
TITLE "VaYishma Yitro: A Collection and Analysis of the
Rabbinic Material on Jethro"

Seth Davis Phillips
Signature of Author

Signature of Library Staff Member

**VaYishma Yitro: A Collection and Analysis
of the Rabbinic Material on Jethro**

Seth David Phillips

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for Ordination**

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

תשל"ט 1979

Referee: Prof. Edward Goldman

Table of Contents

Digest.....	1.
Abbreviations and Critical Apparatus.....	iii.
Introduction.....	1
Jethro in Egypt.....	9
Exodus 2:15b - Exodus 2:22.....	19
Ex. 2:19 He even drew water for us and watered the flock.....	30
Ex. 2:20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he then?"	35
Ex. 2:20 Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread.....	38
Ex. 2:20 Ask him in to break bread.....	42
Ex. 2:21 Moses consented to stay with the man.....	46
Ex. 3:1 Now Moses, tending the flock of his father- in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian.....	51
Ex. 4:18 Moses went back to his father-in-law Jether and said to him, "Let me go back to my kins- men in Egypt and see how they are fairing..."	57
Ex. 4:18 And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."....	67
Ex. 18:1 Jethro.....	70
Ex. 18:1 Jethro priest of Midian.....	89
Ex. 18:1 Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in- law.....	95
Ex. 18:1 Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in- law heard.....	98
Ex. 18:2 So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home.....	106

Table of Contents. (Continued)

Ex. 18:3	And her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land.".....	111
Ex. 18:5	Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons and his wife to him in the wilderness.....	116
Ex. 18:5	Unto Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped, at the mount of God.....	119
Ex. 18:6	He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons.".....	121
Ex. 18:7	Moses went out to meet his father-in-law....	127
Ex. 18:7	He bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare.....	130
Ex. 18:8	Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done.....	133
Ex. 18:9	And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel.....	135
Ex. 18:10	"Blessed be the Lord," Jethro said, "Who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh.".....	140
Ex. 18:11	Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.....	144
Ex. 18:11	Yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people].....	148
Ex. 18:12	And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God.....	151
Ex. 18:12	And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.....	155
Ex. 18:24	Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he said.....	161
Ex. 18:27	Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell..	167
Ex. 18:27	And he went his own way to his own land.....	172

Table of Contents. (Continued)

Num. 10:29	Moses said to Hobab, son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place.".....	174
Num. 10:29	The place of which the Lord has said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will be generous to you, for the Lord has promised to be generous to Israel.....	176
Num. 10:30	"I will not go," he replied to him, "but will return to my native land.".....	180
Num. 10:31	'Please do not leave us.'.....	185
Num. 10:31	Inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness.....	189
Num. 10:31	And thou shalt be to us instead of eyes....	191
Part II	Miscellaneous Midrashim Involving Jethro...	194
	Hanna Fell for Jethro's Sake.....	196
	Jethro and Esau.....	199
	Jethro and Abraham.....	202
	Jethro Serves as an Example to the Nations and Israel.....	205
Part III	The Descendants of Jethro - Their Identity and Activities.....	209
	Who Were Jethro's Descendants?.....	211
	The Jericho Connection.....	217
	Jabez.....	221
	"And the families of scribes who sat before Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites..." (1 Chron. 2:66).....	226
	Piety of Jethro's Descendants.....	233
	How Jethro's Descendants Were Rewarded.....	237
	The Kenites in the Sanhedrin.....	244
	Conclusions.....	255

Table of Contents. (Continued)

Appendix 1	Tools for finding rabbinic references to Jethro - works with subject or verse Indices.....	259
Appendix 2	Historical and legal studies on proselytism.....	260
Appendix 3	Verses which deal with Jethro or the Kenites.....	261
Bibliography	266
ספרים בעברית	268

Digest

Jethro was an important figure in the story of the Jewish people, not only because he became Moses' father-in-law, but also because he was the first proselyte since Abraham and Sarah, whom the Bible specifically mentioned. Consequently, the Rabbis dealt extensively with Jethro as they explicated the biblical text. They elaborated on his deeds, his virtues and faults and his descendants and found him to be, for the most part, a worthy person to be associated with God, Torah and Israel.

This study has attempted to collect, analyze and translate all of the midrashim on Jethro from the age of the Tannaim through the early Middle Ages. Based on preliminary work of earlier scholars this study has organized the Jethro material around the various biblical verses which mention him and around certain non-verse related subjects. Though each section of this study stands as a separate narrative unit, the midrash has been scrutinized for common themes, motifs and techniques.

In addition this study tried to determine if a correlation existed between the date of a midrash and the attitude expressed therein toward Jethro. While earlier material was generally more favorably disposed toward him than the

Digest. (Continued)

later, positive and negative attitudes occurred in all strata of the literature. Consequently, because certain technical questions regarding the composition and dating of the midrash remain unanswered this attempted correlation should be considered secondary to the midrashic survey on Jethro.

Abbreviations and Critical Apparatus

=	the equals sign when used in a footnote indicates that the same material is being quoted in a different edition (critical, traditional, or English translation) of the primary source to the left of the sign.
Mielziner, p. 42	- the Bibliography will contain all details of a work cited only by an author's last name in a footnote.
(יעללינעק)	a Hebrew word in parentheses indicates the name under which the work is to be found in the Hebrew Bibliography.
acc.	according
A.R.N.	Abot de Rabbi Nathan
A.Z.	Abodah Zarah
b.	ben (Hebrew for "the son of")
B.B.	Baba Bathra
B.D.B.	Brown, Driver and Briggs, <u>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u>
Ber.	Berakoth
B.H.M.	Bet HaMidrash (יעללינעק)
Bikk.	Bikkurim
Br.	William Braude translation of Pesikta Rabbati or Midrash on Psalms
Brk.	Braude and Kapstein translation of Pesikta de Rab Kahana
C.B.Q.	<u>Catholic Bible Quarterly</u>
Deut.R.	Deuteronomy Rabbah
Div.HaYamim	Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu (found in B.H.M.)
Ecc.R.	Ecclesiastes Rabbah
ed.princ.	editio princeps
E.J.	<u>Encyclopedia Judaica</u>
Erub.	Erubin
Est.R.	Esther Rabbah
Ex.R.	Exodus Rabbah
F.	Gerald Friedlander translation of Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer
H.	H. Horovitz edition of Sifre to Numbers and Sifre Zuta (האראוויטץ)
J.E.	<u>Jewish Encyclopedia</u>
Kidd	Kiddushin
L.	the Loeb Classical Library English translation of Philo Judaeus (found under Philo Judaeus)
Lev.R.	Leviticus Rabbah
M.	D. Mandelbaum edition of Pesikta de Rab Kahana (מנדלבוים)
Meg.	Megillah
Mek.H.R.	H. Horovitz and I. Rabin edition of Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael (האראוויטץ ורביין)
Mek.J.Z.L.	Jacob Lauterbach translation of Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael

Abbreviations and Critical Apparatus (Continued)

Mek.R.S.E.M.	J. Epstein and E. Melammed edition of Mekilta de Rabbi Shim'on ben Yochai (אפטיין ומלמד)
Mek.R.S.H.	D. Hoffmann edition of Mekilta de Rabbi Shim'on ben Yochai (האפמאנן)
M.H.G.	Midrash HaGadol to Genesis, Exodus, Numbers (found under מרגליות for Genesis and Exodus and under רכינוכיץ for Numbers in the Hebrew Bibliography)
mid.	midrash (refers to a division roughly equivalent to a paragraph in certain Hebrew texts)
Mid.	Midrash (used as the first word in a Hebrew title)
Mid.Ag.	Midrash Aggadah (באכער)
Mid.Shmu.	Midrash Shmuel (באכער)
Mid.Tan.	Midrash Tannaim to Deuteronomy (האפמאנן)
Mid. Teh.	Midrash Tehillim (באכער)
mis.	mishnah (refers to a particular mishnah)
Mish.	the Mishnah (as opposed to the Talmud)
Mish.R.El.	Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer (ענעלאו)
M.K.	Moed Katan
n.	note
Ned.	Nedarim
Num.R.	Numbers Rabbah
p.	page
Pes.Rab	Pesikta Rabbati (איס שלום)
pis.	piska
P.R.E.	Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer (פרקי)
P.R.K.	Pesikta de Rab Kahana (מנדלבוים)
R.	Rabbi (when used before a name)
R.	Remez (when used before a number in citations from the Yalkut Shimoni)
R.Sh.	Rosh ha-Shanah
S.	Soncino English translation of the Hebrew source preceding the equals sign in a footnote
San.	Sanhedrin
Sch.	Solomon Schechter edition of Abot de Rabbi Nathan (cited by page and recension (A) or (B))
sec.	section
Sef.HaLil	Sefer HaLikkutim (גרינהוט)
Sem.	Semahoth
SiF.Deut	Sifre to Deuteronomy (פינקלשטיין)
SiF.Num	Sifre to Numbers (האראוויטץ)
SiF.Zut	Sifre Zuta (האראוויטץ)
Sot.	Sota
S.S.R.	Song of Songs Rabbah
Tan.B.	Midrash Tanhuma edited by S. Buber (באכער)
Tan.debe El.	Tanna debe Eliyahu (איס שלום)
Tan.HaNid	Midrash Tanhuma (HaNidpas) (מדרש תנחומה)
Tar.Jon.	Targum Jonathan (found in the standard גרולות מקראות)

Abbreviations and Critical Apparatus (Continued)

Tar.Onk.	Targum Onkelos (found in the standard מקראות גדולות)
Tar.Ps.Jon.	Targum Pseudo Jonathan (גינזבורגר)
Tem.	Temurah
Tos.	Tosefta (צוקרמאנרל)
T.S.	Torah Shlemah (כשר)
v.	volume
Wh.	William Whiston English translation Josephus (found under Josephus, Flavius in the English Bibliography)
Y.	indicates a tractate in the Jerusalem Talmud (cited first by the Krotoschin edition and then the traditional edition)
Yal.Mak. on Is.	Yalkut HaMakiri on Isaiah (שפירא)
Yal.Mak. on Prov.	Yalkut HaMakiri on Proverbs (גרינהוט)
Yal.Mak. on Ps.	Yalkut HaMakiri on Psalms (כאכער)
Yal.Shim.	Yalkut Shimoni
Zeb.	Zebahim

Introduction

Students of the classics are fond of repeating the story about the Cambridge don who spent twenty years of his life trying to prove that the author of the Illiad and the Odyssey was not Homer, but rather another Greek bearing the same name. As epically confusing as that meander through wine dark seas and rosy fingered dawns may seem, it is mere child's play compared to the search for the identity of Moses' father-in-law. The obvious answer that חתן-משה was Jethro (יִתְרוֹ) does not eliminate the need for an investigation into this matter. Donnish scholasticism did not instigate this inquiry, nor has it prolonged the inquiry beyond the obvious answer. Rather the Bible itself which calls five men חתן-משה and has them appearing and reappearing in all sorts of seemingly unrelated contexts has necessitated such a search.

For the Jew, the answers to questions about the history or identity of a biblical figure are to be found in the midrash, the collected wisdom and exegeses of the Rabbis of old. Because Moses' father-in-law was the "author" of an important piece of legislation in the Torah portion which bears one of his names, as well as the first proselyte specifically named in the Bible since Abraham and Sarah, the rabbinic literature on him is voluminous. This study then

will be directed to the midrash in order to better understand this influential figure and to answer the questions which arise from the biblical text.

This study will attempt to collect (by means of subject and verse indices¹ and cross references), translate and analyze the midrashic material on Moses' father-in-law. While certain preliminary work has been done, most notably by Louis Ginzberg and Bernard Bamberger, this study will exceed the scope of those earlier works. Although Ginzberg's notes are most extensive, his Legends of the Jews paraphrases much of the rabbinic material rather than translating it. While Bamberger in his Proselytism in the Talmudic Period does quote from the rabbinic literature, primarily from the two Mekilta's, he himself concludes in two instances that "this material deserves a fuller and more systematic study than it has yet received."² In neither of the preceding studies has all of the material been collected or grouped according to subject matter with attention being paid to the similarities and differences in the parallel texts.

In addition to studying this material solely as an example of the midrashic treatment of a biblical figure, special scrutiny will be given to the rabbinic portrayal of חתן-משה as a proselyte. Efforts will be made to determine if this rabbinic commentary conforms to the generally favorable biblical view towards converts.³

However, because midrash is generally regarded to be a literature responsive to its sitz im leben, might not a

midrash, composed during ages when proselytism was illegal or when Jewish life suffered the ravages of persecution, reflect hostility toward a proselyte who was, after all, the priest of Midian and who was related to the gentile tormentors of Israel? This conjecture is complicated by three factors. First, Jews suffered at the hands of gentiles in almost all ages. Hence, one would presume that all midrash would share the common background of persecution. Second, midrash almost defies precise dating. The Rabbis were not concerned with the recording of history as we perceive it. Hence, to say that such-and-such a midrash reflects such-and-such an edict or event would be almost impossible. Third, midrash, a literature formulated by tradition, is repeated, revised and redacted in a host of sources. Hence, one cannot know whether a particular tale is included in a source because of slavish copying of the past or because of the "editor's" own judgment or choice. In addition, we cannot assume that the entire midrashic literature has been transmitted to us.

However, because conditions for Jews did deteriorate markedly after the completion of the Talmuds, with proselytism becoming illegal and because midrashic works can at least be dated by century or divided between the Tannaitic (or talmudic) and post-Tannaitic (or post-talmudic), I will try to discuss the midrashic material on Moses' father-in-law in terms of the above conjecture - specifically, did eisegetic considerations cause post-talmudic midrash to take a hostile attitude towards משה-היהודי. For the sake of con-

venience, I will label this conjecture "the general hypothesis" and will try to point out midrashim which would prove it ("late", i.e. post-talmudic, and hostile), as well as those which would disprove it ("early", i.e. Tannaitic or talmudic, and hostile, or "late" and favorable).

I wish to state that I consider the attempted correlation between the date of a midrash and the attitude expressed towards Moses' father-in-law (the general hypothesis) to be only the secondary purpose of this study. The collection, translation and analysis of the midrash remains the primary goal of this study and should be considered independently of the success or failure of the general hypothesis. The history of Moses' father-in-law, his interaction with the children of Israel and the history of his descendants are worthy of being considered in and of themselves to see how the Rabbis treated important biblical personages. The general hypothesis which would give an indication of how the midrash was composed would need to be tested on other proselytes and/or gentile figures to prove its ultimate validity or invalidity.

Before proceeding on the search for the identity of Moses' father-in-law, several things pertaining to the methodology employed in this study must be stated. I will refer to the central character of this study as "Jethro", rather than as "Jether", "Hobab", "Reuel" or "Kenî", the other names which the Bible uses. This decision was made partly because Jethro is the familiar name which is used in

the largest number of verses and partly because the Rabbis themselves placed their discussion of his other names under the rubric of "Jethro."

As the table of contents indicates, the midrashic material on Jethro will be divided into a number of sections, each of which is headed by a subject designation or the biblical verse (or phrase) which mentions Jethro. The division of the midrashic material into subject areas, such as Jethro in Egypt or all of the sections in Part II and III of this study reflects the fact that not all the midrash was generated by a specific verse and/or that small amounts of midrash on several related verses are more felicitously grouped under one heading. The sections which are headed by a verse designation and the verse itself in translation, such as in Part I of this study, will have the Hebrew word or phrase which generated the midrash in brackets [].

