

# LAKE SHORE DRIVE SYNAGOGUE

70 EAST ELM STREET  
PHONE: 312-337-6811

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611  
EMAIL: lds70@yahoo.com

Shomrei Israel  
שומרי ישראל  
WEBSITE: lds70.org

## WAS IT AN APPLE?

All that Genesis says about the fruit that the snake enticed Eve to entice Adam to eat was that it was a “fruit.”  
2:17. 17. But of the **tree** of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

3:2. And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the **trees** of the garden;

3:3. But of the fruit of the **tree** which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, you shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.

So how did that fruit become associated with an “apple?”

It wasn't always so. A fresco in the 13th-century Plaincourault Abbey in France depicts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, flanking a Tree of Knowledge that has the appearance of a gigantic *Amanita muscaria*, a psychoactive mushroom. In recent years the English archaeologist John Marco Allegro proposed that the **mushroom** was the forbidden fruit, culminating with his 1970 book, The Sacred Mushroom and The Cross..



Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco, painted between 1508 and 1512, depicts a **fig** tree:



This, even though the Albrecht Durer painting of 1507 depicts Eve handing Adam an **apple**:



Let's look at Jewish sources. The pseudepigraphic Book of Enoch (said to be written by Noah's father, and really dated around 300 BCE) describes the tree of knowledge: "It was like a species of the **tamarind** tree, bearing fruit which resembled grapes extremely fine; and its fragrance extended to a considerable distance. I exclaimed, How beautiful is this tree, and how delightful is its appearance!" (1 Enoch 31:4).

Rabbi Nechemia supports the idea that the fruit was a **fig**, as it was from fig leaves that God made garments for Adam and Eve upon expelling them from the Garden, saying "By that with which they were made low were they rectified." (Sanhedrin 70b). **Rabbi Yehuda** proposes that the fruit was **wheat**, because "a baby does not know to call its mother and father until it tastes the taste of grain" (Sanhedrin 70b). Rabbi Meir says that the fruit was a **grape**, made into wine, "for nothing else but wine brings woe to man" (Sanhedrin 70a). Finally, Bereshit Rabba (a collection of Midrash about Genesis, probably written between 300 and 500 CE) agrees with Rabbi Meir, saying that the fruit was a **grape** (15.7), or squeezed grapes, perhaps alluding to wine (19:5).

So where did the notion of an apple come from? In the Vulgate (390-495 CE), the Latin translation of the Tanach, Genesis 2:17 describes the tree as **de ligno autem scientiae boni et mali** ("the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). The last word, mali, is a form of the Latin noun malum, which means "evil," But there is another Latin noun, malum, which is borrowed from Greek μήλον, which means "apple." So a misreading of this Latin translation may have led to the notion that the fruit was an apple.

The notion that the fruit was an apple was popularized in the English-speaking world when, in Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan (1678), Book 2 Chapter 7, this was said. "Then they brought them up a dish of apples, and they were very good tasted fruit. Then said Matthew, "May we eat apples, since they were such by and with which the serpent deceived our first mother Eve?"

And what about the Adams's apple? The laryngeal prominence that joins the thyroid cartilage in the human throat is noticeably more prominent in males, and was dubbed "Adam's apple" from a notion that it was caused by the forbidden fruit getting stuck in Adam's throat as he swallowed it.

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## LILITH AND EVE

On December 8, 2018 I gave a *dvar torah*, based on the following verses from Genesis, focusing on the two charges given to Adam. In this article I turn to the two descriptions of Adam's wife given in Genesis.

1:26. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and **let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

1:27. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; **male and female He created them.**

2:21. And the Lord God made Adam fall into a deep sleep, and he slept; and He took one from his ribs, and closed up the flesh.

2:22. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made her a woman, and brought her to the man.

3:20. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

An intriguing question is whether the female referred to in Chapter 1 of Genesis is the Eve of the following chapters or whether she was a different creation. The concept of Eve having a predecessor can be found in Genesis Rabbah 18.4 (written between 300 and 500 CE, containing ancient rabbinic interpretations of Genesis). However, the idea that she had a name, Lilith, is first found in the pseudepigraphical 8th–10th century CE Alphabet of Ben Sira is considered to be the oldest form of the story of Lilith as Adam's first wife. Here's what it said:

*After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith immediately began to fight. She said, "I will not lie below," and he said, "I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be the superior one." Lilith responded, "We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth." But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: "Sovereign of the universe!" he said, "the woman you gave me has run away." At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angels Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof, to bring her back. Said the Holy One to Adam, "If she agrees to come back, what is made is good. If not, she must permit one hundred of her children to die every day." The angels left God and pursued Lilith, whom they overtook in the midst of the sea, in the mighty waters wherein the Egyptians were destined to drown. They told her God's word, but she did not wish to return. The angels said, "We shall drown you in the sea."*

*"Leave me!" she said. "I was created only to cause sickness to infants. If the infant is male, I have dominion over him for eight days after his birth, and if female, for twenty days." When the angels heard Lilith's words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: "Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I will have no power over that infant." She also agreed to have one hundred of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels' names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath, and the child recovers.*

Thus was the legend of Lilith first recorded. There are five mentions of Lilith in the Babylonian Talmud, none relating her to Adam, but all relating to her powers. Lilith has become an item of popular culture, especially in the occult literature. Because she was created co-equal with Adam, Lilith was adopted as the symbol of the women's liberation movement, with the birth of the magazine Lilith in 1976 as "independent, Jewish, and frankly feminist." What led me to write this piece was my search for pictures of Eve receiving the forbidden fruit that I wrote about in my last Bulletin. Here is a picture I found on the slipcover of Robert Alter's translation of Genesis, published in 1997. Note that the presenter of the apple is a snake with a female form, obviously Lilith.



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## AVODAT HALEV – THE NEW RCA SIDDIR

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In 1984 the Brooklyn-based Mesorah Publishing Company published its first siddur, dubbed the Art Scroll Siddur, with its own English translation, commentary on the prayers, and detailed “choreography” of the service (e.g., “step back three paces here,” etc.). The Rabbinic Association of America (RCA, an association of Orthodox rabbis) had to that date adopted as their standard English translation of the siddur that of Rabbi David de Sola Pool, published in 1941. When they saw the Art Scroll Siddur they liked it so much that they decided to adopt it as their new standard English translation, provided that the Art Scroll folks made two changes to the siddur. One was that a page be added containing the Prayer for the Welfare of the Country and the Prayer for the Welfare of Israel (the absence of these prayers was indicative of the bias of the Art Scroll editors). The other was to replace the introduction written by the Art Scroll editors with one written by the RCA. Art Scroll agreed to it and in 1987 the RCA adopted it and put a black cover on it to distinguish it from the brown-covered original Art Scroll Siddur.

Today, thirty two years later, the RCA dropped the Art Scroll Siddur and issued a new siddur, named Avodat Halev, published by the Israel-based publisher, Koren. They of course can’t call it the Koren Siddur because that’s the common name of the Rabbi Jonathan Sachs translation of the siddur which Koren published in 2009. That siddur not only has a translation written by a master of the English language but also has Rabbi Sachs’ commentary, much more palatable to a modern audience than that of the Art Scroll rabbis.

The new RCA siddur’s English translation, though better than that of the Art Scroll, does not even hold a candle to that of Rabbi Sachs (or even Rabbi de Sola Pool). That was predictable; it was done by a committee. The commentary, though, certainly outshines that of the Art Scroll, and gives Rabbi Sachs’s a run for the money. It is based on the collected comments made by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, which are deep and insightful. One problem, though, with the adoption of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s comments is that they spill over into the choreography of the service. In instances where Soloveitchik disagreed with the standard choreography (that reflected in both the Art Scroll and Koren Sachs siddur) the RCA includes both views and leaves it to the user to choose the practice he or she personally wishes to follow.

The most significant change from the Art Scroll siddur, at least according to the RCA’s publicity about Avodat Halev, is that it contains “halachically-sanctioned formulations to facilitate women’s participation in prayer.” I was surprised that an RCA siddur would contain anything that supported greater participation of women, given the recent statement signed by a number of RCA members condemning Orthodox synagogues for hiring ordained women for positions of authority. After examining the siddur my skepticism was sustained.

