a series of verses which appear in the Pentateuch in two versions, one in Exodus 20 and the other in Deuteronomy 5. The verses dealing with the Sabbath contain the only noteworthy difference between the Exodus and the Deuteronomy versions. And even here the difference is in the reason given for the observance of the Sabbath rather than in the command, for "remember" and "observe" have much the same force. There is also a difference in the order of the phrases in the last verses of the Exodus and Deuteronomy texts.

The Decalogue as a whole is of profound theological, as well as ethical importance. It teaches the doctrine of God (as opposed to atheism), of the One God (as opposed to dualism or any other polytheism), of the God of Israel who redeemed them from bondage (as opposed to a general deism), of the God who requires ritual as well as moral conformity to His standards (as in Sabbath observances), and so on. The Decalogue is a religious document, specifically belonging within the traditions of those religions based on the Hebrew Bible. It is not merely "moral law" binding upon all mankind. Furthermore, for Jews, Protestants and Catholics the Decalogue is a sectarian document. Each group divides the verses into 10 sections in such a way as to emphasize its own teachings.

For Jews עשרת הדברות is the law of the ten words or statements, so it need not be cast as ten imperative sentences. The first of the דברות (Ex. 20:2) is a statement of Jewish doctrine, from which any or all

moral teachings may be derived by various means of interpretation.

Further, Jews believe this tenfold teaching is binding *only to Jews*, and a non-Jew can be perfectly ethical without observing its specifically Jewish rules. For example, the second of the דברות (Ex. 20:3-6) prohibits Jewish participation in the worship of any "other gods." The making of images is included as a specific type of pagan religious practice which is forbidden, as part of the more general prohibition contained in Exodus 20:3.

Most Protestant Churches and the Greek Orthodox Church adopt the division of these verses into a Decalogue, starting with Exodus 20:2-3; 4-6; 7; 8-11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17.

However, the Lutheran Church uses a similar text, with the Roman Catholic numbering. Notice that Exodus 20:2 is included as part of the First Commandment, but since the Christian conception is that of *Ten Commandments* as opposed to the Jewish idea of עשרת הדברות, Exodus 20:3 is included to constitute the First Commandment. This numbering gives to the prohibition against image-making the status of a full and independent Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6), and reflects an iconoclastic emphasis, as opposed to the practice of Roman Catholicism.

The Roman Catholics and Lutherans, like the other Christians just mentioned, assume that the Decalogue must consists of ten *commands*. But they recognize, as we Jews do, that Exodus 20:3 to 6 is a unit, so their system must find a tenth command elsewhere in these biblical passages. The Roman Catholic tradition has therefore taken Deuteronomy 5:21 *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife* to be the Ninth, with Exodus 20:17, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house* as the Tenth Commandment. The conclusion is obvious: within each of the three traditions, division of the same biblical passages into a Decalogue, and the interpretation of that Decalogue, was accomplished along sectarian lines.

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THE BLOOD OF NABOTH

P. J. BERLYN

Ahab, king of Israel, was so accomplished at construction that even the hostile narrator of I Kings was impressed by *the ivory house which he built, and all the cities he built* (22:39). Traces of these enterprises can still be seen in the ruins of his ivory-adorned palace, state edifices and stout walls at Samaria, his capital, and other massive works at Megiddo, Hazor and Dan. Yet all this that might have been counted to his credit was out-weighed by the discredit brought upon him by a very small-scale and modest aspiration: he wanted to plant a vegetable garden next to his private manor house in the town of Jezreel. The site of his choice happened to be a vineyard belonging to his neighbor.

> *Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria.*[1] *And Ahab spoke unto Naboth saying: 'Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house; and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seems good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.' And Naboth said to Ahab: 'The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee'* (I Kg. 21:1-3).

Ahab is here identified with the curious title "king of Samaria" rather than the standard "king of Israel" and, whether or not it was

1 Ahab's "house" is called היכל, a term rendered "palace" in this translation. It can also mean a "great hall" and apply to a private mansion rather than an official royal residence.

P. J. Berlyn, formerly of New York, NY and Princeton, NJ, is now a resident of Jerusalem. She is a graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, and has been on the staff of The Commission on Jewish Education and The Council on Foreign Relations.

the intent of the author, the usage points up the difference between his status in the capital city, as a sovereign with royal prerogative, and in Jezreel as a private landowner held to the same law and custom as any other man.

He wanted the vineyard for his personal use, not for any public or official purpose. He made Naboth a fair offer without any suggestion of command that the subject must deliver up his property to the ruler. Naboth refused the offer, as he had every right to do. Attachment to ancestral land was one of the foundations of Israelite society and its structure of family, clan and tribe. Also, since all land belonged to the Lord, it was held without fiefdom or vassalage to any mortal superior. Indeed, the land was so near to the heart of Israelite life that real estate law was designed more to prevent than regulate transfer of ownership:

> *And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine . . . . In all the land of your possession, ye shalt grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother should be waxen poor, and sell some of his possession, then shall his kinsman that is next to him come, and shall redeem that which his brother hath sold. And if a man have no one to redeem it, and he be waxen rich and find sufficient means to redeem it; then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; and he shall return unto his possession* (Lev. 25:24-27).

These provisions do not relate directly to Naboth, but they set the background for his response: *The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you.* If family land was not to be alienated even at need, how much more so when there was no need. In the increasingly complex economy of the monarchical period some folk, especially small holders, did lose their portions, which were then added to the swelling estates of the wealthy — a drift that led to social disruption, political unrest and prophetic indignation. But Naboth would not have been left landless, nor would he have lost his status as a squire in Jezreel, if he had given up his vineyard. As

will be noted, he seems to have had other property, and anyway he would have received another plot or the silver to buy one. Thus his tenacity in keeping his ancestral vineyard may have been inspired not only by the ancient traditional bond of family to the land, but also by some particular determination to stand fast for the old ways against the new ones and the king who fostered them. If there were some in those days willing to relinquish the mores as well as the soil of their fathers in exchange for the profits dispensed by the king, Naboth would not be among them. Perhaps he was clinging not merely to his grapevines, but to an entire way of simple, egalitarian, rural life then being eroded by the newfangled royal state and its increasingly commercial, sophisticated, urban society.

In Samuel's peroration on monarchy there is a warning that a sovereign *will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them and give them to his servants* (I Sam. 8:14). Whether this derived from Samuel's observations of neighboring monarchies, or was added to the text after Israel had some experience with kings, it implies that the ruler could expropriate or dispose of a subject's property. David assumed such a right over the estates of King Saul: first he bestowed them on Meribaal ben-Jonathan as though by favor, though the latter was his grandfather's rightful heir, and after Meribaal was accused of disloyalty, David took back half the grant to give to the accuser (II Sam. 9:7, 19:30). On some occasions, then, the crown could take or shift ownership of hereditary holdings. With Naboth's vineyard, though, there was no pretext for such an act, and Ahab made none.

> *And Ahab came into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he laid him down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread* (I Kg. 21:4).

This unregal petulance in itself suggests that Ahab felt thwarted and frustrated by Naboth, not that he now meant to use his power to take what he wanted. This acquiescence was not acceptable to his

consort, a woman bred as a princess in Phoenicia, with less regard for the rights of commoners.

> *But Jezebel, his wife, came to him, and said unto him: 'Why is thy spirit so sullen, that thou eatest no bread?' And he said unto her: 'Because I spoke unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him: Give me thy vineyard for money; or else if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it; and he answered: I will not give thee my vineyard.' And Jezebel his wife said unto him: 'Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite'* (21:5-7).

It is questionable that the narrator, or the source on which he drew, had a transcript of this connubial colloquy in the royal bedchamber. If it is a literary dramatization, the tone at least is in character: Ahab gives his report to Jezebel, just as he did on his return from the contest of Elijah and her Baal-prophets on Mount Carmel, and Jezebel reacts as ruthlessly as when she threatened the life of Elijah. And she scorns and taunts a king who makes a polite request of a subject and sulks when it is rejected. Whether the exact words are quoted or simulated, Jezebel learned of the matter of the vineyard and took charge. Perhaps in doing so she saw herself as a good wife acting to make her husband happy, and a good queen upholding the privilege of the crown.

> *So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, and that dwelt with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters saying: 'Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people, and set two men, base fellows, before him and let them bear witness against him, saying: Thou didst curse God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he die'* (21:8-10).

Jezebel moved against Naboth on a personal, not political, level. She did not try to confiscate the vineyard by royal command, nor to punish him for his refusal to sell it. Rather, she arranged a judicial

murder on a spurious charge that ostensibly had nothing to do with the vineyard. Thus she accomplished the death of Naboth, and through it the acquisition of the land, but left unchanged and unchallenged the legal principle that the individual had standing the king was bound to honor. This constriction of the power of the throne may have been intolerable to her, but she schemed to circumvent not to abrogate it. The fate of Naboth might intimidate others from exercising their rights, but the rights themselves were not revoked. There was a certain caution in how far, or at least how flagrantly, she could impose a despotic authority.

