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Illustration of the Book of Ruth, Festival Prayer Book, Germany, c. 1320

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EDITORIAL

A few months ago, Israel's Minister of Education, Mrs. Shulamit Aloni, caused a government crisis when she maintained that the Bible story of the Creation cannot be accepted as historical. Her statements implied that the world could not have been created in six days, that man could not have been created as a separate individual, and that the world could not be a mere 5753 years old. How many times have these and similar ideas been argued with great passion. But in Israel such issues seem so vital that they can topple governments. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* — The more things change, the more they remain the same. The recent crisis calls to mind a similar situation which erupted about forty years ago when prime minister David Ben-Gurion suggested that the biblical figure of 600,000 adult males coming out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus is impossible since this would point to a total population of at least two million trekking through a cruel wilderness for forty years. This time it was the extreme religious party Shas which threatened to leave the coalition government because of Mrs. Aloni's so-called heretical views. Perhaps nowhere else in the world could the government fall because of the opposition of Bible literalists to the evolutionist theories.

It could be argued that the recent crisis was not so much over the interpretation of the biblical story of the Creation, as it was over the controversial Minister of Education. But even if the antagonism was against Mrs. Aloni personally, the fact is that the new pretext for the attack was her views on the Creation story.

The reality is that there are many people who do read the Bible story of the Creation as an accurate historical record of what happened. And here lies the problem. Such a view leaves little or no room for interpretation. Even the midrashic approach of the rabbis who sought to find the "seventy different angles" to the biblical text would be ruled out. Even more seriously fallacious is the view that scientific facts are stated in the Bible. Essentially, the Bible is not a book of science. It is the book of religion. It does not tell us how the

universe was created. It tells us that there is a God who created the universe. It does not tell us how old the universe is. It simply records some genealogical tables which might suggest a chronology from the beginning of recorded biblical history. A third-grade schoolboy may have seen a pre-historic museum piece known to be millions of years old, and the world's leading physicists can tell us that there is enough scientific evidence to support the theory that the universe began to evolve many billions of years ago. But even if we accept these theories, they have absolutely nothing to do with the Bible. For the Bible does not provide scientific information; it provides us with religious and moral instruction.

In summary, one can still support modern knowledge uncovered by a study of comparative religion, Near Eastern studies, biology and astronomy, and still hold fast to the Bible as the great source of moral and religious truth.

Chaim Pearl

THE TWO TABLETS OF THE COVENANT

JOSIAH DERBY

The familiar representation of the Ten Commandments has been universally regarded as a symbol of Judaism and the Jewish religion, second only to the Shield of David.[1] Synagogues throughout the world display the two tablets mounted above the holy ark with some schematic form of the Decalogue inscribed upon them, the first five commandments on the right hand tablet and the second five on the left one.

This division of the Ten Commandments is an ancient one.[2] Apart from the fact that it was natural to divide ten into two equal parts, the rabbis of old and Jewish and Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages[3] recognized a theological difference between the first five and the last five commandments, the former setting forth the basic relationship of the Jew to his God,[4] and the latter his relationship to his fellowman.

These traditions derived from the testimony in the Bible that the Decalogue was inscribed upon two stone tablets. The necessity for two slabs of stone could only be explained by the decision of the Law-giver to make a visible distinction between the two categories of law, those between man and God and those between man and man.

1 Jewish chaplains in the U.S. armed forces wear the tablets as their insignia, rather than the Shield of David.

2 *Mekhilta*, Lauterbach Edition, Vol. II, (Phila. JPS, 1933) p. 262.

3 Thomas Aquinas speaks of this division in his *Summa Theologica*.

4 The Fifth Commandment was regarded as a bridge between the two categories, but placed in the first category on the grounds that parents are God's agents on earth vis-à-vis the children.

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Altogether in the Bible there are eighteen references to the two stone tablets: six in Exodus, ten in Deuteronomy, and one in Kings which is repeated in Chronicles.[5] Of the various passages, three describe the tablets as the "two tablets of testimony" (*ha'edut*),[6] and three describe them as the "two tablets of the covenant" (*ha'brit*).[7] The two verses in Kings and Chronicles use the word *karat* in connection with the tablets, also implying that they embodied a covenant.

That Scripture calls our attention so often and so persistently to the fact that there were *two* tablets, and that they were the "two tablets of the covenant" causes us to re-examine the conclusion of the ancients as to why there had to be *two* tablets. For with the recognized economy of language which the Torah seems to employ — a basic principle enunciated by the rabbis of the Talmud — was it necessary for the Torah to remind us so often that the Decalogue is divided into two categories of law? One would assume that the mention of "two tablets" even once would be sufficient. The rabbis and philosophers undoubtedly could have analyzed the Ten Commandments and arrived at the two categories without these numerous reminders.

It should be noted first that Scripture gives no indication as to the size of the tablets. Tradition assumed that they were equal in size.[8] And if the Ten Commandments were inscribed upon them in the manner envisioned by the tradition, then there would have been a substantial disparity between the number of words on each tablet.

Specifically, the total number of words in the Decalogue as stated in Exodus is 172 (there are more in the Deuteronomic version). The first five commandments consist of 146 words and the second five of

5 Ex. 31:18, 32:15, 34:1, 34:4 (contains two references to the two tablets), 34:29. Deut. 4:13, 5:19, 9:9, 9:10, 9:11, 9:15, 9:17, 10:1, 10:3, (contains two references to the two tablets). I Kg. 8:9; II Chr. 5:10. There are seventeen additional references that use only the word "tablets" in the plural, but they are all related to the Ten Commandments as being written on two tablets of stone.

6 Ex. 31:18, 32:15, 34:29.

7 Deut. 9:9, 9:11, 9:15.

8 *TJ Shek.* 6:1, 49d.

only 26 words. Hence, the second tablet could have been one-fifth the size of the first. Why burden Moses with unnecessary weight to carry down from the mountain? There is no archeological example of what, according to the prevailing notion, would have been an extravagant use of writing space.

In view of these considerations, the traditional theory of division of the Decalogue into two equal parts, each inscribed on a separate tablet, becomes untenable. It would have made no less sense to have had one large tablet and one small tablet than the idea that they were equal in size. And if the commandments were not distributed in this manner, but rather in a way more or less to equalize the number of words on both tablets, then the theory of five commandments on each tablet collapses entirely.

The answer to the question of why *two* tablets and not one must be sought elsewhere. But first we must ask: Could the Decalogue have been incised upon one tablet of manageable size? How large a slab of stone would have been needed? Fortunately, there is a handy model to which this problem can be related: namely, the famous Moabite Stele.[9]

This sizable chunk of black basalt rock had a nicely finished flat surface with an inscription, approximately 39.5 centimeters (16.5 inches) at the bottom and 36 centimeters (14 inches) at the top. The flat face is about 24 inches wide at the bottom with its sides sloping gradually upward to a rounded top to a height of about 40 inches. The rounded top is about 20 inches wide, and there is a polished border all around, approximately one-and-a-half inches wide.[10]

9 The Moabite Stone, discovered in 1868 at the site of ancient Dibon in Moab, is a monument erected by Mesha, King of Moab, (mid-ninth century B.C.E.) celebrating his defeat of the king of Israel. See the account of this stele in *Entziklopedia Mikrait* (Hebrew), Vol. IV, col. 925ff, and the photograph.

10 These dimensions were communicated to this writer by Dr. Carney Gavin, Curator of the Semitic Museum at Harvard University.

Mesha's story is inscribed upon it in the Northwest Semitic angular script of his time,[11] in a language almost identical with biblical Hebrew. The inscription consists of 34 lines, most of which are visible and legible; an additional four lines may have originally concluded the statement, but have been completely obliterated.

There are approximately 340 words in the inscription (exclusive of the number that might have been contained in the last four lines). That is, twice as many as in the Decalogue. We may, therefore, conclude that since the Decalogue was written in the same script, it could have been inscribed on about half the written surface area of the Moabite Stele, (excluding the fancy border and the area of its last four lines), or approximately 270 square inches; that is, a slab of stone perhaps 12 inches wide and 22.5 inches high. However, there is ample archeological evidence to indicate that the 172 words of the Decalogue could have been inscribed upon a piece of stone of smaller dimensions. This can be inferred from the fact that since the Moabite Stele was intended for reading by the public, it would require larger script, whereas the Tablets of the Covenant were not meant for this purpose but rather as a private document proclaiming a special relationship between two parties, so that the script could have been of a more conventional size. Taking this into account, the tablets could have been as small as 10 by 20 inches.

We see from this analysis that not only could the entire Ten Commandments have been inscribed upon one slab of stone, but also that the stone could have been of a size a man might carry down or up

11 Different from the Aramaic-Babylonian or "square" script which Ezra brought from the Babylonian Exile, which replaced the ancient script as the official and standard script of Judaism in which the Torah was to be written. However, we are not certain this was the script used on the two tablets. There are very few samples before 1000 B.C.E. of early Northwest Semitic writing which eventually developed into the type of writing on the Moabite Stone. According to the rabbis, God inscribed the Ten Commandments in the "square" lettering, requiring certain miracles to take place. For the sake of this comparison, it is assumed that the script on the tablets was Northwest Semitic.

a mountain. Perhaps it could even have been carried in one hand (in the manner we carry the Torah scroll today) or under one arm, especially where he might want to assist himself in the climb with one free hand. If so, why should God have burdened Moses with the clumsy and more difficult task of carrying two tablets?[12]

Both our arguments, therefore, lead to the same conclusion: *that only one slab of stone was needed*, one slab that could have fulfilled its function more logically and efficiently than two. This brings us back to the beginning: Why, then, was it necessary to have two?

The answer to this question came to light a few years ago with the discovery of a practice common among the Hittites.[13] In the Hittite society, when a suzerain entered into a pact with a vassal, the terms of the pact were written separately on two clay tablets. One was given to the vassal and the other was retained by the suzerain[14] so that neither could lose sight of his obligations to the other. This practice was internationally recognized in the Mosaic period.[15]

The Ten Commandments were clearly the conditions by which Israel would become God's *am segulah*, His special people, and because of which He would be their protector and savior. The Torah specifically states that the two tablets represented the *b'rit*, the Covenant, and that they were the *edut*, the testimony to the Covenant. Hence, we have here a formal relationship established between God as the suzerain and Israel as His vassal.[16] As with Hittite requirements, both parties were to receive a copy of the terms of the agreement.[17]

12 In Deut. 9:15 and 10:3, Moses speaks of his carrying the two tablets with "my two hands," while in Ex. 34:4 and 34:29 it is stated that the two tablets were in "his hand."

13 Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law* (N.Y. Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 3ff.

14 *Ibid.* p. 7.

15 *Ibid.* p. 8.

16 Hence, when Israel broke the covenant by worshiping the golden calf, it was necessary to break the tablets as a symbol of the termination of the relationship.

17 Phillips, p. 3.

This would necessitate the writing of the *entire* Decalogue upon each of two tablets of stone. The conclusion must be, then, that the Ten Commandments were inscribed *in full* upon *each* of the two tablets,[18] even though this would require larger slabs than if the text were divided into two parts. There could be no other way, for it was necessary for each party to the Covenant to be in possession of a complete text. And since it is the suzerain who is the author of the conditions to the pact, both tablets had to come from Sinai.

In that event, why did Moses bring both copies down from the mountain? Why was not one copy left in the suzerain's possession; namely, with God?

God was perceived as "dwelling in the midst" of Israel,[19] in the Tabernacle, with the ark as His seat or throne.[20] Consequently, depositing "His copy" in the ark would be simulating what a human king might do, in placing such an important document in a safe place.

This would answer the question why it was necessary altogether to prepare a copy for God, since He needs none. The awareness of the existence of God's copy and its presence in the ark, which was the focal point of Israel's faith and worship, helped Israel sustain the assurance that so long as it kept its part of the agreement God would keep His.

