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A Translation and Analysis of
The Book of Zerubbabel
With an Analysis of Related Literature

Edwin Cole Goldberg

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
1989

Referee, Professor Richard Sarason

This thesis is dedicated to Melanie,
my loving companion,
and to my parents.

I would like to thank Professor Richard Sarason
for his enthusiastic support,
guidance, and wisdom.

In order to address these issues, this thesis is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1 consists of an introduction to early medieval messianic literature in general and the Book of Zerubbabel in particular.

Chapter 2 discusses the scholarly attempts to establish the book's date and place of composition.

Chapter 3 adumbrates the various textual witnesses available.

Chapter 4 consists of annotated translations of the three complete editions of the book: (a) the S. A. Wertheimer Edition; (b) the A. Jellinek Edition; and (c) the I. Levi Edition.

Chapter 5 discusses the narrative of the book, comparing and contrasting the three editions and commenting on the various messianic motifs found in the book.

Chapter 6 examines the main characters of the book: (a) Zerubbabel, (b) the Messiah b. David, (c) Metatron, (d) Hephzi-bah, (e) the Messiah b. Joseph, and (f) Armilus.

Chapter 7 discusses other medieval messianic texts and examines the relationship between the book and these texts.

Chapter 8 examines the treatment of the book in later literature of the Middle Ages.

Chapter 9 consists of a brief conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 10 features notes to the discursive sections of the thesis.

Chapter 11, the Appendix, features (a) two Geniza fragments of the book; (b) a Pirkei Hekhalot fragment which is, in effect, a fragment of the book; (c) a fragment of the book published by Alexander Marx; and (d) a chart which compares the narrative structures of the three editions of the book.

Chapter 12 consists of a bibliography.

Table of Contents

Digest	iii
Introduction	1
Dating the Book	8
Textual Witnesses	16
Annotated Translations	
A. Wertheimer Edition	20
B. Jellinek Edition	48
C. Levi Edition	60
A Discussion of the Book	80
A Discussion of the Characters	
A. Zerubbabel	95
B. The Messiah b. David	101
C. Metatron	105
D. Hephzi-bah	109
E. The Messiah b. Joseph	111
F. Armilus	121
Related Messianic Texts	126
Treatement of the Book	139
Conclusion	146
Notes	149
Appendix	
A. Cairo Geniza Fragment #1	156
B. Cairo Geniza Fragment #2	158

	vii
C. <u>Pirkei Hekhalot</u> Fragment	160
D. Alexander Marx Fragment	165
E. Comparison Chart	167
Bibliography	172

Introduction

Throughout the past two millenia, while enduring many hardships, Jewish communities maintained a sense of hope through their reading and creation of messianic literature. Many medieval works developed the relatively sparse biblical and classical rabbinic texts on the Messiah into sustained accounts of the coming of the Messiah. The literature also created new characters, friends and enemies of the Messiah, who also would appear at the Apocalypse. One of the most influential and creative early medieval works was the Book of Zerubbabel.

The author of this book presents a narrative which addresses the continuous -- and, in his time, presumably heightened -- yearning for the coming of the Messiah. The primary purpose of the work is to answer the question, "When will the Messiah finally come?" In answering the question, the Book of Zerubbabel creatively combines current messianic myths with an apocalyptic style, resulting in an informative and entertaining tale. Featured in the story is the familiar Messiah ben David, but the book also contains a portrayal of a lesser-known messiah, the Messiah ben Joseph (or the Messiah ben Ephraim).

The book's major contribution, however, is its creation (so far as we know) of the two characters of Hephzi-bah and

Armilus. In particular, the book's portrayal of Armilus, the archenemy of the Lord, became a standard source for later messianic accounts. The book's creativity, and its non-polemical nature (which will be discussed below) helped it become an immensely popular source of messianic information in the Middle Ages. From the amount of extant material, it is clear that many versions of the text existed; moreover, from numerous citations of the text and allusions to the story, one can infer its great popularity.

In order to appreciate the book and its significant contribution to messianic literature, we shall offer annotated translations of the three extant published editions (two of which are transcriptions of manuscripts). A detailed analysis of the differences among the versions will be helpful in determining the most reliable pieces of the text. Furthermore, an investigation into the messianic motifs incorporated by the text will help to relate the text to its antecedents. Naturally, a discussion of the dating of the book's composition will be necessary in order to relate it to other messianic works and to place the work in its historical context. Finally, an examination of various citations of the book by later authors will help to gauge its popularity and significance in subsequent ages.

Before presenting the translations, a preliminary discussion of medieval messianic literature in general, and the Book of Zerubbabel in particular, is useful. Joseph Dan has written:

During the last decades of Byzantine rule in Palestine, in the last years of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century, the political upheavals in the Middle East -- especially the continuous wars between the Byzantines and the Persians -- gave rise to a body of messianic literature, which was destined to play a major role in shaping the image of the messianic age in the eyes of medieval Jewry. The most important work which was written at that time was the Book of Zerubbabel.[1]

The Book of Zerubbabel, indeed, is a brief but full and original orchestration of the messianic motifs of its age. Like other contemporary messianic works, the book reflects the turmoil in the Jewish population of Palestine which the perennial battles of the sixth and seventh centuries produced. Abba Hillel Silver has written, "...the remarkable victories of the Arabs and the crumbling of the Persian and Byzantine Empires before their irresistible onslaught set aflame the new Messianic hopes...."[2]

Central to the messianic hopes of the early Middle Ages, as well as in earlier times, was the belief that the Messiah would come in such a time of upheaval. Even in the Talmud one finds intimations that the years which would bring the

Messiah would be formidable. One sage puts it: "Let the Messiah come, but I do not wish to see him." [b. San. 98b] Concerning the beliefs associated with this event, Raphael Patai writes:

The Messiah myth is, in essence, a myth of the great struggle between good and evil, with all its miraculous concomitants, the story of an upheaval greater than mankind has ever known in the past or will experience in the future, of the most stupendous holocaust one can imagine, which was deemed inevitable so that the old world array, or disarray, of evil could be eliminated and replaced by a new global order of goodness.[3]

The idea that "things will get a lot worse before they will get better" -- a notion culled from the Prophets -- is called in messianic literature the "birth-pangs" of the messiah. Probably, the paradoxical notion that more political upheaval and suffering would bring redemption -- or that redemption can only come in such circumstances -- gave the Jews of Palestine their only sense of hope. Joseph Sarachek has stated: "The Messianic faith was a safety-valve to the Jewish people in every strained situation. They pinned their hope to a mighty and saintly liberator who would rescue them from the torture-chamber and lead them to a mansion shielded by their Heavenly Father." [4]

The major problem in stating that a certain genre of literature, in this case the medieval messianic apocalypse,

was created in a time of distress is that the Jewish people have been in distress continually during the past three millenia. Nevertheless, it is possible to perceive the recurrence of this genre as a response to specific political events which were occurring in the first half of the seventh century. Regarding the Book of Zerubbabel, Joseph Dan writes:

It is possible that this story, which is rich in detailed descriptions of the persons and the wars, and contains detailed dates for all the occurrences included in it, was written under the influence of the great victories achieved by the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, against the Persians; for a Jew living in Palestine at that time it seemed that the emperor was about to conquer the whole world and reunite the empire with the Christian religion. The author believed that the Messiah was not going to overcome an enfeebled, divided Roman-Christian empire, but that his victory should be against an empire which would be physically and spiritually as strong as possible. Only after such unity is achieved by a Christian "messiah" can the Jewish Messiah appear and overcome the enemy.[5]

God, or his agent, it appears, does not fight petty wars. Only at a time of world dominance, in which the anti-Messiah would come to rule the world, would God send the Redeemer. As Gershom Scholem wrote, "Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature -- this cannot be sufficiently emphasized -- a theory of catastrophe." [6]

Stylistically, the Book of Zerubbabel and other contemporary messianic texts are considered to be "midrashic

apocalypses." They are "midrashic" in their interpretation of scriptural verses but their dominant form is the apocalypse. Regarding this form, Joseph Sarachek writes:

The apocalypse, like Prophetic Messianism, deals with the future....The point of departure from the prophets to the apocalypse is not to be found in their substance but in their form; not in their goal but in their method. The apocalypse employs a mysterious setting; ecstatic moods, kaleidescope world movements, and angelology, stamp it as a distinctive branch of sacred literature. In a certain sense, it represents a vulgarization of prophetism.[7]

Gershom Scholem, too, has commented on the apocalyptic form: "...the words of the apocalyptists represent a shift....These anonymous authors of writings like the biblical book of Daniel...encase the words of the ancient prophets in a frame which they mold and furnish in their own way." [8]

Essentially, the medieval messianic works such as the Book of Zerubbabel reformulate the messages of the prophets by adding classical rabbinic messianic beliefs and casting them in the apocalyptic narrative mode. Writes Scholem: "The words of the prophets, which in their original context appear so clear and direct, henceforth become riddles, allegories, and mysteries which are interpreted -- one might say, deciphered -- by an apocalyptic homiletic or an original apocalyptic vision." [9]

The apocalyptic expression of messianic hopes would eventually be attacked by rationalists such as Maimonides, but for a period of time these works enjoyed acceptance by many Jewish groups as well as enormous popularity. Besides the Book of Zerubbabel, midrashic apocalypses such as Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, the Revelations of Simeon ben Yohai, and the Chapters on the Messiah captured the attention of the Jewish people. Fundamentally, they are tales of Jewish power told in response to the Jewish people's lack of power. Scholem writes, "The magnitude of the Messianic idea corresponds to the endless powerlessness in Jewish history during all the centuries of exile, when it was unprepared to come forward onto the plane of world history." [10] In its messianic texts, the Jewish people is in the center of world drama, fighting the war between good and evil, led by God's agent of redemption, the Messiah. The Book of Zerubbabel provides a characteristic window into the world of these messianic texts.

Dating the Book of Zerubbabel

In the introduction to his artificially hybrid version of the Book of Zerubbabel (a discussion of this version appears below), Judah Even-Shmu'el relates the various theories regarding the dating of the book and its place of composition. Since Zerubbabel is told that the redemption will come 990 years after the destruction of the Temple which he, Zerubbabel, is building (i.e., the Second Temple), the simplest of these arguments takes 990, the number of years mentioned in all the versions (except the Pirkei Hekhalot fragment) and adds it to the year of the destruction of the Second Temple. Assuming that the writer of the book wished to state that redemption was imminent, and adding 990 to 68, the traditional year of the destruction, one obtains 1058 as the year that the book was written. This year coincides with the First Crusade, certainly a time in which the European Jewish community faced terrible problems easily identified with "birth-pangs." As for the book's author, the historian Heinrich Graetz argues that he was Italian, suggesting that he journeyed to the East and discovered the story of the book in the writings of Saadya Gaon.[1]

In his article "Studies in Geonic History and Literature," Alexander Marx notes the Pirkei Hekhalot

version, which gives the number of years to redemption as 890, or 958 C.E. Thus, the book would have been written at least 100 years earlier. He supports his argument with a letter dated 960 from the Rhenish Jews to the Palestinian communities in which they inquire concerning advent of the Messiah. Marx proposes that the Rhenish Jews had received the version of the Book of Zerubbabel and, after having read the work, they were prompted to ask if the Messiah had come. Since the reply is in the negative, suggests Marx, perhaps the work was unknown in Palestine. Marx writes:

If, then, this apocalypse, along with other mystic writings, had found its way from Italy to Germany and the Rhenish Jews were acquainted with the prediction concerning the advent of the Messiah in the year 958, we can easily understand how they came to address an inquiry to Palestine and how they met with a rebuff, the text occasioning the inquiry being unknown there, or perhaps being regarded of no value.[2]

These two theories, however, are unacceptable because they rely on numbers in the text which could have been added (or altered) later. For example, a copyist during the First Crusade may have put the number 990 into the text. Certainly, the practice of altering the text with timely references was standard at the time. Hence, it is unconvincing to argue the book's date based on such internal evidence.

According to Judah Even-Shmu'el, the first scholar who reasoned accurately concerning the book's date and place was Israel Levi, who recognized that the text's repeated mention of the Persian king Siroes connects it to Late Antiquity. (The history of this period will be discussed below.) Levi, in fact, argued that the book was written in Palestine between the years 629-636 C.E. (i.e., during the Byzantine-Persian War, or, rather, after Heraclius' victory over Persia).[3] Levi observed that the number 990 could be a later gloss, and therefore, the date of composition need not be computed according to this year. Such a gloss occurs, for example, in a piyyut attributed to Kallir, in which 900 is mentioned; yet Leopold Zunz, as well as later scholars, have argued that Kallir lived before the eighth century.[4] Even-Shmu'el himself argues that the number 990 refers to the elapsed years from the building of the Temple, not its destruction. Hence, he dates the work to 638 C.E.[5]

Even-Shmu'el notes two numbers: Zerubbabel's Temple will last 420 years, according to the angel, and the Messiah will come after 990. He subtracts 420 from 990 leaving 570, then adds this to 68, getting 638. The problem is that there are several places in the text which specify that the Messiah will come 990 years after the destruction of the Temple, not its rebuilding.

Furthermore, this theory would put the rebuilding of the Temple in 352 B.C.E. Even-Shmu'el, it appears, is not concerned about this discrepancy.

Levi and Even-Shmu'el are correct in their identification of the time and place of the book's composition, but they fail to mention another strong argument in favor of their conclusions. Clearly, the Book of Zerubbabel is coterminous with the "messiah" chapters (34-37) of the midrashic collection Pesikta Rabbati. The language of the two texts is similar and the content of the four chapters in Pesikta Rabbati, which discuss the birth-pangs of the messiah and feature the motif of the prisoner messiah, is remarkably similar as well. For instance, in Piska 34 we read:

"Submissive, and yet He promises salvation" (Zech. 9:9) describes the Messiah, for when they laughed at him while he sat in prison, he submitted for the sake of Israel to the judgment imposed on him, and is therefore properly called submissive. Why is he spoken of as "yet he promises salvation?" Because after submitting to the judgment for their sake, he said: All of you deserve extermination; nevertheless, you will be saved, every one of you, by the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He. "Afflicted, and he is riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9) describes the Messiah. And why is he called "afflicted"? Because he was afflicted during all his years in prison while transgressors in Israel laughed at him. [6]

The figure of the afflicted Messiah is known in the Talmud (b. San. 98), but the prisoner motif, found in Pesikta Rabbati and in the Book of Zerubbabel, is a post-talmudic development. The question is, how late?

Regarding the Pesikta Rabbati material, Bernard Bamberger has pointed out that a certain passage dates the text to the years 632-637.[7] The passage reads:

Said R. Isaac: The year when King Messiah is revealed, all the kings of the nations will be at strife with one another. The King of Persia will war with the King of Arabia, and the King of Arabia will go to Edom to take counsel from them. And the King of Persia will again lay the whole world waste.[8]

On the basis of this passage, Bamberger argues that the period of time when the King of Persia, the King of Arabia, and Edom, or Byzantium, existed together as world powers was between 632, when Arabia became a world power with a policy of conquest, and 637, when Persia was crushed at the battle of Kadisiya. Writes Bamberger:

The events pictured in the passage cannot be dovetailed exactly with the historical facts of the period as we know them; but it is not necessary that they should. The utterance is a prediction, not a historical summary. My point is, however, that the utterance makes no sense at all unless it comes from the time when all three empires were in existence.[9]

Besides arguing that the messianic section of Pesikta Rabbati was written at this time, Bamberger connects the material to apocalyptic works, stating that, although the form of the work is midrashic, the "real intent...is apocalyptic and apologetic....This work can be understood only as the expression of enthusiasts in a time of world crisis." [10] Like the Book of Zerubbabel, the messianic chapters of Pesikta Rabbati respond to a certain historical period. It is probable that the Book of Zerubbabel responds to the very same period.

Nevertheless, although the two works respond to the same period, there exists one crucial difference. The Book of Zerubbabel, unlike Pesikta Rabbati, makes no mention of the Arabs. Hence, it is probable that the book was written before the Pesikta Rabbati chapters -- before the beginning of the Arab conquest in 632. At the least, the book must have been written before the Arab victory in 637. Regarding this dating of the book, Joseph Dan writes:

In accordance with the dates given in the text for various stages of redemption, this work was probably written at the beginning of the seventh century, at the time of the last victories of the Byzantine Empire over Persia (629). To one living in Erez Israel at that time, it might have seemed that the last stage of victory over the Roman Empire and the Christian Church had arrived, and that the coming of the Messiah was imminent. Since no mention is made of the Arabs and Islam, whose invasion shortly thereafter

(637) eclipsed these victories, it can be assumed that this is a pre-Islamic work.[11]

In order to understand more clearly the political history of this period, a brief examination of the contemporary world events is useful. In 610 Heraclius became the emperor of Byzantium, the center of the Eastern Christian Church. The Jews of Palestine, meanwhile, sided with the Persians in their campaign to throw out the Byzantines. Benjamin of Tiberias, a rich Jew, helped the campaign. In 614 Jerusalem fell to the Persians, and from then until 628 the Persians ruled Palestine. As the historian Simon Dubnow notes, the Persians disappointed the Jewish communities of Palestine: "The hopes of the Jews that the Persians might restore Jerusalem, and might return to them the right of self-government, were not justified. The Persians were little concerned with the interests of the indigenous population of the country." [12]

Due to their disillusionment, the Jews agreed to a union with Heraclius, who promised to grant them amnesty and improve their civil rights. In an ironic gesture, Benjamin of Tiberias entertained Heraclius. In 629, Heraclius, having defeated the Persians, entered Jerusalem. His promises, however, came to nought and, as many contemporary stories relate, the situation in the

Jewish communities grew worse than ever. Andrew Sharf writes: "When Jerusalem was recaptured by Heraclius in 629 he encouraged the indiscriminate slaughter of Jews and ultimately their expulsion from the city." [13] It is highly possible that during this period, before the Arab conquest, the Book of Zerubbabel was created. Sharf notes that some "scholars consider that Heraclius appears as the notorious King Armilus destined to be slain by the Messiah according to the Hebrew apocalypse Sefer Zerubbavel, written in the 630s." [14]

In his book The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages, Joseph Dan, too, connects Armilus with Heraclius. He writes, "...we can establish the date of the Book of Zerubbabel's formation fairly exactly: the period of the victories of Heraclius, King of Byzantium, before the Muslim invasion in the third decade of the seventh century." [15] Thus, as Dan notes, the book straddles the ending of the ancient era and the beginning of the medieval period. Its sources are drawn from an earlier era, but its influence would be felt throughout the following thousand years. [16]

Textual Witnesses to the Book of Zerubbabel

For the Book of Zerubbabel to have survived throughout the Middle Ages, it must have existed in many different manuscripts. The difference among the publications, which, of course, are "descendents" of manuscripts, further implies that many different manuscript versions were in circulation since its composition in the middle of the seventh century. Listed below is the history of these textual witnesses, [The information regarding the versions is taken from A. J. Wertheimer's introduction to his publication, Israel Levi's introduction to his publication, and Judah Even-Shmu'el's introduction to his compilation of the book.]

- (1) The editio princeps of the Book of Zerubbabel was printed in Constantinople in 1519 in a collection of various midrashim entitled The Book of Ben Sira. It is related to MS Bodleian 160 and MS Bodleian 2797 (The Book of Chronicles/Yerahme'el). Very few copies of this edition have survived.
- (2) The second edition was published in 1807 (the place of publication is not listed) under the title The Book of Zerubbabel and the Comfort of Zion. This edition,

based on the editio princeps, includes annotations on the book.

- (3) The third edition was published in Vilna in 1819, together with The Book of Malkiel, and is based on the second edition. It includes the annotations from the second edition.

- (4) The Solomon Aaron Wertheimer edition, a reprint of the Vilna publication, was first published in 1903 in a collection of midrashim, edited by Wertheimer, entitled Leket Midrashim. Wertheimer adds his comments to the annotations of the earlier edition. He also adds two MS fragments of the book from the Cairo Geniza. In another book, Batei Midrashot, II, p. 29, he publishes yet another MS fragment, MS Bodleian 2642. His grandson, Abraham Wertheimer, reprints all of this material in his Batei Midrashot, II (1953), along with three additional MS fragments and a lengthened introduction (pp. 493-405). S. A. Wertheimer, in 1890, also published a fragment of the book found as chapter 39 of Pirkei Hekhalot. The text is reprinted and re-edited by his grandson in his edition of Batei Midrashot I (1953).

- (5) In 1853 Adolf Jellinek transcribed the book from two manuscripts, MS Leipzig 22 and MS Leipzig 38, comparing these with the first edition (Constantinople, 1519) and the second edition (Vilna, 1819). His edition appears in volume two of his Bet haMidrash (pp. 54-57, with an introduction on pp. xxi-xxii).
- (6) Israel Levi published an edition of the book in the French journal Revue des Etudes Juives 68, in 1914 (pp. 129-160). Levi offers an introduction, extensive notes, and a full French translation of the text. The text is transcribed from MS Bodleian 2797, fol. 248-50, which is the section of The Book of Chronicles/Yerahme'el that reproduces the Book of Zerubbabel.
- (7) Alexander Marx published a fragment of the book from MS Paris 326 -- which is dated approximately 1770 -- in the Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series, I, in 1910, pp. 75-78.
- (8) Judah Even-Shmu'el, in his Midrashei Ge'ulah, published an artificial version of the book, collated

and somewhat rewritten from the other versions, in 1954. He offers a lengthy introduction and extensive notes.

- (9) Four additional fragments of the Book of Zerubbabel were published by Simon Hopkins in 1978. Although the fragments are brief and often unclear, it is possible to discern that they correspond with greater or lesser precision to passages in the Wertheimer and Levi editions.

With the exception of the additional fragments published by Hopkins and the hybrid version published by Even-Shmuel, each of the independent textual witnesses will be translated separately. S. A. Wertheimer's text, which is based on the editio princeps, will be first presented, followed by the Adolf Jellinek edition and the Israel Levi edition. Translations of the fragments of Alexander Marx and the fragments of both S. A. Wertheimer and Abraham Wertheimer will also be included (in the Appendix).

Because it is based on the editio princeps, the S. A. Wertheimer text is presented with the most notes.

- Nevertheless, a few notes concerning the Jellinek and Levi texts will also be found.

A Translation of the Book of Zerubbabel
From the Wertheimer Edition,
Based on the Editio Princeps (Constantinople, 1519)

The word that came to Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel{1}, governor of Judah, on the twentieth-fourth day{2} of the seventh month, the day after the holidays.{3} God showed me this vision while I was praying before the Living God{4}, and the appearance of this vision which I saw lay heavily upon me.{5} "Blessed are You, Lord, who revives the dead."{6}

My heart was moved to say{7}, "Where is the Eternal Rock?"{8} And [a voice] answered me from the doors of the heavens and said to me: "Are you Zerubbabel?" And I said: "I am your servant." And it answered, speaking to me as a man speaks to his friend.{9} I heard a voice but saw no form.{10} And I arose and continued to pray as before, and I returned to my home. On the eleventh day of the month of Adar{11} it spoke to me there, saying to me: "Ask and I will tell you." And I answered: "What shall I ask? My end is near and my days have been fulfilled."{12} And it said to me: "I will make you live."{13} And it said: "Live."{14} Then a spirit lifted me up between the heavens and the earth{15} and brought me to Nineveh{16}, the city of blood.{17} And I said: "Woe is me," for my heart was troubled and my spirit and soul were agitated. And I arose

quickly in order to pray and to beseech my God. And I confessed my transgressions and my sins, saying: "You are He who made everything with the breath of your mouth, and [through] the word of your lips the dead will revive." {18} And [the voice] said: "Turn and go to the House of Debauchery, the place of frivolty." {19} And I went as [he commanded] me. {20} And it said to me: "Turn around." And I turned. And a man despised and of injured spirit touched me {21}, and the despised man said to me: "Zerubbabel, what is your business in this [place]?" And I had compassion for Nineveh, the great city, and I answered: "You cast me here." {22} And he spoke to me words powerful and firm, and when I heard them I was comforted. And I asked the man, "What is the name of this place?" And he answered me: "This is the Great [city of] Rome." {23} And I said to him: "What are you doing here?" And he answered me: "I am the Messiah of the Lord." {24} I fell silent and turned my face from him. But his anger burned within him {25} and his face reddened and his aspect changed, and I turned and looked, and I beheld him and I was afraid. And he said: "Ask of me." And as he spoke all of my limbs shook and he stretched out his hand (and took hold of me) and held me firmly. And he said to me: "Do not fear and let not your heart grow faint." {26} And he supported me and he said to me: "Why did you fall silent and turn your face from me?"