Jezebel seems to have been familiar enough with Hebrew law and tradition to bend them to her own ends, acting in contempt but not in ignorance of them. The offense to be charged to Naboth was prohibited in Exodus 22:27: *Thou shalt not revile God nor curse a ruler of the people.* [2] It is a cruel irony that Jezebel, despising the religion of Israel, used this transgression to destroy a man faithful to it.

Of all the accusations that might be framed against Naboth these would be among the easiest to sustain, for they required no material evidence, only the perjured testimony of the "witnesses." Those designated to bear the false witness against their neighbor were not elders or nobles of his own class, but men Jezebel herself despised as "base fellows"; an odd choice, for men of a better class would have won more credence, and such men — as shown by their obedience to her orders — were willing to be her henchmen. Be that as it may, she did meet the requirement for at least two witnesses to a capital crime: *At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is to die be put to death; at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death* (Deut. 17:6).

The case was to be pursued in the old, pre-monarchical way with the town elders, not the king's judge, considering the matter, rendering the verdict and carrying out the sentence. By staying

2 A precedent for stoning as execution for blasphemy is set down in Lev. 24:11-23. There is an example of *lèse majesté* and its outcome in II Sam. 16:7-10, I Kg. 2:8-9.

with this procedure, Jezebel kept up the pretence that the trial, conviction and execution were strictly a local issue in which the royal government was not at all concerned.

It would have been more discreet to send an oral command, carried by some trusty Tyrian servitor, rather than commit her guilt to writing. Perhaps with letters bearing the king's own seal, she meant to implicate Ahab, or to mislead the recipients into believing the orders came from the sovereign himself. But if they were ever under that illusion it was soon dissipated, for they made their report directly to Jezebel.

> *And the men of the city, even the elders and the nobles who dwelt in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, according as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. And the two men, the base fellows, came in and sat before him; and the base fellows bore witness against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying: Naboth did curse God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying: Naboth is stoned, and is dead* (I Kg. 21:11-14).

Had these elders and nobles, entrusted with upholding justice, any qualms about perverting their office for the murder of their townsman? Did they fear Jezebel, and also fear to appeal to Ahab for protection against her? Or were they agreeable to her will, with no fear of the king's wrath or punishment? Even if Ahab was not an accomplice, even if he did not know what was going on, it could happen in his realm, with him, without him, or despite him. Therein, rather than in the passivity for which his consort derided him, lay his true failure to govern the Kingdom of Israel.

Jezebel's order to proclaim a fast as the occasion for the accusation permits a hypothetical reconstruction of how the plot may have worked. A special fast points to a special distress or anxiety: occurrence or apprehension of drought or famine, epidemic, enemy

attack or other calamity, that would bring out all the community in public assembly to fast in atonement and supplication.[3] Jezreel may have been in some plight at that time, whether or not related to the long and disastrous drought during Ahab's reign, that allowed Jezebel to play upon the common belief that one man's transgression could bring down hardship or peril on his innocent fellows.[4]

Once the assembly was called and Naboth, a respected elder or noble, was placed conspicuously at its head, the stage was set. The base fellows came forth with the accusation that Jezreel was in its present straits, whatever they were, because of this sinner in its midst; a contamination all the graver when the sinner himself was foremost in the assembly. The elders and nobles who were the stage-managers would allow themselves to be persuaded of his guilt. Some of those not party to the plot would be sincerely persuaded, especially if Naboth had ever made remarks critical of Ahab that could now be recalled and exaggerated — all the more so if Naboth happened to be disliked in Jezreel. If any doubted, or even stood up in his defense, their dissent was to no avail. Perhaps none but Elijah the Tishbite could have been daring and forceful enough to save Naboth, but he was not there.

Some fifteen years later, King Jehoram, son of Ahab and Jezebel, was slain by the rebel army officer Jehu, near that same bloody ground where Naboth had fallen — ground it seems that was another portion of Naboth's own property. Jehu then ordered a subordinate:

> *Take up and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, for remember how that when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord pronounced this burden against him, 'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons,' saith the Lord, 'and I will requite thee in this plot,' saith the Lord* (II Kg. 9:25-26).

3 References to a public fast in times of distress or danger can be found in Jud. 20:26, I Sam. 14:24 ff., Joel 1:14, 2:12 and 15, and in the Talmud, *Ta'an 14b*.

4 For examples, see Josh. 7, II Sam. 14:11-18, 21:1-6, Jonah 1.

Jehu was no objective observer. He was in the very act of casting himself as the instrument of requital on the House of Ahab, so reviving memories of Naboth's fate could only advance his campaign. No sons are mentioned in the original story, but it would be difficult to invent them to compound the crime, for there must have been many still in Jezreel who had been present on the fatal day. If there were indeed sons who fell with Naboth, they too must have been victims of the base witnesses.

Jezebel took it for granted that by procuring the execution of the owner, and perhaps of his heirs as well, she simultaneously procured the vineyard for her husband:

> *. . . when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead she said to Ahab: 'Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead'* (21:15).

The grounds for the transfer of the land are not explained, but it may be that cursing the king was tantamount to treason, and the offender's property was forfeit to the crown as compensation to the royal victim. Since there is no such provision in the law, this might be a putative clause of monarchical regulations.[5]

So, a man named Naboth declined to sell his vineyard to King Ahab. Thereafter he was convicted of blasphemy and cursing his sovereign, and put to death. The vineyard then came to the king. The narrator of the tale, or the sources on which he drew, whether on evidence or by surmise, made Naboth the victim of a judicial murder designed by Jezebel. Ahab himself is given no role in these doings. Indeed, had he been willing even to seize the vineyard, much less kill for it, there would have been no need for Jezebel's machinations. Perhaps he truly did not know how she meant to get

5 A legal text of the kingdom of Alalakh (c. 15th century B.C.E.) names a subject who "became an evil-doer, was executed for his crime, and his estate came to the palace." Cited in James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament — Supplementary Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 546.

him the vineyard, but once he heard of Naboth's death he could scarcely suppose there was no link between his wife's promise and his neighbor's execution. Yet he is not known to have done anything except take possession of the vineyard. Any satisfaction he had in the acquisition would evaporate quickly when on its soil he came face to face with Elijah. From him, Ahab heard the sentence of doom on his dynasty. The incident might have mattered little if at all in most kingdoms, but in Israel it was held that a powerful ruling house could be condemned to fall for the sake of one commoner and his bit of land.

In a post-biblical legend, when Ahab was judged in the heavenly court testimony for him and against him was exactly even — a more generous assessment of his merits and demerits than in I Kings — until the spirit of Naboth touched down and tilted the balance forever against him.[6]

6 Cited in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. V (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1954) p. 187.

THE MIRACLE AT THE RED SEA*

JOSIAH DERBY

The "splitting" of the Red Sea — קריעת ים סוף — [1] was considered by the sages of the Talmud as one of the most, if not the most, astonishing and "difficult" miracles that the Almighty performed for the children of Israel in ancient times. To underscore their view, they compare this divine act with several others which, in their opinion, are unusual achievements. For example, they said that the Almighty, who is the great matchmaker, has as much trouble finding proper mates for people as He did in splitting the Red Sea.[2]

They went even further by comparing this miracle at the Red Sea with the ten plagues — miracles in themselves — which the Almighty brought upon the hapless Egyptians. This is recorded in the Passover Haggadah where the sages vie with one another in extolling the miracle at the Red Sea. Rabbi Yosi the Galilean claims it was five times greater than the miracle of the plagues; Rabbi Eliezer said it was twenty times greater; Rabbi Akiba gave it a rating of twenty-five.

What impressed the sages so much about this event? As described in Exodus 14:22, when the waters parted to make way for the crossing of the Israelites, they formed two walls, a wall of water on either side of the path. Now, the physical behavior of water is one of the

* This article, written in February 1991 during the Gulf War, was suggested by the Coalition's aim of breaking Saddam Hussein's powerful war machine until it could no longer be a menace to the region.

1 Modern Bible scholars refer to the Red Sea as the Reed Sea or Sea of Reeds, which is a literal translation of the Hebrew name. For a broader discussion of this matter see Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) pp. 106 ff.

2 *Sotah* 2a; *Pesahim* 118a.

Rabbi Josiah Derby has both a B.S. and M.A. in Mathematics from Harvard University. He was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary before he entered the rabbinate. After forty-two years at the Rego Park Jewish Center, NY, he is now Rabbi Emeritus.

commonest observations known to man. Unless it is restrained by the walls of a container, water will simply fall to the lowest level. That the waters of the Red Sea could remain upright without some kind of restraining dam was beyond credibility unless, of course, it was miraculous. It is no wonder that they saw here a demonstration of the Almighty's enormous powers.

However, a careful reading of the story of the flight of the Israelites from Egypt as it is recorded in Exodus, Chapters 13, 14 and 15 might suggest that the events at the Red Sea were seen differently in the Torah; that, indeed, a much more important miracle occurred there. To arrive at this conclusion we must begin with a discussion of Exodus 13:17 which purports to give an answer to the question: How did the Israelites find themselves at the shores of the Red Sea?

> *Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, 'the people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.'*

In examining the various interpretations of this text it should be borne in mind that the latest date assigned to the Exodus by Bible scholars is 1250 B.C.E. The earliest for the presence of Philistines on the southern coast of Canaan is approximately 1175 B.C.E.[3] Hence there were no Philistines in Canaan at the time of the Exodus. The reference to "the land of the Philistines" is anachronistic, the Torah identifying the location as it was later known.

