

AUTHOR LEAH MINKELE HERZ
TITLE INQUIRING OF THE LORD: THE Urim AND THUMMIM IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

Master's [] Prize Essay []

1. May circulate ☒) Not necessary
2. Is restricted [] for ___ years.) for Ph.D. thesis

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. X yes no

January 31, 2005
Date

Leah M. Herz
Signature of Author

Library
Record

Microfilmed _____
Date _____

Signature of Library Staff Member

Inquiring of the Lord:
The Urim and Thummim in Rabbinic Literature

Leah Minkele Herz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
June 2005
Rabbi Edward Goldman, Referee

Abstract

Inquiring of the Lord: The Urim and Thummim in Rabbinic Literature

This Rabbinic Thesis presents an in-depth look at the rabbinic writings of the first millennium of the Common Era to determine the way in which the sages defined the creation, function, and use of the Urim and Thummim. These mystical objects, mentioned a total of only seven times in the entire *Tanakh*, were sure to catch the attention of the rabbis, who were frequently drawn to investigating that which they found to be mysterious.

Chapter One provides an introduction to the topic at hand followed by a description of the methodology used for research and analysis. Chapter two continues with an in-depth study of the seven biblical verses which contain the words Urim and Thummim either as a word pair or singly. An attempt is made to determine the context in which the UT are found, their physical attributes, and the function they served. Chapter Three then moves into an investigation of the etymology of the terms themselves, in order to establish the ways in which the rabbis may have understood the Urim and Thummim.

Chapter Four presents a critical study of numerous passages from the rabbinic literature which are in any way related to the Urim and Thummim. Within the three sections of this chapter the reader will find rabbinic writings from a broad range of sources and time periods and each of the three sections gives special attention to a different aspect of the rabbinic writings.

Chapter Five explores five additional ancient texts which may have been available to the rabbis and upon which they may have drawn ideas for their own exegesis. Chapter Six completes the Rabbinic Thesis, presenting the author's own conclusions concerning the rabbinic writings. A comprehensive Topical Bibliography is found at the end of the study.

Acknowledgements

חבורה ומשפחה כן הן דומות--לכפת אבנים, אתה נוטל ממנה אבן אחת, וכלה מתרועעת.
*A fellowship and a family are like a pile of stones -
remove one stone, and the pile falls apart. Genesis Rabbah 100:7*

There is no way to adequately express my gratitude to so many without whose support I would not have been able to produce this Rabbinic Thesis. First, to the faculty of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati who taught me to think, reason, question, and wrestle with the texts, I owe so much.

Abundant gratitude to my superb thesis advisor Rabbi Edward Goldman whose patience, insight and editorial skill kept me focused and committed throughout. He is a mensch among menschen and everyone should be as lucky as I to work with someone of his caliber. I hope that he remains my teacher, colleague and friend for many years to come.

To Maor and Arielle Kramer, the most adorable niece and nephew in the world, whose Hebrew skills far surpass mine and always will! To their wonderful Abba, Rafael Kramer, who made sure they called often so that I could hear their sweet little voices at the other end of the phone asking, "When you will be a rabbi, Dodah LuLu?" It was music to my ears.

To my brother and sister-in-law Dr. Gordon I. Herz and Dr. Elaine M. Klein. You gave me four shoulders to lean on and the best "letter sweater" that anyone could wear! Only those who have been through the graduate school process can truly understand what it is really like and go on to lend their generous support to others.

To my amazing son Seth Adam Shapiro. You are the joy and light of my life. I thank God for you every day; for the enthusiasm with which you live your life, for your crazy sense of humor, for your friendship, love and support. Thanks for keeping me grounded, for your faith in me, for teaching me how to be coach-able and for showing me how to follow my dreams. You are an amazing inspiration.

And finally, to my parents Elaine and Heinz Herz. You have been my greatest fans and my staunchest supporters for half a century. I will never be able to thank you enough for being there and for believing in me, even during those many times when I did not believe in myself. Thank you for instilling within me with a love of Judaism and a joy for life.

יְהִי הַיּוֹם עֲשֵׂה יְהוָה נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בּוֹ:

This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad on it.
Psalms 118:24

Table of Contents

	<i>Abstract</i>	1
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	2
<u>Chapter One</u>	<i>Introduction and Methodology</i>	4
<u>Chapter Two</u>	<i>The Biblical Evidence</i>	12
<u>Chapter Three</u>	<i>The Etymology of the Terms Urim and Thummim</i>	27
<u>Chapter Four</u>	<i>The Rabbinic Literature</i>	39
	<i><u>Section 1</u> Rabbinic Literature to Biblical Verses</i>	44
	<i><u>Section 2</u> Rabbinic Literature to Related Verses</i>	82
	<i><u>Section 3</u> Rabbinic Literature to Urim and Thummim</i>	92
<u>Chapter Five</u>	<i>Additional Ancient Texts</i>	116
<u>Chapter Six</u>	<i>Conclusion</i>	152
	<i>Bibliography</i>	161

Chapter One: Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

The Book of Exodus treats the reader to what are two of the most detailed pieces of narrative anywhere in the *Tanakh*. The first, the building of the Tabernacle, occupies the entirety of *Parashat Terumah*, a total of three full chapters of the text. This detailed narrative is followed immediately by *Parashat Tetsavveh* which provides exhaustive instructions for the gifted artisans who will craft the sacral vestments to be worn by the High Priest, Aaron. Included in this meticulous description is the following verse:

וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת־הָאֹרִים וְאֶת־הַתַּמִּים וְהָיוּ עַל־לֵב אֶהְרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ

לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְנָשָׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת־מִשְׁפָּט בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־לִבּוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תָּמִיד:

"Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the *Urim and Thummim*, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times"¹ (Exodus 28:30).

It is with this *Torah* verse that we have our first encounter with two mystical objects that are revealed only by name but never described in detail. Despite the fact that the *Urim and Thummim* are mentioned as part of one of the most elaborate narratives in the *Chumash*, we are provided with no information as to what exactly they were or the specific ways in which they were used. We

¹ Translation from *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5751/1991. p. 181.

know only that they were placed into the breastpiece of decision and that Aaron was to wear them over his heart when he came before God. The mystery continues in the subsequent six citations of the words Urim and Thummim, scattered throughout the *Tanakh*, which again, are simply mentioned by name without any further explanation.

It is astonishing that what appear to be objects of such tremendous import are given such short shrift in the biblical narrative. Whatever the Urim and Thummim were they must have been an essential piece of equipment for the Israelites. Listed right along with all of the other implements of the *mishkan* and entrusted into the keeping of Aaron the High Priest, one can only presume that the Urim and Thummim played some sort of integral role within the priestly cult. We can only speculate as to the reasons for this dearth of descriptive data. For example, it is highly probable that the biblical editors had significantly more material to work with than eventually made it into the final redaction. It is entirely possible that at one time there was a much more detailed account of the Urim and Thummim, what they were, how they were formed, of what materials they were made, and perhaps most importantly, how they operated. If in fact this information did at one time exist, it is conceivable that an editorial decision was made to excise it from the Text. Perhaps there was a separate "user's manual," the sole property of the High Priest, which explained the proper care and handling of the Urim and Thummim. We do know that other texts existed at one time which are no longer available to us today. Throughout the book of Second Kings, for example, we frequently see the phrase "The other events of 'King

Ploni's' reign and all his actions, are recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Israel." Just as the Annals of the Kings was presumably a bona fide text, so too might there have been a manuscript with instructions for the Urim and Thummim that is lost to us now.

Deficit of detail has always been a source of intrigue for the ancient rabbis. Our rabbinic literature is replete with examples of the sages' attempts to "fill in the gaps" which they perceive in the biblical text. The rabbis considered themselves duty-bound to comprehend every word of their most sacred text and to grasp the meaning of that which, to the untrained eye, might appear to be redundant, ambiguous or illogical. For the rabbis the Text was without error and it was their mission to comprehend it fully.

The focus of this rabbinic thesis will be to examine the rabbinic literature and to explore the ways in which the rabbis defined the nature and function of the mystical Urim and Thummim. What did our sages say the objects were, how were they made, and how did they operate? In addition, this thesis will attempt to determine if the rabbis' interpretations might have changed with each successive period of rabbinic literature. What did the rabbis make of the shortage of explanatory material? Did they consider the lack of evidence to be problematic? Was this an opportunity for them to wax eloquent on the subject or were they surprisingly silent? Did the rabbis depend upon other existing manuscripts for their own edification? These are just a few of the questions which the author intends to address in this thesis. It is hoped that the reader will find the subject of the Urim and Thummim to be as intriguing as did the author.

Methodology

Prior to embarking upon a project of this scope it is not possible to know whether the scarcity of research materials might prove problematic. The author was pleasantly surprised to find that this was not at all the case! There was in fact a massive amount of material available and the difficulty arose with selecting that which was to be used for purposes of the thesis. The task began with a thorough investigation of scholarship which has been produced from the late 19th century through the present on the Urim and Thummim themselves. In addition a number of other associated subjects were investigated. Included among these was an inquiry into the various modes of divination in Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, a search of archaeological digests for physical evidence of lot oracles, and a number of gemological studies. Numerous encyclopedic resources were utilized in order to begin to build a bibliography of additional sources.

Chapter Two of the rabbinic thesis, which focuses on the Biblical Evidence, serves as the foundation upon which the rest of the thesis will be built. This chapter provides an in-depth look into the seven biblical verses in which the words Urim and Thummim occur. Each verse is examined within the context of the biblical material resulting in a description of the situations during which the UT were used, when the words appear singly as opposed to a word pair, when the words appear in reverse order, and other key details. This chapter yielded a relatively finite amount of information as the number of times the words Urim and Thummim appear in *Tanakh* is itself limited.

Once the research into the biblical verses was complete, it became evident that an investigation was needed into the meaning of the expressions Urim and Thummim. The author believed that this might be an area of interest for the rabbis as well and something upon which they might have focused their attention and writing. Much of the rabbis' work depended upon defining terms and utilizing those definitions to further their exegesis. Therefore, Etymology is the subject of Chapter Three. The hope was that learning more about the words themselves might lead to a greater understanding of the mysterious objects, their physical description and use. In fact, the research showed that there is a great deal of consensus among scholars as to the etymology and meaning of Urim and Thummim. Only some slight variations were identified.

Chapter Four entitled "The Rabbinic Literature" is the centerpiece of this rabbinic thesis. In order to identify what material might be available, several sources were utilized which proved to be most helpful. Among these were the Bar Ilan Responsa Project which allowed a search to be conducted by key word to determine all of the places within rabbinic literature where the words Urim and Thummim could be found. The second source which proved of enormous value was the three-volume concordance, *Sefer Torah, HaKetuvah, V'HaMesorah* by Aharon Heyman. Beginning with the first verse of the Book of Genesis, this concordance lists every verse in the *Tanakh* and where, within the immense collection of rabbinic literature, that verse or a segment of it appears.

The number of citations identified in the rabbinic literature by using these two sources alone was vast. It would have been impractical within the scope of

the thesis to analyze the entire body of these texts. Therefore, the decision was made to limit the amount of rabbinic literature analyzed to that of the first 10 centuries of the Common Era. The rationale was to begin with the earliest rabbinic writings, those which commenced during the time of destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (70 CE), and continue until the end of the 10th century CE. This one thousand year period in and of itself would prove to yield a significant amount of material. The later writings of the *Gaonim* and the medieval commentaries found in collections such as *Mikraot G'dolot* will not be addressed in this study.

All of the passages in any way related to the Urim and Thummim were read and translated in preparation of Chapter Four. In the end approximately two dozen pieces were selected and analyzed in detail and each of these passages was chosen for very specific reasons. Many of them contained what the author considered to be a unique or unusual description from the rabbis of the Urim and Thummim. Others exhibited hermeneutic or exegetical devices typical of the rabbinic literature which the author felt would be of interest to highlight for the reader. Still others made exceptional use of proof-text, showing the amazing aptitude with which the rabbis approached the biblical text. Still other pieces were picked in order to serve as an example of a certain genre of rabbinic literature within a specific time period. In each case an explanation of the source of the selection, its genre and the time period from which it derives is included preceding the analysis.

It goes without saying that there was a great deal of wonderful material which was not analyzed in detail within Chapter Four on the Rabbinic Literature. In order to address those texts, they will appear listed as a footnote in one of the three sections of this chapter, categorized according to source. It is hoped that the reader will be further inspired to take up his or her own examination of these additional texts, each of which adds a distinctive insight into this fascinating topic.

Chapter Five of the thesis deals with Supplementary Ancient Texts. In order to fully understand what the rabbis wrote about the Urim and Thummim it was necessary to consider other texts which existed prior to and contemporaneous with the rabbinic literature of the first millennium. Specifically, the author was interested in determining whether the rabbis may have drawn upon other literature and if so, what impact it may have had on their own writing. As with the rabbinic literature it was necessary to be selective in choosing the Supplementary Texts. Many passages were examined and the five which were most illustrative of the subject were analyzed in depth for the chapter.

The sixth and final chapter of the rabbinic thesis serves as a Conclusion to this study. Many of the major findings from previous chapters are reviewed and an attempt is made to answer some of the questions posed in our introductory section including the most important question of all: What did the rabbis believe the Urim and Thummim to be and how was this belief reflected in their writing?

The Bibliography for this project has been arranged topically. In doing so it is hoped that this will further assist the reader in identifying areas of interest which they would like to take up for further investigation. All sources quoted

within the text of the thesis along with all sources read for purposes of the research are included in the bibliography. Additionally, the bibliography will provide a section of all encyclopedic, lexical, and electronic sources used.

It should further be stated that a number of consistencies exist with respect to translation, use of Hebrew and Greek texts, use of abbreviations, and so on. Unless otherwise noted:

- Hebrew texts for the biblical passages were taken from "Davka Writer Software."
- Hebrew texts for the passages from *Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrashim* were taken from Davka's "Judaic Classics Software."
- Greek texts from Josephus as well as their English translations were taken from "Bible Works Software."
- All abbreviations appearing in the thesis as well as format for footnotes and bibliographical entries are consistent with *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*.
- Spelling of technical terms within source citations has preserved the spelling of each individual author, though that may differ from the way in which the author of this thesis has spelled that term, e.g. *baraita* versus *baraita* or *Tanach* versus *Tanakh*.

It is the hope of the author that the foregoing systematic methodology will serve to increase the reader's understanding of the subject and add to the enjoyment of learning about The Urim and Thummim in Rabbinic Literature!

Chapter Two: The Biblical Evidence

Introduction

Perhaps much of the intrigue surrounding the Urim and Thummim stems from the fact that the biblical text which we have today mentions these mysterious objects by name a total of only seven times. No two citations appear together in any one book of the *Tanakh* and each usage of the words can vary significantly, adding to the overall mystery. The distribution of the terms is as follows; four of the appearances are found in the *Torah*: Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8, Numbers 27:21 and Deuteronomy 33:8. Next we find one mention of the Urim by itself in Kethuvim: I Samuel 28:6. Our final two examples of Urim and Thummim appear in Nevi'im: Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65. This section of the thesis will examine each of these occurrences, explore its placement and context within the biblical narrative, and identify any unique or unusual characteristics with regard to the usage of the term.

Exodus 28:30

The first appearance of the words Urim and Thummim is found in Shemot, the second book of the *Torah*, and reads as follows:

וְנָתַתָּ אֶל-חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת-הָאוּרִים וְאֶת-הַתֻּמִּיִּם וְהָיוּ עַל-לֵב אֶהְרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ

לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְנִשָּׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת-מִשְׁפָּט בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-לִבּוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תָּמִיד:

"Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and the Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron

shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times."

This first use of the term Urim and Thummim is found towards the end of a narrative which has comprised almost the entirety of two parashiot, Terumah and Tetsavveh. These *Torah* portions, perhaps two of the most detailed pieces of narrative anywhere in the *Tanakh*, provide exhaustive instructions to the gifted artisans who will build the Tabernacle and all of its implements as well as craft the sacral vestments to be worn by the High Priest, Aaron. The directives are clear and precise; nothing appears to be left to chance. The description tells of colors, types of fabric, weave of the fabric, precious metals and stones, animal skins, size and shape and dimension of each component, and method of construction. This comprehensive construction list moves first from the Mishkan then to its contents, and finally to the holy articles of clothing of the priests.

Of particular interest to our discussion are the verses in Exodus 28:15-29, which highlight the crafting of the *Hoshen Mishpat*, the Breastpiece of Decision/Judgment, which is worn by the High Priest over the other sacred vestments. In many respects, this narrative mirrors closely the description of the fabrication of the Mishkan itself in terms of the types and colors of materials used as well as the attachment of golden rings, chains and cords. One might expect therefore, that each component be accorded the same level of detail, and yet we find this not to be the case. This highly descriptive section ends simply by mentioning the Urim and the Thummim by name and that these objects are to be placed inside of the *Hoshen Mishpat*. They are brought up quite matter-of-factly,

with no explanation as to what materials they are made of, the method by which they are crafted, or perhaps even more remarkably, how they are to be used.

It is important to note as well the construction of the Hebrew in the Exodus 28:30 appearance of the term Urim and Thummim, as this is not necessarily consistent for all seven biblical examples. In this particular case the phrase is, אֶת־הָאֲזָוִיִּים וְאֶת־הַתְּמִיִּים, "the Urim and the Thummim," using the definite article before each noun. It appears that we are to understand this as a specific Urim and Thummim as opposed to a more generalized set of objects. In fact, the word pair is stated in such a way as to give us the impression that this is perhaps the one and only pair of Urim and Thummim or at least the one and only pair which is set aside for the sole use of the High Priest.

Leviticus 8:8

At this point in the biblical narrative, the Tabernacle has been built and its implements crafted under the artistic leadership of Bezalel and Oholiab (Vayakhel), and an accounting is given of the materials that have gone into the construction (Pekudei). Before we reach the end of the book of Exodus, we once again read a description of the priestly garments, this time with much of the account detailing the making of the breastpiece itself. The Urim and Thummim, however, are nowhere mentioned until the second occurrence of the words Urim and Thummim appears in the third book of the *Torah*, Vaykira, and reads as follows:

וַיִּשֶׂם עָלָיו אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת־הָאֲזָוִיִּים וְאֶת־הַתְּמִיִּים:

"He put the breastpiece on him, and put into the breastpiece the Urim and Thummim."²

This instruction occurs in Parashat Tsav. Moses has relayed to the Children of Israel, as well as to Aaron and his sons, God's commandments for the variety of offerings which they are obligated to give. Moses is then instructed to ordain Aaron and his sons, and at this point, the narrative commences with a long and elaborate ordination ceremony. The entire community is assembled before the Tent of Meeting and Aaron is washed and clothed in the garments which have been prepared for him. It is Moses who performs the bathing and dressing rituals layering one article of clothing after another onto Aaron. This includes the *hoshen*, the breastpiece, into which Moses places the Urim and Thummim in keeping with the directives which he was given earlier in Exodus 28:30. Once more the phrase used is *אֶת־הָאֲוִירִים וְאֶת־הַתְּמִימִים* , "the Urim and the Thummim," implying a specific Urim and Thummim. Perhaps one is to assume that these are the only objects of their kind in existence at that time as there is only the definite article which characterizes them, with no additional adjectives used.

The description of the breastpiece also differs in a significant way in this passage from the way it is described in Exodus 28:30. The "*hoshen*" in Leviticus is simply a breastpiece, without the addition of the word "*mishpat*," which gives the sense of a special kind of breastpiece. Perhaps the implication is that the

² Translation from *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*. Baruch A. Levine (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5749/1989. p. 50.

"*hoshen*" only becomes the "*hoshen mishpat*" once the Urim and Thummim have been placed inside of it.

Numbers 27:21

Parashat Pinhas in the Book of Numbers is the third place in which one of our words is found. The context for its use is quite different from what we have seen in our previous two passages. The Israelites have now embarked on their lengthy sojourn in the wilderness. Having rebelled against Moses upon several occasions, the people have been told that they will be forced to wander forty years in the desert. This disobedient community, still in the clutches of their slave mentality from Egypt, will not be permitted to cross into the Land across the Jordan River until their entire generation has died. Moses, who earlier in a fit of anger and frustration at this incorrigible nation disobeyed God's command to strike a rock in order to produce water, has received the same sentence. He is to die without the privilege of leading the people into the Land. Out of concern for their well-being, Moses asks God to appoint someone in his stead who will be competent to guide the Israelites from this time on. God commands Moses that he ordain Joshua son of Nun as his replacement and an investment ceremony similar to the one which we first witnessed with Aaron and his sons in the Leviticus passage ensues. Joshua is to stand before Eleazar the Priest, who is now the Kohen Gadol following the death of his father, Aaron. Joshua is invested with some of the majesty which Moses possessed, in order that he is

able to assume command over the people. The successor has been appointed and Numbers 27:21 then reads as follows:

וּלְפָנַי אֱלֶעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן יַעֲמֹד וְשָׁאַל לוֹ בַּמִּשְׁפָּט הָאוּרִים לְפָנַי יִהְיֶה עַל-פִּי יִצְחָר
וְעַל-פִּי יִבְאוּ הוּא וְכָל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אִתּוֹ וְכָל-הָעֵדָה:

"But he shall present himself to Eleazar the Priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the Lord. By such instruction they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelites, the whole community."³

The verse from Bemidbar represents a significant departure from what we have encountered in Shemot and Vayikra. First, and certainly most evident, is the fact that the word Urim appears without its partner Thummim. This generates a great number of questions, not the least important of which is how many objects are being referred to in this verse? Is the term Urim simply shorthand for the word-pair that we have become accustomed to seeing, or are we to understand that whatever these objects were could be utilized alone or as a pair? The answers to these questions are not clear from the text itself.

Secondly, Numbers 27:21 seems to imply that although Joshua has been granted a great deal of authority, it is not fully that which Moses enjoyed. The use of the disjunctive *vahv* which appears in the phrase, וּלְפָנַי אֱלֶעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן, "But before Eleazar the High Priest," indicates that there are certain situations in which Joshua does not have full control over all decisions. Eleazar, who as heir

³ Translation from *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*. Jacob Milgrom (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5750/1990. p. 236.

to the priesthood following the death of Aaron now maintains control of the Urim, is to be consulted by Joshua.

Finally, this is the first time the Text offers us any sort of explanation as to the function of the mysterious object. Nowhere in the narrative have we seen Moses or anyone else consulting the Urim and Thummim, perhaps because his communication with God was direct and required no intermediary. The phrase, **בְּמִשְׁפָּט הָאוּרִים**, "the decision (judgment) of the Urim," gives the sense that there is some power invested within its use that is accessible only to Eleazar. Specifically, the Urim is to be used regarding decisions for "going out" and "coming in," presumably for the purpose of warfare, as this will be Joshua's primary future task. There is still little clarity, however, with respect to the physical appearance of the Urim or a specific description as to how it was used. Additionally, no information is provided as to where on his person Eleazar kept the object(s) although one might be led to assume that he inherited all of the sacred vestments from his father, including the *hoshen mishpat*. Certain rights remain exclusively those of the High Priest.

Deuteronomy 33:8

The fourth and last example of the words Urim and Thummim which appears in the *Torah* can be found in the very last parasha, V'zot haBracha. Moses offers a final blessing in the form of a poem upon the Israelites, highlighting the love of God for his People. "Moses blesses the tribes individually, mentioning each them in geographic order beginning with Reuben, in

whose territory the Israelites are encamped."⁴ The tribe of Levi is mentioned third and the blessing begins as follows:

וְלֵלֵוִי אָמַר תְּמִינָה וּרְיִיִּם לְאִישׁ חֲסִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר נִסִּיתוֹ בְּמַסָּה תְּרִיבָהוּ עַל־מִי מְרִיבָה:

"And of Levi He said: Let Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful one, whom You tested at Massah, challenged at the waters of Meribah."⁵

This verse from D'varim represents a dramatic departure from the way in which the words Urim and Thummim have been used in the past. This is the only place in the *Tanakh* in which the terms appear in reverse order. In addition, this citation is the only one which adds a possessive suffix to the words, using the second person singular masculine ךְ ending to indicate that these objects belong to the Lord. According to the verse, the Levites are identified as the direct descendants of Aaron, and inheritors of the priesthood. Based upon Deuteronomy 33:8 this distinction was granted to the Levites due to their faith when tested at Massah and Meribah. This is a reference to the incidents which took place in *Parashat Beshallah* (Exodus 17:1-7) and *Parashat Hukkat* (Numbers 20:1-13) in which the Israelites quarrel with Moses with respect to the lack of drinking water. The use of the term חֲסִידְךָ in the Deuteronomy verse which blesses the Levites gives the impression that they must have exhibited some sort of extraordinary faith in God, unlike their fellow wanderers. An examination of the narratives regarding this incident in Exodus and Numbers texts, however, shows no evidence of remarkable behavior on the part of the

⁴ *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*. Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5756/1996. p. 322.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 324.

Levites versus any another group, so it remains unclear as to why the Levites have been singled out in this regard. What is clear is that this tribe has inherited the priesthood along with its "tools of the trade," namely, the Urim and Thummim, or in this case, the Thummim and Urim.

Despite the unusual order of the words in this final *Torah* text plus the addition for the first time of pronominal suffix, the mystery as to the nature of the UT endures. Deuteronomy 33:8 provides us with no further insights into their function or physical characteristics. From this reference we know only that they continued to be used by the descendents of Aaron and that they were a direct gift from God to the Levites for some not fully explained act of faith.

1 Samuel 28:6

The fifth piece of biblical evidence with respect to the enigmatic Urim and Thummim is found in the second section of the Bible, The Prophets. At this point in the biblical narrative King David, fearing that he will perish at the hands of King Saul, decides to flee from the land of Israel to the land of the Philistines. Along with his two wives and six hundred of his men, King David crosses over to the land of King Achish son of Moach of Gath, and Saul desists in his pursuit. With the knowledge that King David has raised the ire of his own people Israel, King Achish trusts that David will remain his loyal vassal. At this time, the Philistines, led by King Achish, determine to make war against Israel and Saul. King David naturally joins forces with King Achish against this common enemy.

The Prophet Samuel has died by this time and Saul has determined that it no longer be permitted that one should be able to consult ghosts or "familiar" spirits with respect to seeking advice with respect to warfare. King Saul sees the great Philistine force that has been mustered against him and in fear and trembling turns to God for help. The key verse from I Samuel 28:6 reads as follows:

וַיִּשְׁאַל שְׂאוּל בַּיהוָה וְלֹא עָנָהוּ יְהוָה גַּם בַּחֲלֻמּוֹת גַּם בַּאֲוִרִים גַּם בַּנְּבִיאִים:

"And Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."⁶

Similar to our passage from Numbers 27:21, the term Urim is used without its familiar partner Thummim. This is however, where the similarities end and a number of unusual characteristics are apparent in I Samuel 28:6 versus the other examples which have previously been identified.

First and foremost, and perhaps most striking, is the fact that this is the only occasion in which the Urim have been consulted without the intermediary skills of the priest. There is no mention that Saul seeks out another to assist him with this inquiry, nor does the text indicate that Saul draws the object(s) out of any sort of garment or breastplate as we have seen in past verses.

Secondly, and of equal interest, is that Saul seems to anticipate an answer to his inquiry through one of three different methods: "dreams, Urim, or prophets." According to the biblical text, Saul has evidently forbidden other forms of divination, specifically those which utilize the skills of ghosts and familiar

⁶ *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 1999/5759. pps. 635-636.

spirits. Only dreams, Urim and prophets remain as legitimate forms of communication with YHWH with respect to advice, in this case, warfare. King Saul is evidently disturbed by the fact that none of these regularly used sources of information has provided the counsel which he is seeking and he is compelled to turn to an alternative method.

Finally, this is the first time we encounter the use of the words, **וַיִּשְׁאַל בַּיהוָה**, "inquired of the Lord." It is important to look at this phrase in comparison to that in Numbers 27:21 in which we see Eleazar the Priest, **וַיִּשְׁאַל לוֹ בְּמִשְׁפַּט הָאוּרִים**, "who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the Lord." There appears to be a distinction here in that in the verse from I Samuel, the inquiry is taking place directly of YHWH, whereas in the verse from Bemidar, Joshua stands before Eleazar who stands before God but appears to inquire of the Urim itself. The phrase **וַיִּשְׁאַל בַּיהוָה** will have further importance later on in this study as it is often used to indicate that an inquiry is being made of the Lord, which may have utilized the Urim and Thummim. This word usage, which seems to imply a very specific type of inquiry, will be discussed in greater detail in the section on, "Related Verses."