Regardless of the organizing principle used in a section of this study, be it subject or verse heading, a complete survey of the midrash subsumed under that rubric will be given. The clearest or most complete example of a particular midrash will be translated and analyzed in the body of a section with the other versions or parallels being referred to in the notes which follow each section. Though each section is ultimately a unit in and of itself, some effort has been made to present the Jethro material in as much of a narrative form as possible, for ease in reading. Consequently, cross-references between the sections

will be made (and duly footnoted) to indicate similarities and common themes when they do exist.

Three types of material have been omitted from this study. Some biblical verses which mentioned Jethro were nonetheless not included in this study as subjects for midrashic analysis. Specifically, though Exodus 18:13-23 is filled with Jethro's name and his questions, the midrash generated does not deal with Jethro. The same is true for the midrash on Judges 4:11 and Judges 4:16 on Heber the Kenite. Appendix 3 contains all the biblical verses which mention Jethro and his various alter-egos.

The Targum material, Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, the Jerusalem Targum, Targum Jonathan and the Targum to Chronicles, has all been consulted for the respective biblical verses. Targum to a verse will be quoted or referred to only if it varies from a strict translation of that verse. Such variations usually offer insights according to the midrash and are important to the survey of the midrashic literature on Jethro.

Philo and Josephus who were contemporaries of the Tannaim are outside of the purview of this study. Though Philo mentions Jethro (or "Raguel" as he prefers) in nine places and Josephus paraphrases almost all the Jethro material, they interpret the Bible according to their own philosophical or polemical concepts, which were in many cases alien to those of the Rabbis. In addition, Philo the Alexandrian's knowledge of Hebrew and the Hebrew scriptures is much disputed. Nonetheless, I have included a few representative samples of

their work, usually when they echo something similar to the Rabbis' view or when they are completely different from the Rabbis.

Finally, some notes regarding the mechanics of the text itself. All translations of Torah verses come from the new J.P.S.A. Torah (1962), except where specially noted. Translations of verses from the rest of the Bible come from the 1917 J.P.S.A. translation. Existing translations of midrashic works were used where available. Regarding those works for which no printed translations exist, I composed my own translation. Occasionally, I preferred my own translation over a printed one. Brackets [] indicate additional material inserted in a quote, either my own or the translator's explanation, or a Hebrew word from the original text inserted in a printed translation. Parenthesis () indicate a Hebrew word from the original text in a translation of my own composition.

NOTES

1. Appendix 1 contains a list of works with a subject or verse index which I consulted to find the rabbinic references to Moses' father-in-law. I believe that they comprise the basic tools for locating midrashic material on any biblical figure. Obviously, a work such as Bamberger's would only be useful for a study concerning proselytes.
2. Bernard I. Bamberger, D. D., Proselytism in the Talmudic Period (Cinti.: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939), pp. 182, 190.
3. The frequent injunctions to love the stranger (גֵּר) and not to oppress him found in the Bible are regarded by Jewish tradition as referring to proselytes and mandating kind treatment for them. Of course, the phrase "Jewish tradition" really means how the Rabbis regarded and interpreted the biblical text. See Appendix 2 for a list of works which give a broad overview of the rabbinic attitude toward proselytes.

Jethro In Egypt

While the first biblical reference to Jethro is not found until Exodus 2:15, the story of Jethro as understood by the midrash begins earlier with material not specifically related to any verse. Not only was Israel in Egypt, but so too was Jethro. Therefore not surprisingly in the view of the Rabbis, their destinies intersect, and in a curious way something of a parallel exists between events in the lives of Moses and Jethro. The sources for Jethro's sojourn in Egypt range from early to late, from the Talmud to Sefer HaYashar, yet all share a common aggadic style and supply much information that would otherwise be unknown.

Jethro had high qualifications to be כהן מדין. Previously he had been one of Pharaoh's advisors or one of the חרטומי-מצרים.¹ In either exalted position, Jethro was involved in the events which led up to the Exodus.

Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba, a second generation Palestinian Amora (279-320 C.E.), quoting in the name of R. Simai, a semi-Tanna², gives the earliest report of Jethro's activities in Egypt, though without explicitly indicating his title:

R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of R. Simai: There were three in that plan, viz. Balaam, Job, and Jethro.³

Rashi⁴ explains that the "plan" was the destruction of Israel

formulated in Ex. 1:10, "Come on, let us deal wisely with them...."

Balaam himself delineates Jethro's involvement. In the talmudic section on "four commoners [who] have no portion in the world to come"⁵, Balaam asks rhetorically, "Thou Kenite, wast thou not with us in that scheme?"⁶ The Talmud continues here with a repetition of R. Hiyya B. Abba's comment cited above.

Jethro is linked with another one of the enemies of Israel in a passage which gives his position as an advisor to Pharaoh. Whereas Job is a questionable enemy and Balaam does at least bless Israel, one cannot doubt the evil character of Amalek:

Amalek and Jethro were advisors of Pharaoh.... Likewise, when Balaam, knowing that Amalek and Jethro had been among the counsellors of Pharaoh....⁷

Midrash Shmuel links Jethro with Amalek in a different way. "Jethro was in the army of Amalek."⁸ The above sources make clear Jethro's role as an advisor to Pharaoh. However, his reactions to the proposed destruction of Israel are not what one might expect given his companions, as will be seen below.

The origin of the story that Jethro was one of the חרטומי-מצרים appears to be Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer⁹, a work of the ninth century.¹⁰ Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Midrash Hashkem, which was composed between the ninth¹¹ and twelfth century¹², and Midrash VaYosha, from the eleventh or twelfth century¹³, all discuss Jethro's activities in Egypt in similar terms.

While Midrash Hashkem refers to Jethro as "one of the astrologers of Pharaoh"¹⁴ and Midrash VaYosha calls him "one of the great ones of the magicians of Pharaoh"¹⁵, all three of the above named midrashim discuss Jethro's position in Egypt in relation to the staff of Adam.

The staff of Adam was another of the miraculous items created *ביום השמיני* of the first week.¹⁶ Its history, though ultimately tangential to this study, is quoted below because Jethro became the temporary guardian of this staff before it passed to Moses to resume its career of wonder-working:

Rabbi Levi said: That rod which was created in the twilight was delivered to the first man out of the garden of Eden. Adam delivered it to Enoch, and Enoch delivered it to Noah, and Noah handed it on to Shem. Shem passed it on to Abraham; Abraham transmitted it to Isaac, and Isaac gave it over to Jacob, and Jacob brought it down into Egypt and passed it on to his son Joseph; and when Joseph died and they pillaged his household goods, it was placed in the palace of Pharaoh. And Jethro¹⁷ was one of the magicians of Egypt, and he saw the rod and the letters which were upon it [the Ineffable Name]¹⁸, and he took it.¹⁹

Knowing that Jethro was either an advisor to Pharaoh or a religious functionary tells very little about what he did in Egypt. The Zohar supplies a description of Jethro's religious activities:

Jethro's religious activity had to be continuous, and independent of the needs of the worshippers; for, in order that he might be able to use the power when he needed to do so, he had always to be connected with it.²⁰

From Exodus Rabbah and Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu come two parts of the same story in which Jethro functions

as an advisor to Pharaoh:

The magicians of Egypt sat there and said: 'We are afraid of him who is taking off thy crown and placing it upon his own head, lest he be the one of whom we prophesy that he will take the kingdom from thee.' Some of them counselled to slay him and others to burn him, but Jethro was present among them and he said to them: 'This boy has no sense. However, test him by placing before him a gold vessel and a live coal; if he stretch forth his hand for the gold, then he has sense and you can slay him, but if he make for the live coal, then he has no sense and there can be no sentence of death upon him.' So they brought these things before him, and he was about to reach forth for the gold when Gabriel came and thrust his hand aside so that it seized the coal, and he thrust his hand with the live coal into his mouth, so that his tongue was burnt, with the result that he became slow of speech and of tongue.²¹

In Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu, Jethro's advice follows the crown-coal incident. Here the angel Gabriel assumes the visage of one of Pharaoh's entourage and proposes the test with the coal.²² Afterwards, Balaam, not satisfied with the outcome of the test since it spared Moses, schemes to enslave the whole house of Israel. Jethro, surely an advisor to Pharaoh though without the title, rises to Israel's defense:

Then answered Jethro the Midianite and said, 'My Lord King, thou must surely know that no one who has sent forth a hand against them was acquitted. Don't you know (if you didn't hear)²³ what happened to Pharaoh who took Sarah the wife of Abraham (and also [the wife of] Isaac)²³ and what happened to the four kings on account of Abraham's nephew and what happened to Laban -- no one has tried to harm them and been acquitted.'²⁴

The favorable treatment that Jethro receives from Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu, a late source, seems to contradict the general hypothesis. If anything, Jethro, here the defender of all Israel, has an even greater and more positive role than in Exodus Rabbah, a much earlier work.²⁵ Nonetheless, because Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu continues with Jethro's homicidal actions towards the adult Moses, I am uncertain how to assess its favorable attitude in this midrash. Since the possibility exists that it resulted from a copying of earlier or other sources rather than a conscious editorial choice, I would want to withhold a judgement of this midrash vis à vis the general hypothesis.

Jethro's disinclination to have Israel destroyed was apparently known from earliest times. The Talmud first reported his act of disagreement:

There were three in that plan, viz. Balaam, Job and Jethro. Balaam, who devised it was slain; Job who silently acquiesced was afflicted with suffering; Jethro, who fled, merited....²⁶

Midrash HeHafetz puts it this way:

In the beginning, he was a priest of idolatry. Jethro was considering making teshuvah. When he heard Pharaoh's decree against Israel, he fled to Midian.²⁷

From Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu comes the result of Jethro's advice:

And the king was very angry towards Jethro the Midianite and said to him, 'Go, flee to your place' and he went.²⁸

Just as Moses would flee from before the wrath of Pharaoh in later years, so Jethro had to flee at this time, thus laying

the groundwork for the identification of Jethro's fate with that of Moses and Israel.

The other sources which report that Jethro was in Egypt, such as Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Midrash Hashkem, and Midrash VaYosha, are united by their common assumption that Jethro left Egypt, yet the whys and wherefores are never discussed. From Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer comes the abrupt transition from Egypt to Midian:

And Jethro was one of the magicians of Egypt, and he saw the rod and the letters which were upon it, and he desired in his heart [to have it] and he took it and brought it in the midst of the gardens of his house.²⁹

The text immediately continues with Moses' arrival to Jethro's house in Midian, obviously the "his house" referred to by the passage. The abrupt shift of scene is especially obvious in Midrash VaYosha. After describing Jethro as the advisor who proposes the coal-crown test, as in Exodus Rabbah (above), the midrash continues with nary a pause to state that Jethro fled to Midian, whereupon the history of the staff is given as in Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer.³⁰ Again, no reasons are supplied for Jethro's move. Sefer HaYashar also takes cognizance of Jethro's exodus from Egypt in connection with the history of the staff:

After the death of Joseph...the staff arrived in the Land of Reuel the Midianite. When he [Reuel] left Egypt he took and planted it in his garden.³¹

The style of this reference brings to mind parallels such as Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer.

In summary, the midrashim cited in this section deal with Jethro, the idolator, and Jethro, the cohort of the enemies of Israel. His position is identified and his actions in Egypt are described. One tentative pattern can be seen regarding the correlation between date and content. Though the earliest sources, Talmud and Exodus Rabbah, as well as Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer³², report Jethro's involvement in the highest circles of Egypt, he is more than redeemed by his subsequent good deeds. The later midrashim, such as Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu or Midrash VaYosha, may report Jethro's noble deeds in Egypt but go on to portray more than graphically his misdeeds and hostility to Israel in material unique to them, as the next section will show.

NOTES

1. See Ex. 18:1 Jethro, Priest of Midian for the different understandings of הַכֹּהֵן - secular authority or religious functionary.
2. Strack, p. 119.
3. Sot. 11a. = S., p. 63.
4. loc. cit.
5. Mish. San. 10:2 = S., p. 602.
6. San. 106a = S., p. 722. Ex. R. 27:3 = S.2, p. 323; Mid. Lekah Tov (an eleventh century work acc. to E. J., 11:1516) on Nu. 24:21, p. 130a; Mid. Ag. (a twelfth century work acc. to E. J., 16:1518) on Nu. 24:22, p. 145 all have parallel accounts. Midrash MeHafetz, ms. quoted in Torah Shlemah, v. 8, p. 90 merely reports that Jethro was one of Pharaoh's advisors.
7. Ex. R. 27:6. = S.2, pp. 325, 326.
8. Mid. Shmu., p. 41a.
9. P.R.E. ch. 40, p. 94 = F., p. 313.
10. F., pp. liii-liv.
11. Sef. HaLik. I, pp. 11-12.
12. Zunz, p. 141.
13. Ibid.
14. Sef. HaLik. I, p. 2b, mid. 4.
15. B.H.M.I, p. 42.
16. P.R.E. ch. 40, p. 94a = F., p. 312. The second edition of P.R.E., Venice 1544, reads differently. "Eight things were created on the second day, namely...the rod..." (Friedlander, p. 14. See note 1). For a more thorough treatment of the staff of Adam, see Israel Abraham's, "The Rod of Moses", quoted in Jews' College Literary Society. Papers read...1886-1887.
17. Correction of the printed text's "Pharaoh", based on F., p. 313, note 5. The correction appears in Yal. Shim. R. 173, p. 57a, and the Beor Hardal commentary to P.R.E., note 13.

Notes. (Continued)

18. I supplied the information in brackets based on the parallel versions cited in the next note.
19. P.R.E.ch. 40, p. 94a = F., pp. 312-313. The parallel version from Yal. Shim. R. 173, p. 57a, is taken from P.R.E. Parallel versions with minor elaborations, such as a description of the letters upon the rod, come from Midrash VaYosha (B.H.M.I, p. 42) and Midrash Hashkem (Sef. HaLik. I, p. 2b, mid. 4). Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 4:20, p. 126, has a truncated history of the rod, referring to it as "passed on from generation to generation from the first man." It does not identify Jethro as a religious functionary in Egypt, neither does Sefer HaYashar, which has the most elaborate description of the rod, portions of which will be quoted below. Yal. Shim. R. 168, p. 44b, is taken from the Sefer HaYashar version. All of these sources report that the staff came into Jethro's possession in Egypt, as does Tar. Ps. Jon. on Ex. 2:21 which refers to the staff as "made בִּין הַשִּׁמְשׁוֹת. The great name was engraved and clearly expressed on it."
20. Zohar 2, p. 69a = S. 3, pp. 215-216.
21. Ex. R. 1:32 = S.2, pp. 33-34. A parallel to this can be found in Mid. VaYosha, B.H.M.I, pp. 41-42.
22. B.H.M. II, pp. 3-4.
23. The parentheses and the information in them are part of the original Hebrew text.
24. B.H.M. II, p. 3. Sefer HaYashar has a version of this episode which seems related to both of the above accounts quoted in the body of this study, though Jethro does not appear at all. Balaam demands that something be done to Moses as a representative of a people who have historically meant trouble to Egypt. He relates some of the same facts as Jethro but puts a negative slant on them. "He [Abraham] called Sarah his wife, 'she is my sister,' in order to cause the land of Egypt and its king to sin," (p. 150). Then, Sefer HaYashar continues similarly to Divre HaYamim with an angel both proposing the coal test and pushing Moses' hand, (pp. 140-141). That Jethro is not mentioned in this episode may be indicative of another tradition otherwise unknown to me, or his good deed may have been omitted to be in harmony with the tradition that Jethro later sought to harm Moses, something which Sefer HaYashar does report. What is especially curious is that Sefer HaYashar apparently does know that Jethro was in Egypt. It reports that Jethro left Egypt with the staff of Adam (p. 160), something which P.R.E. and the other sources report because he was one of the חֲרָטוּמֵי מִצְרַיִם.