Yes, the presence of women in the congregation is recognized by the instruction: “*Tahanun* is omitted on certain days... In the presence of a groom **or** bride celebrating *sheva berakhot*.” The Siddur includes the text for a women’s leading of an all-women’s *Birkat Hamazon*, along with a halakhic note explaining the practice. The prayer for the government has been updated to reflect the future possibility that a woman will be elected president or vice-president of the United States. The *mishaberach* for a sick woman has “our mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah” added to the list of “our fathers.” And there is even a *mishaberach* for a Bat Mitzvah, but no discussion of what constitutes a Bat Mitzvah service (probably because the RCA has great internal disagreement about it). And there are no instructions in the siddur for the woman’s role in participatory *minyanim*. As the author of the [morethodoxy.org](http://morethodoxy.org) blog review of this siddur said, “Many of the feminist innovations in the Siddur carry the qualifications “Some” or “Many communities,” showing the editors’ fear that too much unqualified innovation on the feminist front could potentially anger RCA members and their communities.” Maybe Orthodox synagogues will switch to this siddur, but I view it as a failed attempt by the RCA to quell the growing switching from Art Scroll to Koren Sachs.

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**WALLED CITIES**


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Since there is so much preoccupation in the White House today about creation of a “wall,” I thought I would devote this issue of the Bulletin to Jewish considerations of walled cities. Walled cities were a staple even in the days of Moses. Deuteronomy 3:5 says of the towns of Og of Bashan: “All these cities were fortified with high walls, gates, and bars; beside unwalled towns a great many.” “Walled cities” appear in three different circumstances in the Tanach. Let’s see whether the Tanach influences your view on the US-Mexican “wall.”

1. The first Mishnah in the tractate Megillah reads in part: “Cities which have been **walled since the days of Joshua son of Nun** read [the megillah Esther] on the fifteenth [of Adar]; villages and large towns read on the fourteenth.” The basis for this ruling is an interpretation of Esther 9:19: “Therefore the Jews of the villages, **who lived in the unwalled towns**, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a holiday, and of sending portions one to another,” implying that Jews of walled towns celebrate Purim on another day. The Gemara notes that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha, who was part of the generation that preceded the writing of the Mishnah, had interpreted this verse to mean **walled since the days of Ahasuerus**. Centuries later in his Laws of Megillah 1:5 Maimonides raised the question of what is the appropriate day to read the megillah in Shushan, which was NOT a walled city in the days of Joshua. He concluded that Shushan should be treated as a walled city, and that the reason the Mishnah highlighted walled cities “since the days of Joshua” was “In order to give honor to Israel, which was in ruins at the time [of the Purim miracle]. So that they [in cities of Israel] shall read [the megillah] as do the residents of Shushan . . . and there will be some symbolic connection to the Land of Israel in the miracle.”

Jerusalem is the only city that celebrates Purim only on the 15th of Adar. Several other cities celebrate on 14th and 15th since there is a doubt of their status at the time of Joshua. This includes Tiberius, Yafo, Acco, and Hebron. Other Israeli cities where rabbis have declared doubt of their status as former walled cities are: Shechem (Nablus), Lod, Gaza, Safed, and Haifa, as well as Bet Shean, Jericho, Beer Sheva, Ramla. Moreover, though probably irrelevant today, Tyre, Sidon, Damascus, Izmir, and Bagdad. The only (incomplete) list given in the Talmud is in the Mishna in Arachin 32a, which says, “such as the old castle of Sepphoris [*in the lower Galilee*], the fort of Gush-Halab [*Giskala*]. old Yodpat [*Yotapata*], Gamala [*on the eastern shore of Lake Kinneret*], Gadud [*perhaps Gadara, six miles southeast of the bottom of Lake Kinneret*], Hadid [*east of Lod*], Ono [*today Kfir Anneh, east of Lod*], Jerusalem, and the like.”

2. We have another source for the existence of walled cities, namely the cities of refuge. Leviticus 35:6 says, “And the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be **six cities of refuge**, which you shall appoint for the man slayer that he may flee there; and to them you shall add forty two cities.” Moreover, of the cities of refuge Leviticus 35:4, referring to the cities of refuge, says, “And the open ground around the cities, that you shall give to the Levites, shall reach from the **wall of the city** outward a thousand cubits around.” Joshua 21 and 1 Chronicles 6 provide a list of these. The six cities which were to be cities of refuge were Golan, Ramoth, and Bezer, on the east of the Jordan River, (see Joshua 20:8 and Deuteronomy 4:43) and Kedesh (*in Galilee in Mount Naphtali*), Shechem, and Hebron on the western side (see Joshua 20:7). Surprisingly, some of these cities do not appear in the Arachin 32a list.

3. Walled cities appear to get special treatment in the Torah. In Leviticus 25: 29-30 we read, “And if a man sells a dwelling house in a **walled city**, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it is not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the **walled city** shall become the permanent property of he who bought it throughout his generations; it shall not go out in the jubilee.” This indicates that the Torah makes a distinction between city property and rural property. The law of the Jubilee Year, in which all property is to revert to its original owners, applies only to rural property, and is intended to rebalance the distribution of land to its original distribution across families. To quote J. R. Porter’s Cambridge Bible Commentary on Leviticus, “Walled towns, typical of Canaanite culture, were a novelty to the Israelite farming population and their customary family law did not apply to them. So a house in such a town was considered more an individual than a family possession.”

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**THAT "ARAMEAN" REFERENCE**


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The holiday of Shavuot is referred to as *Chag Habikurim*, the holiday of the bringing of the first fruits (*bikurim*) to the temple (see Exodus 23:19 and Numbers 28:26). Deuteronomy 26:5 describes the ceremony of bringing the *bikurim* to the High Priest, along with the recitation required to be made by each person as he hands the fruits over to the priest. It begins with the three Hebrew words אַרְמִי אֶבֶד אֲבִי. When we look at the various translations of this phrase here's what we find:

Art Scroll: An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather  
Hertz: A wandering Aramean was my father  
JPS: My father was a fugitive Aramean

The Hebrew אֶבֶד is the verb in the phrase, surrounded by two nouns, אַרְמִי (an Aramean) and אֲבִי, (my father). We'll get to the translation of the word אֶבֶד later. First let's look at the sentence structure. On the surface it appears that "Aramean," coming before the verb, is the subject and the "my father," coming after the verb, is the object in the sentence. In that case all we need is a good translation of the verb אֶבֶד. This word appears four times in Deuteronomy (4:26, 8:19, 12:2, 30:18), each time translated as "destroy" It looks so straightforward, then, to translate the sentence literally as "An Aramean destroyed my father."

But there are two obvious questions: "My father was not destroyed," and "Who is the Aramean referred to?" The standard interpretation is that Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, wanted to destroy Jacob, but didn't succeed. That explains the Art Scroll choice of verb "tried to destroy" and object "forefather." Indeed, the Onkelos translation of this verse into Aramaic in 110 CE says the following: לָבָן אַרְמֵאָה בְּעָא לְאוֹבְדָא יְת אָבָא "Laban the Aramean came to destroy our father." Note that Onkelos was no longer merely "translating" from Hebrew to Aramaic; he was also interpreting the text. Rashi (1040-1105) commented on this phrase with the following: **"Laban wished to exterminate the whole nation, when he pursued Jacob.** Because he intended to do it the Omnipresent accounted it unto him as though he had actually done it, for as far as the nations of the world are concerned the Holy One, blessed be He, accounts unto them intention as an actual deed." Because of this translation/interpretation of this phrase, the emboldened text from Rashi is used in the Passover Haggadah right after the paragraph that says that "in every generation rises against us to destroy us," as the prooftext, after which the Haggadah provides interpretations of each phrase of the Shavuot *bikurim* recital.

So how did we get to the Hertz/JPS translation? Rashi's grandson, Rashbam (1085-1158), disputed this interpretation. His translation was, "My father Avraham was an Aramean, lost, and exiled from his birthplace Aram."

אָבִי אַבְרָהָם אַרְמִי הָיָה, אוֹבֵד וְגוֹלָה מֵאַרְצֵי אֲרָם He interpreted the verb אֶבֶד as meaning "was lost" (see, for example, Job 31:19 for similar usage). Since Abraham lived in Aram, Rashbam interpreted the word "Aramean" as describing Abraham, and took "father" to be the subject of the sentence.

The great Hebrew grammarian Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) commented on this verse: "'Lost' is an intransitive verb. If 'the Aramean' referred to Lavan, then the verb would be in the transitive *hif'il* or *pi'el* form. Besides, what sense is there to say, "Lavan tried to destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt"? Lavan never considered going down to Egypt! The plausible interpretation is that the Aramean refers to Yaakov, as if Scripture had said, "When my forefather was in Aramea, he was lost" — meaning, he was a pauper, without property..... Thus the lost Aramean was my forefather. The intent of this passage is: I did not inherit this land from my forefather, for he was a pauper when he came to Aramea, and he was a stranger in Egypt, where he was few in number. Afterwards, he became a great nation; and you, God, brought us out of slavery, and gave us the good land. Do not object to Yaakov's being called an Aramean, since similar appellations can be found. Consider "Yeter the Ishmaelite" [I Chronicles 2: 17], even though he was really an Israelite."