To be sure, the burden of carrying down the mountain two large slabs of stone must have been considerable, a burden which God would not have imposed upon Moses unless it were absolutely necessary. In the light of the above, this was so. Otherwise, as has

18 *Mekhilta*, p. 264. This is also the view of the sages, remarkably enough, but the text gives no explanation for their opinion. Tur-Sinai also accepts this view but maintains that only one copy was placed in the ark, and the other was used for public instruction. This supposition is hardly tenable, first because the copy for public reading did not have to be divine, and second because it flies in the face of textual testimony that both tablets were deposited in the ark.

19 Ex. 35:8.

20 I Sam. 4:4; II Kg. 19:15, *et al.*

already been indicated, it would have been more convenient for Moses to carry one slab if it involved only one complete text.

Inasmuch as the geological character of the Sinai peninsula is substantially the same as that of Moab, we can assume that the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments were also of basalt. The fact that this rock can be found in the form of flat sheets explains how Moses was able to fashion two smooth tablets[21] perhaps not more than an inch thick, without too much difficulty. The Moabite Stele was thick because it was displayed on some pedestal in a public place to be read by the passersby. The Decalogue was not intended for such a purpose. It might be estimated that both tablets may have weighed 40 pounds together, a burden not beyond the powers of a strong man to carry. As for Moses, we can deduce from several incidents recorded in the Bible that he was a powerful man.

This study, however, does not advocate the abandonment of the traditional representation of the Ten Commandments.

21 Ex. 34:1.

JOB: A UNIVERSAL DRAMA

DAVID WOLFERS

(Part I of this essay appeared in Vol. XXI:1, Jan. 1993

The long speech of Elihu, the Jewish witness to the dispute, whose provenance has been so often impugned, is more explicit in its dealings with the historical background than any other part of the book. It treats it in a deliberate, analytic and didactic way. In Chapter 34, Elihu first expounds on God's voluntary assumption of responsibility for human history.

Who burdened Him with the governance of the earth?
And who put the whole world on His shoulders? (34:13)

and then spells out the process which in his view led directly to the transference of sovereignty over Eretz Israel to a pagan foe.

At midnight
The people are convulsed and pass away
And the mighty carry them off powerless.
For His eyes are on the ways of men
And He sees all their movements.
There is no darkness, nor no shadow of death
Wherein the workers of iniquity may hide.
For He does not set for man an appointment
To come before God in judgment.
He destroys the great without trial
And places their successors in their stead.
To this end He familiarizes Himself with their deeds;
So when the night turned over, they were crushed.

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He chastised them under [the heel of] *the wicked*
Instead of the prophets;
Which is because they turned aside from following Him
And did not attend to any of His ways,
Causing the cry of the poor to come to Him —
And He does hear the cry of the afflicted.
And if He did nothing, who would condemn?
And if He averted His gaze, who would see it?
— And this applies to nation and man alike —
From the rule of a godless man,
From the seduction of His people (34:20-30).[1]

The most extraordinary part of Elihu's speech is the last six verses, introduced with the plea

Make known to us what we should say to him!
We cannot compete with the darkness (37:19).

It is quite impossible that this appeal asks Job for guidance in dealing with God, as most (all?) commentators have understood. Both Elihu and the three comforters are convinced that Job's addresses to God have been reckless beyond account. Job *reels off words without thinking* (35:16); *His words are without discernment* (34:35); *his own mouth condemns him* (15:6). Nor is there any occasion for Job's antagonists to wish to address God in the context of the debate. They want nothing from Him and are convinced of their truth of the affair. No, as indicated earlier in the Chapter (37:1-5), Elihu has observed the approach of God in the gathering storm and, breaking off his own exposition, turns and addresses these words directly to God, rising momentarily to the stature of a prophet, and adopting a position very close to that of Abraham's in his disputation over Sodom and Gomorrah:

Will it be explained to him if I speak?
When men declare that he has been destroyed?
And then that they cannot see the Light

1 All translations from the Book of Job are the author's own.

It was once bright in the skies,
But a wind swept by and cleansed them?
That from a golden Zaphon there approaches
A majesty more awesome than God! (37:19-22)

There is, however, a substantial difference between Elihu's argument and Abraham's, though both appear to be interventions of mercy. Abraham appealed to God's justice, but Elihu refers only to expediency, to the public effects which are flowing and will flow from the destruction by God of His own people, particularly when using as His agent another nation whose allegiance is to another god. But then there is no suggestion that Elihu considers that Job has really been treated unjustly. Elihu rightly hints that the very survival of God Himself is at stake! The *wind* that *swept by* — the Assyrian invasion which is *a wind from beyond the desert* in Chapter 1 — bids fair to sweep the heavens clean of the Lord as it sweeps the earth clean of the Jews. It is sad that this, as so many other passages of fundamental importance to the development of Jewish thought in the Book of Job, have been obscured by mistranslation and misinterpretation.

Majority opinion agrees with Martin Buber that in His reply "what God says in response does not answer Job's charge; it does not even touch on it." "A noble irrelevance" was how Bernard Shaw described it. God's reply consists of four main sections of which two are reasonably straightforward and two mythopoetical and semi-oracular in nature. The first, the unrivaled poetic catechism of Job about the physical universe, makes the clear statement that knowing nothing of the formation, the mechanism or the purposes of the universe, Job is in no position to take its Maker to task for the way in which it is run. The incommensurability between man and God, which Job reiterated through the dialogue, is now shown from God's vantage point.

There is no point to this defense, for that is what it is, if it is not intended to show, as well as the inadequacy of man, the limitations of God. That is, it hints throughout at unknown conditions in which

He must operate, the inscrutable purpose even He is constrained to serve, the rules He is obliged to obey. Omnipotent He may be, but the thrust of the description is to show omnipotence circumscribed by a limited range of possibility. In the same way, having an infinite choice of what he will create, the sculptor is omnipotent but nonetheless limited by the intransigence and potential of his material and the precision of his tools. Thus there is an infinity of possibility also *not* available to him. So God can perform an infinity of operations upon history, but not everything that can be imagined, nor in every way that it can be imagined. Even Blake was wrong in this.[2] The creation of the world imposed one specific order on the plastic material of chaos, and God Himself is obliged to submit to it. This is the ultimate, incontestable and valid theodicy, as fresh today as quantum theory, but only one minor aspect of this peerless book.

The second section, the biological vignettes of Chapter 39, alludes to the necessity for the severance of the parental bond at an appropriate time for each species, which is itself a message to Israel (the ostrich). It delivers the primary message, already broached in 38:25-27, that man is not alone on the earth, but shares it with innumerable other creatures for each of which God must make provision and which fit into His design. What may be bad for man may nevertheless serve God's purpose on this larger canvas. This ecological proposition is brought to life in the picture of the horse, who fulfills himself only in battle, and the vulture which feeds on death.

It is the last two chapters which deal specifically with the historical crux of which the book treats, and of God's role in it. But these chapters have separately been subjected to the most brutal disfigurement by an interpretative process which has led finally to the identification of Behemoth and Leviathan as hippopotamus and crocodile. There is, I make bold to write, no justification, not in the text of the passages nor in the rest of the Book of Job, nor in biblical

2 William Blake, *Everything possible to be believ'd is an image of truth*, Proverbs of Hell, from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

literature nor in lexicography itself, for these two crass errors. Still less is there justification in common sense, poetic sensibility or literary logic.

Using well-established allegorical symbolism, these two chapters discuss the Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah, the behavior of the Israelites, which according to the Lord led to His letting loose the Assyrians on them, the growing *hubris* of Sennacherib and the punishment that awaits him and the restoration of Judah which is to come.[3]

The problem which God is addressing in Chapter 40 is the accusation which Job has made that He allows "the wicked" to prosper. He roars at Job:

Will you indeed annul My judgment?
Will you condemn Me, that you be found right?
But have you an arm like God's?
And can you thunder with a voice like His?
Deck yourself in majesty and grandeur . . . .
Expose every one that is proud and abase him
And crush the wicked beneath them.
Bury them in the dust together . . . .
Then shall I too extol you
For your right hand has brought you victory! (40:8-14)

and then:

Just look: The beast with which I endowed you[4]
Chews the cud like the cattle (40:15).

בהמות אשר עשיתי עמך is the pregnant phrase, for it is the modulation, the resolution of another phrase — one of only two others in the Bible where Behemoth appears as the intensive plural, in Psalm 73: בהמות הייתי עמך. Coincidences of phraseology as close as

3 D. Wolfers, "Is Behemoth Also Jewish," *Dor le Dor*, XIV:4, 1986, pp. 220-227, and "The Lord's Second Speech in the Book of Job," VT XL: 4, 1990, pp. 474-499.

4 Not the usual understanding of the phrase, but cf. Job 10:12 where the expression עשיתי עמדי means "You endowed me with." This idiomatic use of the collocation is most often found with חסד, "grace" or "favor," as the direct object. In Job 10:12, it is "grace" and "life."

this do not just happen. The psalmist, a precursor of Job, confesses that, in observing the prosperity of the wicked, and from this observation doubting the utility of virtue, he has been *brutish and ignorant; a beast I have been before Thee.* Job is identified with this psalmist, not only by the whole of his tirade against God, but in his decisive rejection of the path of the wicked in Chapter 27 (v.s.). In saying *I endowed you with the beast,* God thereby pardons Job, the Jewish people, mankind altogether, for their doubts and as well for their animal natures which disqualify them from the unaided execution of His will in eradicating the proud and the wicked from the world. Only in music, and there perhaps only in the incredible last bars of Beethoven's Opus 111, have sorrow and sweetness been blended in just the way that they are in this phrase.

Behemoth soon becomes the people of Judah, as in Isaiah 30:6, while Leviathan's identity as Assyria from Isaiah 27:1 (and Nahar's as Sennacherib from Isaiah 8:6-8) complete the allegorical cast. In the first six verses of Chapter 41 the Lord declares His complete control over this evil power and reveals it as His agent in carrying out His moral and political policies, while the remainder of the chapter is a triumphant celebration of the unconquerable potency of Leviathan as an angel of death and destruction, ending with the laconic record of his function as God's agent:

All that are lofty he surveys;
He is lord over all the children of pride (41:26).

Such are Behemoth and Leviathan, the sordid hippopotamus and crocodile of the modern scholar's imaginations, the one God's most potent tool in the manipulation of events, the other the deficiency in mankind and in His people which makes that intervention necessary.

In reply, Job indicates that he has understood God's speech correctly, that God has not abandoned him and transferred His allegiance to "the wicked," that God is fully awake to the *hubris* of Sennacherib:

I knew that You were capable of everything
And that no evil device was concealed from You (42:2)

a confession which is a little late to command respect. Perhaps we should read the statement in the present tense. Job's vision has been enlarged and his concerns broadened to take account of and submit to God's designs and man's insignificance. In the end he does not "repent" as most translations have it,[5] but he declares that God has done for him what all the consolations of his friends could not:

I had heard You with the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye has seen You,
Therefore do I despise, and am comforted
Concerning all that are dust and ash (42:5, 6).

It will now be instructive to examine, through the text of the book, the public effects of Job's trial as recorded there. These are three-fold — effects on Job himself, which is to say on the Jewish people, effects on the three comforters, who represent the strangers dwelling in the midst of Israel, and effects on the world at large. By far the greatest detail is provided concerning the first of these.

In Chapter 27:1-6, Job makes it clear that he understands that the simple compact between God and His people, in which God's protection was guaranteed in return for Israel's obedience, is ended:

By the living God Who has denied me justice
And by the Almighty, Who has embittered my soul,
[I declare] *that for all the time my breath remains in me*
And the breath of God in my nostrils,
My lips will not utter falsehood
Nor my tongue deceit.
Far be it from me to concede you right.
Until I perish, I shall not put off my integrity.
To my righteousness I cling and will not let it go.