25. "The assumption is justified that Shemot Rabbah down to Exodus 12:1, with which section the Mekhilta begins, is based on an earlier exegetical midrash, constituting perhaps the continuation of Bereshit Rabbah" (J.E., 8:562).
26. Sot. 11a = S., p. 63.
27. T.S. v. 8, p. 90.
28. B.H.M. 11, p. 3.
29. P.R.E. ch. 40, p. 94a = F., p. 313. Midrash Hashkem is virtually identical however, with one addition: "It took root in his garden." Sef. HaLik. 1, p. 2b, mid. 4.
30. B.H.M. 1, pp. 41-42.
31. Sefer HaYashar, p. 160.
32. For P.R.E.'s favorable treatment of Jethro as opposed to the other sources which come from it and which likewise incorporate Jethro with the history of the staff, see the next section.

Exodus 2:15b - Exodus 2:22

This biblical section which details Moses' meeting with Jethro in Midian is used by the Rabbis as the rubric under which to place a lengthy discussion of Jethro's past. Either Jethro was a prior monotheist who saw the emptiness of idolatry or an arch-idolator who tried to kill Moses once he recognized him. Again, it seems that the midrash which deals favorably with Jethro is of an earlier date than that which discredits him. The midrash with either tendenz is largely aggadic rather than exegetical. Though the general methodological style will be to treat the biblical verses יִדְד, some of the larger blocks of aggadic material will be presented here by way of introduction and illustration of the two views which the midrash has of Jethro's past.

The story of the seven maidens in distress aroused more than the chivalrous instincts of the Rabbis. In an age when the upper class enjoyed more ease and protection from indignity than today, the sages of the past had to ask why the daughters of the priest of Midian were, of all things, shepherding and, even more unbelievably, were being mistreated. Equally troubling was Jethro's profession. Why did Moses have to settle down with Jethro of all people? Was a heathen priest a fitting father-in-law for Moshe Rabbenu?!

Exodus Rabbah asks some of these questions and along with Tanhuma HaNidpas then supplies the answer that Jethro rejected heathen practices:

Was it possible, he being a priest of Midian¹ that shepherds should drive away his daughters? It is to teach you that they excommunicated him....²

Why was he excommunicated? Again from Exodus Rabbah:

The fact is, say the Sages, that Jethro was at first a priest to idolatrous worship, but when he saw that there was no truth in it, he despised it and thought of repenting even before Moses came. He summoned his townsmen and said: 'Hitherto I ministered unto you, but now I have become old, choose another priest.' And he returned unto them all the insignia of his priesthood. Whereupon they excommunicated him, that no man be in his company, or work for him or tend his flock; he asked the shepherds to look after his flock, but they refused, and he had to employ his daughters.³

Jethro is fast becoming a suitable *gann*. In fact, Tanhuma HaNidpas begins its account of Jethro's rejection of paganism with this judgment:

All of this [the biblical account which begins with Ex. 2:16] is praise for this righteous man [tzaddik] who was walking among practitioners of heathenism.⁴

Thus the question of "why did Moses have to settle with a heathen priest?" is asked and disposed of by Exodus Rabbah:

Does not God hate idolators, yet He allowed Moses to find refuge with an idolator? The fact is, say the Sages...⁵ (see above)

The midrash which presents a steeped-in-idolatry-Jethro will be familiar to the reader. The story of the staff of Adam as developed in the last section will be here continued to show the final transition of the staff into the hands of Moses. As will be seen, this story strikingly resembles the sword in the stone story of the Arthurian legend. However, what is more important for this study than the trans-cultural

popularity of certain motifs is the development of the story from a neutral account in which Jethro recognizes and proclaims Moses to one in which Jethro tries to kill the redeemer of Israel. If the midrash from Exodus Rabbah and Tanhuma HaNidpas approved of Jethro as a suitable father-in-law for Moses, the midrash here will give credence to the "old saw" -- "why did Adam and Eve live so long? -- because they didn't have in-laws!"

The basic story of Moses' involvement with the staff of Adam appears to be the one from Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer partially quoted in the last section. After recounting that Jethro was one of the magicians of Egypt and took the staff after the death of Joseph, the midrash presupposes a change of locale back to Midian:

...he took it and brought it and planted it in the midst of the garden of his house. No one was able to approach it anymore.

When Moses came to his house, he went into the garden of Jethro's house, and saw the rod and read the letters which were upon it, and he put forth his hand and took it. Jethro watched Moses and said: This one in the future will redeem Israel from Egypt. Therefore he gave him Zipporah his daughter to wife...⁶

While pulling out the staff caused Jethro to recognize and proclaim Moses as the redeemer of Israel in the Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer account of the story, something quite different happened according to Midrash Hashkem and Midrash VaYosha:

He [Jethro] saw in his astrological books that the person who would uproot it [the staff of Adam] would be the deliverer of

Israel. [Many] people would try to do it. When Moses came, he stood and uprooted it. He [Jethro] threw him [Moses] into a pit upon his [Moses'] return.⁷

Midrash VaYosha with a fuller format than Midrash Hashkem supplies some of the additional details as to how Moses came to uproot the staff. Purporting to be a first person account of Moses, it begins with the initial meeting of Moses and Zipporah. Smitten by her modest demeanor, Moses proposes only to learn of the test that prospective suitors must face:

'My father has a certain tree in his garden with which he tests anyone who wishes to marry one of his daughters. But as soon as one of them touches it, it swallows that one up.'⁸

Zipporah continues with the now familiar history of the staff, adding:

'For many years it lay in my father's house until one time daddy took it and entered the garden. He inserted it into the ground. When he went back into the garden to take it, he found that it had sprouted and was sending forth blossoms.'⁹

With that knowledge, Moses rises, drives off the hostile shepherds, and goes to Jethro to ask for Zipporah's hand in marriage. Jethro tells Moses of the test, whereupon Moses goes out to the garden:

I found it [the staff] and brought it in my hand. Immediately Jethro pondered and said, 'Verily, this is the prophet that all the wise men of Israel have conjured up -- that in the future a prophet will come out of Israel and will destroy all Egypt and all the Egyptians within it by his hand.' Immediately Jethro got angry at me and seized me and cast me into a pit that was in his house.¹⁰

The other three sources which deal with Moses' mishap in Midian at the hands of Jethro have a different sequence of events. There Moses pulls out the staff only after being himself pulled out of the pit. Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu, Targum Pseudo Jonathan, and Sefer HaYashar paraphrase the biblical account of Moses' saving Jethro's daughters from the shepherds. When Moses gets invited back to the house, he tells his story to Jethro, who recognizes him with great trepidation. From Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu, a direct connection is made with Jethro's past in Egypt:

Said Reuel to him: 'From whence have you come? What is your land? From what people are you?' And he said to him, 'I am Moses,' and he told him all that had befallen him.

As a result, Jethro said in his heart, 'This is the man who stretched out his hand to the king's crown. Now I will take him and send him back to Pharaoh.' So he gave orders to support him with bread of anguish and water of oppression [i.e. put him in jail -- from parallels and below].¹¹

It is more than a little puzzling that the heroic figure who defended all Israel previously should now turn on Moses. However, extraditing Moses to Egypt may have been a politic way to appease a large neighbor for past indiscretions.

Targum Pseudo Jonathan concisely reports the above incident:

When Reuel knew that Moses had fled from before Pharaoh, he threw him in a pit.¹²

Though sparing of narrative or detail, such midrashic elaboration (seemingly out of character for a targum)

is rather symptomatic of Targum Pseudo Jonathan, a seventh or eighth century work.¹³

Sefer HaYashar has a similar story but reports that Jethro sought to serve another power by imprisoning Moses:

And Moses told Reuel that he fled from the king of Egypt and that he ruled over Cush; after which they took the kingdom from him and sent him forth to peace with honor and presents.¹⁴ Now as soon as Jethro heard the words of Moses, he said in his heart, 'I will put him in jail and I will appease the Cushites with him for he has surely fled from them.' So he took him and placed him in jail....¹⁵

While the avowed purpose of casting Moses into the pit/jail may have been to hold him for extradition, in reality such imprisonment was to serve a more sinister purpose. It was intended to be a way station on the road to the 'olam habah. All of the sources which deal with Moses' imprisonment, which resulted from either pulling out the staff or for being a fugitive, report that Zipporah preserved him and kept him in life by clandestinely supplying him with food, a non-existent commodity in Midianite prisons.

Though Midrash Hashkem talks of Zipporah acting out of love for Moses¹⁶ and Targum Pseudo Jonathan on Ex. 2:21 gives no motives for her actions, the reason given in the largest number of sources is that of pity. The account given in Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu tells how Zipporah saved Moses and is typical of all the sources:

And he found favor in the eyes of Zipporah and she had pity upon him. And every day from time to time, she would supply him with bread and food. And he stayed there for seven years. And it was at the end of

seven years that Zipporah said to her father, 'The captive and the prisoner whom you threw into the pit, lo these many years, shouldn't you investigate him? For each day he cries against you and to his God; it will be accounted against you.' Said Jethro to her, 'Who has ever heard of such a man who doesn't eat or drink, lo these many years, and is still alive?' They went to the prison and found him standing and praying to his God, so they brought him forth from there.¹⁷

That Moses survived a seven to ten year stretch in the pit impressed Jethro greatly. No doubt seeing a chance to align himself with a power greater than that of Pharaoh, Jethro betrothed his daughter to Moses. Midrash Hashkem just reports the betrothal¹⁸, while in Midrash VaYosha Jethro first testifies to the power of the Lord God of Israel:

He [Jethro] drew me out of there and kissed me on the head and said, 'Blessed be God who guarded thee for seven years in the pit. I acknowledge because of thee that He slays and revives, and I acknowledge about you that you are completely righteous and that through you Egypt will be destroyed in the future, that God will bring out Israel from Egypt, and that God will drown Pharaoh and all his army by the sea.' He gave me much money and gave me his daughter Zipporah for a wife....¹⁹

Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu and Sefer HaYashar show us a less wordy Jethro. These two works have Jethro giving Zipporah to Moses after he pulls out the staff of Adam which, as noted above, occurred after his release from the pit.²⁰ They do report his astonishment that Moses could perform such a feat where all the other Kenite notables had failed, especially after his recent imprisonment:

When Jethro saw the staff in Moses' hand,
he was greatly surprised. So he gave
Zipporah to him for a wife.²¹

Before concluding this section, one might note with interest the comments of two contemporaries of the Rabbis, Philo and Josephus, on Moses' arrival in Midian and the events thereof. Philo operating no doubt on the 710 level interprets the whole Bible in philosophical fashion. Space and a sense of balance does not permit the inclusion of more than this representative piece from lengthy exposition:

'The priest' of judgment and justice, he says, 'had seven daughters' (Ex. 2:16). The daughters stand as a symbol for the seven faculties of the unreasoning element, namely reproductive power, speech, and the five senses. 'Daughters,' it adds, 'who kept the sheep of their father,' for through these seven faculties come the advances and growths which repeated apprehension produces in the father, the mind.²²

Slightly more down to earth is his explanation of why Jethro's daughters had to shepherd their father's flock, a situation troubling apparently to rationalists as well as to the Rabbis:

The Arabs are breeders of cattle, and they employ for tending them not only men but women, youths and maidens alike, and not only those of insignificant and humble families but those of the highest position.²³

Josephus tells us that of course women are shepherds:

These virgins, who took care of their father's flocks, which sort of work it was customary and very familiar for women to do in the country of the Troglodytes.²⁴

What is especially significant about the testimony offered here and below by Philo and Josephus is that it is so favorable to Jethro. (Philo's allegorizing in On the Change

of Names which uses Jethro, the unenlightened one, as a foil for Moses surely is offset or at least balanced by his treatment in Moses). Nowhere is there mention of Jethro in Egypt or of Jethro imprisoning Moses. This last is important because Josephus is one of the sources for Moses' Ethiopian adventures which only next appear in Sefer HaYashar along with the imprisonment of Moses. Knowing what we know about the things which motivated Philo and Josephus in their interpretation of Jewish history, it is not surprising that Jethro, the stranger who found Judaism so attractive, is not called anything that might upset their Hellenistic readers.

In summary, there definitely seem to be two opposing traditions regarding Jethro in this biblical section. Much of the midrashic material results from Jethro's stay in Egypt. This material presents a side of Jethro and Moses (the Cushite king, etc.) that is left out of the Sunday school treatment of either man. The hostility expressed toward Jethro is clear though no explicit nimshal is drawn as to what Jethro may represent. Even after Jethro's wonderful encomium acknowledging the God of Israel in Midrash VaYosha, the מחבר immediately links with that the midrash showing Jethro the idolator demanding that one of Moses' sons not be circumcised.²⁵ Those midrashim from the Tanhuma-Exodus Rabbah tradition, earlier than the above sources, are favorable but are outweighed by the volume of the later midrash. The following sections will redress the balance somewhat.

NOTES

1. Tan. HaNid. Shemot 11, p. 65b adds, "the greatest and most powerful of those in Midian."
2. Ex. R. 1:32 = S.2, p. 40. Tan. HaNid., *ibid.*; M.H.G. 2, p. 33:19-21.; Mid. Ag. on Ex. 2:16, p. 26 all provide parallels. Sec. Ex. 18:3, note 6 provides another reason for the shepherds' hostility.
3. Ex.R., *ibid.* Tan. HaNid., *ibid.* M.H.G. 2, p. 33:12-19. Mid. Ag., *ibid.*
4. Tan. HaNid., *ibid.* Mid. Ag., *ibid.*
5. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 40. Tan HaNid., *ibid.* Midrash HeHafetz (T.S. v. 8, p. 90) asks the question in this wise: "Why did he go to Midian since Jethro used to be one of Pharaoh's advisors and in the beginning he was a priest of idolatry? Jethro was pondering making repentance and when he heard Pharaoh's decree against Israel, he fled to Midian." The midrash continues with the same story as Ex.R. 1:32. The Zohar paraphrases and shortens the account of Ex.R.1:32 and makes clear the conflict between idolatry and monotheism: "When Moses saw through the Holy Spirit that the shepherds acted as they did out of their idolatrous religion, he straight away stood up and helped the daughters..." (Zohar 2, p. 13b = S. 3, p. 42). Again from the Zohar, "Jethro abandoned idolatry and came to join Israel, and for this he was banished and persecuted" (Zohar 3, pp. 196b-197a = S. 5, p. 282).
6. P.R.E. ch. 40, p. 94a = F. p. 313.
7. Mid. Hashkem. Sef. HaLik. 1, p. 2b, mid. 4.
8. B.H.M.I, p.42
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
11. B.H.M. 11, p. 7.
12. Tar. Ps. Jon. on Ex. 2:21.
13. E.J., 4:845.
14. Ginzberg 5, pp. 407-410 = note 80 traces the origin of Moses' Ethiopian escapades to Artapanus, 432, and

Notes. (Continued)

Josephus 11, x-xi. "The oldest rabbinic source where reference is made to it seems to be Targum Yerushalmi Num. 12:1." See Ginzberg 2, pp. 283-289 for a good summary of Moses' sojourn in Ethiopia as well as note 20.