Rashi adopts the view that the "way of the land of the Philistines" is the coastal highway, the Via Maris, the great road from Egypt northward, used by caravans and armies. He explains that should the Israelites encounter any problem or become disgruntled, they could readily turn about and return to Egypt. Hence, it was necessary to turn them away from this well-known highway. Rashi takes it for granted that the only way left to the Israelites was to turn

3 Sarna, *op. cit.*, p. 105; see also Sarna, *Biblical Archeology Review*, XVII:2, March/April 1991, p. 34.

to the wilderness which would bring them to the Red Sea. He offers no other explanation, nor does he ask why the text does not say that had God led the Israelites by way of the short road, they would not have come to Mt. Sinai.

Rabbi Ovadiah ben-Jacob Sforno (1470-1550) agrees with Rashi as to the road the Israelites did *not* take, but offers a different explanation. The Israelites feared that if they took this well-used road, they would be seen by many travelers who would inform Pharaoh of their position. Hence, they were led into the wilderness where they might not be found. Sforno does not account for the fact that Pharaoh succeeded in locating the Israelites anyway. Moreover, he apparently is unfamiliar with the geography of the region, for he goes on to say that there was a short route to the Red Sea through the land of the Philistines. He notes that God's first intention was to lead the Israelites to the Red Sea in order to drown Pharaoh's hosts in it, but he does not offer any reason why God should want to do that. He leaves the impression that this was to be an additional "plague" with which to punish Pharaoh.

Sforno also notes that God's ultimate purpose is to bring the Israelites to a rendezvous with Him at Mt. Sinai, just as He had promised Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:12). He struggles with this interpretation because he does not know that Mt. Sinai lay in the direction of the Red Sea and not in the direction of the land of the Philistines, as his exegesis of 3:17 supposes.

In all fairness to Rashi, we must say that he most certainly believed in the validity of the prophecy to Moses that the Israelites would worship God "at this mountain." He does not consider this question in his explanation of 3:17 because for him the problem of how God would get the Israelites to Mt. Sinai was irrelevant. God would surely find a way.

Of the modern commentators, Umberto Cassuto[4] believes that proto-Philistines had already settled in the Negev in the days of

4 U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Hebrew (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1955) p. 106.

Abraham,[5] in the 18th century B.C.E. In his view, the Via Maris at the time of the Exodus was controlled by the Egyptians who had built a series of forts along this route. It was obvious, therefore, that Moses could not possibly have even considered leading the people in that direction. Rather, Cassuto maintains, "the land of the Philistines" here refers to the Negev, and the road in that direction would have been the shortest route to the Promised Land. But in an encounter with the Philistines, the Israelites would have retreated and returned to Egypt. Hence they were led into the wilderness.

This interpretation is also flawed, because it does not take into account the possibility that the Philistines, if indeed they were already in the land at that time, might not have been hostile at all, particularly if Moses would remind them of the treaty they had entered into with Abraham, the ancestor of the Israelites .

Another contemporary Bible scholar, Nahum Sarna,[6] accepts the theory that the "way of the land of the Philistines" is the Via Maris, and agrees with Cassuto that it was controlled by Egypt. However, he ignores Cassuto's argument and states simply that the Israelites had no choice but to turn to the wilderness.[7] He also suggests that the Israelites may have been spotted by an Egyptian garrison that sent word to Pharaoh that the Israelites were headed into the wilderness in the direction of the sea. There being no escape for them, Pharaoh might force their return.[8]

In a sense, these efforts at interpreting Exodus 13:17 are irrelevant, because they fail to recognize that this verse falls into the category of what may be regarded as chapter headings, providing a thumbnail summary of what is to follow. This is a common literary stratagem in the Torah, the most notable example of which is its very

5 Gen. 20:1, 26:1.

6 See note 3.

7 For the possible routes that were available to the Israelites and locations of the first Israelite encampments mentioned in Ex. 13:20, 14:2, see map in Sarna, p. 104.

8 Ex. 14:5.

first verse. Modern scholars understand that this verse stands by itself, that it is not an integral part of what follows, but is rather an introduction to what follows: God created the heavens and the earth — and here is how He did it. The same is true of Genesis 2:4, as it is of the several statements אלה תולדות (these are the generations of . . .[9]). This should be translated as: "This is the story of . . ."

Seen in this perspective, our verse is intended to explain the story that follows it: why God led the Israelites with a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, and why Pharaoh decided to pursue them with his men and chariots. He would come upon them straggling in the wilderness, surround them and drive them back into Egypt.

But the Torah had another scenario in mind, God's purpose was to destroy Pharaoh's military power and this could only be achieved by drowning his entire forces in the sea. With his forces intact, Pharaoh could have pursued the Israelites for as long as necessary and forced their return from any place they might have reached, even from Canaan. Thus, the Exodus itself did not guarantee freedom for the Israelites; only the denial to Pharaoh of the power to bring them back to Egypt would assure their escape and their ability to go on the journey to their ultimate destination, without fear of what lay behind them.

It then becomes clear that what appears to be a cute, if not downright silly, game in arithmetic of the three sages of the Haggadah, R. Yosi, R. Eliezer, and R. Akiba, is instead something very serious. They were really comparing, in their special theological idioms, the casualties that Pharaoh had suffered from the ten plagues, including the deaths of the first-born, with the numbers of his forces that perished in the sea. To them, it was in this mighty blow to Pharaoh's power, that God manifested Himself much more even than in the plagues in Egypt (This is, at least, one more

9 The new J.P.S. translation reads: "These are the lines of . . . "

plausible interpretation of a passage in the Haggadah that otherwise brings only wry smiles to the modern reader).

This, then, was the great and necessary miracle at the Red Sea. The parting of the waters was only the means by which the miracle was performed. It is, indeed, this miracle which the Song of Moses (Ex.15) celebrates: the Lord is a warrior; He hurls Pharaoh's chariots into the sea and drowns his horsemen; thereby the Lord demonstrates the glorious power of His right hand. When this mighty song of victory speaks of the fear which seized the nations it is the fear caused by the destruction of Pharaoh's forces, not by the splitting of the waters.

The Torah, in fact, makes an effort to downplay the miraculous nature of the division of the waters by appearing to ascribe it to a natural cause: it was a powerful east wind that blew the water away, revealing dry ground. No, it was not for the parting of the waters that the Israelites sang their praises of thanks. It was for something absolutely vital for their survival:

I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: horse and rider has He thrown into the sea (Ex.15:10).[10]

10 The above interpretation is based solely upon the biblical text. No effort has been made here to discuss the view of modern Bible critics as to the historicity of the Exodus story, or the origins of Israel about which there is still much scholarly debate. In *BAR*, Sept/Oct 1990, the noted Egyptologist Frank Yarco argues that scenes and hieroglyphs in the Karnak Temple depict Pharaoh Merenptah (c. 1207 B.C.E.) claiming "Israel is laid waste." If this reading by Yarco is correct, then history has proved Merenptah to have been an empty boaster. Most recently, this role has been played not by an Egyptian ruler but by an Iraqi.

THE CALL OF MOSES

JEFFREY M. COHEN

Moses, the lawgiver of Israel, commences his ministry by asserting and vindicating the human rights of his oppressed brethren. He sees an Egyptian assaulting a Hebrew, and he intervenes forcefully and dramatically: *And he looked this way and that way and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand* (Ex. 2:12).

But to feel passionately about one's own people's safety vis-à-vis the outside world may easily be construed as mere xenophobia. It does not, of itself, betoken special qualities of leadership and the capacity to inspire and educate a people toward ethical, moral and social concerns. Hence the Torah describes what occurred on the following day: *Behold, two men of the Hebrews were striving together; and he said to the rasha* [the one in the wrong] *'wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?'*

This did, indeed, indicate the breadth of Moses' concerns. Here is a man bent not only upon teaching the hated Egyptian oppressors a retributive lesson, but equally anxious to teach that same lesson to his brethren: to chasten and refine them, to inculcate within them true feelings of compassion and brotherliness, and the will to resolve their differences either by compromise or, if necessary, by recourse to a judicial process.

Another leadership quality displayed by Moses is only indirectly alluded to in the text. In the second altercation, when the two Hebrews were fighting, we are told that he asked the *rasha* why he was smiting his neighbor. In the first altercation, right and wrong,

Dr. Jeffrey M. Cohen is the Rabbi of Stanmore & Canons Park Synagogue, London, and lecturer at Jews' College. He has written six books, the most recent being a collection of biblical studies and contemporary issues, Moments of Insight *(Vallentine, Mitchell, 1989).*

Egyptian oppressor and innocent Hebrew oppressed, were unmistakably determinable. The second situation — where two Hebrews were both indulging in an unacceptable method of resolving a dispute — presented no discernible way of choosing which of the combatants had right on his side. We may well ask then: How could Moses so readily have decided which of the two was the *rasha*, the one in the wrong?