To be consistent with these interpretations of the text, Hertz and JPS rendered their translations. And the (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly altered the Haggadah to follow this translation with a new Hebrew proof text: "He was impelled, by force of the divine word," referring to Genesis 15:13's prediction that "your offspring will be strangers in a strange land and will be enslaved for 400 years."

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**KING DAVID'S LEGITIMACY**


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Let us trace back the lineage of King David. The book of Ruth (Ruth 4: 18-22) ends with the following patrilineage of David, tracing him all the way back to Perez, one of the sons of Judah. *"This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Heston, Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Ammi-nadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz, Boaz begot Obed, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David."* Recall also that Boaz married Ruth, so Obed's mother was a Moabite convert. Recall also that Perez was one of the twins born out of wedlock to Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, after she, pretending to be a harlot, slept with Judah (see Genesis 38).

Deuteronomy 23:4 commands us as follows: *"No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the Lord,"*. And, as we can see from the aforementioned lineage, David was three generations removed from Ruth, the Moabite. And Deuteronomy 23:3 commands us as follows: *"No one misbegotten shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of his descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord."* And, as we can see from the aforementioned lineage, David was nine generations removed from Perez, the misbegotten.

So we see that David carried a double whammy. Based on a strict interpretation of the words of Deuteronomy he was disqualified from being admitted into the tribe of Israel, let alone being king of Israel, both from his father's and mother's lineage. How does the Talmud deal with this?

Yevamot 77b tells a story about Doeg, King Saul's general, who wanted to declare that David should be considered disqualified from being considered part of the nation of Israel because he was a Moabite, saying *"Whosoever will not obey this halachah will be stabbed with the sword; I have this tradition from the Beth din of Samuel the Ramathite (i.e., the prophet Samuel)"* But in Yevamot 77a David is declared qualified on a technicality. *"An Ammonite man is barred from entering into the congregation, but not an Ammonite woman, and similarly, a Moabite man is barred from entering into the congregation, but not a Moabite woman. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda, who derives the halakha from the masculine form of these two terms."*

Of greater significance, though, is the following exchange in Yoma 22b: *"Rav Yehuda<sup>1</sup> said that Shmuel said: Why did the kingship of the house of Saul not continue on to succeeding generations? It is because there was no flaw in his ancestry; he was of impeccable lineage. As Rabbi Yohanan (320-350 CE) said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak (250-290 CE): 'One appoints a leader over the community only if he has a box full of creeping animals hanging behind him (i.e., he has something inappropriate in his ancestry that preceded him). Why is that? It is so that if he exhibits a haughty attitude toward the community, one can say to him: Turn and look behind you and be reminded of your humble roots.'"* The Talmud goes on to say, *"This is why David's kingdom lasted while Saul's did not, as David descended from a family with problematic ancestry, namely Tamar and Ruth the Moabite."*

By the way, this Hebrew verse אין מעמידין פרנס על הציבור אלא אם כן קופה של שרצים תלויה לו מאחורי translated above as *"One appoints a leader over the community only if he has a box full of creeping animals hanging behind him"* is a well-known aphorism to Israelis, which may be why they are so matter-of-fact about the misdeeds of their politicians.

(This article was inspired by a *dvar torah* given by Dr. Jonathan Scheiner of Riverdale, New York)

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<sup>1</sup> This is Rav Yehuda bar Rav Yechezkel, a third generation (250-290 CE) amora, who was a student of both Rav in Sura and Shmuel in Nahardea. He quotes both Rav's and Shmuel's views on Saul in Yoma 22b.

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**THE CONQUERED NATIONS**


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In Deuteronomy 7:1 Moses tells the Israelites, “When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land which you are entering to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, . . . , seven nations greater and mightier than you.” And in the ellipsis Moses lists the nations: “the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” And Joshua wraps up his conquests in Joshua 24:11 with “And you went over the Jordan, and came to Jericho; and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them to your hand.”

But in Exodus 33:2 we read “And I will send an angel before you; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.” Similarly, in Exodus 34:11 we read, “Observe what I command you this day; behold, I drive out before you the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite” First, a simple question: Why are the Girgashites missing from these two lists in Exodus (and from the list in Joshua 12:8 of six, not seven, nations)? In his comment on this absence in the Exodus list Rashi explained that “the Girgashites arose and emigrated of their own accord;” in his comment on this absence in the Deuteronomy 20:17 list he explained that “they were implicitly included.”

In Genesis 15: 18-21 we read: “In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates; The Kenites, and the Kenazites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaim, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.” Next, a bigger question: Why are the lists different? Why are the Kenites, Kenazites, Kadmonites, and Refaim in Abraham’s list of ten nations and not in Moses’s list of seven nations? And why are the Hivites in Moses’s list of seven nation and not in Abraham’s list of ten nations? Did God change His mind?

As you might guess, this set of contradictory lists led to lots of speculation among the rabbinic commentators on the Chumash. As background, there are three neighboring nations that are not mentioned, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Rashi (1040-1105 CE) claims that the Kenites, Kenazites, and Kadmonites are alternate names for the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, and they were not on Moses’s list because God had decided to exempt them from conquest by Joshua (see Numbers 21:4, Deuteronomy 2:9, and Deuteronomy 2:21 for details). Ibn Ezra (1089-1167 CE) does not quite go so far, merely interpreting as “alternate names for some of the Canaanites,” thus not mentioned because they were subsumed under the order to conquer the Canaanites. David Kimchi (1160-1235 CE) is of the opinion that the Refaim in Abraham’s list are the Hivites in Moses’s list.

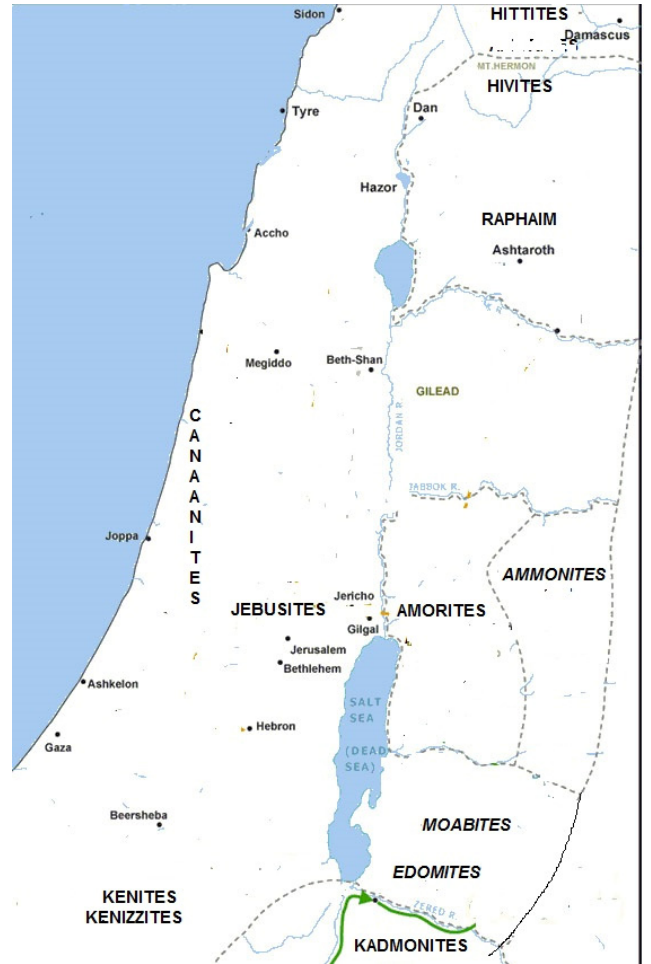
Let’s place these various nations on a map. My main source for what follows is a book I recommend to all, Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World, The Sacred Bridge, by Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley. They state that “the Perizzite and the Girgashite are totally unknown outside of biblical allusions.” But Joshua, who conquered the Perizzites, places them in the hill country of Judah and Ephraim (see Joshua 17:14-15). He also refers to the Girgashites (but with no location) in Joshua 3:10 and 24:11. The Kenites and Kennizites were in the southern hill country of Judah (near Arad in the Negev). The Kadmonites lived on the eastern frontier of what is now Israel (some associate them with the Nabateans, who lived in Petra). The Hittites lived in northern Syria. The Raphaim were at Ashteroth in the Bashan area. The Jebusites were the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the Amorites lived east of them in the hill country. The Canaanites lived on the coast of Lebanon (and are were called Phoenicians by the Greeks). Finally, the Hivites lived at the foot of Mt. Hermon (see Joshua 11:3). A map of all these nations is presented on the right of the next page, with the unconquered Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites denoted in italics.