15. Sefer HaYashar, p. 157. Yal.Shim.R. 168, p. 55b has a parallel account.
16. Sefer HaLik. 1, p. 2b, mid. 4.
17. B.H.M. 11, p.7. Mid. VaYosha is similar but adds that Zipporah persuaded her father to let her take care of the house rather than shepherding with her sisters, thus allowing her secretly to supply Moses (B.H.M.1, p. 43). Sefer HaYashar likewise repeats the basic story but has Zipporah impressing her father with the saving wonders that the God of Israel did for others in desperate situations in order to persuade him even to check the pit for his captive who should have been long since dead, especially after 10 years (pp. 147, 149). This is a change from Divre HaYamim. Yal.Shim.R. 168, p. 55b repeats the Sefer HaYashar account. Midrash Hashkem (Sef. HaLik, ibid,) and Tar.Ps. Jon. on Ex. 2:21 are most brief but have the basic elements of the story. Tar.Ps.Jon., however, also has the length of Moses' imprisonment as being ten years.
18. Sef.HaLik., p. 2b, mid. 4.
19. B.H.M.1, p.43.
20. The information conveyed about the staff and its role in determining the fitness of prospective suitors found in Divre HaYamim (B.H.M.1, p. 7) and Sefer HaYashar (p. 160) is similar to that of Mid. VaYosha quoted above. Tar.Ps.Jon. does not record the staff's matrimonial usage, but its placement of the uprooting of the staff after Moses' release from the pit and the information contained about the staff and Moses' deeds are similar to the other two sources.
21. Divre HaYamim, B.H.M.1., p. 7 and Sefer HaYashar, p. 160.
22. On the Change of Names, xix-xx, sec. 110-120 = L.5, pp. 199, 201, 203 for the entire interpretation.
23. Moses 1, x-xi, sec. 51-58 = L.6, pp. 303, 305, 307 for a peshat type description of the rest of this incident.
24. Antiquities 11, xi:2, sec. 258 = Wh., pp. 49-50 for this entire section.
25. B.H.M.1, p.43.

Ex. 2:19 He even drew water [דלה דלה] for us and watered the flock.

One of the biblical idioms which gives rise to much midrash is the infinitive absolute with a finite verb of the same root. Believing that nothing was superfluous in the Bible, the Rabbis sought explanations for the doublings in the text. The midrash which results from the interpretation of the double דלה in this verse ultimately seeks to connect Jethro with Abraham, again trying to make him an acceptable father-in-law for Moses.

The familiar midrashic apologetic tendency to whiten a biblical character's past occurs here in a dispute between R. Judah (ben Ilai) and R. Nehemiah, both fourth generation Tannaim (139 C.E. - 165 C.E.).¹ Leviticus Rabbah presents the two men's interpretations along with that of the Sages which harmonizes their differences.

R. Judah, R. Nehemiah² and our Rabbis differ on the interpretation of the double 'dalah'. R. Judah says it means: He raised us and our ancestors.³

The Rev. Dr. Judah J. Slotki, the translator of Leviticus Rabbah, understands R. Judah's opinion as "won us over to a higher religion".⁴ His view is based on the Matanot Kehuna commentary which reports, "He [Moses] lifted and exalted them [Jethro and family] in that he caused them to enter under the wings of the Shehinah."⁵ Song of Songs Rabbah has the exact same rabbinic discussion as Leviticus Rabbah. However, the translator, Maurice Simon, renders the Hebrew, "He [Moses] drew for us and our parents."⁶ Nevertheless, his understanding

of the meaning of R. Judah's comment is substantially the same as Slotki's, and he quotes the Matanot Kehuna.⁷

While the Hebrew supports either translation, neither translator's explanation takes into account the double sense implicit in the Hebrew expression. One fails to see how anyone's ancestors could either be raised or drawn to the true religion. If *ללה ללה* does not refer to an action done to or for two parties, then perhaps it involves two actions for a single party. Yalkut Shimoni in a comment unique to itself reports, "He [Moses] surely raised us [the family of Jethro] in this world and the world to come."⁸ Though this usage does show a double action, it does not shed light on the involvement of the ancestors. Only the third opinion in this midrash, that of the Rabbis, does so, as will be seen below.

ללה ללה does give evidence of a two-fold action according to the opinion of R. Nehemiah. "He [Moses] drew water for us and for the shepherds."⁹ Moses, ever the man of peace, first stopped an act of oppression, then sought to educate the oppressors as to the proper course of action -- here, sharing the water and the work.

The Rabbis combine the past and the present, R. Judah's interpretation and R. Nehemiah's. Moses draws water twice and he draws in acknowledgement of the past and as a lesson for the future.

Our Rabbis say that it means: He drew for us through the merit of our ancestors¹⁰ and for the shepherds in order to bring about peace.¹¹

The explanation of the Rabbis, which basically repeats R. Nehemiah's opinion, also explains the role of the ancestors of Jethro vis à vis the actions of Moses. Jethro's ancestors were not raised or led to the true religion as a result of Moses' action, but something about them caused Moses to water the flocks of the daughters of Jethro. The זכות אבות which motivates Moses derives from a connection between Jethro and Abraham. Though the Rabbis do not mention it, they obviously believe that the Midian mentioned in Gen. 25:2 as the son of Abraham by the concubine Keturah is the paterfamilias of the Midianites. Josephus states the connection explicitly:

And when he [Moses] came to the city of Midian which lay upon the Red Sea and was so denominated from one of Abraham's sons by Keturah....¹²

Simple justice may have prompted Moses to stop the shepherds' attack on Jethro's daughters¹³, but his additional kindness, watering the flock, arises in the view of the Rabbis from his recognition of who these girls are.

This whole episode parallels that of Jacob and Rachel. The Tanhuma and other sources report, "Three met their marriage partners at the well."¹⁴ While the Rabbis had no need to give Moses respectability by casting him in the image of Jacob, Zipporah, the daughter of the high priest of Midian, had much to gain by being seen as a "Rachel with her flock." Jethro, too, gains needed credibility and approval by being shown as a descendant of Abraham. This midrash is attributed to Tannaitic personages and occurs nowhere else save Leviticus Rabbah and Song of Songs Rabbah, works of the

fifth and sixth centuries, respectively.¹⁵ Other midrashim deal with the miracles wrought for Moses when he watered the flock but not with the ancestry of Jethro. One may deduce from this an example of the favorable attitude towards Jethro shown by the earlier sources. That Exodus Rabbah only reports the view of R. Nehemiah and not the ancestry of Jethro may indicate only the curtailed format of this part of Exodus Rabbah, which was not conducive to an extended discussion. On the other hand, perhaps the lack of an explicitly favorable comment about Jethro may show a later date for this part of Ex. R. than I have assumed. Only at the end of this study will it be possible to see where this midrash and its sources fit in respect to the general hypothesis.

1. Mielziner, pp. 32, 35.
2. Though this midrash and its parallels do not specify which R. Judah and which R. Nehemiah are giving their interpretations, Mielziner notes that "His [R. Nehemiah's] controversies are mostly with R. Judah b. Ilai." Ibid p. 35.
3. Lev. R. 34:8 = S. 2, p. 433.
4. S. 2, p. 433, n. 3.
5. Matanot Kehnua to Lev. R. 34:8.
6. S.S.R. mid. 3 on S.S. 2:5 = S.5, p. 1.
7. S. 5, p. 111, n. 2.
8. Yal. Shim. R. 169, p. 56a.
9. Lev. R. *ibid.*; S.S.R. mid. 3 on S.S. 2:5 = S. 5, p. 111. Ex. R. (1:32 = S. 2, p. 42) quotes only R. Nehemiah's opinion, but does so anonymously.
10. Simon renders this "for the merit of our fathers" (S.5, p. 111).
11. Lev. R. *ibid.*
12. Josephus, Antiquities 11, xi:1, sec. 257 = Wh. p. 49.
13. From A.R.N. comes this statement, 'It is a worldwide practice, he [Moses] said to them [the shepherds], 'for men to draw up water and for women to water the beasts. Here women draw the water and men water the beasts! Justice is perverted in this place!'" (A. R.N., ch. 20 = Sch., p. 36b(A) = Goldin, p. 96. M.H.G. 2, p. 34:9-10 has a parallel account.)
14. Tan. HaNid. Shemot 11, p. 65b. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 39; M.H.G. 2, p. 31:19-20; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:16, p. 126 contain similar accounts.
15. E.J., 11:147. E.J., 15:153.

Ex. 2:20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he [ואי] then?"

As related above in the section on Exodus 2:15b-22¹, Jethro recognized Moses as a Jew and the redeemer of Israel only after the latter had either uprooted the staff of Adam or told Jethro his story. Jethro's reaction to Moses as narrated by midrashim of the ninth to twelfth centuries was rather extreme. The verse-related midrash in this section will present a more low-key and less dramatic story. Jethro realizes the importance of the "mysterious stranger" as a result of his daughters' narration of the episode by the well.

Exodus Rabbah reports the basic story which is repeated in a number of sources:

He said to his daughters, 'Where is he then?' He said unto them: 'All this that you tell me about his drawing water and watering the whole flock points him out as being a descendant of Jacob, who also stood near a well which was blessed for his sake.'²

Abot de R. Nathan explains how the well was blessed, or more specifically, recognized its master:

So long as Moses remained standing at the mouth of the well, the waters continued to flow and rise up toward him; when he stepped back, the waters receded.³

No wonder Moses could so generously draw water for all concerned!

In Midrash Lekah Tov, Jethro's awareness that Moses is Jewish is based on a gezerah shavah:

And he said to his daughters, 'Where is he?' [ואי] - [Moses is] from the family of 'Where

[אִיָּה] is your wife Sarah?' (Gen. 18:9)-
in that the waters were blessed because
of his merit.⁴

This ingenious comment occurs originally only in Midrash Lekah Tov, though the Yalkut Shimoni contains a similar version.⁵

Just as other midrash has had the purpose of transforming Jethro into an acceptable father-in-law for Moses, so too does the midrash in this section. The Bible may call Jethro, "the priest of Midian," but the Rabbis have portrayed him as a person knowledgeable about Jewish tradition. Consistent with his earlier reported desire in these same sources to make teshuvah, Jethro knows that Jacob stood by a well, the same well that his daughters used, according to the Zohar.⁶ We see Jethro waiting for a sign from heaven, and as the next section will show, Jethro wasted no time in welcoming Moses into his household.

NOTES

1. See the information cited in Notes 7-15.
2. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 42. Yal.Shim.R. 168, p. 55b parallels this. Tan. HaNid. Shemot 11, p. 66a; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:20, p. 126; M.H.G. 2, p. 34:15-17 are similar to Ex.R. but have this difference: "This one [Moses] is descended from the ones who stood at the well, for the well recognized its master."
3. A.R.N. ch. 20 = Sch., p. 36b (A) = Goldin, p. 96; M.H.G. 2, p. 34:9-10 contains the same story.
4. Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 2:20, p. 7b
5. Yal. Shim. R. 169, p. 56b.
6. Zohar 2, p. 13a = S. 3, p. 39.

Ex. 2:20 Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread.

Full of Middle Eastern hospitality, Jethro wishes to meet and reward the noble stranger who rescued his daughters. That much is obvious from the biblical text. Jethro has but to ask, "Why is it that you have left the man?" and Zipporah rushes off to bring Moses back home. As the Rabbis have sought to "rehabilitate" Jethro's reputation, kal vehomer for Zipporah, the future wife of Moses. Of the many comments on Zipporah, a few will be cited here under the rubric of Exodus 2:20 to show her piety, hospitality and good nature.

The basic midrashic comment is reported by Exodus Rabbah from which come several parallel versions. While the placement of this midrash in other sources varies, coming under the heading of several verses, Zipporah's actions are indicative of her response to the parental command of Exodus 2:20.

'Why is it that you have left the man?'...
Immediately Zipporah ran after him like a
bird (zippor) and brought him home.¹

As the Soncino translation indicates, Zipporah's name, which means a bird in Hebrew, describes her deeds -- fast as a bird to obey a command² -- first of her father, then of Moses and God.

Continuing the "rehabilitation" process to emphasize Zipporah's suitability to be the wife of Moshe Rabbenu, the Rabbis found another characteristic implicit in Zipporah, the bird:

Another interpretation: Why was she called Zipporah? Because she purified all of her father's house like the blood of a bird.³

The reference to the purifying power of a bird comes from Lev. 14:48-52. When the priest determines the plague of leprosy has not spread in a house, he then uses the blood of a bird for a cleansing/purification ritual:

He shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the crimson stuff and the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the slaughtered bird, and the fresh water and sprinkle on the house seven times. Having purged the house with the blood of the bird...(Lev. 14:51-52).

The sources which contain this midrash on the blood of the bird also report that Jethro renounced his priesthood in Midian. Yet, just as the house in which leprosy has not spread still requires some purification ceremony, the good deeds and pious nature of Zipporah are needed to fully redeem her father's house from the taint of idolatry.

The notion of Zipporah the purifier does not appear in the later sources which report how Zipporah sustained Moses in the pit. Those sources emphasize Zipporah's good deeds and her likeness to past worthies. From Divre HaYamim shel Moshe Rabbenu:

Zipporah followed the path of righteousness of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. She walked in the way of God when Moses her husband commanded her.⁴

Sefer HaYashar states her piety less conditionally, "Zipporah walked in the ways of the house of Israel."⁵ All of these good qualities that the Rabbis ascribe to Zipporah are

essential⁶ because, as the next section will show, Jethro's invitation to Moses is tantamount to a matchmaker's proposal.

NOTES

1. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 42. Tan.B. Shemot 11, p. 3b, a work of the fifth century (J.E., 12:45) and Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 2:21, p. 7b parallel the Ex.R. account.
2. The statement in Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:21, p. 128 is clearly fragmentary. "Why was she called Zipporah? Because she ran like a bird." Ran like a bird to do what? That could be either good or bad and the verse under which this comment is placed gives no help. In Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 4:25, p. 13a, Zipporah is called "quick as a bird." However, the reference to bird-like speed is derived from her speed in carrying out the commandment of circumcision: "Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son..." (Ex. 4:25).
3. Tan.B. Shemot 11, p. 3b. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 42; and Yal. Shim. R. 169, p. 56a have parallel versions though Ex.R. omits the words "the blood of." Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:21, p. 128 elaborates on the theme of purification by stating, "She purified her father's house from idolatry as a priest does purifying with the blood of a bird."
4. B.H.M. 11, p. 7.
5. Sefer HaYashar, p. 157.
6. For further discussion of Zipporah's good character, see M.K. 16b = S., p. 103 on Nu. 12:1. M.H.G. 2, p. 37:4-7 repeats the talmudic comment. Its note to line 4 gives the other places where this midrash appears.