Two explanations may be offered. The first is to assume that Moses had been an unobserved observer of the entire conflict, including the first verbal exchanges — the charges and denials, arguments and rebuttals, flared tempers and hurled insults — that became exacerbated to violence to settle the matter. If that was the case, and Moses was able to detect the truth by inference from the demeanor of the disputants and the comparative strengths and weaknesses of their respective allegations and arguments, then that alone provides an insight into the wisdom and judicial capabilities that foreshadow his future appointment as lawgiver.

Alternatively, we may prefer to put his prescience down to the simple fact of his being endowed with a divinely bestowed gift of perception, prophetic insight and the ability to assess the true nature of human beings and their conduct, foreshadowing his future role as a faithful shepherd of his people. Either way, Moses' qualities and leadership credentials may be seen to have been impressively displayed at the very outset of his mission.

Moses' passion for the rights of people, their need for justice at both the national and individual levels, was so intense that it impelled him to throw down the gauntlet and to strike the initial blow on their behalf, becoming thereby the first Hebrew freedom-fighter in Egypt. While the rest of the nation groaned, wept and prayed (Ex. 2:23), Moses acted. He displayed fitness for his mission before he had been selected for it by God!

A simple reading of the biblical verses (Ex. 2:11ff.) has prompted the popular though erroneous impression that Moses became involved in those two altercations in a quite unpremeditated way,

during the course of a foray out of his palace to see how his brethren were facing up to their worsening situation. According to this view, Moses had no intention of interfering in any practical way on behalf of his brethren until he was brought face to face with the two manifestations of violence, prompting him to react instinctively and to become embroiled. According to this reading of the text, it was only much later, at Horeb, when God appeared to him at the burning bush, that Moses was made to contemplate, for the very first time, the challenge that he take up Israel's cause at a national level.

Exodus 2:11 may indeed appear to provide support for such a view: *And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren and looked upon their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew* . . . . This verse does appear to be suggestive of an unexpected occurrence following a chance visit. What has been overlooked here, however, is that it does not state that he went out unto his brethren *in order* to look upon their burdens. The text actually makes two detached statements. Moses' first action was to *go out* (*va-yetze*) to his brethren, which suggests leaving the palace *permanently* to live among the Hebrews and to share their life and fate. This is followed by a second statement *and looked upon their burden* (*va-yar besivlotam*) which suggest that he went on and *looked closely* at their burdens, in order to see what he could do to alleviate them. The verb *ra'ah*, followed by the preposition *be*, is intended to convey the idea of looking closely and sympathetically at a situation of distress with a view to lending aid in ameliorating it (see Gen. 29:32, I Sam. 1:11 and II Sam. 16:12).

It is therefore clear that the view that Moses' intervention in the two altercations was an impulsive reaction to a quite unexpected turn of events, is wrong. Having discarded his Egyptian identity, Moses went looking for evidence of the Egyptian oppression of his newly-claimed brethren. He went determined to right their wrongs, to counter violence with even more effective violence, and to protect the Israelites and rally them to his banner in the fight for freedom. This mission was most definitely on his mind when he *went out*

unto [to join] *his brethren*. The two examples of Moses' intervention given in the Torah deal first with the Egyptian-Israelite struggle and then with domestic inter-Israelite relationships. These may be seen as representing his bid to assume leadership of his people, and to win such recognition on the basis of his personal qualities and heroic example. Moses' intervention therefore was clearly not an isolated, unpremeditated reaction to an unexpected crisis. It was the commencement of a planned, premeditated program for leadership and revolt.

Against this background, the words of the *rasha*, the Israelite attacker whom Moses chided on the second occasion, take on an extra dimension of authenticity: *Who made thee a ruler and judge over us?* (Ex. 2:14). Had Moses' intervention on the first occasion been an impulsive act of assistance by one unknown fellow Israelite for another in distress, then the outburst of the Israelite on the following day makes very little sense, for wherein had Moses indicated by his intervention that he had pretensions to becoming the "ruler" over Israel? A "judge" maybe, since he had intervened and addressed one of the parties as *rasha* (the guilty one), but wherein, and to whom, had Moses betrayed a wish to be regarded as a "ruler" of the oppressed people?

Our reconstruction of the situation, although the text records only the bare essentials of the encounter, is that it is likely Moses had some conversation the previous day with the Hebrew whose life he had saved. The latter would have expressed his gratitude, and asked the identity of his savior. He would have been most curious as to why an Egyptian prince (as according to the traditional way of reading the text, Moses still was at that time) should come to the aid of a miserable Hebrew slave, rather than to that of his own representative official. In the situation of those dangerous days, he would have asked Moses what steps they should take to conceal all evidence of the slaying and to maintain total secrecy.

The Torah text takes care to inform us — employing quite a few words in the process — that there was absolutely no eyewitness about to observe the death of the Egyptian by Moses' hand, other than the

rescued Israelite: *Moses looked this way and that way, and saw that there was no man* (Ex. 2:12). Now, if Moses had wanted his part in the deed to remain secret, he would certainly have extracted from the Hebrew a solemn oath not to divulge it to a living soul. This would certainly have been something worth recording in the Torah.

It is suggested, *ex silentio*, that no such promise was extracted by Moses. We may assume from the following day's events that Moses revealed his Egyptian-Israelite identity to the Hebrew he had just saved, as well as his intention to take up leadership of the people and fight for their freedom. We may also assume that Moses told the Hebrew not to think about keeping the matter secret but, quite the contrary, to pass it along the grape-vine and tell as many Israelites as possible about his exploit, in order to rally them to his cause, to accept him as their leader, and to prepare for rebellion and redemption from Egypt. How else do we explain how, the very next day, a totally strange Hebrew, without questioning him, knows Moses' precise identity, and every detail of the act perpetrated? How else does he come to have clear information regarding Moses' desire to become the leader, as well the judge of Israel?

According to our thesis, a different emphasis is required for that outburst of the Hebrew *rasha: Who appointed you as our ruler and judge?* The emphasis is no longer on the word "you," as if referring pejoratively to Moses as an unworthy candidate for leadership. Given Moses' heroic exploit, his leadership qualities were surely hardly in doubt. The emphasis should rather be placed on the first couple of words: *Who made you* our leader and judge? You appointed yourself! Therefore, I resent your censure, since I do not accept your authority over me as pretender to leadership of my people!

On hearing that hostile reaction to his rallying-call to Israel, *Moses feared, and said: So this is how the matter has been publicized* [my rendering of the Hebrew: *akhen noda' ha-davar*]. He expresses here his profound distress that instead of Israel grasping with hope, zeal and courage, the opportunity for liberation that he was offering them, all they could see in it was an attempt by Moses to "appoint

himself," to promote his own ambitions and lead Israel into disaster.

Indeed, so fearful were many Israelites of "rocking the boat" that they actually betrayed Moses to the king. *Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses.* Pharaoh could not have known the identity of the perpetrator from any Egyptian source, since Moses had been very particular to ensure that there were no Egyptian observers in the vicinity. It therefore must have been an Israelite informer who, on hearing the report of his exploits and his wish to enlist the people's support for a freedom movement, was fearful of the dire consequences attendant upon the failure of such a dangerous adventure.

Disconsolate at the failure of his mission, Moses flees to Midian. But he is summoned by God to resume his mission. And the symbolism of the bush "which is never consumed" might well have served as a token of encouragement to Moses and an affirmation of his original contribution toward having ignited the spark of independence in the emotions and minds of the Israelites.

Moses had thought that his original "fire" had truly burnt out, leaving no trace or benefit. But God shows him that such was not the case, but rather that, like the bush which continues burning and is never consumed, so his efforts have left their glow, and the spark of liberation that he kindled has, indeed, spread and intensified to become a potentially great national enterprise.

Viewed in this light, the call of Moses is seen to have been natural and self-earned. He initiated the move for self-determination, and he possessed the required leadership and judicial qualities. Answered now is the oft-repeated question as to why God chose a *kevad peh ukhevad lashon*, an inarticulate person (4:10), to lead the nation, rather than Aaron, the natural and persuasive orator. The answer is that God accepted the man who had already been moved by the determination to act resolutely to lead his people into a new life of freedom and justice.

LOOK UNTO ABRAHAM YOUR FATHER
(ISAIAH 51:2)

MARSHALL P. PORTNOY

How do we estimate the character of Abraham, the first patriarch of the Hebrew people? Most Bible readers do not advance beyond a childlike understanding of this towering character, an idealization nurtured in our earliest years and left there. To re-read the saga of Abraham as an adult is difficult, but to do so is to discover a wholly modern figure, astute, subtle, mature, compassionate and compelling, a leader unlike most represented in ancient literature or onward.

Perhaps the most extraordinary realization about Abraham is the paradoxical manner in which he derives power; not by use of force, but by appearing to relinquish force. He becomes powerful not by *asserting*, but by *yielding*. He gains power when he appears to let another person assume it. The martial arts of the Far East teach the art of conquering someone by "going limp" and subsequently turning an opponent's force against him. Similarly, Abraham knows that force and power are not the same thing; in fact, they are often the opposite. However, Abraham's use of this technique in human interaction is not for his own personal gain, but is rather a function of his sincere belief in the revolutionary premise that he can gain only by understanding the needs of an adversary and helping him to meet those needs. In short, that he can gain only if his adversary does as well. In Genesis 12, Abraham learned the cost of deceit when he lied to Pharaoh about Sarah's identity. From that point, Abraham's techniques are quite different — truthfulness, attentiveness, compassion and compromise.