5 A hoary problem. Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed*) did not accept that Job repents. J. B. Curtis ("On Job's Response to Yahweh," *JBL*, 98/4, 1979, pp. 497-511) cogently argues that נחם does not ever mean "repent" in the sense which is usually understood here. I consider that the confrontation between the לנחמו at the end of the Prologue, *They made an appointment to come to console and comfort him* (2:11), and this נחמו at the beginning of the Epilogue demand, for reasons of literary integrity and dramatic irony, the reading *I am comforted*.

My heart shall not reproach me all the days of my life
(27:6).

In place of the covenant relationship, Job announces in this passage the "internalization" of the rules of conduct which God has taught, their autonomy and independence. For him now they are as valid without God's encouragement as formerly they were with it. A psychologist might say that Job has resolved his Oedipal conflict. Job has more to say in this chapter on this point:

Let my enemy be as the wicked
And he who opposes me as the unjust (27:7)

and he proceeds to explain this absolute rejection of sin and idolatry. Here I must paraphrase: When death comes to the wicked man, he meets it in a state of alienation and terror, but the just man is able to summon (even the absent) God to his side. Never mind that He will not answer him, the just man in trouble can call upon God in all seasons (בכל–עת). This will be his comfort. Not only have the rules of life been internalized, but in a very real sense the Giver of those rules also.

More than this, there is death and there is death, and the death of the wicked is a true obliteration without hope of redemption, while the death of the righteous is not. The survivors of the family of the wicked shall be *buried in death*, and *his widows will not weep* (27:15). In other words, there is the death which is the natural passing from link to link in the chain of life, and there is the death which decisively ruptures that chain. Job still believes that "the wages of sin is death," but in a sense enlarged and a perspective grown historic, since his innocent trust in God's omnipotent decency has been broken.

In Chapters 29 and 30 we see Job mourning the passing of that innocent phase of his life. Mourning is an essential psychological phase which must be endured as one passes from one stage to another in life. We are here made to witness the agonies of adjustment through which the Jewish people passed in reconciling their faith in God to their apparent abandonment by Him.

At this point in the book, Job still has no idea why all this has happened, hence he can still make the majestic avowel of innocence in Chapter 31, and offer it as his talisman (תו) to the absent God. But after God has spoken and revealed not the details but the existence of His deepest design, the agents He is constrained to employ, and the logical incompatibility of all His responsibilities, Job's vision is radically altered. He sees the insignificance of individual life and glimpses the immense design into which it fits. At this moment he senses the mission of God's people, and the role of their suffering in it. So he takes comfort. To Job, if not to contemporary Jewry, God's explanation is adequate.

The non-Jewish witnesses to God's speech, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, have had a unique experience. They have observed at first hand the intimate exchange between a Jew and his God. They are not permitted to speak again in the book, but God Himself addresses some words to Eliphaz:

> *My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as has My servant, Job* (42:7)

and this is followed by instructions to offer a sin-offering, after which Job is to pray for the comforters to deflect God's wrath from them. This passage is surely a general warning to the non-Jewish theologian to avoid the temptation to interpret God, or to intervene between Him and His people. The difference between what the three friends have said of God — which was not true — and what Job has said — which was true — is that the friends asserted that God adheres rigidly to His own covenant, that His invocation of the curses *must* have been a response to Israel's breach of the rules, while Job has asserted that God Himself has been the One to break the compact. The friends asserted that God *always* rewards virtue and punishes sin in the lifetimes of those concerned, and Job has vehemently denied it. All that the comforters can have learned from this display is that the God of Israel is beyond their reach (13:7-12), and that the Jew is their only path of access to Him.

The world at large is no witness to the debate, nor to God's speeches, nor Job's passage through doubt and rebellion to a new certainty and peace. It witnesses events only, and what the world sees of the story of the Book of Job is the destruction of Israel and Judah halted miraculously at the point of execution, with the knife poised as in the frustrated sacrifice of Isaac. They see Judah *escape by the skin of her teeth* (19:20), they see the humiliation and death of Sennacherib and the restoration of Judah as recorded in the last verses of the book. This is lesson and demonstration enough of the supremacy of the One God, but perhaps there is one chapter of the book which is addressed to all mankind; Chapter 28, inserted mysteriously into Job's final monologue, but spoken none knows by whom or to whom. This chapter asserts the unknowability of ultimate truth, the fallacy of all philosophy, the treachery of wisdom and the vanity of knowledge. It appeals to the fundament beneath all these, adherence to which will protect man from the seductive certainties implicit in all of them:

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
And the adjuration of evil is understanding (28:28).

The Book of Job is the record of the emergence of God from the chrysalis of a tribal-national role into the maturity of universality and of the emergence of moral philosophy as a discipline independent of divine sanction. In order to do this, it had to be the first work to show the reality of a God who does *not* count the fall to earth of every sparrow and whose care for His creatures is conceived in a perspective too long in time and too wide in extent for the comfort either of Jews in particular or mankind in general. That the stark truths of the Book of Job inspired a retreat by "religion" from its function of interpreting reality and drawing conclusions from it, and set it on the road of fabricating unreal models of the world more to man's liking, and sentimental wish-fulfillment dreams of a father-figure God cannot be laid to the door of its author. One day, perhaps, the evolution of religious thought will progress from where it recoiled in dismay at the unwelcome truths embodied in Job.

RACE RELATIONS

ROBERT CHERNOFF

One may search the Torah diligently and conclude that no reference to discrimination can be found in any shape or form. In fact, the Torah frequently reminds us that the Israelites were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt and therefore they should treat the *ger* [sojourner/stranger] in their midst like their own. All rabbinic writings on the subject of the "stranger" or "sojourner" indicates that we have the obligation to integrate all people into one society "for at one creation did 'man' come into being." It therefore follows that all people are equal in the sight of the Lord. It therefore also follows that any artificial distinctions based upon racial inheritance or even culture are an abomination to God and of course to all intelligent, thinking people.

There are those in the so-called religious community of America who declare that they "have the Word" insofar as the Bible is concerned. They declare, without equivocation, that their reading and interpretation of the Scriptures is the only correct version and that all other, particularly Jewish, interpretations are false. These would-be scholars justify their interpretations by quoting isolated scriptural passages, nearly always taken out of context. More often than not, they employ their devious means to justify any and all positions they espouse, particularly "segregation" or the "absolute superiority" of white Aryan Protestants. In the latter case, we are not certain which Protestant denomination comes out with the highest marks.

If the advocates of a new order of relations among human groups seem to wrestle with the Word, so must those who would defend the old order press their point. One Southern clergyman wrote in his

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denominational magazine ". . . valid inferences may be drawn from the Old Testament in support of the general principle of segregation as an important feature of the divine purpose and providence throughout the ages."[1] Another clergyman concluded: "God gave the races racial integrity and He intended it to be respected. Those who are trying to destroy racial integrity are fighting against the order of God's creation and against the will of God . . ."[2]

These clergymen have grossly misinterpreted the Torah. They have gone out of their way to substitute folklore and myth for the Bible. For example: It is believed by some that the color black was the sign conferred on Cain; therefore they hold that the "blacks" are definite outcasts, or at the very least inferior to the white race. For this "reason," many hold fast to the belief that blacks can never enter "heaven." However, nowhere in Scripture is there even a remote reference to the black race in connection with Cain. As a matter of fact, the Torah describes the incident of Cain as God's way of showing compassion *lest any finding him should* [want to] *kill him* (Gen. 4:15). The accepted Jewish view of the Cain incident is that God "engraved on Cain's forehead a letter of His holy name" (Rashi). The sign had nothing whatever to do with skin color nor for that matter with Cain's punishment.

It is also popularly held by some denominations that Ham, one of the sons of Noah, from whom the non-white races supposedly descended, was condemned by God to become a slave of slaves. Yet a careful study of the Torah reveals that Noah, not God, declared the "curse"; and that the curse was pronounced not on Ham, but on Canaan, one of Ham's four sons (Gen. 9:20-25). It is far more accurate to read of the episode that consigns Canaan to the role of a servant to Shem as providing divine justification for the later

1 G. T. Gillespie, "Arguments in Defense of Racial Segregation," *Presbyterian Outlook*, March 14, 1955.

2 Letter to *Christian Century*, January 2, 1957.

Israelite conquest of ancient Palestine. But even if such a biblical interpretation is not accepted, the fact remains that the Canaanites were white! Only one of Ham's sons is considered the father of a black race, namely Cush (Gen. 10:6). The Torah also informs us that among the sons of Cush were the founders of Babel and Asshur, neither of which was "colored." Of material interest is the fact that the Torah does not deprecate the marriage of Moses and a Cushite (black) woman (Num. 12:1). Even when Miriam and Aaron speak out against the marriage, they are severely rebuked by God, and Miriam is punished with leprosy.

Finally, it is charged that the Jews "achieved the highest moral and spiritual development of all people on earth . . ." because they maintained themselves as a segregated people, which would have been impossible "had they abandoned the principle of segregation and become integrated with other nations."[3] Again, biblical history has been distorted. While it is true that the Torah does record a conscious effort on the part of the Israelites (Jews) to discourage intermarriage (Deut. 7:3, Ezra 9:10) their concern then, as it is now, is not with maintaining racial purity but religious purity. The millennia of Jewish experience had demonstrated that interfaith marriages tend(ed) to weaken the Jewish religion and open(ed) the door to alien practices. The fact is that the Jews are not now, nor were they ever, inclined to racial limitations. The Jewish people always accepted all races into the faith, and marriage was only proscribed outside the faith. The reluctance to marry outside the faith was never used to justify segregation of races, and segregation by color was never practiced. Today we can find numerous black (Ethiopian/Beta Israel), and Oriental as well as Caucasian Jews.

While it is recognized that the Torah does not specifically address our contemporary political, social or economic systems, we may well ask: What guidance can we obtain from the Torah on this subject? The answer depends largely on how we apply central

3 Gillespie, *op. cit.*

biblical concepts to our lives. The rabbis identify such a concept from Gen. 5:1: *This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him.* Through this reference, the rabbis asserted the unity of man. They interpreted this text in terms that all men were created equal. Thus they further interpreted this concept to declare that "No 'man' shall be able to say that 'my ancestors are greater than yours,' for all were created [stem] from one common ancestor."

Elaborating on this theme, there is a rabbinic Midrash that teaches us that the dust from which man was created was obtained from the four corners of the earth and was of different colors. From this dust, God created man. In this fashion did the rabbis emphatically assert their conviction that even men of different racial appearances are all related to the one man. They also taught that man's divine resemblance was given to him so that no man should ever despise another, remembering that hatred of any man is akin to hatred of God.

God's lesson to Israel that all men are equal in His sight and are to be judged before His law receives expression in the Prophet Amos' declaration: *Are ye not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel, says the Lord*? (Amos 9:7).

THE BRIDEGROOM OF BLOOD

ALLEN S. MALLER

Some incredibly terrible things have been written about Moses. I am not sure who started it but according to *Mekhilta*, a second-third century midrash:

> At the time when Moses said to Jethro, "Give me your daughter Zipporah to wife," Jethro said to him, "Accept one condition which I will lay down and I will give her to you for a wife," "What is it?" asked Moses. He said, "The first son that you will have shall belong to idolatry, and the rest may belong to [your] God." Moses accepted. Jethro then said, "Swear to me." And Moses swore (*Mekhilta-Amalek*).

It is not unbelievable that Moses, a refugee from Pharaoh's court and a stranger in a strange land, should accede to such a demand from Jethro, the priest of Midian. What is strange is that a rabbinic midrash should assert such an appalling thing about Moses. Of course, it would seem natural that Jethro, a pagan priest, would demand of this foreigner that Moses yield his first son to paganism. Since Jethro had no sons he would need a grandson in order to pass on his priestly vocation. But no midrash presents this view. Indeed, the opposite claim is made.

There are many midrashim that assert that Jethro himself had already rejected idolatry before he even met Moses. *Exodus Rabbah* (a later midrash) relates that Jethro had already removed the idols from his house and resigned his position as a priest prior to Moses' arrival. For this behavior, Jethro's community had ostracized him, and this explains why his daughters had to take care of the flock

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(because the shepherds would not work for him) and why the shepherds treated his daughters so badly at the well. This indeed makes sense, since it is not likely that the daughters of the village priest would be mistreated unless he was in some form of disgrace.