The saga of the lists of the conquered nations does not end with these discrepancies and explanations. There is one more, namely Nehemiah 9:8: “And you found that his heart was faithful before you, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, to give it to his seed, and you have fulfilled your words; for you are righteous;” Notice that the Girgashite is included in the list, and the



Hivites are missing. The rabbis explain that the Hivites were missing from the original list presented to Abraham, and so Nehemiah decided to exclude it as well from his list. And it is this list which is incorporated in our daily prayers, on page 76 of the Art Scroll Siddur.

To put the “conquered nations” into perspective I included on the left a map of the territories of the tribes of Israel when the conquests were over. Notice that it does not encompass the northern lands of the Hittites or Hivites.



## LAKE SHORE DRIVE SYNAGOGUE

70 EAST ELM STREET  
PHONE: 312-337-6811

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611  
EMAIL: lds70@yahoo.com

Shomrei Israel  
שומרי ישראל  
WEBSITE: lds70.org

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## THE WISDOM LITERATURE

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“Wisdom literature” is a term used by scholars to describe a genre of Ancient Near East literature characterized by sayings intended to teach about divinity and virtue. Wikipedia gives a list of items of wisdom literature, including the classic Works and Days by the Greek poet Hesiod (c. 750-650 BC), De Officiis by the Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC), and Meditations by the Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius (121–180). The genre has ancient origins in Egyptian works: The Instructions of Kagemni (2613-2589 BCE), The Maxims of Ptahhotep (2375-2350 BCE), the Instructions of Amenemhat (written in 1300-1075 BCE, a work that is very similar to Proverbs), and the Loyalist Teaching (1878-1839 BCE).

“Hebrew wisdom literature” is the appellation given collectively to the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach. You may recognize the first four names, as they are part of the *Tanach*, but not the last two. The **Wisdom of Solomon** or Book of Wisdom is a Jewish work, written in Greek, and most likely composed in Alexandria, Egypt in the mid first century BCE. **Sirach**, also known as The Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom of Yeshua ben Sira, or the Wisdom of Sirach, and also known as the Book of Ecclesiasticus, or Ben Sira, was written by the Jewish scribe Ben Sira of Jerusalem and dates from approximately 200 to 175 BCE. In Egypt it was translated into Greek by the author's unnamed grandson in 132 BCE. The book itself is the largest wisdom book from antiquity to have survived

The “Hebrew Bible” is referred to in Hebrew as the *Tanach*, (תנ"ך) an acronym of its three parts, the *Torah* (תורה), literally “teaching,” consisting of the Five Books of Moses), the *Neviim* (נביאים, literally “prophets.” consisting of eight books: the historic descriptions in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, along with four books of prophetic writing), and the *Ketuvim* (כתובים, literally “writings”). The Ketuvim is miscellany of 11 manuscripts, including the five Megillot (Esther, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs), the books of Ezra/Nehemiah, Daniel, Chronicles, a history of the Jewish nation until 540 BCE). Also included in the *Ketuvim* are Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Though Moses died in 1273 BCE, scholars believe that the text of the *Torah* was finalized in the time of Ezra (398 BCE); that *Neviim* was finalized in the Persian era (323 BCE).

The canonization of the *Ketuvim* occurred much later. The Book of Ben Sira, written in the early second century BCE (and not canonized) makes reference to three sections of the Bible, “the law of the Most High,” “the wisdom of all the ancients,” and “prophecies.” In his early second century Against Apion, Josephus states that the Hebrew Bible contains “but twenty-two books.” But an extracanonical book, 2 Esdras, written between the end of the first century CE and the beginning of the third century CE, mentions twenty-four books. Most likely the final two books are Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, as seen from the discussion of their holiness in the Mishnah Yadayim 3:5 (the Mishnah was completed in the late second century CE).

The “Greek Bible,” written in 285-247 BCE as a translation of the Hebrew Bible, contains books other than that of the Hebrew Bible, namely 1-4 Maccabees, Judith, and Psalms of Solomon. It is sometimes referred to as the Septuagint, because of the associated legend that 72 scholars gathered in Egypt to translate the Hebrew Bible from Hebrew to Greek, and that miraculously each of the translations was identical (see Megillah 9a). The problem with the Septuagint is that it not only contains the 24 books of the *Tanach* but also so-called Deuterocanonical Books: Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Esther with additions, and Daniel with additions, as well as the so-called Apocryphal Books: 1 Esdras, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151, Prayer of Manasseh, and Psalms of Solomon.

The confusion arises with the construction of the “Old Testament” by the Catholic Church at the Council of Rome (382 CE). The “Old Testament” is not synonymous with the *Tanach*. Rather, it is based on the Greek Bible and is organized as follows (with items not in the *Tanach* appearing in bold face font):

Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy  
Historical books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, **Tobit, Judith**, Esther, **1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees**  
Wisdom books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, **Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach**  
Prophetic books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, **Baruch**, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi  
Note that the Catholic Church did not accept some of the books of the Septuagint as being Scripture, e.g., the Book of Enoch, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and some others.

At the time of the Reformation, Protestants decided that, because the additional books weren't in the Hebrew Bible, they shouldn't be in the Old Testament, either (though they were included in early editions of the King James Bible). At the Council of Trent (1546) Catholics decided to keep the "deutero-canonical" books. So the Protestant "Old Testament" and the Catholic "Old Testament" do not match, the former, except for the order of the books, being congruent with the *Tanach*.

An interesting example of the intertwining of the Hebrew wisdom literature that I invite you all to examine is Psalm 39, which contains elements of both Ecclesiastes and Job. In particular, the last verse of this psalm is an amalgam of Job 10:20-21. Wikipedia also classifies Sayings of the Fathers – Pirkei Avot (c. 220) as wisdom literature. Though this genre of writing was not native to the Hebrews, it was transformed by the Hebrews into something consistent with their religious beliefs and teachings, making it a unique genre of religious literature.

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### LAMED VAV TSADIKIM- 36 RIGHTEOUS MEN

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Mystical Hasidic Judaism as well as other segments of Judaism believe that there exist 36 righteous people whose role in life is to justify the purpose of humankind in the eyes of God. Jewish tradition holds that their identities are unknown to each other, or even to themselves: For the sake of these 36 hidden saints, God preserves the world even if the rest of humanity has degenerated to the level of total barbarism.

Abbaye (278-338 CE) is quoted in both Sanhedrin 97b and Sukkah 45b as saying, "The world must contain not less than thirty-six righteous men in each generation who are vouchsafed the sight of the Shechinah's countenance," His proof text is the verse from Isaiah 30:18, "Blessed are all they that wait for him." (אַשְׁרֵי כָּל-הוֹכְיֵ לֵו) The Hebrew translate of "for him" is the word לָו, whose numerical value is thirty-six and whose letters are *lamed-vav*. This is the Talmudic source for this legend, and each of the 36 such righteous men were dubbed "lamed vavniks."

One of the earliest (and, in my opinion, the best) of the post-Holocaust novels, Andre Schwarz-Bart's The Last of the Just, published in 1959, uses this theme to trace eight centuries in the lives of the Levy family, in which one member of the family is a *lamed-vavnik*. In the 1988 novel The Quest for the 36 by Steven Biliias, Dexter Sinister, a booking agent, gets tasked by God to collect the 36 so they can avert the end of the world. The theme has also been the basis for a number of mystery novels. The 2006 mystery novel The Righteous Men by Sam Bourne deals with the murder of the righteous ones, one by one, and solving the murders. And a recent 2019 novel, 36 Righteous Men, by best-selling author Steven Pressfield derives its title and some material from the idea of the *Lamed Vav Tsadikim*.

(I've read the Bourne book, and, as soon as I've read the Pressfield book I'll review the two of them in my sporadic **Shamuses Are Not Shamashim** column. Also to be reviewed is the new Nicholas Meyer book, The Adventure of the Peculiar Protocols, in which Sherlock Holmes traces the origins of the anti-Semitic tract known as *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.)

## LAKE SHORE DRIVE SYNAGOGUE

70 EAST ELM STREET

PHONE: 312-337-6811

RABBI DR. DAVID BAUMAN

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611

EMAIL: lds70@yahoo.com

EMAIL: rabbilsds@gmail.com

Shomrei Israel

שומרי ישראל

WEBSITE: lds70.org

PHONE: 847-454-7993

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**THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART**


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The descriptions of Pharaoh's reaction to each of the ten plagues leads one to question the interplay of free will and predetermination in his decisions. On God's first encounter with Moses He says (Exodus 4:21), "and I will harden ( וַיְחַזֶּק ) his heart." Later He says (Exodus 7:3), "and I will harden ( וַאֲקַשֶּׁה ) Pharaoh's heart". Those who argue that Pharaoh did not have free will, that his actions were preordained, point to these verses as their proof. Rashi is forced to comment on this, rationalizing that "since he (Pharaoh) has wickedly resisted Me, and it is manifest to Me that the heathen nations find no spiritual satisfaction in setting their whole heart to return to Me penitently, it is better that his heart should be hardened in order that My signs may be multiplied against him so that you may recognize My divine power."