Ex. 2:20 Ask him in to break bread.

Jethro's invitation to Moses, to be delivered by Zipporah, seems perfectly straight forward on the biblical level. However, our Rabbis of blessed memory knew that a father with seven daughters always has ulterior motives for inviting a man to the house. Exodus Rabbah reports what was on Jethro's mind when he said, "Ask him in to break bread."

Perhaps he might marry one of you? The expression 'eating bread' here means taking a wife; its parallel is: 'Save the bread which he did eat (Gen. 39:6).'¹

Potipher's restriction upon Joseph in Gen. 39:6 that he might rule all "save the bread which he did eat" has been understood by the Rabbis as a reference to Potipher's wife.² The invitation to dine paid off for Jethro (one less daughter to marry off) and Moses (a fitting wife) as the Bible tells, "He [Jethro] gave Moses Zipporah his daughter as wife" (Ex. 2:21). In fact, Jethro's choice of Moses as a son-in-law gave rise to a general rule, "A man should always give his daughter to a talmid haḥam...."³

Though Philo simply paraphrases the biblical text when he tells of Jethro giving Zipporah to Moses in his treatise Moses, his philosophical midrash in On the Change of Names plays off of the biblical text and the concept of eating:

But if you have not as yet at least now 'invite him that he may eat.' (Ex. 2:20) and feed on your advance to higher stages of goodness and a closer affinity to him. Perhaps he will even dwell among you and wed the winged, inspired and prophetic nature called Zipporah.⁴

Philo's comment reflects that he too, is aware that Zipporah means bird.

According to Eleazar and R. Simon, Jethro's invitation was motivated by something different than matchmaking. Song of Songs Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah report their difference of opinion. In commenting on the reasons for Saul's kindness to the Kenites in 1 Samuel 15:6, R. Eleazar said:

Jethro certainly showed kindness to Moses, as it is written, 'call him, that he may eat bread.' (Ex. 2:20)⁵

Thus, Jethro acted out of the spirit of hospitality to the wayfaring Moses, according to R. Eleazar.

However, R. Simon disagrees, seeing Jethro's invitation as no more than what was proper and required:

It is not so [a free act of generosity]; he gave him food only in repayment, as it is written, 'and moreover he drew for us' (ibid, 19).⁶

Though Leviticus Rabbah calls Jethro's action a kindness, it is clear that Jethro's invitation was a quid pro quo:

Who was it who showed kindness to one to whom he was indebted? Jethro to Moses.... R. Simon explained that he gave him food as his wages; for it is written, 'and moreover he drew for us' (Ex. 2:19).⁷

It would be wrong to see R. Simon's comment as a negative one, rather he is not as enthusiastic toward Jethro as R. Eleazar. R. Simon sounds matter-of-fact, basing his comment on the rabbinic principle of s'muchim -- the invitation to eat follows Moses' action.

Whatever motivated Jethro to invite Moses back to his

house, matchmaking, hospitality, or wages, Moses accepted as the biblical text tells us. The midrash in the next section will show how firmly Moses accepted the invitation.

NOTES

1. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 42. Tan. HaNid. Shemot 11, p. 66a; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:20, p. 127; and M.H.G. 2, p. 34:18-19 have parallel versions.
2. M.H.G. 1, p. 659:10-12. The note to line 10 lists the sources of this midrash.
3. Tan. debe Eliyahu ch.(5)6, p.30. Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b parallels this. While Moses may have been the ideal son-in-law, not everyone agreed that Zipporah was the proper wife for Moses. In the Cozbi-Zimri affair, Zimri accuses Moses of using a double standard by taking Zipporah, a Midianite, for a wife and then denying him the right to Cozbi, also a Midianite. As Rashi points out, Moses' marriage preceded the giving of the Torah and therefore, was permissible, while Cozbi was forbidden by the Torah. See San. 82a = S., pp. 545-546 for a complete account of this episode. Many sources paraphrase this, including Y.San 28d = gemorah on mis. 10:2; Tan HaNid.Balak 20, p. 89a; Tan.B. Balak 29, p. 74b; Ex.R. 33:5 = S. 2, p. 419; Num.R. 20:24 = S. 3, p. 823. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num.25:5, pp. 130b-131a; Tar.Ps.Jon. on Num. 25:6; M.H.G. 4, 439:18-21. One source (Num.R. 22:4 = S.3, p. 856) states that the Midian where Moses lived was not the same as that with which Israel warred as a result of the Cozbi-Zimri affair.
4. On the Change of Names, xx, sec. 120 = L. 5, p. 203.
5. S.S.R. on S.S. 2:5, mid. 3 = S. 5, p. 110. Yal.Shim.R. 168, p. 56a contains the parallel version.
6. S.S.R., *ibid.*
7. Lev.R. 34:8 = S. 2, p. 433.

Ex. 2:21 Moses consented [וַיֵּוָאֵל] to stay with the man.

To understand this verse and Moses' relationship to Jethro, one must first define וַיֵּוָאֵל. Under the root וָאֵל, the Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament supplies the meaning "to show willingness, be pleased",¹ hence the English translation "consented" in the verse. We further find that both Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo Jonathan use the Aramaic צָבַי to render the Hebrew. Jastrow defines the Aramaic word as "to find pleasure in, to choose, desire."² A concordance reveals that besides Ex. 2:21, the Bible contains four verses³ which use וַיֵּוָאֵל as the main verb followed by the infinitive לִשְׁבֹּת. One verse, Judges 17:1, is the exact duplicate of this part of Ex. 2:21 in wording and context and consequently is the same in English translation. The other three verses, Ju. 1:27, Ju. 1:35, Josh. 17:12, have a slightly different sense, being translated as "were resolved" in the J.P.S.A. 1917 translation and "were determined" by B.D.B.⁴ To translate this Hebrew, the Targum uses the word שָׂרִי, which Jastrow renders as "to consent, be willing."⁵ All in all, the sense of וַיֵּוָאֵל seems to imply that Moses freely and willingly settled in Midian with Jethro.

The Rabbis, however, understood the word differently. At least thirteen different sources report the rabbinic meaning of וַיֵּוָאֵל. The Mekilta gives one of the earliest rabbinic definitions of וַיֵּוָאֵל:

Jethro then said: 'Swear unto me'. And Moses swore, as it is said: 'And he adjured (vayoel) Moses' (Ex. 2:21). For alah is but an expression for swearing, as it is said: 'But Saul adjured (vayoel) the people' (I Sam. 14:24). So also: 'Be adjured (hoel) to take two talents' (II Kings 5:23)⁶.

The Rabbis are punning as they define ויאל in terms of הואל, "to swear." More precisely, they are using a gezerah shavah to define a questionable word in terms of a known word. Interestingly, of the two proof texts cited to show that ויאל means "to swear," only "vayoe" in I Samuel 14:24 comes from the root אלה, to swear. "Hoel" in II Kings 5:23 comes from אל, ⁷ "to be content, be willing."

The Talmud in a statement unique to itself gives the same definition for ויאל but proves it by means of a different verse:

R. Nahman said:...He [God]⁸ said [thus] to him [Moses]⁸: 'In Midian thou didst vow....' [How do we know that he [Moses]⁸ vowed in Midian?] - Because it is written, 'and Moses was content [wa-yo'el] to dwell with the man'; now alah can only mean an oath, as it is written, 'and hath taken an [alah] oath of him' [Ez. 17:13].^{8,9}

Regardless of the derivation of the definition, the Talmud is firmly of the opinion that what Moses said to Jethro was an oath. In fact, a rule for individual oath-taking is formulated from Moses' statement. From tractate Nedarim on Mishnah 1:3:

Or One Who Vows by Mohi, These Are Substitutes [for Shebu'a]. One who says 'by Mohi', [Moses] says nothing: 'by the Momtha which Mohi said,' these are substitutes for an oath.¹⁰

Rabbenu Nissim supplies the explanation that the Momtha which Moses said was the oath implicit in Ex. 2:21.¹¹ So while one

may not vow merely "by Moses", one may swear "by the oath which Moses swore", and this oath will be valid.

Thus the midrashim studied would translate this part of Ex. 2:21 as "And Moses swore." What then did Moses swear to do? While the rabbinic sources are in agreement that Moses swore, not surprisingly, they differ as to what Moses swore to do. Four answers are proposed and will be discussed in their respective sections. He either swore to tend Jethro's flock (sec. Ex. 3:1) or not to leave Midian (sec. Ex. 4:18 Moses went back...), or not to circumcise one of his sons (sec. Ex. 18:3¹²) or not to mistreat Zipporah. The last answer will be discussed here since the comment is not tied to any verse.

Tanhuma HaNidpas portrays Jethro as the father of the bride who is giving advice to his new son-in-law. This delightfully human touch is unique to the Tanhuma:

And why did he [Moses] take an oath to him [Jethro]? So that he [Moses] would not do to him [Jethro] that which Laban said, 'If you ill-treat my daughters...' (Gen. 31:50).¹³

The verse continues, "or if you take other wives besides my daughters - though no one else be about, remember, God Himself will be witness between you and me." Moses may have been the redeemer of Israel but, by God, he had better not mistreat Zipporah.¹⁴ This interpretation of וְיָאֵל is quite favorable to Jethro. As will be seen, especially in the section on Ex. 18:3, some of the others present us with quite a different picture of Jethro.

NOTES

1. B.D.B., p. 384.
2. Jastrow, p. 1258.
3. Josh. 17:12, Ju. 1:27, Ju. 1:35, Ju. 17:11.
4. B.D.B., p. 384.
5. Jastrow, p. 1630.
6. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 169 = Mek.H.R. p. 191:12-13. The following sources give the same explanation as the Mekilta, although some only have one proof text: Sif. Deut.pis. 4, p. 12:12-14 and pis. 27, p. 41:11-12; Mid.Tan. on Deut. 1:5, p. 4; Ex.R. 1:33 = S. 2, p. 42; Tan.HaMid.Shemot 12, p. 66a; Tan.B.Shemot 11, p. 4a; Tan.debe El.ch. 17, p. 83; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 2:21, p.7b; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:21, pp. 127-128; M.H.G. 2, p. 27:1-2; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56b; R. 268, p.82a; R.801, p. 283a; R. 697, v. 2, p. 450b; Yal.Mak. on Ps. 24, p. 82a, mid. 19; Mid.Teh. on Ps. 24, p. 104a, mid. 7 = Br. 1, p. 342.
7. B.D.B., p. 384.
8. I inserted the footnoted brackets in the texts. Those without footnotes were supplied by the Soncino translator.
9. Ned. 65a = S., p. 207. Yal Shim.R. 173, p. 57a has a parallel.
10. Ned. 10b = S., p. 26. Brackets supplied by the translator. The Jerusalem Talmud (Y.Ned. 37a = gemorah on mis. 1:2 says approximately the same thing. The commentary supplied by the Korban HaEdah on נדר דנדר במוהל is most helpful.
11. Rabbenu Nissim on תניא רשב"ג in B.Ned. 10b.
12. Ex. 2:22 which gives the naming of Gershom is repeated in Ex. 18:3. Again, I will place the midrashim under Ex. 18:3 to be able to quote the Tannaitic sources in their proper place.
13. Tan.HaMid. Shemot 12, p. 66a.
14. Jethro's reference to Laban and Gen. 31:50 has been understood differently by the Etz Yosef. It harmonizes the Tanhuma's statement with the majority view that Jethro made Moses swear not to leave Midian without permission.

Notes. (Continued)

To do so, the Etz Yosef replaces Gen. 31:50 with Gen. 31:26. "And Laben said to Jacob, 'What did you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword?'" There doesn't seem to be reason to substitute one verse for another. The ed. princ., Constantinople 1520-22, as well as the Mantua edition of 1563 support the reading, "If you ill-treat my daughters..." (Gen. 31:50).

Ex. 3:1 Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian....

As discussed in the last section, one midrashic definition of וְיֹאֵל has Moses swearing to Jethro to shepherd his flocks. Exodus Rabbah explains that agreement by means of an unstated gezerah shavah:

The Sages said: He [Moses] agreed to tend his [Jethro's] flock, for the word (wa-yo'el) means beginning, for when he married his daughter, he began by agreeing to look after his sheep.¹

The basis for "beginning" as the meaning of וְיֹאֵל comes from the Sifre on Deuteronomy which deals with a related word, הוֹאִיל, in Deut. 1:5:

R. Judah said: הוֹאִיל is only used as an expression of beginning, as it says, "(הוֹאֵל) Begin, I pray thee, and tarry all night and let thine heart be merry" (Ju. 19:6), and also it says, "Now therefore (הוֹאֵל) begin to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee forever" (1 Chron. 17:6).²

In spite of R. Judah's effort, his gezerah shavah with Ju. 19:6 and 1Chron. 17:6 does little to establish the meaning of הוֹאִיל. To cite only one problem with R. Judah's "evidence", the Levite who was invited to "begin" his tarrying had already stayed with his father-in-law for three days.³

Regardless of this, however, הוֹאִיל is understood to mean "beginning" because that is what R. Judah prefers. Actually in the context of Deuteronomy 1:5, "On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses _____ to expound this teaching", began makes much more "sense" than the other

meanings tradition also assigns to *וְנִאֲמָר*, such as "swear" or "admonish."⁴

Tanhuma Buber supplies a similar account, but bases its conclusion on the rabbinic principle of *s'muchim*:

'...and he [Jethro] gave Moses Zipporah his daughter' (Ex. 2:21). As soon as he [Moses] took his [Jethro's] daughter, he [Jethro] appointed him [Moses] to shepherd his flocks, as it says, 'Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law...' (Ex. 3:1).⁵

Though Exodus 3:1 does not immediately follow Exodus 2:21, it does represent the continuation of the story of Jethro and Moses. The intervening verses deal with another subject unrelated to Jethro and Moses.

The details of Moses' care and skill as a shepherd "keeping the flock of Jethro" need not concern us. One source, however, does provide an insight into Midianite social practices, in the context of Moses' shepherding. From the Zohar:

Moreover, Moses 'tended the flock of Jethro', not on his own, though he must have possessed some, for as R. Jose remarked, 'Jethro was a rich man, and surely, he must have given his son-in-law sheep and cattle!' Yet he did not tend his own sheep, for then people might have said, 'he treats them so well because they are his own.'⁶

R. Jose's comment occurs only in the Zohar. Other sources do not draw the distinction as to whose sheep Moses kept. Yet in accordance with Middle Eastern customs, Zipporah would have brought with her much sheep and cattle as her dowry, hence the necessity of explaining why Moses was not tending his own flock.

Philo interprets this verse not in terms of sheep but of minds. Reading allegorically, Moses guides, not the sheep of Jethro, but "the thoughts and counsels of the world-ing" Jethro.⁷

He [the poet] ascribes the same profession to Moses, the all wise; for he also is appointed shepherd of a mind that welcomes conceit in preference to truth, and approves seeming in preference to being. For 'Jethro' or 'Iothor' means uneven⁸ and self-conceit is an uneven and adventitious thing that comes in to beguile a fixed and steady life.⁹

Philo concerns himself with issues quite different than those of the rabbis. In fact, the emphasis is completely reversed. Where the Rabbis show Jethro as the superior, adjuring or appointing Moses,¹⁰ Philo uses Jethro as a foil for Moses, portraying him as the opposite and inferior of Moses.