Lekach Tov, a much later midrash, even relates that Jethro was not a real priest but an official, like the mayor of the city, who oversees the civic religious practices. Thus there is no necessary reason to believe that Jethro would desire that a grandson follow in his idolatrous footsteps.

Perhaps we can find a clue in the way the *Mekhilta* midrash ends, for it states "It was for this that the angel at first wished to kill Moses." This refers to the short and very obscure biblical passage (Ex. 4:24-25), *It came to pass on the way, at the lodging place, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at his feet.* Most commentators think that it was Moses, not the baby, who was suddenly struck with a mortal illness. They also agree that his illness was due to God's anger that Moses had not circumcised Eliezer, his younger son. In the Mishnah, Rabbi Joshua ben Korha says, How important is circumcision, for Moses that righteous man did not have his punishment suspended even for a single hour. And in the Talmud it is taught, Rabbi Joshua ben Korha said, Circumcision is so important that all Moses' merits did not avail him when he was apathetic towards circumcision.

Of course, there are those who defended Moses. Rabbi Yose said, Heaven forbid that our master Moses should have been apathetic about circumcision. The rabbi explained that Moses was caught in a quandary. If he circumcised Eliezer right away, and then did not wait three days for the baby to heal before setting out to Egypt, he would be endangering the baby. If he did wait three days after the circumcision, he would be delaying the fulfillment of God's commandment to go to Egypt and speak to Pharaoh. Either way, he would be transgressing. If this was the reason Moses did not circumcise Eliezer, Rabbi Yose asked rhetorically, why was he

punished? Because when Moses got to the inn, he did not proceed to do the circumcision immediately, but took care of other things first.

This explanation puts Moses in a better light, but it makes God look bad. To make Moses mortally ill because he delayed fulfilling a commandment for a few hours makes God a very severe task-master. The *Mekhilta* account could be a defense of God's justice in the face of a Rabbi Yose-type defense of Moses. After all, if one is going to besmirch someone's honor, better Moses than God.

Perhaps the different views also express a different assessment of the failure to circumcise. Rabbi Eleazar of Modiin, who probably authored the statement in *Mekhilta*, viewed failure to circumcise one's son as the equivalent of raising him to be a pagan, especially if one is married to a non-Jew. Thus, he has Jethro make it a condition of marriage, and even has Moses take an oath to this effect. This sounds like a twentieth-century situation, when a Jew marries a non-Jew and agrees to raise the children, or even one of them, as a non-Jew. According to Rabbi Eleazar, even if such a person was as great as Moses he would be worthy of an early death for doing this.

The other rabbis do not view failure to circumcise as equivalent to apostasy. Perhaps they hope that in later years the family could be drawn towards Judaism. More likely, they thought that all the children of a non-Jewish mother are automatically non-Jews who of course would not be circumcised. This is the view of Zayit Raanan, a medieval commentator on this passage, which is reproduced in the midrashic anthology *Yalkut Shimoni*.

In the centuries after Rabbi Eleazar of Modiin, the danger of mixed marriage might have declined. The example of the consequences of the terrible agreement that Moses made to raise his first-born son as a pagan was not needed so much for propaganda purposes. The later versions of the account are therefore softened. The *Sefer Hayashar* version is that Moses only agreed not to have his first-born son circumcised. The part about raising him as a pagan is omitted. This version assimilates Rabbi Eleazar of Modiin into the view of Rabbi Joshua ben Korha. Another midrash says

Moses agreed that the children should be divided into two equal groups; one Israelite and one Egyptian. In this account the first-born son, Gershom, is circumcised and it is the second one who is not.

The tendency to move away from Rabbi Eleazar of Modiin's blunt assessment of what Moses did is understandable, but mistaken. If Moses swore to raise Gershom as a pagan we can easily understand how in the weeks following his experience at the burning bush Moses would begin to feel guiltier and guiltier about what he had done. After the birth of his second son, whom we assume was circumcised, Moses, his wife and two children began the journey to Egypt (Ex. 4:20). As he got closer and closer to Egypt his guilt must have grown. He could not forget what God had told him at the end of his experience at the burning bush: *Say to Pharaoh: Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, My first-born. And I have said unto that: Let My son go, that he may serve Me; and thou hast refused to let him go. Behold I will slay thy son, thy first-born* (Ex. 4:22-23). Moses probably feared that if things ended up as God predicted, the death of the first-born sons of the non-Israelites in Egypt would include his own son Gershom. Moses became obsessed with God's threat to the first-born and it was continually on his mind. This is indicated in the Torah's placement of verses 21-23 in the midst of the account of the return of Moses to Egypt which begins with verses 19 and 20 and concludes with verses 24-28.

Moses became so obsessed by his guilt feelings of impending doom that he believed that death was imminent. When he and Zipporah lodged for the night, Zipporah must have finally gotten him to confess why he was so depressed and perhaps even suicidal. Moses felt he could not circumcise Gershom because he had given his oath to Jethro to devote the boy to idolatry. Zipporah then acted decisively to resolve the crisis. When she circumcised Gershom, Zipporah also converted him. To be more precise, she made him a member of the tribes of Israel. There is no term for conversion in the early biblical period, but as the story of the rape of Dinah reports (Gen. 34) circumcision was required for intermarriage.

If we understand Zipporah's act as not being the circumcision of an Israelite boy, but being a conversion rite, then we can also understand the obscure term used by Zipporah when she circumcised Gershom. *Zipporah took a flint, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet; and she said, 'Surely you are my hatan damim'* (v. 25). The word *hatan* indicates a man who becomes a member of the family clan, not by birth, but by law; i.e., a son-in-law, a father-in-law, or a bridegroom. Thus a *hatan damim* is a man who becomes a member of the tribe not by birth, but by legal adoption and circumcision. During the Babylonian Exile and the post-exilic period and perhaps even earlier, the term was replaced by another emphasizing conversion to Judaism. In the earlier period the children of a non-Israelite woman married to an Israelite were considered Israelites, as in the case of Joseph's children. The exception is in the case of Gershom, who required the ceremony of *hatan damim* in order to make him a member of the tribe because Moses had taken an oath to devote him to paganism. When Zipporah touches Moses, the insider, with Gershom's bloody foreskin it was possibly part of an initiation rite. Such rites are common in many tribes, and the mixing of blood or the transfer of blood from one person to another is often a way of making men blood brothers.

Without Rabbi Eleazar of Modiin's assertion that Moses had promised his first-born to paganism we would not understand that Zipporah's action was a conversion ritual. Indeed, most commentators have great difficulty in explaining both the reason for Moses' near-mortal illness and Zipporah's decisive action. Now, however, we can understand not only the term *hatan damim*, and the reason for Moses attributing to God the desire to cause death, but we also understand the intrusion of verses 21-23 in the middle of this account. Zipporah's action saved the situation, and compensated for the transgression that Moses committed in order to acquire Zipporah as his wife. Zipporah is truly a woman of valor.

THE TASSEL AND THE BLUE CORD

BENJAMIN GOODNICK

There is a well-known quotation "apparel oft proclaims the man" — and, of course, the woman. There is no denying that one's external appearance can make a strong initial impact on the beholder. It is true that often our judgment of the worth and character of the individual may be shaped by the façade of an enveloping outer garb.

In past epochs one's costume was significant for pragmatic purposes: to establish or "advertise" one's field of endeavor, whether physician, tailor, or tradesman.[1] The military were readily distinguished in all periods by their uniforms, defensive armor and offensive weapons. Furthermore, an individual's socio-economic status in society was and still is proclaimed by richness of raiment.

Religious functionaries of all faiths have always had their special dress, maintained in some fashion up to the present. The Temple high priest, for example, was laden with unique attire (breastplate, ephod, and mitre), the symbols of his station. Indeed, biblically, not only the spiritual leaders but all Israelites, presumably as befitting members of a holy people, were commanded to wear the distinguishing characteristics of the fringes on the edges of their outer clothing with an additional purple-blue cord. (Being adorned

1 In the Great Synagogue at Alexandria the various craftsmen (e.g., tailor, weaver, carpenter, etc.) grouped together, being distinguished from each other by marks on their clothing. See *T. B. Sukkah* 51b and *T. J. Shabbat* 1:3.

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in this color has apparently always been seen as a prerogative of nobility and royalty.[2])

As in other respects, Jews throughout the ages have shown a remarkable ability to adapt themselves to their surroundings even in matters of dress. Outwardly, they adopted the civil behavior and appearance of the general population while retaining their own culture in all its integrity. On the street or in the workplace today it would be difficult to distinguish Jews from other groups by their attire.[3]

There were times, of course, when Jews (and other groups) were forced to wear outlandish, drab or inferior clothing or put on distinguishing marks (e.g., a peaked, duncelike yellow cap or yellow patch) in order to denigrate and set them aside from the dominant group.[4]

Changes in garb over the generations and millennia have, however, led to problems in religious observance. Thus, the Bible commands the attachment of dangling threads, variously named, to the edges of garments (Num. 15:38; Deut. 22:12). It is evident that today our outerwear, particularly in Western culture, has been so tailored as to make the hanging of tassels unfeasible. Accommodation to the prevailing outer style has become the norm.

In early ages (from the pastoral era through the days of the First Temple) this presented less difficulty. The outermost garment was, it seems, a straight strip, possibly worn folded as a shawl over the shoulder, called *simla* — שמלה (Deut. 22:5), which may also have been spread out to serve as a covering at night, called *kesuth* — כסות

2 In the Jewish tradition these adjuncts to normal garments, discussed here, were intended to have morally elevating as well as socially enhancing goals (Num. 15:39-40).

3 Admittedly, exceptions exist. Hasidim are still garbed in the costume of seventeenth-century Poland; today's yeshiva students have the corner tassels of the *tallit katan* (small fringed undergarment) peeping from beneath their suit-jackets; and numerous orthodox Jews wear a skull-cap at all times, at home or at work.

4 In our own "civilized" age, the Nazi-imposed shield of David enclosing the word Jude sewn on the outer garment of the Jew is an obvious example.

(Deut. 22:12). So it was possible to make the required adornments at the ends of the outer apparel.

Other garments fitting over the body, such as tunics or loose long shirts, *ketoneth* — כתנת (Ex. 38:39) and perhaps *beged* בגד (Gen. 39:12) had no corners to use. Nor is the word "four" found in the major biblical source (Num. 15:37-41) commanding the placement of tassels or fringes on clothing. Indeed, the Hebrew word usually translated as "corner" may have other valid meanings — just as the well-known expression "the four corners of the earth" can readily refer to the extremities of the earth (or land).[5]

Artifacts, bas reliefs and paintings exist which display Hebrews — and, sometimes, other groups — with tassels on the hems of their long tunics or outer garments and distinct dyed girdles about their bodies. It appears that officials and persons of status donned sashes about their waists. In one of the earliest discovered representations of Israelites, for example, King Jehu of Israel is seen dressed in a waist girdle with a tassel, as is the Assyrian monarch to whom he offers tribute.[6] Often, these cords would indicate the token of the rank of the individual.[7]

Such conformity in dress apparently endured through the time of the early kings. With the continuing impact of foreign contacts during the reigns of the later kings of that epoch, dress changes began to occur — though prophets raised their voices, ineffectually — against these influences.[8]

5 In this respect, it is noteworthy that today's *tallit* (prayer-shawl) in addition to the prescribed corner tassels also has decorative fringes along the sides which are an extension of the cloth for a wool *tallit* and an added adornment for a silk *tallit*.

6 Section of The Black Obelisk. British Museum 118885. The same costume is shown on Israelite prisoners captured by Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.) at the city of Astartu. British Museum 118908.