And I answered him: "Because you said 'I am the servant and the Messiah of the Lord.'" And he is the light of Israel.{27} And he appeared as a radiantly beautiful child{28} and I said to him: "When will redemption come to the world?"{29}

And as I was speaking a man with six wings{30} came to me and said to me "Zerubbabel, what are you asking the Messiah of the Lord?" And I said to him: "I need to ask." And he said to me: "[Ask me] and I will tell you." [And I said:] "Who are you, my lord?" And he answered me in a pleasant voice: "I am Metatron, the captain of the innermost chamber, and Michael is my name.{31} And He has appointed me over His people and over those who love Him. I am he who led Abraham out of the Land of Canaan and I blessed him in the name of the Lord. I am he who delivered Isaac and who wept over him. I am he who wrestled with Jacob in Transjordan. I am he who led Israel in the desert for forty years in the name of the Lord God. I am he who appeared to Joshua at Gilgal. I am he who sent forth fire and brimstone from God from the heavens.{32} And He made my name to be like His name.{33} .

"And you, Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel ben Jeconiah King of Judah, ask [of me] and I shall tell you." And I asked him: "Who is this man?" And he answered me: "He is the

Messiah of the Lord, and this one was born to the House of David{34} and the Lord preordained{35} him to be a prince, a covenant for the people.{36} And this is Menahem ben Ammiel{37} and this one was born at the time when Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem.{38} And I lifted him up through the spirit of the Lord and put him in this place until the time of the End." And I, Zerubbabel, [asked] this Metatron: "What are the signs which [this] Menahem ben Ammiel will perform?" And he said to me: "The staff of [these acts of] salvation the Lord will give to Hephzi-bah{39}, the mother of Menahem ben Ammiel, and she will go forth, the great star shining before her, and all the stars shall descend from [the] courses of their wars{40}, and Hephzi-bah the mother of Menahem ben Ammiel will go forth and she will slay two kings. And the two kings shall set their hearts to do evil{41}, and the name of the first king is Nof, King of Yemen, who will 'swing' (yanif) his hand against Zion, and the name of the second is Ateras, King of Antioch.{42} These signs will arrive in the fifth year in the third month when the Israelites will observe the Shavuot festival to the Lord; 990 years{43} after the destruction of Jerusalem (from this point onward wait for him) there will be the redemption of the Lord.{44} And the staff which (God) the Lord will give

to Hephzi-bah, He will [also] give to Menahem ben Ammiel, and this lapis lazuli staff lies ready in Rakkat{45}, a city of Naftali, and it is the staff which the Lord gave to Adam and to Seth and to Noah and to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob and to Moses and to Joshua and to David and to Elijah and it is the staff of Aaron who brought it forth and it blossomed."{46}

And I, Zerubbabel, said to Metatron: "When will he come, this Messiah of the Lord?" And he said: "Nehemiah ben Hushiel, a descendant of the tribe of Ephraim ben Joseph,{47} will come in the fifth year before{48} Hephzi-bah, mother of Menahem ben Ammiel, and he will make a stand in Jerusalem and will gather all of Israel in (one) gathering, each man [and] the people of his household, and the Israelites will offer a sacrifice to the Lord{49} and it [the sacrifice] will be pleasing to Him and the Israelites will be registered according to their families.{50} And after three months of [the presence of] Nehemiah ben Hushiel in Jerusalem, all Israel shall mourn him and lament him.{51} And afterwards Hephzi-bah, the wife of the prophet Nathan ben David, will come. These signs of arrival [of Hephzi-bah] will be in the sixth year{52} in the fifth month, the month of Av, on the sixth of the month. Siroes will stab Nehemiah{53}, and Israel

will be greatly troubled. And they shall disperse into the Judean Desert to fulfill the mourning of Nehemiah (and all of Israel will mourn him and cry over him){54}. And his corpse shall lie strewn in front of the gates of Jerusalem for forty-one days, but neither man, beast, nor bird will be able to touch it. And after forty-one days the Holy One Praised Be He will bury him in the graveyard of the House of Judah."

And I, Zerubbabel, continued to ask Metatron, the captain of the innermost [chamber], concerning the signs{55} of the prince of the holy people. And he said to me: This calf will lie down [and will cut off] the branches{56} of this city, Nineveh, the city of blood, which is Great Rome." And I said to him: "My lord, when [will be the] End?" And he came and seized me and grabbed my hand and took me to the house of licentiousness and showed me there a marble stone and it had the likeness of a virgin who had known no man. And he said to me: "What do you see?" And I said: "I see a stone with the image of a woman and the image of her face is like a beautiful woman." And the speaker answered me, saying: "This stone is the wife of Belial{57}, and at the moment in which she had intercourse with this Belial she conceived and bore Armilus, and she will be the head of all idolatry." And

this word [was revealed] in the prophecy of the Lord to Zerubbabel.{58}

And my soul within me became very agitated. And I went to Rosh ha-Mayim and I prayed there to the Lord God of all flesh, "Let Him send His angel [to me again]," and again the prayer was [fluent] within my mouth and I made no interruption. And I saw him and knew that he was the one who had spoken to me all of the previous words. And I bowed before him, and again he touched me as the first time. And he said to me: "What is wrong, Zerubbabel?" I told him that [my]{59} spirit was agitated about the Messiah of the Lord. And he said to me: "As God, the One who sent me, lives, now I will tell you the deed of the Lord, the Holy One, who said: 'Go, tell and announce to Zerubbabel my servant whatever he will ask.'" And he said: "Please approach and pay attention to all which you will hear from my mouth, for in truth I will tell you the word of the Lord God." And he said to me: "Menahem ben Ammiel will come suddenly{60} in the month of Nisan{61}, on the fourteenth day of the month, and he will come and make a stand in the Valley of Arbael{62} which belongs to Joshua ben Saraf{63}, and all the remaining sages of Israel will go out to him, for only a few will be left from the plunderers who had plundered them. And Menahem ben Ammiel will say to the elders that he is the Messiah of the Lord

'Who sent me to bring to you good tidings.' And the elders will look upon him [and see] that he is despised and that his clothes are filthy.{64} And his anger will burn inside him. And he will remove his clothes and he will put on the garments of vengeance.{65} And Elijah the Prophet will come with him and they will go together to Jerusalem. And they will resurrect Nehemiah b. Hushiel, who was slain at the gates of Jerusalem. And all of Israel will go [to Jerusalem] and they will see him when Nehemiah comes with him and they will believe in Menahem ben Ammiel." {66}

And this is the word of the Lord which Metatron, the captain of the host of the Lord, spoke in truth; Ephraim shall not envy Judah and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. And peaceful counsel shall be between them. {67} And on the twenty-first day of the first month of the nine hundred and ninetieth year after [the destruction of] Jerusalem, the redemption of the Lord [^{Cometh}will be]. Menahem ben Ammiel will come in the days of Armilus, whom the statue bore. And this Menahem ben Ammiel will go, and [with him] Nehemiah ben Hushiel and Elijah ben Phineas {68}, and he will stand at the great sea and draw out and raise up the corpses which had cast themselves into the sea in flight from their enemies {69}, and on the waves of the sea and he will cast them to the Valley of Yehoshafat {70}, for there will be

justice for the wicked and rejoicing for the righteous. And in the second month, the month of Iyar, the band of Korah{71}, for whom the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses and their tents, will arise in the plains of Jericho at the Wadi Shittim.{72} And on the eighteenth day the mountains and the hills will quake, and the earth and everything upon it, and the sea and all within it will tremble.{73} And on the first day of the third month the dead of the desert{74} will come and they will regroup with their brothers at the Wadi Shittim.

And on the eighteenth day of the month of Sivan there will be an earthquake that will affect the houses and the walls and the towers, and the earth and its inhabitants shall tremble. And Menahem ben Ammiel and Nehemiah ben Hushiel and Elijah the Prophet and all Israel -- from near and far as well as those living whom the Lord had resurrected -- shall ascend to Jerusalem. And in the month of Av, on that very day when they had lamented Nehemiah, there shall be great rejoicing and they will offer a sacrifice to the Lord God and the Lord will accept the sacrifice of His children{75} and He will be very happy with Israel and he will greatly rejoice, and the pillar of fire of the incense which was in the Temple of the Lord will arise toward heaven.{76}

And the Messiah of the Lord will go forth with all Israel after him on foot and they will stand before the gates of Jerusalem across from Mount Gerizim.{77} And the Holy God will stand at the summit of the mount{78} and fear will lie heavily upon{79} the highest heavens, and upon the waters and their floods and upon the mountains and their foundations. And there will not be found in any creature breath or soul, for the Holy One praised be He [will ascend] in the sight of everyone upon the Mount of Olives. And the mount will split asunder under Him{80} and the exiles of Jerusalem will ascend to the summit of the Mount of Olives, and Zion and Jerusalem will watch, and Zion will say: Who has begotten me these...and these, where have they been? (Isaiah 49:21). Nehemiah will go to Jerusalem and say: "Here are your children which you bore, who were exiled from you!" Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! (Zechariah 9:9) Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations (Is. 54:2).

And Metatron, who was speaking to me, showed me all these things, and [he showed me] Jerusalem in its length and breadth{81}, and I saw her encompassing walls, surrounding her from the Judean desert [south] and the Lebanon [north] and from the great river, the Euphrates

River [east], to the utmost sea [the Mediterranean -- west].{82} And he showed me the Temple and the Sanctuary built on five mountain peaks. And he said to me: "These are the mountains which the Lord chose to bear [Him]." And I asked: "What are their names?" And he said to me: "These are their names: "Lebanon, Mount Moriah, Tabor, Carmel, and Hermon."{83} And Metatron said to me: "This sign will occur at the fulfillment of 990 years [after] the destruction of Jerusalem: the salvation of the Lord. If you will inquire, inquire. Come back again. Come (Isaiah 21:12)."{84}

In the fifth year Nehemiah ben Hushiel will come and will gather Israel to Jerusalem. In the sixth year Hephzibah, the wife of Nathan ben David, who was born in Hebron, will make a stand and she will kill two kings, Nof and Aterus. And in the seventh year the poor one of Jesse, Menahem ben Ammiel, will blossom and before him will arise ten kings from the nations. And for a week and a half they will not be able to rule year after year. And these are their names and their cities{85}: The first king is Seleucis and the name of his city is Sefarad; the second king is Artemus and he is from across the sea; the third king is Talis and the name of his city is Gotya; the fourth king is Paulus and the name of his city is Gilos; the fifth

king is Me'edor and the name of his city is Martutanya; the sixth king is Markilnos{86} and the name of his city is Italy. The seventh king is Iftonres and the name of his city is Dores; the eighth king is Efremos and the name of his city is Aram Naharayim. The ninth king is Siron{87}, king of Persia. He will come and conduct a war in the Valley of Arbael and Nisrav{88} will go out against him and Siroes will come and reign in that same valley, beginning to plant the Asherot{89} which He [God] hated, for on that day the earnings of men will be nil and the profits of beasts will be nothing.{90} And he will build four altars and he will anger the Lord with his deeds and a great famine{91} will be on the face of the earth for forty-five days; and Israel and their kings and their prophets [will disperse] to the Jerusalem desert and the Wadi Shittim -- all of Israel -- [for] forty-five days and they [will] pluck saltwort and wormwood for sustenance on that day.{92} And a spring from the house of the Lord will go forth and water the Wadi Shittim.{93}

And the tenth king is Armilus, son of a marble stone that is in the House of Debauchery.{94} And all the nations from all places will come and will stand before the statue, and they will offer incense but they will not be able to look upon her face, on account of its radiant

beauty. And each one who will strive to look at her will not be able [to do so]. And this is the sign (i.e., the appearance by which he can be recognized) of Armilus, son of a stone: the hair of his head will be colored, and his hands [will reach] the bottoms of his feet, and the length of his face [will be] a span, and his stature [will be] twelve cubits, and his eyes [will be] deep, and he will have two skulls.{95} And he will arise and rule in Imus{96}, provinces of Satan which his father took. And all who see him will recoil from him. And after this Menahem ben Ammiel will come before him from the Wadi Shittim. And he will blow with his nostrils and kill him, as it is written in Scripture: ...and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked (Is. 11:4). And after this the sovereignty will belong to the Lord and the holy ones of the most High shall take the kingdom.{97}

These are the words{98} which Metatron, captain of the host of the Lord, told Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, governor of Judah, in the midst of the Exile in the days of the king of Persia; Zechariah ben Iddo and Elijah the Prophet wrote them for the people who will come in the end of days. And the Lord took Zerubbabel{99} and put him with Menahem ben Ammiel for days and years and seasons. At the time of the End he will bring with him words of peace [to] all of the

community of Israel. May God grant that we merit to behold
the Temple rebuilt and to behold our righteous Messiah
speedily in our days. Amen amen amen selah selah selah.

Notes to the Wertheimer Edition of
The Book of Zerubbabel

- [1] This opening is characteristic of prophetic books. Cf. Hosea 1:1: "The word of the Lord that came to Hosea...."
- [2] The twenty-fourth of the month of Shevat is the day on which the word of the Lord came to Zechariah (Zech. 1:7).
- [3] The problematic phrase, לחוד השביעי בחג, is emended to "of the seventh month, the day after the holidays" on the basis of Levi's suggestion that, for Zerubbabel, the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month would be immediately after Sukkot Azeret. The anonymous annotator of the 1807 edition suggests reading "in the days of Haggai" instead of "the day after the holidays." This suggestion is plausible, since the prophet Haggai is associated with Zerubbabel in the Bible. In a parallel passage found in a Pirkei Hekhalot fragment the text reads "of the seventh month, of the month of holidays." The Jellinek edition contains no reference to any month, and the Levi version clearly states "the seventh month" but has no reference to "holidays" or "Haggai." Because the text is so problematic, no positive emendation can be made.
- [4] Levi has "my God" instead of "the Living God."
- [5] The Wertheimer version (editio princeps) of these words is difficult:

וּחֲזוֹן הַמְּרָאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי בְּכָבֵד עָלַי

The Jellinek and Levi MSS are clearer, stating the place where the vision occurs:

Jellinek:

בְּחֲזוֹן הַמְּרָאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי עַל נְהַר כְּבֵד

Levi:

בְּחֲזוֹן הַמְּרָאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי בְּכָבֵד

Levi suggests that perhaps the printed edition should be emended:

וּחֲזוֹן הַמְּרָאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי (ב)כְּבֵד (ר)

The river Kebar is mentioned in a vision of Ezekiel (43:3): "...and the visions were like the vision I saw by the river Kebar, and I fell upon my face."

- [6] Zerubbabel is reciting the Eighteen Benedictions. The second benediction, concerning the revival of the

dead, is connected to the messianic time. Biblical imagery of resurrection is found in Ezekiel 37.

- [7] The phrase, **גדל על לבי**, "grew upon my heart" is difficult to understand. The 1807 commentary emends **גדל** to **עלה**, or "grew" to "ascended." Accordingly, the meaning would be, "it occurred to me to say." Our translation is based on the Jellinek MS: **נהם לבני עלי**.
- [8] In this version, Zerubbabel asks "Where is the Eternal Rock?" (i.e., Where is God?): In the Jellinek MS, Zerubbabel asks, "What will be the form of the Eternal House?" (i.e., "How should the Temple be rebuilt?"), which appears to be a better reading, since Zerubbabel, like Ezekiel, would naturally wonder about the form of the Temple. The text in the Levi MS follows the Jellinek MS. Cf. Ezekiel 40-48 for a description of his contemplation of the Temple. The term "Eternal House" appears in Tosefta Zevahim, 13:6.
- [9] From Exodus 33:11: "And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."
- [10] From Deuteronomy 4:12: "And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the voice of the words, but saw no form, only a voice."
- [11] If the voice was first heard in the seventh month (i.e., in Tishrei) then this next communication occurs many months later.
- [12] This phrase is difficult and varies throughout the MSS.
- Wertheimer: **קרב קצי ומלאו ימי**
- Jellinek: **קסני (נ"א:קצרו) ימי קצי ואמלא ימי**
- Levi: **קסן קיצי ומלאו ימי**

Nevertheless, the meaning is clear: Zerubbabel fears for his life.

- [13] The angel tells him that he will not die prematurely. Cf. Exodus 23:26, where God tells the Israelites: "The number of thy days I will fulfill." Cf. also Ezekiel

37:5, where God says to the dead bones, "I will make you live."

- [14] The text contains a fragmented repetition of the phrase: "I will make you live." The Jellinek MS contains a clearer repetition.
- [15] Cf. Ez. 8:3.
- [16] Nineveh, "that great city," is mentioned in Jonah 1:2.
- [17] Nineveh is called a bloody city in Nahum 3:1.
- [18] Cf. Daniel 8:27 and 9:4 in which Daniel becomes sick and prays to God for forgiveness. Why Zerubbabel asks for forgiveness is unclear. Perhaps he feels he is going to die and he wishes to prepare himself. Or, like Isaiah, perhaps he feels he must purify himself in the presence of a divine messenger.
- [19] The term varies among the MSS between **בית החורף**, "the Winter House," and **בית התורף**, "the House of Debauchery." "The House of Debauchery" is the correct reading. Likewise, the editions have both **מקום השוק**, "the market place," and **מקום השחוק**, "the place of frivolty." "The place of frivolty" is the correct reading. Levi supports both of these emendations. Here are the three versions of the phrase:
Wertheimer:

בית החורף מקום השוק

Jellinek:

בית התורף (נ"א: בית הלכות) מקום השוק

Levi:

בית החורף...מקום השוק

- [20] This is the text as emended by Wertheimer and as it is found in the Jellinek MS.

- [21] The description varies among the MSS.

Wertheimer:

נבזה ונכזה רוח

Jellinek:

נבזה ונפוצ

Levi:

נכזה ונפוצ דכא ומכאוב

For the imagery of the Suffering Messiah, refer to Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of pains, and acquainted with sickness; and we hid

as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." Cf. also the entire chapter in Isaiah and the discussion in b. Sanhedrin 98b: "The Rabbis said: His name is 'the leper scholar,' as it is written: 'Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him a leper, smitten of God, and afflicted.'" Also Cf. San. 93b for a mention of the messiah suffering, and San. 98a, in which the messiah is portrayed as a leprous beggar. Cf. also Pesikta Rabbati 161b, Midrash Kohen (BhM II, p. 29) and Derek Eres Zuta 1. Finally, Cf. below, the examination of the character Messiah ben David.

- [22] Zerubbabel's compassion for Nineveh, incomprehensible as it is, recalls the Lord's compassion for Nineveh in the book of Jonah. This phrase, surely out of place, is missing in MSS Jellinek and Levi. In the Jellinek and Levi MSS, Zerubbabel says that a spirit of the Lord carried him (a propos the language of Ezekiel), and not the angel.
- [23] Great Rome is Byzantium, not the Rome of the West.
- [24] In the Jellinek and Levi MSS, the messiah describes himself as a prisoner. This statement is not found here.
- [25] Why the messiah becomes so angry is not clear. In the Jellinek MS he does not become angry, and in the Levi MS it is Zerubbabel who is angry, or as Judah Even-Shmu'el suggests, perhaps Zerubbabel is agitated from his two competing desires to turn away and to look. The phrase *וַיִּשְׁתַּנּוּ צִלְמוֹתָיו* is emended to *וַיִּשְׁתַּנּוּ שְׁלֵמוֹתָיו* by the 1803 anonymous commentary. Hence, the translation reads, "and his aspect changed."
- [26] The Levi MS offers a slightly different reading:
Wertheimer:
וּלְבָן אֶל יִרְאֵה
Jellinek:
לְבָנָן אֶל יִירָא
- [27] These words here are difficult to comprehend. The Levi MS is clear: "I am the servant of the Lord and His Messiah and the Light of Israel."
- [28] The imagery of the transformed messiah varies, although the meaning and effect remain the same:

Wertheimer: כתינוק יפה ומיפה

Jellinek: כנער מכלול יפה ונעים בחור אין

Levi: כמותו

כנער בחור נאה ומיפה

- [29] The question is asked in various forms. The Jellinek and Levi MSS both contain light imagery applied to the Messiah ben David:

Wertheimer: מתי תבוא גאולה לעולם

Jellinek: מתי יאיר נר ישראל? (נ"א: מתי יבוא קץ

הישועה?)

Levi:

מתי יבוא אור ישראל

- [30] The printed edition portrays the angel with six wings, the Levi MS has two wings, and the Jellinek MS simply has "wings".

- [31] All of the MSS contain the Metatron=Michael identification. Cf. below for a detailed examination of Metatron and Michael. The title, "captain of the innermost [chamber in the throne room of God]" refers to Metatron's status as the "one nearest to the throne," or meta thronos. The angel's divine appointment over God's people refers to Michael's status as Israel's guardian angel. As Levi notes, it is possible that the confusion between Metatron and Michael results from an early conflation of two versions -- one in which Metatron addresses Zerubbabel, and one in which Michael speaks to him.

- [32] In the Jellinek and Levi versions the angel also describes the military campaigns that he has fought and will fight in the future. Here is the biblical support for the angel's claims in this text: conducting Abraham: Joshua 24:3; blessing Abraham: Genesis 22:17; saves Isaac: Genesis 22:12 -- Midrash Vayosha (BhM I, p. 38) identifies the angel with Michael; the angel crying over Isaac is found in Pesikta d'Rabbi Eliezer 31, Midrash Vayosha 1, and Genesis Rabbah 56, which explains the absence of the mention of the knife in Genesis 22:12: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad," by saying: "Where was the knife? Tears had fallen from the angels upon it and dissolved it." -- Cf. also Isaiah 33:7, which states: "...angels of peace shall weep bitterly"; the wrestling angel is

found in Genesis 32:25 and discussed in Genesis Rabbah 77, PdRE 37, and Tanhuma Vayishlach -- note that at times (G.R. 77:3, for example) the angel is connected with Esau, and not with God; the angel who conducted Israel is found in Exodus 23:20 and in a corresponding comment in Exodus Rabbah -- here and in Tanhuma Mishpatim, section 18, there is a connection between the angelic guide and the angel who appears to Joshua; the revelation to Joshua occurs in Joshua 5:13; regarding the angel who sends down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gemorah, b. Baba Mezia 86b and Genesis Rabbah 50:2 mention Gabriel as the angel who was sent to overturn Sodom.