I find it quite difficult to assess Philo's Jethro. As a shadowy figure of allegory,¹¹ he appeals not at all, yet in the straightforward biography of Moses, Jethro shows himself to be one of God's gentlemen. To his daughters, Jethro says, (in a comment typical of the whole section):

'Run back with all speed and invite him [Moses] to receive from me first the entertainment due to him as a stranger, secondly, some requital of the favour which we owe to him.'¹²

Because Philo's place in Judaism and his relationship to Palestinian rabbinic Judaism has yet to be resolved,¹³ his contradictory testimony about Jethro must remain midrash outside of the purview of this study. Philonic material will continue to be cited for its antiquity and descriptive

nature, yet it will not be assessed in terms of the general hypothesis regarding the correlation of age and attitude.

NOTES

1. Ex.R. 1:33 = S. 2, p. 42.
2. Sif.Deut.pis. 27, p. 41:9-12.
3. Ibid., note to line 11.
4. For "swear" as a meaning, see sec.Ex. 2:21, note 6.
For "admonish", see Mid. Tan. on Deut. 1:5, p. 4.
5. Tan.B. Shemot 11, p. 4a.
6. Zohar 2, p. 21a = S. 3, p. 69.
7. The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain, xii, sec. 50 = L.2, p. 133. The translators prefer the term, 'worlding', to the literal meaning, 'man of superfluity' (L. 2, p. 490 for notes on sec. 50).
8. On Husbandry, x, sec. 43 = L. 3, p. 131. Here, the translators revise their earlier translation (see above note) stating, 'the translation 'worlding' was perhaps too loose' (L. 3, p. 490 for notes on sec. 43).
9. On Husbandry, ibid.
10. One wonders about the emphasis which the midrash places on Moses' agreement to Jethro: Moses had to swear to be a shepherd? After all, what else would a son-in-law do for a living in a nomadic society? One possible reason for the necessity of adjuring Moses may come from the fact that it was an Egyptian (albeit, Jew) who stood before Jethro. Remembering the Egyptian attitude toward shepherds, "for all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34), the Rabbis may have sought to show Jethro logically responding to a complex problem. He needed help with his flocks; here was an available man, yet Moses' Egyptian origin made it questionable if he would want to help. Regardless of that, Jethro made him swear to agree to shepherd the flock. But this explanation is only modern midrash and as such must give way to the next section, which discusses another aspect of Moses' oath to Jethro.
11. The majority of Philo's references to Jethro are allegorical!. From On the Change of Names, "He is Jethro when vanity is flourishing, for Jethro is by interpretation 'superfluous', and vanity is to the verities of life a superfluity..." (L. 5, p. 193ff). "Superfluous" is one of those Philonic etymologies that might lead scholars to question Philo's knowledge of Hebrew (see Samuel Sandmel, Philo's Place in Judaism

Notes. (Continued)

(New York: Ktav, 1971), p. 11ff). In On Drunkenness the allegorical nature of the comment is even more apparent. "Jethro is a compound of vanity, closely corresponding with a city or commonwealth peopled by a promiscuous horde, who swing to and fro as their idle opinions carry them" (L. 3, p. 337ff).

12. Moses I, xi, sec. 58 = L. 6, p. 307ff.
13. See the introductions and Chapter One (pp. ix-29) in Sandmel's Philo's Place in Judaism for a good survey of these matters.

Ex. 4:18 Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring."

After the dramatic encounter at Horeb, those events outside time and space which were to forever alter Moses' life, one thing did not change -- the obligation of a son-in-law towards his father-in-law. As the biblical text clearly tells us, Moses came down from the mountain and went home to ask permission from Jethro to leave Midian. This account in Exodus 4:18 could have either troubled or elated the Rabbis of the midrash. Was Moses less than fired with zeal for his divine mission so that he gave a mere mortal a veto over his fulfilling a command from God? Or was Moses' request proof of his superb sense of responsibility in that he concerned himself with his earthly obligations even in a time of keen spiritual challenge? As one might expect, the midrash generated by this verse reflects the latter question. Moses' return to Egypt is discussed in terms of his prior commitment to Jethro from Exodus 2:21.

As stated above¹, one of the explanations of וַיֵּלֶךְ is that Moses swore to live in Jethro's household and presumably then, not to leave. Exodus Rabbah gives the now familiar gezerah shavah with I Sam. 14:24 and then asks:

Why did [Jethro]² adjure him [Moses]?³
Because he [Jethro]³ said unto him
[Moses]³: 'I know that Jacob your
ancestor, when Laban gave him his daugh-
ters, took them and left him without
his knowledge. I am afraid if I give
you my daughter you will do the same to
me!' Whereupon Moses swore at once and
he gave unto him Zipporah.⁴

Whereas Tanhuma HaKidpas' comparison between Jethro and Laban quoted above⁵ was basically favorable - both were protective papas - this comparison does not bode well for Jethro, for Laban was a wily trickster who did not do right by his son-in-law. However, the comparison need not be an invidious one. While Laban, who had sons, kept Jacob in Padan-aram out of greed, Jethro, with no sons, needed the protection and help of Moses and could not afford to be surprised by a sudden departure.⁶ That Jethro and Laban are not linked to the former's discredit is indicated by the Zohar, a composite work assembled over several centuries:⁷

R. Abba said... 'Now Moses was a shepherd of Jethro's flock and lived with him as Jacob with Laban, when he wished to go away, he first obtained his permission; why then did not Jacob, being so upright a man, obtain permission from Laban before leaving him? The truth is, as tradition teaches us, that Jacob feared lest Laban might employ all sorts of devices to make him remain with him longer, as he had done at first. Moses, however, had nothing of the kind to fear from Jethro.'⁸

The above selection from Exodus Rabbah (note 4) as well as its continuation, a gezerah shavah, come under the heading of Exodus 2:21:

R. Nehemiah said that he [Moses] agreed to abide with him [Jethro], for the word (wa-yo'el) always refers to residence, as it is said: Be content (ho'il), I pray thee and tarry all night (Judg. 19:6).⁹

However, most of the midrashim which discuss Moses' oath to Jethro occur in connection with Ex. 4:18. Tanhuma HaNidpas and Tanhuma Buber show us Moses' honorable nature, that he

was zealous "to fulfill the lightest duty even as the weightiest."¹⁰ The mission to Egypt could not start with a broken promise to Jethro:

Said he [Moses] before Him, 'Master of the Universe, I swore an oath to Jethro that I would not go except with his permission.' Said He to him, 'Go and return to Midian and there, I will release you from your vow.' Therefore, He spoke with him in Midian as it says, 'The Lord spoke to Moses in Midian' (Ex. 4:19). 'Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro' (Ex. 4:18) didn't need to be stated, but only 'He returned to [Egypt]'.¹¹ Why [was the] 'to his father-in-law Jethro' [included in the text]? [In order] to release him from his vow and to take from him [Jethro] permission [to depart].¹²

Rather than going straight from Mt. Horeb back to Egypt, as one might expect, Moses returns to Midian, as he must. Apparently God must have approved of this delay, for He did speak to Moses again -- in Midian. In fact, it is in Midian (i.e. Ex. 4:19) that the final reassurance that it is safe to return to Egypt is delivered.

The Tanhumas indicate that both God and Jethro excused Moses from his oath in Midian. However, in Midrash HaGadol, God does not play a part until the end. As a consequence, Moses is less sure that Jethro will let him go:

It was in Moses' mind to be crafty in order to seek an opening [to get out of] his oath. 'If I say to him [Jethro], "I am going and I will return to my brethren..." perhaps he will not approve. Rather I will make the speech more palatable for him as 'Let me go, I pray you, and I will return' [Rather than asking for permission to go -- leave Jethro -- and return to Egypt, Moses sought to dissemble by indicating that he would return. In addition, he was beseeching rather than demanding]. Jethro understood

[the hidden purpose of] the speech. He responded to him regarding the first thing [you may go] and didn't deal [let lie]¹³ with the second [you will return]. Moses began to be distressed [that he was still bound by his oath, thus making it impossible to lead the children of Israel]. Immediately, God in the guise of the heavenly host appeared unto him [Moses] and he released him [Moses] from his oath, as it says, 'The Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt... (Ex. 4:19). Jethro has already given you permission."¹⁴

While one may wonder in the Tanhuma account if it was through God's agency that Jethro excused Moses from his oath, hence God's insistence that Moses return to Midian, Midrash HaGadol leaves no doubt about Jethro's unwillingness to lose Moses. Since Midrash HaGadol is a work of the early middle ages, this unique comment which shows Jethro seeking to thwart Moses' mission by making him return can serve as evidence for the correlation between unfavorable attitudes towards Jethro and late dating of the respective source.

Whereas the sources quoted above consider Moses' oath to Jethro binding to such a degree that it had to be dealt with before Moses could return to Egypt, and then had to be dealt with by God Almighty, the Sages quoted in Exodus Rabbah downplay Moses' obligation. They divided the verbs in the verse to show how Moses first went (וילך) to Egypt and only then returned to Jethro (וישב):

Another interpretation: It need only have said: "And Moses returned", but our Sages say that first he went to Pharaoh with his divine charge and then he returned to Jeter his father-in-law; for God said to him: 'Should Jethro at all remind you of your oath, you can say: "The Master of oaths

has absolved me of my vow." Hence doth it say: 'And Moses went; and then he returned to Jethro his father-in-law.'¹⁵

One can understand why these Rabbis were reluctant to show that Moses had bound himself in any way to Jethro, the priest of Midian. However, the other sources which indicate that God did absolve Moses from his oath do so in a way that safeguards Moses' honor -- i.e. Moses adhered to his vow and went to ask permission to leave. The abrupt account in Exodus Rabbah achieves the same purpose in that Moses is able to return to Egypt, but it short-circuits the niceties of politeness and propriety. In addition, the chronology confuses the issue. When did Moses return to Jethro -- after his initial meeting with Pharaoh or after the Exodus? All in all, this account in Exodus Rabbah is a controversial and difficult one, apparently even to the "compiler" of Exodus Rabbah who includes a differing opinion immediately following it:

The sons of R. Hiyya the Great said: He did not go to Pharaoh before Jethro had absolved him of his oath.¹⁶

This comment in the name of first generation Amoraim (219-279 C.E.)¹⁷ states the generally held rabbinic view. If it is accurately attributed to the sons of R. Hiyya, it may represent the earliest statement of this motif.

In spite of the opinion of the Sages in the Exodus Rabbah passage that Moses did not check back with Jethro, Moses' fidelity to Jethro became proverbial. His honorableness in obeying his oath of Exodus 2:21 is also discussed in Exodus Rabbah, among other sources:

'And hath not sworn deceitfully' [Ps. 24:4]³ -- this is Moses for when he came to Jethro, he swore to him that he would not depart without his knowledge, and when he went on his divine mission, he went to ask Jethro to absolve him of his oath. Hence: And he returned to Jethro his father-in-law [to gain release from his oath to Jethro].^{3,18}

Moses' accumulation of virtues, of which this was one, make him worthy to "ascend into the mountain of the Lord" (Ps. 24:3).

Not only is Moses' behavior the subject of maxims, but a general rule was derived from Moses' דרך ארץ. Tractate Nederim supplies the pertinent comment of an Amora, R. Nahman:

It was taught: He who is forbidden to benefit from his neighbor can have the vow absolved only in his [neighbor's]² presence. Whence do we know this? -- R. Nahman said: Because it is written, 'And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life' [Ex. 4:19]³. He said [thus]² to him: 'In Midian thou didst vow; go and annul thy vow in Midian.'¹⁹

Exodus Rabbah reworks the talmudic version and supplies the rationale for this rule, which is based on the Jerusalem Talmud.²⁰ Commenting on Ex. 4:19, Rabbi Johanan said:

The Torah here teaches a maxim of propriety, that one who takes an oath before his friend should obtain absolution only in his presence, so that he may not suspect him of having sworn deceitfully. Is not this what you find in the case of Moses, who because he had sworn to Jethro, now had to go to Midian to absolve himself of the oath in his presence.²¹

This midrash then concludes as does the Talmud account cited above. Thus, Mosaic propriety is enshrined and tradition scrupulously protects the reputation of one of its heroes from any suspicion of trickery.

Finally, to conclude this section, Tanhuma HaNidpas and Exodus Rabbah present a most favorable estimation of Jethro. While honor required Moses to return to Jethro for annulment of his oath, Tanhuma HaNidpas and Exodus Rabbah give an additional reason for Moses' return. Jethro's hospitality was such that it bound Moses firmly to him:

At the time when God said to Moses, 'Come, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh...' (Ex. 3:9-10), Moses said to Him, 'I cannot go on account of the fact that Jethro welcomed me and opened the door of his house to me and I am like a son to him. He who opens his door to his friend, his [the friend's] soul is beholden to him....' Thus Moses said to God, 'Master of the Universe, Jethro received me and treated me with respect. Am I to go without his permission?' Therefore it is written, 'Moses went back to his father-in-law Jether...(Ex. 4:18),'²²

One cannot help but feel the affection between the two men which comes through the centuries.²³ Accepting the antiquity of this part of Exodus Rabbah, a correlation between the age of the source and the attitude towards Jethro appears. The favorable attitude towards Jethro continues in the next section, where Jethro sends off his son-in-law in the best possible way.

NOTES

1. Sec. Ex. 2:21, p. 48.
2. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
3. I supplied these brackets.
4. Ex.R. 1:33 = S. 2, p. 42.
5. Sec. Ex. 2:21 note 13.
6. Especially because Jethro had already depended on Moses for forty years. Sif.Deut.pis. 357, p. 429:8 is the source for this. "He [Moses] was in Midian for forty years." Mid. Tan. on Deut. 34:7, p. 226, repeats this. P.R.E. is more explicit about Moses' help. "Moses was keeping the sheep of Jethro for forty years, and the beasts of the field did not consume them; but they increased and multiplied exceedingly" (P.R.E. ch. 40, pp. 94a-b = F., p. 314). M.H.G. 2, p. 43:1-2 has a shorter version of this. Mid.Lekah Tov gives sixty years as the time Moses spent in Midian (on Ex. 4:18, p. 12a). It is interesting to note that later sources such as Sefer HaYashar replace Moses' lengthy sojourn in Midian with one of equal duration in Ethiopia. While both sets of sources are motivated by a common need to explain the "empty years" in Moses' life, no doubt, the later aggadists found it more exotic and interesting to describe Moses as a king in Cush than a shepherd in Midian.
7. "...the contents of the Zohar clearly indicate that the work is the production not of a single author or of a single period, but of many authors, periods, and civilizations; for it combines the most puzzling incongruities and irreconcilable contradictions..." (J.E., 12: 691). Hence, the Zohar's usefulness for establishing a correlation between attitude and date is extremely limited.
8. Zohar 1, p. 158b = S. 2, p. 109.
9. Ex. R.1:33 = S. 2, p. 42. Tan.B. Shemot 11, p. 4a and Yal.Shim.R. 168, p. 56a report the same gezerah shavah, but in the name of R. Judah. Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:21, p. 128 has the same thing, but anonymously.
10. Pirke Avot 4:2 = Goldin, p. 240.