Marshall P. Portnoy is the cantor of Congregation Adath Yeshurun in Louisville, a lecturer on music history and an author of many articles which have been widely published.

Consider, for example, the famous episode in Chapter 13 in which his and his nephew's shepherds argue over grazing land. Abraham's and Lot's relative positions in life are quite clear. The uncle was *very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold*. The nephew *had flocks and herds and tents*. Abraham could easily have asserted that might makes right and dictated a settlement. But he tells Lot to choose whatever land he wishes; he, Abraham, will simply make do with whatever is left. *Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate. If you go north I will go south and if you go south, I will go north* (13:9).

This is an astonishing statement. It is the utterance of a man who believes in the overriding importance of self-determination. He reasoned that Lot would always be a thorn in his side if he did not get his way. In addition, Lot could only praise him if things went well, but could never blame him if they did not. In addition, it is the utterance of a man who has compassion. Lot was his nephew; why not give him a start? It might cost Abraham something, but the family would remain united. But most of all, it is the utterance of a man who believes completely in himself and in his God, who has the supreme self-confidence to know that he will succeed.

Another remarkable facet of Abraham's appealing character is the paradoxical manner in which he enters the decision-making process. Abraham in fact makes few decisions, yet he grows more and more powerful. He seldom issues ultimatums, although he is usually in a position to do so. Rather, he subtly constructs the context in which decisions are rendered by others. Time and again, when one expects Abraham to take charge, another seems to do so — or rather, Abraham *lets* another person do so. Who has the greater power? The one who decides or the one who decides who decides?

His interaction with Sarah, like all marital balancing acts, is fascinating and instructive. Sarah cannot conceive, so she gives Hagar to Abraham as her surrogate. Hagar becomes pregnant. Sarah then complains to Abraham that Hagar is uppish with her — which she is — yet blames Abraham for this. *The wrong done me is your fault! . . . The Lord decide between you and me* (Gen. 16:5).

What might a husband say under these circumstances? Perhaps something like "My fault? You got what you wanted and you're blaming me?" See, for comparison, Jacob's reaction to Rachel under somewhat similar circumstances (Gen. 30:2). Abraham's reaction, however, is very different. He seems to listen to Sarah and to understand that she is hurting, regretful of her decision, and understandably jealous. Yet he is able to distinguish between what is his responsibility and what is not. He could have intervened forcefully but then someone would have had to lose, perhaps all three. He says instead, *Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right* (16:6). Abraham asserts his power by empowering Sarah. Again he has created a situation in which neither he nor Sarah can lose. If the results of her action prove good, she has Abraham to thank; if not, she can look only to herself. But whatever happens, she knows she has her husband's attentiveness and respect. From a problem without an apparent solution, he has extracted an ultimately favorable conclusion.

A third characteristic aspect of Abraham's approach is his attentiveness, his ability to listen, and thus to understand and respond appropriately. Again, this quality is sometimes disguised as passivity, even weakness. Often Abraham seems simply to respond rather than initiate: "Leave your home" — "Count the stars" — "Sacrifice your son" — but that is not all that happens. Abraham indeed responds, but his responses are paradoxically *active*, the result of his active listening. Abraham always seems to be asking, "What is God trying to tell me?" "What is this person really saying?" Far from passive, Abraham is actively decoding the words spoken to him to discover their real meaning. Abraham does much more than hear; he listens.

Abraham's ability to listen is common to the three stories read on Rosh Hashanah: the banishment of Hagar, the covenant with Abimelech, and the binding of Isaac. But it is the second and least familiar narrative that is the subtlest. Abimelech, king of Gerar, approaches Abraham about a non-aggression treaty. Abraham

knows full well that Abimelech's servants have illegally seized Abraham's well, a serious offense. Yet Abraham does not start a feud. Rather, he agrees to the treaty, and only then reproaches Abimelech, who pleads (feigns?) ignorance. What might Abraham have said? "Either you know what happened, or you should have known. You're responsible for your underlings. Don't you ever come near my wells again or you'll regret it!" But what does he actually do? He gives Abimelech sheep and oxen. Abraham knows he has made his point. No threat could have intimidated Abimelech more than this wise blend of stick and carrot, brilliantly timed. To reinforce his point, Abraham does an incredible thing. He sets aside a portion of his own gift — seven ewes — and presents them separately. Why? To remind Abimelech of their oath (seven in Hebrew is *sheva*, the same word as oath), living proof that the well belongs to Abraham. Without force, Abraham has won an important contest, and scored a diplomatic coup of immense implications.

We come finally to one of the most fascinating narratives in the Pentateuch, in which Abraham secures a family burial area from his Hittite neighbors. A close reading of Genesis 23 reminds one of the explosion of books on "negotiation" that fill bookstore shelves nowadays. Father Abraham, I think, wrote the first one. The story shows not only his remarkable insight into human character, but his ability as a man of business.

Notice, for example, that, although he wants to buy a specific cave called Machpelah, he entreats the children of Heth for *a burial site among you* (23:4). Why such a general inquiry? Why could Abraham not have revealed his exact intentions completely and immediately? Possibly because the cave he wanted may already have been sold or reserved for an important Hittite personage. If that were so he would have revealed himself as uninformed or impolitic or both. In any case, he would have begun the talks poorly and put himself at an instant disadvantage.

Consider instead the masterful way in which Abraham does begin. *I am a resident alien among you* he modestly petitions. *Sell*

me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial. Who could refuse such an entreaty? Not the Hittites. They immediately agree to Abraham's general request. Although he is a rich and powerful man, Abraham begins the discussions by seeming to be "one-down." Yet how would the Hittites have reacted if he had said, "Look, I can afford anything you people have, so let's get on with it!" By making himself appear beneath them, he assures they will feel at once powerful and sympathetic. This is what truly constitutes the "art" of negotiation, getting what you want while making the other side feel it is not losing.

Once Abraham discerns that his request is reasonable, he goes to work, asking that the Hittites intercede for him with Ephron, the actual owner of the cave. Ephron is himself in the audience which Abraham addresses, and Abraham is doubtless aware of this. Yet, once more, Abraham makes himself appear lowly, not "good enough" to approach Ephron directly. But Abraham is bringing other principles into play here. He is attempting to learn who is really in charge. That is, who can really get him what he wants. In addition, he is avoiding highest level negotiation until lower level discussions convince him that negotiation at the top will likely bear fruit. Should the request for intercession with Ephron have proved unsuccessful, Abraham would have lost nothing. Not having lost face, he could eventually have renewed the discussion with Ephron at a more favorable time, or initiated new talks with another Hittite.

As it happened, Ephron was receptive to Abraham's request and he proves himself Abraham's match. He begins the monetary negotiation with a brilliant stroke, offering to *give* Abraham the cave, realizing naturally that Abraham would never agree to put himself under such an obligation. But Ephron's offer serves another purpose; it paradoxically makes Abraham more inclined to pay Ephron's price in order to appear just as fine a fellow and so not lose face. No amateurs, these men of the world. Abraham bows low, but insists on paying and indeed pays the price which Ephron states he need not pay. "My lord," says Ephron, refusing to allow Abraham to

co-opt the underdog role, *A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver — what is that between you and me*? (v. 15). What indeed? Abraham pays immediately and in full: and so the matter is closed.

Reading the story of Abraham as a literary creation reveals that the first patriarch of the Jewish people was not only gifted with a sense of the divine presence but with a practical sense as well. To marvel that the biblical author depicted such an authentic flesh-and-blood master character leads to a fuller understanding of the greatness of Genesis.

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RAV A. SOLOFF

POSTSCRIPT

Reading and re-reading the Bible always raises fresh questions. Ancient rabbis learned even from the crowns on letters of the Torah Scroll. Modern scholars use study-tools of philology, archeology and textual comparisons. One of the exciting approaches of recent years is to pay close attention to the literary structure and narrative devices of our Hebrew classic texts. Even punctuation and chapter divisions can raise fresh questions!

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PSALM 24

JOSHUA J. ADLER

I happened to be reading through some back issues of the *Jewish Bible Quarterly* (then known as *Dor LeDor*) and came across an article by G. Thomson (Vol. IV:2, Winter 1975-76) that offers a theory on the historical background of Psalm 24. I have recently formed an alternative hypothesis on this psalm, the text of which reads in the New JPS translation:

1 *The earth is the* LORD'S *and all that it holds,*
the world and its inhabitants.
2 *For He founded it upon the ocean,*
set it on the nether-streams.
3 *Who may ascend the mountain of the* LORD?
Who may stand in His holy place?—
4 *He who has clean hands and a pure heart,*
who has not taken false oath by My life
or sworn deceitfully.
5 *He shall carry away a blessing from the* LORD,
a just reward from God, his deliverer.
6 *Such is the circle of those who turn to Him,*
Jacob, who seek Your presence.
7 *O gates, lift up your heads!*
Up high, you everlasting doors,
so the King of glory may come in!
8 *Who is the King of glory?—*
the LORD, *mighty and valiant,*
the LORD, *valiant in battle.*

Joshua J. Adler, formerly the Rabbi of Chisuk Emuna Congregation in Harrisburg, Pa., has lived in Jerusalem since 1972, serves as the managing editor of The Jewish Bible Quarterly (Dor LeDor) *and is the assistant to the Chairman of the World Jewish Bible Society.*

9 *O gates, lift up your heads!*
Lift them up, you everlasting doors,
so the King of glory may come in!
10 *Who is the King of glory?—*
the LORD of hosts,
He is the King of glory!