Ezra 2:63 and Nechemiah 7:65

The verses from the second chapter of the Book of Ezra and from the seventh chapter of the Book of Nechemiah, which include the key phrase Urim and Thummim, read identically. These are the only two citations in the third section of the Bible, Kethuvim, in which we find the terms. The biblical narrative

is recounting the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem following its destruction in 586 BCE by the armies of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Less than fifty years later, in 539 BCE, King Cyrus of Persia's armies defeated Nebuchadnezzar. King Cyrus delivers an edit permitting the Israelites, who have been taken into exile in Babylonia, to return to the Land to rebuild the Temple. The biblical text then proceeds to provide a lengthy and highly detailed list of all of those who came out of captivity to return to Israel, including the descendants or the priests. Ezra 2:65 and Nechemiah 7:65 read as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַתִּרְשָׁתָּה לָהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ מִקֹּדֶשׁ הַקֹּדֶשִׁים עַד עֹמֵד כֹּהֵן לְאוֹרְחִים

וּלְתַמִּים:

"The Tirshatha ordered them not to eat of the most holy things until a priest with Urim and Thummim should appear."⁷

By itself this verse seems to make very little sense, but when read within the context of the complete paragraph we begin to see its importance. The narrative in both Ezra and Nechemiah tells us that:

"Of the sons of the Priests, the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai⁸ who had married a daughter of Barzillai and taken his (their) name—these searched for their genealogical records, but they could not be found, so they were disqualified for the Priesthood."⁹

Although it is not perfectly clear from this passage, we nevertheless get the sense that the creation of an absolutely accurate genealogy of the Israelites

⁷ Ibid. pps. 1840 and 1872.

⁸ Nechemiah adds, "Barzillai the Gileadite."

⁹ Ibid. pps. 1840 and 1872.

was not a possibility. After fifty years in exile, family lines have become muddled. In the aforementioned case, it appears that a marriage had taken place and the new sons-in-law have adopted the name of their father-in-law, making the search for their accurate heritage difficult, if not impossible. With respect to the priesthood, lineage was not a proposition of "close enough." It was a frightening notion that someone whose pedigree was in question might perform the sacrifices within the Temple and then eat of those "most holy things." In order to avoid such a catastrophic occurrence, the Tirshatha, (defined in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* as, "the title of a Persian governor in Judaea,"¹⁰) ordered that they were not to eat of the sacrifices until a priest with Urim and Thummim appeared among them. This was apparently the conclusive evidence necessary to identify who was an authentic priest. There is no mention of what might happen should a "pretender priest" arise, but the ruling of the Tirshatha did not allow for such an error to occur. Until such time as an individual emerged with the all-important Urim and Thummim, the "holy things" were not to be consumed.

The citations from Ezra 2:63 and Nechemiah 7:65 clearly show the importance of the object(s) in question. Unfortunately, we do not gain any additional insights into the nature of the Urim and Thummim. We do not know from these passages what they looked like or how they were used, only that they were an important part of the priestly paraphernalia.

¹⁰ *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers) March, 2000. p. 1079.

Summary

The biblical evidence with respect to the term Urim and Thummim has provided little assistance with respect to identifying the nature of these most mysterious objects. What we have learned are the following limited number of facts:

Regarding the four references to the Urim and Thummim in the *Torah*, we first discover that they were placed in the Breastpiece of Decision (*Hoshen haMishpat*) and worn by the High Priest Aaron over his heart. The UT was therefore small enough to fit into a small garment and light enough to carry on one's person with ease. They are described as the Urim and the Thummim, implying that they were unique and that only one pair of its kind existed (Exodus 28:30). Secondly, we are told that it is Moses who, prior to the anointing of Aaron and his sons, dresses them in their sacred vestments and places the UT into the Breastpiece (Leviticus 8:8). Thirdly, Joshua ben Nun is appointed to replace Moses following the great prophet's death. Despite this position of leadership, Joshua must still come before Eleazar the Priest in order that Eleazar seek the decision of the UT. This privilege apparently remains within the purview of the High Priest. The types of decisions sought appear to be within the realm of when to go out to and return from battle (Numbers 27:21). The fourth and final *Torah* verse awards the Urim and Thummim to the tribe of Levi due to their righteousness in not participating in the complaints of the other Israelites while wandering in the desert in need of water. The words are reversed from their

normal order and have been given the second person masculine pronominal suffix ך (Deuteronomy 33:8).

Our fifth piece of biblical evidence, the verse from I Samuel 28:6, indicates that Saul "inquires of the Lord" with respect to military advice. He does so without the assistance of a priest, and receives no answer from YHWH, either by the method in question, that is, the Urim, nor by dreams or prophets. We glean very little additional information from this solitary verse in *Nevi'im*. Lastly, the sixth and seventh, (and virtually identical,) verses from *Kethuvim* found in Ezra 2:63 and Nechemiah 7:65 further reflect the importance of the objects without detailing their nature. Upon their return from Babylonian exile, the priests are to desist from the consumption of the holy sacrifices unless and until one arises among them who possesses the UT. With priestly lineage in question, the ownership of the Urim and Thummim resolves any doubt as to who might be a genuine priest.

The biblical evidence with respect to the Urim and Thummim is scant and their obscure nature persists.

Chapter Three: The Etymology of the Terms Urim and Thummim

Introduction

One of the factors which perpetuates the ambiguity surrounding the nature of the Urim and Thummim has to do with the meaning of the terms themselves. This has been the subject of a great deal of speculation on the part of scholars throughout the ages, and a variety of opinions have been put forth. It is interesting to note that in most translations of the Hebrew Bible into English, the words are simply transliterated from Hebrew characters into Roman characters, as has been done for this thesis. These translators, it appears, have been hesitant to render the words into anything other than a phonetic representation of the original Hebrew. Perhaps this is in an attempt to avoid the dilemma of proffering an interpretation of the words simultaneously. "Translation, by necessity, implies interpretation,"¹¹ and with regard to Urim and Thummim, it is perhaps best to leave these terms in their original form.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to provide an exhaustive etymological study of our key terms. Rather, the goal is to address specific etymological concerns which may also have been of interest to the writers of the rabbinic literature. In most cases, it would be mere speculation to attempt to determine what the ancient rabbis might have been aware of with regards to literature in other languages which existed at their time. We do encounter some Greek "loan words" in both the *Halakhic* and *Midrashic* works which indicate at least a casual

¹¹ Thank you to my beloved professor Edward Goldman, who has made me keenly aware of this key concept.

acquaintance with the languages of those around them during their own time. The greater concern, however, is whether or not the rabbis were cognizant of other Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, whose own languages and practices might have had an impact on that of the Ancient Israelites. Were the authors responsible for the vast corpus of rabbinic literature familiar with the writings of authors from other cultures? If so, did those writings have any influence on the rabbis' work? We have no written evidence to indicate, for example, that the rabbis were privy to Akkadian or Mesopotamian texts, some of which contain accounts of practices and terminology similar to those described with respect to the Urim and Thummim. This lack of documentation does not directly indicate a lack of knowledge on the part of the rabbis. It simply implies that we cannot, with certainty, verify what was or was not within the consciousness of the rabbis.

With that in mind, the central concern of this chapter will be on the etymological features of the Hebrew words Urim and Thummim which might have caught the attention of the writers of rabbinic literature. We know for example, from numerous illustrations, that the rabbis often concerned themselves with the notions of word play, word choice, puns, unique spellings, comparisons of word usage from one place in *Tanakh* to another, and so on. With this as our focal point, there are three principal matters related to this topic.

The first of these revolves around the identification and meaning of the roots of the words themselves. This is critical to the understanding of what the Urim and Thummim might have been, in that the root itself might describe the physical characteristics of the object(s) and how they functioned in the hands of

those who operated them. This is also something with which the writers of the rabbinic literature would have been concerned.

Secondly, much research has focused on what appear to be the masculine plural "im" endings on אורים ותומים. Is this defacto a plural ending, indicating that at least two or even several of each item were being used simultaneously? Or, is what appears to be a characteristic plural ending, really something else entirely?

A third and final area of concern with regard to the origin of the terms Urim and Thummim relates to their appearance in some verses as a word pair, at other times singly without the partner word, and in one case in "reverse" order. Scholars have attempted to determine if this bears any significance with respect to the way in which the UT were used; indeed, this may have also been of concern to the ancient rabbis as they attempted to ascertain the nature of the Urim and Thummim. The conclusions pertaining to the plural endings and word-pairs will be discussed in one section as the research has identified them as closely related etymological issues.

This chapter will deal solely with etymological findings regarding the Hebrew terminology. Translations and interpretations of the words Urim and Thummim into other languages found in supplementary texts such as the writings of Philo and Josephus, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate will be the focus of a later discussion. Similarly, Hebrew usage of words which are similar in structure to Urim and Thummim, specifically passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls, will also be addressed further on in this thesis.

The Root of the Problem

The exact etymology of the words Urim and Thummim is unknown but several theories dominate the literature. The first of these theories examines the three letter root or *shoresh* of each term to determine if this might lead to a further explication of the manner in which the objects were constructed and how they might have been utilized.

Perhaps the most frequent etymological explanation we find for the word אורִים is that it derives from the word א-ו-ר (or) meaning light, "the idea being, perhaps, that Urim was the lot which *brought to light the guilt* of the subjects of the ordeal."¹² As discussed in Chapter One, based upon the seven biblical verses in which the term appears, we have very little specific descriptive evidence as to the range of circumstances for which the UT was used. We do know from the passage in I Samuel (28:26) that the UT was called upon prior to King Saul's waging war, but we have no additional knowledge that the Urim and Thummim were used with respect to the determination of guilt or innocence. It might be reasonable to deduce, given the vast biblical literature describing the multitude of priestly responsibilities, that the Urim and Thummim may have played a role in the adjudication of legal cases. This would be a logical inference as well, given that the UT as described in the first biblical citation, (Exodus 28:30) were worn by the High Priest and kept in the חֶשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט , the breastpiece of judgment. It is apparent that some sort of decision-making process of a legal

¹² *A Dictionary of the Bible Dealing with its Language, Literature, and Contents*. James Hastings, Editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) 1902. Volume IV. p. 838.

nature might have occurred which "illuminated" or "shed light upon" the guilt of the person involved.

The translation of Urim as having derived from the root word א-נ-ו has had a tremendous impact on the way in which scholars have further elucidated the use of the mystical object(s). For example, Cornelius Van Dam, in his book *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*, has posited that, "the UT were used by the priest as a verification of the divine origin of the oracle. If the priest had obtained his message by means of divine inspiration, a miraculous light shone in close association with the UT, but if there was no special light worked by YHWH, one would know that YHWH was not imparting revelation by means of the priest."¹³

This etymologically based view of the Urim having some connection to "light" is written upon extensively in modern literature. Scholars have examined every possible nuance of the word א-נ-ו as the three letter root of אורִים and, like Van Dam, have hypothesized other ways in which the "lot oracle" was employed. Some have stated that the "stone" or other "object" was made of alabaster, a luminous white rock which reflected light. Others have put forward that the Urim was in fact one of the שְׁתֵּי אֲבִנֵי-שָׁהֶם , the "two lazuli stones," which were attached to the shoulder pieces of הָאֶפֹד , the ephod (Exodus 28:9).¹⁴ These stones, each etched with the names of six of the twelve tribes of Israel, were

¹³ As quoted in C. Houtman, "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion." *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol XL, No. 2 (April 1990) p. 229.

¹⁴ The nature, construction, and purpose of the ephod is, in and of itself, a subject of enormous scholarship and speculation. It is not within the purview of this thesis to embark on an explanation of this piece of the High Priest's wardrobe.

believed by some to have become illuminated when called upon by the High Priest for an answer to a query. Or, at least the one designated as the Urim was believed to have "lit up."

A final theory which accepts the root of the word Urim as ר-ו-א states that the Urim and Thummim were in actuality the twelve gemstones mounted into the $\text{תָּשֻׁבֶּת הַמִּשְׁפָּט}$, the "breastpiece of judgment." Each of these precious stones was inscribed with the name of one tribe, and along with names etched into the shoulder stones, the entirety of the Hebrew alphabet was represented. This conjecture asserts further that when the High Priest posed a question to YHWH, the individual letters in the words would illuminate, thereby spelling out the answer resembling an Ancient Israelite version of the enigmatic Ouija Board.

A second theory regarding the word Urim is that the term derives from the root letters ר-ו-א (*arar*) meaning "to curse." This interpretation is informative in that it implies that the "lot oracle," if indeed that is what the Urim was, might be indicative of one's culpability in a given situation. When the Urim "came up," the person in question was judged as guilty, or in the case of a military venture, it was doomed to failure and therefore should not be embarked upon. The supposition that אורִים derives from the *shoresh* ר-ו-א provides some clarification in as to what the specific oracle might have meant. We are still in the dark, however, as to the way in which this was manifested. We would have to accept the theory that the UT were stones or sticks of different colors or textures, perhaps smooth on one side and rough on the other. When tossed, rolled, or cast out of a container of some sort, the High Priest would have either looked at

or felt the object(s) to determine which answer had been elicited. From the root א-ר-ר however, we know nothing other than that there was a negative, or “accursed” response.

There is far less controversy concerning the root of the word thummim. Most scholars agree that תומים originates from the *shoresh* מ-מ-ת meaning “to be complete, finished, innocent or perfect.”¹⁵ Looking now at Thummim coupled with its partner Urim, the word-pair makes a bit more sense. If, as in our first case, אורים derives from א-ו-ר meaning “light,” then the words Urim and Thummim come to mean that the Urim brought to light the parties’ guilt and the Thummim recognized one’s blamelessness. If, on the other hand, Urim derives from א-ר-ר, the word-pair אורים ותומים now reads as “curse and innocence,” again identifying the party as either guilty or not guilty.

As a consequence of their etymological inquiries, there are some scholars who have made a giant leap from certainty about the meaning of the words Urim and Thummim to certainty as to what they looked like and how they were used. For example, we find the following statement of “fact” written by Dr. Paul Carus: “The term *orim* as derived from the root *or* means ‘light,’ or ‘sunrise,’ or ‘morning,’ or ‘beginning, or ‘east’; *tom* or perhaps *tam* or *tum*, should mean ‘completion,’ or ‘sunset,’ or ‘evening,’ or ‘end,’ or ‘west.’ They may fitly be translated by ‘the shining ones and the dim ones,’ or ‘start and finish,’ or ‘motions and rest,’ or ‘beginning and end,’ and when we consider that they were carried in a bag, it is

¹⁵ Op. cit, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. p. 1070.

more probable that they were pebbles of two different colors, presumably white and black."¹⁶

The preceding etymological suppositions concerning of the roots for the words Urim and Thummim are plausible and logical. One must be cautious, however, regardless of which translation one might consider to be more convincing, to acknowledge that much of the scholarship is still in the realm of conjecture. Furthermore, regardless of how accurate the translations of the words אורים ותומים might be, they do not necessarily provide the additional information needed to state, with absolute conviction, what these puzzling objects were.

Plurals and Pairs

Most students of the Hebrew language learn early on in their studies that masculine nouns in the plural form characteristically end with the syllable ים, (*im*), a *yod* followed by a *mem sofit*. It would logically follow then, that the Hebrew terms אורים ותומים are present in the biblical text as plural nouns. This is the case in each of the seven verses from the *Tanakh* enumerated in Chapter One, including that of Deuteronomy 33:8 which uses the terms תִּפְמִיךָ וְאוּרִיךָ. In this instance, the second person masculine singular second suffix ך has been added to the word, but the yod which precedes the suffix, verifies the plural form of the noun. As asked earlier, is this in fact a true plural ending, leading to the

¹⁶ *The Oracle of Yahveh: Urim and Thummim, The Ephod, The Breastplate of Judgment*. Dr. Paul Carus (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company) 1911. pps. 13-14.

conclusion that at least two or even several of each item existed or was being utilized at the same time? Or, could what appears to be a plural ending, really something else entirely?

The predominant theory put forth with respect to the "im" ending is that "urim and thummim reflect a *pluralis intensivus*. This type of plural, although singular in meaning, emphasizes the magnification or interior multiplication of the stem to express 'greatness, majesty, grandeur and holiness.'¹⁷ Similarly, C. Houtman writes that, "in my opinion it is worth considering the UT as a single object. The plural forms can be understood as *pluralis intensivus* and the combination of both terms as hendiadys."¹⁸ A comparable view is stipulated by W. Muss-Arnolt who states, "it is a well-known fact that the so-called plural ending (ים-) of the two words expresses the *pluralis intensivus*, they are plurals only in form, but not in meaning."¹⁹

According to these scholars, the "im" ending is not a plural ending at all. Rather, the Urim and Thummim were one object, not two, as one might conjecture from looking at the Hebrew. The purpose then was to "intensity" the splendor of the UT, and "enlarging" its importance by portraying it as more than one object. If indeed the אורים ותומים was used by the High Priest as a tool for consulting with God regarding questions of great significance such as guilt or innocence of an individual, propitious times for battle, etc., then it would certainly

¹⁷ "The Plural Form of *urim* and *thummim*." Anne Marie Kitz. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 116, No. 3 (Fall 1997) p. 401

¹⁸ Op. cit, Houtman. p. 230

¹⁹ "The Urim and Thummim: A Suggestion as to Their Original Nature and Significance." W. Muss-Arnolt. *The America Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Volume XVI, Number 4 (July, 1900) p. 218.

be logical to magnify the words used by making them plural. Perhaps a similar example that we can use from the English language is with respect to the expression, "heads or tails," used when executing a coin-toss for the purposes of making a decision. It is only one coin that is being tossed; only one side displays a likeness of a head, leaving the opposite side of the coin as the "tail."

Nonetheless, we are likely to ask the participants to name, "heads or tails," as if we were, in actuality, using multiple coins. It is exactly this point which is being made concerning the Urim and Thummim.

Related to the issue of *pluralis intensivus* is the number of times that Urim and Thummim appear together as a word pair as opposed to singly. Referring back to the seven biblical verses in which either אֱוֹרִים or תְּוֹמִים appear, five of those verses contain both words together (Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8, Ezra 2:63, Nechemiah 7:65, and in reverse order, "Thummim and Urim" in Deuteronomy 33:8). The technical term for the appearance of two words together to signify one item or concept is hendiadys, defined as "a figure of speech in which two words connected by a conjunction are used to express a single notion that would normally be expressed by an adjective and a substantive, such as *grace and favor* instead of *gracious favor*.²⁰ Given the attention to detail and degree of scrutiny with which the writers of rabbinic literature approached the biblical text, it would seem plausible that they had seen other examples of hendiadys. They would not, however, have known this specific terminology.

²⁰ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin) 2000. p. 818.

In addition to the theory of Urim and Thummim as a hendiadys, there are those who characterize the *mem sofit* at the end of each word as a "*mimetic mem*," meaning to mimic or imitate. "Proponents of *urim* and *thummim* as two individual objects argue that the terms are an example of mimation, an archaic noun form that retains a final *mem* in the nominative singular. This means that the vocalization of the MT gives the appearance of a plural even though a singular noun is meant. Thus, later editors who no longer understood the terms interpreted the mimation as a standard nominative plural ending in *-im* and vocalized *urim* and *thummim* accordingly. Since mimation is an archaic form, for several writers its presence illustrates how ancient, and perhaps foreign, the cultic use of the Urim and Thummim is."²¹ Again, the ancient rabbis did not know the etymological phrase "*mimetic mem*," but they might certainly have been familiar with other words and phrases in text that were a singular object expressed in plural language.

It is, of course, entirely possible that the words אורים ותומים are truly plural and that our rabbinic interpreters might have seen them as such. Despite the compelling arguments of some modern scholars, the biblical text might have, in point of fact, been describing pairs of or multiple sets of objects.

Finally, it is no secret that the rabbis had a penchant for highly creative word play and complex hermeneutic exercises which often resulted in extremely imaginative explanations of what terms meant. In all likelihood, it would not have escaped their attention that the word אורים begins with the Hebrew letter *alef*

²¹ Op. cit, Kitz. p. 402.

and the word תומים with the Hebrew letter *tav*, the first and last letters respectively, of the Hebrew alphabet. This would be very similar to our modern day notion of viewing something as incorporating a full range of possibilities from "A to Z," "Alpha to Omega," or in this case, "*Aleph ad tav*." It is not out of the realm of possibility that the writers of our rabbinic literature may have caught onto on to the first letter of each word and provided us with *midrashim* on the subject.

Summary

The etymological features of the terms Urim and Thummim are as much of a mystery as the objects themselves. Notwithstanding the vast body of research available on the subject, differences in theory and opinion are evident, and it is not possible to provide absolute proof as to the meaning of the words. No doubt, the rabbinic literature will demonstrate that the struggle for clarity concerning the nature of the אורים ותומים was on the minds of the ancient rabbis no less than the modern scholars who struggle with this question today.

Chapter Four: The Rabbinic Literature

Introduction

There is no way in which to approach the enormous corpus of rabbinic literature which we have in our possession today, other than with a great sense of humility and awe. Never before, and perhaps never again, has one tiny contingent from one miniscule civilization produced such a vast array of law, narrative and commentary. The *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, Babylonian and Palestinian *Talmuds*, and wealth of *Halachic* and *Aggadic Midrashim* serve as testimony to the brilliance of our ancient rabbis who, through their creativity and determination, documented their discussions, arguments, sermons and stories for the generations to come. What remains for us today is a gift of unparalleled significance, providing scholars and laypersons alike with an in-depth view of the customs, practices, concerns, and personalities of the ancient sages and the worlds in which they lived. It is to this remarkable body of writing to which we now turn.

The destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE represents an event of enormous consequence in Jewish history. With the most holy of all places demolished and a powerless priesthood incapable of performing those sacrifices and rituals which had kept the populace in communion with and faithful to their God, the Israelite people was now close to the brink of annihilation. Jews would either fade into oblivion as had so many other peoples up until that time, or they would be forced to reform their religious

practice into something that was vital and could sustain them into the future. By studying the rabbinic literature, beginning with the *Mishnah* and moving on to the *Midrashim* of the *Tannaitic* period and continuing with the *Talmud* and *Midrashim* of the *Amoraim* and the *Saboraim*, we can begin to comprehend the substantial changes necessitated by the abrupt end to the Priestly Cult.

The mission of the rabbis was to take the Law of Moses and to find in it new truths that would assure Jewish survival. If sacrificial offerings for guilt, sin, and well-being could no longer be offered because the Temple no longer stood, the rabbis would be compelled to re-interpret the text and develop innovative practices to replace those which had previously been performed. At the same time, our Sages never lost hope that at some point in the future the Temple would be rebuilt and they would be free to re-instate the priesthood. It was imperative therefore, that the practices of the Israelite Cult be recorded not as some quaint, anachronistic rite, but as something which would certainly return. The Scriptures were scrutinized from every angle. Nothing escaped the critical eye of the rabbis as they searched for meaning in each letter, word and phrase of the text. For these ancient sage, nothing in the sacred writings could be construed as superfluous, meaningless or erroneous. It was their task to create meaning where they found none and to make lucid that which was ambiguous. The rabbinic literature is filled with clarifications of the most complex events and concepts that we encounter in the *Torah*, some derived through common sense explanation and others via convoluted hermeneutics and exegesis.

Given their mystifying nature one might presume that the Urim and Thummim would capture the imagination of those writing the literature of the first ten centuries following the destruction of the Temple. These puzzling objects were a crucial piece of the priest's paraphernalia and the rabbis would no doubt be enticed to flesh out the Text by explaining their physical attributes, how they were constructed, and the way in which they were utilized. What follows in this chapter is an attempt to review the rabbinic literature which commented on the Urim and Thummim. Were the rabbis, through their application of linguistic and hermeneutic skills, able to derive answers to the many questions which might have arisen simply by having read the biblical text?

There are literally dozens of references to the Urim and Thummim in rabbinic literature and it would be nearly impossible, within the purview of this thesis, to comment on them all. Chapter Four will therefore concern itself with carefully selected writings of the 1st through 11th centuries of the Common Era which provide us with the most revealing insights into the UT from the perspective of the rabbis. Carefully selected texts within these time frames, commonly referred to as the Early Period (400-640 CE) and the Middle Period (640-1000 CE), will be presented for analysis.²² Remaining passages not chosen for analysis will appear within the footnotes for those interested in further reading. The passages selected for commentary will be addressed within three distinct sections.

²² Division of time periods is according to those specified in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing) 1975: 1511-1512.

The first section will examine each of the biblical verses described in Chapter Two above and identify those passages within the literature which use the verse either as the basis for an exegetical exercise or as a proof-text to support an argument. Specifically, we will look at text samples from the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, Palestinian and Babylonian *Talmuds*, and *Halachic* and *Aggadic Midrashim* which cite the seven biblical verses in which the UT appear, namely: Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8, Numbers 27:21, Deuteronomy 33:8, I Samuel 28:6, Ezra 2:63, and Nechemiah 7:65.

The second section of this chapter will examine a number of passages that contain what I shall refer to as "Related Verses." These are texts from the rabbinic literature that comment on biblical verses the sages have determined are concerned with the Urim and Thummim. This determination was made despite the fact that the verses themselves do not contain the words Urim and Thummim, nor do they cite anywhere the seven biblical verses which do contain the words. The significance of the "related verses" will become more apparent as we investigate the phrase which the rabbis saw as the proof that the verse was indeed referring to the Urim and Thummim.

Finally, the third section will look at other references to the words Urim and Thummim which are not linked to the use of the specific biblical verses. In these examples the rabbis have simply used one or both of the words as part of a narrative, without explicitly citing any of the seven verses in the *Tanakh* in which the terms actually appear.

In each of the three sections, English translations of the text in question will be used. The Hebrew text will be employed wherever necessary, particularly to illustrate unique spellings, word plays, and other hermeneutic strategies used by the rabbis to prove their case. Additionally, each section will study the passages in chronological order, beginning with the earliest *Tannaitic* material and working forward in time to the writings of the Classical Middle Periods. As each new text is introduced, the reader will find a concise description of the body of work from which the passage was taken. This methodology is being used in an attempt to identify certain themes that might have been woven throughout the literature as well as to ascertain how those themes might have metamorphosed over the centuries. By using a chronological approach to the texts, we might discover whether or not the rabbis' understanding of the Urim and Thummim changed over time, as they moved further away from the catastrophic events of 70 CE which would so radically transform their religious practice.

Section One: Rabbinic Literature to the Biblical Verses

Rabbinic Literature to Exodus 28:30²³

וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת־הָאֲוִרִים וְאֶת־הַתּוֹמִיִּם וְהָיוּ עַל־לֵב אַהֲרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ

לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת־מִשְׁפָּט בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־לִבּוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תָּמִיד:

"Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and the Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times."

Bavli Arakhin 16a

A tractate of the Fifth Order of the Babylonian *Talmud*, *Kodashim*, or "Holy Things." This order is devoted to laws pertaining to sacrifices and to the Temple. *Arakhin*, translated as "valuations," deals with "laws regarding dedicatory vows of valuation and other laws of dedicating objects to the Temple; in particular, the dedication of fields. Also laws relating to the Jubilee Year."²⁴

Exodus chapters 25-27 contain an exquisitely detailed description of the instructions for the building of the *mishkan*. Chapter 29 then begins to enumerate the multitude of sacrifices which are to be made on behalf of Aaron and his sons at the time of their ordination. In this passage from *Arakhin 16a* the

²³ In addition to the passages in this section, please also see *Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:10 and 4:5*, *Shemot Rabbah 3:17*, and *Tanchuma Shemot 27* for supplementary Homiletical and Exegetical *Midrashim* to Exodus 28:30.

²⁴ *The Steinsaltz Edition of the Talmud: A Reference Guide*. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. (New York: Random House) 1989. p. 44.

rabbis have been discussing the seven things for which the plague of leprosy is incurred and the sacrifices which might be brought in such a case. The conversation soon turns to the question of why the section of *Torah* pertaining to the construction of the priestly garments in Exodus chapter 28 is found next to the section on sacrifices in chapter 29. In their reading of the text, the rabbis must have thought this to be somehow "out of place," and it was their task to resolve the dilemma. Rabbi Anani b. Sason poses and then answers his own question:

"למה נסמכה פרשת בגדי כהונה לפרשת קרבנות? לומר לך: מה קרבנות מכפרין, אף בגדי כהונה מכפרין כתונת מכפרת על שפיכות דמים."

"Why is the portion about the priestly garments placed next to the portion about the sacrifices? It is to tell you that just as the sacrifices procure atonement, so too do the priestly garments."²⁵

Each of the articles of clothing is then listed with the accompanying sin for which it atones; the Tunic for bloodshed, the Breeches for incest, the Mitre for an arrogant mind, the Girdle for sinful thoughts of the heart, the Breastplate for error in legal decisions, the Ephod for idolatry, the Robe for slander, and the Golden Plate for impudent deeds. Curiously absent from this list are the Urim and Thummim, for although they are not technically a garment, they were an integral part of the priestly vestments, certainly as much so as the diadem (Golden Plate) and Breastplate. The *תָּשֶׁן הַמְּשָׁפֵט* is included in this *Talmudic* paragraph but

²⁵ Hebrew text and English translation taken from The Soncino Talmud CD Rom, Judaic Classics Library. (Skokie: Davka Corporation) 1991-1995.