Notes. (Continued)

11. The modern printed editions of the Tanhuma had "He returned to Midian." This is a corruption of the text. Both the ed. princ., Constantinople 1520-1522 (p. 28a) and the Venice edition of 1545 (p. 26a), as well as all the parallel sources (see next note) read "to Egypt." Without this correction, the whole effect of Moses' action--fulfilling a prior obligation first -- is lost. The substitution of Midian for Mitzraim (Egypt) occurred first in the Mantua edition of 1563, p. 26a. This edition has become the basis for all the subsequent printed editions. Hence a four hundred year old mistake has been perpetuated.
12. Tan.HaMid.Shemot 20, p. 68b. Tan.B.Shemot 18, p. 5b reverses Tan.HaMid.'s account. "'Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro' (Ex. 4:18) didn't need to be stated..." is followed by Moses' dialogue with God. God signals his approval of Moses' desire and need to return to Midian by "affixing a cloud of glory there." Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 4:12, p. 12a gives two reasons for Moses' return to Midian. The first was to pick up his wife and children. This totally skirts the issue of an oath to Jethro. The second is a much abbreviated version of Tan.B., which does include the important motif of the cloud of glory. Mid.Ag. on Ex. 4:18, pp. 131-132 also reports the seeming superfluity of "Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro" and resolves it in the same fashion as Tan.HaMid. and Tan.B. It too has a דבר אחר interpretation which states that Moses returned to Jethro in order to inform him of the mighty deeds of the Lord. M.H.G. 2, 72:13-14 and Yal.Shim.R. 173, p. 57a both resemble the first part of Mid.Ag.
13. Dr. Werner Weinberg first suggested this wording to me.
14. M.H.G. 2, pp. 72:13-73:5. Hoffmann, in his edition of Mek.R.S., gives this passage in an addendum of passages "which appear to be from the Mekilta of R. Shim'on b. Yohai" (p. 167). The passage itself appears on p. 169.
15. Ex.R. 4:4 = S. 2, p. 79.
16. Ex.R. 4:4 = S. 2, p. 80.
17. Mielziner, pp. 41-42.
18. Ex.R. 4:1 = S.2, p. 77. Mid.Teh. on Ps. 24, mid. 7, p. 104a; Tan debe El. ch. 17, p. 83, Deut.R. 11:2 = S. 3, p. 173; Yal.Shim.v.2,R.697 2, p. 450b; Yal.Mak. on Ps. 24, mid. 19, p. 82a all contain parallel versions.
19. Ned. 65a = S., pp. 206-207. Tos.Ned. 2:10, p. 278:11-12 quotes the baraita.
20. Y.Ned. 39b = gemorah on mis. 5:4.

Notes. (Continued)

21. Ex.R. 5:4 = S. 2, p. 83.
22. Tan.HaNid. Shemot 16, pp. 67a, 67b. Ex.R. 4:2 = S. 2, pp. 78-79 gives the same report.
23. One Rabbi puts a different interpretation on the two men's relationship by denigrating Jethro. However, a refutation of the negative view and a rebuke immediately follow in Ex.R. 11:1 = S. 2, p. 137:

'He shall stand before kings' [Prov. 22:29] - [as it says], 'And stand before Pharaoh' [Ex. 8:16]. 'He shall not stand before mean men' [Prov. 22:29] - this refers to Jethro. Whereupon R. Nehemiah said to him [R. Judah]: 'According to thy words, thou hast made that which is holy profane. No, the meaning of 'He shall stand before kings' is that he shall stand before God, the King of kings, as it says: 'And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights' (Ex. xxxiv, 28). 'He shall not stand before mean' [lit. "darkened"] refers to Pharaoh, whom God plunged into darkness,⁷ together with his country, as it says: 'And there was a thick darkness' (ib. x, 22).

Whether the meaning of חשכים is "mean" or "obscure" or "unimportant", R. Judah seems to be implying that Moses' life will improve once he leaves Jethro. R. Nehemiah's rejoinder deals with a more important topic - preserving God's honor. Surely, Pharaoh cannot be the king in Moses' life; rather the king must be God. Likewise, the mean or "darkened" person for Moses has to be Pharaoh, not his father-in-law. S.S.R. on S.S. 1:1, mid. 2 has a shortened version of this. Pes.Rab.pis. 6:2, p. 23a = Br., p. 120 also parallels the Ex.R. account. However, both Friedlander and Braude place "'He shall not stand before mean men' [Prov. 22:29] - this refers to Jethro" in brackets meaning that it was not in the original text. Both the Parma ms. 1240 or the ed. princ. (Prague, 1657) omit it.

Ex. 4:18 And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in Peace [לך לשלום]."

Ben Bag Bag's maxim in Pirke Avot, "Occupy yourself with it [the Torah] over and over again, for everything is contained in it,"¹ was amply borne out in the rabbinic exegesis on Exodus 4:18. Not only was a rule for an oath seen in this verse (see the preceding section), but also the proper way to bid farewell to a friend. The Rabbis observed that the Bible has two different expressions which are used to say goodbye, either לך לשלום or לך בטלום. The first expression literally means, "Go to peace," and the second, "Go in peace." Rabbinic discussion found in the Talmud centers on the significance of the preposition as an indicator of the departing person's fate:

R. Abin the Levite² also said: When a man takes leave of his fellow, he should not say to him, 'Go in peace,' but 'Go to peace.' For Moses to whom Jethro said, 'Go to peace,' [Ex. 4:18]³ went up and prospered, whereas Absalom to whom David said, 'Go in peace' [2 Sam. 15:9]³ went away and was hung.⁴

The reason for not saying "Go in peace," to a living person is also given by R. Abin:

One who takes leave of the dead should not say to him, 'Go unto peace,' but 'Go in peace,' as it says [about Abraham],³ 'But thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace, thou shalt be buried' [Gen. 15:15].^{3, 5}

While the J.P.S.A. English translation disguises Jethro's wishes for Moses, on the rabbinic level, it is clear that Jethro's mode of farewell virtually assured Moses's success.

When the two men meet again in the wilderness, Moses will be as effusive in his greeting to Jethro as Jethro was in his farewell.

NOTES

1. Pirke Avot 5:22 = Samson R. Hirsch, Chapters of the Fathers (New York: Phillipp Feldheim, Inc., 1967), p. 95.
2. A fourth generation Palestinian Amora according to Strack, p. 128.
3. I supplied these brackets.
4. Ber. 64a = S., p. 404. M.K. 29a = S., p. 192 has the same thing only in the name of R. Levi b. Hita. M.H.G. 2, 74:20-75:2 repeats the M.K. account in the name of R. Levi b. Hita, an almost unknown Amora, perhaps of the fourth or later generation. My attempt to date R. Levi b. Hita is based on the fact that Hyman's Toldoth Tannaim VeAmoraim, p. 859 gives a Yerushalmi quote in which R. Levi comments on the words of R. Berechiah, a fourth generation Amora. Yal. Shim. v. 2 R. 148, p. 368b has a parallel version in the name of R. Jose b. Hanina. Tan. HaNid. Shemot 21, p. 68b. quotes the talmudic accounts anonymously. Tan.B. Shemot 18, p. 5b paraphrases the Talmud, giving as a general rule, "All about whom it is written בשלום will go and return. All about whom it is written בשלום will go and not return." Abner in 2 Sam. 3:21 is given as an example of בשלום. Yal.Shim R. 173, p. 57a repeats this version. Tan HaNid. Shoftim 19, p. 144b gives both Abner and Absalom as examples of בשלום. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 4:18, pp. 12a-b has just Moses and Absalom for examples. Mid.Ag.on Ex. 4:18, p. 122 and Ex.R. 4:4 = S. 2, p. 80 and Ex.R. 5:3 = S. 2, pp. 82-83 just give the basic rule as in Tan.B., but cite no examples. Perek HaShalom (Derek Eretz Zuta, p. 59b = S. 2, p. 601) states that peace was given as a blessing to both the living and the dead. Ex. 4:18 establishes it as a blessing to the living.
5. Ber. 64a = S., p. 404 and M.K. 29a = S., p. 192. Of the sources quoted in note 4 only M.H.G. 2, p. 74:20-22 gives this information about parting from the dead.

Ex. 18:1 Jethro [יִתְרוֹ]

Throughout this study, I have consistently referred to the central character of this study as Jethro. This decision was made to avoid passing on to the reader the confusion resulting from the differing ways in which the Bible refers to Jethro. Biblically, the father-in-law of Moses the priest of Midian is known as Reuel, Jethro, Jether, Hobab and Keni. This multiplicity of names results from the fact that the unnamed priest of Midian (Ex. 2:16) is called Reuel by Exodus 2:18. This father who gave one of his seven daughters to Moses (Ex. 2:21) is called Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses by Exodus 3:1. Exodus 4:18 has Moses returning to his father-in-law who is called Jether. While Exodus 18 consistently refers to Jethro as Moses's father-in-law, a grammatically ambiguous Numbers 10:29 would allow either Reuel or his son Hobab to be labelled the father-in-law of Moses. Judges 4:11 makes clear that Hobab is the father-in-law, while Judges 1:16 assigns this role to one Keni. Who are these people? No wonder the search for the "real" Homer pales by comparison!

The Rabbis resolve this problem in a most convenient fashion. Not only do Reuel, Jethro, Jether, Hobab and Keni refer to one and the same person, but they find three more names for this person, Putiel, Heber and Ben. For purposes of accuracy, one must note that one source, the Sifre to Numbers, does try to distinguish between Reuel and Hobab,

yet the majority view as reflected in over forty midrashim is that one Jethro was called by six to eight names. While modern scholars postulate different strata or textual emendations,¹ the Rabbis see in the names various aspects of Jethro's love for and close relation to the God of Israel.

The Mekilta of R. Ishmael, the source for much of our knowledge about Jethro, introduces the subject of his names in a most organized fashion:

He was called by seven names: Jether,
Jethro, Heber,² Hobab, Ben Reuel,²
Putiel, Keni.³

Each name is then briefly discussed. Going down the list, the Rabbis explain Jether (יֶתֶר) in terms of its root meaning-- "addition," or "more".⁴

Jether, because he caused an additional chapter to be put into the Torah.⁵

A parallel passage in the Mekilta of R. Shim'on identifies Jethro's chapter and explains how the priest of Midian (!) came to supply material for the Torah:

Jether, because he caused an additional chapter to be put into the Torah. The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave him a chapter in order that he might distinguish himself through it. Which [chapter] was it? The appointment of the elders, as it says (Ex. 18:21), 'You shall also seek out from among all the people [capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens!].'⁶

While the section on Ex. 18:24 (see below) will have a fuller discussion of Jethro's role with פרשת הדיינים and the suitability of his being associated with it, this midrash

serves the familiar function of upgrading a biblical character's reputation. How much of a goy (read: evil pagan) could Jethro have been if God Almighty found him worthy to advise Moses. Along this same line of argument, It should be remembered that this whole section of the Torah, Exodus 18-20, which includes the Ten Commandments, bears Jethro's name. As Jethro is defended and firmly included in the community of Israel, Moses' association with him cannot be seen as detrimental to the great leader.

The name, Jethro, next on the Mekilta's list, is also explained in terms of its root. In the kal, יתר means "to be rich, plentiful,"⁷ hence, "Jethro, because he abounded in good deeds."⁸ A following devar aher comment makes the performance of good deeds even more central to the derivation of the name Jethro:

Originally they merely called him Jether, as it is said: 'And Moses went and returned to Jether his father-in-law' (Ex. 4:18). After he had performed good deeds, they added one more letter to his name so that he was called Jethro.⁹

The midrash continues by stating that Abraham, Sarah, and Joshua all were known by shorter names until good deeds caused their names to be expanded, clearly honor by association for Jethro.

Other sources explain Jethro in terms of the addition of a chapter to the Torah. From Sifre to Numbers:

R. Shim'on b. Yohai¹⁰ said: ...Jethro, because he caused an additional chapter to be put in the Torah.¹¹

Sifre Zuta expands this comment with more familiar material:

Inasmuch as he added one thing to the Torah, so did the All-Present add a letter to his name, since in the beginning he was called Jether.¹²

This harmonizing of the explanations for Jether and Jethro comes from sources which by virtue of their limitation to the book of Numbers have no need to provide a separate exegesis for the two names, as did the Mekiltas where both names occur. Aside from this comment on Jethro, which would be the well-known name, the Sifre sources limit their comments to names which occur in their purview, specifically Reuel, Hobab and Keni.

The comments on Heber occur in only a few sources. From the Mekilta comes a very literal explanation of this name, "Heber, because he associated himself [נתחבר] with God."¹³ Since the inclusion of this name seems problematic, not surprisingly differing ms. traditions exist. The Horovitz-Rabin edition of the Mekilta gives the derivation of Heber as "he made himself like a friend (חבר) to God."¹⁴ Either version is faithful to the meaning of the root חבר.

Hobab, the fourth of Jethro's seven names, is discussed in both an exegetical and semi-critical fashion. Exegetically, Hobab is expressive of two types of love. From the root חבר, Hobab tells us of Jethro's relation with God. "Hobab because he was beloved of God."¹⁵ Sifre to Numbers shows human love and no doubt explains why Jethro was beloved of God. "Hobab, because he made the Torah beloved. We don't find any proselyte who made the Torah more beloved

than Jethro."¹⁶ Jethro would be rewarded across the generations for his role in making the Torah beloved, as the sections on Jethro's descendants will show.

A few of the midrashim which deal with Hobab are not concerned with the derivation of his name, but rather his identity. In Numbers 10:29, Hobab is called the son of Reuel. Though the Mekilta describes Hobab and Reuel as two names for the same person, some of the Rabbis of Sifre to Numbers who were directly concerned with commenting on Numbers 10:29 could not accept this. They tried to distinguish between Hobab and Reuel based on evidence offered by other verses, especially in order to determine to whom the ambiguous phrase in the verse, חבב בן רעואל המדיני חתן משה applied:

Hobab was his name. [Or was] Reuel his name as it says, 'When they returned to their father Reuel' (Ex. 2:18)? Because it says, 'Now Heber the Kenite had severed himself from the Kenites even from the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses' (Judg. 4:11). Hobab is his name, rather than Reuel. Why did the Bible then say, 'When they returned to Reuel their father'? This is to teach that children call their father's father 'Father.'¹⁷

For the Rabbis, that Hobab is explicitly mentioned as the father-in-law of Moses in Judges 4:11 is the chief identifying factor in proving that Hobab is the same person as Jethro. In comparison to the previous comments on the meaning of Jethro's name, this dismissal of Reuel as an alter-ego of Jethro seems like a piece of modern Bible scholarship. Yet emphasizing the eclectic nature of the midrashic, the very

next comment in Sifre to Numbers explains Reuel as one of Jethro's names.