Mr. Thomson's theory asserts that this psalm is to be dated to the time of, or was recited by, the soldiers of David's army as they conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem which subsequently became David's city. He even justifies the presence of the first verse as answering the doubts of the soldiers who might ask: "By what right are we conquering this city which belongs to another people?" The answer to the troops is that the earth belongs to God. It is He who divides up the land according to His will, and they need have no pangs of conscience in going to war for a land promised by God to Israel.

The dialogue of verses 8 and 9 is seen by Thomson as a shouting match between the taunting Jebusite defenders and the Israelite attackers. We are reminded of the Jebusite taunts recorded in II Samuel 5:6ff: *You will never get in here! Even the blind and the lame will turn you back.*

As attractive as Mr. Thomson's hypothesis might seem at first, there are many things in the psalm it does not explain — for instance, the "everlasting gates." Nor does it take account of the fact that the subject here is not a city but a holy place, that did not exist in Jerusalem until *after* the conquest of the city by David's troops. Even then, David had to purchase the property on the mountain above the city from a Jebusite named Araunah (II Samuel 24:18ff) to set it aside as a place to which the holy ark of the covenant would be brought in the future. Indeed, some commentators think this is the background for the psalm: namely, when David brought the ark from Kirjat Jearim and placed it in the special tent he had set up for it on Araunah's hill farm.[1]

1 See introduction to this psalm in Soncino edition, edited by Dr. A. Cohen.

However, it is my view (cf. Rashi, *ad locum*) that this psalm, especially from verse 7 onward, was composed for the dedication of the Temple of Solomon, and is appropriate for the time when the ark was moved from David's tent to the new Temple structure. As already mentioned, verse 7 speaks of gates and everlasting doors — wholly inappropriate for a tent. Thomson interprets "dialogue" as a shouting match between David's men and the Jebusites. It seems more logical to hear a dialogue between one group of priests, who had taken positions at various stations in the Temple, and an incoming procession of other priests carrying the ark into its permanent home. The Temple dedication ceremony seems to me most appropriate for asserting and reasserting the greatness and glory of God as the ark is borne to that enduring resting place, as described in I Kings 8:1-5:

> *Then Solomon convoked the elders of Israel — all the heads of the tribes and the ancestral chieftains of the Israelites — before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the Ark of the Covenant of the* LORD *from the City of David, that is Zion.*
>
> *All the men of Israel gathered before King Solomon at the Feast, in the month of Etanim — that is, the seventh month. When all the elders of Israel had come, the priests lifted the Ark and carried up the Ark of the* LORD. *Then the priests and the Levites brought the Tent of Meeting and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent. Meanwhile, King Solomon and the whole community of Israel, who were assembled with him before the Ark, were sacrificing sheep and oxen in such abundance that they could not be numbered or counted.*

It is also my view that verses 2-6 are meant to emphasize the moral and ethical requirements for pilgrims who come to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, stressing that only individuals who observe these injunctions and not those who come merely to bring sacrifices

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WHY MOSES?

BY ERNEST NEUFELD

Why Moses? Why did God choose Moses as His emissary to Pharaoh? Why send the meek Moses, a stutterer, to make demands on the mighty king in the name of a deity unknown to him? Imagine the lofty reception hall with the throne of Pharaoh, the humble Moses below, stammering before the Egyptian god-king on the authority of an unheard-of God! You can hear the laughter filling the vast, pillared chamber.

We know Moses' qualities, those which surely weighed in favor of his election. He was a shepherd, accustomed to solitude and the loneliness of responsibility, familiar with the everyday care of his flock, and conscious under the star-studded sky of the mystery of the universe.

While a Hebrew by birth, Moses was Egyptian by upbringing. His heritage did not come to him through childhood influences. It came through later self-identification. Those born to the manner, so to speak, wear the habit lightly. Those who acquire the manner, in this case the religion and traditions they embrace, often are far more devoted, zealous and observant than those to whom the religion and traditions have come by way of inheritance.

Reared as a prince in a royal court, Moses had none of the psychological handicaps of slave mentality. He could think beyond the demands of daily survival, the humiliations and mundane concerns; a necessary quality in a leader.

Then with his newly emphasized commitment to the Hebrew slaves, Moses showed the faith, loyalty and steadfastness of the recent convert. His doubts were only of himself, never of the God who called him to His service. He did not aspire to the role for which

Ernest Neufeld is retired after a career in journalism, law and municipal government. His last position was Director of the N. Y. City Council's Division of Finance.

he was destined. He did not have the self-aggrandizing ambition of the usual political, military or religious leader, as demonstrated by his reluctance to undertake the task God wanted to assign to him. His intelligence was manifested in the objections he raised, and his trust in God was evinced in his implicit belief in God's promise to guide him and help him at every step of the way.

Though meek and humble, Moses could be impatient in the Lord's cause, even to the point of taking the people's complaints personally, as when in anger at their grumblings over the lack of water, he struck the rock and failed to make clear that it was the Lord who would provide water and was punished for his failure to sanctify the Lord before Israel. If Moses was meek, he was not timid, not afraid to remonstrate even with God. Nor was he soft, but hard as rock, as when he meted out terrible punishment after the incident of the Golden Calf. He was far-sighted, resolute and persevering in the face of apparently impending calamity on the shore of the Sea of Reeds and again and again in the crises during the wanderings in the wilderness. Beneath the meek exterior there was an inner firm determination.

In Moses, who by upbringing was an Egyptian prince, the Lord discerned a potential for unselfish leadership, ambition not directed at self-aggrandizement but toward the advancement of his fellow men, readily expressed in his deep-seated sense of justice and mercy without regard to person, class or social standing. Out of a feeling of outraged justice, Moses comes to the aid of the Hebrew slave being beaten by the Egyptian. He is similarly animated when he intervenes in an altercation between two Hebrews (Ex. 22:11-13). And he steps forward just as readily to defend the Midianite women whose flocks are driven from the well by shepherds meaning to water their own first (2:15-17).

And Moses justified the Lord's confidence in him. He showed the even-handedness of his justice in the way he reacted to the Lord's proposal to destroy the people for having worshiped before the Golden Calf and to make of Moses a people, to be His people, as numerous as the stars (Ex. 32:9-14). Moses refuses, reminding the Lord of His

obligations under the covenants He made and renewed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses' sensitivity to what is right and just finds final expression in the way he accepts the punishment the Lord imposes on him for not having sanctified His name when he struck the rock at Meribah to draw forth water, and had to pay for his failure by not being allowed to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:12, 24; 27:12-14; Deut. 31:2). He could plead for mercy for his sister Miriam (Num. 12:13-14) and for the people, but accepts without appeal the Lord's judgment in his own case.

In the modern world of television, radio and public relations, we see how easy it is for the projected image to be mistaken for reality, how easy it is to present a picture calculated to deceive, to hide the true behind a false façade, concealing incompetence or worse. History provides an abundance of instances of appealing leaders whose oratorical skills and appeal led their peoples into tyranny, war and the slaughter of millions.

The Lord did not want such a leader for Israel — a great orator to sway the passions of the multitude: no assertive, aggressive personality, however courageous, resolute or determined. God divided such leadership gifts between Moses and Aaron, Moses having what we might call the *effective* roles and Aaron the *affective* ones. To put it another way, Moses was to be the lawgiver, the mediator between God and man, while Aaron was to be the functionary, the chief priest of a nation of priests.

Moses is chosen precisely because he is not the kind of leader who will do his own will. Moses does not rise to power by his own powers of spellbinding, or the sword, or successions, or political skills, or assassinations. Moses does not possess the character that could ever turn him into an absolute ruler. He is a lawgiver, but not a lawmaker. He is God's representative to His people, not their governor. He wields no power of his own, but serves only as God's agent in transforming the Hebrew slaves into a holy people.

HAIM M. I. GEVARYAHU, MEMORIAL VOLUME

ENGLISH-FRENCH-GERMAN-HEBREW

Editors, Joshua J. Adler and B. Z. Luria

World Jewish Bible Center, Jerusalem, Israel, 1990

SHUBERT SPERO

This handsome volume of biblical studies contains 30 articles in four languages by different authors. It is dedicated to the memory of Professor Haim Gevaryahu, noted biblical scholar and founder of the World Jewish Bible Society, the Hebrew quarterly *Bet Mikra* and the English-language *Jewish Bible Quarterly*. The Hebrew section (150 pages), edited by B. Luria, consists of 16 articles by noted scholars on a variety of biblical themes and includes the text of a lecture given by Gevaryahu. The multi-language section (143 pages), edited by Joshua J. Adler, consists of nine articles in English, four in German and one in French. The participation of so many non-Israeli scholars in this memorial volume is further tribute to the fruitful efforts of Professor Gevaryahu to bring together the universal interest in Bible scholarship. The book includes an appreciation of Professor Gevaryahu by Joshua J. Adler and a bibliography of his works.