Nonetheless, Rashi goes on to note, "Nevertheless, in the case of the first five plagues it is not stated "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, but "Pharaoh's heart was hardened." So let's look at the sequence of the ten plagues and Pharaoh's responses to observe closely the interplay of these forces.

Pre plagues: In Exodus 7 Moses meets Pharaoh, turns his staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians do likewise, Moses's snake eats the magicians' snakes, and Pharaoh reacts: Exodus 7:13 "And Pharaoh's heart was hardened ( וַיְחַזֶּק ) ...just as God said." Note that God's role is this is diminished; God is described merely as a predictor of Pharaoh's reaction. The use of the reflexive verb וַיְחַזֶּק indicates that it is Pharaoh himself who is hardening his heart.

Plague 1: Blood דם: Moses initiates the first plague, Pharaoh's magicians likewise turn water into blood, and once again (Exodus 7:22) we see the same reaction, Pharaoh's heart was hardened ( וַיְחַזֶּק ). Pharaoh interpreted the plague as a magic trick, one his magician could also perform.

Plague 2: Frogs צפרדע: (Exodus 8:11) Pharaoh had the same reaction as that to plague 1, but in describing his hardening, another reflexive verb הִקְבֵּד is used. God is still not causing the heart-hardening; Pharaoh is doing that by himself.

Plague 3: Lice כנים: (Exodus 8:16) This time the magicians strike out, nonetheless we still see the same reaction by Pharaoh (and the text goes back to the reflexive verb וַיְחַזֶּק ).

Plague 4: Wild animals ערב: (Exodus 8:28) Once more Pharaoh hardens his own heart, with the text going back to וַיְחַזֶּק

Plague 5: Pestilence דבר: (Exodus 9:7) Pharaoh is still hardening his heart, using same verb as in plague 4

Plague 6: Boils שכין: (Exodus 9:12) Here we begin to see God come into direct play. "And God hardened וַיְחַזֶּק Pharaoh's heart, ... just as God told Moses"

Plague 7: Hail ברד: (Exodus 9:34-35) But here Pharaoh goes back to his old ways, hardening his heart, this time using both verbs וַיְחַזֶּק and וַיְקַבֵּד

Plague 8: Locusts ארבה: (Exodus 10:20) God returns to harden Pharaoh's heart, with language just like in plague 6

Plague 9: Darkness חשך: (Exodus 10:27) Again language just like plagues 6 and 8.

I would summarize this by saying that Rashi is almost right; God steps into the picture at plague 6, and again at plagues 8 and 9. In six out of the first nine plagues it was Pharaoh himself who made the decision to "harden his heart," without Divine cause. So where does one get the erroneous impression that God did all the hardening? From the wrap up to the first nine plagues (Exodus 11:10) "And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart," Though this is a summary verse, it is an overstatement of God's role. But God is not through. When the plagues were over and the Israelites left Egypt we have (Exodus 14:4, 8) "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart that he shall follow after them ...And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh King of Egypt, and he pursued after the people of Israel."

Pharaoh had free will after each of the first five plagues and chose not to free the Israelites. At plague 6 his free will was taken from him, then returned to him at plague 7, and then permanently taken away from him. Maimonides concludes from this story (and others) that "all who sinned willfully deserve to be prevented from repenting."

# LAKE SHORE DRIVE SYNAGOGUE

70 EAST ELM STREET  
PHONE: 312-337-6811  
RABBI DR. DAVID BAUMAN

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611  
EMAIL: lds70@yahoo.com  
EMAIL: rabbilsds@gmail.com

Shomrei Israel

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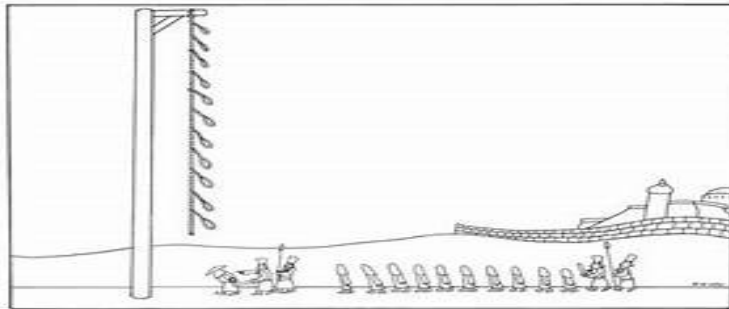
WEBSITE: lds70.org  
PHONE: 847-454-7993

## HAMAN'S TEN SONS

Before we were shut down by the pandemic our Wednesday morning minyanaires heard a *dvar torah* from Sam Schuster about some peculiarities in the listing of the 10 sons of Haman in the Megillat Esther. Here is a picture of what the list looks like in the scroll:

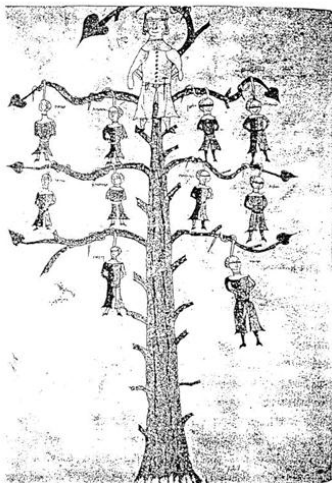


First of all note that these verses, Esther 9:7-9, are arranged in a column of 10 names, rather than as the standard text of the Megillah, seen on the left and right of the list. This is to connote that this is the manner in which the sons were hung, as depicted in the illustration on the left. Unfortunately, other artists have depicted the hanging of the 10 sons (plus Haman) in different (incorrect) fashion, as illustrated on the right and below



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Esther  
אֶסְתֵּר



The layout of the verses, with the names right-justified and the **וַיָּאָת** left-justified, is prescribed in the Talmud (Megillah 16b) along with a similar layout for the list of 31 kings that Joshua smote (see Joshua 12:9-24), to symbolize “that they should never rise again from their downfall.”

The next thing to notice is that there are five “defective” letters in the sons’ names. The first of these is the miniature **ת** in the name **פַּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא**. The second and third of these are the miniature **ש** and **ת** in the name **פַּרְמִשְׁתָּא**. The fourth and fifth of these are the enlarged **ו** and the miniature **ז** in the name **וַיִּזְתָּא**. The reason given by the Talmud (Megillah 16b) for the enlarged **ו** in **וַיִּזְתָּא** is that it resembles the tall tree from which the sons were hung. It was also a reminder of the order in which the sons were hung, which is in reverse order of the list, with **וַיִּזְתָּא** being the uppermost and **פַּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא** being the lowermost of the sons.

According to the Midrash (Batei Hamidrahot 2 51:7, a compendium of midrashic material put together by Rabbi Solomon Aaron Wertheimer in 1897) the **ז** is miniaturized in **וַיִּזְתָּא** to remind us that Haman bad-mouthed the Jews seven times in Esther 3:8. Here is the midrashic enumeration of the seven: “And Haman said to king Ahasuerus, There is (1) a certain people (2) scattered abroad and (3) dispersed (4) among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; and (5) their laws are different from those of every other people; and (6) they do not keep the king’s laws; therefore (7) it is not for the king’s profit to tolerate them.”

Batei Hamidrahot 2 21:23 gives a few (to me farfetched) reasons for the **ת** to be miniaturized in **פַּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא**, the most compelling reason being that it counters the enlargement of the **ת** in Esther 9:29, **וַתִּכְתֹּב**. As for the miniature **ש** and **ת** in the name **פַּרְמִשְׁתָּא**, I can find no midrashic justification, merely an indication that in some manuscripts even the **ר** is miniaturized. The only reference that I can find for that name is in the Talmud Soferim 12:6, which lists the 15 generation lineage from Amalek to Haman and says that Amalek’s son was named Vaizasa and Vaizasa’s son was Parshandasa.

Rabbi Mordechai Sasson of Bagdad (1747-1830) wrote a book **דבר בעתו** where, in the section called **רמזי מגלה**, he explains that Haman symbolizes the Yetzer Harah (evil inclination), and his ten sons allude to its ten bad character traits. He goes through the ten sons and explains the meaning of each name and how each corresponds to a particular type of evil. Here is his interpretation:

**פַּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא** (Parshandasa) — the Yetzer Harah distances (**מפריש**) a person from the Torah (**דתא**).

**דַּלְפוֹן** (Dalphon) — it is a **דלת** (door) to **פְּנוּיַת רַעוּת** (bad intentions): it makes a person who is performing a Mitzvah do so with wrong intentions.