7 Note, for example, that Tamar requested of Judah as part of his pledge "your seal and your cord" (Gen. 38:18), the signet apparently hanging on the sash about his waist. The cord and seal were worn as insignia of his social rank.

8 Note, for example, the outcry of the prophet Zephaniah: *And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons, and all who don a foreign vestment* (1:8).

Experiences, in turn, with Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman cultures and on to the present inevitably affected the external, clothed appearances of Jews in those countries. Such situations, in turn, brought about creative adaptations in the use of religious garments. After all, a biblical law cannot be abrogated.[9]

Let us now analyze one biblical source for this commandment regarding external wear (Num. 15:38-40):

> *The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the generations; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus shall you be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, the Lord your God.*[10]

Other translations of this Hebrew passage offer slight shifts in wording but give essentially the same meaning with respect to verses 38 and 39: Fringes were to be made at the [four?] corners of each garments and a blue thread was to be added within each fringe.[11]

This common understanding, then, of blue threads intertwined with white threads and attached to the corners of the outer garment has come down to us through the ages as the assumed original practice in the view of practically all commentators, traditional and

9 The reference here is to the *tallit* and *tallit katan*, which are not discussed in this article.

10 *The Torah* (Phila.: JPS, 1962) pp. 276-277. This is the third paragraph of the שמע, the core of the daily service, repeated morning and evening.

11 The talmudic schools of Hillel and Shammai differ as to the number of blue threads required. *T. B. Menahot* 41b.

modern. The blue cord has not been used for about two millennia; it is suggested that the source of the blue color was a mollusk unavailable since the talmudic period,[12] though there have been a few differing opinions as to the nature of this blue dye.[13]

There are other possible interpretations of the verses containing this commandment. It can be contended that the fringes at the "corners" and the blue cord may have initially been intended as separate elements of dress. With the changes in costume the distinction between the tassels at the edges of garments and the blue cord (with its tassel) may have been gradually lost (i.e., during the early Second Temple period) through the unsuitability of wearing a separate blue cord (girdle or sash) and the difficulty and cost in obtaining the blue dye.

Indeed, it requires only minor word adjustments in the translation, without any need for restructuring the original Hebrew text, to present this alternative perspective:

> *The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and instruct them to make for themselves a tassel on the edges of their garments throughout their generations. They shall place above the edge tassel a blue cord. You shall use it with a tassel, so that you may see it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, and do not follow your heart and your eyes in lustful urge . . . .*

Let us now examine the underlined changes.

In most English versions the term "fringe" is commonly used to

12 The Talmud names the mollusk חלזון, apparently a shellfish of the murex family, described as resembling a fish. It was said to appear only once in 70 years, probably the result of being hunted to extinction. Its rare purple dye was highly valued and sought by the nobility (*T. B. Menahot* 42b and 44a). Quite likely this very rarity and costliness led to permitting use of white threads alone (*Menahot* 38a).

13 Gershon Hanokh of Radzyn, *Petil Techelet* (1888) stated that the color was a blue-black dye originating in cuttlefish, and advocated a return to the use of the blue threads.

translate the Hebrew word ציצת.[14] A more appropriate term might be "tassel." Fringe would appear to refer to threads, usually loose, forming a continuous margin or border.[15] Tassel, on the other hand, would seem to imply an adornment made up of threads bundled together to form a specific pattern (perhaps flower-shaped here).[16]

Similarly, the word "corner," a frequent translation of כנף, originally meant "covering." From this Hebraic origin, the word would refer to a wide expanse rather than to a narrow area (i.e., a corner). Accordingly, this term, in its biblical contexts, has been variously translated as "wing" (Is. 10:14),[17] "border," "side," or "end," (Job 37:3, 38:13), "edge" (Hag. 2:12), and "skirt" or "flap" (I Sam. 15:27, 24:5, Ruth 3:9). The neutral term "edge" is used here, though "skirt" and "flap" would be just as appropriate.

What is equally important, however, is that the Hebrew twice employs the singular, i.e., one edge and one tassel,[18] in referring to these words. While in the first mention the plural is used to relate to many "corners" on many garments, it does not necessarily mean each individual garment had more than one edge or flap. In fact, the opposite seems to be true: the passage intends one lower tassel and one flap.

The phrase ונתנו על (*They shall place above . . .*) is interesting. The usual rendering of the triliterate root נתן is "give." Yet it very

14 See first translation above from *The Torah*. The wording in *The Holy Scriptures* (Phila.: JPS, 1917) varies minimally (vs. 15:38): *Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them throughout their generations fringes in the corners of their garments, and that they put with the fringe of each corner a thread of blue*. "Fringe" is also the word used in both Philip Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1949) p. 78 and *Weekday Prayer Book* (New York: RAA, 1962).

15 Fringe: "An ornamental border or trimming of hanging cords, threads, etc." *Standard College Dictionary* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968) p. 535. See *The International Critical Commentary, The Book of Numbers* p. 185 on this verse.

16 ציץ, the source of ציצת, is frequently defined as "flower." See Is. 27:16 and 28:1.

17 Note that "wing" is the original symbol of a natural covering, equivalent to protection of one's young. We find the same expression in English where "under one's wing" means figuratively "under one's protection."

18 The plural of ציצת is ציציות.

often means to put in position: e.g., ויתן אתם ברקיע השמים — *And* [He] *set them in the expanse of the sky* (Gen. 1:17), or a high placement; ולתתך עליון על כל העמים *And place you high above all nations* (Deut. 26:19).

Thus, in this textual interpretation, the word על was rendered "above,"[19] one of its legitimate meanings (perhaps closer to the Hebrew than the words "to" and "with" often used in translations). In this form, the quotation would strongly suggest that, first, the making of a garment tassel was completed, and then a separate blue cord was prepared, set high, and adorned with its own distinct tassel, probably worn at waist level.

The grammatical structure of the sentences would appear to bear out this contention. First, the word "it" (part of the verb והיה) must refer back to its direct antecedent, "blue cord." Second, the gender and number of והיה and אתו are masculine singular, which would make it agree with פתיל (cord); the gender of ציצת ("tassel" or "fringe") is feminine and therefore could not be intended. Thus, the major focus of this commandment is not on the fringe as such but on the blue cord, placed in a more visible position where it could serve as a symbol, an obvious reminder and challenge, leading to control of one's passions.[20]

This description closely matches the early tunic, a shaped garment; indeed, the word *beged* — בגד is used in this context. This piece of apparel was formed by leaving a head opening in the middle of the cloth (and perhaps making extensions for sleeves) during the

19 While על is commonly translated as "on" or "upon," it has the meaning of "above," "high," and even "high above." Observe, e.g., among its uses: (1) as noun, "height" or "elevation"; (2) as adverb, "on high" or "highly"; and (3) as divine name, "The Highest" (Hos. 11:7).

20 It is evident that this passage contains a syntactical shift from the third person ("They shall place above . . .") to the second person ("You shall use . . ."). However, this is not unique in the Bible. Note, for example, a similar change in relation to Jacob's dream of the heavenly ladder. The passage proceeds (Gen. 28:21-22): ". . . if I return safe to my father's home — the Lord shall be my God . . ." and ends with ". . . of all that You give me, I will always set aside a tithe for You."

weaving. The fabric, cut from the loom, was then folded in half to juxtapose the two sides. The free ends of the warp threads of the two sides were plaited into twine and joined to finish the tunic while leaving the threads near the hem open, thus forming a flap and a tassel through weaving together the free threads. Obviously, this gown would not have any corners.[21]

In short, the blue cord would be clearly dissociated from the low-hanging adornment and serve as a band or sash about this garment while prominently displaying its own tassel.[22]

By contrast, the Deuteronomic reference (22:12) states succinctly: גדלים תעשה לך על ארבע כנפות כסותך אשר תכסה בה. In translation, it is usually read: *You shall make tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself.* More appropriately, the verse seems to say: You shall form tufts on the four sides . . . . Since "four" is mentioned, it is evident that the verse refers to a flat, square or oblong product of the loom that can be used as an outer covering or night sheet. The snipped-off edges, as the fabric is removed from the loom, could be gathered and braided into groups to form a continuous edging of rows of tufts.

Note, however, that this biblical reference to גדלים makes no mention whatsoever of an added blue cord. Such an omission would be considered critical if, indeed, blue threads were to be incorporated with the end tassels (tufts). However, if we were to look upon the blue cord as a separate object having an existence and "sanctity" of its own, such a seeming lacuna would be understandable, since the cord would serve in its own right and for its distinct goal.[23]

21 L. Bellinger, "Cloth" in *International Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, 1962), I:650-655.

22 See Ex. 39:29. The high priest and his sons wore girdles about their tunics.

23 Friedrich Delitzsch, in Julius H. Greenstone, *Numbers With Commentary* (1939), p. 16, suggests the reading of לאות instead of לציצת, rendered in English: ". . . let them place above the edge tassel a blue cord, and it shall be for a sign . . ." Such an interpretation, requiring a word change in the biblical text, would make the verse parallel to associated passages (Deut. 6:8, 11:18): ". . . and you shall bind them as a sign upon our hand . . ." This proposed textual emendation would actually reinforce our contention that the focus was on the blue cord. Our rendering appears satisfactory by giving the blue cord its own tassel and elevating it to the plane of the phylacteries. By their position these items, blue cord and tassel and phylacteries, became highly visible, sacred adornments.

Equally remarkable, the passage reveals no attribution at all to these tufts (which are usually translated "tassels") of any moral value or even of the objective of seeing them so as to *recall all the commandments . . . and observe them. . . .* These omissions tend to confirm the view presented here that the investment of the power of recall and of sanctity resided only in a distinct blue cord.

From the above discussion it appears quite likely that, at least *ab initio*, the tassel or tufts were an extension of the cloth itself rather than, as has always been assumed, being composed of foreign fibers superimposed upon the garment.[24] Observe that the same verb for "make," (עשה) is found in both biblical references to tassels (tufts). In neither commandment is the word "attach" or "place" applied to the appendages. The intent of the biblical passage could be to the effect that . . . when the Israelites make [or: weave] their clothing, they shall form tassels [tufts] at the ends.

The פתיל, on the other hand, whether or not dyed (תכלת), could not have been a flimsy thread or two to blend with the threads of the tassel.[25] Its applications seem to demand a substantial, strong twisted cord: support for a seal (Gen. 38:18), a band for a high priest's weighty mitre (Ex. 28:37), shoulder supports for his breastplate and ephod (Ex. 28:28 and 39:21) and a measuring line (Ez. 40:3). In a like form, it would be suitable for us as a sash wrapped about the outside garment while displaying its tassel.

To carry the comparison of priestly with lay dress to its ultimate, it is reasonable to assume that the tassels and the blue cord of the garb of the average Israelite were intended as a modest parallel of the

24 It is written (*T. B. Menahot* 42b) that "if a man made [the tassels] from the fringes of the cloth . . . they are invalid." The reason given (*Menahot* 40b) is that "The Torah has said 'Thou shalt make' and not use what is already made." To our understanding, this reasoning does not seem to apply, since nothing has been "made" until the fringes are gathered and formed into a tassel. In any event, by this period there were undoubtedly changes in types of clothing worn.

25 The root of פתיל is פתל, which means to twist or twine; this again would point to the strength and thickness of a blue cord having many threads.

symbolism and sanctity displayed by the priestly raiments, the blue color reflecting the heavens and divine kingship.[26]

Moreover, it could be claimed that tying a band about the body would demand active involvement of the person (including visual focus) through handling the cord and its tassel. This function is comparable to the manipulations required in placing phylacteries on the head and arm (Deut. 6:8, 11:18) with their symbolic intent (i.e. אות — sign) as well as their high visibility.

An existing parallel to this former practice of wearing a blue cord as a sash is the hasidic custom of tying a "gartle" (waistband or belt) about the waist during services. While there is, obviously, no historical or religious continuity from ancient times to this present act, the symbolic intent may have been comparable: to prepare oneself to address the divine by "separating the upper [spiritual] from the lower [physical] drives/regions."[27]

The above discussion is not intended to be conclusive, but does suggest an alternative approach to the interpretation of the biblical passages relating to the commandment of the wearing of fringes or tassels.