Rabbi Anani has chosen to disregard the Urim and Thummim in his commentary along with the fact that they appear in the same verse with the Breastplate of Judgment. This particular paragraph in the *Talmudic* text does not ascribe any expiatory powers to the UT and so, although this is chronologically the first mention of these objects in the *Torah* text, there is no elaboration upon them.

In this passage from *Arakhin*, the rabbis are employing a hermeneutical method known as *samukhin* from the Hebrew root *samekh, mem, chaf* (ס-מ-כ) meaning to rely, lean, or depend upon. They are attempting to make some sort of connection between the section of *Torah* describing the priestly clothing followed by the section describing the various sacrifices. Why this juxtaposition of two so seemingly different subjects? The rabbis answer their own question by showing the connection between the sacrifices which are used for the atonement of different sins and the priestly garments, each of which also atones for a sin. *Samukhin* is a commonly used hermeneutic device and is used to clarify words, verses and sometimes entire paragraphs which appear adjacent to one another.

Vayikra Rabbah 10:6

Vayikra Rabbah, also known as *Leviticus Rabbah*, is a compilation of thirty-seven homilies on the book of Leviticus. "Each homily begins with *pethichot*; these are followed by the sermon proper, which has an eschatological

ending in the *Hatimah*.²⁶ It is believed that this collection dates to sometime between 400 and 500 CE. "That the *midrash* originated in Palestine is clear from its language (Galilean Aramaic, a lot of Greek), its preference for Palestinian rabbis, many Palestinian geographic references, and also from its *halakhah*, whose agricultural laws were valid only in Palestine."²⁷ *Leviticus Rabbah* represents one of the earlier anthologies of *midrashim* from what is also known as the Classical period.

Vayikra Rabbah 10:6 uses as its *petichta* verse Leviticus 8:2 which reads, "The Lord spoke to Moses: 'Take Aaron and his sons, and the garments, the anointing oil, the bull of the sin offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread.'" This sermon focuses specifically on the phrase, "and the garments," and like our previous example from *Arakhin*, ascribes an atoning power to each of the eight garments in which the High Priest officiated. There are remarkable similarities between this passage and that of *Arakhin*, and yet the narrative in *Leviticus Rabbah* is far richer in detail. Additionally, there are some slight variations with respect to the exact sin for which a garment atones. For example, in *Arakhin* we learn that the tunic atoned for the bloodshed while in *Vayikra Rabbah*, "the High Priest wore the tunic to atone for those who wear a mixture of wool and linen, as it is said, *And he made him a coat [tunic] of many colours*" (Genesis 37:3).²⁸ According to the biblical text, the High Priest was the only person allowed to wear clothing made of material which had been woven

²⁶ *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. H.L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1996. p. 289.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

²⁸ *The Soncino Midrash Rabbah: Judaic Classics Library CD ROM*. (Chicago: Davka Corporation) 1991-2001.

from a combination of wool and linen. The laws of Leviticus strictly prohibited this practice to all others, so it was the priest's own tunic which atoned for those who might commit this sin.

Once again, just as we saw in the description of the garments in *Arakhin*, *Vayikra Rabbah* 10:6 has apparently glossed over the part of the verse from Exodus which mentions the Urim and Thummim. Notwithstanding the great use of detail in describing the priestly garments along with their powers of atonement, the Urim and Thummim are nowhere to be found in this passage.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:52

Song of Songs Rabbah is a collection of exegetical *midrashim*. An Exegetical *midrash* takes each biblical verse and expounds upon it, sometimes offering additional exegesis on one phrase or even one word within the verse. This differs from a Homiletical *Midrash* whose purpose is more sermonic than it is expository. The anthology of *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* is divided into eight chapters, one for each in the *megillah* itself. "This midrash is marked by multiple repetitions and diverse material...The Genizah texts demonstrate that some of the repetitions were omitted from the printed editions."²⁹ The work is believed to be dated around the middle of the sixth century, placing it within the Classical Period.

Song of Songs Rabbah 1:52 expounds upon verse 1:10 which reads,

נָאֵנוּ לְחַיֵּיךָ בְּתָרִים צְוֹאֲרֶךְ בְּחִרְוֹתֶיךָ:

²⁹ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. p. 315.

"Your cheeks are comely with plaited wreaths, your neck with strings of jewels."

The primary focus of the rabbis' attention in this verse is the word, בַּתָּרִים *batorim*, which is alternately translated as "plaited wreaths," "ornaments," and "circlets." The word תָּרִים *torim* without the preposition "*bah*" appears eight times in the *Tanakh*. Seven of those appearances are in the book of Leviticus and the eighth is in Numbers. In every case, *torim* is translated as "turtledoves" and the word is incorporated in a passage describing a specific sacrifice. The word בַּתָּרִים *batorim* however, with the affixed preposition, is found only once in the entire *Tanakh* and it is this verse from Song of Songs. In etymological terms this is known as a *hapax legomenom*, a word or form that occurs only once in the recorded corpus of a given language. Although the Latin term would not have been known to the rabbis, the unique nature of the word would have certainly caught their attention. The focus therefore, of Song of Songs *Rabbah* 1:52 is on the *batorim* as the rabbis attempt to clarify just exactly what it means.

After a number of explanations, the passage reads, "With two ornaments (*batorim*), with two brothers, Moses and Aaron, who smile on one another, each rejoicing in the greatness of the other...How do we know that Aaron rejoiced in the greatness of Moses? Because it says...'There is your brother Aaron the Levite...Even now he is setting out to meet you and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart' " (וְשִׂמְחָ בְּלִבּוֹ), Exodus 4:14). The passage from the *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* continues:

תני רבי שמעון בן יוחאי לב ששמח בגדולת משה אחיו ילבש אורים ותומים

הה"ד (שמות כח) ונתת אל חשן המשפט את האורים ואת התומים והיו על לב אהרן.

R. Shimon b. Yohai taught, "The heart which rejoiced in the greatness of his brother Moses shall wear the Urim and Thummim, as it is written, '*And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart*' " (Exodus 28:30).

Rabbi Shimon has used our key verse as a proof-text to demonstrate how one knows that Aaron rejoiced over the greatness of Moses. He connects the word heart or *lev* from Exodus 4:14 with the same word in Exodus 28:30. This hermeneutic technique is known as *gezayrah shavah* or verbal analogy. By identifying a word used in one verse with the identical word in another verse, an inference is drawn. "The inferences drawn on the basis of *gezayrah shavah*, rely on verbal identity rather than conceptual similarity..."³⁰

The use of Exodus 28:30 in this passage from Song of Songs *Rabbah* has been used appropriately and well to demonstrate Rabbi Shimon's position. Unfortunately, we learn nothing new about the Urim and Thummim from this exegesis and the mystery remains!

Rabbinic Literature to Leviticus 8:8

וַיִּשֶׂם עָלָיו אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַחֹשֶׁן אֶת־הָאֹרִים וְאֶת־הַתְּמִיּוֹת:

"He put the breastpiece on him, and put into the breastpiece the Urim and Thummim."

³⁰ Op. cit., Steinsaltz. p. 150.

Despite the author's diligent attempts, she was unable to unearth so much as one passage in the rabbinic literature from the 1st through 11th centuries which employed this verse from *Torah*. This seems rather astonishing given the significance of this biblical narrative which describes the ordination of Aaron and his sons and tells of Moses bestowing upon Aaron the device by which he will be communing with YHWH.

Rabbinic Literature to Numbers 27:21³¹

וּלְפָנַי אֵלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן יַעֲמֹד וְשָׂאֵל לִי בְּמִשְׁפֶּט הָאוּרִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל-פְּנֵי יִצְחָק
וְעַל-פְּנֵי יִבְרָאוֹל הוּא וְכָל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אִתּוֹ וְכָל-הָעֵדָה:

"But he shall present himself to Eleazar the Priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the Lord. By such instruction they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelites, the whole community."

Bavli Yoma 73a and 73b

A tractate of the second Order of the Babylonian *Talmud*, *Yoma* means "The Day" in reference to the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. It deals mainly with the order of the service in the Temple on Yom Kippur. One chapter is devoted to the Yom Kippur fast and the prayers on this day.³²

³¹ In addition to the passages in this section, please also see *Bavli Eiruvim* 63a, *Bavli Yoma* 72b, *Yerusalmi Sanhedrin* 2:5:1a, *Yerusalmi Shabbat* 2:6:11a, and *Bamidbar Rabbah* 8:4 and 12:9 for supplementary Talmudic references as well as Homiletical and Exegetical *Midrashim* to Numbers 27:21.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Given the focus of tractate *Yoma* one would not be surprised to find discussions surrounding the garments and tools of the High Priest. This particular passage gives us a remarkably detailed passage as to exactly how the Urim and Thummim are employed. Although quite lengthy, it is well worth exploring this section from *Bavli Yoma 73a* and *73b*. The author has underlined words and phrases which were key to the rabbis' understanding of the UT. The biblical verse from Numbers 27:21 appears in bold text.

תנו רבנן: כיצד שואלין? השואל פניו כלפי נשאל, והנשאל פניו כלפי שכניה.
השואל אומר: (שמואל א' ל) ארדף אחרי הגדוד הזה והנשאל אומר: כה אמר ה'
עלה והצלת. רבי יהודה אומר: אין צריך לומר כה אמר ה' אלא עלה והצלת, אין
שואלין בקול - שנאמר (במדבר כז) ושאל לו, ולא מהרהר בלבו שנאמר ושאל לו
לפני ה'. אלא כדרך שאמרה חנה בתפלתה, שנאמר: (שמואל א' א) וחנה היא
מדברת על לבה. אין שואלין שני דברים כאחד, ואם שאל - אין מחזירין אלא
אחד, ואין מחזירין לו אלא ראשון, שנאמר (שמואל א' כג) היסגרני בעלי קעילה
בידו הירד שאול וגו' ויאמר ה' ירד. - והא אמרת אין מחזירין אלא ראשון - דוד
שאל שלא כסדר, והחזירו לו כסדר. וכיון שידע ששאל שלא כסדר - חזר ושאל
כסדר, שנאמר (שמואל א' כג) היסגרו בעלי קעילה אתי ואת אנשי ביד שאול
ויאמר ה' יסגירו. ואם הוצרך הדבר לשנים - מחזירין לו שנים, שנאמר (שמואל
א' ל) וישאל דוד בה' לאמר ארדף אחרי הגדוד הזה האשיגנו ויאמר ה' לו רדף
כי השג תשיג והצל תציל, ואף על פי שגזירת נביא חוזרת, גזירת אורים ותומים -
אינה חוזרת, שנאמר (במדבר כז) במשפט האורים. למה נקרא שמן אורים

ותומים? אורים - שמאירין את דבריהן, תמים - שמשלימין את דבריהן. ואם
 תאמר: בגבעת בנימין מפני מה לא השלימו? - הם שלא ביחנו אם לנצח אם
 להנצח ובאחרונה שביחנו - הסכימו, שנאמר (שופטים כ) ופינחס בן אלעזר בן
 אהרן עמד לפניו בימים ההם לאמר האוסף עוד לצאת למלחמה עם בני בנימין
 אחי אם אחדל ויאמר ה' עלו כי מחר אתננו בידך. כיצד נעשית? רבי יוחנן אומר:
ולטות, ריש לקיש אומר: מצטרפות. - והא לא כתיב בהו צד"י - אמר רב שמואל
בר יצחק: אברהם יצחק ויעקב כתיב שם. - והא לא כתיב טי"ת - אמר רב אחא
בר יעקב: שבטי ישורון כתיב שם.

Our Rabbis taught: How were [the Urim and Thummim] inquired of? —
The inquirer had his face directed to him who was consulted, and the latter
directed himself to the Divine Presence. The inquirer said: Shall I pursue after
 this troop? He who was consulted answered: "Thus saith the Lord: Go up and
 succeed"! R. Judah said: He need not say, "Thus saith the Lord" but only "Go up
 and succeed" — One does not inquire in a loud voice, as it is said: Who shall
 inquire for him; neither shall one but think thereof in one's heart, as it is said:
 "Who shall inquire for him"; but rather in the manner in which Hannah spoke in
 her prayer, as it is said: Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart. One should not
put two questions at the same time; if one has done so, only one [question] is
answered; and only the first [question] is answered, as it is said: "Will the men of
 Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, etc." . . . "and the Lord
 said. He will come down." But you said: Only the first [question] is answered? —

David had asked in wrong order and received his answer in right order. And as soon as he knew that he had asked in wrong order, he asked again in right order,
 as it is said: "Will the men of Keilah deliver up me and my men in to the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said. "They will deliver thee up." But if the occasion required both questions, both were answered, as it is said: And David inquired of the Lord, saying: Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him: pursue; for thou shalt surely overtake them and shalt without fail recover all. And although the decree of a prophet could be revoked, the decree of the "Urim and Thummim" could not be revoked, as it is said: By the judgment of the Urim. (Numbers 27:21) Why were they called "Urim and Thummim"?
"Urim" because they made their words enlightening. "Thummim" because they fulfil their words. And if you should ask: Why did they not fulfil their words in Gibeah Benjamin? It is because they did not inquire [whether the result would be] victory or defeat. But at last, when conquered, they [the Urim and Thummim] approved their action, as it is said: "And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days, saying: "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?" and the Lord said: "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver him into thy hand." How was it effected? — R. Johanan said: [The letters] stood forth. Resh Lakish said: They joined each other. But the 'Zade' was missing? R. Samuel b. Isaac said: They contained also the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But the 'Teth', too, was missing? — R. Aha b. Jacob said: They contained also the words: The 'tribes' of Jeshurun were written upon them.

This remarkable passage from *Yoma* is overflowing with the insights of the rabbis regarding the Urim and Thummim. From it we learn the following:

- The individual inquiring of the Urim and Thummim as well as the one consulting of YHWH (the High Priest) were required to face in specific directions. The "one who consulted" directed himself to the "Divine Presence." It would not have been difficult for the person inquiring to look face to face with the High Priest, but how did the High Priest know in which direction he was to face to before the *shekhinah*?
- "He who was consulted" did not have to answer with, "Thus says the Lord," but only to give the answer. It was understood that the response was coming from YHWH.
- "One does not inquire in a loud voice...but rather in the manner in which Hannah spoke in her prayer." The question was neither shouted nor silent, but uttered softly.
- Two questions should not be asked at the same time. One question should be asked and answered, followed by the second question and answer.
- When consulting the Urim and Thummim through the High Priest Abiathar, "David had asked the questions in the wrong order but received his answer in the right order." As soon as he realized his error, David reversed the order of the questions. From this statement, the rabbis are explaining that the order in which the High Priest consulted the Urim and Thummim was of extreme importance. If the UT were somehow

answering with a simple, "Yes" or "No," this could have a serious even deadly outcome should the order be incorrect.

- "Although the decree of a prophet could be revoked, the decree of the 'Urim and Thummim' could not be revoked." As a prooftext for this statement we find a segment of Numbers 27:21, "*By the judgment of the Urim.*" This judgment was apparently seen as final, an interesting commentary given that prophetic decrees were also considered the words of YHWH speaking through the prophet. Is there then a hierarchy with respect to the various methods used to communicate and consult with God?
- "Why were they called 'Urim and Thummim'? 'Urim' because they made their words enlightening. 'Thummim' because they fulfill their words." This statement is significant in that it gives us a clear understanding as to how the rabbis understood the etymology of the words Urim and Thummim. For them, אורים derived from the root א-ו-ר for "light" and תומים from the root ת-ו-מ meaning "fulfill." This confirms one of the theories explained in Chapter Three of this thesis.
- The final paragraph of the *Yoma* passage describes the way in which the UT actually functioned. Rabbi Johanan tells us that the "letters stood forth." Resh Lakish follows up on this statement with, "they joined each other." What these two sages are referring to are the letters which have been etched into the precious stones of the *Hoshen Mishpat*. Each stone had been inscribed with the name of one tribe and as a question was

asked of the Urim and Thummim, the letters lit up and joined together in order to spell out the answer to the query. It is noted, however, that the names of the tribes do not contain all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Two letters, the *tzadi* and the *tet*, are missing. Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac responds to this problem by stating that the names of the three patriarchs were also on the breastplate, providing the missing *tzadi* in the name יצחק, Isaac. Rabbi Aha ben Jacob addresses the second dilemma when he states that the missing *tet* is contained in the phrase, "The tribes שבטי of Jeshurun were written upon them." In an pre-empt the question that one might ask, "What about the *tzadi* and the *tet*, the rabbis tell us that the letters are in point of fact there and simply accounted for in another way. Throughout this entire narrative from *Bavli Yoma 73a and 73b* we have been given numerous prooftexts as evidence for the rabbis' arguments. This final piece on the other hand provides no such biblical backup but is nonetheless a brilliant piece of rabbinic creativity!

This *Talmudic* section seems to have conflated two different views of the function of the Urim and Thummim. The beginning of the passage appears to imply that the UT provided either a "yes" or "no" answer. It was imperative that questions be offered by the High Priest in the correct order as reversing those questions could have disastrous results. The end of the passage infers that the letters on the Breastplate of Judgment became illuminated, thereby spelling out the answer in its entirety. If the only letters which lit up were those that spelled

out the words "yes" and "no" we would not have needed the explanations of Rabbis Samuel and Aha to tell us where we might locate the missing *tzadi* and *tet*. Nonetheless, *Bavli Yoma 73a and 73b* give us an extraordinary look into the inventiveness of the authors of the rabbinic literature.

Bavli Yebamoth 78b

A tractate of the third Order of the Babylonian *Talmud*, *Yebamot* means sisters-in-law. In this tractate the laws of the levirate marriage are discussed. "The tractate is the main source for the basic laws of forbidden sexual relationships. Also dealt with are the laws of prohibited marriages, conversion, and the testimony confirming a husband's death that permits his wife to remarry."³³

Yebamoth 78b focuses on who is considered to be part of the community of Israel and who ineligible for all time. Bastards and *nethinim* are deemed ineligible. This latter category, the *nethinim*, "were descendants of the Gibeonites whom Joshua made into Temple slaves (Joshua 9:27).³⁴ The specific passage which the rabbis are discussing takes place in II Samuel. There has been a famine in the land and King David suspects that this is as a result of idolatry, harlotry, or those who have promised gifts and not paid them. When all of his inquiries come up empty, King David believes that the blame for the famine must somehow lie squarely with him. At this point he inquires of God:

וַיִּתֵּן רָעָב בַּיָּמִי דָּוִד שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים שָׁנָה אַחֲרַי שָׁנָה וַיִּבְקֶשׁ דָּוִד אֶת-פָּנָי יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר

³³ Op. cit., Steinsaltz. p. 41.

³⁴ Herbert Danby. *The Mishnah*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) 1933. p. 795

יְהוָה אֶל־שְׂאוֹל וְאֶל־בֵּית הַדְּמִים עַל־אֲשֶׁר־הִמִּית אֶת־הַגִּבְעֹנִים:

"There was a famine during the reign of David, year after year for three years, and David sought the face of the Lord, and the Lord said, 'It is because of Saul and the blood-guilt of his house for he put the Gibeonites to death'" (II Samuel 21:1).

The *Bavli* quotes Resh Lakish explaining that, "He enquired of the Urim and Thummim. How is this inferred? Rabbi Eleazar responds:

אתיא פני פני, כתיב הכא: ויבקש דוד את פני ה', וכתוב התם:

"It is arrived at by an analogy between two of the expression, 'countenance of the Lord,' for here it is written, '*And David sought the countenance of the Lord*' (II Samuel 21:1), and elsewhere it is written, '*who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the countenance of the Lord*'" (Numbers 27:21).

Rabbi Eleazar has used the hermeneutic device of *gezayrah shavah* as discussed above in the passage from *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:52, to show that the words, וַיִּבְקֶשׁ דָּוִד אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה, from the verse in II Samuel, have the identical meaning as the phrase from Numbers which reads,

וְשָׂאֵל לֹו בְּמִשְׁפַּט הָאוּרִים לְפָנֵי יְהוָה. Specifically, Rabbi Eleazar has pinpointed the word פני to show that if in one place this refers to the use of the UT, then it must do so in the second place as well. As we shall see later in the third section of this chapter regarding Related Verses, the rabbis often

interpreted phrases such as *וְשָׁאַל בְּיָהוָה* and *בִּקֵּשׁ יְהוָה* as having to do specifically with inquiries using the Urim and Thummim.

It is interesting to note in this passage that both Resh Lakish and Rabbi Eleazar presume the use of both the Urim and the Thummim, as is observed in their commentary. The verse from II Samuel, however, does not mention either object and the verse used as the proof-text (Numbers 27:21) mentions the Urim only without its partner Thummim. It is impossible to determine with any certainty, but perhaps the rabbis' familiarity with the UT was such that they understood they could use the word Urim and imply Thummim as well.

Bavli Sanhedrin 16a and 16b

A tractate of the Fourth Order of the Babylonian *Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* contains the "laws of capital punishment: those crimes punishable by death and the ways these sentences are carried out. Considerable space is devoted to the composition of the various courts and to judicial procedure. The *Aggadic* sections contain a broad discussion of the question of man's place in the World to Come and other fundamental tenets of faith."³⁵

In this section of *Sanhedrin* the rabbis discuss the matters over which the Sanhedrin has decision-making power. The subject turns to "war of free choice," that is, war which is not declared in order to retaliate for having been attacked first, but war that is meant to invade a foreign territory in order to enlarge the holdings of the Israelites. At this point in the text Rabbi Abbahu quotes the

³⁵ Op. cit., Steinsaltz. p. 43.

entirety of Numbers 27:21 along with Numbers 27:22 which reads: *At his word* (that of Eleazar the Priest)*shall they go out and at his word they shall come in,* both he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the Congregation. Rabbi Abbahu goes on to explain that "He" refers to the King, in this case meaning Joshua who had regal authority. "And all the children of Israel with him," refers to the Priest who has been anointed for war. Evidently this Priest had the authority to lead the people in war and his call to war was to be heeded by all of the people. Finally, Rabbi Abbahu tells us that the "congregation" is the Sanhedrin and it was these three entities who had the authority to inquire of the Urim and Thummim.

The rabbis deduce this by quoting from Rabbi Simeon the Pious who tells the story of King David who, while asleep one midnight, was awakened when the wind blew on the strings of his harp which was hanging over his bed. He arises, studies *Torah* and is then met by the Sages of Israel who tell him that Israel needs sustenance. He recommends that they support themselves through mutual trading and when that suggestion is not positively met, King David advises them to invade a foreign land. They seek the guidance of David's personal counselor Ahitophel, who in turn gets advice from the Sanhedrin via the Urim and Thummim.

This is a rather convoluted passage, but it appears that the rabbis are attempting to show that it was not only the High Priest who used the UT but by extension the King, the Priest Anointed for War as well as the Sanhedrin who might inquire of the Urim and Thummim. *Sanhedrin 16b* further expands this

idea by stating that after Ahitophel, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada served as chief counsel. Benaiah, say the rabbis, refers to the Sanhedrin although they do not explain why. He was commander over the Kerethites and the Pelethites (the Urim and Thummim) (II Samuel 8:18). The *Bavli* then asks,

"ולמה נקרא שמן כרתי ופלתי? כרתי - שכורתי דבריהן, ופלתי - שמופלאתין
מעשיהן."

"And why were they called the Kerethites and the Pelethites? The Kerethites because they gave definite instructions (literally 'cut' their words) and the Pelethites, because their acts were 'wonderful.'"

In this last section, the rabbis are employing word play which gives us some insight into characteristics of the Urim and Thummim, or at least those characteristics which the sages believed were possessed by the UT. The Hebrew word כרתי has as its root כ-ר-ת meaning to "cut" or to "make a covenant." The Hebrew word פלתי has as its root פ-ל-א meaning "wonder" or "miracle." This paragraph offers us yet another glimpse into the minds of our rabbis with regard to the Urim and Thummim. At least for the rabbis of this piece of Tractate *Sanhedrin* the UT gave specific instructions to the one who was inquiring, and did this in a miraculous or wonderful manner.

Sifrei Deuteronomy: Pisqa 305:3

Sifrei to Deuteronomy, "is an exegetical *midrash* on Deuteronomy 1:1-30, 3:23-29, 6:4-9, 11:10-26:15, and 31:14-32:34. Thus in addition to the legal core of Deuteronomy 12-26 there are also narrative portions (the historical prologue,

the prayer of Moses, the *Shema*, the transfer of office to Joshua, Moses's song a blessing, as well as his death).³⁶ The structure of this *Halakhic Midrash* is according to paragraphs known as *pisqa'ot*, each one most likely corresponding to one verse of the *parasha* from Deuteronomy. It is believed that *Sifrei Deuteronomy* is not a homogenous work but that its' final redaction took place in the late third century.

Pisqa 305 uses as its opening verse Numbers 27:18 which reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה קַח־לָךְ אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־רוּחַ בּוֹ וְסָמַכְתָּ
אֶת־יָדְךָ עָלָיו:

"The Lord said to Moses, 'take for yourself Joshua, son of Nun, a man within whom there is spirit, and place your hand upon him.'"

The *midrash* begins to expound upon the verse in an attempt to clarify what is meant by the words "take to yourself" as well as the specific method by which Moses anointed Joshua. It is at this point that Rabbi Nathan tells us that Moses was "distressed in his heart" because it was Joshua and not one of his own sons who was selected to succeed him. The Holy One Blessed be He assures Moses that Aaron's sons are tantamount to his own sons and that even though Joshua has been designated as his successor, he will still have to stand before Eleazar the High Priest (Aaron's son). The *midrash* continues, "To what may this be compared? To a mortal king who had a son who was not worthy of the throne. He took the throne from him and gave it to the son of his ally. He

³⁶ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. p. 270.

said to him, 'Even though I have assigned greatness to you, go and stand at my son's door.' So said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Even though I have assigned greatness to you (Joshua), go and stand at the door of Eleazar.' That is in line with the verse of Scripture: 'And he will stand before Eleazar the priest'"(Num. 27:21).³⁷

There are two items of note with respect to this *midrash*. First, the opinion of Rabbi Nathan that Moses was, "distressed in his heart," appears nowhere in the biblical text describing God's selection and anointing of Joshua. It is in fact Moses who requests that God choose someone as his successor as we read immediately prior to the *petichtah* verse. *Bamidbar* 27:15-17 reads:

וַיִּדְבֹר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר: יִפְקֹד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָרוּחַ לְכָל־בָּשָׂר אִישׁ
עַל־הַעֲדָה: אֲשֶׁר־יֵצֵא לִפְנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יָבֹא לִפְנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יוֹצִיאֵם וְאֲשֶׁר יְבִיאֵם
וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עֲדַת יְהוָה כַּצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם רֹעֶה:

"Then Moses said to the Lord, 'Let the Lord, the God of the breath of all flesh, appoint a man over the community, who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will take them out and who will bring them in, so that the community of the Lord will not be like sheep that have no shepherd."

It is unclear as to where Rabbi Nathan might have derived from this that Moses was "distressed in his heart," and the *Sifrei* passage provides no prooftext to that effect. In fact, the only prooftext used in this entire section is the first half of Numbers 27:21: וְלִפְנֵי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן יַעֲמֹד . The *vahv* prior to the word *lifnei*

³⁷ Translation taken from Jacob Neusner. *Sifre to Deuteronomy: An Analytical Translation*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1987. Volume II. p. 291.

might be translated as a conjunctive *vahv* so the phrase would read, "And before Eleazar the Priest he shall stand." On the other hand, the *vahv* might be translated in the disjunctive form, in which case the phrase would read, "But before Eleazar the Priest he shall stand." Perhaps this was Rabbi Nathan's basis for telling us that Moses was distressed. By translating the *vahv* as "but," this shows that despite having chosen Joshua as Moses' heir to the leadership position, God is commanding that Joshua must nevertheless stand before Eleazar with respect to the most crucial decisions. And although Eleazar is not Moses' son by blood, he is Aaron's son and therefore, equivalent to Moses' own son.

It is also possible that because the anointing of Joshua takes place immediately following the verses in which Moses is told once again that he will not be accompanying the Israelites into the Promised Land, that he was feeling distraught over his fate. We can only surmise as to what Rabbi Nathan might have had in mind with his "distressing" comment.

Secondly, it is important to note that the second half of Numbers 27:21 which mentions the use of the Urim by Eleazar is not included in this passage from *Sifrei Deuteronomy*. It appears that the rabbinic author had no use for the second stich of the verse and therefore has focused solely on the beginning of the *pasuq*.

Rabbinic Literature to Deuteronomy 33:8³⁸

וּלְלֵוִי אָמַר תְּמִיד וְאוּרִים לְאִישׁ חֲסִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר נִסִּיתוֹ בְּמַסָּה תִּרְיָבָהּ עַל־מֵי מְרִיבָהּ:

"And of Levi He said: Let Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful one, whom You tested at Massah, challenged at the waters of Meribah."