**אַסְפָּסָא** (Aspasa) — means "gathering" — the Yetzer Harah gives a person the desire to gather piles of money so that he will have no time for Torah study and performing Mitzvos.

**פּוֹרָסָא** (Porasa) — **פּוֹרָסָא** spelt backwards is **תּוֹרָפָא**, a word used by the Talmud to indicate a woman's private parts — the Yetzer Harah makes a person desire to gaze at uncovered women.

**אַדְלִיָּא** (Adalia) — from **לִדְלָה** (לָה) — feelings of haughtiness and arrogance.

**אַרִידָסָא** (Aridasa) — the Yetzer Harah appears to a person praying like a lion (**אַרִי**) to distract him.

**פַּרְמִשְׁתָּא** (Parmashta) — it rips apart (**פּוֹרֵם**) the strong connection (**שְׂתִי**, literally criss-cross of a garment) that exists between fellow Jews.

**אַרִיסָי** (Arisai) — it continuously poisons a person with the venom (**אַרִס**) of the snake.

**אַרִידָי** (Aridai) — the evil that subjugates (**רִוּדָה**) a righteous person with suffering and worries about his livelihood.

**וַיִּזְתָּא** (Vaizasa) — the bitterness of the olive (**זֵית**) — symbolizing bitter and strong judgement.

So now I circle back to Sam Schuster’s *dvar torah*. On October 16, 1946 ten Germans were hung for their activities as Nazi leaders. One of them, Julius Streicher, shouted “Purim Fest 1946” just before he was hung. An Israeli numerologist, Rabbi Mordecai Neugroschel, tied this event to the hanging of Haman’s ten sons, and cherry-picked three of the four miniature letters, the **ת**, the **ש**, and the **ז**, and calculated that the numerical value of these three letters is 707. He then interpreted the large **ו** as referring to the sixth millennium, thereby appending it to the 707 to create 5707, which is the Hebrew calendar year corresponding to 1946. To read more about this read The Code of Esther, by Bernard Benyamin and Yohan Perez, published in France in 2012. This code also plays a role in a 2014 fictional work, The Esther Code, by Michael Danneman and Sarah Hurst, described as “Silence of the Lambs meets The DaVinci Code.”

## LAKE SHORE DRIVE SYNAGOGUE

70 EAST ELM STREET

PHONE: 312-337-6811

RABBI DR. DAVID BAUMAN

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611

EMAIL: lds70@yahoo.com

EMAIL: rabbilsds@gmail.com

Shomrei Israel

שומרי ישראל

WEBSITE: lds70.org

PHONE: 847-454-7993

## THE NAMES OF THE SPIES

As you may have inferred from my May-June Bulletin on Haman's sons, the Rabbis have a penchant for interpreting names by connecting them with Hebrew words that sound almost like the name and using the meanings of those words as a basis for their "interpretation." So when I read the section of Numbers 13 describing the twelve tribal representatives sent to scout out the Promised Land (by God's command/viz. Numbers 13:1-2 or by Moses's decision/viz: Deuteronomy 1:22-23, I'll let you decide!) I wondered whether there was a rabbinical interpretation of those names as well.

The precedent for such interpretations is Midrash Rabba Bamidbar 16:10 which says, "*There are people whose names are nice and whose actions are ugly, people whose names are ugly and whose actions are nice, people whose names and actions are nice, people whose name and actions are ugly, whose names are nice and whose actions are ugly.*" It goes on to give Ishmael and Esau as examples of ones had nice names but ugly actions, and as the names of the spies as examples of ones whose names and actions are ugly, the names of the spies, and gives as an example Sethur, "*who closed himself off from the world* שסתרו מן העולם."

Even though they were described as "chiefs" of their tribes, they were not the true chiefs; those were listed in Numbers 1:5-15. So why were these spies listed by name? In Sotah 34b Rabbi Isaac (69-74 CE) said, "*It is a tradition in our possession from our forefathers that the spies were named after their actions, but only with one has it survived with us.*" He then proceeded to give us the etymology of Sethur ben Michael. Rabbi Yochanan, responded with the etymology of Nahbi ben Vophti. Recognizing that this may not be the last word on the subject, I looked at Ginzberg's The Legends of the Jews (Volume 3, pages 264-5) and, not at all surprised, found a list with interpretations of all the names.

The list of interpretations of the names of the ten who recommended against going into the Promised Land was taken from a Midrashic text, Tanhuma, attributed to Rabbi Tanhuma bar Abba (350-375 CE), edited in the 5th century CE, and published by the 8th century CE. (Oddly, though, the passage I will cite, from Tanhuma Haazinu 7, ends with and this is found in the book of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan," an 11th century rabbi, so who knows when this actually was written.)

Here they are, including both the Hebrew from Tanhuma and the English translation from Ginzberg (G), along with my interpolation of the key Hebrew words which link the interpretation of the name with the name itself, and some comments on the differences in the various texts. (If you want to skip the details, jump ahead to the punch line.)

**Reuben:** Shammua ben Zaccur שמוע בן זכור  
על שלא שמע בדברי המקום וכאלו שאל בזכורו

G: He did not obey שמע God which was counted against him just as if he had pursued sorcery

**Simeon:** Shaphat ben Hori שפט בן חורי  
על שלא שפט את יצרו ונעשה חורי מן הארץ

G: He did not conquer שפט his evil inclination and hence went out empty handed without receiving a possession in the land of Israel

**Issachar:** Igal ben Joseph יגאל בן יוסף  
על שהוציא דבה על הארץ לכך נאסף בלא עתו

G: He soiled the reputation of the Holy Land, and therefore died נאסף before his time.

**Benjamin:** Palti ben Raphu פלטי בן רפוא  
פלט עמו ממעשים טובים ורפו ידיו שהרי מת

G: He spat out פלט the good qualities that had previously been his and therefore wasted away

**Zebulun:** Gadiel ben Sodi גדיאל בן סודי

דבר דברים קשין כגידין

G: He spoke infamous things דברים קשין כגידין against God in executing the secret plan of the spies

**Manasseh:** Gadi ben Susi גדי בן סוסי

הטיח דברים כלפי מעלה והעלה סיסיא הוא שאמר ארץ אוכלת יושביה

G: He blasphemed God and aroused his wrath, for it was he who said of the land, it eateth up its inhabitants

**Dan:** Ammiel ben Gemalli עמיאל בן גמלי

העמה כחו על שאמר כי חזק הוא ממנו וגמל לעצמו שלא נכנס לארץ ישראל

G: He cast a shadow upon God's strength

**Asher:** Sethur ben Michael סתור בן מיכאל

על שהיה בלבו לסתור מה שכתוב מי הוא כאל ה', ואומר אין כאל ישורון

G: He had resolved to act against לסתור God and instead of saying "Who is like unto God?" he said, "Who is God?"

(AM: this is an imperfect translation. The Hebrew אין כאל ישורון is taken from Deuteronomy 33:26, "There is none like the God of Jeshurun." In Sotah 34b Rabbi Isaac interpreted both the names Sethur and Michael. He said that Sethur was so named because he undermined שסתר the works God; and that Michael was so named because he suggested that God אל was weak מך. The Midrash Rabba Bamidbar 47:10 says that Sethur was so named העולם אל מן העולם "because he suppressed God from the world." This indicates that whatever Rabbi Isaac remembered got amplified by the time it got copied into the Tanhuma.)

**Naphtali:** Nahbi ben Vophsi. נחבי בן ופסי

החביא האמת ופסה האמונה מפיו כמו פסו אמונים מבני אדם

G: He suppressed החביא the truth and faith found no room in his mouth, for he brought forth lies against God

(AM. In Sotah 34b Rabbi Yochanan interpreted both the names Nahbi and Vophsi. He said that Nahbi was so named because he hid שהחביא the words of God, and Vophsi was so named because he stepped over שפיסע the attributes of God. Again what was recorded in the Talmud got amplified by the time it got copied into the Tanhuma.)

**Gad:** Geuel ben Machi גאואל בן מכי

על שגאה לומר דברים אשר לא בן על הקבה, לפיכך על בן נעשה מן

G: He was humbled because he urged untruths against God.