- [33] The notion of the name of God within the angel is found in Exodus 23:21. Also, in b. Sanhedrin 38b, in a passage discussing heretics, one reads: "It was Metatron [who said that]...whose name is similar to that of his Master, for it is written, For my name is in him. Despite the similar idea, each of the MSS contains different phrases:

Wertheimer:

וְיֵשׁוּעַ שְׁמִי כְשֵׁמוֹ

Jellinek:

וְאֲנִי הוּא שְׁמִי רַבִּי וְשֵׁמוֹ בְּקִרְבִּי

Levi:

וְיֵשׁוּעַ שְׁמוֹ בְּקִרְבִּי

- [34] Hence, he is the Messiah ben David.

- [35] The term, וְיִצְחָק, is used idiomatically here. God "preordains" this man to be the Messiah of Israel. Even-Shmuel renders the meaning as "I [the angel] brought him here. Cf. J. Berakhot 2:4, Ruth Rabbah 2:14, where the messiah will be hidden for forty-five days, Pesikta Rabbati 49a and Derek Eres Zuta 1, where the messiah is spirited away.

- [36] As is noted in the 1803 commentary to the printed edition, the text should read נְגִיד לְבְרִית עָם, "prince of a covenant people," and not נְגִיד לְעָם, "a prince, a covenant for the people." The phrase, נְגִיד לְבְרִית עָם occurs in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8, where the new JPS translation renders it as "a covenant people." The title נְגִיד is rendered as "prince" in I Chron. 11:2.

- [37] Menahem, as a name for the messiah, is mentioned in Sanhedrin 98b: "He is Menahem the son of Hezekiah, for

it is written: 'Because Menahem [the comforter], that would relieve my soul, is far' (Lam. 1:16)." Cf. also J. Berakhot 5:1. The name "Ammiel" is found in Numbers 12:12, listed as a chief of Dan. The name is also found in II Samuel 9:4, connected with an acquaintance of King David. It has been pointed out that in gematria, Menahem = semah, a messianic term, and Ammiel = gana, vengeance. This connection is certainly a post-facto justification. Apparently, Ammiel was identified as Hezekiah, who was considered by some to be the messiah -- Cf. Sanhedrin 94a. As Levi notes, perhaps it should be vocalized קמאל (like קמנואל), meaning "God is with me."

- [38] The coming of Nebuchadnezzar refers to the destruction of the First Temple. Cf. J. Berakhot 2:4 and Lamentations Rabbah 1:51, where the Messiah is born when the Temple is destroyed and then he is spirited away by the wind.
- [39] The name Hephzi-bah occurs in II Kings 21:1, as the mother of Menasseh, the evil son of Hezekiah. It is significant that she is Hezekiah's wife, given the connection between Hezekiah and the Messiah. (In Lamentations Rabbah 1:51, Hezekiah is identified as the father of Menahem, the Messiah); hence it is logical that Hephzi-bah is the Messiah's mother.)
- [40] Cf. Judges 5:20: "...the stars from their courses fought against Sisera." The text is confused here. It should read "And all the stars will fight their wars from their courses," as emended by Even-Shmu'el (p. 78).
- [41] The phrase, לנבם להרע, is similar to Daniel 11:27: "And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief."
- [42] The name Nof is unknown elsewhere. A metaphysical connection with the verb yanaf is found in Isaiah 10:32: "This very day he will halt at Nov; he will shake his hands against the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." The name of the second king varies in the different versions:
- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| Wertheimer: | אסרס |
| Jellinek; | אסרנו (אנסורי) |
| Levi: | אסרני |

- [43] The number 990 years appears in all the versions. In a fragment in Pirkei Hekhalot, however, the number 890 is found. There remains uncertainty concerning the starting point of the 990 years. Most scholars believe the 990 years to begin after the destruction of the Second Temple in 68 C.E. Even-Shmu'el, however, counts from the time of the rebuilding of the Second Temple, or from the time of Zerubbabel. Cf. chapter on the dating of the Book of Zerubbabel.
- [44] The statement "from this point onward wait for him" was added later by a copyist. The phrase תְּסוּעָה לַיהוָה is rendered as "redemption of the Lord," based on parallel texts, but the literal translation is "a victory for the Lord."
- [45] The staff is stored in Rakkat, prepared and waiting for the messianic events. Rakkat is identified as Tiberias in Megillah 6a. According to Joshua 19:35, Rakkat is a city of Naftali.
- [46] The staff blossoms in Numbers 17:23: "And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tent of the Testimony; and, behold, the rod of Aaron, for the house of Levi had sprouted, and brought forth buds, and blossomed, and yielded almonds." Cf. also Jeremiah 1:11, where the prophet sees a rod of an almond tree, and Psalms 110:2, where a mighty staff is mentioned. In Numbers Rabbah 18:23, the staff mentioned in Numbers will be one day in the hands of the messiah: "That same staff also is destined to be held in the hand of the King Messiah (may it speedily be in our days!); as it says, 'The staff of thy strength the Lord will send out of Zion: Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies (Ps. 110:2).'"
- For thematic parallels to the passing of the staff, refer to PdRE 40, and Numbers Rabbah 18.
- [47] Nehemiah ben Hushiel is a symbolic name for the Messiah ben Joseph.
- [48] The word "before" is problematic in that in some versions, one finds the word "after"; hence, the question remains: does Nehemiah ben Hushiel come before or after Hephzi-bah? According to the editio princeps, he comes before; according to MSS Jellinek

and Levi he comes after her. The repetition of events which occurs in the editio princeps agrees with the initial order in the editio princeps.

- [49] The renewal of sacrifices is similar to their renewal in the days of Zerubbabel, at the time of the rededication of the Temple.
- [50] The gathering and registration of families relates to similar activity in Ezra chapter 2, where the proper genealogy of the Israelites is restored.
- [51] In the editio princeps the death of Nehemiah comes much more suddenly than in the MSS Jellinek and Levi. In these two versions there is a more extensive narrative of Nehemiah's military stand before the description of his demise. These versions, by first introducing Armilus, also prepare the reader for Nehemiah's death, even though there is the suggestion that Siroes, not Armilus, kills him. Siroes was the king of Persia who killed his father and became allied with Byzantium and the queen of Heraclius.
- [52] Earlier the text stated that Hephzi-bah arrived in the fifth year, and not the sixth year.
- [53] The idea of the stabbing of the messiah is interpreted from Zechariah 12:10: "And they shall mourn for him (that is slain) as one mourns for an only son." Cf. b. Sukkah 52a: "'And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart (Zechariah 12:12).'. . . .What is the cause of the mourning [mentioned in the last cited verse]?One explained, The cause is the slaying of Messiah the son of Joseph. . . .It is well according to him who explains that the cause is the slaying of Messiah the son of Joseph, since that well agrees with the Scriptural verse: 'And they shall look upon me because they have thrust him through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son.'"
- [54] This repetition may be correct here. The "duplicate" reading may be the first occurrence eight lines above.
- [55] The phrase, על אודות, means "concerning". A Geniza fragment, published by Wertheimer, contains the word אודות, "signs," instead, and the translation, "concerning the signs" follows this reading.

- [56] This phrase is a paraphrase of Isaiah 27:10: "[Yet the fortified city shall be solitary, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness;] there the calf shall feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume its branches." The Levi MS offers a more precise rendering of the biblical verse. The calf = the messiah.
- [57] Belial is the name for Satan found in some Second Commonwealth literature. The name also appears in the Bible (Cf. Deuteronomy 13:14). Both the Wertheimer and Levi MSS use this name, as well as the name Satau
- [58] The prophetic narrative is interrupted here by a description of Zerubbabel's agitation and another meeting with Metatron/Michael. The prophetic narrative continues in the next paragraph.
- [59] Wertheimer emends "spirit" to "my spirit," but Jellinek, too, has only "spirit". The phrase appears to be a paraphrase of Job 17:1: "My spirit is broken." The Levi MS, too, appears to be a paraphrase.
Wertheimer: כי הבהילני רוח

Jellinek: הבהילנו רוח

Levi: חבלנו ברוח בטני
- [60] Malachi 3:1 proclaims that the messiah, as well as the Lord, will come suddenly: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall clear the way before Me; and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in, behold, he shall come, says the Lord of hosts."
- [61] For the motif of the messiah coming in Nisan, refer to b. Rosh Hashanah 11a: "...in Nisan they were redeemed and in Nisan they will be redeemed."
- [62] Many aggadot connect the Valley of Arbael, a place which appears in Hosea 10:14, with redemption. Cf. J. Berachot 1:1; Yoma 3:2; Midrash Psalms 22.
- [63] The name Joshua ben Nisraf, which is similar to "Saraf" is known from the Baraita of the Priestly

Watches in Seder Olam Zuta 9 (or 11). The Levi MS calls him "Joshua ben Yehosadak, the priest." The Jellinek MS does not attribute ownership of the valley to any person.

- [64] The notion of the messiah not being believed is common to the "suffering servant" imagery in Isaiah 53. In the Jellinek and Levi MSS, the angel remarks that the messiah was despised just as "you, Zerubbabel, despised him." Wertheimer emends נעולה אנולה or "filthy."
- [65] Cf. Isaiah 59:17: "...and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing." Also note the parallel between the Messiah's burning with anger here and the account of Zerubbabel's first meeting the Messiah, where Zerubbabel is incredulous and the Messiah burns with anger.
- [66] Once again the prophetic narrative is interrupted.
- [67] Isaiah 11:13. In the current context, this verse refers to the relationship between the two messiahs, ben Joseph (Ephraim) and ben David (Judah).
- [68] The identification of Elijah as the son of Phineas is curious, considering that Elijah is identified with Phineas in rabbinic lore.
- [69] B. Gittin 57b discusses the suicide by drowning of youths in order to avoid immoral acts in Roman captivity.
- [70] Even-Shmu'el emends the text: "the waves of the sea will arise and cast them into the valley."
- [71] In M. Sanhedrin 10:3, Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Eliezer discuss whether the band of Korah will be resurrected. According to Akiba, the band will not be resurrected; according to Eliezer, the band will be resurrected. Each derives his opinion from a biblical verse.
- [72] The Wadi Shittim is mentioned in Joel 4:18, in a particularly hopeful passage. Wadi Shittim is a dry river valley which in the messianic time will be filled with water.

- [73] The imagery of the trembling earth is found in Ezekiel 38:19-20: "...Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the Land of Israel...." as well as in Zechariah 14:4. The Land of Israel lies on a major fault line.
- [74] The dead of the desert (i.e., those who died during the forty years of wandering) are mentioned in M. Sanhedrin 10:3.
- [75] Cf. Malachi 3:4: "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant to the Lord...."
- [76] Cf. b. Yoma 38a, where the pillar of incense ascends straight up.
- [77] It would seem appropriate to emend this name to the "Mount of Olives."
- [78] Cf. Zechariah 14:4.
- [79] The meaning of the phrase "fear will lie heavily upon the heavens" is clear: the fear will be palpable.
- [80] Cf. Zechariah 14:4.
- [81] The larger dimensions of the future Jerusalem are discussed in PdRK 20:7 and in b. Baba Batra 75b as well as in Ezekiel 40 ff.
- [82] The border description is from Deuteronomy 11:24.
- [83] The mountain names are listed in PdRK 21. Mount Sinai is listed instead of Mount Lebanon and Mount Hermon. Ps. 133:3 mentions the name Hermon.
- [84] The prophetic narrative breaks here. What follows constitutes a chronological recapitulation, but the information about Menahem's wars is new.
- [85] The names of the kings differ somewhat in the different versions. According to Even-Shmu'el, these kings fought with Armilus (Heraclius) against Persia. The cities referred to are actually their countries. Some of the names are known elsewhere.
- [86] Even-Shmu'el emends: Herkulanos (son of Heraclius).

- [87] He is Siroes.
- [88] Nisrav(f) is mentioned in the Baraitha of the Priestly Watches. Cf. n. 60.
- [89] Asherot in the Bible are groves used for idolatrous worship.
- [90] Zechariah 8:10. The verse is employed to state that during the period of distress described by Zechariah business will be difficult on account of oppressors.
- [91] Even-Shmu'el notes that a great famine is one of the signs of the imminent coming of the messiah.
- [92] Job 30:4.
- [93] Cf. Zechariah 14:8: "And on that day, living waters shall go out from Jerusalem...." and the corresponding comment of Rashi.
- [94] The text is again emended to "House of Debauchery." Cf. n. 19.
- [95] The grotesque depictions of Armilus vary among the versions.
- Wertheimer: שער ראשו צבוע ויריו עד פעמי רגליו
ואורך פניו זרת ושתיים עשרה אמה קומתו
ועיניו צפופות ושני קדקדיו ויהיה לו
- Jellinek: שער ראשו כזהב וכחול ויריו עד עקבי
רגליו וזה עינו זרת בן עין לעין
ועיניו צפופות ושני קדקדיו לו
- Levi: ושער ראשו כזהב צבוע וירוק גם פעמי
רגליו ורוחב פניו זרת ועיניו צפופות
ושנים קדקדיו
- Cf. discussion on Armilus for his description as depicted in other sources.
- [96] The name of the place varies slightly in the Wertheimer and Levi versions:

Wertheimer: באימורס מדינות השטן

Levi: באימורס מדינתא

[97] Daniel 7:18: "But the holy ones of the most High shall take the kingdom."

[98] This final section is a colophon.

[99] This sentence is not found in the other versions.

A Translation of the Book of Zerubbabel
From the Jellinek Version (MSS Leipzig 22,38)

The word that came to Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, governor of Judah (alternative reading [AR]: He showed me there){1} this sight: I was praying before the Lord at the time of the vision which I saw at the river Kebar while I was saying (AR: and I said) "Blessed are You, Lord, Who revives the dead."

My heart was greatly agitated within me, saying, what will be the form of the eternal House? And [a voice] answered me from the doors of the heavens and said to me: "Are you Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah?" And I said: "I am your servant." And a voice went out to me (AR: and answered me) and spoke with me as a man speaks to his friend. I heard its sound but I did not see its form. I arose and prayed as before and I recited (AR: and I finished) my prayer and I returned to my home. On the eleventh of Adar (AR: of the month) it spoke with me and said to me: "Come to me and ask of me." And I said: "What shall I ask? Brief (AR: Cut short) are my appointed days; my days have been fulfilled." And it said to me: "I shall make you live." And it said to me: "Live thou!"

And a spirit lifted me up between the heavens and the earth and brought me to Nineveh, the great city, the city of blood, and I was greatly agitated and I arose from my

pain in order to pray and beseech the God of Israel. And I confessed my transgressions and my sins. And I said: "O Lord, I have transgressed and I have sinned and I am guilty, for I am sick with pain{2}. But You are the God of Israel Who made everything with the breath of your mouth, and by your speech the dead revive." And the Lord{3} said to me: "Go to the House of Debauchery (AR: House of Licentiousness), the place of frivolty."{4} And I went as He commanded me. And He said to me: "Turn around." And I turned and he{5} touched me and I saw a man despised and wounded. And the wounded and despised man said to me: "Zerubbabel, why are you here (AR: what is your business)?" And I answered: "The spirit of the Lord carried me whither (AR: to this city) I do not know and it brought me to this place." And he said to me: "Do not fear, for you were brought here in order to show you."{6} When I heard his words I was comforted and I asked him: "What is the name of this place?" And he answered me: "This is Great Rome where I am imprisoned in jail until my appointed time arrives."{7} (AR: And I said to him: "My Lord, who are you and what do you want and what will you do here?" And he answered me: "I am the Messiah of the Lord, imprisoned here until the time of the End.") And when I heard this I turned my face from him for a moment and then

I turned and looked at him again, and I turned away again for I was afraid. And he said to me: "Do not be afraid and do not be downcast; why are you silent?" And I said: "I heard your tidings that you are the Messiah of my God." And immediately he appeared to me as a youth full of beauty and pleasantness, a lad with none like him. And I said to him: "When will the light of Israel shine forth?"

And as I was saying to him these words, suddenly a man with wings came to me and said to me (AR adds: "What are you going to ask the Messiah of the Lord?" And I answered: "When will come the appointed time of redemption?" And he said to me) that he was the captain of the host of Israel who fought with Sennacherib{8} and with the kings of Canaan and in the future will fight the battle of the Lord together with the Messiah of the Lord against the king of fierce countenance{9}, and Armilus, son-of-a-stone, who came forth from the stone.

And Metatron continued{10}, and he said to me: "I am the angel who led Abraham throughout the land of Canaan, and I am he who saved Isaac and wrestled with Jacob at the ford of Jabok, and I am the one who led Israel in the desert for forty years in the name of the Lord, and I am the one who revealed myself to Joshua in Gilgal, and I am he whose name is like the name of my master and His name is

within me. And you, Zerubbabel, ask of me and I will tell you what will happen to your people in the end of days."

And he said to me{11}: "This is the Messiah of the Lord, who is hidden here until the time of the End." (AR: And he said to me: "The Messiah of the Lord who will come at the time of the End and his name is Menahem ben Ammiel and he was born in the days of David, king of Israel, and a spirit lifted him up and hid him here until the time of the End.") And I asked Metatron and he said to me: "The Lord will give a staff of salvation to Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem, and a star will shine before her, and Hephzi-bah will go out and kill two kings, the first one Nof from Yemen and the name of the second one Antioch (AR: Asarnu from Antioch). And these signs will come to pass during the holiday of Shavuot and the matter is true. (AR adds: and when he will be killed) and when the city will be built 420 years it will be destroyed a second time, and twenty years after the submission (AR: after the building of Rome) of Rome, seventy kings will rule there and when ten kings finish, the tenth one will come and destroy the Temple and abolish the daily sacrifice, and from that day reckon 990 years; then will be the redemption of the Lord and He will remember His holy people [in order to] redeem them, to take them up, to carry them, and to gather them. And this staff

which God will give to Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem, from an almond tree (AR: from almonds) will be hidden in Rakkat (AR adds: a city of Naftali). And it is the staff of Aaron and Moses and David, king of Israel. And it is the staff which flowered in the tent of meeting and blossomed and ripened almonds, and Elijah ben Eleazar hid it in Rakkat{12}, which is Tiberias, and there Messiah ben Ephraim hid it. And Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel said (AR: and said to Michael): "My master, when will come the light of Israel and what will be after all of this?" And he said to me: "Messiah ben Joseph will come five years after Hephzi-bah and he will gather all of Israel as one man and they will make a stand forty years in Jerusalem, and they will offer a sacrifice, and then the king of Persia will arise against Israel and there will be great trouble in Israel and Hephzi-bah, the wife of Nathan the Prophet, will go out with the staff which the Lord will give her and the Lord will put in them a spirit of confusion and they will kill each other and there the evil one will die."{13}

And when I heard his words I fell on my face and I said to him: "Tell me the truth about [the] holy people." And he clung to me and showed me a stone in the image of a woman and said to me: "Satan will lie down with this stone and from her will come forth Armilus, and he will rule over

all the world and no one will be able to stand in his way, and all who do not believe in him will die by his ruthless sword, and he will come through the Land of Israel with ten kings to Jerusalem and they will kill there the Messiah ben Joseph and sixteen righteous ones with him and they will exile Israel into the desert, but Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem, will make a stand there; that evil man will not prevail{14}, and this battle will be in the month of Av. And then there will be torment in Israel such as there never was in the world, and they will flee to vaults and caves and wildernesses, and all the nations of the world except for Israel will err after this evil Satan-Armilus, and all of Israel will lament Nehemiah ben Hushiel who has been killed and whose corpse will lay strewn before the gates of Jerusalem, but no wild animal or bird shall touch it."

When I heard these words I was greatly agitated (AR adds: over the murder of ben Joseph and concerning all Israel). And I arose to pray before the Lord, and He heard and sent his angel to me, and I knew that he was the angel who had spoken to me and I bowed before him. And he said to me: "What's the matter, Zerubbabel?" And I said to him: "[My] spirit was agitated." And Metatron stood and said to me: "Zerubbabel, ask of me before I leave you." And I

asked him: "When will come the light of Israel?" And he answered me: "By the life of the Lord who sent me, I will tell you the work of the Lord, for the holy voice{15} sent me to you to tell you all that you ask." And Michael said to me: "Approach me now and pay attention to what I tell you, for true is the word in the name of the Living God."

And he said to me: "Menahem ben Ammiel will come suddenly in the month of Nisan and he will make a stand in the Valley of Arbael and all the sages of Israel will go out to him and to them ben Ammiel will say, 'I am the Messiah whom the Lord sent to announce to you good tidings and to save you from the hand of your persecutors.' And the sages will look upon him and despise him, as you despised him (AR adds: and they will not believe in him) and his anger will burn inside of him and he will put on the garments of vengeance for clothing. And he will come to the gates of Jerusalem, and with him Elijah, and they will awaken and revive Nehemiah (AR: ben Shealtiel{16}, who was killed) and [then] they will believe in him. And thus Metatron swore to me that 990 years after the destruction of Jerusalem will be the the redemption of the Lord; Menahem and Elijah will stand over the great sea and they will call in [the name of] the prophets and all the corpses of Israel who threw themselves into the sea because of

their captors will come forth. And then the band of Korah will arise and will come to Moses and the dead of the desert will revive and the banner of the Korahites will be restored.

"And the Lord will descend upon the Mount of Olives and the mount will split asunder from His rebuke, and He will fight with the nations as a man of war stirs up his vengeance{17,} and the Messiah ben David will come and blow upon the nostrils of Armilus and kill him, and all Israel will behold, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion (AR adds: as it is said: they shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion) as a man of war with a helmet of salvation on his head{18}, and girded in armor, and he will fight with Armilus and with his troops, and all of them will fall dead in the valley of Arbael, and the remnant [of the Gentiles] will escape and they will gather at the stone of the Lord, 1500 men and 100,000 dressed in armor coats. And 500 from Israel, with Nehemiah at their head will kill them. And after this Menahem ben Ammiel will come [with him] and Nehemiah and Elijah and they will go up to Jerusalem, and in the month of Av they shall restore the ruins of Jerusalem and there will be great rejoicing for Israel and they will offer their sacrifices, and the offering of Judah and Israel will be pleasing to the Lord,

as in ancient times. And God will smell our fragrant offerings and He will be greatly pleased with the beauty of the Temple that is built above and He will add to it in length and width and it will extend from the East and from the great desert up to the Mediterranean Sea and up to the great river Euphrates, and also the Sanctuary will be built on (AR: five) summits of mountains." And I asked him: "What are their names?" And he answered me: "Lebanon, Mount Moriah, Tabor, Carmel, and Hermon."

And these are the ten kings who will arise over the nations in seven years: the first one is Seleucis from Aspamia; the second one is Armimus (AR: Artimus) from over the Sea; the third is Kilus (AR: Talis) from Gita; the fourth is Plo'os (AR: Paulus) from Gaul; the fifth is Romatrus from Moratya; the sixth is Meklanus from Zaltya (AR: Morkolus from Italy); the seventh is Arktonis from Adamis (AR: Aktonus from Rodma); the eighth is Misplisnis (AR: Efalastous) from Mesopotamia; the ninth is Parus from Parsi (AR: Siroes from Persia); the tenth is Armilus ben Safon{19} (AR adds: and this is a sign of the appearance of Armilus: the hair of his head is like gold and like fodder, and his elbows descend to his ankles, and the space between his eyes is a span, and his eyes are crooked and he has two skulls and all who look upon him are frightened of him, and

the ten kings who will be created with him will rise up over the nations).