26 Observe that the sacred furnishings of the Tabernacle (e.g., the ark, candelabrum, golden altar, and table of the show-bread) were wrapped in בגד תכלת, a blue fitted cover (Num. 4:6, 7, 8, 9, 12) during the journeying in the wilderness.

27 Oral quotation offered by an anonymous Lubavitcher rabbi for wearing the gartle — without benefit of proof-text.

TWO CONCEPTS OF THE COVENANT

RICHARD D. SPERO

The initial books of the Torah offer two distinct concepts of the covenant. In Genesis, for example, we read of the covenant of the patriarchs — a kind of civil agreement that in essence provides assurance of the promised land to the Hebrews. Later, in Exodus, another notion of covenant emerges. This is a spiritual agreement — a covenant of faith, of loyalty to God.[1]

Within the text of the Book of Numbers, each of these notions of covenant undergoes further development. Initially, both the covenant of the land and the spiritual covenant are broken, though not in the same way and not by the same people. Despite these ruptures, as Numbers unfolds it also sets forth the vehicles or mechanisms by which both of these covenants will be restored and renewed. Moreover, through the use of the covenant concept, the text clearly foreshadows and legitimizes the nature of the new leadership — both political and religious — that eventually would assume control in Israel.

THE RUPTURED COVENANTS

Consider first the covenant of the land. Even though they have escaped from the physical bondage of Egypt, the generation of the Exodus in Numbers is a group of malcontents. Riven with internal dissension and craving the foods of Egypt, the people are repeatedly

1 That the Torah can be viewed as containing multiple concepts of the covenant has been suggested by many commentators, but I am particularly indebted to Rabbi Moshe Tutnauer for the distinction between the perspective of Genesis and Exodus noted here.

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portrayed as murmurers and complainers. After various such incidents, the turning point of the story insofar as the general populace is concerned is reached with the report of the scouts. As will be recalled, this frightening and depressing account tells of a promised land that devours its settlers, and is inhabited by beings so large as to make the scouts appear like grasshoppers.

The reaction of the people, in essence, constitutes a rejection of the land and a renunciation of the land covenant: *Why is the Lord taking us to that land to fall by the sword? . . . It would be better for us to go back to Egypt! And they said to one another, 'Let us head back for Egypt'* (Num. 14:3-4).[2]

For this, the Exodus generation is punished by God in a way that unmistakably recalls the covenant of the land from Genesis and repeatedly makes clear that this covenant has been shattered: [*None of the men*] *shall see the land that I promised on oath to their fathers; none of those who spurn Me shall see it* (14:23). And again: *not one shall enter the land in which I swore to settle you* . . . (14:30). There are two exceptions to this absolute prohibition, which will be considered further on, but at this point the stark clarity of the language cannot be misunderstood: insofar as the Israelites are concerned, the covenant of the land has been broken.

Within the pages of Numbers, the covenant of Sinai also is shattered, though, significantly, it is not the populace as a whole which is responsible; rather, it is the leadership — specifically, Moses and Aaron — that bears the onus for breaking this covenant. The critical incident takes place in Chapter 20 in the story of the rock that produces water.

To put this episode in context, we should recall that this same story has occurred earlier in Exodus, but, as told in Numbers, the tale assumes a far different tone. Thus, in Chapter 17 of Exodus, after the

2 Throughout this article, the English translation of Numbers is as it appears in the recently released commentary by Jacob Milgrom is employed. See, Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Phila. The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), hereafter referred to as Milgrom.

people complain of thirst, Moses asks the Lord what he should do. God responds by saying: *I will stand there upon the rock in Horeb before you and the people and you shall smite the rock and water shall come out of it* (Ex. 17:6).

This version of the story should be contrasted with that in Numbers. Here, in addition to striking the rock, Moses and Aaron do something more: they speak. And in the wake of their verbalization, they are punished by being forbidden to lead the people into the land of Israel. What did these leaders say and what wrong was conveyed by their utterance? The critical language is at 20:10: *. . . and [Moses] said to [the people] shall we get water for you out of this rock*? In what has been called "the fatal pronoun,"[3] the answer to these queries emerges. Before the assembled multitude, the pronoun "we" (*notsi*) — shall *we* get water — conveys the notion that the miracle belongs not to God but rather to Moses and Aaron. Unlike the version of the story in Exodus, then, here Moses and Aaron lay personal claim to the miracle and in so doing they put themselves forward in the place of God and arrogate to themselves the divine power.[4]

It is this usurpation that represents the rejection of the Sinai covenant of faith:

> *. . . the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them'* (Num. 20:12).

Somewhat later, the incident is recalled in the same way:

> *For, in the wilderness of Zin . . . you disobeyed My command to uphold My sanctity . . .* (Num. 27:14).

3 Milgrom, comment on 20:10, p. 165.

4 As indicated by Milgrom, this interpretation has a long tradition tracing back to Joseph ben Isaac (*Bekhor Shor*) and Rabbi Hananel ben Hushiel of Kairouwan. See Milgrom p. 451.

In this way, the covenant of Sinai, the covenant of loyalty to God is broken as well.

THE COVENANTS RESTORED

Neither the land covenant nor the spiritual covenant remains in this shattered state. As one reads further through Numbers, the text points the way by which both of these covenants are — or will be — restored.

In the case of the spiritual covenant, the agent of restoration in Numbers is Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron. The setting is Peor in Moab, at the very frontier of the Promised Land. At this location, the Israelites engage in the cult worship of Baal by whoring with the Moabite women. After spotting one couple engaging in intercourse in the proximity of the sanctuary, Phinehas without hesitation slays the offending idolaters. As a reward for arresting this apostasy, the response of the Lord is especially significant: He establishes the covenant of priesthood with Phinehas and his line, later known as the Zadokites:

> *Say, therefore, I grant him [Phinehas] My pact of friendship. It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time, because he took impassioned action for his God, thus making expiation for the Israelites* (Num. 25:12-13).

Thus, Phinehas, who acted to prevent the sanctuary from being despoiled, can be viewed as doing what Moses and his grandfather Aaron were punished for failing to do: namely, affirming the sanctity of the Lord in the sight of the Israelite people.

With regard to the land covenant, it is noted earlier that when the entire adult male population of the Exodus was punished by being forbidden to enter the promised land, there were two exceptions: Joshua and Caleb. These two merited this exception because they were the only ones to dissent from the report of the scouts. As such, Joshua and Caleb were in a unique position: they were the *only*

persons of the Exodus generation who had not rejected the covenant of the land, and they are, therefore, essential to the story of how this covenant was re-established.

Looking first at the case of Joshua, it is important to recall that at the point in Numbers where he is selected to be the successor to Moses, Joshua is described in quite a particular manner:

> *someone . . . who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that the Lord's community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd* (Num. 27:16-17).

As Milgrom observes, there is only one other person in the Bible who is accorded this description: David. This identical characterization, moreover, occurs at a most important moment — when the tribes of the Northern Kingdom are about to anoint David as their king (II Sam. 5:2). Under these conditions, one can easily regard the *who shall go out . . . and come in* language ascribed to Joshua as presaging the united monarchy under David. Thus, Joshua — who refused to reject the covenant of the land — is linked to David, the king who is most closely identified with achieving the realization of the promise that is the essence of the land covenant.[5]

As for the other dissenting scout, Caleb, to appreciate his role it is useful to refer to Milgrom's textual analysis where he argues that Numbers actually weaves together two separate scouting expeditions: one involving Joshua and traversing all of Canaan; the other, led by Caleb, but embracing only the area proximate to Hebron in the south. According to this reading, therefore, the land which the Lord promises to Caleb as a reward for his loyalty is the area in and around Hebron, and it is this region which he eventually conquers.[6]

5 Indeed, a prominent theme of Psalm 89 is the covenant with David: *I will appoint him first-born, highest of the kings of the earth. I will maintain My steadfast love for him always; My covenant with him shall endure. I will establish his line forever, his throne, as long as the heavens last* (89:28-30). See also Ps. 132: 10-12 and Jer. 33:19-22.

6 Milgrom, pp. 387-92.

In the tradition of the land covenant, though, Hebron assumes an especially prominent role. First and foremost, it is the site of the patriarchal tombs — a fact that links Hebron, and by analogy, Caleb — to the land covenant of Genesis. Beyond this, Hebron also is the place where David is crowned. In fact, he is twice crowned: first as king of Judah (I Sam. 2:4) and again as ruler of all Israel (II Sam. 5:1-3). Considered in this light, then, Caleb — with his close association to Hebron — also foreshadows the restoration of the land covenant.

CONCLUSION

Just as Numbers serves as a book of geographical transition — relating the story of the Hebrews in the wilderness from the Exodus out of Egypt to the conquest of Canaan — so too can it be seen as providing a conceptual bridge between earlier and later notions of covenant. This is apparent both with respect to the civil covenant of the promised land as proclaimed in Genesis and the spiritual covenant of Exodus.

In both cases, Numbers prominently features episodes in which these covenants initially are ruptured by the generation of the Exodus and its leadership. As the text unfolds, the mechanisms by which these covenants eventually are to be restored are set forth, but these vehicles are designed in a manner that specifically looks to the civil and religious dynasties which will become operative in Canaan once the land is settled by the Israelites.[7] Thus, by rejecting the report of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb maintain a linkage to the covenant of Genesis; at the same time, their distinct orientation to the Davidic line anticipates the political leadership that, in fact, will realize the covenant of the land. Similarly, by his actions at Baal-Peor, Phinehas fosters the dynasty of the priesthood that

7 Milgrom, pp. 216-17.

re-establishes the spiritual covenant which his grandfather and Moses earlier had forsaken in the incident with the rock.

Considered in this way, the transitional character of Numbers is significantly amplified. In its treatment of the covenants, the book underscores the linkage between the patriarchs and the Divine on the one hand and the political and religious leadership of the new nation on the other.

THE LARGE NUMBERS IN THE BIBLE

JOHN WENHAM

The Old Testament at various places records numbers which seem impossibly large. It has often been assumed that these figures were simply invented, and are evidence that the Bible is historically unreliable. But who would make up figures which are patently absurd? Would any man in his senses invent a story of a bus crash in which 16,000 passengers were killed? It is much more likely that the numbers in the Bible were faithfully copied out, despite the fact that they did not seem to make sense. Invention does not satisfactorily account for them. The explanation must lie elsewhere. And in fact, patient research has gone a long way towards resolving this knotty problem.

THE CORRUPTION OF NUMBERS

There is evidence that the Old Testament text is on the whole marvelously well preserved. There is also evidence from the parallel passages in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles and (especially) in Ezra 2 and Nehemia 7 that numbers were peculiarly difficult to transmit accurately. We have instances of extra zeros being added to a number: II Samuel 10:18 reads '700 chariots,' I Chronicles 19:18 reads, '7,000.' A digit can drop out: II Kings 24:8 gives the age of Jehoiachim on accession as 18, whereas II Chronicles 36:9 gives it as 8. An entire numeral can drop out: I Samuel 13:1 says 'Saul was years old.' In Ezra 2 and Nehemia 7 the digits often vary by one unit. And there are other errors of copying, many of which are easily explained.

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THE CONFUSION OF WORDS

In the Hebrew Bible of today all numbers are written out in full, but in ancient times, the text was written without vowels. The absence of vowels made it possible to confuse two words which are crucial to this problem: *eleph* and *alluph*. Without vowel points these words look identical: *'lp*. *Eleph* is the ordinary word for "thousand," but it can also be used in a variety of other senses: e.g., "family" (Jud. 6:15, Revised Version) or "clan" (Zech. 9:7; 12:5, 6, Revised Standard Version) or perhaps a military unit. *Alluph* is used for the "chieftains" of Edom (Gen. 36:15-43), probably for a commander of a military "thousand," and almost certainly for the professional, fully-armed soldier.