Ginzberg also gives an interpretation of the names of the two who recommended going into the Promised Land

**Ephraim:** Hoshea ben Nun הושע בן נון

G: Full of understanding and not caught like a fish by the spies

(AM: Sorry, but I don't know where Ginzberg got this; Tanhuma instead says that Moses gave his name an added letter so that his name would begin with the name of God and therefore prevent him from listening to the spies)

**Judah:** Caleb ben Jephunneh קלב בן יפנה

שבדברים שהיו על לבבו השיב למשה, ולא כדברים אשר היו על לב מרגלים

G: He spoke what he felt in his heart and turned aside from the advice of the rest of the spies

You may think that this is merely a rabbinic game, in which one stretches a bit to force the name to match a Hebrew term that corresponds with a characteristic of the person, especially when that characteristic is only determined ex post facto. But there is a precedent in the early part of the Torah, beginning with Adam and on through the sons of Moses, in which the derivation of each name is explicitly given. We see an example of this in 1 Samuel 25:25, when speaking of Nabal, the text says, "for as his name is, so is he; Nabal נבל is his name and folly נבלה is with him." The rabbis interpret this phrase, כשמו בן הוא, "for as his name is, so is he," as indicating that each name has an interpretation, and that it is the task of the exegete to discover that interpretation. So as you browse through the Talmud and Midrash, don't be surprised to find rabbinic interpretations of other names in the Tanach.



# LAKE SHORE DRIVE SYNAGOGUE

70 EAST ELM STREET

PHONE: 312-337-6811

RABBI DR. DAVID BAUMAN

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611

EMAIL: lsds70@yahoo.com

EMAIL: rabbilsds@gmail.com

Shomrei Israel

שומרי ישראל

WEBSITE: lsds70.org

PHONE: 847-454-7993

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## ABOUT 613 MITZVOT

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We've all learned that the Torah contains 613 mitzvot. Some have been taught that there are 248 positive mitzvot and 365 negative mitzvot. But what is the source of these counts? And have you ever seen a list of them? The short answer to the first question is that this was a count mentioned in both the Talmud and the Midrashic literature. The short answer to the second question is that the post-Talmudic rabbis played "Where's Waldo?" to work up a list of exactly 365 positive and 248 negative mitzvot.

Let's look at the Talmudic source, Makot 23b: "*Reb Simlai (second generation amora 250-290 CE) when preaching said: Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty-five negative precepts, corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred and forty-eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of the members of man's body.* (For details on the 248 (אברים) "members of man's body", sometimes mistranslated as "organs," see the list in the Mishnah Oholot 1.8. I warn you, this is not to be confused with Gray's Anatomy.)

When asked, "*What is the authentic text for this?*" Rabi Hamnuna, Reb Simlai's contemporary, quoted Deuteronomy 33:4, "*Moses commanded us torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob,*" and interpreted the word "torah" (תורה) as being in letter-value equal to 611. He then said that since we heard the first two commandments from God's mouth (not from Moses), that this has to be added to the count, bringing it to 613.

Obviously, these amoraim did not make this up; they must have had an earlier source. Wikipedia cites two earlier sources for 613 mitzvot, Simon ben Azzai in Sifre Deuteronomy 76 and Eliezer ben Yose HaGelili in Midrash Aggadah Genesis, 15:1. Both were contemporaries of Akiva, so the notion of 613 was, according to "Reb Wikipedia," around before the Mishna was written. However, I was unable to find either reference. (In fact, the reference in Sifre Deuteronomy 76 is to 3 positive mitzvot, not even the 300 referred to more specifically later in Wikipedia.)

Unfortunately, the Talmud does not provide a list of the 613 mitzvot. The first known listing of the 613 mitzvot is in a book, Halachot Gedolot, written by Simon Kayyaha (first half of 8<sup>th</sup> century). Rabbi Saadiah Gaon (9<sup>th</sup> century) published his list in Sefer Hamitzvot. Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century) published a book also titled Sefer Hamitzvot, with his own list of the 613 mitzvot. This appears to be the definitive list referred to today, though in 1247 Moses ben Jacob of Coucy, France published an alternative list of 613 mitzvot in Mitzvot Gadol. To see the Maimonides list, just go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613\\_commandments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613_commandments). One can also find reference there to other lists, some of which do not contain 613 items.

Three related asides: (1) These counts appear today in the prayer for a sick man (Art Scroll Siddur, page 442-3), where the wording is "his 248 organs (אבריו) and 365 blood vessels (גידיו)" (2) Rashi comments on the verse (Genesis 32:5) "I have sojourned (גרתני) with Laban" as an indication that Jacob observed the 613 mitzvot, because the Hebrew number for 613 is תריג, an anagram of גרתני. (3) In a comment of the verse (Genesis 5:1) "this is the book of the generation of Adam," the 13<sup>th</sup> century Midrash Genesis Rabbah 24:5 says "I only gave him 6 mitzvot and he was not able to abide by them, so how am I going to give him 613 mitzvot, 248 positive ones and 365 negative ones."

Of some interest is the continued rabbinic discussion in Makot 24a, pointing out that the prophets had reduced this list. First David produced a list of 11 mitzvot in Psalms 15. Isaiah reduced the count to 6 in Isaiah 33:15-116. Micah reduced it to the oft-quoted three in Micah 6:8, "to do justice, and to love loving mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Finally both Amos and Habakuk reduced the count to 1, with Amos 5:4 "Seek me, and you shall live," and Habakuk 2:4, "the just shall live by his faith."

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RABBI DR. DAVID BAUMAN

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611

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Shomrei Israel

שומרי ישראל

WEBSITE: lsds70.org

PHONE: 847-454-7993

## DIFFERENCES IN JUDAISM

Rabbi Bauman's recent Wednesday night Zoom classes have concentrated on the differences between the four major Jewish religious denominations, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform. He hasn't drilled down to the differences between various strands of the Orthodox community, such as Chasidic, Litvish, Neturei Karta, modern Orthodox, standard Orthodox, partnership Orthodox, and Traditional, nor to the different siddurim used in the Orthodox community: Ashkenazic, Sefardic, Arizal, Romi. He also hasn't dissected the Chasidic community, to differentiate between Lubavitcher, Satmar, Ger, Bobover, Bratslaver, and other smaller sects. As one can see from this list, current Judaism is variegated. But was it always thus?

In this Bulletin we drill back 2000 years and see what was then the state of Judaism. Those with an acquaintance of the writings of the historian Josephus know that in temple times there were three major sects of Judaism, the **Pharisees** פרושיים, **Sadducees** צדוקים, and **Essenes** אסניים. There was also an (unmentioned by Josephus) fourth sect, namely the **Boethusians** ביתוסים (see Shabbat 108a), who may have been a variant of the Sadducees. The Phariseean Rabban Gamaliel (40-68 CE) lumped Gentiles (נכרי), Sadducees, and Boethusians into a single category for a legal ruling (see Eruvin 68b).

The **Pharisees** tended to be a plebian group, which emerged after the John Hyrcanus, Judas Maccabaeus's nephew, established a new monarchy in the form of the priestly Hasmonean dynasty in 152 BCE. They were "separatists" (from the Hebrew word פרוש), a group of scribes and sages (but not priests) who were more concerned with laws of purity and the laws of sacrifice than laws relating to the priesthood. The **Sadducees** tended to be a patrician group, typically priests descended from Zadok (צדוק, 2 Samuel 8:17), the High Priest at the time of Solomon's Temple. The distinction between the Pharisees and the Sadducees centered around their view of the religious practices that were not explicitly defined in the Torah. The Pharisees believed that the religious practices not explicitly defined in the Torah were nonetheless given to Moses at Sinai orally, and Moses taught these oral laws to Joshua, who in turn passed them on orally to the judges and prophets of the Tanach and thence to the rabbis of the Sanhedrin. By contrast, the Sadducees tended to follow only the laws of the written Torah, along with a set of oral laws not consistent with those of the Pharisees. One can see the contrast between them clearly in the last three *mishnayot* of Chapter 4 of Yadaim.