Pesiqta deRab Kahana 5:4

The "chapters" or "verses" of *Rab Kahana* is a "homiletic midrash for the readings of the festivals and the special Sabbaths."³⁹ There is some speculation with respect to the name of this work, but it is believed that the title comes from the work's longest unit of text comprised of twelve chapters, which begin with the phrase, "*R. Abba bar Kahana patach.*" The origin of the work is Palestinian which can be inferred from the language used and rabbis cited within the text. It is difficult to date due to its inconsistent structure and order, but the piece is considered to be part of the Classical *Amoraic Midrashim* of the Early Period with its redaction at some point during the 5th century of the Common Era.

Pisqa 5:4 is a sermon for Passover which will eventually conclude with the verse from Exodus 12:2: *This month for you is the first of the months.* The homily opens with Judah bar Nachman in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Laquish quoting from the Book of Psalms 43:3-4. The verse reads:

שְׁלַח-אוֹרְךָ וְאַמְתָּךְ הִמָּה יִנְחֹנֵי לְבִיאוֹנֵי אֶל-הַר-קֹדֶשׁ וְאֶל-מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ: וְאַבְרָאָה

³⁸ In addition to the passages in this section, please also see *Vayikra Rabbah 1:4, Shemot Rabbah 5:10, 15:14, 19:5, 35:1 and 38:9, Bamidbar Rabbah 12:1 and 15:12, Midrash Tehillim 25, Pesikta Rabati 15:4, Tanhuma Shemot 28, Beha'alotecha 8, and Hukat 10* for additional Homiletical and Exegetical *Midrashim* to Deuteronomy 33:8.

³⁹ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. p. 292.

אֶל־מִזְבֵּחַ אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אֵל שְׁמִי וְאֹדֶךְ בְּכֹנֹר אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי:

"Send out Your Light and your Truth; let them lead me, let them bring me to Your holy mountain and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise You there with lyre, Oh God, my God."

The focus of Rabbi Nachman's homily is on the words, אֹדֶךְ וְאֵל שְׁמִי, Your Light and Your Truth. What exactly is meant by this phrase? He continues, "*Send out your light* refers to Moses: '*And Moses did not know that his face was glistening with the beams of light*' (Exodus 34:29). "*And Your truth* refers to Aaron, '*The Torah of truth was in his mouth*' (Malachi 2:7). '*Your truth and your light be with your holy one*' " (Deuteronomy 33:8).⁴⁰

In very rapid succession, the *midrash* has given us four biblical citations, beginning with the *petichta* verse from the Book of Psalms, followed by the quotes from Exodus, Malachi, and Deuteronomy. One of the hallmarks of classical *midrash* was the plentiful use of prooftexts, preferably from various books of the Bible, which help to reinforce the position. In this case, Rabbi Nachman has selected verses from *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim* lending an air of authority to his line of reasoning and at the same time exhibiting his knowledge of the Text and his prowess for using it well.

The *midrash* continues however with an alternate interpretation. It is not clear if this is Rabbi Nachman apprising us of the fact that not all agree with his interpretation or if this is an anonymous voice offering a second opinion. We read, "And there are those who reverse matters: '*send out your light* refers to

⁴⁰ Translation taken from Jacob Neusner. *Pesiqta deRab Kahana: An Analytical Translation*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1987. p. 75.

Aaron: *Your light and your truth be with your holy one* (Deuteronomy 33:8).

'And your truth' refers to Moses, 'Not so is my servant Moses, in all my household the most trustworthy.' " There is no attribution for the second "reversed" explanation of the *petichta* verse from Psalms, but the reasoning is just as powerful. In this second example the author is defining Aaron as from the tribe of Levi who, in the verse from Deuteronomy 33:8, are given the Urim and Thummim due to their trustworthy character.

What is fascinating in both of these interpretations is the seeming reluctance to translate אורֶךְ וְתִמְנִיךְ as "Your Thummim" and "Your Urim" as it states in the verse from *Devarim*. In point of fact, the *petichta* verse from Psalms not only reverses the order in which the words are written in Deuteronomy 33:8, but completely changes the two key words to those from Psalms which reads, אורֶךְ וְנֶאֱמַתֶּךָ, "Your light" and Your truth." The narrative from Deuteronomy is clear; God is asking Moses to bestow the Urim and Thummim upon the Levites, as they had been faithful to Him at Massah and Meribah when they refused to join with the rest of the Israelites in complaint. The use of a word with the same root, in this case נ-ו-ר is certainly justified when comparing אורֶךְ of Deuteronomy 33:8 with אורֶךְ of Psalms 43:3. To the ear they sound very much the same, and given that this homily was most likely delivered orally, to the listener this might have appeared to be a clever word play. The same cannot be said, however, with the second word pairing. The word תִּמְנִיךְ has an entirely different root from the word נֶאֱמַתֶּךָ and yet, none of this

seems to have bothered either Rabbi Nachman or the anonymous voice of the second part of the *midrash*. "Truth" after all can be understood to be almost synonymous with "complete" or "perfect." Again, because this sermon was presented in spoken form, the congregation might only have heard two words which sounded very much alike despite their different meanings.

Bamidbar Rabbah 19:9

Bamidbar or *Numbers Rabbah* is a collection of *midrashim* to the fourth book of the Pentateuch. "The midrash consists of two very different parts. *Numbers Rabbah* I comprises sections 1-14, approximately three-quarters of the total work, and is a haggadic treatment of Numbers 1-7. *Numbers Rabbah* II (sections 15-23) is a homiletic midrash which discusses Numbers 8-36 more briefly."⁴¹ As with other collected works of this genre exact date of origin is difficult to ascertain, but it is believed that *Bamidbar Rabbah* is part of the *midrashim* of the Middle Period during the 9th century CE.

Bamidbar Rabbah 19:9 focuses its sermon on the verses from Numbers 20:8-20:12. This is the passage in *Torah* in which God instructs Moses to take up his staff and for Aaron and him to gather the community of Israelites before them. Moses is then told to speak to the rock in order to produce water, but instead of following God's directive, Moses strikes the rock with his staff not once, but twice. Water does flow out in abundance, as does God's wrath for this act of insolence on Moses' part. The *midrash* then asks:

⁴¹ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. p. 310.

ולמה נתפש אהרן שנאמר ויאמר ה' אל משה יען לא האמנתם בי משל לבעל
 חוב שבא ליטול גורנו של לוח ונטל שלו ושל שכנו אמר לו הלוה אם אני חייב
 שכני מה חטא אף כך אמר משה רבינו אני הקפדתי אהרן מה חטא לפיכך
 הכתוב מקלסו (דברים לג) וללוי אמר תומיך ואוריך לאיש חסידך אשר נסיתו
 במסה:

"Why was Aaron made responsible? As it says, *and the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron: 'Because you did not believe in Me'* (Numbers 20:12). This may be illustrated by a parable. A creditor came to take away a debtor's granary and took both his and the one of his neighbor. He said to him, 'If I am guilty, what sin has my neighbor committed?' So also did Moses our teacher say, 'I lost my temper but what was Aaron's sin?' For this reason Scripture praises Aaron saying, *'And of Levi he said: Your Thummim and Your Urim be with your merciful one, whom you did test at Massah'* " (Deuteronomy 33:8).

This is a decidedly different interpretation of the verse from *Devarim* than we found in the previous passage from *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* 5:4. First and foremost, the rabbis employ a frequently found *midrashic* device known as the *mashal* or parable. By comparing a situation in the biblical text to one which is more commonly understood by the listener, an analogy is created which clarifies the verse. In this case the homily employs the story of a creditor who takes the granary of not only the debtor but his neighbor as well. Just as the neighbor is not culpable for the debtor's wrongdoing, so too is Aaron not to be held liable for the guilt of his brother Moses. In fact, not only is Aaron held blameless, but he is

praised for keeping his composure under the most stressful of circumstances. Aaron is described as 'your merciful one' חסידך . This is quite an interesting remark on the limits of communal responsibility and would no doubt have occupied those who wrote biblical commentary during later time periods.

In *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:9 the focal point is on Aaron's attribute of *chesed* חסד (mercy) rather than on the interpretation of תומיד ואוריד as we have seen in previous passages.

Midrash Tehillim 104:14

The *midrash* to the Book of Psalms known as both *Midrash Tehillim* and *Shocheh Tov* consists of two distinct parts. "The first comprises Psalms 1-118 and perhaps part of 119. This first part is not the work of a single redactor; for the manuscripts differ considerably and there are not a few repetitions... The second part of *Midrash* on Psalms contains psalms 119-150. It presents its expositions anonymously and is much shorter."⁴² Our concern in this segment deals with the first part of *Midrash Tehillim* as we are looking at Psalm 104. Because of the diverse nature of this composition it is difficult to date with any certainty but much of the material dates back to the *Talmudic* period. "The expression and nature of the Haggadic expositions speak in favour of Palestine as the place of origin: the cited Amoraim are all Palestinians; or at least, in a few instances, they appear also in PT."⁴³

⁴² Ibid., pps. 322-323.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 323.

The theme of Psalm 104 is one which praises God for the magnificence of our natural world. There are many allusions to the opening chapters of *Breishit*, beginning with the creation of the heavens, the foundations, the waters and all of the creatures which inhabit the earth. *Midrash Tehillim 104:14* takes as its opening verse line 17 of Psalm 104:

אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם צִפְרִים יִקְנְנוּ חֲסִידָה בְּרוּשִׁים בֵּיתָהּ:

"Where birds make their nests; as for the stork, the cypress trees are her home."

The commentary continues, "The *birds* are the Levites. As to the meaning of *hasidah*, 'stork,' in the concluding words of the verse, *as for the stork, the fir-trees are her house*, Rabbi Huna bar Papa and Rabbi Simon differed. One of them said: The stork is called *hasidah* because she lets herself be stepped on. But the other said: Because she has compassion for her companions. And there are others who say: because she is given to deeds of loving-kindness among her neighbors. But according to Rabbi Judah bar Simon, the concluding words refer only to the tribe of Levi who were called *hasidim*, 'holy ones,' as it is said, *And to Levi he said: Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy Holy One*" (Deuteronomy 33:8).

As in the previous passage from *Bamidbar Rabbah* this section of *Socher Tov* is grappling with the meaning of the word חֲסִידָה or stork. The brilliant imagery of Psalm 104 relates not only to the creation of the world but also brings to mind the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem in whose "cypress rafters" the storks made their homes. The Levites too made their "home" in the Temple, as they were the primary caretakers of this sacred edifice. It is but a short jump

then from the idea of חֲסִידָה "stork" to the word חֲסִידָךְ "Your holy (righteous, merciful) one." Once again, the rabbis are treating us to a clever example of the word play at which they were so skilled. It is also of interest to note that this *midrash* takes no notice of the Urim and Thummim and instead places its emphasis on expounding upon the bird in question.

Rabbinic Literature to I Samuel 28:6

וַיִּשְׁאַל שְׂאוּל בַּיהוָה וְלֹא עָנָהוּ יְהוָה גַּם בְּחִלְמוֹת גַּם בְּאֻרִּים גַּם בְּנְבִיאִים:

"And Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."

As with Leviticus 8:8, the author was not able to find a passage from rabbinic literature which mentions I Samuel 28:6.

Rabbinic Literature to Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65⁴⁴

וַיֹּאמֶר הַתִּרְשָׁתָא לָהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ מִקִּדְּשׁ הַקִּדְּשִׁים עַד עֹמֵד כֹּהֵן לְאֻרִּים

וּלְתַמִּים:

"The Tirshatha ordered them not to eat of the most holy things until a priest with Urim and Thummim should appear."

⁴⁴ In addition to the passages in this section, please also see *Yerusalmi Kiddushin 4:1:35b* and *Bavli Kiddushin 69b* for additional Talmudic passages.

Tosefta Sotah 13:2

The *Tosefta* is an addition or supplement which expands upon the *Mishnah*. Unlike the shorthand, clipped style of the *Mishnah*, designed to make sense only to those with a deep understanding of *halakhah*, the *Tosefta* fills in many of the gaps, explaining what might have been vague from the *Mishnah* text alone. "The language of the *Tosefta* is *Mishnaic* Hebrew; as in the *Mishnah*, this is interspersed with occasional Aramaic sentences and with numerous loan words, especially of Greek and Latin origin. The rabbis named in *Tosefta* also correspond to those of *Mishnah*, although not in quite the same distribution."⁴⁵

The passage in question comes from *Tosefta Sotah 13:2*, an amplification of the laws found in *Mishnah*, one of the tractates of the Third Order known as *Nashim*, or Women. More specifically, *Sotah* deals with the issue of a woman suspected of adultery; what laws and punishments apply to her.

In *Tosefta Sotah 13:2* we read that, "When the first Temple was destroyed, the kingship was removed from the House of David. The Urim and Thummim ceased. The cities of refuge came to an end, as it is said, *The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food until there should be a priest to consult the Urim and Thummim* (Ezra 2:63). This is like a man who says to his friend, 'Until the dead will live,' or, 'Until Elijah will come.'"⁴⁶

The second statement of the passage, "the Urim and Thummim ceased," is taken directly from the *Mishnah* in *Masechet Sotah 9:12*;

מִשְׁפָּתוֹ נְבִיאִים הָרְאִשׁוֹנִים, בְּטִלּוֹ אֲוִרִים וְתַמִּיּוֹם. מִשְׁחָרְבַּת בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ

⁴⁵ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. p. 150.

⁴⁶ Jacob Neusner. *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew Third Division, Nashim*. (New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc.) 1979. p. 201.

"When the First Prophets died, Urim and Thummim ceased." The rabbis have been discussing all of the horrors that took place upon the destruction of the Temple. The *Mishnah* goes on to say that the *Shamir*-worm also ceased, faithful men came to an end, there wasn't a day without its curse, dew no longer fell and fruit lost their flavor. These were just a few of the disasters that befell the Israelites."

What is striking about verses from the *Tosefta* is that it appears that it was not just a matter of the Urim and Thummim no longer working effectively, but that there was not even a priest at hand who might be able to consult with them. That is why the *Tosefta* uses the verse from Ezra; to show how dire the situation was at that time. All communion with God had stopped as there were neither prophets channeling the word of God, nor was there a priest who had possession of the oracular device.

The cessation of the cities of refuge is also indicative that there were no priests left. These cities of refuge were specified locations to which a person who had committed involuntary manslaughter could flee for safety. While in one of the cities, the individual was safe from those who might pursue him in order to seek vengeance. When the High Priest died, that individual was free to return to his home, without fear of reprisal. According to the *Mishnah*, the cities of refuge were no longer in existence because the High Priest was absent.

It is also striking to see the last comment of the *Tosefta* which gives the reader a great sense of the despair felt by the writers. "Until the dead will live," or, "until Elijah will come," are the rabbinic equivalents to our more modern

expression, "when Hell freezes over." In other words, the rabbis realized that the possibility of a return of a priest who could consult with the Urim and Thummim was slim indeed.

Once again we do not learn any new details about the Urim and Thummim, only that they were a critical part of the priestly apparatus and that without the UT and a priest who could use them effectively the sacrificial cult was in a state of ruin.

Bavli Sotah 48b

This segment of the Babylonian *Talmud* addresses the same verse from Mishnah as the *Tosefta* passage above. The *Gemara* begins with the beginning of the statement, "When the former prophets died..." and proceeds to go into detail on this phrase. Who are the former prophets? Rabbi Huna answers:

זה דוד ושמואל ושלמה. רב נחמן אמר: בימי דוד זימנן סליק וזימנן לא סליק,
שהרי שאל צדוק ועלתה לו, שאל אביתר ולא עלתה לו, שנאמר: (שמואל ב' טו)
ויעל אביתר. מתיב רבה בר שמואל: (דברי הימים ב' כו) ויהי לדרוש אלהים כל
ימי זכריה המבין בראות אלהים, מאי לאו באורים ותומים לא בנביאים.

"The former prophets were David and Samuel and Solomon. Rabbi Nachman said: In the days of David, sometimes they were successful and sometimes they were not successful; for behold, Zadok consulted it and it answered him, Abiathar consulted and it did not answer him, as is it said, 'then Abiathar went up'" (II Samuel 15:24).

Rabbi Nachman is of the opinion that Abiathar's "going up" means that he retired from the priesthood because he was unsuccessful in obtaining a response from the Urim and Thummim. This seems to presume that when the priest has lost his magic touch with the UT, he is no longer of value in his position.

The dispute among the rabbis continues then with whether or not the Urim and Thummim were used in the days of Zechariah and King Uzziah. They are still attempting to pinpoint the time at which the UT were no longer in use.

מתיב רבה בר שמואל: (דברי הימים ב' כו) ויהי לדרוש אלהים כל

ימי זכריה המבין בראות אלהים, מאי לאו באורים ותומים לא בנביאים.

"Rabbah ben Samuel objected; "It is written, *and he (King Uzziah) set himself to seek God all the days of Zechariah who had understanding in the vision of God* (II Chronicles 26:5). Was this not by means of the Urim and Thummim? No! It was through the prophets."

Rabbah ben Samuel is of the opinion that the UT had already ceased in the land by the time of Zechariah and that prophecy had supplanted the priestly oracle as the communication device of choice.

Not to be outdone, the *Talmud* continues with another rendition of those things which came to an end with the destruction of the Temple, including the cessation of the Urim and Thummim, the abolition of pasture land, (the land owned by the Levites), and kings from the House of David. The anonymous voice then warns us against those who would try to convince us of the return of the Urim and Thummim by quoting the verse from Ezra 2:63. We are admonished that "until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim" is

nothing but a figure of speech akin to, "Until the dead revive and the Messiah, son of David comes!" In other words, one should not hold one's breath!

Rabbi Nachman, intent on having the last word with regard to the identity of the former prophets, says:

מאן נביאים הראשונים? לאפוקי מחגי זכריה ומלאכי דאחרונים נינהו דת"ר:

משמתו חגי זכריה ומלאכי - נסתלקה רוח הקודש מישראל, ואע"פ כן היו

משתמשים בבת קול.

"Who were the former prophets? [The term former] excludes Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi who are the latter [prophets.] Our rabbis taught: when Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel; nevertheless, they made use of the *Bat Kol*."

This entire passage has had as its focal point the issue of exactly when the Urim and Thummim ceased to be used as the primary mode of consultation with God. The *Talmud* seems to be telling us, contrary to the Rabbi Huna's view that the UT were in existence in the days of King Uzziah and up to the destruction of the first Temple. Regardless of who has come out as the victor in this difference of opinion it of interest to note that the Rabbis were indeed concerned that the Urim and Thummim were no longer in existence. Once again we learn nothing new about what these objects actually were. We only discover that some priests were successful with them and others were not and that they ceased to function at some point following the deaths of the former prophets, however they might be defined.

Bavli Ketuboth 24b

A tractate of the Third Order of the Babylonian *Talmud* (*Nashim*, Women), *Ketuboth* deals with laws of marriage deeds. It defines, "all the financial and personal obligations pertaining to husband and wife, whether as part of the conditions of the marriage deed itself, or as a result of other special agreements. The tractate also deals with the laws concerning rape and seduction."⁴⁷

One might naturally wonder, given the nature of *Ketuboth*, why it would contain commentary or even mention of the Urim and Thummim. But *Masechet Ketuboth* contains not only those laws regarding marriage between two Israelites but the laws with respect to whom the priest might be permitted to marry. Specifically in the passage from 24b, the discussion has turned to the subject of those who might be "non-priests" and what priestly duties they may or may not perform. The issue of course, is that during the course of the exile of the Israelites to Babylonia, genealogy became a question of great concern. Some children of priests "married out" and later, when seeking to reinstate their genealogy, were deemed polluted and banned from the priesthood. The rabbis argue over a variety of subjects:

רב חסדא ורבי אבינא, חד אמר: מעלין, וחד אמר: אין מעלין.

"Rabbi Hisda and Rabbi Avina (disagree), One said, 'he may lift them' and one said, 'he may not lift them.' "

⁴⁷ Op. cit., Steinsaltz. p. 41.

The sages have a difference of opinion over the "lifting up of the hands" or Priestly Benediction, and whether or not this might be performed by someone whose pedigree is in question. Could someone simply claim to be a priest because he believed himself to be part of the priestly lineage? If someone has married a non-Kohen or worse yet, a non-Israelite, may he reclaim his priestly rights? The rabbis referred to this as *hazakah*, "the presumptive state." This is used in the sense of the "presumptive continuance of a state or condition, until evidence is produced rebutting the presumption."⁴⁸ To operate in this presumptive state might not only be dangerous but deadly. For example, a non-priest who eats of the most Holy Things (the *terumah* offering), has committed a transgression that is punishable by death. Because of the gravity of this situation, one of the rabbis offers a *baraitah* from Rabbi Jose:

הלכתא מאי? א"ל: אנא מתניתא ידענא דתניא, ר' יוסי אומר: גדולה חזקה, שנאמר: (עזרא ב') ומבני הכהנים בני חביה בני הקוץ בני ברזילי אשר לקח מבנות ברזילי הגלעדי אשה ויקרא על שמם, אלה בקשו כתבם המתייחסים ולא נמצאו ויגאלו מן הכהונה, ויאמר התרשתא להם אשר לא יאכלו מקדש הקדשים עד עמוד כהן לאורים ותומים.

"What is the law? He said to him, 'I know of a *baraitah*, Rabbi Jose said: 'Great is presumption, for it is said, *Of the sons of the priests, the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai who took the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after his name; these searched for their genealogical*

⁴⁸ Marcus Jastrow. *A Dictionary of the Talmud*. (Jerusalem: Horev) 1980. p. 445.

records, but they could not be found, so they were disqualified from the priesthood, and the Tirshatha said unto them that they should not eat of the most holy things until there arose a priest with Urim and Thummim' " (Ezra 2:61-63).

The passage from Ezra is used as a prooftext by the anonymous authority of the *baraitah* to convince the others that an individual, whose ancestry is at all in question, should not perform the functions of a priest without infallible evidence of his status. This would include the "lifting up of the hands" to pronounce the Priestly Benediction as well as eating of the *terumah*. To do anything else would be to assume great risk.

Although *Ketuboth 24b* has not given us greater insight into exactly what the Urim and Thummim were, we do understand from this *Talmudic* passage that when in the possession of the person in question, they were considered to be incontrovertible evidence that he was the High Priest. We do not learn anything further about what our rabbis believed the Urim and Thummim looked like or how they were used, but we do understand how very crucial they were as part of the accoutrements of the Kohen Gadol and that without them, the other priestly functions should not be carried out.

It is of significance to note that there are no passages in rabbinic literature which uses the verse from Nechemiah 7:65 instead of from Ezra 5:63. The rabbis certainly understood the almost identical nature of the two books and may have deferred to the use of prooftexts from Ezra rather than Nechemiah because it appears first in the canon. This is particularly interesting given the fact that, according to tradition, it was Nechemiah who was believed to have been the

Tirshatha (the governor in Judea) who delivered the edict. Furthermore, there is no evidence either in the biblical text or in rabbinic literature that the Urim and Thummim were ever used during the time of the Second Temple. It may be possible then to conclude that the prohibition against "eating of the most holy things" is still in effect to this day!

Section Two: Rabbinic Literature to Related Verses⁴⁹

Introduction

Throughout the rabbinic literature there are numerous examples of passages in both the *halachic* and *midrashic* texts which interpret specific verses from *Tanakh* as related to the use of the Urim and Thummim, even though the terms do not appear in the biblical verses themselves. "The UT were to be used when a civil ruler approached the high priest for divine direction (Num 27:21) Examples of inquiries directed to the high priest can be traced by noting occurrences of the phrase *sha'al be* "inquire of" [Yahweh or Elohim], whether or not the Urim and Thummim are actually named. With the addition of this technical term to our catalog of data, we discover that all instances of actually using the UT occurred between the time of the judges and the time of David."⁵⁰

These verses, which I shall refer to as Related Verses, comprise a rather large sampling. It is hoped that by examining some of the rabbinic literature which either comments upon a verse or employs it as a prooftext, we might be able to gain a clearer idea of what the Urim and Thummim were and how they were used. The fifteen verses in question are all found in *Nevi'im*, the second section of the Bible. They are as follows: Judges 1:1; 20:18, 23, 27-28; I Samuel

⁴⁹ In addition to the passages which will be discussed in detail in Section Two of this chapter, please also see the following rabbinic sources for use of the phrase "*sha'al b'YHWH* or *sha'al b'elohim*" as evidence of use of the Urim and Thummim: Judges 1:1-Agadat Breishit 60:4; I Samuel 10:22-Avot deRebbe Natan 10, Tanchuma-Vayikra 4, Midrash Tehillim 108, Eliyahu Rabbah 18; Mishnat Rebbe Eliezer 9:186, I Samuel 30:8-Yoma 73a-b; II Samuel 2:1-Seder Olam Rabbah 13; II Samuel 5:23-Midrash Tehillim 27, Tanchuma Shoftim 27; and II Samuel 5:24-Midrash Tehillim 1.

⁵⁰ *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel.* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns) 1997. p. 4.

10:22; 14:37; 22:10; 23:2, 4; 30:8; II Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23-24. In the case of six of the citations, there were no examples of rabbinic literature to be found for the time frame in question (Judges 20:18; 20:23, 27; I Samuel 14:37; II Samuel 5:19). The purpose of this section is to explore a selection of the rabbinic literature to the remaining biblical verses which contained the critical phrase *sha'al b'elohim* or *sha'al b'yahweh* in order to see if they offer insights into the enigmatic Urim and Thummim. As in Section One of this chapter, both the biblical and rabbinic texts will be studied in chronological order. With respect to the rabbinic literature, as each new text is introduced the reader will find a concise description of the body of work from which the passage was taken.

Rabbinic Literature to Judges 20:27-28

וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּיהוָה וְשָׁם אָרוֹן בְּרִית הָאֱלֹהִים בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם: כֹּחַ וּפְּיֻחָס
בְּרֹאֲלֵעֶזֶר בֶּן־אֶהֱרֹן עַמֵּד | לִפְנֵי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם לֵאמֹר הַאֲוִסֶּף עוֹד לְצֹאת לַמִּלְחָמָה
עִם־בְּנֵי־בִנְיָמִן אֲחֵי אִם־אֶחָדָל וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה עָלָיו כִּי מִחֹר אֶתְנַנֶּנּוּ בַּיּוֹם:

Then the Children of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the Ark of the Covenant was there in those days, and Phineas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest ministered before Him in those days), "Shall we again take the field against our kinsmen the Benjaminites, or shall we not?" The Lord answered, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hands."⁵¹

⁵¹ Op. cit., *The Jewish Study Bible*. P. 554.

Bavli Shevuoth 35b

A tractate of *Nezikin*, the Fourth Order of the Babylonian *Talmud*, *Masechet Shevuoth* means "Oaths" and outlines the "various oaths administered in the course of court hearings concerning monetary matters, as well as private oaths and various oaths instituted by the Rabbis."⁵²

In this particular section of *Shevuoth* the rabbis are engaged in a discussion surrounding the Names of God and specifically those names for which a person may be held liable for using in a blasphemous manner. Additionally, this is the location in *Talmud* which addresses which letters of the Tetragrammaton might be written together and either erased or not erased. The discussion then turns to which of God's names in *Tanakh* are used in either a secular or sacred context. The determining factor appears to be with whom a specific Name is connected. The passage reads as follows:

כל שמות האמורים בגבעת בנימין - ר"א אומר: חול, רבי יהושע אומר: קדש.
אמר לו ר"א: וכי מבטיח ואינו עושה? אמר לו ר' יהושע: מה שהבטיח עשה, והם
לא ביחנו אם לנצוח אם לנצח, באחרונה שביחנו הסכימו על ידן, שנאמר:
(שופטים כ') ופנחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן (הכהן) עומד לפניו בימים ההם לאמר
האוסף עוד לצאת למלחמה עם [בני] בנימין אחי אם אחדל וגו'.

"All of the Names mentioned in connection with Gibeah of Benjamin, Rabbi Eliezer said, are secular; Rabbi Joshua said, are sacred. Rabbi Eliezer said to him: Does He then promise and not fulfill? Rabbi Joshua said to him: What He

⁵² Op. cit., Steinsaltz. p. 43.

promised He fulfilled; but they did not inquire whether [the result would be] victory or defeat. Later, when they did inquire [of the Urim and Thummim] they approved their action, as it is said, *Then Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days saying, 'Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother or shall I cease?'* [And the Lord said, *'Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.'*]"

The issue here revolves around the nature of Phineas' inquiry. Rabbi Eliezer's argument is that God did not fulfill the promise made to Phineas when he inquired as to whether or not they should go into battle. Therefore, any Names of God associated with this incident should be considered secular. Rabbi Joshua, on the other hand, argues that God did indeed fulfill the promise as Phineas simply asked whether or not they should go into battle and not what the outcome of that battle would be. Therefore, any Names of God associated with this incident should be deemed sacred.