MILITARY STATISTICS

A military force of over 600,000 as cited in Numbers 1:46 would mean a total population of some 2-3 million. The Bible account makes it plain that the numbers involved were considerable. Israel could not have survived in the desert without God's miraculous provision. Even so, 2-3 million would equal the entire population of Canaan, and other passages imply that the Canaanites were more numerous than the Israelites (Deut. 7:7, 17, 22). For this reason, various attempts have been made to reduce the numbers. Some believe, for example, that the word translated "thousands" should be "captains"; others that it should be "families." It is also possible that the numbers are used as symbols of power and importance, rather than a literal count of heads.

At certain periods warfare was conducted by two sharply distinguished types of fighting men — the Goliaths and the Davids — the professional soldiers who were fully armed, and the folk army, whose only weapons were those of the peasant shepherd. It seems clear that in a number of places the word for professional soldier had been misunderstood as meaning "thousand." Take, for

example, the attack on the little town of Gibeah in Judges 20. Verse 2 says that 400,000 footmen "that drew the sword" assembled. If these were in fact 400 fully armed foot-soldiers, the subsequent narrative makes excellent sense. The Benjaminite forces (verse 15) consist of 26 soldiers armed with swords, together with 700 men armed only with slings. At the first attack (verse 21) the Israelites lose 22 of their crack soldiers, the next day (verse 25) they lose a further 18; on the third day (verses 29, 34) an ambush is set, consisting of, or led by, 10 of them. (Could 10,000 men take up their positions undetected?) The losses begin again (verse 31) "as at other times" and in this case the scale of loss has been clearly preserved, for about 30 Israelites (not apparently sword-armed soldiers), 25 Benjaminite soldiers and 100 others are killed. Eighteen of them were killed in the first stage of the pursuit, five were later "cut down in the highways" and two more at Gibeah. The remaining 600 slingers took refuge in the rock of Rimmon. Similarly, in the assault on Ai (Josh. 7-8) the true proportions of the narrative become clear when we realize that the disastrous loss of 36 men is matched by the setting of an ambush, not of 30,000 men of valor, but of 30.

David's feast in Hebron in I Chronicles 12 appears to be attended by enormous numbers, not of ordinary men but of distinguished leaders — some 340,800 of them. In this case it looks as though in fact there were "captains of thousands" and "captains of hundreds," and that by metonymy or by abbreviation "thousand" has been used for "captains of thousands" and "hundreds" for "captains of hundreds." "Thousand" and "hundred" have been treated as numerals and added together. When these figures are unscrambled we get a total of roughly 2,000 "famous men," which seems emi-nently reasonable.

Along these lines most of the numerical problems of the later history fall into place. In I Kings 20:27-30, the little Israelite army killed 100 (not 100,000) foot-soldiers, and the wall of Aphek killed 27 (not 27,000) more. The Ethiopian (Sudanese) invasion had a thousand, not a million, warriors (II Chr. 14:9). 10 (not 10,000) were cast down from the top of the rock (II Chr. 25:12).

THE SIZE OF THE ISRAELITE NATION

The most interesting, most difficult and (from the historian's point of view) the most important question is the size of the Israelite population at the different stages of its history. The present texts indicate that the 70 souls of Joseph's day had risen to two or three million at the time of the Exodus (Num. 1) and to at least five million in the time of David (II Sam. 24:9; I Chr. 21:5). With regard to the latter, R. de Vaux rightly says: "[Sam.] lists 800,000 men liable for military service in Israel, and 500,000 in Judah . . . . The lower total, in Samuel, is still far too high: 1,300,000 men of military age would imply at least five million inhabitants, which, for Palestine, would mean nearly twice as many people to the square mile as in the most thickly populated countries of modern Europe."

The solution of the problem of the Exodus numbers is a long story. Suffice it to say that there is good reason to believe that the original censuses in Numbers 1 and 26 set out the numbers of each tribe, somewhat in this form:

Simeon:

57 armed men; 23 "hundreds" (military units).

This came to be written: 57 *'lph*; 2 *'lph* 3 "hundreds."

Not realizing that *'lph* in one case meant "armed man" and in the other "thousand," this was tidied up to read 59,300. When these figures are carefully decoded, a remarkably clear picture of the whole military organization emerges. The total fighting force is some 18,000, which would probably mean a figure of about 72,000 for the whole migration.

The figures of the Levites seem consistently to have collected an extra zero. The mystery of Plato's Atlantis has been solved by recognition of this same numerical confusion. Plato obtained from Egyptian priests what now turns out to be a detailed account of the Minoan civilization and its sudden end. But as all the figures were multiplied by a factor of ten, the area was too great to be enclosed in the Mediterranean, so he placed it in the Atlantic; and the date was

put back into remote antiquity, thousands of years too early. This same tenfold multiplication factor is found in the figures of the Levites in the Book of Numbers. When it is eliminated, Levi fits into the pattern as a standard-size tribe of about 2,200 males. These figures agree remarkably well with the other indications of population in the period of the conquest and the Judges.

DAVID'S CENSUS

The discrepancy between the two sets of figures for David's census can be accounted for by recognizing different stages in transmission, first, the addition of zeros, and then, a misunderstanding of *'lph*. If we postulate original figures: Israel: 80,000 plus 30 *'lph*; Judah: 40,000 plus 70 *'lph*, the present text of both Samuel and Chronicles can be accounted for thus:

Chronicles:

Stage	Israel	Judah
1	80,000 + 30 *'lph*	40,000 + 70 *'lph*
2	800,000 + 300 *'lph*	4000,000 + 70 *'lph*
3	1,100,000	470,000

Samuel:

Stage	Israel	Judah
1	80,000 + 30 *'lph*	40,000 + 70 *'lph*
2	800,000 + 30 *'lph*	470,000

At this stage it would seem that the copyist was perplexed by the floating "30 *'lph*," which he took to be 30,000. He wrongly combined it with the Judah figure, so producing:

3	800,000	500,000

If the original figures in stage 1 totaled 120,000 men of military age, together with 100 professional soldiers, the entire population would have been about half a million, which again tallies well with other indications in the text.

By the use of these methods a very large proportion of the numerical difficulties can be resolved.

BDELLIUM

ABRAHAM H. GOTTESMAN

The Hebrew word *bedolah*, translated by the English, " bdellium" appears twice in the Bible, in Genesis 2:12 and Numbers 11:7, but its meaning is not disclosed in either of these two verses and is therefore uncertain. The two most commonly held ideas are: (1) that bdellium is a jewel, and (2) that it is a resin — i.e., a sap which extrudes from a tree or shrub. Both meanings can be justified.

Such a simple answer may be correct, but not illuminating. Why is bdellium even mentioned in the Bible at all? The Bible does not include stories or even words which are insignificant or unimportant. Its primary objective is to present a message; to teach ethical or moral concepts. It is the aim of this paper to discover the relevance of bdellium in the text through an exploration of the biblical text and other related sources.

Let us begin with Genesis 2:7-12. Man is created (2:7), then God plants a garden eastward in Eden where he puts man (2:8). The garden is watered by a river which parts into four heads (2:10). The next verses are directly related to our topic: *The name of the first is Pishon; that is it which compasses the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; there is bdellium and the shoham* [onyx] *stone* (2:10-12).

It is to be noted here that not only is bdellium not identified or described, but also there is no clarity about the other names.

The Pishon River is unknown. It is considered by some authorities, including Rashi, to be the Nile, and by others to be the Ganges. The land of Havilah is an obscure region. From a negative viewpoint, it is assumed not to be Egypt, while some think it is southern

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Arabia. The shoham stone is mentioned later in the Bible (Ex. 28) as one of the twelve precious stones embedded in the priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:20). Each jewel represented one of the twelve tribes, and the shoham stone was for the tribe of Joseph because its flag was black and the shoham stone is identified as onyx, which is black. However, Speiser believes it to be lapis lazuli, and others consider the shoham stone to be a very hard, rare, valuable jewel which is no longer in existence.

Why is the Bible so uninformative and obscure in this area? Can it be said that the ancient people readily understood what these names meant? Perhaps this conjecture may be correct, but another explanation might be considered: the Bible is deliberately terse and obscure so that its meaning be open ended.

Specificity is too limiting and restrictive, whereas obscurity enables the mind to meander and reflect. For even one word may have multiple meanings or references and thus embrace many different areas of understanding which can give depth and dimension to a word or passage. Perhaps the word bdellium is such a word.

That bdellium might be a jewel may be inferred in part from its contiguity in Genesis 2 with gold and the shoham stone. In this context it is certainly a precious substance. Perhaps more revealing is a comparative study of the Garden of Eden story and an ancient Mesopotamian myth which tells of the creation of a garden of the gods. In this garden there are trees of gold from whose branches hung jewels. Man is put there to serve the gods. By contrast, the Bible avoids such fantastic features and eliminated the mythical elements. The Garden of Eden is realistic and natural, with trees pleasing to the sight and good for food (Gen. 2:9), created by God for man's benefit.

Still, the wondrous garden of the Mesopotamian myth must have had great appeal to our earliest ancestors for, as noted above, the Bible does include gold and jewels in its story. However, such riches are not supernatural, and they are not in the garden itself. The Bible conveys the suggestion that they can be found somewhere nearby. It

would appear that by this method the Bible employs a kind of weaning process to divert attention from the appeal of a fabulous mythical garden to a more realistic yet satisfying substitution. For the inclusion of gold and jewels in the Garden of Eden story could lead to the belief that the Garden of Eden is nearly identical to the Mesopotamian mythical garden. Indeed, Ezekiel 28:13 speaks of the Garden of Eden being covered with precious stones.

Our study now takes us to consideration of the second mention of bdellium in the Bible. In Numbers 11:7, bdellium is mentioned in connection with manna: *Now the manna was like coriander seed and the appearance thereof was as the appearance of bdellium.* Obviously this verse offers no help as to the nature of bdellium. Perhaps a distant clue may be gleaned from the description of manna in Exodus 16:14: *when the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance as fine as frost on the ground.* Abraham Ibn Ezra regarded manna as white and sparkling (like frost, one would suppose). In like manner, bdellium might be likened in appearance to sparkling frost, and thus opens the possibility that bdellium is a shining jewel. Rashi refers to bdellium as crystal.

Thus far there is nothing in the text which suggests that bdellium is a resinous gum, nor that such resin has any special properties. However, in Ginzberg's *Legends of the Bible*, we discover that in the desert, manna gave forth a wonderful fragrance (Yoma 75a).

If we now consider bdellium as a fragrant substance, a whole new vista opens for understanding the significance of bdellium. Aroma, a delight to the sense of smell, has always been highly valued throughout the ages. Spices, perfumes and aromatic products were particularly desirable in ancient times on their own account.

We learn from botanists that bdellium is indeed a high-quality fragrant resin obtained from various shrubs of the genus *commiphora*. We come closer to our subject when we learn that bdellium is closely linked to that most precious of ancient perfumes, myrrh, which is also obtained from another species of the

commiphora shrub. Indeed, a resin named bellosis was commonly called sweet myrrh or bdellium myrrh.

A special variety of myrrh called *mor d'ror* (*d'ror* from *dar* meaning pearl) was the most important ingredient in the compounding of the anointing oil mentioned in Exodus 30:23. This myrrh was a special resin which exudes from the shrub as liquid but soon solidified into small pearl-like globules. It is thus noteworthy that Saadia referred to bdellium as "pearls." Here is a link between the identifications of bdellium as a jewel and as a resin.

In ancient times, myrrh and frankincense were two of the most highly prized fragrant resins. They were precious and very expensive and were stored together with gold, jewels and other royal treasures in the Temple treasuries. But there were other products such as gum, balm, ladanum (an exudate from the citrus shrub) and spicery which were also notable for their fragrances. The earliest reference to aromas in the Bible is in Genesis 8:20-21. After emerging from the ark, Noah offers a burnt offering on the altar: *And the Lord smelled the sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart: 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living as I have done.'* These verses reveal the special significance of fragrance. Not only does God appreciate the aroma but, in this account, the aroma inclines Him to be generous to mankind. Thus good odors signify blessings and life from God.