Three of the articles in the multi-language section deal, appropriately, with the subject of biblical colophons, an area in which Professor Gevaryahu did pioneering work. One of the lengthier articles, by Dov Rappel of Bar Ilan University, attempts to demonstrate the "semantical, structural and syntactical inadequacy of translation" by giving a verse-by-verse analysis of eight different English translations of Psalm 102. One is impelled to

Shubert Spero was ordained as Rabbi, Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. He has a B.S. from C.C.N.Y. and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University. He is the Irving Stone Professor of Jewish Thought at Bar Ilan University. He is the author of Morality, Halakha and the Jewish Tradition: God in All Seasons, *and Editor,* Religious Zionism, 40 Years After Statehood.

agree with the author that although his evidence involves only one psalm, the conclusion that emerges from the nature of his arguments is that very probably *any* translation of biblical poetry is "inadequate" in these senses. However, I would suggest that the explanation lies beyond the technical question of "translation." Since we are dealing with poetry, we are facing the problem of grasping its "meaning" as "art." This would apply to art in any of its diverse forms where the very attempt to express its "meaning" in words is already a "translation." In short, a work of art is always richer and more complex than any combination of expressible meanings, and will thus evade full explication.

In a rather short article, Helmer Ringgren of Uppsala University attempts to find a parallel to the Israelite Sabbath institution and the seven-day week in a description of the building of Ba'al's house found in the Ugaritic *Ba'al Epic*. The author admits that the parallel is rather weak, since all that the text is saying is that the work on the house went on for six days (*any* six days) and ceased on the seventh. Ringgren, however, sees his main difficulty in finding a "connection between the building of a temple and the creation of the world." The best he can do is reluctantly to refer us to an article by P. J. Kearney ("the argument seems strained at times") which purports to see a correspondence in the Bible between "seven speeches" in connection with the construction of the Tabernacle and the days of Creation. Too bad Ringgren does not seem to be aware of the Midrash, M. Buber and Nehama Leibowitz who long ago saw the "connection," both on literary-stylistic and on theological grounds.[1] However, this is still not enough to make *shomre Shabbat* of the Ugaritic priests of Ba'al.

The Hebrew section offers an even richer repast of varied scholarship from the sublimely simple to the statistically complex. Here are some of the insights garnered by the reviewer, presented briefly to whet the appetite:

1 M. Buber, *Darko Shel Mikra* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1964) pp. 55-56.

1. The point of the Genesis story of the Tower of Babel, according to Yehuda Elitzur, is to serve as the background foil for the story of Abraham which follows. He suggests that the meaning of Babel is not "gateway to God" as generally understood, for the true "gateway to heaven" is discovered by Jacob at Beth-el (Gen. 28:17). Rather, it means "confusion of tongues." Nations cannot make a "name" for themselves (*Let us make us a name* — Gen. 11:4) by self-aggrandizement but only in the pursuit of values approved by God: (*And I* [God] . . . *will make thy name* [Abraham's] *great* — Gen. 12:2). And while the Babylonians are located where they are because *They found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there* (Gen. 11:2), Abraham and his seed are *directed* to their land by God (. . . *unto the land that I will show thee* — Gen. 12:1).

2. In Genesis 14, after Abraham's triumphant return from his pursuit of the four Mesopotamian kings, there are two encounters which seem to run together in a confusing manner. The first is between Abraham and Melchizedek, king of Salem, who blesses Abraham in the name of *God* [El] *Most High, Maker of heaven and earth*, a ceremony suddenly interrupted by verse 4: *And the king of Sodom said unto Abraham* . . . . According to Shamai Goildener, these two encounters are brought together so that we may appreciate the response of Abraham to the profitable proposition of the king of Sodom in which he swears by the *Lord* [YHVH] *God* [El] *Most High, Maker of heaven and earth* (Gen. 14:22). The point is that while adopting the very apt titles given to the deity by Melchizedek, Abraham makes sure that we realize who is the proper referent of these titles: not just *El Elyon* [God Most High] but *YHVH — El Elyon* [Lord God Most High Maker of heaven and earth].

3. It would appear that Cain kills his brother Abel because of anger and envy over the fact that God *had respect unto Abel and his offering but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect* (Gen. 4:4, 5). But why did God not find Cain's offering acceptable? Avraham Kurman suggests that one of the essential requirements of proper offering is that it belongs to the donor, coming from the yield

of his work and effort. While Cain was indeed a "tiller of the ground" the offering he presented to God is described as *of the fruit* [pri] *of the ground* (Gen. 4:3), which perhaps means that this was "fruit" from trees growing naturally on common ground. Whereas Abel *brought of the firstlings and of the fat of his flock* which were his own and the result of his toil.

4. The principle of *Smichut parshiot*, that is, whether the proximity of biblical portions of apparently different subjects implies some "hidden" connection, has supporters and opponents. However, Meshulam Margoleot suggests that at least in the case of three seemingly unrelated portions in Numbers there may be a connection: Numbers 26, an account of the second census taken of Israel on the plains of Moab; Numbers 27:1-11, the case of the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad; Numbers 27:12-23, the appointment of Joshua bin-Nun to be the successor of Moses.

The census reveals that while the tribe of Levi is listed, including Aaron and his sons, no mention is made of the sons of Moses. In presenting *before the Lord* (27:5) the case of the daughters of Zelophehad which was essentially the argument *why should the name of our father be done away from among his family*? (27:4), Moses must have petitioned for his own case as well. Why should not his own sons in some fashion inherit the place of their father? After Moses receives God's ruling in regard to the daughters of Zelophehad, he receives the tragic answer about his own fate (27:12-23). He is destined to die in the wilderness, and his mission will be continued not by his children but by Joshua, *a man in whom is spirit* (27:18).

5. The jewel in the crown of this scholarly collection is, in my judgment, the last article in the Hebrew section, "By The Rivers of Babylon." This is a study by Baruch Kaplinsky of all nine verses of Psalm 137 which, ironically, was left out of the Table of Contents. Here we learn that unlike the other psalms, we know *where* it is placed, *when* it is placed (between 597 and 586 B.C.E.), and the kind of person who wrote it (a priest or Levite who performed music in the

Temple). Psalm 137 is one of only 51 psalms with no superscription or attribution. While most of the other psalms express the emotions of the individual, Psalm 137 identifies completely with the nation. Instead of pausing by the rivers of Babylon to rest and recuperate and express gratitude for having survived, these refugees can only weep as they remember their national loss. In refusing to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land, these exiles were fashioning their own *halakha*. In that context we must understand their awesome oath: *If I forget thee O Jerusalem* [by playing my harp] *let my right hand* [that plays it] *forget her cunning and* [if I sing the songs of Zion on foreign soil] *Let my tongue* [that sings] *cleave to the roof of my mouth* (Ps. 137:5, 6).

Unfortunately, there are many Jews today who have broken this oath and who pathetically sing "songs of Zion" in foreign lands, in order to keep alive their memory of Jerusalem. But as Kaplinsky puts it: while the author of Psalm 137 stayed true to his oath and did not *sing* God's song in a foreign land, he surely *composed* a song of God in a foreign land which in some respects is superior to many songs of Zion composed in Israel.

This volume is a treasure trove of biblical insight and should grace the library of every student of the Bible.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PSALM 24 *continued from p. 270*

will be blessed by God. (Mr. Thomson's view is that these verses are a moral code for David's soldiers about to assault the Jebusite fortress.)

Concerning the first verse in this psalm, which stresses the thought that the whole world belongs to God, one can only say that this theme is a constant in Judaism from biblical times to the present. This statement might allay any qualms of David's soldiers as they conquered Jerusalem three thousand years ago — as Mr. Thomson suggests — but it has also buttressed the Jewish claim to the Promised Land ever since.

SIX BIBLICAL SIGNATURES DISCOVERED

ABRAHAM RUDERMAN

Among the varied archeological discoveries of the late Hebrew University Professor Nahman Avigad is his identification of four Hebrew seals with the names of the persons mentioned in the Bible. A fifth seal has been identified by the late Yigal Shiloh, the excavator of the City of David, and a sixth by Tzvi Schneider, the author of an article which appeared in *Biblical Archeology Review* (July-August 1991). A description of the first five may be found in a book by Avigad, *On the Identification of Persons Mentioned in the Hebrew Epigraphic Sources* (Eretz Yisrael) pp. 235-237. In ancient times seals were used to witness or sign documents. The seal was impressed on a lump of clay, called bulla, with the name and title of the seal's owner. Papyrus documents were rolled and tied with a string, and a piece of wet clay placed on the knot and stamped with the seal. Cities conquered were generally burned, but the bullae would be preserved like pottery for all time. Prof. Avigad refers to hundreds of Hebrew seals in his book, but only six have been identified with people mentioned in the Bible. These people lived before the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

The first and best known Bible character mentioned on a bulla is Baruch son of Neriah, secretary and faithful companion to the prophet Jeremiah. Four episodes in the Book of Jeremiah mention Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe. In the first, he witnesses Jeremiah's purchase of land in Anathoth to indicate his faith in the future in spite of the impending doom. This seal may have been the one affixed to the deed for this land (Ch. 32). The second mention of Baruch ben-Neriah is in Chapter 36 in which he records Jeremiah's

Rabbi Abraham Ruderman was ordained at the Jewish Institute for Religion. He served as a chaplain during W.W. II and was spiritual leader of congregations in Poughkeepsie, Elmont, Hazelton, and South Africa. He came on aliyah in 1976, and at present is the editor of the weekly bulletin of the Jerusalem Rotary.

oracles of the destruction of Judah on a scroll. These he read at the bidding of Jeremiah to a gathering of cabinet ministers of King Jehoiakim who advised him to go into hiding as Jeremiah had done. When the scroll was read to King Jehoiakim, the king destroyed the scroll, and Jeremiah dictated another copy to Baruch. The third reference concerns his exile to Egypt with Jeremiah (43:1-7). The fourth mention of Baruch is in Chapter 45, which chronologically goes back to the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim.

