

# **REFLECTIONS OF READERS**

## **THE NUMERICAL EXPRESSION OF TWO FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS IN THE TORAH**

**GERARDO G. SACHS**

The importance, even the holy character, which the number seven had in the ancient Near East is well known and has been the topic of studies and papers. It is not surprising, then, that it also has this same character in the Torah.

According to Rashi on Exodus 31:13-14, the seventh day of the week, Shabbat, has first priority and even interrupts the construction of the Tabernacle. Its observance is not interrupted by any other festival. The seventh year frees the slave (Ex. 21:2) and extinguishes all debts (Deut. 15:1). Accordingly, each seventh year the farmer is forbidden to sow or reap or do any other farm labor (Ex. 23:11-12). The festivals of the deliverance (Pessah) and of the last harvest (*Succot*) each lasts seven days (Ex. 13:7, Deut. 16:13). The menorah in the Tabernacle and later in the First and Second Temples had seven candles (Ex. 25:37).

Far and wide in the Scriptures, in poetry and tales, there are many examples of ideas that reflect a special significance of the number seven which finally became part of the mentality of Occident in general. Obviously, this number seven symbolizes the idea of "completed" or "perfect."

Much less attention has been given to the number that follows seven, the number eight. It appears in many laws as a kind of complement to seven; for example, circumcision on the eighth day after birth (Gen. 17:12). Beginning with the first workday of the harvest of grain, fixed as the day following the first day of Pessah, we count seven times seven full weeks to the festival of *Shavuot*, not on the forty-ninth day but on the day that follows it (Lev. 23:16).

After the seven days of celebration of *Succot* there follows the additional and separate festival of of Shemini Atzeret (Lev. 23:39), as it were the beginning of another agricultural cycle.

After the seven days of his preparation and learning, on the eighth day the priest begins to perform his duties (Lev. 9).

The year that follows seven-times-seven years, that is, the fiftieth year of the cycle, is the Jubilee, when all alienated property is restored to the original owners (Lev. 25:8-10).

Hanukkah lasts eight days.

The number eight stands for a new start.

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## ***SONS OF ELOKIM AS USED IN GENESIS***

**ELIHU A. SCHATZ**

The unusual concept of the *sons of Elokim* marrying the *daughters of Adam* is found in Genesis 6:2: *And the sons of Elokim saw the daughters of Adam that they were fair, and they took for themselves wives from whomsoever they chose.* Two sentences later, it is stated: *When the sons of Elokim cohabited with the daughters of Adam, and they bore them offspring; they were the heroes of old, the men of renown.*

The term *sons of Elokim* has been used in Job 1:6, 2:1 and Daniel 25 to refer to angels. In contrast, the term in Job 38:7 more probably refers to Man who was created on the sixth day of Creation.

In biblical criticism, these sentences have been interpreted as referring to male celestial beings, such as angels, marrying human females, and reflect legends and mythology that have entered into the biblical text. However, the concept that angels could marry humans is foreign to Judaism. Ibn Ezra explains that the term *sons of Elokim* in Genesis does not mean angels, but rather important people such as sons of judges or holy persons or capable people.

A more straight-forward interpretation is that *sons of Elokim* are the men who were created in a direct manner by God, as in Genesis 2:7: *And God Elokim formed Adam of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils*

*the breath of life, and Adam became a living being. Similarly, the daughters of Adam refers to women who were created in an indirect manner from the side of Adam, as in Genesis 2:22: And God Elokim made woman from the side that he took from Adam . . . And Adam said, 'This is now bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken from man.'*

In other words, the text in Genesis 6:1-4 simply states that men who were created in a direct manner by *Elokim* married women who were created in an indirect manner from the side of man. Even though man and woman were created by a different procedure, they were able to cohabit and have exceptional children. There is thus no hint of mythology in the passage Genesis 6:1-4.

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## **POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL MUTINIES**

**ISRAEL C. STEIN**

The episode of the spies in Numbers 14 was a challenge to the political and spiritual leadership of Moses. The majority report not only threatened Moses personally but also represented a serious schism within the body politic of the people of Israel. One is reminded of the lesson President Abraham Lincoln taught when he said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." As the Confederacy was defeated in war, so those who raised an insurrection were undone in a calamity.

The political mutiny against Moses in Numbers 14 is directly followed by a spiritual mutiny in Numbers 15. This comes with the willful violation of Shabbat by a certain gatherer of wood, a violation of the only ceremonial

mitzvah in the Decalogue and a mainstay of Israelite/Jewish identity. This mutiny against God brought about the execution of the offender.

The parallels between Numbers 14 and 15 are obvious. The people of Israel cohere as a nation by remaining at one in its body politic under Moses and its commitment to religious forms under God.

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