Immediately after him, and the sovereignty will belong to the Lord{20}. And let our eyes behold the annointed city whose exile extends until now, on account of our sins. Hope [too] continues. (AR: Immediately, and the sovereignty will belong to the Lord" -- speedily in our days!)

Notes to the Jellinek Edition of
The Book of Zerubbabel

- [1] Jellinek includes variant readings, but he does not indicate which MS is his main text and which provides the variant readings. Presumably, MS 22 is his main text and MS 38 is the variant text.
- [2] The phrase, כִּי נַחֲלִי כְאֲנִי, rendered as "I am sick with pain," is difficult to understand. Perhaps the text should be emended to חֲלָה לְבִי, "my heart is sick," as found in the Levi edition. Cf. Isaiah 17:11: בְּיוֹם נַחֲלָה וְכָאֵב אֲנוֹס, "in the day of grief and desperate pain."
- [3] These MSS have the Lord Himself speaking to Zerubbabel -- undoubtedly an error.
- [4] As noted in the notes to the Wertheimer edition, שֹׁחַק should read שְׂחֹק.
- [5] It is unclear who touches Zerubbabel, the angel or the messiah. The Levi version, too, is unclear. In the Wertheimer version, the messiah touches Zerubbabel. This reading makes the best sense.
- [6] Ez. 40:4: "...for thou wast brought here, in order that they might be shown to thee."
- [7] Unlike in the Wertheimer version, the messiah here and in the Levi MS specifically says he is a prisoner. This motif is found in Aggadat Bereshit 23:1 (BhM IV, p. 351) and Pesikta Rabbati 34. One also finds the idea that just as Moses, who would liberate the Israelites from Egypt, lived in Egypt, so will the messiah, liberator of the Jews from Rome, live in Rome. Cf. b. Sanhedrin 98a, where the Messiah lives in Rome, and Exodus Rabbah 1:26, which states: "The Messianic king, too, who will one day punish Edom [Rome], dwells with them in that province, as it is said: There 'shall the calf feed, and' there 'shall he lie down (Isaiah 27:10).'" Tanhuma Shemot, section 8, contains a parallel statement. The proof-text from Isaiah is found in the Book of Zerubbabel too.
- [8] Cf. Exodus Rabbah 18:5: "When Sennacherib came, Michael came out and smote them...."
- [9] Cf. Daniel 8:23: "And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance...shall arise."

- [10] This passage may be a conflation of the Metatron and Michael traditions.
- [11] The prophetic narrative resumes here.
- [12] Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 47 identifies Elijah with Phineas. Since Phineas is known as the son of Eleazar, Elijah in our text is called the son of Eleazar. J. Shekalim 6:1 discusses who hid the staff: Josiah, King of Judah.
- [13] Presumably the evil one refers to the king of Persia.
- [14] A redundant phrase, "and the same evil man will not be seen," has been omitted.
- [15] הקול הקדוש, "the holy voice," should read האל הקדוש, "the holy God." So notes Levi (p. 137, n. 19).
- [16] The text should read "ben Hushiel," and not "ben Shealtiel," which is the patronymic of Zerubbabel.
- [17] Cf. Isaiah 42:13: "The Lord shall go forth as a might man, He shall stir up ardor like a man of war."
- [18] Cf. Isaiah 52:8 "...they shall see, eye to eye, the Lord return to Zion," and also Isaiah 59:17: "...and a helmet of salvation upon his head...."
- [19] Probably שטן, "Satan," not שפון, "Safon."
- [20] Cf. Obadiah 21.

A Translation of the Book of Zerubbabel
From the Levi Version
(MS Bodleian 2797, "The Chronicles of Yerahmiel")

The word that came to Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, governor of Judah, on the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month. The Lord showed me there this vision while I had been praying before the Lord, my God, in the vision which I saw in Kebarah.{1} And while saying: "Blessed are You, Lord, who revives the dead," my heart became agitated within me, saying: "It was the trouble [sic] of the Eternal House." {2} And it [a voice] answered me from the doors of the heavens and said to me: "Are you Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, the governor of Judah?" And I said: "I am your servant." And it answered me, speaking to me as a man speaks to his neighbor. I heard its voice but I did not see its form. And I arose and prayed as before. I finished my prayer and returned to my home. On the eleventh of the month of Adar it spoke with me there, saying to me: "Are you Zerubbabel my servant?" And I said: "I am your servant." And it said to me: "Approach me. Ask of me and I will tell you." And I answered: "What shall I ask, for my end is short [sic]{3} and my [allotted] days have been fulfilled?" And he said to me: "I will make you live." And he said: "Live!" And a spirit lifted me up between the heavens and the earth and brought me to the

great city Nineveh, the city of blood. And I said: "Woe is me," for my heart was disturbed and my soul was very agitated. And I arose from my pain in order to pray and to beseech the Lord, God of Israel, and I confessed (all) my transgressions and my sins (for my heart was disturbed), saying: "O Lord," I cried, "I have committed iniquity; I have transgressed; I have sinned, (for my heart was sick), but You are the Lord God Who made everything with the utterance of your mouth, and with a word from your lips the dead will revive." And it [the voice] said to me: "Go to the House of Debauchery, to the place of frivolty."^{4} And I went as it commanded me. And it said to me: "Turn around." And I turned and he^{5} touched me and I saw a man despised and wounded, downcast and in pain. And the (same) despised man said to me: "Zerubbabel, what is your business here, or who brought you here?" And I answered: "A spirit of the Lord bore me up and cast me down in this place." And he said to me: "Do not fear, for you were brought here in order that it might be shown to you."

As I heard these words I was comforted and my composure (will) return[ed] to me. And I asked him: "My lord, what is the name of this place?" And he said to me: "This is Great Rome, in which I am imprisoned." And I asked him: "Who are you and what is your name and what do you seek here and what are you doing in this place?" And

he answered me: "I am the Messiah of the Lord, (ben Hezekiah), imprisoned in jail until the time of the end." As I heard these words I fell silent and turned my face away from him, and my anger burned within me and I regarded him again, and I was afraid. And he said to me: "Approach me." And as he spoke to me my limbs trembled and he put out his hand and grabbed me and said to me: "Do not be afraid and do not fear in your heart." And he strengthened me and said: "Why did you fall silent and hide your face from me?" And I answered him: "Because you said 'I am the servant of the Lord and His Messiah and the Light of Israel.'" And he spoke to me and appeared to me as a youth, a pleasing and handsome lad. And I asked him: "(Until) when will come the Light of Israel?"

And as I was speaking to him suddenly a man with two wings came to me, and he said to me: "Zerubbabel, what are you asking the Messiah of the Lord?" And I answered him: "I am asking, 'When will come the appointed time of redemption?'" And he said: "Ask me and I will tell you." And I asked him: "Who are you, my lord?" And he answered: "I am Michael who announced good tidings to Sarah.{6} I am [the] captain of the Host of the Lord God of Israel who fought with Sennacherib and smote one hundred and eighty thousand men, and I am [the] guardian angel of Israel who

fought the wars with the kings of Canaan, and in the future I will fight the wars of the Lord together with the Messiah of the Lord, this one who sits before you, against the king of fierce countenance and with Armilus, son of Satan, who will descend from the image of a stone. And the Lord appointed me over His people and over those who love him as a captain to fight with the captains of the nations." And Michael answered Metatron [sic]{7} and said to me: "I am the angel who guided [Abraham] throughout the land of Canaan and blessed him in the name of the Lord, and I am he who saved Isaac and wept{8} over him, and I am he who wrestled with Jacob at the ford of the Jabbok, and I am he who conducted Israel in the wilderness forty [years] in the name of the Lord, and I am he who appeared to Joshua in Gilgal, and I am he who caused it to rain fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gemorah and He placed His name within me." (Metatron in Gematria = Shaddai.){9} And you, Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, whose name is [son of] Yeconiah, ask of me and I shall tell you what will occur in the end of days."

And he said to me: "This is the Messiah of the Lord, who is hidden in this place until the end, and this is Messiah ben David and his name is Menahem ben Ammiel and this one was born in the days of David, King of Israel.

And a spirit lifted him up and hid him away in this place until the time of the End." And I, Zerubbabel, asked Metatron, captain of the Host of the Lord, and he said to me: "The Lord will give this staff of salvation to Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem ben Ammiel, and a great star will shine{10} before her and all the stars will depart from their orbits. And Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem ben Ammiel, will go forth and slay two kings, both of whose hearts will be set on doing evil. And the name[s] of the two kings [are] Nof, King of Yemen, who lifted his hand against Jerusalem, and (the name of the second one is) Isarinan, King of Antioch, and this war and these signs will be during the holiday of Shavuot, in the third month -- and this word is true.

"When the city and the Temple will have been built for 420 years, it will be destroyed a second time, and twenty years after the building of Rome, seventy kings will rule in it, corresponding to the seventy nations, and when ten kings will have finished [their reigns], the tenth king will come and destroy the Temple and he will stop the daily sacrifice and disperse the holy people, and he will put them to the sword and despoil and trouble [them], and many of them will fall in their Torah and they will abandon the Torah of the Lord and they will worship their idols, and in

pleasing to the Lord, and he will establish the genealogy of all Israel, and in the fifth year of Nehemiah and the gathering of holy ones, Siroes, King of Persia, will rise up against Nehemiah ben Hushiel and against Israel and there will be great trouble in Israel, and Hephzi-bah, the wife of Nathan the prophet, the mother of Menahem [ben] Ammiel, will go forth with the staff which the Lord, God of Israel, will give her, and the Lord will put a spirit of confusion in their midst, and they will kill each other and there will the evil one die." And as I heard these words I fell on my face and I said: "Lord, tell me what Isaiah the prophet meant: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down and consume its branches (Isaiah 27:10)." And he said to me: "The calf is Nineveh, the city of blood, Great Rome." And there I again asked concerning the prince of the holy covenant, and he [Michael/Metatron] clung to me and he brought me to the house of debauchery, the place of licentiousness{13}, and he showed me there a marble stone in the image of a virgin and her appearance and her look was pleasant and exceedingly beautiful to see. And he said to me: "This stone is [the wife of] Belial, and Satan will come and lie down with her and out of it will come a son and his name [will be] Armilus [which means] "and he will destroy the people" in the Hebrew [sic] tongue.{14} He

will rule over all, and his dominion will extend from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, and ten signs will be in his hand and he will worship the god of the gentiles and he will speak to the male.{15} And no one will stand up against him, and all who will not believe in him he will kill by sword and he will kill many and he will attack the holiest of people and ten kings will be with him in strength and great might and he will make war against the holy ones and he will destroy them and slay Messiah ben Joseph -- Nehemiah ben Hushiel -- and sixteen righteous ones will be killed with him, and Israel will go into exile in the wilderness in three different groups. But Hephzibah, mother of Menahem ben Ammiel, will make a stand by the eastern gate and there that evil one will not come, to fulfill the Scripture, And the remainder of the people will not be removed from the city (Zechariah 14:2). And this war will take place in the month of Ab, and there will be unparalleled distress in Israel, and they will flee to rocky vaults, and to the mountains and caves, but they will be unable to hide from him, and all the peoples of the lands will err after him -- excepting Israel, who will not believe in him. And all of Israel will lament Nehemiah ben Hushiel forty days, and his corpse will lie ignominiously strewn before the gates of Jerusalem, but bird and beast

will not touch it, and the Israelites will cry out to the Lord on account of the enormity of the oppression and from great torment and the Lord will answer them."

As I heard this word in the prophecy of the Lord (to me) I was greatly agitated and I arose and went to the water canal and I cried there before the Lord, God of Israel, God of all flesh, and He sent His angel to me and I was in the midst of another prayer and did not interrupt it. And the Lord sent His angel to me and I saw and knew that he was the angel who had spoken to me all the previous words. And I bowed before him and again he touched me like the first time. And he said to me: "What is the matter, Zerubbabel?" And I said to him, "My lord, I am afflicted by the sighing of my entrails." [16] And Metatron answered me: "Ask of me and I will tell you before I depart from you." And again I asked him: "My lord Metatron, when will come the Light of Israel?" And he answered me: "By the life of the Lord Who sent me and Who appointed me over Israel, I will tell you the work of the Lord, for the Holy God said to me: 'Go to Zerubbabel, My servant, and tell him whatever he will ask of you.'"

And Michael -- Metatron -- said to me: "Approach here and pay attention to all that I say to you, for true is the word which I speak to you in the words of the Living God."

And he said to me: "Menahem ben Ammiel will come suddenly in the first month -- the month of Nisan -- on the fourteenth day and he will make a stand in the Valley of Arbael which belongs to Joshua ben Yehosadak, the priest, and all the remaining sages will go out to him, for a few will remain from the smiting and spoiling of Gog and Armilus and from the despoilers who despoiled them [i.e., the sages and the people]. And Menahem ben Ammiel will say to the elders and to the sages: 'I am the Messiah of the Lord, whom the Lord has sent to announce good tidings to you and to save you from the hand of these oppressors.' And the elders will look at him and despise him, for they will see the same despised man, dressed in worn clothes, and they will despise him as you despised him, and his anger will burn inside of him and he will wear the garments of vengeance for clothing and he will wrap himself with zeal as a cloak, and he will go to the gates of Jerusalem, and Hephzi-bah, the mother of the Messiah will come and give him the staff with which the signs have been performed, and all of the elders of Israel will go forth and the Israelites will see that Nehemiah lives and he will stand on his feet -- instantly they will believe in him as the messiah." And thus did Metatron, captain of the Host of the Lord swear to me that this is the truth, for

peaceful counsel shall be between them as in the prophecy of Isaiah: Ephraim shall not envy Judah and Judah shall not vex Ephraim (Isaiah 11:13).

"And on the twenty-first day of the first month 990 years after the destruction of Jerusalem will be the Lord's redemption of Israel. And Menahem ben Ammiel will come, and Nehemiah ben Hushiel and Elijah the Prophet, and they will stand at the great sea and call out through the prophecy of the Lord and all the corpses of Israel who threw themselves into the sea because of their enemies will come out of the sea and a wave of the sea will arise and scatter them and throw them living into the Valley of Jehoshapat by the Wadi Shittim, for there will the judgment of the nations take place. And in the second month, in Iyar, the band of Korah will arise in the wilderness of Jericho by the Wadi Shittim and they will come to Moses and the banner of the Korahites will be restored, and on the eighteenth day the mountains and hills shall tremble, and the earth and all upon it and the sea and all within it shall disintegrate.

"[On] the first day of the third month the dead of the desert will revive and come to their houses at the Wadi Shittim, and on the eighteenth day of the month of Sivan there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. In

Tammuz, in the fourth month, the Lord God of Israel will descend upon the Mount of Olives and the Mount of Olives will split asunder from His rebuke. And He shall sound the great shofar{17} and all the gentile gods and the temples of idolatry will fall to the earth and every wall and embankment will fall to the ground, and the Lord will strike their horses and He will fight among these nations. As a man of war He will bestir his jealousy, and the Messiah of the Lord will come -- Menahem ben Ammiel -- and he will blow upon the nostrils of Armilus and kill him.

"And the Lord will put the sword of each man against the neck of his neighbor, and there corpses will fall and the holy people will go forth and see the redemption of the Lord -- all of Israel shall see it -- as a man of war with a helmet of salvation on His head and He will wear a coat of armor and He will make war [against] Gog Magog and against the army of Armilus, and all of them will fall down dead in the valley of Arbael. And all Israel will go forth and slight their captors and despise their despisers seven months and remnants of them [the gentiles] will escape -- five hundred men will be gathered together at Sela ha'Elef{18}, wearing coat[s] of armor. And 100,500 men from Israel{19}, with Nehemiah and Elijah and you, Zerubbabel, at their head, will kill all of them and there one man will chase a thousand.

"And this shall be the third war, and there will be three wars in the land of Israel, one that Hephzi-bah will make with Siroes, the king of Persia, and one that the Lord God of Israel and Menahem ben Ammiel will make with Armilus and ten kings with them and Gog and Magog, and the third at Sela-ha'Elef that Nehemiah ben Hushiel and Zerubbabel will make, and the third battle will be in the month of Av. And after all of this Menahem ben Ammiel will come, and Nehemiah ben Hushiel and all of Israel with him, and all the dead will revive and Elijah the Prophet will be with them and they will ascend to Jerusalem, and in the month of Av, in which they lamented Nehemiah, in which Jerusalem [was] destroyed, there will be great rejoicing for Israel, and they will offer a sacrifice to the Lord and the Lord will be pleased with them and the offering of Israel will be pleasing to the Lord, as in previous days, and the Lord will smell the pleasing fragrance [offered by] His people Israel and the Lord will be very happy and the Lord will lower to earth the Temple built in heaven and a pillar of fire and a cloud of incense will arise to the heavens, and the Messiah will go out and all Israel after him on foot to the gates of Jerusalem. And the holy God will stand on the Mount of Olives and His awesomeness and glory [will be revealed] over the heavens and the highest of heavens and

all the earth and that which is under it, and over all walls and buildings on their foundations, and there will not be found any soul, for the Lord God will be revealed in view of everything on the Mount of Olives and the Mount of Olives will be split asunder, and the exiles of Jerusalem will ascend to the Mount of Olives and Zion and Jerusalem will see and they will say, Who has begotten for us these, and these, where have they been? And Nehemiah and Zerubbabel will ascend to Jerusalem and they will say to her: 'Here are your children which you bore, who were exiled from you.' Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion." {20}

And again I began to ask Metatron, captain of the Host of the Lord: "My lord, show me Jerusalem -- how long her length and how big her width and her building." {21} And he showed me the walls of Jerusalem surrounding her, walls of fire from the great desert to the farthest sea, to the Euphrates River, and he showed me the Sanctuary, and the Temple and the Sanctuary were built on five mountain summits, upon the mountain of the Lord, to bear His Temple: Lebanon, and Mount Moriah, and Tabor and Carmel and Hermon. And Michael answered me: "990 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the redemption of Israel is ordained." And he also explained to me the word and the

vision that he had said to me in the beginning: ...if you will inquire, inquire; return, come.{22}

On the fifth day of the week Nehemiah ben Hushiel will come and gather all of Israel, and on the sixth day of the week Hephzi-bah, the wife of Nathan the Prophet who was born in Hebron, will come and kill two kings, Nof and Asarugan{23}, and in that year the root of Jesse, Menahem ben Ammiel, will blossom, and ten kings will rise up from among the nations and they will not suffice to rule a week and a half, year by year, and these are the ten kings [who] will rise up over the nation in seven years -- these are their names according to their cities from their places: the first king is Selcum, and the name [of his city] is Sepharad, which is Aspamia, across the Sea; and the second king is Artimus and the name of his city is Gitania; the third king is Plius and the name of his city is Pluis; and the fourth king is Galvas and the name of his city is Galia; the fifth king is Ramosdes and the name of his city is Moditica; and the sixth king is Moclanus and the name of his city is Italy; the seventh king is Ochtenus and the name of his city is Dormes; the eighth king is Aplostos from Mesopotamia, and the ninth king is Siroes, the king of Persia, and the tenth king is Armilus, son of Satan, who comes forth from the image of the stone.

He will rule over everyone and he will come and stir up war in the valley of Arbael with the kings of Kedar and the people of the East and theirs will be the sovereignty. And he will ascend in his strength and he will conquer all the world and from there in Riblah, which is Antioch{24}, he will begin to plant all the groves of the nations and to serve Ba'alim, which the Lord hates, on the face of the earth. And in the same days there will be no profit for man nor beast and he will build four altars and he will anger the Lord with his evil deeds, and a great and severe famine will be upon the face of the earth for forty days -- their bread will be saltwort and they will pluck wormwood for sustenance{25} -- and on that day a stream from the house of the Lord will go forth and water the Wadi Shittim, and Armilus will take his mother from whom he was born from the House of Debauchery and of scorn and all the places and all the nations will come and worship that stone and burn incense to her and pour libations to her and no man will be able to look upon her face because of her beauty, and all who do not bow down to her will die like animals.

And this is the sign of Armilus: the hair of his head is like painted gold and he is also green [down to] the bottoms of his feet, and the width of his face is a span, and his eyes are deep and he has two skulls and he will

rise up and rule in the city of Imis, and Satan the father of Belial{26}, and all who see him will be frightened of him and Menahem will arise up from the [Wadi] Shittim and blow in his nostrils and kill him, as it is written: ...and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked (Isaiah 11:4). And to Israel will be the sovereignty and the holy ones of the most High shall take the kingdom.{27} These are the words which Metatron spoke to Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, in the Exile in the days of the kingdom of Persia. And Zechariah ben Anan and Elijah wrote them down in the total Exile.{28}

Notes to the Levi Edition of
The Book of Zerubbabel

- [1] Based on the Jellinek MSS, the name, כברה, "Kebarah," should be emended to כבר, "Kebar," i.e., the River Kebar.
- [2] The phrase היה צורת בית עולמים is clearly an error. Based on the parallels, the phrase should read: איך יהיה צורת הבית לעולמים, "What will be the form of the Eternal House?"
- [3] The word, קטן, "short," should be emended to קרב, "near," as in the editio princeps.
- [4] Once again, the words, בית החורף and מקום השוק, should be emended to בית התורף and מקום השחוק. Levi suggests that the "House of Debauchery" refers to a church.
- [5] As in the Jellinek MSS, the indeterminate pronoun probably refers to Messiah ben David.
- [6] Cf. b. Baba Mesia 86b: "Michael came to bring the tidings to Sarah [of Isaac's birth]...."
- [7] There is a textual problem here. Michael and Metatron are interchangeable in this text and hence should not be speaking to one another.
- [8] The text should be emended from ובנתי to ובנתי, "I cried," based on the other versions.
- [9] This is clearly a copyist's gloss. According to some heretics, Metatron was a second god, a view "supported" by the numerical equation of Metatron and Shaddai (the Almighty). Cf. Sanhedrin 38b and Rashi to Ex. 23:21.
- [10] The text is emended from יניח to נונה, "shine," based on the other versions. Levi suggests an anti-christological import to the star, though this is not a necessary assumption. The motif of the shining star appears throughout Hellenistic and Jewish literature.
- [11] Daniel 11:34: "Now when they fall, they shall receive a little help...."
- [12] Daniel 12:7.
- [13] The text should be emended from הלאות to הלצות, "licentiousness," based on the other versions.

- [14] According to Levi, the name Armilus means "destroyer of the people" in the Greek language, and the text should be emended accordingly: "Armilus, which means 'destroyer of the people' in the Greek language (not the Hebrew).
- [15] The significance of the phrase, וְלִזְכֹּר יִדְבֹּר, "and he will speak to the male" is unclear.
- [16] Cf. Job 17:1.
- [17] Cf. Isaiah 27:13: "And it shall come to pass on that day, that a great shofar shall be blown...."
- [18] Cf. Joshua 18:28, which mentions the city Elef.
- [19] There is a numerical discrepancy between this version and that of Wertheimer, where the Israelites have only 500 men, while the gentiles have many more.
- [20] For the biblical source of these verses, refer to Isaiah 49:21 and Zechariah 9:9.
- [21] Zerubbabel, like Ezekiel, is shown the dimensions of the future Jerusalem.
- [22] Isaiah 21:12: "The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night; if you will inquire, inquire; return, come."
- [23] Note that the chronology here, in the recapitulation, agrees with the order in the Wertheimer MS (Nehemiah comes before Hephzi-bah) and not the order found earlier in the Levi version.
- [24] Cf. Sanhedrin 96b, where Riblah is connected to Antioch.
- [25] Job 30:4.
- [26] The text here is corrupt. According to the Wertheimer edition, the text should read: "the city of Imis, provinces of Satan." The reference to Satan as the father of Belial does not belong in the text.
- [27] Cf. Dan. 7:18.