The names of two other biblical persons are found inscribed on the bullae in the Avigad study. They are Jerahmeel son of the king, and Gemariah son of Shaphan. Both of these are mentioned in Jeremiah 36. Jerahmeel was a member of the royal security service sent by the king to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. The bulla with the name of Gemariah was discovered by Yigal Shiloh in the City of David excavation. It was from Gemariah's house that Baruch read Jeremiah's scroll to the people (Jer. 36:10). A fourth bulla contains the name Seraiah son of Neriah, mentioned in Jer. 51:59. Seraiah was the brother of Baruch, apparently a confidant of Jeremiah. He is told to accompany King Zedekiah to Babylon and there to read the scroll of destruction and then throw it into the Euphrates River: *Thus shall Babylon sink and never rise again* (Jer. 51:64).

The fifth bulla contains the name Azaliah son of Meshulam (II Kg. 22:3): *In the 15th year of King Josiah, the king sent the scribe Shaphan the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam to the House of the Lord.* Azaliah and Meshulam on this seal are Shaphan's father and grandfather and Gemariah's grandfather and great-grandfather.

The sixth seal bears the name Hanan son of Hilkiahu the priest. While there is no person named Hanan ben-Hilkiahu in the Bible, Hilkiahu, nevertheless, is famous. It was he who in 622 B.C.E. discovered the Torah scroll in the Temple believed to be the Book of Deuteronomy (II Kg. 22:8). Jeremiah's father is also called Hilkiahu. So the seal could refer to that Hilkiahu, and Hanan would then be Jeremiah's brother. But this theory is questioned by scholars.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

In the previous issue of *J.B.Q.*, Rabbi Allen S. Maller in his provocative article "The Biblical Beginning of the Jewish Calendar" writes:

> The most famous attempt to calculate "the beginning" was that of James Ussher, an Irish bishop who wrote a book on biblical chronology in the early 1650s. Ussher's dates were later inserted in the margin of the authorized version of the King James Bible and these dates became widespread. He sets the date for the departure from the Garden of Eden in the year 4004 B.C.E.

The question I wish to raise is this: What impelled Bishop Ussher to date the Eden episode and, indeed, the Creation itself at 4004 B.C.E.? Why *davka* 4004?

I believe that the answer to this intriguing question can be found in the Midrash. In the opening passage of the second chapter of *Tanna de be Eliyahu* we find:

> . . . The world [in its present form] is to last six millennia;
> the first two millennia are to be an age of tohu (chaos),
> the next two millennia—an age of Torah,
> the next two millennia—the age of the Messiah.

Now, we must note that Bishop Ussher along with many, if not all, NT scholars, dates the birth of Jesus to the year 4 B.C.E. (in the light of Math. 2:1, the year of Herod's death, 4 B.C.E., remains the *terminus ad quem* for dating the birth of Jesus).

Thus, Ussher's chronology places the birth of Jesus exactly 4000 years after the Creation — corresponding precisely with the statement of the above quoted midrash that the fifth millennium will usher in the messianic era!

The question to be dealt with now is whether or not Bishop Ussher was aware of this midrash.

First of all, it should be noted that this was a well known midrash that must have enjoyed wide circulation. In the Babylonian Talmud it is quoted twice, in *Sanhedrin* 97a and *Avodah Zarah* 9a. Secondly, according to the verdict of contemporaries, James Ussher was one of the most learned scholars of his day. We know that he studied Hebrew at Trinity College in Dublin, where later at the age of 26 he was appointed Regius Professor of Divinity.

This writer feels that it is almost a certainty that Ussher gained knowledge (probably from a secondary source) of this midrash and its messianic chronology and that the midrash influenced his computations. On the other hand, if one assumes that he was entirely unaware of the midrash, we are forced to accept a most remarkable coincidence!

Rabbi Saul Leeman

עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

September-October 1992

1	T	Jeremiah 25
2	W	Jeremiah 26
3	Th	Jeremiah 27
4	F	Exodus 8:16-9:35
6	S	Jeremiah 28
7	M	Jeremiah 29
8	T	Jeremiah 30
9	W	Jeremiah 31
10	Th	Jeremiah 32
11	F	Exodus 10:1-10:29
13	S	Jeremiah 33
14	M	Jeremiah 34
15	T	Jeremiah 35
16	W	Jeremiah 36
17	Th	Jeremiah 37
18	F	Exodus 11:1-12:28
20	S	Jeremiah 38
21	M	Jeremiah 39
22	T	Jeremiah 40
23	W	Jeremiah 41
24	Th	Jeremiah 42
25	F	Exodus 12:29-13:1
27	S	Erev Rosh Hashana
28	M	Rosh Hashanah
29	T	Rosh Hashanah
30	W	Jeremiah 43
OCT		
1	Th	Jeremiah 44
2	F	Exodus 13:2-14:14
4	S	Jeremiah 45

October-November 1992

5	M	Jeremiah 46
6	T	Yom Kippur Eve
7	W	Yom Kippur
8	Th	Jeremiah 47
9	F	Exodus 14:15-16:3
11	S	Jeremiah 48
12	M	Jeremiah 49
13	T	Jeremiah 50
14	W	Jeremiah 51
15	Th	Jeremiah 52
16	F	Exodus 16:4-16:27
18	S	Ezekiel 1
19	M	Ezekiel 2
20	T	Ezekiel 3
21	W	Ezekiel 4
22	Th	Ezekiel 5
23	F	Exodus 16:28-17:16
25	S	Ezekiel 6
26	M	Ezekiel 7
27	T	Ezekiel 8
28	W	Ezekiel 9
29	Th	Ezekiel 10
30	F	Exodus 18:1-19:5
NOV		
1	S	Ezekiel 11
2	M	Ezekiel 12
3	T	Ezekiel 13
4	W	Ezekiel 14
5	Th	Ezekiel 15
6	F	Exodus 19:6-20:23
8	S	Ezekiel 16

9	M	Ezekiel 17
10	T	Ezekiel 18
11	W	Ezekiel 19
12	Th	Ezekiel 20
13	F	Exodus 21:1-22:23
15	S	Ezekiel 21
16	M	Ezekiel 22
17	T	Ezekiel 23
18	W	Ezekiel 24
19	Th	Ezekiel 25
20	F	Exodus 22:24-24:18
22	S	Ezekiel 26
23	M	Ezekiel 27
24	T	Ezekiel 28
25	W	Ezekiel 29
26	Th	Ezekiel 30
27	F	Exodus 25:1-25:40
29	S	Ezekiel 31
30	M	Ezekiel 32
DEC		
1	T	Ezekiel 33
2	W	Ezekiel 34
3	Th	Ezekiel 35
4	F	Exodus 26:1-26:30
6	S	Ezekiel 36
7	M	Ezekiel 37
8	T	Ezekiel 38
9	W	Ezekiel 39
10	Th	Ezekiel 40
11	F	Exodus 26:31-27:19
13	S	Ezekiel 41
14	M	Ezekiel 42
15	T	Ezekiel 43
16	W	Ezekiel 44
17	Th	Ezekiel 45
18	F	Exodus 27:20-28:43
20	S	Ezekiel 46

21	M	Ezekiel 47
22	T	Ezekiel 48
23	W	Hosea 1
24	Th	Hosea 2
25	F	Exodus 29:1-29:46
27	S	Hosea 3
28	M	Hosea 4
29	T	Hosea 5
30	W	Hosea 6
31	Th	Hosea 7
JAN		
1	F	Exodus 30:1-30:38
3	S	Hosea 8
4	M	Hosea 9
5	T	Hosea 10
6	W	Hosea 11
7	Th	Hosea 12
8	F	Exodus 31:1-32:14
10	S	Hosea 13
11	M	Joel 1
12	T	Joel 2
13	W	Joel 3
14	Th	Joel 4
15	F	Exodus 32:15-34:26
17	S	Amos 1
18	M	Amos 2
19	T	Amos 3
20	W	Amos 4
21	Th	Amos 5
22	F	Exodus 34:27-36:38
24	S	Amos 6
25	M	Amos 7
26	T	Amos 8
27	W	Amos 9
28	Th	Amos 10
29	F	Exodus 37:1-38:20
31	S	Amos 11

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