It is of interest to note that the nature of the Urim and Thummim has been totally glossed over in the preceding discussion. Admittedly, the rabbis are concerned here with the Names of God and under which circumstances an individual might swear an oath using a Name that is considered either sacred or secular. This would certainly make a difference in terms of the punishment meted out to that individual. Swearing an oath using a sacred Name of God and then not fulfilling that oath is a transgression of the seventh commandment. What the rabbis have failed to notice here, or have at least not found to be worthy of commentary, is that the Urim and Thummim now appear to be

connected with the Ark of the Covenant. The inquiry no longer requires simply the presence of the High Priest, in this case Phineas who inherited the UT from his father Eleazar who had inherited them from his father Aaron. Now, the Urim and Thummim are associated with the Ark which was carried into battle with the Israelites.

This passage from *Shavuot 35b* is the only place within the rabbinic literature of the first millennium that utilizes Judges 20:27-28 as a proof-text. The rabbis' concern has focused here upon the answer to the inquiry versus the nature of the inquiry itself and the role of the Urim and Thummim in soliciting God's will.

Rabbinic Literature to I Samuel 22:10

וַיִּשְׁאַל לֹא בַיְהוָה וַיִּצְדָּקָה נָתַן לוֹ וְאֵת חֶרֶב גִּלְיָת הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי נָתַן לוֹ:

"And he inquired of the Lord for him and gave to him provisions and gave to him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Mishnat Rebbe Eliezer: 9:171

Also known as *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, "this work appears to have originated in the eighth or ninth century. The document is not a *midrash* in the real sense, but should rather be classified as 'rewritten Bible.'⁵³ Comprised of fifty-four chapters, *Mishnat Rebbe Eliezer* begins with two chapters on the life of Rabbi Eliezer and then begins a chronological stroll through the Bible beginning

⁵³ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. pps. 328-329.

with creation and ending with the punishment of Miriam for her criticism of Moses. The narrative ends here.

The passage in question relates the story of Doeg the Edomite and tells of his meeting with King Saul prior to Saul's going out to do battle with David at Nob. In the biblical narrative, Doeg reports to Saul that he has seen the High Priest Ahimelech inquiring of the Lord on David's behalf, giving him provisions, and the sword of Goliath. The *Midrash* describes Doeg as:

אַהֲבֵת רַע מְטוֹב שְׂקָר מְדַבֵּר צֶדֶק סָלָה: אַהֲבֵת כָּל-דְּבָרֵי-בָלַע לְשׁוֹן מְרָמָה:

"one who preferred evil to good and lies to truth" (Psalms 52:5).

The passage then answers the accusation regarding Doeg's character stating that he was not a liar but was indeed giving Saul an accurate account of what he had witnessed: "from where in Scripture do we learn that he spoke truth? For it says in I Samuel 22:10 that 'he inquired for him of the Lord and gave to him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine he gave to him.' How do we know, provisions? For it says, 'So the Priest gave him consecrated bread' (I Samuel 21:7). And how do we know the sword? For it says, 'the Priest said there is the sword of Goliath' (1 Samuel 21:10). And from where do we know that he inquired of the Urim and Thummim? For it says, 'after (behind) the ephod' and there is no ephod other than the one inquired of by Urim and Thummim. If so, on account of what was he punished? On account of slander." Doeg's punishment, then, came as a result of his gossiping and not because what he had relayed to Saul was untrue.

Doeg, in recounting this incident to Saul, indicates that the Priest Ahimelech had, "inquired on his behalf of the Lord." And yet nowhere during the actual event (I Samuel 21:2-10) does the text anywhere say that:

שאל-לו ביהוה אֶחֱמֵלֵךְ, implying the use of the Urim and Thummim. Where is Doeg getting this piece of information?

When Ahimelech retrieves the sword of Goliath for David, we are told:

הִנֵּה-הִיא לִוְטָה בְּשִׁמְלָה אַחֲרֵי הָאֵפוֹד

"It is over there, wrapped in a cloth, behind the ephod" (I Samuel 21:10).

In his retelling of the episode, Doeg has somehow equated the use of the Urim and Thummim with the ephod. Our research up until this point has indicated that the ephod was one of the eight priestly garments, and yet this passage seems to imply an ephod of another kind. There is indeed a significant body of research, well beyond the scope of this thesis, which posits that there was more than one type of ephod. It is to another category of ephod that Doeg is referring. This other ephod was not one worn by the High Priest but was instead some kind of idol which was kept in the Ark of the Covenant. It was behind this ephod that the sword of Goliath had been stored.

The passage from *Mishnat Rebbe Eliezer* is interesting in that its focus is not on the details of the story but on the character of Doeg. He is punished, we learn, not because he was relating a set of events in either a truthful or untruthful manner. The penalty comes because he acts as a tale-bearer and is therefore guilty of slander. *Mishnat Rebbe Eliezer* implies that "I'shon ha rah" is

considered to be gossip of any kind, whether or not the information spread is positive or negative.

Rabbinic Literature to II Samuel 5:23 and 5:24

וַיִּשְׁאַל דָּוִד בַּיהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תֵעָלֶה הָסֵב אֶל-אֲחֵרֵיהֶם וּבֹאֲתָ לָהֶם מִמּוֹל בְּכַאֲסִים:
וַיִּזְוִי בְּשִׁמְעָדָּה [בְּשִׁמְעָדָּה] אֶת-קוֹל צְעָדָהּ בְּרֹאשֵׁי הַבְּכָאִים אֲזִי תִחַרֵּץ כִּי אֲזִי יֵצֵא יְהוָה
לִפְנֵיךָ לְהַכּוֹת בְּמַחֲנֶה פְּלִשְׁתִּים:

"And when David inquired of the Lord He said, 'Do not go up but circle around behind them at the *balsam* trees. And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the *balsam* trees then you shall go into action, for the Lord will be going before you to strike down the armies of the Philistines."

Pesikta Rabati 8:5 and 8:6

"*Pesikta Rabati* is a collection of sermons for feasts and special Sabbaths...In the present structure, *Pesikta Rabati* traces the following annual cycle: New Moon Sabbath, Hanukkah, distinguished Sabbaths, Pesah, Feast of Weeks, three Sabbaths of mourning as admonitions before the 9th of Ab, seven Sabbaths of comfort after the 9th of Ab, New Year through Yom ha-Kippurim, Feast of Booths and Shemini Aseret, Shabbat Bereshit."⁵⁴ Because of the diverse nature of this work it is difficult to pinpoint a time during which it was written and opinions range from the third century to a date in the sixth or seventh century. It is unlikely that *Pesikta Rabati* is the work of an individual redactor and

⁵⁴ Ibid., pps. 297-298.

many scholars believe it to be a work which originated in Palestine due to its language and the names cited in the literature (*Palestinian Amoraim*.)

Piska 8:5 and 8:6 are paragraphs within the homily for Hanukkah. The sermon opens, not surprisingly, with two verses which speak of "light and lamps." The initial verse out of which the sermon will spring is from the first verse of Psalm 27 which reads:

יְהוָה אֹרְחִי יִשְׁעֵי מִמֶּנִּי אִיֶּכָא יְהוָה מְעוֹז חַיִּי מִמֶּנִּי אֶפְחָד , "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid."

Rabbi Tanchuma Berabbi then begins his discourse with Psalms 119:105
נֶר-לְרַגְלִי דְּבָרְךָ וְאוֹר לְנִתְיָבְתִּי "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." The question arises as to when King David, the presumed author of *Tehillim* according to the rabbis, composed this particular verse. The *midrash* tells us that it was "at the time when he went twice during a certain war into battle in the Valley of Rephaim, though, to be sure, he never before set forth to any war without first inquiring of 'the Lights,' the Urim and the Thummim, as to his conduct."

The homily then speaks of the time when Samuel anointed David as the new king and the ministering angels made an accusation before the Holy One Blessed Be He that the kingship was being taken away unfairly from Saul. God responded by saying that Saul was disrespectful and did not show reverence when using the Urim and Thummim. On one occasion Saul had stopped the priest in mid-inquiry when he heard the Philistines approaching. David, on the

other hand, even when the Philistines were directly upon him, continued with his inquiry. As a result, the Lord gave to King David critical advice as to how he should attack the Philistines namely, by circling behind and then listening for a sound in the tops of the trees. This sound, presumably that of God signaling the Israelites to attack, was God's way of protecting the Israelites when they were in a dangerous situation.

This sermon from *Pesikta Rabati*, delivered during Hanukah, includes a significant number of references to light. It is not unexpected that Rabbi Tanhuma Berabbi would make the connection between *Chag Urim* and the Urim which were so carefully inquired of by King David. We do not necessarily learn anything new about the way in which the UT were manipulated or what they may have looked like physically, but we do learn from this passage that they were to be treated with awe and respect. Saul lost the kingship of Israel for not doing so. "David, unlike Saul, made reverent use of these, indicating the extraordinary piety that was to win the kingship for him, even as it was to save him from many dangers."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ William G. Braude. *Pesikta Rabati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) 1968. p. 145.

Section Three: Rabbinic Literature to Urim and Thummim

Introduction

As we have observed thus far, there are plentiful examples of rabbinic literature which contain either one of the seven biblical verses in which the words Urim and Thummim (or a variation of them) appear as well as the at least fifteen other verses which we have identified as "related," due to their use of the phrase, "sha'al b'YHWH" or "sha'al b'Elohim." A third category is represented by passages in rabbinic literature which make no reference at all to the aforementioned biblical verses but nonetheless provide us with a piece of narrative regarding the Urim and Thummim. It is to those illustrations which we shall now turn.

As with Sections One and Two of this chapter, the examples are too numerous to analyze them all within the scope of this paper. Therefore, we will focus on a number which provide the most instructive paradigms for our purposes. As in the previous two Sections, the passages will be presented in chronological order and as each new text is introduced the reader will find a concise description of the body of work from which the passage was taken.

Mishnaic Passages⁵⁶

Mishnah Yoma 7:5

כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל מְשַׁמֵּשׁ בְּשִׂמוֹנָה כְּלִים, וְהַדְּיוֹט בְּאַרְבָּעָה. בְּכֶתֶנֶת וּמְכַנְסִים וּמִצְנָפֶת
וְאַבְגָּט. מוֹסִיף עָלָיו כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל, חֹשֶׁן וְאַפֻּד וּמַעֲיֵל וְצִיץ. בְּאֵלֹ נִשְׁאָלִין בְּאוּרִים
וּתְמִימִם. וְאֵין נִשְׁאָלִין אֶלָּא לְמֶלֶךְ וּלְבֵית דִּין וּלְמִי שֶׁהֻצְבֹּר צָרִיךְ בוֹ:

"The High Priest ministers in eight pieces of raiment, and a common priest in four—in tunic drawers, turban, and girdle. To this the High Priest adds the breastplate, the apron, the upper garment, and the frontlet. In these were Urim and Thummim inquired of; and they were not inquired of for a common person, but only for the king, for the Court, or for one of whom the congregation had need."

We have previously seen rabbinic passages that enumerated the vestments worn by the High Priest when consulting with God. In *Bavli Arachin 16a* in particular, the narrative provided exquisite detail as to which item of clothing atoned for which sin. In this passage from *Mishnah Yoma* however, the focus is on something entirely different. *Mishnah Yoma 7:5* defines, in general terms, those for whom the Urim and Thummim might be used.

First and foremost, it was the High Priest who did the inquiring as he was the one wearing the garment in which the UT were kept. Secondly, the passage tells us, "in these (garments) were the Urim and Thummim inquired of." The *Kohen Gadol* was required to be dressed in the eight holy vestments before an

⁵⁶ In addition to the following passages from the *Mishnah* please also see *Mishnah Sotah 9:12* as well as the *Tosefta 13:2a* which was discussed in the section on rabbinic literature to Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65.

inquiry could be made. The language of this last phrase is a bit murky because it does not explicitly state in which of the garments the Urim and Thummim might have been placed. It is difficult to tell with certainty simply because the *mishnah* does not state that the UT were placed in the "frontlet" (*ephod* תִּפְנֵן) and the breastpiece is simply referred to as the *hoshen* חֹשֶׁן, rather than the *mishpat* which we have seen before.

Most importantly perhaps is that the *mishnah* advises that the Urim and Thummim are to be used only for the benefit of three parties, "the King, the Court, and for one of whom the congregation had need." The first two of these categories are fairly well-defined. We have already seen rabbinic literature which spoke of monarchs who utilized the Urim and Thummim before going to war in order to know the outcome of their battles. We have also identified narratives which explained the use of the UT by the Court (*Sanhedrin*) in order to determine one's innocence or guilt. The third category, however, is a bit puzzling. Just who might this person be, of "whom the congregation had need?" Does this mean that anytime an individual is identified who might serve a vital purpose to the community that he may go to the High Priest to inquire of the Urim and Thummim? The King and Court are certainly not the "*Am HaAretz*," but the third category gives us the sense that perhaps even a commoner might have access, through the office of the High Priest, to consultation via the Urim and Thummim. The rabbis of the *Mishnah* may have wanted us to recognize that communion

with YHWH was not the prerogative of only the lofty but of the community as a whole.⁵⁷

Shavuoth 2:2

אֶחָד הַנִּכְנָס לְעֶזְרָה וְאֶחָד הַנִּכְנָס לְתוֹסַפֵּת הָעֶזְרָה, שֶׁאִין מוֹסִיפִין עַל
הָעִיר וְעַל הָעֶזְרוֹת אֶלָּא בְּמֶלֶךְ וְנָבִיא וְתַמִּים וּבִסְנֵה־דָרִין שֶׁל שְׁבָעִים
וְאֶחָד וּבִשְׁתֵּי תוֹדוֹת וּבִשְׁשִׁיר. וּבֵית דִּין מְהֻלָּכִין וּשְׁתֵּי תוֹדוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶם, וְכָל
יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרֵיהֶם. הַפְּנִימִית נֹאכָלֶת וְהַחִיצוֹנָה נִשְׂרָפֶת. וְכָל שֶׁלֹּא נַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל
אֵלוֹ, הַנִּכְנָס לָשֵׁם אֵין חַיִּבִּין עָלֶיהָ :

"It is all one whether a man enters into the Temple Court or into any space that has been added to the Temple Court, since they may not add to the [Holy] City or to the courts of the Temple save by the decision of a king, a prophet, Urim and Thummim, and a Sanhedrin of one and seventy [judges] and with the bringing of two Thank-offerings behind them and all Israel following after. The innermost [Thank-offering] is consumed [by the priests] and the outermost is burnt. If any addition is made not after this fashion, and a man [that is unclean] entered there, he is not thereby culpable."⁵⁸

This paragraph from *Mishnah Shavuot* is difficult to explain without looking at the paragraph which precedes it. The discussion focuses on the types of knowledge one might possess as to whether or not they suffer from some variety of personal contamination which would prohibit that individual from entering the

⁵⁷ Op. cit., *Danby Mishnah*. p. 171.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 410.

Temple Court as this would be a transgression. A person might be unclean and have knowledge of it, but enters the Temple Court anyway in order to make an offering or a person might not be aware of the uncleanness and enter the Temple Court accidentally. Our passage from *Mishnah Shavuot* goes one step further by defining the boundaries of the Temple Court and specifies that this includes any space that has been "added to the Temple Court."

This *mishnah* provides us with a couple of new items of interest. First is that additions to the Temple Court were considered to be as holy as the original structure. This tells us that the process of building the Temple might be an ongoing project done in phases and that each new piece became holy through association with what was already standing. Despite the fact that the rabbis of the *Mishnah* were writing this passage post destruction, they still dreamed of the day in which the Temple would be rebuilt and stand again in its full glory. There were ruins of the Second Temple still standing and the plan of course was to rebuild in the same location by simply repairing and adding to what was already there. The rabbis wanted to make certain that those who lived in the future to see the Temple rise again would understand clearly that it was all considered holy. Therefore, anyone suffering an uncleanness was forbidden to enter the site, whether it had been the 6th century before the Common Era or hundreds of centuries later.

Additionally we learn there are very specific guidelines for adding on to the Holy City, similar to our own building codes today. What was required was indeed a tall order: the decision of a king, a prophet, the Urim and Thumim, the

Sanhedrin of seventy-one judges, and two offerings of Thanksgiving behind them, along with all Israel in procession behind them. The *mishnah* is making the very powerful point that additions were not made to the Temple Court easily and that it required the approval of all the "powers that be." The authorization of the monarch or the court was not in and of itself enough; required as well were the permission of the prophet and the Urim and Thummim inquired of by the High Priest. The latter two received their authority from God who communicated through each of them in a unique manner. This *modus operandi* provided checks and balances to ensure that not any one entity was in a position to make a unilateral decision with regard to the Temple Court. The rabbis might certainly have been providing us with insight into the power struggles between the various factions which existed in their own day. Indeed *Mishnah Shavuot* 2:2 may not be so much about who is clean and unclean and may or may not enter the Temple Court. After all, at this time in Jewish history the point was moot. The real motivation behind this *mishnah* may have more to do with the rabbis' attempts to maintain some influence and control in what was no doubt a time of great uncertainty.

Finally, it is of interest to note that neither the passage from *Mishnah Sotah* 2:2 nor the one previously analyzed from *Yoma* 7:5 contain biblical prooftexts which we have become so accustomed to seeing in much of rabbinic literature. This omission of prooftexts is quite common in the *Mishnah*, as those who taught it orally and those who were recipients of the oral teaching were presumed to have known the biblical source for each statement and law. The

Oral Law, after all, was based upon the interpretation of *Torah*, the Written Law. Those who did not know the biblical basis would have to wait for the work of the *Tosafists* and *Talmudists* who would later come along to expand upon the work of the *Mishnah*.

Talmudic Passages⁵⁹

Bavli Berakhoth 12b

"In most traditions, Tractate *Berakhoth* is the first tractate of the *Talmud*. Its contents include the laws for reciting the *Shema*, the *Amidah* prayer (the eighteen benedictions), Grace after Meals, blessings for various kinds of food and fragrances, blessings for various occasions and things seen."⁶⁰ The variety of situations for which prayers are offered along with the instructions as to how those prayers are rendered is truly mind-boggling. In the section just preceding our passage, the rabbis have been discussing the way in which one is required to bend at the knees and straighten upright when pronouncing the first blessing of the *Amidah*, the *Avot*.

The discussion then turns to the *tefillah* that takes place on the New Year and the Day of Atonement. On the subject of sin and repentance, Raba ben Hinena the elder in the name of Rab tells us:

כל העושה דבר עבירה ומתבייש בו - מוחלין לו על כל עונותיו, שנאמר: (יחזקאל

ט"ז) למען תזכרי ובשת ולא יהיה לך עוד פתחון פה מפני כלמתך בכפרי לך לכל

⁵⁹ In addition to the following passages from the *Talmud* please also see *Berachoth 3b and 4a*, *Yoma 71b*, *Shevuoth 14a, 15a, 16a and 35b*, the last of which was discussed in the section on rabbinic literature to Related Verses for Judges 20:28.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., Steinsaltz. p. 38.

אשר עשית נאם ה' אלהים. דילמא צבור שאני? - אלא, מהכא: (שמואל א' כ"ח)
 ויאמר שמואל אל שאול למה הרגזתני להעלות אתי, ויאמר שאול צר לי מאד
 ופלשתים נלחמים בי וה' סר מעלי ולא ענני עוד גם ביד הנביאים גם בחלמות
 ואקראה לך להודיעני מה אעשה, ואילו אורים ותמים לא קאמר - משום
 דקטליה לנוב עיר הכהנים. ומנין דאחילו ליה מן שמיא - שנאמר (שמואל א'
 כ"ח) (ויאמר שמואל אל שאול מחר) ומחר אתה ובניך עמי, ואמר רבי יוחנן: עמי
 - במחיצתי. ורבנן אמרי, מהכא: (שמואל ב' כ"א) והוקענום לה' בגבעת שאול
 בחיר ה', יצתה בת קול ואמרה: בחיר ה'.

"If one commits a sin and is ashamed of it (guilt-stricken), all of his sins are forgiven, as it says, '*That you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more, because of your shame; when I have forgiven you all that you have done, says the Lord God*' (Ezekiel 16:6). Perhaps with a whole congregation the case is different? Rather [we derive it] from here: '*And Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disquieted me to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am very distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams; therefore I called you that you may make known to me what I shall do*' (I Samuel 28:15). But he does not mention the Urim and Thummim because he had killed all [the people of] Nob, the city of priests. And how do we know that Heaven had forgiven him? Because it says, '*and Samuel said, tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me*' (I Samuel 28:16, 19), and Rabbi Johanan said: with Me means

in my compartment [in Paradise]. The Rabbis say [we learn it] from here: '*We will impale them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord*' (II Samuel 21:6). A divine voice came forth and proclaimed: '*The chosen of the Lord.*' "

This *Talmudic* passage recounts the biblical narrative which tells of King Saul's failed attempts to receive guidance from God. With the Philistines in hot pursuit, Saul has used all of the previously successful forms of communication to petition for the advice of YHWH. From the information in I Samuel 28:6, one of the seven biblical verses which mentions the Urim, that Saul has been unsuccessful in his endeavors either through dreams, prophets, or the Urim. Following Samuel's death, Saul had prohibited the use of all forms of divination. Finding himself now in a desperate situation, he enlists the aid of the Witch of Endor in summoning up the ghost of Samuel to solve his dilemma. This practice of necromancy, communicating with the spirits of the dead in order to predict the future, is strictly forbidden and Samuel is not happy to have been conjured up.

What Raba ben Hinena has brought to our attention in the passage from *Berakhoth* is the discrepancy between what we have read in I Samuel 28:6 and what King Saul offers to the prophet Samuel as a rationale just a few verses later in I Samuel 28:15. Saul clearly states in the former verse that neither dreams, prophets, nor the Urim have helped him. When he relates this information to Samuel however, he conveniently forgets to mention the Urim. This incongruity in the biblical text was exactly what would have caught the interest of the rabbis and they would have made an attempt to develop an explanation. Raba ben

Hinena tells us that Saul purposely did not mention the Urim and that this omission of a critical piece of information was his way of repenting for the sin he had committed by killing the Priests at Nob who were the guardians of the Urim and Thummim. Furthermore, we are assured that Saul has been forgiven for his transgression because he will join Samuel in Paradise the following day when he and his sons will be killed.

The passage from *Bavli Berakhoth 12b* offers a brilliant example of biblical exegesis. The rabbis have taken several verses and woven them together to prove their case; forgiveness for one's sins comes from acknowledging the shame that one feels from having committed that sin. Unfortunately we learn nothing new of import with regard to the nature of the Urim, its physical qualities or use from this otherwise instructive passage.

Bavli Yoma 21b

This section of the *Talmud* finds the rabbis discussing the disposition of the ashes on the altar following the sacrifices which are made on *Yom Kippur*, as well as the unique appearance of the wood which remained burning on the altar. There was apparently one coal, which, according to tradition, had fallen from heaven during the days of Solomon and stayed there until the time of Manasseh. This special lump of coal assumed the shape of an animal; that of a lion during the time of the First Temple and that of a dog during the time of the Second Temple. This image of a lion implies a certain degree of admiration for the First Temple and that of a dog, a degree of disdain for the Second Temple. A debate

then ensues among the rabbis as to whether or not there was even a sacrificial fire at the Second Temple. Rabbi Samuel ben Inia offers his position that there was surely fire in the Second Temple. He proves his case with the following:

מאי דכתיב (חגי א) וארצה בו ואכבד, וקרינן ואכבדה מאי שנא דמחוסר ה"א?
אלו חמשה דברים שהיו בין מקדש ראשון למקדש שני, ואלו הן: ארון וכפורת
וכרובים, אש, ושכינה, ורוח הקודש, ואורים ותומים. - אמרי: אין, מיהוה הוה,
סיועי לא מסייעא.

"What is the meaning of the verse, '*I will look on it with favor and I will be glorified*?' (Haggai 1:8) The traditional reading is, '*I will glorify it*.' Then why is the letter '*hay*' omitted? To indicate that there were five things in which the First Temple differed from the Second, and these are they: the Ark, the curtain and the Cherubim, the fire, the *Shekhinah*, the Holy Spirit, and the Urim and Thummim. I will tell you, they were present but they were not as helpful."

Rabbi Samuel ben Inia has used the verse from Haggai to create a *midrash* which will suit his purposes. Contained in this verse is what is termed a *kere-ketiv*, which is a word written in one way but pronounced in another. In this case, the word is written as ואכבד meaning, "I will be glorified." This is the *ketiv*, the written form. When rendered orally, however, the word is read as ואכבדה meaning, "I will glorify it." The dissimilarity between the two words may be of no consequence to the casual observer, but the rabbis, who discovered profound significance in each and every letter of Scripture, took notice of the variation between the written and spoken word. The letter *hay*, the fifth letter of

the Hebrew alphabet, also has the numerical value of the number five. Rabbi Samuel assures us that this corresponds exactly to the number of ways in which the two Temples differed. The Ark, the Curtain, and the Cherubim constitute one unit and therefore, one item. The fire, the *Shekhinah*, the Holy Spirit, and the Urim and Thummim round out the five items. By using *Gematria*, Hebrew numerology, Rabbi Samuel has provided us with an excellent explanation for the difference in the rendering of a word in *Tanakh*.

The familiarity with which the ancient Sages approached the holy Text and their remarkable ability to clarify differences are which would have escaped the casual reader are nothing less than amazing. We also learn from this passage in *Bavli Yoma 21b* that there was at least one rabbi who believed that the Urim and Thummim were still present and in use during Second Temple times but that its efficacy had been diminished.

Bavli Baba Bathra 106b

Baba Bathra is the fourth tractate of *Seder Nezikin* and deals primarily with "laws of partnership, problems connected with the preservation of a person's property rights, and sales contracts for property of all kinds. Also dealt with extensively are the laws of inheritance and the laws regarding legal documents and deeds."⁶¹

In this section of *Baba Bathra* the conversation concerns the division of a parcel of land into equal shares by brothers who have inherited the estate. There

⁶¹ Ibid., Steinsaltz. p. 42.

appears to be some urgency in the desire of the brothers to "close the deal." The *Talmud* states:

תניא, ר' יוסי אומר: האחין שחלקו, כיון שעלה גורל לאחד מהן - קנו כולם. מ"ט?

אמר ר' אלעזר: כתחלת ארץ ישראל, מה תחלה בגורל, אף כאן בגורל. אי מה

להלן בקלפי ואורים ותומים, אף כאן בקלפי ואורים ותומים אמר רב אשי:

בההוא הנאה דקא צייתי להדדי, גמרי ומקנו להדדי.

"It was taught, Rabbi Jose said: 'when brothers divide [an estate] all of them acquire possession [of their respective shares] as soon as the lot for one of them is drawn.' Rabbi Eleazar said: '[Possession is acquired in the same way] as at the beginning of [the settlement of] the Land of Israel. As at that beginning, [the acquisition was] by lot, so here [also it is] by lot. Since there, however, [the division was made] through the ballot box and the Urim and Thummim, [should not the division] here also [be made] through the ballot box and the Urim and Thummim?' Rabbi Ashi replied: '[The lot alone suffices here] because [in return for] the benefit of mutual agreement they determine to allow each other to acquire possession [by the lot alone.]'"

There are several items of note in the preceding narrative. First, this is the only *Talmudic* passage regarding the Urim and Thummim which we have encountered thus far that contains no biblical prooftexts. It appears that the rabbis themselves are not only familiar with the methodologies of land division used in the Bible, but perhaps they expect that others are as well and therefore, the citation of a prooftext is not necessary. The accounts in the *Torah* which describe the division of lands among the twelve tribes and two half tribes of Israel

as well as other instances of land acquisition are well-known to the sages of the *Talmud*.

Secondly, this is the first example we have encountered of the Urim and Thummim being used for something other than a matter being adjudicated by the court such as the guilt or innocence of an individual, or of the UT being utilized for purposes of the decision to go to war. The parceling out of an inherited estate is a civil matter and yet the rabbis seem to imply that this too was an issue the outcome of which was to be determined by the Urim and Thummim.

Finally, there is a very critical distinction being made in this passage between the ballot box containing the גורלות the lots, and the Urim and Thummim themselves. According to what we read in *Baba Bathra 106b*, these are two entirely discrete objects or sets of objects. It is purely speculation, but it may have been that the lots within the ballot box were drawn initially and then the Urim and Thummim were employed in order to corroborate the decision as having been Divinely made. Rabbi Eleazar's objection is that since the determination for land division in Israel was made by the lot and the Urim and Thummim, that this same methodology should be used at the present time. This is of course impossible, as the UT no longer exist. Rabbi Ashi answers that the *goralot* will suffice in this case because of the mutual consent of the parties involved.

This is certainly an interesting addition to the bits and pieces of information that we have been able to derive up until this point based upon the rabbinic literature. The Urim and Thummim were perhaps lots imbued by a

Heavenly power versus the *goralot* which were used for more everyday purposes.