- [28] Cf. Amos 1:6,9. The biblical usage refers to the exile of an entire population, but in the context of the Book of Zerubbabel the meaning is not clear. The "total" exile might refer to the end of the period of exile, or it might refer to the midst of the exile.

A Discussion of the Book of Zerubbabel

Each of the three complete versions of the Book of Zerubbabel incorporates these basic narrative motifs about the coming of the messiah:

- 1) the Messiah ben Joseph and Hephzi-bah, the mother of the Messiah ben David, come forth;
- 2) the Messiah ben Joseph gathers Israel together in Jerusalem;
- 3) Armilus, or Siroes, kills the Messiah ben Joseph;
- 4) the Messiah ben David arises and revives the first Messiah;
- 5) Armilus is killed and the Lord brings redemption to the world.

Related with these incidents is the framework story: (1) Zerubbabel's visit to Nineveh, where he meets the Messiah ben David, and (2) his learning of the messianic future from the teaching of the archangel Metatron/Michael.

Although the three versions of the story differ slightly in language and in the order of the events, they are similar in structure and content (i.e., they are variant recensions of the same document). Each of the versions stylistically is apocalyptic, a style which reflects the Bible in three ways: (1) its emphasis on the prophetic books such as Ezekiel; (2) its echoes of the apocalypse Daniel; and (3) its pseudo-biblical language. The book's content also reflects rabbinic literature, especially aggadic motifs about the messiah found in the Talmuds and in midrashic compilations.

None of the versions completely gratifies the reader who hopes to find a logical narrative or an absence of difficult phrases (not that any rabbinic text does). Each of the versions has its own particular problems: the Levi version is too long and repetitive; the Jellinek version is too short; and the Wertheimer version's plot is harmed by a lack of dramatic preparation. Specifically, the reader receives no warning concerning the death of the first messiah; the other versions, by first introducing the nemesis of the messiah, prepare the reader.

The three versions vary most significantly in structure; although the plot is similar, the arrangement differs after the first couple of pages. By breaking each of the versions down into small units one can see the ways in which the versions differ and how, often, two of the versions will share a piece of narrative which the third version lacks. The chart in the appendix presents the narrative units side by side.

Until the angel describes to Zerubbabel his past deeds (i.e., his credentials), the narrative units coincide, with a few minor exceptions (such as the number of wings the angel has). When the angel describes his deeds, one can clearly discern that the Jellinek and Levi versions contain two traditions: (1) the angel fought wars against God's

enemies and he will fight Armilus in the future; and (2) he protected and saved many of the biblical patriarchs and heroes. One wonders if these two traditions account for the two different names, Michael and Metatron, which are conflated here. In the Wertheimer version, one finds only the second tradition.

The narrative units become similar once again until the Messiah ben Joseph regains Jerusalem. Once again, the Jellinek and Levi versions remain similar while the Wertheimer version is quite different. In the Wertheimer version, Jerusalem, instead of being regained for forty years, appears to be regained only for three months. At this time, Nehemiah is mourned; later one reads that he was stabbed by Sidoe (Siroes). Finally, Zerubbabel is shown the stone which will bring forth Armilus. In the other two versions, Jerusalem regained lasts for forty years, the stone of Armilus is shown, and then Nehemiah is killed by Armilus. In an interesting addition, the Levi version suggests that Siroes, not Armilus, kills Nehemiah. Clearly, the Levi version presents two traditions concerning the murderer of Nehemiah. The following chart displays the traditions and the versions which employ them.

WertheimerJellinekLevi

Sidoe (Siroes)
stabs Nehemiah

Armilus kills
Messiah b. Joseph

Armilus kills
Messiah b. Joseph
(or Siroes stabs
him)

As one can see, the Levi version comprises both the Jellinek and the Wertheimer traditions concerning the Messiah's murderer; furthermore, the Armilus tradition involves "Messiah ben Joseph" while the Siroes tradition involves "Nehemiah." Although the two names are interchangeable within the book, they are linked, perhaps, to different traditions.

Once again the three narratives become similar, although the Levi version, due to its hybrid nature, is quite longer than the other editions. As one would expect, the differences between the Jellinek and Levi versions are comprised of material found in the Levi version which is also found in the Wertheimer edition. One example is the adumbration of the fifth, sixth, and seventh years of the messiah, which is found in the Wertheimer and Levi versions but omitted in the Jellinek text.

The versions end with the same basic narrative units, although the details differ. Both the Wertheimer and Jellinek editions conclude with some words of hope as well as a statement about the writing of the book. The Levi version does not include a statement of hope.

Although in the Book of Zerubbabel biblical verses related to the messianic time form the subterranean basis of the narrative, the form of the book is not midrashic; rather, as we noted in the introduction, the tale is an apocalypse. Regarding this genre, Christopher Rowland writes:

According to Gunther Bornkamm, "the disclosure of divine secrets is the true theme of later Jewish apocalyptic." It is concerned with knowledge of God and the secrets of the world above, revealed in a direct way by dreams, visions or angelic pronouncements. As such it differs markedly from the other ways of ascertaining the divine will which tend to rely on more indirect modes of discernment, like the interpretation of scripture." [1]

Formally, as was said earlier, the Book of Zerubbabel is an apocalypse written in pseudo-biblical Hebrew, and based on numerous verses from the Prophets. The book depends on paraphrasing the biblical messianic texts to indicate that the prophecies will be fulfilled in the messianic future. Integral to this procedure is the transforming of verb tense from the past to the future. For example, when the book discusses how the Messiah ben David will dress, it cites a verse from Isaiah: "...and he wore the garments of vengeance for clothing...." The book transforms the consecutive waw and places the sentence into the future tense: "He will wear the garments of vengeance...." The

book also changes the subject of the verse from the Lord to the Messiah. In this way, many of the verses, taken out of context, are rendered into prophetic statements concerning the end of days. It should be noted that many of these messianic interpretations were known before the writing of the Book of Zerubbabel and that the technique of changing verb tenses is used by earlier texts such as early apocalypses and the Gospels.

The pseudepigraphic nature of the Book of Zerubbabel -- its focus on a historical character and its claim that the events which occur to him are chronicled by that character -- is appropriate to its apocalyptic style. Like other apocalyptic works, such as 2 Baruch, and also like many prophetic books, the story begins with "the word of the Lord" coming to the protagonist. As in the Bible, Zerubbabel is presented as a conscientious restorer of Judah. When the story begins, he is praying the second of the Eighteen Benedictions. This prayer, which praises God for reviving the dead, foreshadows the great resurrection of which Zerubbabel will learn. Like the prophet Ezekiel, Zerubbabel wonders about the form of the Eternal House -- the Temple. Zerubbabel, whom the prophet Haggai called the "Lord's chosen," exemplifies the messianic mortal, the restorer of the land of Israel. Hence, he is an appropriate figure to receive the apocalyptic vision.

The voice which he hears, without seeing the speaker, recalls the statement of Moses in Deuteronomy: "...you heard the voice of the Lord, but saw no form..." but this motif also is characteristically found in the Pseudepigrapha and the Prophets. The angel who eventually appears, too, is characteristic of apocalyptic works.

Throughout the early part of the work, Zerubbabel is constantly distressed by the enervating experience of revelation and the terrors which are in store for his people. Like the seers in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, and also like the prophets Jeremiah and Daniel, what he sees pains him. For example, at the conclusion of his first vision, the narrator in 4 Ezra says: "Then I awoke and my body shuddered violently, and my soul was so troubled that it fainted. But the angel who came and talked with me held me and strengthened me and set me on my feet." [2] Daniel, too, is stricken after seeing a vision (Daniel 8:27).

Throughout the Book of Zerubbabel the angel oscillates between frightening the protagonist and comforting him. (These contradictory aspects are often attributed to God Himself.) Essentially, the narrator's passionate reaction to the events foretold to him serves to engage the reader. Ideally, Zerubbabel's fear and joy become the reader's fear and joy.

When he is taken to Nineveh, Zerubbabel prays to God for forgiveness. He does not yet understand that he has been chosen to see the future. Rather, he fears for his life. (This reaction is a standard response to an encounter with God.) Daniel, too, prays a confession to God after considering future events (Ch. 9). Zerubbabel is taken to the "House of Debauchery." The implication of the author is clear: Zerubbabel visits a sordid pit, a moral slum, which is the last place in the world where one would expect to find the messiah. The setting fits perfectly with the image of the Suffering Messiah, however; out of such squalor will come redemption. This motif is found in b. Sanhedrin 98a, where the messiah, a leprous beggar, is found at the gates of Rome; the talmudic imagery, in turn, is based on the "suffering servant" image of Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised...." The motif of the messiah in the capital of the enemy is an example of how the Book of Zerubbabel incorporates a rabbinic story into its narrative.

At this point in the story, Zerubbabel meets the Messiah ben David, Menahem ben Ammiel. The Messiah ben David first appears to him as the Suffering Messiah, a talmudic motif, noted above, which at times is identified with the Messiah ben David and at other times

with the Messiah ben Joseph. In the Book of Zerubbabel, the Messiah ben David is identified with the Suffering Messiah, and the Messiah ben Joseph is identified with the Fallen Messiah, who will be slain in battle.

Although the Messiah ben David will transform himself into a handsome young man who will eventually destroy Armilus and save the Jewish people, when Zerubbabel first meets him in Byzantium, he is clearly suffering. His poor state reflects the image of the leprous messiah in b. Sanhedrin 98a; his status as a prisoner reminds one of a similar portrayal of the messiah in a contemporaneous text, Pesikta Rabbati (chapter 34). The prisoner motif perhaps represents the inability of the messiah to redeem the world until the world is ready for redemption.

After recovering from this most recent shock, Zerubbabel asks the Messiah ben David the essential apocalyptic question: "When will come the light of Israel?" or "When will redemption come?" Such a question is asked and answered in Sanhedrin 98a, but here, the Messiah is not allowed to answer. Instead, the angel Metatron appears, almost like an overzealous bodyguard, demanding to know what Zerubbabel is asking the Messiah. (The angel's zeal in guarding the Messiah perhaps reflects the "hidden messiah" motif found in the text as well as the motif of

the archangel's -- or archon's -- protecting divine knowledge and spheres from human penetration.) The angel informs Zerubbabel that he, Metatron, will answer any questions, leaving the reader to wonder why the Messiah is not permitted to answer. (Perhaps his inability to answer complements his status as a prisoner, or ^{represents} the great distance between him and the mortal Zerubbabel.) Before answering, the angel delivers Zerubbabel an impressive oral resume of his past achievements in the service of the Lord in order to identify himself as a credible guide in the eschatological mysteries. Actually, they are the achievements of another archangel, Michael. Characteristic of all the versions of the story, the character Metatron is merged with the character Michael. In the Levi MS the two angels speak to each other; this instance is regarded as a textual corruption. (Perhaps it is a vestige of two different textual recensions assigning the speaker's role to either Michael or Metatron.)

Next, Metatron introduces the staff of salvation and its bearer, Hephzi-bah, the mother of the Messiah ben David. A true heroic figure, Hephzi-bah, who appears for the first time in the Book of Zerubbabel, will fight and kill two evil kings. Moreover, her appearance is part of the seven messianic years which will lead to the ultimate

redemption. These seven years are discussed in b.

Sanhedrin 97a:

In the seven year cycle at the end of which the son of David will come -- in the first year, this verse will be fulfilled: "And I will cause it to rain upon one city and cause it not to rain upon another city (Amos 4:7);" in the second, the arrows of hunger will be sent forth; in the third, a great famine, in the course of which men, women, and children, pious men and saints will die, and the Torah will be forgotten by its students; in the fourth, partial plenty; in the fifth, great plenty, when men will eat, drink and rejoice, and the Torah will return to its disciples; in the sixth, [Heavenly] sounds; in the seventh, wars; and at the conclusion of the septennate the son of David will come.

In the Wertheimer and Levi versions of the story, Hephzi-bah is said to come in the sixth year. The appearance of such a character -- the mother of the Messiah -- is quite remarkable. Where did she come from? Possible antecedents will be presented in the following chapter.

The staff, which will be given to Hephzi-bah, is connected with the majority of biblical heroes (a motif known in particular from PdRE), thus providing Hephzi-bah with additional heroic status. After the introduction of Hephzi-bah, the arrival of the Messiah ben Joseph -- the Fallen Messiah -- is mentioned. Often portrayed in messianic literature as the War Messiah, this Messiah will lead Israel in battle and in the restoration of Jerusalem.

(This latter act connects him with Zerubbabel, as do additional comments found in the texts.) Subsequently, however, the Messiah will be killed, either by the nefarious Armilus or the king of Persia, Siroes, the son of Hosroes. Hephzi-bah, however, will not fall (nor, by extension, the Davidic Messiah).

Essential to the message of the story is the rabbinic notion of the "birth-pangs" of the messiah, which states that "things will get a lot worse before they will get better." The Sanhedrin passage quoted above, as well as the Book of Zerubbabel, reflect this idea. Joseph Klausner notes that these "birth-pangs" of the time preceding the Messiah's advent are "an essential part of the very idea of redemption" which express the historical and psychological truth: "When Suffering is severest, the redeemer is nearest" (i.e., when suffering is severe, people wish most for the redeemer and project his nearness onto their suffering).[3] Hence, Mishnah Sota 9:15 declares: "In the footsteps of the Messiah [i.e. when the Messiah is about to come], insolence will multiply and honor will disappear....The wisdom of the scribes will become corrupt....The truth will disappear." [4]

In tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud, too, one finds a discussion of the difficult years before the

Messiah's coming, such as the comment of R. Yohanan: "When thou seest a generation overwhelmed by many troubles as a river, await him [the Messiah]...."(San. 98a). The theme of the "birth-pangs" of the Messiah appears in other places in classical rabbinic literature. By the ^{time of the} writing of the Book of Zerubbabel, it was an accepted idea that the years preceding redemption would be difficult to endure.

Not surprisingly, at this point in the book, the state of the Israelites reaches its nadir: their Messiah lies dead before the gates of Jerusalem; most of them have either been killed or have been driven into the desert; and, in general, there is "great torment in Israel." Moreover, Armilus, the son of a stone and Satan, has succeeded in conquering the world. Even the narrator, Zerubbabel, despairs, praying to God for help.

Fortunately, the angel has hopeful words to tell Zerubbabel: the Messiah ben David, back in his squalid disguise, will appear suddenly, with none other than the prophet Elijah, the traditional harbinger of redemption. The remaining Israelite sages, demoralized and bitter, will refuse to believe in this messiah until he revives the first messiah. Before continuing the tale, the book pauses to reassure the reader that the two messiahs will not compete with each other, quoting Isaiah: "...and peaceful counsel shall be between them."

Before killing Armilus and liberating Jerusalem, the three heroes (the two Messiahs and Elijah) will revive the dead. Next, God will descend upon Jerusalem, as it were, and fight against the army of Armilus. The Messiah ben Joseph and Elijah will be dispatched to kill the surviving enemies and the Messiah ben David, who has no need for weapons, will kill Armilus with the breath of his mouth.

The final section of the book consists of a description of the halcyon days of redemption, in which God will enjoy the sacrifices of the Israelites, and a relating of the dimensions of Jerusalem, which will extend to Mesopotamia. This section also includes, in the Wertheimer and Levi versions, a short chronological schema (by "weeks" in the sabbatical cycle) of the messianic events to come, beginning with Nehemiah ben Hushiel's appearance and ending with the rise of Menahem ben Ammiel. This section is partially repetitive of the earlier narrative, which is now depicted schematically. Finally, the book offers a listing of the ten kings who will attempt in vain to destroy Israel. The book ends with a description of the monstrous Armilus. As discussed above, the versions also contain codas, each of them different, which consist, appropriately enough, of messianic perorations. The Wertheimer and Levi versions list Zechariah and Elijah the Prophet as the scribes of the book.

The apocalyptic nexus of familiar biblical and rabbinical messianic traditions in the book helped to insure its acceptance and popularity. Joseph Dan comments on the perception, advanced by the Book of Zerubbabel, that:

[t]here was no conflict between the texts from ancient times and the apocalyptic literature of the early Middle Ages; what was fragmentary and incomplete in the ancient texts was developed in the latter into a complete, coherent picture, in which it was easy to believe as if it sprang directly from the traditional sources.[5]

Dan notes that the absence of doctrinal religious elements (i.e., sectarian polemics) in this particular apocalyptic literature insured that the book would be uncontroversial. He writes, "In none of these works is there any explanation as to why anything is going to happen, or what a Jew should do in order to help in the great task of bringing about the redemption. The apocalyptic future is given as a story, not as a theological doctrine." [6] Hence, the Book of Zerubbabel managed to appear biblically and rabbinically authoritative as well as acceptable to all ideological streams existent in its period.

A Discussion of the Characters in the Book of Zerubbabel

A. Zerubbabel

The character Zerubbabel in the Book of Zerubbabel is based on the historical figure Zerubbabel mentioned in the Bible. According to Ezra 2:2, Zerubbabel, a Babylonian (the name means "a shoot of Babylon"), came to postexilic Jerusalem under the Persian king Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.). Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah and perhaps it was his high office which inspired messianic expectations of him. Like the Zerubbabel in our book, the biblical Zerubbabel is portrayed as a restorer of Jerusalem. According to the Bible, together with Joshua the High Priest he resumed the building of the Temple.

The prophets Zechariah, Haggai, and Jeremiah offer statements which support the theory that, at one time, Zerubbabel might have been viewed as a forerunner of the Messiah, or even the Messiah himself. Because his grandfather was Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah, Zerubbabel could claim the House of David as his lineage. Zechariah calls Zerubbabel a "Branch" (Zech. 3:8), who will help to restore and lead the Jewish people: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: 'Behold, a man called the Branch shall branch out from the place where he is, and he shall build the Temple of the Lord. He shall build the Temple of the

Lord and shall assume majesty, and he shall sit on the throne and rule...' (Zech. 6:12-13). In other places, Zechariah mentions Zerubbabel by name: "And the word of the Lord came to me: 'Zerubbabel's hands have founded this House and Zerubbabel's hands shall complete it'" (Zech. 4:8).

The prophet Haggai, too, discusses the contribution of Zerubbabel, as well as his special messianic position:

And the word of the Lord came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: Speak to Zerubbabel the governor of Judah: I am going to shake heaven and earth. And I will overturn the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the might of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overturn chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders shall fall, each by the sword of his fellow. On that day -- declares the Lord of Hosts -- I will take you, O My servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel -- declares the Lord -- and make you as a signet; for I have chosen you -- declares the Lord of Hosts.

This passage clearly portrays Zerubbabel in a messianic role. God wishes to bring Zerubbabel close, designating him as a chosen one of God. Nevertheless, the biblical account of Zerubbabel ends suddenly, and without excitement. Concerning his end, B. T. Dahlberg, in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, writes:

The circumstances of the end of Zerubbabel's service as governor are unknown, as are those of

his death. Because no known Davidic ruler appears to have followed Zerubbabel in the governorship, and because Ezra 6:14 omits his name from among those mentioned who participated in the completion of the temple construction, it has been conjectured that he was removed from office by the Persian throne for rebelling or threatening to rebel against it.[1]

The argument that Zerubbabel disobeyed the Persians, perhaps becoming a martyr, is unsupported by the biblical sources.[2] At least one rabbinic text offered another explanation for Zerubbabel's mysterious disappearance, though the answer is not very likely.[3]

Although the messianic hopes placed on Zerubbabel were not fulfilled, he was remembered in many aggadic traditions. Midrash Tanhuma (ed. Buber) includes the following:

It is written: "Who are thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (Zech. 4:7). What does it mean, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" This is the King Messiah. And why does he call him "great mountain"? Because he is greater than the Fathers...loftier than Abraham...more elevated than Moses...and higher than ministering angels....And from whom will he issue? From Zerubbabel....[4]

The most famous early apocryphal story, found in 3 Ezra 1-57 and in Josephus' Antiquities, XI, 3.3-9, features Zerubbabel as a high official in Babylon, before he travels to Palestine. After Zerubbabel wins a contest, King Darius

grants his wish to help him restore Jerusalem. The story declares: "Not only did Darius grant what Zerubbabel wished for, not only did he give him letters of safe-conduct, but he also conferred numerous privileges upon the Jews who accompanied Zerubbabel to Palestine, and he sent abundant presents to the Temple and its officers." [5]

Although Zerubbabel was not identified as the Messiah in post-biblical literature (since he had failed to fulfill the earlier messianic expectations of him), he continued to be connected with the Messiah. Besides his appearance in our book, he is found in a related text, undoubtedly influenced by the book. His surname, ben Shealtiel, appears in the contemporaneous piyyut "In Those days, At This Time," (attributed to Rabbi Eleazar haKallir) in connection with the messianic events described in the text. (Cf. the following chapter for a discussion of the piyyut.) Zerubbabel also appears in other medieval works, including the Chapters of the Messiah and the Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba, where he recites the Kaddish prayer, declaring, "Let [God's name] be exalted and sanctified" and the evil ones of Israel, as well as the righteous Gentiles, all in Gehenna, must answer, "Amen." [6]. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that within the Book of Zerubbabel itself (the Levi edition), Zerubbabel, along with Nehemiah

and Elijah, plays an active part in the retribution against the enemies of Israel.

Zerubbabel is also connected with the messianic future in Halakhot Gedolot, which states: "Zerubbabel and Elijah will come [in the Messianic age] and explain and expound all the secrets of the Torah and all that which is crooked and distorted...."[7] It is possible, of course, that this text's reference to Zerubbabel is based on a familiarity with the Book of Zerubbabel. A midrashic fragment found in Jellinek's Bet haMidrash also mentions Zerubbabel in connection with the End of Days:

The house of study of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the Future to Come will be eighteen thousand times ten thousand parasangs by eighteen thousand times ten thousand parasangs. And the Holy One, blessed be He, sits on the Throne of Judgement, and the throne of David is opposite Him. And all the peaceable women who have given fees to have their sons taught Tora and Scripture and Talmud and proper manners, and all the honest women, come and take their reward from the Holy One, blessed be He, and sit in His presence. And all the men see their faces, and their faces shine like the radiance of the Shekhina, and they hear a new Tora from the mouth of God. And Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel stands and translates and explains every word from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He.[8]

Hence, although in the Book of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel plays only a supporting role, Zerubbabel has messianic associations suggested in the Bible and in other aggadic

texts. Moreover, his depiction in the book, as the confidant of the archangel Metatron, as the interviewer of the Messiah, and as a participant in the final return to Jerusalem, increased his importance in subsequent messianic literature.

B. The Messiah ben David

Obviously, not only one but many theses could investigate the character of the Messiah ben David without adequately covering all the information and theories concerning him. Hence, in this chapter, only the characteristics of the Messiah ben David which appear relevant to the Book of Zerubbabel will be examined. Specifically, the identification of the Messiah ben David with Menahem ben Ammiel will be investigated.