In Genesis 37:25 we read that Joseph's brothers cast him into a pit, then sit down to eat bread *and they lifted up their eyes . . . and, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery, gum, balm and ladanum, going to carry it down to Egypt.*

Similarly, Jacob instructs his sons to go to Egypt to buy food because of the famine: *Carry down a present, a little balm and a little honey, spicery and ladanum, nuts, and almonds* (Gen. 43:11).

In Leviticus 1-4, the various burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings and sin offerings are repeatedly referred to as a *sweet savor unto the Lord*. In the Bible, fragrances are an indicator of sacredness. They have special meaning in relationship to God, not only in pleasing God through sacrifices, but reciprocally if God is pleased, He is beneficent, forgiving and life giving.

Further in Leviticus, one of the "four species" used during Sukkot is the myrtle. Although identified as the *boughs of leafy trees* (Lev. 23:40), myrtle is a highly fragrant shrub.

Returning now to bdellium, in Numbers we discover another aspect of our study of fragrances: those which are not pleasing but malodorous instead.

Numbers 11 is an extraordinary chapter, particularly revealing if studied in conjunction with Exodus 16. In both chapters in which manna and quail are mentioned there are references to bad odors.

In Exodus 16, the people have not yet reached Mount Sinai and they are starving. God provides them with the life-sustaining manna. But despite Moses' explicit instructions, the people gather too much manna and it rots and stinks. In Numbers 11, one year after Sinai, the people murmur against God because of a lack of variety of food. Here they are provided with quail which stinks in their nostrils and becomes loathsome to them. Bad odors are thus associated with the people's disobedience to God, arousing His great displeasure which results in their punishment or death.

We now come closer to learning why bdellium is mentioned in Numbers 11. Perhaps a greater appreciation of its inclusion may be derived from an uncommon style used in this chapter for it appears in the text that there is dismay at the unwarranted complaints. In the beginning of the chapter, the people speak evil against God, who is very angry. Later they cry because of a lack of the variety of foods they had in Egypt. They also complain that the manna is dry and tasteless (Num. 11:6-7). Something had gone seriously awry. It must have been very puzzling that the people had regressed so badly. They had apparently forgotten the evils of slavery in Egypt; the

suffering and decrees of death under the tyrannical rule of a Pharaoh. They had forgotten their rescue by God through the infliction of plague after plague on the Egyptians. Why did they not remember all the wondrous things God did for them? Why could they not have viewed every morning the glistening frost on the manna awakening within them an ancestral fantasy of jewels paving the Garden of Eden and then to feast on manna provided to them from heaven?

In Exodus 16:31 it is stated that the *manna was like coriander seed* and in Numbers 11:7 the beginning of the verse is identical, *Now the manna was like coriander seed*, but here a description is added: bdellium. What a brilliant insertion, linking the wilderness experience with the Garden of Eden!

For bdellium, as an epitome or representation of the most highly prized fragrances, has the potential of conjuring up many meaningful images: of sacred rituals; of God's beneficence and forgiveness of sin and evil; of life and hope for a better life. Potentially, it could stimulate a sense of positiveness as well as act as an antidote to regressive longings and regressive behavior. All this and much more is subsumed in the Bible in the key word "bdellium."

Lastly, what seems remarkable is that linking together verses from various books of the Pentateuch provides an opportunity to clarify otherwise obscure passages, and results in a deeper, richer understanding of the Bible and leads one to regard the unity of Scripture with awe and reverence.

REFLECTIONS OF READERS

JUDAH AND JOSEPH: A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

HERBERT RAND

Genesis 38 leaves the reader with the picture of Joseph in Egypt to interrupt the story with the incident of Judah's escapade with Tamar. This chapter tells how she disguised herself as a prostitute so Judah did not recognize her when he encountered her on the road and had relations with her.

Some commentators, such as Speiser, regard the inserted narrative as intrusive, a completely independent unit which has no connection with the drama of Joseph. Hertz contrasts the conduct of Joseph, who resisted the blandishments of Potiphar's wife, with the sexual encounter between Judah and Tamar. Sforno suggests that Judah's loss of two of his sons during their marriages to Tamar was in retribution for his participation in the kidnaping which deprived Jacob of Joseph.

The key to understanding why the Judah-Tamar story was inserted at that place is genealogy. It is the turning point of the Joseph story, the binding force which connects the early and latter parts of the saga. In the early part of the Joseph story, the actions of Jacob and his other sons had the effect of breaking up the family. Jacob's favoritism and his gift to Joseph of a regal, multicolored coat were contributing causes for the brothers' hatred, which culminated in the break up of the family and the sale of Joseph as a slave in Egypt. Indeed, Joseph had contributed fuel to the fires of fraternal hatred when he revealed his dreams of dominating his older brothers. In contrast with the early part of the Joseph story, Tamar was motivated by the desire to build up the family of Jacob. She had been left a childless, widowed daughter-in-law of Judah through luckless marriages with two of his sons; she was being ignored, and deprived of her right to marry a third son and propagate Jacob's line.

So, when she put on the veiled garb of a prostitute and placed herself at the side of the road to entice Judah, she was acting to build up the family.

The inclusion of the Judah-Tamar incident as an interlude in the Joseph saga reinforces the principle that the growth and continuity of Jacob's lineage were of paramount importance to the emergence and destiny of the people of Israel.

THE BIBLE LANDS MUSEUM

ABRAHAM RUDERMAN

The Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem is a treasure trove of artifacts and relics from a dozen civilizations of the ancient Near East that brings to life the history of Israel, Judaism and early Christianity. Some of the objects in the collection date as far back as 6000 B.C.E., and provide material evidence of life in the biblical age.

The founders of the Museum are Dr. Elie Borowski of Toronto and Jerusalem and his wife Batya. Dr. Borowski, a scholar and collector of Near Eastern antiquities, has donated his collection to the Museum. He began the collection more than 40 years ago when he bought a cylinder seal from an Armenian art dealer; the seal bears the name of "Shallum," whom he believed to be Shallum ben-Jabesh, king of Israel in the mid-eighth century B.C.E.

Just as "no man is an island," neither is any civilization, particularly that of the ancient Near East. We come to a fuller understanding of the Bible by understanding the surrounding world. The Bible Lands Museum reflects the millennia-old interplay of neighboring cultures, with the life of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Hittite Empire and others shown in juxtaposition to that described in the Bible.

There are striking bronzes, mosaics and massive sarcophagi, seals from Sumeria, ivory inlays from Phoenicia, terracotta figurines from Syria, wine vessels from Persia, various items from Anatolia and the Byzantine Empire — the world of the Bible and the cradle of our civilization.

For example: Phoenicians made ivory and bronze figures of hybrid creatures, combining features of man, eagle, lion and bull,

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.

the kind of creature described in Ezekiel 1:10. These figures bring to mind the battle the prophets waged against idolatry, and the injunction in Numbers 33:52, *You shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you and destroy all their pictures and their molten images, and demolish all the cult places.*

A bronze showing a female figure carrying an idol on her should remind us of Rachel taking the teraphim from her father's house (Gen. 31:34).

A display of miniature wagons in metal and in stone, drawn by oxen, recalls Genesis 46:5, *And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba, and the sons of Israel put their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to transport them.*

In Genesis 24:45, Rebecca carries a water pitcher to the well, and this scene is illustrated by many such pitchers from that period.

A beautiful display of ceramic necklaces, metal bracelets and rings with dove-shaped stones suggest the verse in Isaiah 61:10, *As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

On the lower level of the Museum there are a large auditorium, a library, research and study rooms and a cafeteria. Around the building, the garden is planted with trees, bushes and flowers mentioned in the Bible.

The emblem of the Bible Lands Museum is inspired by Genesis I — a composition of a star symbolizing the heavens, a horizontal line depicting the earth and two wavy lines representing the sea.

An unforgettable experience awaits the visitor to The Bible Lands Museum.

עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

April 1993			May 1993		
1	Th	Psalms 6	2	S	Psalms 27
2	F	Leviticus 12:1-13:28	3	M	Psalms 28
			4	T	Psalms 29
4	S	Psalms 7	5	W	Psalms 30
5	M	Psalms 8	6	Th	Psalms 31
6	T	Psalms 9	7	F	Leviticus 15:25-16:34
7	W	Psalms 10			
8	Th	Psalms 11	9	S	Psalms 32
9	F	Leviticus 13:29-13:59	10	M	Psalms 33
			11	T	Psalms 34
11	S	Psalms 12	12	W	Psalms 35
12	M	Psalms 13	13	Th	Psalms 36
13	T	Psalms 14	14	F	Leviticus 17:1-17:16
14	W	Psalms 15			
15	Th	Psalms 16	16	S	Psalms 37
16	F	Leviticus 14:1-14:32	17	M	Psalms 38 (1-20)
			18	T	Psalms 38 (21-40)
18	S	Psalms 17	19	W	Psalms 39
19	M	Psalms 18	20	Th	Psalms 40
20	T	Psalms 19	21	F	Leviticus 18:1-18:30
21	W	Psalms 20			
22	Th	Psalms 21	23	S	Psalms 41
23	F	Leviticus 14:33-14:57	22	M	Psalms 42
			25	T	Psalms 43
25	S	Psalms 22	26	W	Psalms 44
26	M	Psalms 23	27	Th	Psalms 45
27	T	Psalms 24	28	F	Leviticus 19:1-19:22
28	W	Psalms 25			
29	Th	Psalms 26	30	S	Psalms 46
30	F	Leviticus 15:1-15:24	31	M	Psalms 47

June 1993

1	T	Psalms 48
2	W	Psalms 49
3	Th	Psalms 50
4	F	Leviticus 19:23-20:27
6	S	Psalms 51
7	M	Psalms 52
8	T	Psalms 53
9	W	Psalms 54
10	Th	Psalms 55
11	F	Leviticus 21:1-22:16
13	S	Psalms 56
14	M	Psalms 57
15	T	Psalms 58
16	W	Psalms 59
17	Th	Psalms 60
18	F	Leviticus 22:17-23:14
20	S	Psalms 61
21	M	Psalms 62
22	T	Psalms 63
23	W	Psalms 64
24	Th	Psalms 65
25	F	Leviticus 23:15-25:13
27	S	Psalms 66
28	M	Psalms 67
29	T	Psalms 68
30	W	Psalms 69

July 1993

1	Th	Psalms 70
2	F	Leviticus 25:14-25:34
4	S	Psalms 71
5	M	Psalms 72
6	T	Psalms 73
7	W	Psalms 74
8	Th	Psalms 75
9	F	Leviticus 25:35-26:2
11	S	Psalms 76
12	M	Psalms 77
13	T	Psalms 78
14	W	Psalms 79
15	Th	Psalms 80
16	F	Leviticus 26:3-26:46
18	S	Psalms 81
19	M	Psalms 82
20	T	Psalms 83
21	W	Psalms 84
22	Th	Psalms 85
23	F	Leviticus 27:1-27:34
25	S	Psalms 86
26	M	Psalms 87
27	T	Psalms 88
28	W	Psalms 89
29	Th	Psalms 90
30	F	Numbers 1:1-1:54

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ע and א	assumes the sound of its accompanying vowel = e.g., Amen, Alenu, Olam, Eretz.
ה	= H e.g., Hodesh.
ב and פ	= K e.g., Ketuvim, Kadosh.
כ	= Kh e.g., Melekh.
צ	= Tz e.g., Tzaddik.
ֵ	= E e.g., Ben.

Standard transliteration of biblical names remains unchanged.

FOOTNOTES:

For a book: Author's name, *Title of Book*, (place, date of publication), p.

For an article: Author's name, "Title of Article," *Title of Book* or *Periodical*, vol. (date), p.

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