Midrashim of the Classical Period⁶²

Esther Rabbah 4:1

Also known as *Midrash Esther*, this work is "an exposition of the Esther scroll, which is read at the feast of Purim. It is divided into two collections, *Esther Rabbah I* which contains sections 1-6 and *Esther Rabbah II* comprised of sections 7-10. The specific *Midrash* with which we are concerned is from the first collection which is characterized by "classical proems which are rarely anonymous and according to its language it originated in Palestine. This text quotes Palestinian *Talmud*, *Genesis Rabbah* and *Leviticus Rabbah*, and is in turn quoted in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, and *Midrash Tehillim*, hence it must be dated after around 500."⁶³

The episode from *Megillat Esther* upon which the rabbis are expounding takes place when King Ahasuerus consults with members of his court as to what he should do with the insolent Vashti who has refused his request for a dance. The verse from Esther 1:13 reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יָדְעֵי הָעֵתִים כִּי־כֵן דִּבֶּר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי כָל־יָדְעֵי דָת וְדִין:

"Then the king said to the wise men, who knew the times, for this was the manner of the king before all who knew law and judgment."

⁶² In addition to the following *midrash* from *Esther Rabbah*, please also see *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 8:13 and 9:3 as well as *Vayikra Rabbah* 26:7 and 30:3 for other *midrashim* of the Classical Period.

⁶³ Op., cit., Strack and Stemberger. pps. 318-319.

All of them are in agreement that these were the tribe of Issachar and then offer a number of reasons for coming to that conclusion. According to Rabbi Simon the men of Issachar had understanding of the times because they knew what Israel ought to do. Rabbi *Tanhuma* argued that they were wise because they had fixed the calendar. In the opinion of Rabbi Jose ben Kazrath it was because of Issachar's ability to heal skin disease. Regardless of the specific reason there was a consensus among the rabbis that the wicked king was soliciting the advice of the men of Issachar.

The *midrash* then moves on to the verse from Esther 1:15 which says:

כָּדַת מֶה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת בַּמֶּלֶכָה וַשְׁתִּי עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחִשְׁוֶרֶשׁ
בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים:

"What shall I do to Queen Vashti according to the law, because she has not performed according the command of the king Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?"

Esther Rabbah 4:1 interprets the verse from *Tanakh* in the following way:

אמר להם אותו רשע בשביל שגזרתי על ושתי שתכנס לפני ערומה ולא נכנסה
מה הוא דינה?

"He (King Ahasuerus) said to them, 'seeing that I ordered Vashti to enter before me naked (to dance) and she refused to do so, what shall be her punishment?'"

According to the *midrash* the wise men of Issachar reply to the king:

אדונינו המלך כשהיינו בארצנו היינו שואלים באורים ותומים ועכשיו מטולטלין
אנו וקראו לפניו המקרא הזה (ירמיה מ"ח) שאנן מואב מנעוריו ושקט הוא אל
שמריו ולא הורק מכלי אל כלי ובגולה לא הלך על כן עמד טעמו בו וריחו לא

"Your Majesty the King, when we were in our own land, we used to inquire of the Urim and Thummim, but now we are tossed about,' and they quoted to him the verse (Jeremiah 48:11), *'Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remains with him and his scent is not changed.'*"

The men of Issachar were indeed wise. According to the *midrash* they feigned ignorance about the law, insisting instead that their wisdom was no more because they were no longer in their own land with access to the Urim and Thummim. Instead they perform a magnificent job of passing the buck to Moab, who unlike themselves, have not had the misfortune of being shuttled from land to land and exiled. King Ahasuerus turns his attention to finding someone from Moab to advise him and is directed instead to their "near neighbors," the seven princes of Persia and Media. The men of the tribe of Issachar have saved themselves from having to pronounce judgment upon poor Vashti and have given that responsibility to those more wicked than themselves. The *midrash* ends with the following verse from Proverbs 11:8:

צדיק מצרה נחלץ ויבא רשע תחתיו צדיק מצרה נחלץ אלו שבטו של יששכר

ויבא רשע תחתיו אלו שבעת שרי פרס ומדי.

The righteous is delivered out of trouble and the wicked come in his place. 'The righteous is delivered out of trouble,' this is the tribe of Issachar. 'And the wicked come in his place,' these are the seven princes of Persia and Media.

The biblical text itself makes no mention of the men of Issachar, what it was they might have done to be considered wise, or their reluctance to tell King Ahasuerus how he should punish Vashti. Nowhere does the biblical text speak of the "wise men" defending their ignorance because they are Urim and Thummim-less. This entire narrative is the remarkable creative work of the rabbis writing the *midrash*. In order to illustrate the wisdom of Issachar and make them heroes in this story, they have shaped the words of *Megillat Esther* to serve their purpose. The Urim and Thummim have now become the powerful implements by which the tribe received its extraordinary insight but whose absence have left them unable to make judicious decisions.

Middle Period Midrashim⁶⁴

Bamidbar Rabbah 20:20

This homiletical *midrash* is an exposition on a verse from *Parashat Balak*. The narrative opens with the verse from Numbers 23:23 which reads:

כִּי לֹא-נִחַשׁ בִּיעֶקֶב וְלֹא-קִסָּם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כָּעֵת יֹאמַר לִיעֶקֶב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה-פָּעַל אֵל:

"For there is no augury against Jacob, and no divination against Israel.

According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel what God has done."

The words are those of Balaam, the prophet who has been sent by Balak the King of Moab to curse the Israelites. Frustrated numerous times in his attempts, Balaam ends up blessing them instead. The preceding verse is from a segment of biblical poetry in which Balaam tries to convince Balak that the task

⁶⁴ In addition to the following *midrash* from *Bamidbar Rabbah*, please see also *Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:7, 21:9 and 22:4 for other *midrashim* of the Middle Period.

which he has asked him to perform is impossible. The words of God come into his mouth and he is unable to speak ill of this people.

The rabbis respond to this *petichta* verse with the following *midrash*:

הרי את מחזר ומנחש ומקסם באי זה מקום תשלוט בהם והם אינם כן כשהן
צריכין להלחם בשונא עומד כ"ג ולובש אורים ותומים ונשאל בהקב"ה וכל
הגוים מקסמים ומנחשים ואלו משברין אותם בתשובה שנאמר (ישעיה מ) מפר
אותות בדים וקוסמים יהולל

"See, you repeatedly resort to enchantment and divination in order to discover the spot where you can prevail against them; but they are not so! When they have to go out to fight against an enemy, the High Priest comes forward, puts on the Urim and Thummim, and inquires of the Holy One, blessed be He. Moreover all the nations resort to enchantment and divinations but these break their spells by means of repentance, as it is said, *who annul the omens of the diviners and make fools of the augurs*" (Isaiah 44:25).

The sages have made a clear differentiation between the divination practiced by those of other nations and that of the Israelites which comes directly through the power of the Urim and Thummim in consultation with God. Other methods simply cannot compete with the supremacy of Israel as they are able to break the spells placed upon them by means of *teshuvah*, repentance. This is evidently the "secret weapon" which positions the Israelites above all others.

The *midrash* seems to imply a correlation between the effectiveness of the Urim and Thummim and the act of repentance. Perhaps the rabbis are suggesting that UT and the High Priest's ability to use them in such a efficacious

manner comes as a result of his role as the intermediary for the people in offering sacrifices for their transgressions.

Finally, we learn a bit more about the rabbis' impressions of the Urim and Thummim when they say that the *Kohen Gadol* comes forward and puts on or "wears" the UT. One gets the impression that the objects were something more than just items manipulated by hand. They were either part of an article of clothing or contained within one of the priestly vestments, such as the pocket of the *Ephod* or as one of the engraved precious stones embedded in the *Hoshen Mishpat*.

Summary

The vast body of rabbinic literature has provided us with a wealth of information as to how our ancient sages viewed the Urim and Thummim. Beginning with the *Mishnah* and the early *Tannaitic* literature and running all the way through the *Amoraic* and *Midrashic* passages, we find a rich collection of laws, beliefs, parables and prooftexts providing us with wonderful rabbinic insights. For the most part, the writings of the rabbis have fallen into four main categories.

The first of these categories deals with the meaning of the words Urim and Thummim. The great preponderance of the evidence looked at shows that the rabbis adopted the position that אורים derived from the root א-ו-ר for "light" and תומים from the root ת-ו-מ meaning "complete" or "truth." This is supported in a number of the passages which use these exact labels or ones almost identical to

them. Nowhere was there an example in the literature which held that Urim and Thummim derived from anything other than these root words. More specifically, the opinion that the word אורִים derived from the *shoresh* א-ר-ר meaning "to curse," is nowhere evident.

Next, the rabbinic literature has provided us with knowledge as to the situations and people for whom the Urim and Thummim were applied. According to what has been analyzed, the UT were the tool by which the High Priest consulted with YHWH on matters of warfare, judgment of guilt or innocence or an individual or group, and distribution of land. The Urim and Thummim were the sole property of the *Kohen Gadol* but might be used on behalf of the king, the Sanhedrin, or even an *Am HaAretz* should this benefit the congregation of Israel at large. The Urim and Thummim according to some, were a lot oracle specifically for communication with God. Based upon this description the UT were distinct from the *goralot* or more "secular" lots which were used for other everyday civil matters. It is possible that the Urim and Thummim and the *goralot* might have been used in conjunction with one another but they were not one and the same.

Thirdly we achieve some understanding of the way in which the Urim and Thummim worked, at least according to the ancient rabbis. The most telling description is derived from the passage in *Bavli Yoma 73a-73b* which relays in exquisite detail the position of the petitioner, that of the High Priest, the order in which questions should be posed, and even the tone of voice in which the query should be made. We learn that letters of the names of the tribes of Israel

became illuminated within the brilliant stones of the *Hoshen HaMishpat*, providing the supplicant with the answer he sought. This creative account, despite its deficit of biblical prooftext, is nonetheless quite convincing. Nowhere in this passage are the Urim and Thummim referred to as a variety of lot oracle which might have been tossed or drawn to render a "yes" or "no" response.

The fourth and final category of the rabbinic literature we have investigated addresses the cessation of the Urim and Thummim. For the rabbis, who read the biblical text as if it was one continuous and chronological narrative, used the sacred Scripture as the basis for making historical decisions. In the case of the UT, the sages took notice of the places within the text where they were used and then not used. In the *Torah*, Joshua becomes successor to Moses but is instructed to go before Eleazar the Priest who will continue to hold the power of the Urim and Thummim. Interestingly, despite the battles in which Joshua led the Israelites, we have not one account of an inquiry made of the UT. The rabbis speak of King Saul's failed attempts to seek Divine instruction as well as King David's successes at doing the same. The passages from Ezra and Nechemiah clearly state that the Urim and Thummim are no longer present. The priest with the Urim and Thummim should arise. Most of the passages from rabbinic literature agreed that the UT were no longer in use after the deaths of the "first prophets" although there seems to be some dispute as to who those prophets were. The general consensus is that by the time of the Second Temple, the Urim and Thummim had fallen into desuetude.

As with many questions which evolve from reading the "plain" text of the *Tanakh*, the rabbis identified the mystical Urim and Thummim to be objects which warranted further attention and explication. Throughout dozens of pieces of rabbinic literature, they have assisted in clarifying what they believed was meant by the words אורים and תומים , the situations and people for whom they were used, how they operated in terms of supplying an answer to an inquiry, and the historical time periods during which Urim and Thummim were employed. This is a great deal of information, certainly more than that provided by the seven verses we read in the biblical text itself. However, the rabbinic literature has not provided solutions to all of the questions which might arise and many ambiguities remain.

Chapter Five: Additional Ancient Texts⁶⁵

Introduction

The sages to whom we are so indebted for the vast corpus of rabbinic literature did not exist in a world totally unto themselves. Whether in *Eretz Yisrael* or Babylonia, the rabbis were undoubtedly exposed to the languages and customs of the societies around them and their writing was surely impacted by those day to day experiences. Sprinkled throughout the rabbinic literature, for example, we find Greek loan words, which bear witness to this contact of cultures. We also come across names within the writings which sound distinctly Hellenistic, showing a level of syncretism that is common even today when peoples live among one another. In addition, practices which were typically Roman in nature were borrowed and then transformed to take on a distinctively Jewish character. Perhaps one of the most obvious of these is the Passover Seder, many of whose elements were co-opted from the Roman banquet feasts.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the rabbinic literature which we have evaluated up until this point may have also been influenced by the literature of the other cultures in which the rabbis lived. Just as scholars have noted uncanny similarities between certain narratives in the Hebrew Bible and their Egyptian and Mesopotamian counterparts, so too might the rabbis have either knowingly or unknowingly made use of the texts, stories and commentaries of those among

⁶⁵ Sincerest thanks to the following: Ph.D. Candidate David Everson and Dr. Stephen Kaufman for assistance with the dating and sequencing of the ancient texts; friend and colleague Amy Greenbaum for her insights into the Dead Sea Scroll material; Drs. Samuel Greengus, Adam Kamesar, and David Weisberg for their assistance in identifying those texts which would be useful for this chapter.

whom they lived. They most likely heard anecdotes and parables, maxims and jokes, and utilized them for their own purposes within their own literature. To know this with certainty of course is not possible, as we were not left with explicit written proof of what the rabbis did or did not have access to with respect to other oral or written traditions. We can only assume that cultures then functioned in much the same way as cultures do now that is, borrowing that which they found attractive and useful and making it their own.

With that in mind, it is the purpose of this chapter to briefly evaluate a number of other sources and texts from the ancient which may have been available to the rabbis, to see what they might offer. The five examples either pre-date or are contemporaneous with the rabbinic literature of the first ten centuries of the Common Era. The primary focus will be to identify some of the similarities and differences evident between these texts and those which the rabbis produced. Were there common literary traditions upon which the rabbis may have drawn for their own *halakhah* and *aggadah*? Are there strange similarities between two seemingly unrelated texts or are there differences so great that it is difficult to believe that both texts were commenting on the same biblical verse? These are some of the questions we will explore.

As with previous chapters each section will begin with a brief introduction giving succinct information about the text or piece of literature, its author, source, language, and place in history. The texts will be analyzed in chronological order based upon the time period in which most scholars agree they were written or

redacted. Where necessary, the original Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Hebrew terminology will be used along with English translations of key words and verses.

The Septuagint

The Septuagint, often abbreviated as LXX, is the oldest extant Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Its origin is dated to sometime between 300 and 200 BCE in Alexandria, Egypt. At this time in history, Jews were becoming more widely dispersed throughout the lands of the empire and many were beginning to lose their facility with the Hebrew language. This Greek translation provided Hellenistic Jews with a text which they could easily comprehend.

There are a number of theories as to the actual writing of the Septuagint. According to an ancient document called the "Letter of Aristeas," it was composed in Alexandria at the request Ptolemy II Philadelphus who, "was a bibliophile and heard from his librarian, Demetrius, that the Jewish Bible was worth translating for the king's archives. The king wrote to the high priest in Jerusalem, asking him to send scholars who would be able to translate the Pentateuch into Greek. The high priest sent 70 wise men whom the king lodged in a building on the island of Pharos, near Alexandria. Each translated only a part of the Pentateuch and after 70 days the work was complete"⁶⁶

In the Babylonian *Talmud* tractate *Megillah 9a* we read a slight variation on this story. The *Bavli* states that all 70 of the scholars each made his own translation and when they compared their work, they discovered that all of the

⁶⁶ Op. cit., All About Judaism.

texts were identical. The word Septuagint means seventy and is named to honor the seventy scholars responsible for its creation.

Other theories posit that the Egyptian Jewish community and not the king initiated the project out of the need for a Greek translation. Still others believe that the text may have simply emerged as a result of oral tradition in the synagogues of Alexandria. Whatever its exact origin, the entire Bible had been translated from the Hebrew into Greek by 100 BCE.

The LXX contains a different format from that of the *Tanakh*. The books are in a different order and additional books, which do not appear in the Hebrew Bible, are evident in the Septuagint. This includes some of the works from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. The translation itself is not standardized due to the number of translators involved and the period of time over which the project was completed. "The Septuagint is noteworthy for its popular, limited and simple vocabulary. It was because of the Septuagint translation that the rest of the world became aware of the culture of the Jews, and, according to Philo, the Jews of Alexandria held an annual festivity on the island of Pharos on the anniversary of its completion."⁶⁷

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one can only surmise as to whether or not the rabbis might have had some familiarity with any other texts which existed prior to and during their own time. This is not the case however, with the Septuagint. The sages in the Land of Israel were indeed aware of this translation and considered it a tremendous danger. They had a number of concerns, the first of which was that Greek would supplant the Hebrew language.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

"In addition, the translation began to be used as the basis for the allegorical sermons of the Hellenistic Jews, and the Christians, too, began to utilize it in their polemics against Judaism. The sages therefore announced: "The day that the *Torah* was translated was as terrible as the day that the golden calf was made." The last chapter of *Megillat Ta'anit* states: "On the 8th of *Tevet* the *Torah* was written in Greek during the time of King Ptolomy, and darkness came to the world for three days." Clearly the translation of the most holy of all writings into a pagan tongue was seen by the rabbis as a grave threat to the integrity of the text.

There is a passage appearing in the Septuagint which offers a wealth of information not available in the Masoretic Text regarding the Urim and Thummim. One verse in particular has not yet been discussed because the words Urim and Thummim do not appear in it at all in the Hebrew Bible. The Septuagint, however, offers a much expanded version of the same verse, which has greatly intrigued scholars over the years. Some have actually gone so far as to state that the account from the LXX enables them to assert with confidence what the UT were and how they were used. In order to truly appreciate the significance of this situation we will examine both texts.

The narrative in question is found in I Samuel 14:37-44 in the Hebrew Bible. Leading up to these five verses, the following has taken place. King Saul has just earlier battled against the Philistines and despite mass confusion among his troops who had lifted swords against one another, the Philistines had fled. Saul then commands the troops that they refrain from eating until they have been completely victorious. The king's son Jonathan who has been off with his arms

carrier doing a bit of creative Philistine battling of his own, had not heard his father's admonition. He comes upon a pool of honey on the ground tastes it and is revived, only to be told by the famished troops that his father has made them swear an oath not to eat. Jonathan in turn convinces the men that King Saul is responsible for the troubles in the land and encourages them to eat, saying that they will feel better if they feast on the spoils of their enemies. Having battled all day and feeling faint, the people fall upon the booty from the Philistines and eat the animals raw and dripping with blood, a serious transgression of the laws of the *Torah*. Upon hearing this, Saul commands the people to disperse and bring him oxen and sheep which are killed and sacrificed upon an altar which the king has built. Not wanting to wait until daylight to continue his pursuit of the Philistines, King Saul is determined to lead the troops by night. The soldiers support Saul and say that they will do whatever he wishes, but when he calls upon the High Priest for assistance, he encounters a slight problem. The Masoretic text of I Samuel 14:37 reads as follows:

וַיִּשְׁאַל שָׁאוּל בְּאֱלֹהִים הֲאֶרְדָּ אַחֲרֵי כָל־שָׂטָיִם הַתִּתְּנָם בְּיָד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא עָנָהוּ בְיָוִם

הַקּוֹא:

"So Saul inquired of God, 'Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you deliver them into the hands of Israel?' But He did not answer him that day."

The use of the phrase **וַיִּשְׁאַל שָׁאוּל בְּאֱלֹהִים** is the formula which indicates that Saul is inquiring of the Urim and Thummim. This is why he has called the High Priest to him beforehand. Unfortunately, God does not respond

and King Saul suspects that someone among them has sinned. The text continues in I Samuel 14:38-44:

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל גִּשּׁוּ הַלֵּם כָּל פְּנוֹת הָעָם וּרְאוּ בְמָה הִיְתָה הַחֲטָאת הַזֹּאת
יִשְׁנֻ בְּיוֹנָתָן בְּנִי כִי מוֹת יָמוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם יִהְיֶה הַמּוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת הַיּוֹם: כִּי חַי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לְעֶבֶר אֶחָד נֶאֱנִי וַיּוֹנָתָן כָּל הָעָם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל וְאִין עֲנֵהוּ מִכָּל
שָׁאוּל הַטּוֹב בְּעִינֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל בְּנִי נִהְיָה לְעֶבֶר אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָעָם אֶל
יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲבֵה תַּמִּים וַיִּלְכְּדוּ יוֹנָתָן וְשָׁאוּל וְהָעָם יֵצְאוּ:
וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל הֲפִילוּ בִּי וּבִין יוֹנָתָן בְּנִי וַיִּלְכְּדוּ יוֹנָתָן: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל-יוֹנָתָן
הַגִּידָה לִּי מָה עָשִׂיתָה וַיַּגֵּד-לוֹ יוֹנָתָן וַיֹּאמֶר טַעַם טַעַמְתִּי בַקָּצֶה הַמָּטָה אֲשֶׁר-בְּיָדִי
מִעֵט דָּבַשׁ הִנֵּנִי אֲמֹת: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל כֹּה-יַעֲשֶׂה אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסֵף כִּי-מוֹת תָּמוּת
יוֹנָתָן:

'Then Saul said, 'Come forward, all chief officers of the troops, and find out how this guilt was incurred today. For as the LORD lives who brings victory to Israel, even if it was through my son Jonathan, he shall be put to death!' Not one soldier answered him. And he said to all the Israelites, 'You stand on one side, and my son Jonathan and I shall stand on the other.' The troops said to Saul, 'Do as you please.' Saul then said to the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Show Thammim.' Jonathan and Saul were indicated by lot, and the troops were cleared. And Saul said, 'Cast the lots between my son and me,' and Jonathan was indicated. Saul said to Jonathan, 'Tell me, what have you done?' And Jonathan told him, 'I only tasted a bit of honey with the tip of the stick in my hand.

I am ready to die.' Saul said, 'Thus and more may God do: You shall be put to death, Jonathan!' "

There are a number of unusual occurrences within this account. First and foremost is the use of the word *thammim* תָּמִים . Needless to say, the spelling is so close to that of *thummim* תּוֹמִים , that it is almost impossible to believe that this is anything other than a "scribo."⁶⁸ In addition, this is the only place within the entire *Tanakh* that the word appears, making it even more likely that it was simply an error on the part of the copyist. In many translations the phrase תָּמִים הָבָה has been rendered alternatively as, "give a true decision," "give a perfect lot," "give truth," "give a right judgment," and "give me the right answer."

Secondly, if we agree that it is the Thummim which is being used here, then it is the first time that we have seen it used in order to answer a series of "either-or" questions. First Saul and Jonathan are separated from the rest of the Israelites and then Jonathan is indicated as the guilty party.

Finally, the passage seems to indicate that the Thummim is some sort of lot or lots which are being used to determine who is at fault. The word *goralot* which is the more common term for lots is nowhere evident in verse 42, but two terms do appear which are commonly used in association with the lottery process. The first is הִפִּילוּ , the *hiphil* masculine plural imperative meaning to "throw down" or "cast down," specifically where lots are concerned. Additionally, we find the word נִלְכָּד meaning to "be entrapped" or "taken by lot."

⁶⁸ Thank you to my beloved Bible professor Dr. David Aaron who coined this term to refer to a biblical "typo" made by the scribe copying from one text or scroll to another.

Despite the fact that the actual words Urim and Thummim are not used in the passage from I Samuel, the combined usage of **וַיִּשְׁאַל שְׂאוּל בְּאֱלֹהִים** , **וַיִּלְכֹּד** , **הַפִּילוֹ** , **וַתָּמִים** , makes for a very strong case that the Urim and Thummim, or at the very least, the Thummim alone, is in use.

The Septuagint to these seven verses is quite similar to those of the *Tanakh*, except for verse 14:41. At this point there is a radical departure between the two texts. The translation of the LXX reads as follows:

"Then Saul said, 'Oh Lord, God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If the guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim [*dos delous*]; and if you indicate that it is in the people of Israel, give Thummim [*dos dehosioteta*].' And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped."⁶⁹

The Greek words *dos delous* and *dos dehosioteta* are used throughout the Septuagint to refer to the Urim and Thummim in those passages where the Divine Oracle is in use. *Dos delous* is translated as "clear manifestations" and *dehosioteta* as "holiness" or "completeness." These translations would be very much in keeping with others that we have seen up until this point for the UT. The real question is how this enlargement of the text came about in the Septuagint, that is, the inclusion of references to both the Urim and Thummim.

As is to be expected, there are a number of theories concerning the difference between I Samuel 14:41 in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint. The LXX provides more information than does the MT which has led some scholars to

⁶⁹ Translation taken from Van Dam. p. 199.

favor this text. The conjecture is that the LXX was copied from a more complete manuscript of the Bible and that in fact the Masoretic text had fallen victim to another scribal error known as homoioteleuton. This term comes from the Greek meaning "like endings," and involves an accidental omission of an individual word or phrase when the copyist's eye jumps from one line to another. This is certainly a reasonable explanation and if we look again at the translation of the LXX it is easy to see how something like this may have occurred.

"Then Saul said, 'Oh Lord, God of Israel, [why have you not answered your servant this day? If the guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim and if you indicate that it is in the people of Israel] give Thummim.' And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped."

The bracketed words indicate the entire segment which does not appear in the Masoretic Text. A scribe could have certainly made the mistake of skipping from the first "Israel" to the second one, thereby leaving out the entire phrase within the brackets and ending up with, "Then Saul said, 'Oh Lord, God of Israel, give Thummim.' And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped." What remains is a verse which reads exactly as it appears in the *Tanakh*! Again, according to this theory, the scribe was simply working with a more complete manuscript when preparing the Septuagint than the one from which the Masoretic Text had been copied.

It goes without saying that there are other scholars who do not ascribe to this explanation for the differences between the Bible and the Septuagint.

"Although it has been argued that the occurrence of several other lacunae of this

kind in the MT in I Samuel favor a homoioteleuton here, it seems highly unlikely that such a large and significant section of material could have dropped out of the MT for this reason. Furthermore, a tendency on the part of the LXX to enlarge the text for purpose of elucidation where the translators deemed this necessary has been demonstrated in Samuel, and the conclusion has been drawn that the LXX represents basically the same Hebrew text (only explained and enlarged) as the MT ... When all of the above factors are weighed, the most attractive conclusion is that the MT should be preferred."⁷⁰

Once again there is uncertainty as to the identity of the Urim and Thummim and with respect to the Septuagint, whether or not I Samuel 14:41 was even talking about the UT in the first place. Did the sages who wrote the rabbinic literature know about the Septuagint? There is *Talmudic* evidence that indeed they did. Could they have been aware of the difference in this specific verse? That we will most likely never know!

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), first discovered in a Judean Desert cave in 1947, are most certainly one of the most important archaeological finds of the 20th century. These ancient scrolls and scroll fragments, found in eleven caves along the shores of the Dead Sea, were connected with a sect living in the area of Qumran. Many scholars believe that this Qumran community and the Essenes were one and the same and that their origins may date back as early as 167

⁷⁰ Ibid., pps. 201 and 203.

BCE, prior to the Maccabean revolt. The founder and leader of the sect was known as the Teacher of Righteousness and was most likely a priest.

This remarkable discovery yielded tens of thousands of fragments, written in various dialects of Hebrew as well as Aramaic. "All the scrolls, with a few minor exceptions, are Jewish religious texts...These religious writings are of two different kinds: the *biblical* and the *non-biblical*. The *biblical* texts are copies of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament), forming about one-quarter of the total number of scrolls in the collection. The caches included a copy of every one of the books of the Jewish Bible, except, apparently, the book of Esther. Not a trace of Esther has turned up."⁷¹

The importance of this "Dead Sea Bible" cannot be overestimated. Some of pre-date by at least a millennium the traditional Hebrew texts from the medieval period which served as the basis for our modern translations of the Bible. "In many cases, the scrolls have supported the traditional text of the Bible, but in others, what they say in particular verses (their "readings") agrees with nontraditional versions like the Septuagint ... Sometimes the scrolls preserve readings we never knew existed. At other times, the scrolls contain differences more profound than the readings of individual verses. They preserve "editions" of entire biblical books that differ from the traditional text."⁷²

In addition to the biblical scrolls, the Qumran sect produced other major writings. They spoke of their messianic hopes and rules of the community in the *Manual of Discipline* and *Rule of the Congregation*. The *Copper Scroll* told of a

⁷¹ Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., & Edward Cook. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins) 1996. p. 11.

⁷² Ibid.

vast treasure hidden away in Jerusalem or elsewhere in the Land of Israel and the *War Rule* relayed instructions for the final battle of the "Sons of Light" and the "Sons of Darkness." Laws regarding the Temple area and purity were outlined in the *Temple Scroll* and within other scrolls were found hymns, sermonic material and legal and moral precepts. "Qumran, through its literature and depictions of others, has left behind a fairly well-limned portrayal of its life and beliefs and, most important, definite evidence of the existence of Jewish groupings other than the Pharisees and Sadducees."⁷³

The translation and study of the Dead Sea Scrolls has captured the fascination of scholars for the past six decades and this scholarship has led to the publication of hundreds of volumes on the subject. It would be impossible within the scope of this thesis to begin to scratch even the surface of what has been revealed by the Scrolls to date. Therefore, the focus of this section will be strictly to identify a select number of passages within the Dead Sea Scrolls which mention the Urim and Thummim in order to see how the mysterious objects were understood by the community of Qumran.