The name Menahem is derived, most likely, from Lamentations 1:2, which states that "there is none to comfort (menahem) Jerusalem." The name implies that when the Messiah arrives, he will comfort her. The Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b) discusses the name: "His name is Menahem the son of Hezekiah, for it is written, 'Because Menahem, that would relieve my soul, is far.' (Lam. 1:16)." The Messiah ben David is given many surnames, including ben Hezekiah, in the passage above, and ben Ammiel, in the Book of Zerubbabel. Both surnames occur in medieval literature too.

In the Jerusalem Talmud (Berakhot 5a) the Messiah is called Menahem ben Hezekiah. Menahem, according to the story found there, is born at the time of the destruction of the First Temple. At the end of the story, "winds and

storms" snatch away the infant Messiah from the hands of his mother. This motif appears in the Book of Zerubbabel, in which Metatron tells Zerubbabel that Menahem, born during the coming of Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem, was lifted up by Metatron and hidden away in Byzantium until the time of the End.

Besides appearing in the Book of Zerubbabel and earlier texts, motifs concerning the Messiah ben David are also found in works contemporaneous with or later than our book. In a story similar to the one found in the Jerusalem Talmud, the Messiah, once again born during the destruction of Jerusalem, is hidden away as an infant. In this tale, found in Lamentations Zuta, a late manuscript edited by Solomon Buber (1894), the name of the Messiah is Menahem ben Ammiel. (It is possible that the author of Lamentations Zuta gleaned this information from the Jerusalem Talmud and the Book of Zerubbabel.) The stories in the Talmud and Lamentations Zuta focus on a farmer plowing his field who is told, either by an Arab or by a talking cow, that the city Jerusalem is destroyed and that the Messiah has been born. In both stories the farmer visits the infant and his mother, who hates the child because of his birthdate. In one of the stories she even wishes that he would be strangled to death. The farmer, however, shows affection for the baby, saying: "We are sure that if it was destroyed for his sake

it will be rebuilt for his sake." Perhaps this anonymous mother of the Messiah is a forerunner, albeit a distant one, of Hephzi-bah, the mother of Messiah ben David in the Book of Zerubbabel. The anonymous mother appears once again in yet another similar story, found in the relatively late Genesis Rabbati.

The Messiah is also identified as Menahem ben Ammiel in the medieval Signs of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai as well as in the piyyut of Kallir, "In Those Days, At This Time." The Signs of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai, and the piyyut of Kallir, in an apocopated way, present the messianic legend found in the Book of Zerubbabel without the narrative between Zerubbabel and Metatron. Instead, the various messianic events which will occur are adumbrated as a series of signs or by the month in which they will occur (similar to the chronological recapitulation found at the end of the Book of Zerubbabel). Most likely, either these materials were based on the Book of Zerubbabel or all of the versions used an earlier known legend as their basis. Besides sharing the name of the Messiah, these materials share the characters Armilus and Nehemiah ben Hushiel. Once again, these references may have been derived from the earlier Book of Zerubbabel.

In one known place Menahem ben Ammiel is identified with the Messiah ben Joseph, not the Messiah ben David.

Israel Levi published a Geniza fragment which relates that in the fifth year (of the final sabbatical cycle) Menahem ben Ammiel will come and say that he is the Messiah ben Joseph. Because of the appearance of Armilus, who kills Menahem ben Ammiel in this version, it is probable that the piyyut is based on the Book of Zerubbabel, and that the author confused the name. In the piyyut, the Messiah ben David is not given a name. This piyyut is discussed in detail below in the following chapter.

Finally, it is worth noting once again that in the Book of Zerubbabel, like in the earlier b. Sanhedrin 98, the Messiah ben David is identified with the Suffering Messiah motif. The Messiah ben David is "hidden away" -- a prisoner in the Diaspora -- until the final redemption occurs. He, like the Jewish people, is in exile from God and Israel. Also like the people Israel, he suffers day after day, awaiting God's deliverance.

C. Metatron/Michael

A significant apocalyptic characteristic of the Book of Zerubbabel is the appearance of an angelic guide for Zerubbabel -- Metatron, or Michael. All of the editions of the book feature the dual identification of the angel, implying that the confusion between the two angels is very old, in addition to suggesting that the extant versions are confections of more than one textual tradition. Michael, an angel who first appears in the Book of Daniel, is found along with the angel Gabriel in numerous aggadot. As he himself tells Zerubbabel in the book, it is he who announced to Sarah that she would bear Isaac. It is also Michael who accompanied Abraham's servant on a mission to find Isaac a wife. Michael was with Moses at Mount Sinai and it is he who pushed Haman on Esther in front of the king. According to a medieval work, both Michael and Gabriel would accompany the Messiah and then fight the wicked.[9]

Throughout much of the aggadic literature, Michael appears as an angel quite capable of guiding Zerubbabel to the Messiah and relating to Zerubbabel the events to come. Why, then, does the book present an amalgamation of Michael with Metatron? Perhaps Michael's appearance in mystical texts provides an answer. Joseph Dan notes that in

Heikhalot and Merkabah literature of the early Middle Ages Michael plays a central role as the guardian of the south side of the Chariot of God. According to Gershom Scholem, Michael and Metatron --who is the highest angel -- were identical at first and that "some of the descriptions of Michael in talmudic and midrashic literature were later transferred to the figure of Metatron." The interchangeability of Michael with Metatron in the Book of Zerubbabel heavily supports this theory.[10]

Scholem argues that the extra-talmudic Visions of Ezekiel is the most important source for the transformation of Michael to Metatron. In a passage discussing the third heaven, it is implied that Michael is the chief angel of the heavens, but a certain Eleazar Nadwadaya calls him Metatron. Writes Scholem: "This passage proves not only that the figures of Metatron and Michael were indeed consolidated, but that they were still identical as late as the fourth century and that Metatron was but a secret name of Michael, on an equal footing with his other secret and unexplained names." [11]

Despite their interchangeable identities in some texts, in general, it is Metatron, not Michael, who is known as the the highest angel, second in the Heaven only to God. His name literally means in Greek "[he who stands]

above the throne." Metatron is not mentioned in the Bible, although he is later identified with the early biblical character Enoch. In the Babylonian Talmud, Metatron is mentioned in three places, two of them in connection with heretics.[12] In the most famous passage, Hagigah 15a, Elisha ben Abuya sees Metatron sitting in Heaven -- something only God can do -- and thereupon decides to become an apostate, believing that there is more than one God. In b. Sanhedrin 38b, it is related that Metatron's name is like God's name -- a fact he proudly announces in the Book of Zerubbabel.

Added to Metatron's status as a heavenly angel, born before the creation of the world, who takes over many of Michael's duties, is a contradictory tradition that Metatron is the biblical character Enoch (who "walked with God") transformed after ascending into Heaven. This role is related in the Book of Jubilees (4:23) and in Heikhalot literature but the tradition is absent in the Talmud.[13] In Heikhalot, or mystical ascension, literature Metatron is an important figure whom the mystic traveller meets during his heavenly journey.

The association of Metatron with Enoch, Metatron's status as the angel subordinate only to God, and the heresies which his presence in Heaven caused, as well as

his mystical duties -- so important to Merkabah mystics -- remain unimportant to the writer of the Book of Zerubbabel. To him, and to the reader, Metatron's function and character is identical with Michael's function and character. Because he is nearest to the Throne of God, he is the most credible revealer of divine secrets to Zerubbabel. Hence, it is he who will show him the Messiah and inform him concerning the future redemption. The rest of his history is irrelevant.

D. Hephzi-bah

Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem ben Ammiel, the Messiah ben David, makes her and first and only appearance in the Book of Zerubbabel. It is true that an anonymous mother of the Messiah appears in the Jerusalem Talmud, but she exhibits none of the heroic characteristics of the mighty Hephz-bah, who, one reads, will slay two kings. The same anonymous character appears in similar stories in Midrash Zuta and Genesis Rabbati, two later works (ca. eleventh century). These appearances, most likely, are inspired by our book.

The name Hephzi-bah occurs in Isaiah 62:4, in a messianic reference in which the people of Israel is called Hephzi-bah, or "I [God] delight in her." Hephzi-bah is also the name of King Hezekiah's wife, and mother of Menasseh, which is another messianic association. As noted above, besides the Book of Zerubbabel, she appears by name no where else, not even in related works derivative of the book.

According to Joseph Dan, the figure of Hephzi-bah has anti-Christian overtones. Hephzi-bah's portrayal reflects the Christian emphasis on Mary as the mother of the Messiah. Writes Dan: "It is hard to doubt that the inclusion of this figure is a result of the influence of

the Chrisian atmosphere, and the worship of the mother of the messiah in Christianity...."[14] The writer of the Book of Zerubbabel transforms the mother of the messiah into a Jewish heroine, and the mother of Christianity, the Virgin, into a statue who will bear the anti-Messiah, Armilus.

E. The Messiah ben Joseph

The character Messiah ben Joseph, or Nehemiah ben Hushiel, as he is called in the Book of Zerubbabel, represents a messianic figure known as the Fallen Messiah. The function of this second messiah is clear: he will come before the Messiah ben David and he will wage war on Israel's enemies; he will be killed. Besides in the Book of Zerubbabel, the Messiah ben Joseph appears in many contemporary texts. He also appears in earlier Targumim. Nevertheless, he is almost absent from talmudic literature. He is mentioned in only one place in the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 52a and b). Lawrence Silverman notes that "the figure of Messiah Son of Joseph represented no more than a minority tradition of messianic speculation. Nevertheless, our primary texts in Tractate Sukkah do mention Messiah Son of Joseph as though he were a familiar figure...."[15] Hence, Messiah Son of Joseph, argues Silverman, was known to the rabbis of the Talmud.

In the Targumim, the Messiah ben Joseph is paired with the Messiah ben David. The crucial difference between the two is that the earlier redeemer, the Messiah ben Joseph, is explicitly portrayed as a warrior. The details of his tragic death are developed later, however, in messianic works such as the Book of Zerubbabel.

Silverman sums up this literature's portrayal of him:

...Messiah Son of Joseph will be a 'War Messiah'...he will gather the Jewish people together at Jerusalem...he will lead them in battle against a host of enemies led by an arch-tyrant and anti-Messiah named Armilus...after many victories, Messiah Son of Joseph will be killed in battle...his death will occur in Jerusalem...he will be mourned by Israel...shortly after his death, Messiah Son of David will come....[16]

Obviously, it is important to understand the significance of this character. Why are two messiahs needed? From where did the idea of a "fallen" messiah come? Before addressing these questions, it is worthwhile to examine in detail the Messiah ben Joseph's portrayal in literature.

Perhaps the basis for the "fallen messiah" motif is derived from the words of the prophet called Deutero-Isaiah, who spoke about the "Servant of the Lord," a figure who suffers. According to Deutero-Isaiah, he "was despised, shunned by men, a man of suffering, familiar with disease....he was wounded because of our sins....his grave was set among the wicked...."(Isaiah 53) Deutero-Isaiah's description of the "suffering servant" has been widely applied to the people Israel in particular (and even to Jesus by Christians), but the figure has also been identified by some Jews as the Messiah ben Joseph. At other times, he is identified as the Messiah ben David.

The classic talmudic source which identifies the Messiah ben Joseph as the Fallen Messiah occurs in a discussion of the meaning of a dire prediction in Zechariah 12:12: "The land shall wail, each family by itself [about those who are slain]." The Talmud comments: "What is the cause of the mourning? R. Dosa and the Rabbis differ on the point. One explained, The cause is the slaying of Messiah the son of Joseph, and the other explained The cause is the slaying of the Evil Inclination" (Sukkah 52a). As Silberman notes, the laconic allusion to the Messiah ben Joseph suggests that the tradition was known to the rabbis of the Talmud.[17]

The Messiah ben Joseph appears in many medieval works. His surname is explained, after the fact, in a Yelammedenu fragment published by Jellinek in Bet haMidrash (6:81): "'May the Lord add to me another son' (Gen. 30:24) Hence [we know] that the Anointed of War will arise in the future from Joseph....[And Rachel said:] 'God hath taken away [asaf] my reproach' (Gen. 30:23) -- because it was prophesied to her that the Messiah would arise from her." [18] In a Tanhuma fragment published by Jellinek (6:96), the two Messiahs are mentioned, with the statement that the Messiah from Judah (the Messiah ben David) will be the stronger of the two.

The Messiah ben Joseph is discussed in medieval messianic works, designated by the scholars who published these works as The Tale of the Messiah, The Signs of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai, The Ten Signs, and The Signs of the Messiah, as well as in the piyyutim "Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David," and "In These Years, At This Time." His function never varies: he leads Israel in battle only to be slain. The only significant variation is the matter of his resurrection and participation in the final redemption. The Book of Zerubbabel features Nehemiah ben Hushiel in an important post-resurrection role as a vindicator of Israel. Nevertheless, the book explicitly notes that there will be no competition between the two Messiahs. Ultimately, Messiah ben David is the true redeemer.

Besides being called the Messiah ben Joseph, the Fallen Messiah is also identified as the Son of Ephraim. In Targum Onkelos to Song of Songs 4:5 and 7:4, as well as in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Exodus 40:11, he is called Messiah Son of Ephraim in the context of a description as one of Israel's two messianic redeemers.[19] The later Midrash on Psalms (60:3 and 87:6) also mentions him by this name. Perhaps the Fallen Messiah is connected with Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, because Ephraim is the

name of a northern tribe -- note that we have both a northern messiah figure (the Messiah ben Ephraim) and a southern messiah figure (the Messiah ben David). As for the name Nehemiah ben Hushiel, it is easy to understand why the first name, a cognate of Messiah ben David's name, Menahem, is used. Both names mean "comforter." Perhaps, the name also recalls Nehemiah ben Hacaliah, the colleague of Ezra who helped to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.[20] The last name, Hushiel, appropriately means "the One Who has concern for me is God."

It is now time to investigate why the notion of a second messiah was developed and how the traditions concerning the Messiah ben Joseph (or, ben Ephraim) arose. First, we shall review what some scholars have said. Joseph Klausner notes that in the tannaitic literature it is either God or the Messiah ben David who will conquer the ultimate enemy of the Jewish people, Gog and Magog, but later tradition wavers between the two Messiahs. Furthermore, the "belief in Messiah ben Joseph arose from the logical contradiction between 'redeemer' and 'king.' Hence those who saw God Himself as the military commander, or those who had not yet perceived the yawning gulf between 'salvation' and 'warfare'...could get along very well without the fighting and dying Messiah." [21] If the people

wished to differentiate between a warrior messiah and a redeemer messiah who eschews violence, however, as Klausner maintains, then a second messiah was needed.

According to Jacob Levy, cited by Klausner, the specific period which inspired this differentiation occurred after the Bar-Cochba revolt of the early second century. Levy writes: "The legend of the warrior Messiah probably owes its origin to the uprising of the Jews in the time of the Emperor Hadrian, under the leadership of the revolutionary chieftain, Bar-Cochba." [22] Levy argues that the disillusionment caused by Bar-Cochba's defeat forced his followers to reject him as the Messiah ben David but not as a false messiah. Hence, he was thought of as a pre-Davidic, warrior messiah.

Klausner finds fault with Levy's theory, arguing that "belief in a second Messiah could have arisen in the consciousness of the people, or of their best representatives, only from a deep inner need, from religious-psychological motives; and not in order to save the Messianic faith [in Bar Cochba]...." [23] Klausner believes that the notion of the second Messiah arose when the contradiction between the political and spiritual ideals of the Messiah reached a crisis in the minds of the people. This contradiction is felt most powerfully when the people

are disillusioned with military efforts to bring redemption, and the greatest disillusionment occurred after the fall of Bar-Cochba. Writes Klausner:

Only after the disillusionment that came with the fall of Bethar and the untimely death of both Bar-Cochba and R. Akiba, only after the political hope of redemption by war and weapons had been dashed by historical events themselves -- only then was the contradiction described above felt with full force. Then the spiritual and religious ethical tendency in the Messianic faith inevitably gained the upper hand.[24]

The people wondered why Messiah ben David needed to fight with sword and thus was born the idea, writes Klausner, that "the twofold character of the Messiah should be transformed into a twofold Messiah. And this was achieved by transferring to a second Messiah the function of waging war in its entirety." [25] Moreover, reasons Klausner, the second Messiah had to come from the tribe of Joseph, or his son Ephraim, since the first Messiah came from Judah, and these tribes were the two predominant tribes in Israel. [26] Finally, in order to avoid competition between the two redeemers, the war Messiah would be slain.

Joseph Heinemann candidly points out the problem with Klausner's theory. He writes, "While a good deal of Klausner's criticism of his predecessors is valid, his own theory is undoubtedly weak and unconvincing." [27]

Specifically, according to Heinemann, if the people were repelled by the idea of a military messiah, why did they preserve the notion of a military messiah instead of depending on God to perform the necessary military acts? Moreover, the hopeful figure of the Messiah ben Joseph must have been created before the vast disillusionment of the Bar-Cochba failure.[28] Actually, Heinemann's views do not adequately negate Klausner's theory. After all, the notion of a military messiah probably was created in the first place in order to remove from God the necessity of battle; hence, a military messiah figure had to be retained in order to prevent God, as well as the Messiah ben David, from performing the sordid acts of war.

According to Heinemann, the existence of a second messiah offers no problem, since there were many messianic figures before and during the beginning of the Christian era. For example, the Qumran materials refer to two messiahs -- a king messiah and a priest messiah. Heinemann's problem focuses on the notion that the Messiah ben Joseph must die. He notes that in some texts this Messiah does not die. Hence, he writes,

We must therefore assume that the motif of the Messiah ben Joseph underwent, at some time, a radical transformation; and there can be no doubt that, if we know this legend in two versions, one

of which tells only of the militant, victorious Messiah, while the other adds his death in battle, the one relating his tragic end must be the later one....for it is inconceivable that the death in battle of the Messiah, once maintained, could be quietly ignored subsequently.[29]

For the event which inspired this radical transformation, Heinemann turns to the defeat of the Bar-Cochba revolt, arguing that the adherents of Bar-Cochba would have struggled to see their fallen leader as a messianic figure even in death. Thus, they took the motif of the Warrior Messiah and added the tradition, post facto, that he was destined to die in battle. Writes Heinemann:

...this generation must have attempted, by hook or by crook, to achieve the impossible: to uphold Bar Kokhba's messiahship in spite of his failure. This paradoxical position could find no more suitable expression than in the highly ambivalent legend of the militant Messiah who is doomed to fall in battle, and yet remains a genuine redeemer, the forerunner of another Messiah who will follow him and complete his mission.[30]

Clearly, the origin of the Messiah ben Joseph remains unclear, but the significance of the second Messiah is easy to appreciate: the disillusionment produced by a messiah who fails -- and there must have been many who failed -- was tempered by the notion that the failed Messiah, although dead, was not a false Messiah. Rather, his actions and defeat fit into God's overall plan of

redemption. The motif of the Fallen Messiah, then, provided hope, and this hope was enough to sustain the legend for centuries.

F. Armilus

The Book of Zerubbabel features a gruesome enemy of the Jewish people, Armilus, the son of Satan and a stone statue of a virgin. As Jacob Klatzkin has noted, Armilus is mentioned in the seventh century Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Isaiah 11:14, which adds the name Armilus to the verse: "And with the breath of his lips he [the Messiah] shall slay the wicked," (a verse which is also cited in connection with Armilus in all the versions of the Book of Zerubbabel) and in the Targum Jonathan (Deut. 32:43) in which the cataclysm of Armilus is shown to Moses.[31]

Since these works are contemporaneous with the Book of Zerubbabel, it is difficult to tell where the character originated. Some scholars have suggested that the name Armilus is derived from Romulus, the founder of Rome, the traditional enemy of Israel. Armilus, states the legend, was born from the union of Satan and a marble statue. Klatzkin notes that the legendary "marble virgin" was based on a medieval fable which says that "in Rome there was a stone statue of a virgin with which the Romans had immoral relations." [32] According to other scholars, the name is derived from the word Heremolaos, the "Destroyer of Peoples," or from Suetonius' description of Caligula, who "armillatus in publicum processit," or "and was tall, bald,

had thin legs, and a crooked eye." [33] This description is reminiscent of the monstrous depiction found in the Book of Zerubbabel. Unfortunately, this explanation fails to recognize the fact that the rabbis probably never read Suetonius. Most likely, the name is derived from Romulus. By naming the last enemy like the first, one declares that the end recapitulates the beginning. Joseph Dan notes that Armilus, in fact, represents the king of Rome in two aspects: (1) he is the ruler of all peoples of the world, just as at one time the caesar was the ruler of the world, and (2) he is the religious ruler of the world, and thus represents the union of religious and secular rule which materialized in the nexus of the church and Rome. Armilus, then, is a personification of the Roman Emperor, the destroyer of Jerusalem, and the Church, which caused so much misery for the Jews. [34] Thus, he represents Byzantine Rome.

The portrayal of Armilus as the ultimate enemy of the Jewish people was a significant innovation. As Joseph Dan notes, until this portrayal, the apocalyptic enemy of the Jewish people was never portrayed as an individual. Rather, Gog and Magog, who represented the evil nations of the world, were mentioned as the enemies of Israel. The development of Armilus as the "antichrist" reflects a

changing world view in which the Messiah, or the anti-Messiah, is viewed as an individual.[35] This change represents the personification of Roman oppressive power in the figure of the Emperor.

It is possible to infer that the writer of the Book of Zerubbabel portrays the anti-Messiah as an individual in order to connect him with Jesus. Armilus, the monster born from a virgin, or the Virgin, is presented as a savior of the world, who is believed in by all the nations of the world. Surely, the character of Jesus -- or possibly of the Emperor -- had been given ominous potency for the writer of our book, who had witnessed the fusion between Christianity and Rome, materialized in the power of Byzantium, the Rome of the East. Hence, as Levi notes, the myth of the birth of Armilus is a parody of the cult of the Virgin. Adding elements of folklore (i.e., the monstrous depictions inspired by descriptions of Alexander the Great), the writer attempts to reduce the Christian myth to absurdity.[36]

Armilus appears in many medieval works, compiled slightly later than the Book of Zerubbabel. Such works include The Prayer of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai, Midrash Wayosha, and the Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai. In these texts, as well as in the Book of Zerubbabel, Armilus

is a hideous monster who kills the Messiah ben Joseph, exiles the Jewish people, and succeeds not only in ruling the world, but also in making the world believe that he is God. In one text, The Signs of the Messiah, Armilus is actually called the "antichrist" by the nations of the world.[37] This label reflects the cosmic importance which the tradition placed upon Armilus. He was to be the last impediment between the Jewish people and salvation.

Jacob Klatzkin best sums up the significance of the Armilus character:

All these legends, that embody the beautiful and the moral as well as the curious and the coarse, originated from an intermingling of Persian, Roman, and Christian beliefs with an ancient Jewish tradition concerning "messianic birthpangs" which would precede the messianic age and during which Messiah the son of Joseph would be killed by Romulus-Rome, even as Bar Kokhba was killed by Rome, which had adopted the belief, so strange in Jewish eyes, in a holy virgin and in beautiful stone images. The yearning for the downfall of Christian Rome, which persecuted Israel after adopting its Torah, gave rise to the legend of Armilus, the anti-Messiah, who would multiply evils upon Israel. But Messiah the son of David would vanquish him (that is, Romulus-Rome) and bring the kingdom of Heaven upon earth.[38]

In every age there is an Armilus. Most likely, when the Book of Zerubbabel was composed, the "Armilus" was Heraclius, the Byzantine ruler who, with the help of the

Palestinian Jewish communities, defeated Persia, only to
preside over further persecution of the Jews. In their
eyes, he certainly was a monster.