The **Essenes** were a small sect who lived an ascetic life, and some scholars think it was they who were responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some believe the name אסניים is a corruption of the Hebrew for "the outsiders" (ההוצינים) used in Megillah 4:8 to refer to the sect that covered their tefillin with gold and/or wore them over their sleeves. Scholars even discerned subgroups within the Essenes. Epiphanius, a church father of the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, said that there were seven sects of Jews, mentioning by name two sects, the **Nasaraeans** and the **Ossaeans**. He described these sects as follows: "*The Nasaraean—they were Jews who kept all the Jewish observances, but they would not offer sacrifice or eat meat. They claim that these Books [i.e., the Tanach] are fictions, and that none of these customs were instituted by the fathers.*" "*The Ossaeans are Jews like the former [i.e., the Nasaraeans]... Though it is different from the other six of these seven sects, it causes schism only by forbidding the books of Moses like the Nasaraean.*"

In addition there were Jews dubbed as the **Minim** (המינים), usually translated as "the heretics," one of whose practices was to wear the tefillin on the palm of their hand (see Megillah 4:8). (The Soncino Talmud translates מינים as "sectarians," and in a footnote to the use of this term in Shabbat 116a, it says, "The term denotes various kinds of Jewish sectarians, such as the Sadducees, Samaritans, Judeo-Christians, etc., according to the date of the passage in which the term is used.") Berachot 29b recounts that the nineteenth added blessing in the *Amidah*, labelled on page 107 of the Art Scroll siddur as AGAINST HERETICS, was "*the benediction relating to the Minim.*" (Censors later changed the wording of the Talmud from "Minim" to "Sadducees.") The Talmud continues (Berachot 30a) to say, "*Said Rabban Gamaliel to the Sages: Can any one among you frame a benediction relating to the Minim? Shmuel HaKattan arose*

and composed it.” But what is now the blessing beginning with the word ולמלשינים (“and for slanderers”) may not be the original such blessing. The following blessing, found in the Cairo Geniza, refers instead to *meshumadim*, *notrim*, and *minim* (“converts [from Judaism], Nazarenes [i.e., Christians], and Minim”), and contains a clause relating to *tsadikim* (“righteous”) and a quote from Ezekiel 18:30

למשומדים אל תהי תקוה ומלכות זדון מהרה תעקר בימינו והנצרים והמינים כרגע יאבדו ימחו מספר החיים ועם צדיקים אל יכתבו שובו והשיבו מכל-פשיעכם ולא-יהיה לכם למקשול עון ברוך אתה ה' מכניע זדים

Berachot 30a goes on to say of Shmuel HaKattan, “*The next year he forgot it and he tried for two or three hours to recall it.*” The Soncino edition of Berachot has the following footnote justifying Shmuel HaKattan’s memory lapse: “Apparently this benediction was at that time not recited daily as now, but on special annual occasions.” My (irreverent) take on this matter is that perhaps the version found in the Cairo Geniza was the original one, one that Shmuel HaKattan had conveniently forgotten because it was politically incorrect.

Even within the Pharisees there were differences of opinion. The most famous of these were the disputes between the students of Hillel and Shammai, where one lasting three years was reported in Eruvin 13b with the famous resolution being a cry from Heaven announcing “*both are the words of the living God.*” But their differences were even bloodier. Here are two Talmudic versions of an incident between the two groups.

Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 17a: “They [Beit Shammai] thrust a sword into the study house and declared: “Whoever wants to enter may enter, but no one may leave!” And on that day Hillel sat in submission before Shammai, like one of the disciples, and it was as wretched for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made.”

Jerusalem Talmud Shabbat 1:4 [3c] “That day was as wretched for Israel as the day which the golden calf was made.... It was taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua Oniya (290-320 CE): The students of Beit Shammai stood below them and they began to slaughter the students of Beit Hillel. It was taught: Six of them ascended and the others stood over them with swords and lances.”

This occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Adar and that as many as 3,000 (one source says 28,000) were killed. That date is even declared a fast day in Karo’s Shulchan Aruch, to commemorate that tragic event. (For more detail, see my March-April 2014 Bulletin.)

Finally, let us turn to two Jewish-related sects, the **Karaites** and the **Samaritans**. On the surface, the **Karaites** are similar to the Sadducees in their rejection of rabbinical authority and the Oral Law. But the Karaites claim that there are major differences, and that their beginnings was a group called Benei Sadeq during the Second Temple period (see [http://www.orahsaddiqim.org/History/Events/The\\_Name\\_Karaite.shtml](http://www.orahsaddiqim.org/History/Events/The_Name_Karaite.shtml)). The British theologian John Gill (1767) believes that the Karaites arose in the times of John Hyrcanus and were first called the congregation of Judah ben Tabbai, which was afterwards changed into the name Karaites. The movement flourished in Baghdad in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of Anan ben David (considered by some the founder of Karaism). In 1897 there were about 13,000 Karaites in Russia. On January 5, 1939, the Reich Office for Genealogical Research issued a written opinion stating that it did not view the Karaite community as being racially connected to the Jews, and so they survived during World War II. The Karaite sect exists to this day, with 30,000 in Israel (mostly in Ashdod), and 4,000 in the United States (with a synagogue in Daly City, CA).

**Samaritans** claim they are descendants of the Northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who survived the destruction of the ten tribes of Israel (whose capitol was Samaria) by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. The Talmud and Josephus refer to the Samaritans as *Cutheans* (כּוּתִיִּים), referring to the ancient city of **Kutha**, located in what is today **Iraq**. (2 Kings 17: 24 says, “*And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from **Cuthah**, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria, and lived in its cities.*” 2 Kings 17:29 goes on to say “*Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Beth-El, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.*”) Samaritan worship is based on the Samaritan Pentateuch preserved by those who remained in Israel. (According to Wikipedia, there are some 6,000 differences between the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Masoretic Jewish Pentateuch text.) Samaritans see Judaism as a related but altered and amended religion, brought back by those returning from the Babylonian captivity. There were an estimated one million Samaritans in Biblical times. Today there are about 800 Samaritans in Israel; half reside in modern homes at Kiryat Luza on Mount Gerizim, and the rest in the city of Holon, just outside Tel Aviv.

As John Keating of the Dead Poets Society said, “’twas always thus and always thus will be.”

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PHONE: 312-337-6811

RABBI DR. DAVID BAUMAN

CHICAGO ILLINOIS 60611

EMAIL: lds70@yahoo.com

EMAIL: rabbilsds@gmail.com

Shomrei Israel

שומרי ישראל

WEBSITE: lds70.org

PHONE: 847-454-7993

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**AMALEK, HAMAN, AND AHASUERUS**


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The Shabbat before Purim is called Shabbat Zachor, significant not only because we read Deuteronomy 25:17-19 as the *maftir aliya* from a second *sefer torah*, but because by hearing this maftir one fulfills three of the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah. The three *mitzvot* are: (1) Always remember what Amalek did (Deut. 25:17), (2) Do not forget the evil done to us by Amalek (Deut. 25:19) and (3) Destroy the seed of Amalek (Deut. 25:19). What does this have to do with Purim? The Midrash tells us that Haman was descended from Amalek, So before Purim, the day on which we read how Haman and his children were actually killed. we read the verses which contains the *mitzvah* to remember to kill out Amalek. Also, verse 9:28 of the Megillah states, "And these days should be remembered and done," so first we remember (by reading *parashat Zachor*), then we do (by reading Megillat Esther). The event of listening to this *maftir* is so important that one is required to bring his child of age 6 and up to listen to this *maftir*. The general custom is that, if possible, women try to come to the synagogue to hear the reading of this *maftir*. In some communities, there is even a separate reading just for women.

So where does the connection of Haman and Amalek come from? After all, the Haftorah of that day, Samuel 15:1-34, contains these verses: 8. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and **completely destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword**. 9. **But Saul and the people spared Agag**, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not completely destroy them; but everything that was despised and worthless, that they destroyed completely.... 32. Then said Samuel, Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. 33. And Samuel said, As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women. And **Samuel cut Agag in pieces** before the Lord in Gilgal. Reading this one would think that all the Amalekites were destroyed in the time of King Saul.

Our first clue is Esther 3:1, in which Haman is introduced as "Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite," thus establishing the connection. The Targum Sheni (an Aramaic translation of the Book of Esther) gives Haman's lineage as follows: "Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, son of Ada, son of Bizna'i, son of Aphlitis, son of Djosos,[a] son of Peros, son of Hamdan, son of Talyon, son of Atnisomos, son of Harum, son of Harsum, son of Shegar, son of Genar, son of Parmashta, son of Vaizatha, son of Agag, son of Sumqar, son of Amalek, son of Eliphaz, son of Esau". (There are apparently several generations omitted between Agag, who was executed by Samuel the prophet in the time of King Saul, and Amalek, who lived several hundred years earlier.)

So how did Agag's son survive Saul's sword? There are lots of *midrashim* about this, including one where Agag's son was disguised as one of the sheep spared in verse 9, and one where in the time elapsed between Agag being spared and the time he was executed he produced an heir. No matter what, our tradition is that Haman is a descendent of Amalek.

Let me close with one more interesting Purim relationship. "The Legend of the Wandering Jew" is a Christian legend based on an exchange between a Jewish shoemaker and Jesus as Jesus went to his crucifixion. In the legend the Jew said, "Go on quicker," Jesus thereupon answering: "I go; but thou shalt wait till I come." This story first appeared in 1228 in a manuscript by Roger of Wendover under the title Of the Jew Joseph. The central figure in that story is named Cartaphilus. However, at least from the 17th century, the name Ahasver has been given to the Wandering Jew, apparently adapted from Ahasuerus, the Persian king in the Book of Esther, who was not a Jew, and whose very name among medieval Jews was an exemplum of a fool. This name may have been chosen because the Book of Esther describes the Jews as a persecuted people, scattered across every province of Ahasuerus' vast empire, similar to the later Jewish diaspora in countries whose state and/or majority religions were forms of Christianity.