As discussed in Chapter Two on the Biblical Evidence, the verse from Deuteronomy 33:8 describes the blessing which Moses bestows upon the Tribe of Levi. They are the inheritors of the precious Urim and Thummim because of their faithfulness at Massah and Meribah. The Qumran text elaborates on this notion of faithfulness and describes what the Levites did which the other tribes did not:

⁷³ Ibid.

["Of Levi he said: 'Give to Levi Your Thummim, and Your Urim to Your
 loyal one, whom You tested at Mass]ah, with whom You con[tes]ted at the waters
 of Meribah; who s[aid] [of his father and mother, 'I regard them not': he ignored
 his kin, and did not] acknow[ledge his children]. For [they observed Your wo]rd,
 [and kept Your] covenant. [They teach Jacob Your ordinances, and Israel Your
 law; they place incense] before You, and whole burnt offerings on Your altar.
 [Bless his substance, O Lord, and accept the work of his hand; crush the loins of
 his adversaries, of those who hate him, so that they never] rise again. [...The]
 Urim and Thummim belong to the man who [...] For he sai[d] [...the] land,
 because [...]⁷⁴

The passage begins with the words, "Give to Levi your Urim and Your
 Thummim," a slight variation from the Deuteronomic text which simply begins,
 "Your Urim and Your Thummim to your faithful one." The act of giving to Levi
 whatever these objects might have been is implied. Also, this passage from the
 Dead Sea Scrolls provides us with additional information as to the exact
 misbehavior of the Israelites as compared with the righteous behavior of the
 Levites which resulted in their being rewarded with the Urim and Thummim.
 Apparently the Israelites had little regard for either their parents or children,
 leaving the impression that each one was concerned only for his or her own
 welfare. The Levites, on the other hand, continued to be faithful to God's
 covenant and to teach God's Law to all of Israel. What's more, they maintained
 the Temple and its sacrifices for the benefit of the entire community. This

⁷⁴ Op. cit., Wise, Abegg & Cook. p. 226.

selflessness on the part of the Tribe of Levi earned them the title of "Righteous Ones" and the gift of the valuable Urim and Thummim.

Another scroll entitled the *Apocryphon of Moses* details "an unprecedented procedure of adjudication for dealing with a case not raised in the Bible: What to do if a prophet's tribe appeals an accusation against him, claiming that he is a truthful and faithful prophet?"⁷⁵ The fragment describes a process which scholars have called *Tongues of Fire*, in which the Urim and Thummim were used to prove the High Priest's authenticity or lack thereof. In this case, either a positive or negative response was elicited. The following translation is from fragments identified as 1Q29 and 4Q376 and offer a negative ruling concerning the prophet:

"for the Urim [...*the stone when...*] they shall give light to thee and *he/it* (i.e., 'the priest' or 'the cloud') shall go forth together *with it (?) with flashes of fire*, then the left stone which is on his left hand side shall shine forth to the eyes of all the assembly until *the priest finishes speaking...*"⁷⁶

A very similar event takes place if the priest is indeed truthful in his prophecy, only this time accompanied by flashes of fire from the right hand stone. These accounts are similar to some of the passages from rabbinic literature which speak of the stones of the breastplate flashing out brilliant lights to answer questions. In the case of the text from this Scroll, it is not entirely clear whether the High Priest is holding the stone in one hand or the other or whether the

⁷⁵ Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam, Editors in Chief. *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Volume I*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) 2000. p. 579.

⁷⁶ Cornelius Van Dam. *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*. (Indiana: Eisenbraun's) 1997. p. 17.

reference is to the stones on the shoulders of the priest, one of which was on his "right hand" side and the other on the "left hand" side. As mentioned earlier, this is a procedure which is nowhere evident in the Masoretic Text and offers an additional situation in which the UT might have been used. Determining the authenticity of the High Priest would have been paramount to the members of the Qumran Sect. This group had separated itself from the priesthood and Temple in Jerusalem, holding them in disdain for what they perceived as their corrupt and impure practices. For the sect at Qumran, the Urim and Thummim as tools of divination through which the priest communicated with God, offered proof positive of his authority.

The biblical verse from Numbers 27:21 which tells of Joshua standing before Eleazar the Priest while he inquires of the Urim and Thummim also appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls and is an expansion upon that which we read in the *Torah*. Another fragment from the DSS which mentions the Urim and Thummim is found in the *Statutes of the King* which is part of the *Temple Scroll*. This fragment, which deals with the issue of when a king is permitted to go out to war, has been dated by scholars to the end of the second or beginning of the first century BCE. The DSS passage reads as follows:

"...who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim and Thummim. At his word he shall go out, and at his word he shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him; he shall not go out by the counsel of his heart until he inquires by the judgment of the Urim and the Thummim..."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

It is impossible not to see the remarkable similarity between this verse and that of Numbers 27:21 which in translation reads:

"But he shall present himself to Eleazar the Priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the Lord. By such instruction they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelites, the whole community."

In the first case, the subject in question (he) is the king who is not to go out to war until he has first consulted with the High Priest via the Urim and Thummim. In the passage from Numbers, the subject is Joshua who is also required to go present himself to the priest (Eleazar) before entering battle. In the account from the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, we get the extra admonition that the king is not to go out based upon his own gut instinct but must first inquire of the judgment of the UT. The Urim and Thummim are mentioned twice as a pair in the DSS whereas in Numbers, only the word Urim appears and only once. This is a slight variation upon whose significance one could only speculate. What is of more consequence is the dating of the passage itself. If scholars are correct about the dating of the *Temple Scroll*, it would seem to contradict that which we read in some of the rabbinic passages which asserted that the Urim and Thummim ceased to function after the first prophets or after the destruction of the First Temple. This reading seems to imply that this type of consultation was still in use by the priests of the second and first centuries before the Common Era including the period of the Maccabean revolt.

A final note of interest with respect to the Urim and Thummim in the Dead Sea Scrolls concerns the use of an unusual term found nowhere in our Masoretic Text. As was noted in Chapter Three on Etymology of the Terms Urim and Thummim, there is some discussion as to whether or not the words are "true" plurals. Was the ים, (*im*), a *yod* followed by a *mem sofit*, really indicative of more than one object or was it an example of the archaic *mimetic mem* which simply mimics the plural? The Dead Sea Scrolls introduces an interesting twist to this dilemma by using the word *Urtum* אורתום, an apparent conflation of the two separate words. The term appears in a number of places including the *Thanksgiving Hymns* and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. At least one scholar has determined that אורתום is the singular of אורים and תומים which would clearly disagree with those who theorize that these words are in themselves not genuine plural forms. If the words אורים ותומים are translated as "light and perfection," then the blended word אורתום might be translated as "light of perfection" or something of that nature. "Although there is no agreement on whether there is a clear relationship between the Qumran term and the Hebrew terms for the UT, translations such as 'perfect light' seem to be the most widely accepted. It is difficult to draw very many conclusions from the occurrence of אורתום because of the peculiar problems in interpreting the passages in question. What does appear to be a constant element in all the occurrences is that *urtum* is used in association with God, either for divine illumination and revelation or for a 'celestial light,' associated with the *debir* of the

heavenly sanctuary and perhaps with the appearance of the throne of Glory itself."⁷⁸ Like so many other characteristics of the Urim and Thummim, the unusual word אֹרְתוֹם will likely remain a mystery.

The Samaritan Pentateuch

One of the greatest unknowns still revolving around the Urim and Thummim has to do with their origin and construction. When first introduced in Exodus 28:30 we learn only that they were placed in the *hoshen mishpat* over Aaron's heart to be worn when he comes before the Lord. As discussed in the introduction to this study, we have no description of how they were crafted and of what they were made, if indeed they were physical objects at all. The Samaritan Pentateuch, in a very small way, assists in answering at least part of this question.

"The Samaritans were descendants of the people who were formed by the mixture of Israelites remaining in the northern kingdom of Israel with the other peoples settled there by the Assyrian conquerors after 722 BCE."⁷⁹ The Samaritans differed in a number of ways from the "native" Israelites, the most significant of which was that they observed only the *Torah* and rejected the other books of the Bible as well as all of the Oral Law. Rather than Mount Sinai representing the holy mountain of their faith, the Samaritans recognized Mount Gerizim as this site. In addition, the Samaritan calendar and their observance of the festivals varied from that of the Israelites. For the Samaritans, Shavuot

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁹ *Judaic Classics Library CD Rom. All About Judaism.* (Chicago: Davka Software) 2000.

always fell on a Sunday as they began the counting of the Omer on the first Sunday following Passover. The *Talmud*, which considered the Samaritans to have descended from non-Jewish tribes who converted to Judaism, has one entire tractate (*Khutim*) dedicated to the relationships between Samaritans and Jews. "The Samaritan Pentateuch can be characterized as a sectarian redaction of a biblical text type in use during the Hasmonean Period. It contains many demonstrable secondary readings in the form of additions and adjustments to the text. Such readings were designed to clarify and remove historical difficulties and objectionable passages."⁸⁰ The Samaritans must have recognized this need with regard to the origin of the UT and were no doubt troubled by the silence of the Masoretic text on the subject.

In the MT of Exodus 28:30 we read the following:

וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־חֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת־הָאֹרִיִּם וְאֶת־הַתָּמִיִּם וְהָיוּ עַל־לֵב אֶהְרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְנִשָּׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת־מִשְׁפָּט בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־לִבּוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תָּמִיד:

In the Samaritan Pentateuch, the verse reads identically except for four words which are appended to the very beginning: וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הָאֹרִיִּם וְאֶת־הַתָּמִיִּם "And you shall make the Urim and the Thummim." The addition of the verb וַעֲשִׂיתָ is truly remarkable in its implication that the UT were made before they were placed within the *hoshen hamishpat*. This reading suggests that the Urim and Thummim, just like all of the other pieces of clothing worn by the High Priest, were somehow constructed. We gain no further insight into exactly how this

⁸⁰Op. cit., Van Dam. p. 234.

might have been done but we are more certain that the UT were physical objects which did not exist prior to the time of Aaron's ordination.

Further on in Exodus 39 in the biblical text we find a repetition of all of the instructions for the making of the priestly garments and the implementation of those instructions. Exodus 39:21 reads:

וַיִּרְכְּסוּ אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן מִטְּבַעְתָּיו אֶל־טְבַעַת הָאֶפֶד בְּפִתִּיל תְּכֵלֶת לְהִיָּת עַל־תְּשֻׁב
הָאֶפֶד וְלֹא־יָצָא הַחֹשֶׁן מֵעַל הָאֶפֶד כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

"The breastpiece was held in place by a cord of blue from its rings to the rings of the ephod, so that the breastpiece rested on the decorated band and did not come loose from the ephod—as the Lord commanded Moses."

The words Urim and Thummim appear nowhere in this verse in the Masoretic text. Once again this omission must have been observed by the authors of the Samaritan Pentateuch who found the exclusion of the all-important Urim and Thummim to be problematic. In this case, they appended a clause to the end of the verse which reads,

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הָאֻרִּים וְאֶת־הַתֻּמִּיִּם כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

"Then they made the Urim and the Thummim as the Lord had commanded Moses."

In order to maintain consistency, the Samaritan Pentateuch again adds this clause to make the picture complete. Exodus 28:30 provides the initial directive to make the Urim and Thummim and Exodus 39:21 carries out that command which came directly through Moses from God.

We might find the Samaritan Pentateuch a more desirable text due to these phrases which seem to clarify the making of the Urim and Thummim. Unfortunately, the Samaritan Pentateuch is the only extant text which reads this way. "The silence of the MT is remarkable, to be sure, for Exodus 28 and 39 meticulously describe God's command and the execution of that command to make all the other pieces of the high-priestly clothing. Nevertheless, the MT should be retained as the more difficult reading, and the text of the Samaritan Pentateuch should be rejected. The text of these passages is simply another illustration of the tendency of the Samaritan Pentateuch to smooth over problems."⁸¹

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there is no absolute way of determining which texts outside of the Hebrew Bible might have been available to the sages who wrote the rabbinic literature. Short of the rabbis telling us what they did or did not know about, the best we can do is hypothesize on the subject. We are able to note, however, that none of the rabbinic sources investigated for this paper offered any version of a narrative describing the Urim and Thummim having been "made." Not only is the Masoretic Text silent on the subject but the rabbinic literature did not seem to be troubled by the seemingly obvious omission. In this respect, the Samaritan Bible is truly unique.

Josephus Flavius

Josephus was a Jewish historian believed to have lived from around the year 38 CE until approximately 100 CE. He wrote numerous historical accounts

⁸¹ Ibid.

in defense of his fellow Jews but was hated by them as one who had been a traitor to his own people. In the year 66 CE, when the Jewish War broke out, he was given a key military appointment as commander of Galilee. His task was to prepare and command the defense against the expected Roman counter-attack to the Jewish rebellion. Instead, following a mass suicide which he orchestrated, Josephus ended up surrendering to the Romans. He ultimately secured himself a role in the court of the Emperor Vespasian as an historian.

The accuracy of Josephus' writings was writing is a subject of great scholarly debate. All that we really know about Josephus is what he wrote about himself and there is no independent corroborative material with which to prove or disprove his statements. Some of his work is self-biographic and at times borders on fanciful. At various points during his lifetime, for example, Josephus describes himself alternately as a Sadducee, a Pharisee, and a resident among the Essenes of the cult sect at Qumran. He claims that at age sixteen he committed himself to studying these three groups in order to choose the one that might be most appropriate for him. "Not satisfied with what he had learned, he decided to join a desert hermit with whom he spent a period of three years living an ascetic life in the wilderness, wearing clothes made of reeds, and eating wild herbs. After this period of hermitage, he decided to join the Pharisees."

The problem of the historic accuracy of Josephus' writing might be less difficult to resolve if we were able to determine for whom he was writing. This too has been a topic of scholarly debate. If indeed Josephus was a member of the Roman Court writing at the whim of the Roman Emperor, then it would be easy to

understand if his historical accounts looked more favorably upon the Romans. If on the other hand Josephus was attempting to assuage the loathing of his fellow Jews for his disloyalty, then his works would have a more apologetic and even adulatory tone. In truth, Josephus' writings reflect both of these positions.

Josephus wrote three major works: *The Jewish War*, *Antiquities of the Jews*, and *Against Apion* which included his autobiography, *The Life*, as its appendix. It is with the second of these works, *Antiquities of the Jews or Judean Antiquities*, that we will concern ourselves. *Antiquities* is an enormous work of twenty-one volumes written in Greek and completed in 93-94 CE. Josephus was in his mid 50's at that time and may have written this monumental piece in part to placate his fellow Jews. "His situation at the time of writing—his patrons, friends, audience, motives—is not immediately clear, but must be hypothetically reconstructed...the simplest solution is that Josephus expects Gentile readers who are deeply interested in Judean culture. That is what the prologue implies: He writes because he has been pursued by those who are curious about Judean history."⁸²

Following a brief introductory section, *Antiquities* traces the complete history of the Jewish people beginning with the creation of the world and ending with the Roman Conquest and fall of Jerusalem. Josephus' account is filled with embellishments of the biblical narrative and often he removes details which he finds to be unessential or not supportive of his historic bias. The section with which we are concerned is found in Book Three. Here we begin by reading of

⁸² Louis H. Feldman. *Judean Antiquities: Volume 3, Books 1-4*. (Leiden: Brill) 2000. pps. xvii and xix.

the journey of the Israelites through the desert under the leadership of Moses and conclude with the incident of the twelve scouts who are sent into Canaan to spy on the land. The description of the building of the tabernacle and the construction of the priestly garments is within this book.

In Book Three, Paragraphs 162-171 (3.162-171), Josephus offers a detailed description of the vestments of the Kohen Gadol which is reminiscent of the rich detail that we find in the biblical text itself. He takes particular interest in the Breastpiece of Judgment or $\psi\delta\psi\mu\eta\ \psi\psi\eta$ which he refers to as the *essen*.

Paragraphs 3.163-1.64 read as follows:

τῷ δὲ διακένῳ τοῦ ἐνδύματος σύνεισι περίτμημα σπιθαμῆς τὸ μέγεθος χρυσῷ τε καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς τῷ ἐφώδῃ βάμμασι διηριθισμένον ἐσσην μὲν καλεῖται σημαίνει δὲ τοῦτο κατὰ τὴν Ἑλλήνων γλώτταν λόγιον πληροῖ δὲ ἀκριβῶς τοῦ ἐφώδου ὅπερ ὑφαίνοντες κατὰ στήθος ἐξέλιπον ἐνοῦται δ' ὑπὸ κρίκων χρυσέων αὐτῷ τε κατὰ γωνίαν ἐκάστην κάκείνῳ τῶν ἴσων προσκεκοινωμένων ῥάμματος ὑακίνθου παραληφθέντος εἰς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους κατάδεσιν τοῖς κρίκοις

"But in the void place of this garment there was inserted a piece of the size of a span, embroidered with gold, and the other colours of the ephod, and was called *Essen* , [the breastplate,] which, in the Greek language, signifies the Oracle. This piece exactly filled up the void space in the ephod. It was united to it by golden

rings at every corner, the like rings being annexed to the ephod, and a blue ribbon was made use of to tie them together by those rings.”⁸³

The key word in Josephus’ narrative is ἐσσην the Greek which he uses in place of the יֶשֶׁן . “As it was that the יֶשֶׁן or *essen* was the means of giving the power of prophecy to the person who wore it, the Essenes were also credited by Josephus with the power of prophesying (*War* 2.159).⁸⁴ Josephus then continues with a remarkable description of the *essen* including the twelve stones on the breastplate, each of which was outstanding in size and beauty and engraved with the names of *Iakobos*, Jacob.

Notwithstanding the great detail in which Josephus has described the *essen*, surprisingly absent from the narrative is any mention of either the Urim and Thummim or Aaron. The “oracle” now seems to be associated with the breastpiece itself and we hear nothing of the UT. This strange omission might be explained by Josephus’ comments later on in Book Three. In his depiction of the breastpiece, Josephus has mentioned the “sardonyxes,” two stones placed at the shoulders of the priestly vestments to which the *essen* was attached. He explains that due to the weight of the *essen* and to protect it from the possibility of slipping, two additional gold loops were made and it was into these that the shoulder stones were hooked. In 3.185, Josephus has described the Ephod, the *Essen*, and the Sardonyxes in the following way:

“He also appointed the breastplate to be placed in the middle of the ephod, to resemble the earth, for that has the very middle place of the world. And

⁸³ *BibleWorks CD Rom*. (Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC) 2003.

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, Feldman. p. 275.

the belt which surrounded the high priest all around, signified the ocean, for that goes all around and includes the universe. Each of the sardonyxes declares to us the sun and the moon; those, I mean, that were in the nature of buttons on the high priest's shoulders."⁸⁵

This is a stunningly beautiful account which appears nowhere in the *Pentateuch*. Several paragraphs later, Josephus continues in 3.215-218;

"For as to those stones, which we told you before, the high priest bare on his shoulders, which were sardonyxes, (and I think it needless to describe their nature, they being known to everyone,) the one of them shone out when God was present at their sacrifices; I mean that which was in the nature of a button on his right shoulder, bright rays darting out from there, and being seen even by those who were most remote; which splendour yet was not before natural to the stone. This has appeared a wonderful thing to such as have not so far indulged themselves in philosophy, as to despise Divine Revelation. Yet will I mention what is still more wonderful than this: for God declared beforehand by those twelve stones which the high priest bare on his breast, and which were inserted into his breastplate, when they should be victorious in battle; for so great a splendour shone forth from them before the army began to march, that all the people were sensible of God's being present for their assistance. Where it came to pass that those Greeks who had a veneration for our laws, because they could not possibly contradict this, called that breastplate The Oracle. Now this breastplate, and this sardonyx, stopped shining two hundred years before I composed this book, God having been displeased at the transgressions of his

⁸⁵ Ibid. *BibleWorks*

laws. Of which things we shall further discourse on a more fit opportunity; but I will now go on with my proposed narration."⁸⁶

We learn several important things from these four brief paragraphs. First of all, Josephus tells us that it was both the shoulder stones as well as the twelve stones inserted into the breastplate itself that worked in concert. Not only did bright rays emanate from the sardonyxes, but the twelve stones of the *essen* also shone forth with a great brilliance. Next we learn that Josephus has associated the shining of the breastpiece and shoulder stones with victory in battle. The magnificent light indicated God's presence among the Israelites and served as a communication that they would triumph in their military conquests. No other purpose for the *essen* is described such as for determination of guilt or innocence or distribution of property. Thirdly we learn from the passage that this light was visible not only to the Israelites but to the Greeks as well, who held a certain veneration for the Judean customs and recognized that God was in their midst. The narrative states that the Greeks called the *essen*, the breastpiece, an "Oracle" and Josephus employs the Greek term *λόγιον* which is the same word used in the Septuagint in Exodus 28:15.

Finally, and perhaps most interesting, is that Josephus gives us his time frame for the cessation of the use of the oracle as well as a reason for its no longer functioning. He tells us that the *essen* and sardonyx ceased to shine two hundred years before he wrote *Judean Antiquities*. Since it is believed that this work was completed in 93/94 CE, this would take us back to around 105 BCE or

⁸⁶ Op. cit., Feldman. pps. 288-289

shortly before the death of John Hyrcanus. "Indeed, Josephus (*War* 1.68-69 and *Ant.* 13.299-300) says that John Hyrcanus possessed the gift of prophecy and was in such close touch with the Deity that he was never ignorant of the future."⁸⁷ In his autobiography *Life*, Josephus claims that he is of Hasmonean ancestry which may account for his flattery of John Hyrcanus' talents. In any event, the *essen* and shoulder stones ceased to send out their brilliant rays because of God's displeasure in the Israelites' violation of laws. In the *Tanakh* we are generally aware of exactly which laws have been violated but in the case of Josephus, we are not given this detailed information.

These passages from *Judean Antiquities* call to mind two pieces from the rabbinic literature which were discussed in the previous chapter. Like the section from *Bavli Yoma 73a and 73b*, Josephus gives an account of a miraculous priestly garment which sends out dazzling beams of light to indicate God's presence. Unlike the *Talmudic* passage, however, the twelve stones engraved with the letters of the names of Jacob's sons do not light up to spell out the answer to a question being posed. In fact, nowhere in these passages does Josephus mention that any sort of inquiry of the breastpiece is being made. We are also reminded of the passage from *Mishnah Sotah 9:12* which claimed that when the First Prophets died out that the Urim and Thummim ceased to function. Josephus does not mention the UT at all in these passages, but if we are to understand the "oracle" of which he speaks as being akin to the Urim and Thummim, then his dates and those stated in the *Mishnah* would differ by over 450 years.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

There is one additional paragraph found in the *Antiquities of the Jews* which warrants some attention. This one found in Book Eight speaks of the evolution and fall of Israel. This specific passage describes the construction of Solomon's Temple along with its lavish accoutrements and the vestments to be worn by the High Priest. It states the following:

"The sacerdotal garments which belonged to the high priest, with the long robes, and the oracle, and the precious stones, were one thousand; but the crown upon which Moses wrote [the name of God], was only one, and has remained to this very day. He also made ten thousand sacerdotal garments of fine linen, with purple sashes for every priest" (*Antiquities* 8.93). Josephus is making a very clear distinction between the crown worn by the priest and the rest of the garments. It appears that the crown was unique; it was the only one of its kind ever made and upon it Moses had written the Tetragrammaton, the secret and unpronounceable name of God. We get the impression, however, that all other pieces of the priest's wardrobe had been made in great abundance, including the "oracle" (*essen*) and the precious stones which had been embedded within it. This is quite different from the biblical account which gives the impression of the unique nature of the priestly vestments. Likewise, the Urim and Thummim are depicted when first introduced in Exodus 28:30, as one of a kind and the sole property of the High Priest. This may be yet another example of Josephus' tendency to embellish the text in an attempt to make it more appealing to the audience for whom he wrote.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

The *Targumim* are the ancient Aramaic translations of the Bible. Their composition is dated several centuries before the Common Era a time during which Aramaic was the primary language in the Ancient Near East including Judea. Many of the earliest *Targumic* fragments were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Included among these scrolls was a *Targum* to the Book of Job, leading scholars to believe that these translations were used not only for synagogue and liturgical purposes but for private and public study as well.

There are several genres evident within *Targumic* material including poetry and liturgical collections. There are *Targumim* to specific books of the Bible and others which are translations and interpretations of the entire Biblical text. The latter most accurately describes the *Targum Pseudo Jonathan*. The *Targumim* were produced in both Israel and Babylonia providing versions in both Galilean Aramaic and Babylonian Aramaic. "The Babylonian and Palestinian scrolls differed in their literary approaches no less than in their dialects. Whereas the *Targums* edited in Babylonia tend to be literal word-for-word renderings of the Hebrew original (with some exceptions), the Palestinian *Targums* are often paraphrastic and expansive with interpretive passages that do not exist in the Hebrew base text. These interpretations are usually evoked by some difficulty in the Hebrew verse and almost always have parallels in early rabbinic literature."⁸⁸

The *Targumim* might depart from the original text by identifying anonymous people or places in the Hebrew Bible, by attempting to reconcile contradictory narratives, and by avoiding anthropomorphic descriptions of God.

⁸⁸ Op. cit., *All About Judaism*.

"Likewise, embarrassing passages related to the Patriarchs or the ancient Israelites are frequently altered to protect the dignity of these figures. The Palestinian *Targums* often insert lengthy *aggadic* passages into the biblical narratives."⁸⁹ The similarities between the content and the format of the *Targumim* and *midrashic* literature is quite evident but, "the relationship between *Targum* and *Midrash* is impossible to define. Nechemiah 8:8 is frequently cited as the point of departure, or even as the first instance, of both genres... The *Targum* in any case is not merely a translation, but also an explanation and often expansion of the Bible by means of *haggadah*. It must be assumed that many elements of *Targum* entered the *midrash*, and vice versa, so that there was no independent development of the independent genres."⁹⁰

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan represents the latest of this genre of Aramaic translations and it is believed to have been redacted sometime between the 7th and 12th centuries CE. *The Urim and Thummim* would no doubt have presented the authors of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* with a prime opportunity for their own interpretation. This was exactly the sort of biblical narrative which caught their attention, that is, objects of ambiguous origin which warranted further explication. This is especially evident regarding two of the verses in which the words Urim and Thummim appear, Exodus 28:30 and Numbers 27:21. It should be noted that the *Targum* contains no demarcation of verse numbers but simply utilizes book numbers followed by the names of the *parashiot*. Therefore, Exodus 28:30

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Op. cit., Strack and Stemberger. p. 236

simply appears in *Sefer Sheni, Parasha Tetzavveh* and Numbers 27:21 is found in *Sefer Revi'i, Parasha Pinchas*.

Targum Pseudo Jonathan gives us an interesting expansion on the verse from *Shemot*. The translation of the Aramaic text reads as follows: "*And you shall put into the breastplate the Urim, which illuminate their words and make manifest the hidden things of the House of Israel, and the Thummim, which perfect their deeds, for the High Priest who seeks instruction from the Lord through them. Because in them is engraved and exposed the great and holy Name by which the three hundred and ten worlds were created ... and whoever pronounces this holy Name in the hour of distress, shall be saved.*"⁹¹

This verse has many of the same elements that we have seen in other texts such as the idea of illumination linked to the Urim and the perfection associated with the Thummim. Instead of a reference to Aaron however, the verse talks about the High Priest, making this a generalized instruction applicable to all the *Kohanim Gedolim* for all time. What is more noteworthy about the verse from *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* is the mention of the "Name," the unpronounceable name of God known as the tetragrammaton which is represented by the letters יהוה . It appears from this interpretation that it is not the Urim and Thummim themselves which make revelation possible but the uttering of God's name. This is quite a change from what we have encountered in the rabbinic literature which made no mention of the *Shem Hamephorash*, the unutterable name of God as being anyway involved with the UT.

⁹¹ Op. cit., Van Dam. p. 23

In Numbers 27:21, the second appearance of the word Urim in the *Tanakh*, Joshua is commanded to stand before Eleazar the Priest who will inquire of God concerning leading the people into war. The *Targum* adds: "According to the word of Eleazar the Priest they shall go forth to wage war, and according to his word they shall judge cases."⁹²

Again, this is a departure from the biblical text with which we are familiar. The rabbinic literature has certainly addressed the use of the Urim and Thummim for determination of war and the judgment of cases, but this is the first time a translation has taken up both issues in the same verse. The author took the opportunity to interpret Numbers 27:21 by expanding Eleazar's role to include using the UT for two distinct functions.

It should also be noted that the Pentateuch to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* mentions the Urim and Thummim a total of six times as opposed to the four times we encounter in the Masoretic Text to the *Torah*. In addition to the aforementioned verses, the *Targum* adds references to the UT in Numbers 3:32 and 31:6 and Deuteronomy 18:14, and to the Thummim alone in Numbers 11:5.⁹³ This is a radical departure from what we have experienced with the rabbinic literature. The rabbis did not find it problematic to interpret the text in a variety of ways or to use a verse or even part of a verse as a proof-text to prove their case. The rabbis however, would never have considered adding or deleting words from a verse or changing so much as a letter of the Holy Scripture. It was their mission to understand the complexities and mysteries of the *Torah* but never to

⁹² Ibid., p. 179.