Related Messianic Texts

In his book Midrashei Ge'ullah, Judah Even-Shmu'el publishes other messianic texts which are related to the Book of Zerubbabel. In a section entitled "In the Footsteps of the Book of Zerubbabel" the following works are listed (the titles are late, designated by Even-Shmu'el or Jellinek):

- A. Midrashic Literature
 - 1. The Days of the Messiah, the apparently autonomous conclusion of Midrash Vayosha
 - 2. The Tale of the Messiah, found in Lekah Tov
- B. Piyyutim (Hymns)
 - 1. Messiah ben Joseph and Messsiah ben David, anonymous
 - 2. In Those Days, At This Time, by Eleazar Kallir (Ca. 7th century)
- C. Gaonic Literature
 - 1. A Treatise on Redemption, by Saadia Gaon (882-942)
 - 2. A Treatise on Armilus, attributed to Saadia Gaon
 - 3. On the Subject of Redemption, by Hai Gaon (939-1038)

It should be noted that most of these works were compiled relatively late. Midrash Vayosha, for example, an aggadic work on the Song of the Sea, was apparently redacted at the end of the eleventh century.[1] Lekah Tov, too, is a late eleventh century midrashic compilation on the Pentateuch and Five Scrolls.[2]

Even-Shmu'el also publishes in his book a section entitled "Chapters About the Messiah" which features

messianic traditions found in earlier works such as the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds and later messianic material which adumbrates future messianic occurrences. The following is a list of texts which are related to the Book of Zerubbabel (once again, these titles are not authentic):

- A. The Birth of the Messiah and His Concealment
 - 1. Menahem ben Hezekiah (J. Berakhot 5a)
 - 2. Menahem ben Ammiel (Lamentations Zuta, Version B, ed. S. Buber, Vilna, 1894, commenting on Lamentations 1:2)
 - 3. A story of Elijah (Genesis Rabbati, ed. Hanoch Albeck, pp. 130-131)
- B. The Messiah in His Place of Concealment
 - 1. At the Gates of Rome, from (b. Sanhedrin 98a)
 - 2. In the Garden of Eden, an abridged version of a text published in Bet haMidrash by Jellinek under the title "A Story of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi" (2:48-51)
 - 3. At the Temple of Radiance and In the Bird's Nest, an abridged version of a text published in Bet haMidrash by Jellinek under the title "The tractate of the Garden of Eden" (3:131-140)
- C. In the Generation When Ben David Comes (The following medieval fragments, published in various editions, feature adumbrations of the messianic events to come.)
 - 1. The Signs of Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai (Higger, Halakhot v'Aggadot, pp. 115-123)
 - 2. The Ten Signs (Higger, pp. 125-130)
 - 3. The Signs of The Messiah (Jellinek, BhM, 2:58-63)

As noted above, most of these works are late. Lamentations Zuta is part of a work published in two versions by Solomon Buber (in 1894). The versions consist of aggadot on the destruction of the Temple as well as addenda from the

Babylonian Talmud, Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, and Lamentations Rabbah. The two versions were redacted no later than the tenth century.[3] Genesis Rabbati is an eleventh-century midrash on Genesis which is usually ascribed to Moses ha-Darshan of Narbonne. The work is based upon the two Talmuds and many known midrashim, especially Genesis Rabbah.[4] Many of the texts listed above contain thematic parallels to material in the Book of Zerubbabel. Some of these similarities will now be examined.

First, we will investigate texts found under the heading "In the Footsteps of the Book of Zerubbabel." The passage "The Days of the Messiah," found as the last section of Midrash Vayosha, is dated by Even-Shmu'el as a work finished shortly after the Book of Zerubbabel. [5] The work begins with the evil Gog and Magog and seventy-one nations of the world ascending to Jerusalem. God quickly destroys them, making way for the principal enemy, Armilus. Once again, Armilus is described as a monster, bald-headed, with one large eye and one small eye, and with one long arm and one short arm, who quickly kills Messiah ben Joseph. Messiah ben David comes just as quickly and kills Armilus. After Armilus' death the exiles are ingathered and a thousand years of rejoicing follow. Like the Book of Zerubbabel, the basic narrative sequence consists of Messiah ben David killing Armilus after Messiah

ben Joseph has fallen. Similar, too, is the stylistic use of prooftexts to buttress the eschatological claims. This short passage differs from the Book of Zerubbabel in its relative brevity, its additional inclusion of Gog and Magog, and its omission of Hephzi-bah as a significant figure in the narrative. The prooftexts it employs, too, are generally different.

"The Tale of the Messiah," another midrashic work, found in Midrash Lekah Tov, too, treats the basic narrative in midrashic style. The text begins by relating the biblical words "A star (understood as the Messiah) shall rise from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17) to the "week in which Ben David comes," or the years of suffering before the Redemption (i.e., the "birth-pangs of the Messiah"). The exposition is introduced by the phrase "a teaching from our Rabbis." The text continues by discussing the rise of "the King of Fierce Countenance" who will abrogate the Torah from Israel as well as the Jewish sacral calendar. Next, Messiah ben Joseph arises in the Galilee and retakes Jerusalem, rebuilding the Temple and restoring the sacrifices, as in the Book of Zerubbabel, and, after making war on Moab, forty years of prosperity ensue.

Gog and Magog (not Armilus) then kill Messiah ben Joseph and the people of Israel despair, crying: "The

Messiah is lost from us and another Messiah will not arise!" [6] Instead of Messiah ben David saving Israel, God Himself fights with Gog and Magog, and Israel is exiled to the wilderness. Next, ten heavenly pronouncements are made (taken from biblical quotes) which fulfill biblical verses and prepare the way for the coming of Messiah ben David. Finally, at the end of the account, Messiah ben David appears.

Of special note in the text are the caveats against those of Israel who would follow evil. First there is the declaration of Rabbi Hiyyah: "When you hear that the King of Fierce Countenance has arisen, do not dwell there...for he [will] decree that anyone who says 'The God of the Hebrews is One' will be killed." [7] This warning presumably reflects the anti-trinitarian view of the author. Later, we read that anyone who harbors evil thoughts against God will be cast out by the clouds and killed by the Canaanites (i.e., they will be led to the Canaanites). [8] Clearly, this midrashic text has a didactic function as well as an eschatological one. The only similarity between this text and the Book of Zerubbabel is the sequence of the Messiah ben Joseph arising and saving Jerusalem, only to be killed by an enemy of Israel, and the subsequent appearance of the Messiah ben David.

The anonymous piyyut "Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David" was first published by Israel Levi in 1920 in Revue des Etudes Juives. It is found in a Geniza fragment (n. 3474). The piyyut features an interesting alteration: Messiah ben Joseph, not Messiah ben David, bears the name Menahem ben Ammiel. The name of Messiah ben David is not mentioned. Levi points out that in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer (ch. 19, as Even-Shmu'el notes, not ch. 10 as Levi cites), too, Messiah ben Joseph is called Menahem ben Ammiel, although in a variant reading the name is Nehemiah b. Hushiel.[9] According, to Even-Shmu'el, the Pirkei deRabbi Eleazar text should be emended to Nehemiah b. Hushiel. The other details of the piyyut do not differ from the Book of Zerubbabel. In particular the years are the same: in the fifth year of the final sabbatical cycle the Messiah ben Joseph appears and gathers Israel to Jerusalem, restoring the sacrifices. Next, Armilus comes and stabs him, but he is revived by Messiah ben David. It is curious that, in the passage, Armilus is not killed.

"In Those Days, At This Time" is a piyyut for Tisha b'Av found in Mahzor Romania and attributed to Rabbi Eleazar haKallir in which the messianic narrative is presented in twelve stanzas describing messianic occurrences during each month of the year. The piyyut, it appears,

depends heavily on the Book of Zerubbabel for details, but it also is related to the Book of Elijah in its adumbration of each month's messianic events. According to Moses Bottenweiser, who published the Book of Elijah in 1897, the book was an apocalypse written about 260 C.E. [10] (A. H. Silver has noted that the text was redacted much later, perhaps in the eighth century. Hence, the mention of "Armilius" in the book probably is later than our book.[11]) Scholars have debated when Kallir lived and wrote. Zunz held that the earliest acceptable date is the first half of the ninth century, but some modern scholars believe he lived about 750. Finally, because he does not mention Ishmael (the Arabs), some scholars (i.e., J. Hertzmann Schirmann) believe he lived before the Arab conquest of 636-40. This opinion is generally accepted today.

It is possible, of course, that the author of the Book of Zerubbabel based his work on the piyyut, but Israel Levi convincingly proves that our book preceded the piyyut. [12] It is also plausible that the two works, the piyyut and the Book of Zerubbabel, were written independently (and both presumably depended on a prior tradition), for despite the similarities, the radical differences between the two works make it hard to believe that either work is based upon the other.

Some of the similarities between the piyyut and our book are the mention of Menahem ben Ammiel as Messiah ben David, as well as his appearance in the Valley of Arbael, the appearance of the band of Korah, the resurrection of the dead, the rise of an evil king, and most interestingly, a mention of [Zerubbabel] ben Shealtiel. Noteworthy is the absence of Nehemiah ben Hushiel, the Fallen Messiah, until the last stanza, where the names Nehemiah and Elijah (Tishbi) appear beside Menahem. It is not even clear that this name refers to Messiah ben Joseph. Even-Shmu'el suggests that Nehemiah here refers to Zerubbabel, who, according to Kallir, fulfills the role of the Messiah ben Joseph.[13] His argument is not supported by the text, however; it is much more likely that Nehemiah does refer to Messiah ben Joseph. Especially noteworthy is the absence of Hephzi-bah, as well as any reference by name to Armilus. Why would the Kallir leave out these important figures? Finally, the piyyut contains material not found in our book. For example, the angel Gabriel is mentioned, alongside of Michael. Why would our author not include this material if he was using the piyyut as a basis for his work?

These differences suggest that Kallir may have based his work on the same motifs which the author of the Book of

Zerubbabel used but he did not adapt his piyyut from the book. His messianic motifs could have predated our work. Even the mention of Ben Shealtiel is explainable: Zerubbabel was known in the tradition as a messianic figure long before the advent of the Book of Zerubbabel. Another possible explanation for the differences is that Kallir, basing his work on the Book of Zerubbabel, chose to omit some details, just as the other works discussed above contain various details gleaned from our book. This view is accepted by Levi, as well as by Zunz.[14]

Of special interest in the section which Even-Shmu'el entitles "Chapters about the Messiah" are the texts about "the generation when the son of David comes." Three works, entitled (1) "The Signs of Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai," (2) "The Ten Signs," and (3) "The Signs of The Messiah," adumbrate various messianic motifs similar to those found in the Book of Zerubbabel. The messianic future is foretold as a series of signs. Each of the texts contains motifs not found in our book, but the similarities are great. Besides our book, these works are based on material in The Revelations of Simeon Ben Yohai (ca. 750 C.E.) and The Prayer of Simeon Ben Yohai, (based on the preceding work) as well as various messianic Baraithot and material unknown elsewhere.[15] These two works add an Islamic context to the messiah story.

Concerning the Islamic influence, Abba Hillel Silver has noted the attempt of these texts to understand the Islamic conquest as a hopeful messianic sign. With regard to The Revelations of Simeon Ben Yohai he writes:

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, the classic hero of Jewish mysticism, to whom the Revelations, as well as the Prayer of Simeon Ben Yohai and the Zohar are attributed, is disclosed in his cave (Shab. 33b) ruminating over the passage in Num. 24:21: "And he saw the Kenite (Arab)." He complains to God: "Is it not enough what the kingdom of Edom has done unto us? Must Thou now send upon us also the kingdom of Ishmael?" Whereupon the angel Metatron (the Revealer) allays his fears: "Fear not, man, the Lord, blessed be He, brings this kingdom of Ishmael upon you only to deliver you from this wicked one" (Edom=Rome=Byzantium).[16]

Much of the messianic material in these works is similar to the Book of Zerubbabel. The narrative motifs are not new: Nehemiah ben Hushiel arises; Armilus kills him; Menahem ben Ammiel comes and the redemption begins. Nevertheless, Hephzi-bah, for some reason, is not mentioned.

The "Signs of Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai," a text which Even-Shmu'el reprints from a geniza fragment published by Michael Higger, features eschatological information not found in our book. The first six "signs" of the Messiah consist of strange phenomena, such as three gigantic arches which will appear in the sky.[17] In the seventh sign the parallels to our book commence, beginning with the

statement that the king of Edom will come to Jerusalem and all the Ishmaelites will flee. The reference to Ishmael suggests that the material is not pre-Islamic. In the next sign, Nehemiah ben Hushiel appears and kills the King of Edom. Next, Armilus ben Satan, a giant who was born from a statue and Satan, as in our book, arises from the Roman state and is proclaimed God by the nations of the world, except for Israel. Nehemiah and other Israelites bring him a Torah and he refuses to believe in it, whereupon they declare: "If you do not believe in the Torah, then you are not God -- you are Satan!"[18]. Armilus then burns Nehemiah's compatriots with the Torah. After Nehemiah still refuses to believe in him, Nehemiah is killed. Finally, in the last sign, God brings forth Messiah ben David from his prison and he kills Armilus. The messianic narrative is very similar to our book, but as described above, some narrative innovations are found.

The chief difference between this work and the Book of Zerubbabel is the format. In our book, the messianic narrative is gradually told to Zerubbabel. In the "Signs of Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai," the phenomena are listed by sign with brief midrashic citations of text for support. In another text, entitled "Ten Signs," also reprinted from Michael Higger's Halakhot V'Aggadot, once again the events

are presented as signs. Also, once again the signs known from the Book of Zerubbabel occur late in the text. The only interesting difference is the last sign, which ends the work with an ominous allusion to the coming of Gog and Magog. It is unclear why the work ends on such a foreboding note.

Finally, "The Signs of the Messiah," a text published in Jellinek's Bet haMidrash (1853), offers yet another adumbration of messianic phenomena. The text contains some interesting details. First, in the sixth sign, Nehemiah kills the king of Edom and destroys Rome itself, redeeming the holy vessels of the Temple. Next, in the seventh sign, we read that God (!) created the marble statue which bears Armilus.[19] Furthermore, Armilus is referred to as the anti-christ. Clearly, the writer projects his theological view that even the evil Armilus, the "anti-christ," was created by God for a reason. In another elaboration on the messianic narrative, when Nehemiah dies his corpse is not laid before the gates of Jerusalem; rather, angels take him and store him with God. In general, this text is longer and more detailed than the two preceding works; nevertheless, all of them constitute basically similar attempts to present the messianic predictions in a particular structure which clearly and quickly displays the

eschatological events. Unlike apocalyptic works such as the Book of Zerubbabel, the information is given without the need to explain how the writer knows his secrets. No Metatron or Michael appears, nor is the text known to be attributed to an earlier authority.

In summary, it cannot be proven that the writers of the texts discussed above wrote their works with a version of the Book of Zerubbabel before them. Nevertheless, it is clear that these texts are closely related to our book. Many of the characters are the same and do the same things. The sequence of the events remains similar as well. The major difference is one of literary form, not content or function.

The Treatment of the Book in Later Literature

In previous chapters, the influence of the Book of Zerubbabel on related and contemporary messianic apocalyptic works has been chronicled. The book's influence, however, reached beyond the boundaries of medieval midrashic apocalypse. The later medieval philosophers, too, knew of the book and commented on its message. Jospheh Dan writes, "Most of the philosophers did not accept the apocalyptic picture, even though Saadia Gaon, the first systematic Jewish philosopher, included in his Book of Beliefs and Opinions a paraphrase of the Book of Zerubbabel when describing the messianic age." [1] The philosophers had two problems with the book, and apocalypses in general: (1) their own ideas of redemption did not include violent and miraculous upheaval in the world order; and (2) the apocalyptic eschatology clashed with their concept of personal eschatology. [2]

In the context of this theological dissonance, one finds several references to the Book of Zerubbabel: (1) Saadia Gaon's discussion of the messianic future, found in chapter eight of his Book of Beliefs and Opinions; (2) the similar messianic comments of Hai Gaon; (3) Rashi's reference to the work, found in a commentary to the tractate Avot in Mahzor Vitry; (4) Ibn Ezra's disdainful

remark in his commentary to Exodus 2:22; and (5) a statement made by the pietist Rabbi Eleazar HaRokeah, a druggist from Germany and one of the leaders of the Hasidut Ashkenaz, in Yain haRokeah, a commentary on the Song of Songs and the Book of Ruth.

Saadiyah's (892-942) account of the messianic future includes a discussion of the coming of Messiah ben Joseph, his murder by Armilus, and the salvation which Elijah brings. The inherent message of his polemic is this: "If Israel chooses not to repent then Messiah ben Joseph will come and be killed; if they do repent, then Messiah ben David alone will come." Consistent with Saadiyah's anti-Karaite polemical style throughout his work, he provides biblical -- not rabbinic (he quotes Talmud only once in the chapter) -- support for his views, but it is clear that Saadiyah had before him a version of the Book of Zerubbabel. The essential question is, how does Saadiyah differ from the beliefs espoused in the book?

Unlike the apocalyptic version of the messianic future, where redemption is inevitable, Saadiyah's eschatology relies on the acts of the people. Joseph Sarachek writes,

The redemption [according to Saadiyah] of course will not happen suddenly, like a bolt out

of a clear sky. There are several preliminary steps that lead up to the climax. Saadia introduces into his Messianic theology the idea of compulsory repentance....The gaon builds this thought out of the Talmudic opinion: "If Israel will repent, they will be delivered, if not, God will place over them a tyrannical ruler like Haman, and they will speedily repent and be delivered." (San. 97b) This enforced reformation makes a setting for the birth-travails of the Messiah, the woes of the pre-Messianic state, during which the legendary struggle will be fought between the Messiah ben Joseph and Armilus....[3]

Saadia sums up the conditional nature of redemption with the simple declaration: "If we do not repent there will be the occurrences of 'Messiah ben Joseph,' but if we repent, they will not come to be -- 'Messiah ben David' will be shown to us suddenly." [4]

Hai Gaon (939-1038), a later Babylonian authority, according to Judah Ibn Shmuel, also relies on the Book of Zerubbabel, as well as Saadia's work, in his own presentation of the messianic idea.[5] Hai Gaon's eschatological description occurs in the form of a responsum to the question, "What will redemption be like?" He begins by mentioning that the years of the Messiah will be seven, that Messiah ben Joseph will come and kill the ruling authority in Jerusalem. Armilus, in turn, will kill the Messiah. Hai Gaon adds a notion of theodicy to Armilus' mission. He writes, "Why will Armilus be given

permission to kill Messiah ben Joseph? In order to break the hearts of the partisans in Israel, who have no faith." [6] The ascension of the evil Armilus, according to Hai Gaon, is allowed by God in order to punish the unbelievers of Israel, who will be killed by the forces of Armilus.

Hence, as Saadiah wrote, because of Israel's sins, Messiah ben Joseph comes, he is killed, and the "birth-pangs" follow. With the coming of Elijah and Messiah ben David, Hai Gaon follows the basic narrative found in the Book of Zerubbabel. One interesting addition is worth noting: Zerubbabel blows the shofar of redemption. [7]

Rashi's (born 1040) reference to the book occurs in a commentary on Pirkei Avot. He writes, "And so we find in the Book of Zerubbabel that [the staff mentioned in M. Avot 5:8] is the staff of Aaron, which ripened almonds and, in order not to develop jealousy, Moses stood and split it into twelve staffs." As S. A. Wertheimer notes, Rashi's reference to the Book of Zerubbabel is problematic because the extant versions do not contain the story of Moses' splitting the staff, although they do contain a reference to the staff of Aaron which ripened almonds. Hence, one must conclude that Rashi, like Saadiah, knew of a different version of the book (or perhaps Rashi does not intend to

suggest that the Moses motif is found in the Book of Zerubbabel).

Ibn Ezra (Spain, 1092-1167) provides the only recorded comment critical of the Book of Zerubbabel, although it is doubtless that many medieval thinkers, including Maimonides, would have agreed with him. His commentaries on the Bible, as well as his poetry, are filled with messianic interpretations, so one cannot argue that he did not support messianic beliefs. Nevertheless, his disdain for apocalyptic messianism is clear.

Specifically, in a comment on Exodus 2:22 ["She (Zipporah) bore a son whom he (Moses) named Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land,'"], Ibn Ezra writes,

...and this is Zipporah, the Cushite woman...and do not believe what is written in the Chronicles of Moses [that Moses had another wife before Zipporah]. And I will tell you the rule: do not rely on any book which a prophet or a sage did not write according to the accepted tradition, especially if there are things in it which contradict true knowledge. So it is with the Book of Zerubbabel and also the Book of Eldad HaDani and those similar to them.

Ibn Ezra's laconic comment fails to explain why he finds the Book of Zerubbabel particularly unacceptable, but his mention of the book indicates his strong dislike of its aggadic-apocalyptic nature and its hyperbolic style.

Finally, R. Eleazar HaRokeah refers to the book in a comment on Ruth 4:11: And all the people at the gate and the elders answered [Boaz], "....May the Lord make the woman [Ruth] who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem!" In response to this verse, the author writes: "'Perpetuate your name in Bethlehem.' This refers to the Messiah. With the same name, go to Nineveh, i.e., Rome, as it is found in the Baraitha of Zerubbabel." The connection of Nineveh with Rome, found in all the versions of the book, supports the idea that Rabbi Eleazar is referring to "our" Book of Zerubbabel.

The significance of these references is not their proof that the philosophers and commentators completely subscribed to the apocalypticism of the Book of Zerubbabel -- clearly they did not; rather, the references and allusions prove that the book was not forgotten during their eras, even if it was not viewed in all circles with enthusiasm. Wertheimer correctly observes that Ibn Ezra's disdain for the book, as well as for the Chronicles of Moses, implies that the books were popular, or why should Ibn Ezra trouble to tell his readers not to consult them?[8] The reference by Rashi to an event not mentioned in our versions of the

book suggests that our versions may lack material originally included in some versions of the story. What this material comprised is, of course, impossible to know.

Conclusion

The Book of Zerubbabel has been introduced through the annotated translations of three editions which, in turn, were based on manuscripts of the book. The date of the book's composition, the middle of the seventh century, and the place of the book's composition, Palestine, have been established; the characters and messianic motifs incorporated in the work have been examined; and the influence of the book on contemporary and later works has been discussed. At this point, a summary of the significance of the book is in order.

The importance of the Book of Zerubbabel lies in three areas: (1) its introduction and development of certain characters; (2) its unique synthesis of messianic motifs and narrative style; and (3) the particular time and circumstances of its composition. These three areas will be briefly examined.

The writer of our book, as far as we can tell, introduces de novo the figure of Hephzi-bah into messianic literature. Although the character Armilus may possibly have been introduced slightly earlier by another work, the Book of Zerubbabel provides the first known extensive depiction of the character as a monster, the "son of Satan and a stone statue of a virgin." The notion of a Suffering

(or Hidden) Messiah who must endure imprisonment in a "house of debauchery" in Byzantium offers new insights into the motif of the Suffering Messiah. So, too, the concept of a Fallen Messiah is cultivated into a human portrait of victory followed by tragic death followed by victory. These character portrayals made our book the locus classicus for later messianic character descriptions.