⁹³ E.G. Clarke. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance*. (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.) 1984. pps. 11 and 596.

alter it, something about which the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* had no compunction!

Summary

It is indeed a fascinating exercise to explore the supplementary ancient texts which existed prior to or contemporaneous with the Hebrew Bible. Each of those that were examined for purposes of this chapter offered its own unique amplifications and interpretations of the Urim and Thummim and in some cases may have expanded the ways in which we think about these mysterious objects.

The Septuagint, the earliest extant Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, brings to light a new phenomenon. In I Samuel 14:41 we encounter an entire phrase containing the Greek equivalents of the words Urim and Thummim where no such phrase can be found in the *Tanakh*. Theories abound as to how such an insertion might have occurred or whether this was indeed the original reading and it is in fact the Masoretic Text which is corrupt. The rabbis who wrote the rabbinic literature knew of the Septuagint and considered it a danger and a desecration of the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tongue. We do not know, however, how well they knew the LXX and if they could have possibly been aware of the great disparity in the verse from Samuel.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls we discovered the reason behind the bestowal of the Urim and Thummim upon the Tribe of Levi. According to one of the fragments from Qumran, the Levites were faithful to the covenant with God, continued to teach *Torah* to the other Israelites, and maintained the Temple and

sacrifices. It was all of these actions which made them the "*hasidekha*" God's "pious ones" as described in Deuteronomy 33:8. The Scrolls also provide us with a narrative in which brilliant rays of light shoot forth from the Urim and Thummim thereby proving the legitimacy of the High Priest should his authenticity come into question. This narrative was reminiscent of some of the *aggadic* materials that described the gem stones on the *hoshen mishpat* as glowing with light and spelling out the answers to the Priest's questions with the letters inscribed upon the stones. Finally, the Dead Sea Scrolls introduce an intriguing new word, *urtum*, a seeming combination of Urim and Thummim, the meaning of which we can only guess.

In the Samaritan Pentateuch we discover the addition of a seemingly unremarkable phrase appended to the beginning of Exodus 28:30 which reads, *וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הָאֹרִיִּם וְאֶת־הַתְּמִיִּם*, "and you shall make the Urim and the Thummim." Similarly, Exodus 39:21 appends several words to the end of its verse saying, *וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הָאֹרִיִּם וְאֶת־הַתְּמִיִּם כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה*, "Then they made the Urim and the Thummim as God had commanded Moses."

Not satisfied with the UT simply "showing up" without any prior explanation, the writers of the Samaritan Pentateuch edited the text by representing the Urim and Thummim as objects which had been made, just like all of the other parts of the Tabernacle and the pieces of the Priest's garments. We know nothing of what they may have looked like or out of what they had been made, but this text assures us that they were indeed physical objects.

Josephus Flavius, whose life story has been preserved in the minutest of detail by his own hand, regardless of the fact that we will never know how much of what he has written is truth or fiction. As a man who lived during one of the most crucial periods of Jewish history, Josephus had an unparalleled view of life in both the Judean and Roman cultures. His *Antiquities of the Jews* which relates the history of the Jewish people from Creation through the Roman Conquest holds its own distinctive description of the Urim and Thummim. For Josephus the UT were the stones on the breastplate of the High Priest working in concert with the sardonyxes on shoulders to produce a magnificent light which would assure the Israelites victory in battle. Josephus also makes us aware of his position that the Urim and Thummim ceased to function two hundred years before he wrote *Antiquities*, placing their demise sometime in the first century before the Common Era.

And finally, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, which begins to more closely approximate the kind of *aggadic* literature with which we are more familiar. This ancient Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch makes its own unique contribution to the puzzling Urim and Thummim. The *Targum* associates the use of the UT with the uttering of the tetragrammaton, the mystical name of God known only to the High Priest. Unlike the sages of the rabbinic literature who would never consider changing so much as a letter within the *Torah*, the writers of the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* enlarged the text when necessary in its attempt to reconcile what was considered to be ambiguous or contradictory.

Each of these texts holds our fascination in its own way. Each adds to our curiosity about the Urim and Thummim and attempts to explain away some of the obscurity. How much if any of these writings the sages who wrote the rabbinic literature might have been aware of is largely unknown. It may be entirely possible that what was written within these ancient documents was available to the rabbis and they drew on the material for their own writing. We will never know with any certainty unless we find evidence in their words indicating this to be the case. In the meantime, like the Urim and Thummim themselves, this too shall remain a great mystery.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The purpose of this rabbinic thesis was to examine the rabbinic literature of the first millennium of the Common Era and to explore the ways in which the rabbis defined the nature and function of the mystical Urim and Thummim. What did our sages, through ten centuries of writing, have to say about these puzzling objects, their physical characteristics and mode of operation? Did the rabbis seem to be bothered by the paucity of biblical information about what appeared to be a vital means of communication with God? Did the rabbis have access to and rely upon other sources for their own understanding? These were just a few of the questions which the author hoped to answer in this study.

What sparked the initial interest in this topic was the relative silence of the Bible itself as to just what the Urim and Thummim were. As elucidated in Chapter Two on the Biblical Evidence, the biblical text has a mere seven mentions of the Urim and Thummim, sometimes as a word pair and sometimes as only a single term. This is a stunning discovery considering the fact that prior to, and some would say during the existence of the early prophets, the Urim and Thummim were a primary means of consultation with YHWH.

The author believed that the rabbinic literature would provide detailed information on the UT based upon a number of factors. First and foremost, clarification and amplification of the biblical text has always been the primary objective of the rabbinic literature. The redacted text came into the possession of the rabbis in the same general form as we see it today and the questions raised

in their minds were much the same as those which we still confront. The difference is that the rabbis lived in a time much closer to the redaction of the Bible than do we and this may have given them knowledge and insights which we cannot possibly fathom in the 21st century. Our scientific and archaeological research may be far more sophisticated but we are much farther removed from the time during which the Urim and Thummim were in use. The *halakhic* and *aggadic* writings are ripe with explanations of every word and phrase of the *Tanakh* and for each of those explanations we find one “*d’var aher*” (interpretation) after another. The rabbis left no stone unturned and if there was yet one more way of looking at the same verse, the rabbis were sure to have found it. The Urim and Thummim were certain to be just the kind of mystery which would attract the attention of the sages and motivate them to produce a wealth of descriptive material.

With regard to two specific subjects the rabbinic literature did not disappoint. The first of these deals with the situations in which the Urim and Thummim were used by the High Priest on behalf of the king or the Israelite community. The rabbis expanded their understanding of the UT to show that it was not only those passages containing the actual words **תָּמִיִּם** and **אוּרִים** which indicated their use. The sages argued that phrases such as **שָׁאַל בְּיָהוָה** and **בִּקֵּשׁ יְהוָה** meant that the UT were being consulted. Within the rabbinic literature there are plentiful passages that highlight the use of the UT for purposes of determining the most favorable times to go to war, the judgment of

guilt or innocence of an individual or group, and decisions on the distribution of property, primarily land.

Secondly, the rabbinic literature surveyed provided many wonderful accounts of the way in which the Urim and Thummim functioned. Of great importance to these passages was the interpretation the rabbis gave to the words. As discussed in Chapter Three on the Etymology of the Terms Urim and Thummim, modern scholarship seems to lean heavily in the direction of translating the words in one particular way. The issues of whether or not the words are true plurals or utilize the ancient *mimetic mem* or whether Urim and Thummim is a *hendiadys* are the subject of some discussion. But the most frequently posed theory about the meaning of the words themselves is that Urim derives from the root א-ר-ח having to do with "light" and that Thummim derives from the root מ-ל-ל for "completeness" or "perfection." This is indeed the way the rabbis understood the terms as evidenced in a number of the passages which were analyzed. The rabbis saw the Urim and Thummim as intimately linked to the *Hoshen HaMishpat*, the Breastplate of Judgment, a magnificent garment woven of wool and gold threads and embedded with twelve brilliant gemstones. These stones, along with the two on the High Priest's shoulders to which the *hoshen* was attached, shone out with marvelous rays of light when the Priest asked a question of YHWH. The most vivid example which we found in the rabbinic literature came from the *Talmud Bavli* tractate *Yoma 73a and 73b*. It is here that we see the Urim and Thummim described in this manner, including

the notion of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet etched into the stones, joining together to form words in response to the question posed.

It was surprising, given the relatively small number of biblical verses containing the words Urim and Thummim, that two of those verses (Leviticus 8:8 and I Samuel 28:6) yielded no passages in the rabbinic literature whatsoever. Equally as surprising were the number of passages which chose to go in a completely different direction, focusing on characters mentioned in the verse such as Doeg, David, and Saul, or on the interpretation of other words within the verse such as *hasidecha* and *hoshen*. In these cases it was almost as if the rabbis were "tiptoeing" around the Urim and Thummim, providing exegesis on only half the verse or one word within the verse and ignoring the UT entirely.

Despite the wealth of material found there was one important topic of discussion which was noticeably absent, that is, the actual origin of the Urim and Thummim. What makes this much more than just an interesting observation is the UT are first introduced in the context of a biblical narrative so rich in detail. Why is it that the rabbis did not see this as a problem in the text, one for which they could provide a multitude of explanations? Certainly within the rabbinic literature one can find many examples which help to shed light on whole biblical narratives which are unclear or lacking in detail. Similarly, the rabbis gravitated towards objects named in the Bible but not fully explained as to their origin or use. One case in point can be found in the *Mishnah* in *Masechet Avot*, one of the sections of *Seder Nezikin*. It is not the author's attempt to lead the discussion astray, but this particular *mishnah* provides an excellent illustration in

that it addresses a number of mysterious objects which seem to simply materialize in various places in the Bible and attempts to explain exactly when they were created. Avot 5:6 reads as follows:

עָשְׂרָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרָאוּ בְּעֶרְבַּ שַׁבָּת בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן, פִּי הָאָרֶץ, וּפִי הַבְּאֵר, וּפִי הָאֵתוֹן, וְהַקֶּשֶׁת, וְהַמָּן, וְהַמָּטָה, וְהַשְּׁמִיר, וְהַכֶּתֶב, וְהַמִּכְתָּב, וְהַלְוִיּוֹת. וַיֵּשׁ אוֹמְרִים, אֵף הַמֵּאֲקִין, וְקִבּוּרָתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְאֵילּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ. וַיֵּשׁ אוֹמְרִים, אֵף צֶבֶת בְּצֶבֶת עֲשׂוּיָהּ:

"Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath [on Friday] at twilight, and these are they: the mouth of the earth, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the ass, the rainbow, the manna, the rod, the *shamir*, letters, writing, and the tables of stone. And some say: Also the destroyers, the grave of Moses, and the ram of Abraham, our father. And some say: Also the tongs made with tongs [with which the first tongs were made].⁹⁴

This *mishnaic* passage demonstrates how the rabbis took a number of objects named throughout the *Torah* and clarifies when they came into being. It is entirely possible that someone listening to a public reading of the scroll might have heard one of these words and wondered about its origin. Did the *shamir*, the legendary rock-eating worm that hewed the stone for the altar, just spontaneously appear in Exodus 20:22? Did the abundant manna which first appears in Exodus 16:15 and sustained the Israelites for decades in the wilderness simply drop from the heaven without ever having been known to humankind before? The rabbis felt it imperative to craft an explanation for the

⁹⁴ Jacob Neusner. *Torah From Our Sages: Pirke Avot*. (Dallas: Rossel Books) 1984. p. 186.

etiology of those things which are not specifically accounted for in the creation stories of Genesis. Their reasoning was that these items came into being on the Eve of the Sabbath before the actual dawn of the seventh day and that they appeared later in the *Torah* only at such time when they were first needed for some specific task. In this particular case the *Mishnah* does not provide us with any prooftexts or substantiating data; we are simply to take it at face value that the analysis of the rabbis is correct.

The author had hoped to see a similar *midrash* with respect to the Urim and Thummim especially given the nature of their first appearance in Exodus 28:30. The Urim and Thummim, for all intents and purposes, just materialize. Within the context of a biblical narrative that is rich with the minutest of detail, the Urim and Thummim are given no explanation whatsoever. They are merely given to Aaron to wear in the breastplate with no further commentary. Where did they come from? Were they fashioned at the time of creation like the rainbow, the rod, and the tongs, only to turn up at the exact time and circumstance for which they were needed? Had God given them to Moses prior to leaving Egypt and instructed him to hold onto them until such time as the Tabernacle was complete and Aaron was invested as High Priest? To all of these questions the rabbis are surprisingly mum. Nowhere was the author able to unearth a passage within the rabbinic literature that spoke to the creation or crafting of the Urim and Thummim.

The reasons for the silence regarding the origins of the Urim and Thummim are a matter of pure speculation. The rabbis did not leave us with any

explicit information as to why, what to many of us may seem like such an obvious topic of discussion, was not addressed at all. One might offer three suggestions understanding, of course, that these constitute only an educated guess and we cannot state with any certainty that any one of them is correct.

First it might be assumed that the rabbis did indeed comment upon the creation of the Urim and Thummim and that these accounts have been simply been lost to us. We know from numerous other examples that ancient texts are discovered millennia after they have been written, shedding new light on old scholarship, and overturning what had previously been accepted as fact. Nowhere has this been more apparent than with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the multitude of fragments unearthed at the Cairo Geniza. These two sources alone account for an enormous amount of information which, prior to the late 19th century, was simply not within the consciousness of historians and biblical scholars. It is possible that, like these other invaluable archaeological finds, there exists somewhere a writing from our sages which described the Urim and Thummim. It is equally plausible that the biblical text did at one time describe the origin of the Urim and Thummim in as much detail as it did the construction of the Tabernacle and the crafting of the High Priest's vestments. The rabbis may have had access to this information and therefore not found it necessary to comment upon it and that either through the conscious act of later editors or the careless copying of scribes this key material has been lost to us as modern readers. We know for a fact from our research of the Additional Ancient Texts in Chapter Five that the Samaritan Pentateuch spoke of

the "making of the Urim and Thummim" contained in the same section of the *Torah* dealing with the making of the Tabernacle and the Priestly clothing. Additionally, variant readings in the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, point to the possibility that the rabbis may have had these texts available to them.

A second option for the omission of rabbinic commentary about the origin of the Urim and Thummim is that the rabbis simply did not see it as a matter of extreme importance. Perhaps the knowledge of what the UT actually were was so ubiquitous that it would have been seen as unessential for the sages to even mention it. The Tabernacle and the Priestly Vestments were entirely new and original creations, the instructions for which were given to Moses in the minutest of detail and then passed on to the craftsmen and artisans. But if indeed the Urim and Thummim were already known by all in terms of where they came from, how they were made, and the manner in which they were used, the rabbis simply directed their attention to other matters. Suppose, to use a rather preposterous example, the biblical text in Exodus 28:30 read: "Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Hamburger and French Fries, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord." As a modern commentator reading this text, one may have ignored the appearance of the words Hamburger and French fries, given the familiarity most readers would have with them, especially within the context of the audience to whom the commentary was directed. It would be superfluous for there to be a detailed explanation of how one grinds beef, forms a flat round disk, and either bakes, broils, or barbeques a

hamburger patty. Nor would one need to read about peeling, cutting, and frying potato pieces to make French Fries, never mind having to explain why they are called French. This information is just not important. Perhaps the ancient sages who wrote the rabbinic literature felt the same way about the Urim and Thummim. Everyone knew what they were and where they came from. In the earliest days of the rabbinic literature perhaps there had even been a rabbi or two who had seen the Urim and Thummim and thought nothing of their origin, or at least not enough to expound endlessly upon it.

There exists a third and final theory for the exclusion of any rabbinic literature addressing the origins of the Urim and Thummim and it is this conjecture to which the author subscribes. It goes without saying that the Urim and Thummim were objects of great obscurity and great importance. At the time during which they were used they provided a unique mode of communication with God. What made the Urim and Thummim so special was not only their singular function within the cult, but the extent of the mystery within which they were shrouded as depicted in the biblical text. It may be entirely possible that the rabbis, recognizing the inscrutability of the origins of the Urim and Thummim, felt it best to let the mystery stand. There are some unknowns that are best left unknown; too much scrutiny may have ruined the mystique.

This is indeed what has kept the Hebrew Bible as alive and fresh for us today in the 21st century as it did for the writers of the rabbinic literature as long as 2000 years ago. Mixed in with the familiar narratives, the verses which one might be able to can be recite by heart, and the characters we feel that we know

intimately, the mysteries such as the Urim and Thummim remain. It is the unknowns and ambiguities within the Bible which, for many of us, draw us back time and again to read, study and learn from this remarkable text.

Bibliography

Urim and Thummim

Arnold, William R. *Ephod and Ark: A Study in the Records and Religion of the Ancient Hebrews*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 1917.

Carus, Paul. *The Oracle of Yahweh: Urim and Thummim, The Ephod, The Breastplate of Judgment*. (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co.) 1911.

Cody, Alred. *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute) 1969.

Cooper, Charles W. *The Precious Stones of the Bible with an Account of The Breastplate of the High Priest the Ephod and Urim and Thummim*. (London: H. R. Allenson, Limited) 1923.

Cryer, Frederick H. *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation*. (England: Sheffield Academic Press) 1994.

Davies, T. Witton. *Magic, Divination, and Demonology Among the Hebrews and Their Neighbors*. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.) 1969.

Foote, Theodore C. *The Ephod: Its Form and Use*. (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press) 1902.

Goldstein, David. *Library of the World's Myths and Legends: Jewish Legends*. (New York: Peter Bedrick Books) 1988.

Grabbe, Lester L. *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International) 1995.

Horowitz, Wayne and Hurowitz, Victor Avigdor. "Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA 137)" *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* Volume 21 (1992): 95-115.

Houtman, C. "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion." *Vetus Testamentum* 40:2 (April, 1990).

Jeffers, Ann. *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill) 1996.

Kitz, Ann Marie. "The Plural Form of Urim and Thummim." *SBL Journal of Biblical Literature* Volume 116, No. 3 (Fall 1997): 401-410.

Klingbeil, Gerald A. *A Comparative Study of The Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369*. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press) 1998.

Lindblom, Johannes. "Lot-casting in the Old Testament." *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. XII, No. 2 (April, 1962): 164-178.

Lipinski, E. "Urim and Thummim." *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. XX, No. 1 (October, 1970): 495-496.

Muss-Arnolt, W. "Urim and Thummim: A Suggestion as to Their Original Nature and Significance." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 16:4 (July, 1900): 193-224.

Robertson, Edward. "The Urim and Thummim; What Were They?" *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. XIV, No. 1 (January, 1964): 67-74.

Swartz, Michael D. *Scholastic Magic*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1996.

Van Dam, Cornelius. *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns) 1997.

Magic, Divination, Oracles and Prophecy

Berchman, Robert M., ed. *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1998.

Fine, Steven, ed. *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction During the Greco-Roman Period*. (London: Routledge) 1999.

Fishbane, Michael A. *Doctoral Dissertation: Studies in Biblical Magic: Origins, Uses and Transformation of Terminology and Literary Form*. Waltham, MA: June, 1971.

Guillaume, Alfred. *Magical Terms in the Old Testament*. (London: Publisher Unknown) 1942.

Guinan, Ann K. "Divination" found in *The Context of Scripture Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*. William W. Hallo, ed. (Leiden: Brill) 1997.

Hallo, William W. "The First Purim." *Biblical Archaeologist* Volume 46, Number 9 (Winter, 1983): 19-26.

Haran, Menahem. *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1978.

Houtman, C. "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion." *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. XL, No. 2 (April, 1990): 229-232.

Orlinsky, H.M. "The Seer in Ancient Israel." *Oriens Antiquus* Volume IV, Fascicolo II (1965): 53-174.

Silver, Abba Hillel. *Rabbinic Thesis: Divination in Ancient Israel*. Cincinnati, 1915.

Skirball, Jack. *Rabbinic Thesis: Relation of Divination to Prophecy*. Cincinnati, 1921.

Stutley, Margaret. *An Introduction to the Magical Elements of the Bible*. (Cornwall: Weavers Press Publishing) 1991.

Trachtenberg, Joshua. *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion*. (New York: Anthaneum) 1975.

Priestly Garments⁹⁵

Avigad, Nahman. "The Inscribed Pomegranate from the 'House of the Lord.'" *Biblical Archaeologist* Volume 53, Number 3 (September, 1990): 157-166.

Bertman, Stephen. "Tasseled Garments in the Ancient East Mediterranean." *The Biblical Archaeologist* Vol. XXIV (February, 1961).

Davis, A. Paul. "The Recreation of the Exact Replica of Aaron's Breastplate." *Lapidary Journal* (December, 1968).

Gilmore, E.L. "Which Were The Original Twelve Gemstones of the First Biblical Breastplate?" *Lapidary Journal* (December, 1968).

Gossens, Tom E. "The Twelve Stones on the High Priest's Breastplate." (Conemaugh Grace Brethren Church: PA) 1991.

⁹⁵ Sincerest thanks to Ph.D. Candidate Christine Palmer for her assistance with source material for this topic.

- Haran, Menahem. "The Priestly Image of the Tabernacle." *Hebrew Union College Annual* XXXVI (1965): 191-226.
- Houtman, C. "On the Pomegranate and the Golden Bells of the High Priest's Mantle." *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. XL, No. 2 (April, 1990): 223-232.
- Jensen, Lloyd B. "Royal Purple of Tyre." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*: Volume XXII (January-October, 1963): 104-118.
- Jenson, Philip Peter. *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*. (England: Sheffield Academic Press) 1992.
- Morris, Paul and Sawyer, Deborah, eds. *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*. (England: Sheffield Academic Press) 1992.
- May, Herbert G. "Ephod and Ariel." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* Volume LVI (January-October, 1939): 44-69.
- Morgenstern, Julian. "The Ark, The Ephod, and the 'Tent of Meeting.'" *Hebrew Union College Annual* XVIII (1943-44): 1-17.
- Oppenheim, A. Leo. "The Golden Garments of the Gods." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Volume VIII (January-October, 1949): 172-193.
- Phillips, Anthony. "David's Linen Ephod." *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. XIX, No. 4 (October, 1969): 485-487.
- Slemming, Charles W. *These Are The Garments: A Study of the Garments of the High Priest of Israel*. (London: Henry E. Walter, Ltd.) 1955.
- Smith, W. Robertson. *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*. (London: Adam and Charles Black) 1902.
- Swartz, Michael D. "The Semiotics of the Priestly Vestments in Ancient Judaism" found in *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*, Albert I. Baumgarten, ed., (Leiden: Brill) 2002.
- Waldman, Nahum M. "The Imagery of Clothing, Covering, and Overpowering." *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, Volume 19 (1989): 161-170.
- Ziderman, Irving. "First Identification of Authentic *Tekelet*." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Volume 265 (February, 1987): 25-33.

Rabbinic Literature

- Berman, Samuel A. *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammdenu*. (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House) 1996.
- Bialek, Hayim Nahman and Ravnitzky, Yehoshua Hana, eds. *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*. (New York: Schocken Books) 1992.
- Braude, William G. *The Midrash on Psalms; Volume Two*. (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1959.
- Braude, William B. *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*. (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1968.
- Danby, Herbert. *The Mishnah*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1933.
- Davis, Avrohom. *The Metsudah Midrash Tanchuma: Pesach*. (Monsey: Eastern Book Press, Inc.) 2004.
- Davis, Avrohom. *The Metsudah Midrash Tanchum: Devorim*. (Monsey: Eastern Book Press, Inc.) 2004.
- Friedlander, Gerald. *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer*. (New York: Hermon Press) 1970.
- Friedman, M. *Seder Eliahu Rabba and Seder Eliahu Zuta*. (Jerusalem: Wahmann Books) 1969.
- Hammer, Reuven. *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1986.
- Lehrman, S.M. *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*. (London: The Soncino Press) 1983.
- Midrash Shocher Tov Al Tehillim*. (Jerusalem: Chamo"l) 1992.
- Milikowsky, Chaim Joseph. *Seder Olam: A Rabbinic Chronography; Volume II: Text and Translation*. (Yale University: Doctoral Dissertation) May, 1981.
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Sanhedrin and Makkot*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 1982.
- Neusner, Jacob. *Sifre to Deuteronomy: An Analytical Translation; Volume Two: Pisqaot One Hundred Forty-Seven through Three Hundred Fifty-Seven*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1987.

Neusner, Jacob. *Pesiqta deRab Kahana; Volume One: Pisqaot One Through Fourteen*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press) 1987.

Neusner, Jacob. *The Tosefta: Nashim*. (New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc.) 1979.

Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Qiddushin*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 1982.

Neusner, Jacob. *Torah From Our Sages: Pirke Avot*. (Dallas: Rossel Books) 1984.

Simon, Maurice. *Midrash Rabbah: Esther*. (London: The Soncino Press) 1983.

Simon, Maurice. *Midrash Rabbah: Song of Songs*. (London: The Soncino Press) 1983.

Slotki, Judah J. *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*. (London: The Soncino Press) 1983.

Slotki, Judah J. *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers; Volume One*. (London: The Soncino Press) 1983.

Teugels, Lieve M. *Aggadat Bereshit*. (Leiden: Brill) 2001.

Zundel, Hanokh. *Midrash Tanhumah al Hamishah Humshe Torah*. (Jerusalem: Lein Epstein) 1964.

Additional Ancient Texts

Brenton, Lancelot Charles Lee. *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: Greek and English*. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons) 1879.

Clarke, E.G. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance*. (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.) 1984.

Feldman, Louis H. *Judean Antiquities 1-4*. (Leiden: Brill) 2000.

Mason, Steve, ed. *Flavius Josephus*. (Leiden: Brill) 2000.

Sandmel, Samuel. *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press.) 1979.

Steckoll, S.H. "The Qumran Sect in Relation to the Temple of Leontopolis." *Revue de Qumran*, Numero 21, Tome 6 (February, 1967): 55-69.

Tal, Abraham. *The Samaritan Pentateuch*. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University's Printshop) 1994.
Whiston, William. *The Works of Josephus*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers) 1980.

Wise, Michael, Abegg, Martin, Jr., and Cook, Edward. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco) 1996.

Bibles and Bible Commentaries

Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary. (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly) 2001.

Friedman, Richard Elliott. *Commentary on the Torah*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco) 2001.

Hertz, J.H., ed. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*. (London: Soncino Press) 5739/1979.

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 1999/5759.

Levine, Baruch A. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5749/1989.

Milgrom, Jacob. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 1990/5750.

Plaut, W. Gunther, ed. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations) 1981.

Sarna, Nahum M. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5751/1991.

Tigay, Jeffrey H. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society) 5756/1996.

The Jewish Study Bible. (New York: Oxford University Press) 2004.

Dictionaries, Concordances and Reference Volumes

Alcalay, Reuben. *The Complete English-Hebrew Dictionary*. (New York: Hemed Books) 2000.

Alexander, Patrick H. et. al, eds. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers) 2003.

Brown, F., Driver, S., and Briggs, C., eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers) 2000.

Einspahr, Bruce. *Index to Brown, Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*. (Chicago: Moody Press) 1976.

Encyclopedia Judaica. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House) 1975.

Even-Shoshan, Avraham. *Concordantzia Hadashah L'Torah, Nevi'im, Uch'tuvim*. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer) 1979.

Frank, Yitzhak. *The Practical Talmud Dictionary*. (Jerusalem: Ariel) 1994.

Freedman, David Noel. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. (New York: Doubleday) 1992.

Hastings, James ed. *A Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) 1902.

Holladay, William A. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1988.

Holtz, Barry W. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Jewish Texts*. (New York: Touchstone) 1984.

Heyman, Aaron. *Sefer Torah, HaKetuvah, V'HaMesorah*. (Tel Aviv: Devir) 1979.

International Standard Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Erdmans) 1979.

Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Talmud*. (Jerusalem: Horev) 1980.

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. (Nashville: Abington Press) 1962.

Maskilon Hebrew-English Dictionary of Verb-Roots. (Jerusalem: Milah Productions) 1996.

New Bible Dictionary. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Erdmans) 1962.

Jewish Encyclopedia (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls) 1907.

Ryken, Leland et. al. eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. (InterVarsity Press) 1998.

Schiffman, Lawrence H. and VanderKam, James C. eds. *Encycloperdia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2000.

Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Talmud: A Reference Guide*. (New York: Random House) 1989.

Strack, H.L. and Stemberberger, Gunter. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1992.

Strunk, William and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon) 2000.

Unterman, Alan. *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend*. (London: Thames and Hudson) 1991.

Electronic Sources

Bar-Ilan Responsa Project: Version 11+ (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University) 2003.

BibleWorks CD Rom. (Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC) 2003.

Judaic Classics Library CD Rom. (Chicago: Davka Corporation)

All About Judaism. 2000

The Soncino Midrash Rabbah. 1991-2001

The Soncino *Talmud*. 1991-1995