Besides effective character development, the work superbly molds messianic motifs, such as the notion of a Fallen Messiah, and the prophetic eschatological visions, into a story which, even in the convoluted manuscripts available to us, splendidly recounts the episodes of Zerubbabel with the angel and the apocalypse which is revealed to Zerubbabel. In comparison with related messianic works of the period, our book stands out as a relatively simple yet complete tale of captivity and redemption. Its combination of prophetic declarations, rabbinic motifs, and apocalyptic styles is seamless.

Finally, the specific period in which the work was composed -- at the dawn of the Middle Ages, as the Arab hordes grew ready to descend upon the world -- insures the Book of Zerubbabel an important place in Jewish literature. The work is a literary nexus between Israel's ancient past, represented by midrashic and apocalyptic

texts, and the medieval literature devoted to cataloging and calculating the phenomena concerning the End of Days. The earlier works provided messianic interpretations and predictions, and the later works offered complicated adumbrations of the events to come, but our book effectively bridges both styles, without including objectionable philosophies or theological doctrines which would limit its appeal. The future is revealed in the form of a readable and memorable story.

Essentially, the book is one person's dream of how the ominous events around him might be resolved by the incredible involvement of God, directly and through the Messiahs sent by God, and of how the people of Israel could participate in a future in which present-day catyclysm would lead to redemption, and utmost depair would be followed by the glorious day of God's sovereignty throughout the world.

Notes

Introduction

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[9] Scholem, p. 9.

[10] Scholem, p. 10.

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- [10] Bamberger, pp. 430-31.
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- [12] Simon Dubnow, History of the Jews, II (South Brunswick, N.J.: Thomas Yoseloff, 1968), p. 217.
- [13] Andrew Sharf, "Heraclius," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 8:333.
- [14] Sharf, 333.
- [15] Joseph Dan, The Hebrew Story in the Middle Ages (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), p. 43.
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[3] Joseph Klausner, The Messianic Idea in Israel (New York: MacMillan, 1955), p. 441.

[4] M. Sotah 9:15, transl. by Patai, p. 97.

[5] Dan, Encyclopaedia Judaica, 11:1413.

[6] Dan, Encyclopaedia Judaica, 11:1413.

Discussion of the Characters in the Book

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[7] Halakhot Gedolot, ed. Azriel Hildesheimer (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1888), p. 223, transl. by Patai, p. 251.

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[17] Silverman. p. 6.

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- [20] Patai, p. 28.
- [21] Klausner, p. 501.
- [22] Cited in Klausner, p. 486.
- [23] Klausner, p. 486.
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- [26] Klausner, p. 495.
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- [29] Heinemann, p. 68.
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- [31] Jacob Klatzkin, "Armilus" Encyclopaedia Judaica, 3:476, and Patai, p. 156.
- [32] Klatzkin, 477.
- [33] Patai, p. 157.
- [34] Dan, Hebrew Story, p. 42.
- [35] Dan, Hebrew Story, p. 42.
- [36] Israel Levi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroes," Revue des Etudes Juives, 69 (1914), pp. 60-61.
- [37] Even-Shmu'el, p. 320.
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Related Texts

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- [2] Jacob Elbaum, "Midrash Lekah Tov," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 11:1516.
- [3] Herr, 1515.
- [4] Jacob Elbaum, "Genesis Rabbati," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 7:401-402.
- [5] Even-Shmu'el, p. 93.
- [6] According to Even-Shmu'el, the name "Gog and Magog" should be understood as referring to "Gog, King of Magog, which is the biblical sense, but not the medieval sense in Judaism and Christianity." Cf. Even-Shmu'el, p. 104n.
- [7] Even-Shmu'el, p. 102.
- [8] Even-Shmu'el, p. 104.
- [9] Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, p. 64.
- [10] Michael E. Stone, "Elijah, Apocalypse of," Encyclopaedia Judaica, 6:643.
- [11] Silver, p. 42.
- [12] Cf. Israel Levi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel: et le roi de Perse Siroes," REJ, 71 (1920), pp. 118-121.
- [13] Even-Shmu'el, p. 116.

- [14] Levi, REJ, 71, p. 118.
- [15] Even-Shmu'el, pp. 294-95.
- [16] Silver, pp. 43-44.
- [17] Even-Shmu'el, p. 311.
- [18] Even-Shmu'el, p. 313.
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Treatment and Influence

- [1] Dan, Encyclopaedia Judaica, 11:1414.
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- [4] Even-Shmu'el, p. 123.
- [5] Even-Shmu'el, p. 133.
- [6] Even-Shmu'el, p. 136.
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(Jerusalem: Ktab Wasepher, 1953), p. 195.

Appendix

A. A Fragment of the Book of Zerubbabel from the Cairo Geniza (Published initially by S. A. Wertheimer in Leket Midrashim, p. 13, and reprinted in Batei Midrashot II, 2nd ed., p. 502.)

...the Messiah of the Lord. And I answered him: "I need to ask." And he said to me: "Ask and I will tell you." And I said to him: "You are Metatron." And he answered me in a pleasant voice, saying to me: "I am Metatron, Michael, the captain of the Host of the Lord, and He appointed me to be over His people and over those who love Him. I am he who conducted Abraham throughout the land of Canaan, and I blessed him in the name of the Lord. I am he who saved Isaac, and the angels cried over him, as it is written: Behold the mighty ones shall cry.... (Isaiah 33:7). And I am he who wrestled with Jacob in Mesopotamia. I am he who conducted Israel in the desert forty years in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. I am he who appeared to Joshua in Gilgal. I am he who rained on Sodom and Gemorah fire and brimstone from the Lord from the heavens, Who sent me and Who made my name like His. And you, Zerubbabel, ask and I will tell you." And I answered him: "That man said to me, 'I am the Messiah of the Lord,' and I was astonished at him." And Metatron said to me: "He is the Messiah of the Lord, who was born to the House of David and the Lord ordained for him to become a prince of

the covenant of the holy people. This is Menahem ben Ammiel who was born during the coming of Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem, and He bore him away with the spirit of the Lord and He put him in this place until the time of the End." And I, Zerubbabel....

B. A Fragment of the Book of Zerubbabel from the Cairo Geniza (MS Bodleian 2642 fol. 9a. First published by S. A. Wertheimer in the first edition of Batei Midrashot II, p. 29, under the title Aggadat Y'mot haMashiah, and reprinted in the second edition, II, p. 504. The text is similar to the Pirkei Hekhalot fragment, below.)

And he stabbed Nehemiah in Jerusalem, and all Israel lamented him and they were embittered over him in bitterness [and] wailing. After this the wife of Nathan the Prophet, ben David -- Hephzi-bah -- the mother of Menahem ben Ammiel ben David, will come, and these signs [will] arrive in the month of Av. On the sixth day of the month, (Sidoe) [Siroes], the king of Persia, will stab Nehemiah in Jerusalem, and unto Jerusalem will arrive mourning after mourning [i.e., occasions for mourning], and he will trouble them greatly, and they will disperse into the wilderness of Jerusalem at the conclusion of the mourning for Nehemiah; forty-one days his corpse will lay strewn before the gates of Jerusalem, but man, beast, animal and bird will not be able to touch him, and after forty-one days the Holy One Praised Be He [will] bury him in the gravesite of the House of Judah." And I, Zerubbabel, again asked Metatron and Michael [sic], the captain of the Host of the Lord, concerning the signs of the covenant of the holy people." And he said to me: This calf its mouth [sic] shall lie down and will cut off the

branches [of this city] (Isaiah 27:10). And this city is the city of Nineveh, the city of blood -- it is Great Rome." And I said to him: "My lord, how long shall it be until the appointed time of the wonders?" And he clung to me and grabbed my hand and brought me to the House of Debauchery, and he showed me there a marble stone with a face like the appearance of a virgin whom no man has known, and exceedingly beautiful.

And he said to me: "Zerubbabel, what do you see?" And I said to him: "I see a statue of marble and the image of its face is like a beautiful woman." And the man who was speaking with me said to me: "This statue is the wife of Belial, and at the moment that Belial sees the statue she will conceive and bear for him Armilus, and she will be the head of all idolatry." And this word was [communicated] in the prophecy of the Lord to Zerubbabel, and my soul was greatly agitated within me, and I arose and went out, and I was astounded and I confessed there to the Lord, the God of Israel, and He, the God of all flesh, will send his angel and he will make known to me whatever I will ask from him. Again I was praying [lit. -- there was a prayer in my mouth] and he interrupted me and I saw him and I recognized him as the one who had spoken to me all these words [previously], and I bowed.

C. Fragments of the Book of Zerubbabel found in Pirkei Hekhalot (Published by S. A. Wertheimer in his edition of Pirkei Hekhalot and reprinted in 2nd ed. of Batei Midrashot I, pp. 67-136.)

[Ch. 32] ...And Zerubbabel said, "Come to me. What will be the form of the Eternal [House]?" And it answered me from the doors of the heavens, and it said to me: "Are you Zerubabbel?" And I said: "I am." And he answered and spoke to me as a man speaks to his friend, and he spoke to me many comforting words.

And I said (to me) [to him]: "Who are you, my lord?" And he said to me: "I am Metatron, captain of the Host of the Lord, and He made my name like His name." And he showed me a man [who appeared] like an exceedingly beautiful baby, and Metatron said to me: "This is the Messiah of the Lord who was born to the House of David, and God ordained him to be a prince over Israel; he is Menahem ben Ammiel, who was born in the House of Nebuchadnezzar, and a wind lifted him up and placed in the city of Nineveh.

And I asked: "What are the signs that Menahem ben Ammiel will make?" And Metatron and Michael [sic] answered me: "A year before one week, the Holy One Praised Be He [will] send a messenger to Israel...."

[Ch. 39] And forty years before the Messiah ben David, whose name is Menahem ben Ammiel, will come, Nehemiah ben

Hushiel, a man of Ephraim ben Joseph, will come and make a stand in Jerusalem, and all Israel will gather to him there, each man and his household will be gathered, and the Israelites will offer a sacrifice and it will be pleasing to the Lord and the Israelites will be registered according to their families. And after forty years of Nehemiah ben Hushiel, Siroes, the king of Persia, will arise and he will stab Nehemiah ben Hushiel in Jerusalem. And all of Israel will lament him in great mourning and weeping. And after this Hephzi-bah, the wife of Nathan the Prophet, ben David, will come, and these signs [will] arrive in the month of Av.

On the sixth day of the month Siroes, the king of Persia, will stab Nehemiah in Jerusalem, and mourning upon mourning will befall Israel, and he will greatly trouble them and they will disperse into the desert of Jerusalem at the end of the mourning for Nehemiah. His corpse will lie strewn before the gates of Jerusalem forty-one days, but neither man, beast, animal nor bird will be able to touch him, and after forty-one days the Holy One Praised Be He [will] bury him in the gravesite of the House of Judah.

And I, Zerubbabel, again asked Metatron and Michael, captain of the Host of the Lord, concerning the [prince] of the covenant of the holy people. And he said to me: "This

calf will lie down there and cut off her branches (Isaiah 27:10) and this city was Nineveh, the city of blood, Great Rome." And I said to him: "My lord, how long shall it be until the appointed time of the wonders?" And he seized me and grabbed my hand and brought me to the House of Debauchery, and he showed me there a marble stone with its face like the appearance of (the) [a] virgin whom no man has known, and exceedingly beautiful. And he said to [me]: "Zerubbabel, what do you see?" And I said to him: "I see a marble statue and the image of her face is like a beautiful woman." And the man who was speaking with me answered me: "This statue is the wife of Belial, and at the moment that Belial had intercourse with the statue she conceived and bore this Armilus, and he will be the chief of all idolatry, and he will be disfigured on one side [of his face], for half of him is from the stone and half of him is from Belial; his half from the stone will be hewn like the appearance of the stone."

And this word [was communicated] in the prophecy of the Lord to Zerubbabel. And my soul was greatly agitated within me, and I arose and went to the water canal and confessed there to the Lord, God of Israel -- He is the God of all flesh -- and He sent His angel, and once more a prayer was in my mouth and I had barely stopped when I saw

that he [was the one who had] spoken to me all the previous words, and I bowed to the Lord, and he answered me: "Ask of me before I go from you." And again I asked him about the Messiah of the Lord. And I said to him: "When will [the light of] Israel come?" And he answered me: "By the life of the Lord, Who sent me, Who appointed me over Israel, now I will tell you the work of the Lord, for the Holy God said (them) to me: 'Go and tell Zerubbabel my servant whatever he asks.'"

And he said: "Please approach me and I will tell you the word of the Lord. Know that Menahem ben Ammiel will come on the fourteenth day of Nisan and he will make a stand in my valley. And Menahem ben Ammiel will answer the elders: 'I am the Messiah of the Lord, Who sent me to announce good tidings to you.' And the elders will look, for he [will be] despised and dressed in rags, [and] they will despise him as you despised the elders [sic!], for he [will be] despised. And his anger will burn within him, and he will remove his clothes and he will wear garments of vengeance for clothing, and Elijah the Prophet will come with him and they will go to Jerusalem, and he will revive Nehemiah ben Hushiel, who was buried in the gates of Jerusalem, and they will go to the community of Israel and the Israelites will see that Nehemiah is with him and they

will believe in Menahem ben Ammiel." Metatron (and Michael), the captain of the Host of the Lord spoke in truth: Ephraim shall not envy Judah.... (Isaiah 11:13) and peaceful counsel shall be between them (Zechariah 6:13). And on the twenty-seventh of the first month, 890 [sic!] years [after the] destruction of Jerusalem, will be the redemption of the Lord.

And Menahem ben Ammiel will go forth (in gematria, Armilus), and he and Nehemiah ben Hushiel and Elijah the Prophet ben Eleazar ben Aaron the Priest, and they will make a stand together over the great sea, and they will do [sic] and raise up the corpses which fell by the hands of their enemies, and the waves of the sea will arise and throw them to the Wadi (Soter) [Shittim], for there will be justice for the wicked and joy for the righteous. And in the aforementioned second month the band of Korah for whom the earth opened and swallowed them will arise....

D. A Fragment Based on the Book of Zerubbabel. (MS Paris 326, published in "Studies in Gaonic Literature," by Alexander Marx.)

And at the end of days, Hephzi-bah, the mother of Menahem ben Amiel, the wife of Nathan the Prophet, will come and she will bring with her many souls from Israel and [s]he [will] make war with Nof, the king of Yemen, and Asrat, the king of Antioch, and she will defeat them. And after this Nehemiah ben Hushiel --who is the Messiah ben Ephraim -- will come and the kings of the nations [will] gather themselves and they [will] fight with them and they will defeat him and he will be killed together with many souls from Israel, and the survivors will flee and they [will] make a stand in great distress. Some of them will flee among the nations, and some of them [will] flee by the way of the desert of the peoples, having come that way from the beginning and they [will] eat saltwort forty-five days. And the rest of the remnant that [will] remain from Israel out of the great distress in which they [will] stand will return in complete-repentance to the Holy One Praised Be He, out of the bitterness of their soul[s] and the anger of their spirit[s], and He [will] reveal to them the Messiah ben David. (Until) the Holy One Praised Be He will revive by His spirit Menahem ben Ammiel -- Messiah ben David -- and He [will] revive the dead for them and they

will return to Israel, and Gog [will] hear that Israel has returned to their place and he [will] come up against them.

And the Holy One Praised Be he [will] descend upon the Mount of Olives and He will fight with them and [will] avenge the trouble of Israel, and by the prayer of the Messiah, and He will fight with Armilus and he [will] die by his hand, as it is said: ...and with a breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked (Isaiah 11:4) -- this refers to Gog and the multitude of nations who are mobilized against Jerusalem. And this Armilus, whom we have mentioned, is the son of Satan [and] a marble stone in Nineveh in the image of a peerlessly beautiful woman. Nineveh is Great Rome. And Satan will have intercourse with her and Armilus will be born from it. And the same war will take place forty-five days [after] the creation of Hephzi-bah, who came after 1270 years; concerning that time does Scripture say: Happy is he who waits 1000 days (Daniel 12:12). A record of the signs that will occur during the final days and the wars of Armilus and the army of Gog and the kings of the nations who are numberless, and they [will] come and make war with Israel and strike them a mighty blow; everything is explained in sequence.

E. A Chart Comparing the Narrative Structures of
The Wertheimer, Jellinek, and Levi Editions

The Wertheimer Edition

- (1) The word of the Lord comes to Zerubbabel.
- (2) A voice is heard again on 11 Adar.
- (3) Z. is brought to Nineveh.
- (4) Z. prays in order to beseech God.
- (5) Z. is commanded to go to the House of Debauchery.
- (6) Z. meets the Messiah b. David.
- (7) The Messiah appears as a youth.
- (8) A man with six wings appears.
- (9) Metatron/Michael gives his resume:
B. He conducted Abraham....
- (10) Metatron explains who the Messiah b. David is.
- (11) The Staff of Salvation and Hephzi-bah are introduced.
- (12) Hephzi-bah will slay two kings.

The Jellinek Edition

- (1) The word of the Lord comes to Zerubbabel.
- (2) A voice is heard again on 11 Adar.
- (3) Z. is brought to Nineveh.
- (4) Z. prays in order to beseech God.
- (5) Z. is commanded to go to the House of Debauchery.
- (6) Z. meets the Messiah b. David.
- (7) The Messiah appears as a youth.
- (8) A man with wings appears.
- (9) The angel tells Z. that
A. He fought against Sennacherib and he will fight against Armilus.
B. He conducted Abraham....
- (10) Metatron explains who the Messiah b. David is.
- (11) The Staff of Salvation and Hephzi-bah are introduced.
- (12) Hephzi-bah will slay two kings.

The Levi Edition

- (1) The word of the Lord comes to Zerubbabel.
- (2) A voice is heard again on 11 Adar.
- (3) Z. is brought to Nineveh.
- (4) Z. prays in order to beseech God.
- (5) Z. is commanded to go to the House of Debauchery.
- (6) Z. meets the Messiah b. David.
- (7) The Messiah appears as a youth.
- (8) A man with two wings appears.
- (9) Michael gives his resume:
A. He fought against Sennacherib and he will fight against Armilus.
B. He conducted Abraham....
- (10) Metatron explains who the Messiah b. David is.
- (11) The Staff of Salvation and Hephzi-bah are introduced.
- (12) Hephzi-bah will slay two kings.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| (13) A messianic date is given:
990 years after the
destruction of the Temple. | (13) A messianic date is given:
990 years after the
destruction of the Temple. | (13) A messianic date is given:
990 years after the
destruction of the Temple. |
| (14) The story of the Staff of
Salvation is told. | (14) The story of the Staff of
Salvation is told. | (14) The story of the Staff of
Salvation is told. |
| (15) Nehemiah b. Hushiel is
introduced. | (15) Messiah ben Joseph is
introduced. | (15) Nehemiah b. Hushiel is
introduced. |
| (16) Jerusalem will be regained
for three months.
Sacrifices will be renewed. | (16) Jerusalem will be regained
for forty years.
Sacrifices will be renewed. | (16) Jerusalem will be regained
for forty years. Sacrifices
will be renewed. |
| (17) Nehemiah will be mourned. | (17) The king of Persia will
attack. | (17) Siroes will rise up against
Nehemiah. |
| (18) Hephzi-bah will come. Sidoe
will stab Nehemiah. | (18) Hephzi-bah will come and the
enemy, confused, will kill
each other; the evil one
will die. | (18) Hephzi-bah will come and the
enemy, confused, will kill
each other; the evil one
will die. |
| (19) The Israelites will go into
the desert. Nehemiah's
corpse will be at the gates
of Jerusalem for 41 days but
no one will touch it.
Then the Lord will bury him. | (19) Z. is shown the stone which
will bring forth Armilus,
who will kill Messiah ben
Joseph. | (19) The stone which will beget
Armilus is shown to Z. |
| (20) The stone which will beget
Armilus is shown to Z. | (20) There will be torment in
Israel. The Messiah's
corpse will not be touched. | (20) Armilus will kill Nehemiah
(or Siroes will stab
Nehemiah and the Israelites
will disperse into the
desert and Nehemiah's
corpse will be in front of
the gates of Jerusalem for
forty-one days.) |
| (21) Z. is very agitated and he
prays to God. | (21) Z. is very agitated and he
prays to God. | |
| (22) Metatron returns and tells
Z. that he will tell him
what he wants to know. | (22) Metatron returns and tells
Z. that he will tell him
what he wants to know. | (21) The Israelites will lament
Nehemiah for forty days.
The corpse will be in front
of the gates of Jerusalem. |
| (23) Menahem b. Ammiel will come
suddenly. | (23) Menahem b. Ammiel will come
suddenly. | (22) Z. is greatly agitated and
prays to God. |

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|---|---|---|
| (24) The elders of Israel will not believe in Menahem b. Ammiel. | (24) The elders of Israel will not believe in Menahem b. Ammiel. | (23) Metatron returns and tells Z. that he will tell him what he wants to know. |
| (25) Menahem will revive Nehemiah. | (25) Menahem will revive Nehemiah. | (24) Menahem b. Ammiel will come suddenly. |
| (26) The relationship between the two messiahs will be harmonious. "Eprhaim shall not envy Judah...." | (26) 990 years is mentioned; again. | (25) The elders of Israel will not believe in Menahem b. Ammiel. |
| (27) 990 years is mentioned again. | (27) The corpses in the sea will be revived. | (26) Menahem will revive Nehemiah. |
| (28) The corpses in the sea will be revived. | (28) The band of Korah will arise. | (27) The relationship between the two messiahs will be harmonious. "Eprhaim shall not envy Judah...." |
| (29) The band of Korah will arise. | (29) God will fight with the nations. Messiah ben David will kill Armilus. | (28) 990 years is mentioned again. |
| (30) There will be rejoicing in Jerusalem. The sacrifices will be renewed. | (30) Nehemiah and Elijah will kill the remaining enemies. | (29) The corpses in the sea will be revived. |
| (31) The exiles will return to Jerusalem. | (31) There will be rejoicing in Jerusalem. The sacrifices will be renewed. | (30) The band of Korah will arise. |
| (32) The dimensions of the future Jerusalem are described, including the names of the mountains which will support her. | (32) The dimensions of the future Jerusalem are described, including the names of the mountains which will support her. | (31) God will fight with the nations. Messiah ben David will kill Armilus. |
| (33) 990 years is mentioned again. | (33) The names of the ten kings who will come are listed. | (32) Nehemiah and Elijah will kill the remaining enemies. |
| | (34) A grotesque description of Armilus is given. | (33) Three wars are listed:
A. Hephzi-bah vs. Siroes
B. Menahem b. Ammiel vs. Armilus
C. Nehemiah and Zerubbabel vs. the remaining enemies |
| | (35) A brief <u>nehemta</u> . | |

(34) The fifth, sixth, and seventh years of the messiah are listed:

5: Nehemiah will come;

6: Hephzi-bah will come;

7: Menahem will come.

(35) The names of the ten kings who will come are listed.

(36) A grotesque description of Armilus is given.

(37) Menahem will kill him.

(38) Concluding words.

(39) A brief nehemta.

(34) There will be rejoicing in Jerusalem. The sacrifices will be renewed.

(35) The dimensions of the future Jerusalem are described, including the names of the mountains which will support her.

(36) 990 years is mentioned again.

(37) The fifth, sixth, and seventh years (days) of the messiah are listed:
5: Nehemiah will come;
6: Hephzi-bah will come;
7: Menahem will come.

(38) The names of the ten kings who will come are listed.

(39) A grotesque description of Armilus is given.

(40) Menahem will kill him.

(41) Concluding words.

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