The rabbinic comments on the name Ben illustrate a peshat level approach to this word. Though few sources have this material, one cannot fail to be struck by the high esteem it has for Jethro. "Ben, because he was like a son to God."¹⁸

While a few midrashim consider Reuel to be Zipporah's grandfather, thus a different person than Jethro, Hobab, etc., ¹⁹ most sources do consider him to be the equivalent of Jethro.²⁰ The commentary on Reuel results from dividing his name into two parts, as the Mekilta shows. "Reuel (רעואל) because he was like a friend (רֵיַע) to God."²¹ Though the midrash uses the Hebrew מִקוֹם for God out of piety, this is a synonym for the אֱל in Reuel's name. Midrash Lekah Tov combines the aspects of friendship and God in a different way in a comment unique to itself. "Reuel because he became beloved to God and a friend to Israel."²²

While Philo regards Jethro as a name indicating vanity and superfluosity,²³ Reuel indicates complimentary things about this biblical character:

Yet often this wiseacre [the Jethro type] changes round and leaves the flock which had him in his blindness for their leader: he seeks the herd of God and becomes therein a member without reproach, so much so does he admire the nature of its herdsman and reverence the skill in governing which he shews in charge of his flock. For the meaning of Raguel [=Reuel in Greek] is 'the shepherding of God.'²⁴

Here, Philo's etymologizing is more on target than sometimes happens as he interprets the רעל in Reuel as coming from the root רעה, to shepherd.

The name Putiel seems to be the strangest of Jethro's names and the one with the least connection to him. Before quoting the Mekilta's definition of Putiel, a few words on how this name became associated with Jethro. The name Putiel is derived from Egyptian and means "he whom God gave."²⁵ It occurs but once in the Bible in Ex. 6:25 as the father-in-law of Eleazar, "And Eleazar Aaron's son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife." While a father with more than one daughter might have been the clue that this was Jethro, it was the need to define Putiel that led back to Jethro. Since פוט as a root occurs only in this word, the Rabbis apparently felt free to link it to other roots which had at least two of the same letters, hence, the etymology which occurs in the Talmud:

A Tanna taught: Not for naught did Phinehas go to battle [against Midian]²⁶ but to exact judgment on behalf of his mother's father [Joseph];²⁶ as it is said, 'And the Midianites sold him into Egypt' etc. [Gen. 37:36].²⁷ Is this to say that Phinehas was a descendant of Joseph? But behold it is written, 'And Eleazar Aaron's son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife'; ['and she bare him Phineas']²⁶ [Ex. 6:25]²⁷ Is it not to be supposed then, that he was a descendant of Jethro who fattened [pittem]²⁶ calves for idolatry?-- No; [he was a descendant]²⁶ of Joseph who mastered [pitpet]²⁶ his passion. But did not the other tribes despise him [saying],²⁶ Look at this son of Puti, the son whose mother's father fattened calves for idolatry; he killed a prince in Israel!' But, if

his mother's father was descended from Joseph, then his mother's mother was descended from Jethro; and if his mother's mother was descended from Joseph, then his mother's father was descended from Jethro. This is also proved as a conclusion from what is written, 'One of the daughters of Putiel,' from which are to be inferred two [lines of ancestry].²⁷ Draw this conclusion.²⁸

While this does not seem to be much to link Jethro to Phineas -- since when are mem's dropped (ממ to פמ), it was enough to convince the children of Israel.²⁹ In the rabbinic literature, Phinehas was the most maligned of the leadership in the wilderness, next to Moses. Various mid-rashic devices are used to protect his reputation, such as stressing "one of the daughters of Putiel" or his genealogy as "Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest" (Num. 25:10).³⁰

On the surface, it would seem that this talmudic comment would wreak havoc with the general hypothesis that the earlier the material the more favorable it would be towards Jethro. However, if anyone is being tainted or shown to ill advantage, I would venture to say that it is the children of Israel, not Jethro. The Israelites usually act like a quarrelsome bunch of louts always ready to murmur or lust after strange gods. Here, at the time of war with the Midianites or at the Cozbi-Zimri affair in other sources, Phinehas who punished the guilty is being insulted with the foulest of insults. The past of a convert is being dragged up. No one would deny that Jethro used to be an Akum, but

at this point that fact had precious little relevance. After all, no one is suggesting that Phinehas is going to fatten calves himself. If there is no specific statement defending Jethro here, perhaps it was because the overriding need was to protect Phinehas and because the attack on Jethro was so transparently wrong that it needed no rejoinder. On the other hand, of course, there is nothing that would stop one from assuming that this statement is the work of an individual who did not like converts; such people must have existed in all generations.

While the Talmud derives the name Putiel from פטט, stuffing cattle for idolatry, the definitions from the Mekilta and other sources are quite the opposite. However, grammatically, they share the shakiness of the talmudic etymologies. The Mekilta offers Putiel, "because he freed himself (נפטר) from idolatry."³¹ Putiel thus comes from פטר with the final resh dropping off. Midrash Lekah Tov gives another definition which links Putiel with another kindred root "Putiel, because God detached [פלטו] from idolatry."³² Thus, פלטו shares some of the same letters as Putiel, though one would imagine that the rabbinic comparison is made by dropping the middle letter in פלטו. From the Mekilta of R. Shim'on comes what seems to be a circular definition. "Putiel because he פט all the idolatry in the world."³³ The circularity is only because of our own lack of knowledge. Neither the Aruch, Levy, Jastrow or Ben Yehuda help to define the word in the context of Mekilta of

R. Shim'on. While the Aruch states that the root טב comes from the Syriac, all its references (with the exception of one on the name Putiel to be cited below) concern the pilpel טבטב of the verb with the meaning of schwartzzen-to talk or babble.³⁴ Levy follows the Aruch giving the same meaning, but listing the root verbs as טבט.³⁵ Jastrow and Ben Yehuda only deal with the pilpel form and list it as טבטט³⁶. Jastrow offers two meanings--"to talk or babble," or "to conquer one's self."³⁷ Ultimately, whatever Jethro's action toward "all the idolatry in the world" is established by the editors of the critical editions of the Mekilta of R. Shim'on. Hoffman goes along with the pilpel form of the verb and proposes "perhaps its meaning is that he conquered his passions (טבטט) and fought against them."³⁸ Epstein-Melammed suggest that Jethro spurned or despised idolatry, this meaning of טב coming from the Syriac.³⁹ Either definition conforms to the spirit of the Mekilta of R. Ishmael's טבטט, especially if טב does have a meaning in Syriac apart from טבטט.

Apart from טב, the Aruch also offers a definition of Putiel. Working on the meaning of the root, the Aruch tells us "Puti is from Greek and means light."⁴⁰ We recognize the stem photo from this. Further on, "Putiel (Ex. 6:25) in that he shone with good deeds, for you say in Greek photia which means candle."⁴¹ The Aruch here is quoting the Yelamdenu which unfortunately does not appear in either Tanhuma known to us. Midrash HaGadol does however pick up the comment and quotes in a slightly different form in the name of R. Joshua

b. Levi, a first generation Palestinian Amora (219-279 C.E.).⁴² "Why was he called Putiel? Because God made him shine through repentance. In Greek, a candle is called פוט." ⁴³

The final of Jethro's seven or eight names comes from a source outside of the Torah. "And the children of the Kenite [בני קני], Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah..." (Judges 1:16). As a Midianite, Jethro was the exception, a friend of Israel out of a tribe of traditional enemies. However, as Keni, the progenitor of the Kenites, his friendship was known through the generations.

The name Keni is defined in any one of five ways, each definition rich with word plays on the stem קנ. From the Mekilta comes a two-fold explanation, "Keni, because he was zealous (קנא) for God and also because he acquired (קנה) the Torah for himself."⁴⁴ Other sources elaborate on both Jethro's zealousness and his acquisitions. Sifre Zuta tells us, "He was called Keni because he was zealous for God over the matter of idolatry."⁴⁵ From Sifre to Numbers, "Why was he called Keni? Because he acquired heaven and earth and the Torah."⁴⁶ Clearly, R. Jose, a fourth generation Tanna (139-165 C.E.),⁴⁷ to whom the above is ascribed, approved of Jethro's actions.

Albright tells us that קין meant originally metal-worker, a smith.⁴⁸ The Rabbis possessed this knowledge as a comment by R. Dosethai, a contemporary of Rabbi⁴⁹ reveals:

R. Dosethai said, 'Keni was his name. Why was his name Keni? Because he withdrew himself from the goldsmith's art (מעשה קיני), a thing which God is aroused against as it says, 'They have incensed me (קנאנו) with no God' (Deut. 32:21) and 'where was the seat of the image of jealousy which provoketh to jealousy (המקנה)' (Ez. 8:3).⁵⁰

It is clear from the proof texts that the מעשה קיני which Jethro ceased doing was the making of idols. In addition, Horovitz, the editor of Sifre to Numbers further establishes the meaning of Keni by pointing to Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 40:19 and Jeremiah 10:14 which translates the concept of an idol-making goldsmith as קינאה and קיני respectively.⁵¹ Thus, the name Keni signifies avoidance of idol-making and angering God, both which share the same קנ stem.

Finally, from the Zohar come two explanations for the name Keni, one favorable to Jethro, and the other unfavorable:

From Cain (קין) was descended Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, as it is written 'And the sons of the Kenite...' (Judg. 1:16), and according to tradition he was called Kenite (קני) because he originated from Cain.⁵²

Yet the last volume of the Zohar removes the stigma of murderer from Jethro and makes him the father of תלמידיו-החכמים. However, unlike the traditional rabbinic view, it does not regard Keni and Jethro as two names for the same person.

He [R. Shim'on b. Yohai traditionally supposed to be the author of the Zohar] expounded the verse: 'And Saul said to the Kenites, etc.' (1 Sam. 15:6) 'The Kenites, he said, 'were the descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law

of Moses, and were so called because they made for themselves a nest (Ken) [קן] in the wilderness, in order to study the Torah...⁵³

The reference to a nest hearkens back to Numbers 25:21 where Balaam addresses the Kenites, "Though your abode be secure, and your nest (קן) be set among the cliffs..." Like Philo, the Zohar contains a variety of material on Jethro. Because of the uncertain date of the Zohar, Tannaitic or medieval, it is hard to know how to evaluate the Zohar's place for the general hypothesis. Since I have not mastered the intricacies of the Zohar, I prefer to present its material as interesting parallel midrashim, but not subject to correlation of date and attitude toward Jethro.

For some relief from the complex detailing of Jethro's names and the reasons behind them, I would offer a folk answer:

Aleph: So, tell me, why did Jethro have seven names?

Baiz: Simple, He had seven daughters. Right? He had to provide seven dowries. Right? After the first dowry, he went bankrupt. So he took a new name, borrowed money on that to provide a second dowry, went bankrupt, took a new name...

Aleph: פטיטה.

NOTES

1. In an article in C.B.Q., 25:1 (1963), pp. 1-11, William Albright presents a good survey of and bibliography on the scholarly proposals for the identification of Jethro, Reuel and Hobab (Keni is considered an occupational designation, not a personal name and Jether is obviously subsumed under Jethro). Basically, the solutions are based on either the documentary hypothesis or textual emendations. The division of the Jethro stories into strands reveals that Reuel/Hobab is used in the J. material, Ex. 2:15-21 and Num. 10:29-32, while in the E. strand, Ex. 3:1, 4:18 18:1-27, Jethro is the name used. Following this approach, the different names and the two departure stories fall into place.

Textual emendation is a way of reconciling the use of Reuel in Ex. 2 with Jethro in Ex. 3 and 4 and distinguishing between Jethro and Hobab. While no ms. or parallel supports it, the insertion of "Jethro, the son of" into Ex. 2:18, "When they returned to their father ____ Reuel" would harmonize the two traditions. Albright would then relegate Reuel to the status of a tribal name, as Jethro, the Reuelite.

If Jethro is considered Moses' father-in-law, something which Ex. 18 repeatedly states, what is to be done with Judg. 4:11 and Num. 10:29 which calls Hobab or Hobab, the Reuelite, the father-in-law of Moses? Various scholars would emend the word hoten (father-in-law) in the two verses to hatan (son-in-law). Though grammatically hatan can apparently mean these things, by accepting this emendation, one must also accept the idea that Moses had a daughter. Personally, I favor a solution which involves the least number of changes or assumptions. Jethro and Reuel are the same person and have the same function. While the ambiguity in Num. 10:29 would allow either Hobab or Reuel to be called Moses' father-in-law, I would be consistent and assign the role to Reuel. Hobab would then be the son of Moses' father-in-law. The only place that an emendation might be needed would be in Judg. 4:11: "Now Heber the Kenite had severed himself from the Kenites, even from the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses..." The insertion of "the son of" to make the verse read "Hobab, the son of the father-in-law of Moses" would be most convenient. However, the verse can be understood perhaps even without the addition. Hobab the pathfinder is the progenitor of the Kenites who settled in Judah with the Israelites. His chief distinction is his relation to the father-in-law of Moses. To emphasize Heber the Kenite's defection from his people, the Bible tells us that he left even

Notes. (Continued)

the children of Hobab (who was of the father-in-law of Moses.

Ultimately, of course, a "real" solution to the question of who was who is probably impossible. The above precis of Albright's article was intended to convey some modern midrash related to, but not essential for, this study.

2. This list of names from Mek.J.Z.L. 2, 164:31-32 reflects the eclectic nature of the Lauterbach edition because it includes Heber and a compound name, Ben Reuel. Of the seven names, several sources do not include Heber who manifestly appears to be another person on the biblical level. The number seven appears to be hallowed by tradition, so to make up the seventh name if Heber is excluded, Ben is counted as one name and Reuel as another. Mek.H.R., p. 189:7-8 does include Heber and lists Reuel instead of Ben Reuel. However, the note to line 7 gives the Mekilta ms. and parallels which delete Heber and divide Ben from Reuel. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:16-17 is the primary source for dividing up Ben Reuel with an explanation of each and for omitting Heber. M.H.G. 2, p. 352:15-16 follows Mek.R.S. in its treatment of the names. Ben Reuel appears to be literally one name, i.e. the son of Reuel, and so a certain degree of confusion reigns in later sources about how many names Jethro indeed had. One can easily come up with a count of only six names if Heber is omitted. For example, Tan.B.Shemot 11, p. 3b has the familiar lead-in, "They called him by seven names, Jether, Jethro, Reuel, Hobab [Heber], Keni and Putiel." Buber, in note 58 says that his ms. omits Heber. He, however, added it in brackets based on the text of the Mekilta of R. Ishmael and others. Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 55b brings the confusion over names into the body of the text. "They called him by six names, Jether, Jethro, Reuel, Hobab, Keni, Putiel. There are those who say, 'They called him by seven names, Jether, Jethro, Heber, Hobab, Reuel, Putiel, Keni.'" Another place in the Yalkut (v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b) lists and explains eight names. While the modern printed edition (p. 352b) has both Ben and its explanation in parentheses, no distinction exists between Ben and the other names in the ed.princ., Salonika, 1521 (p. 11a).
3. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:31-32 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:7-8.
4. Jastrow, p. 605.
5. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:32-33 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:8. Parallels are also found in the Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek. R.S.E.M., p. 128:17; Tan.HaNid.Yitro 4, p. 94a; Mid.

Notes. (Continued)

- Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b; Yal.Shim.R. 169 following the Dov Hyman text, v. 2:1, p. 41:66.
6. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86. Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:17 has only "Jether, because he added a chapter in the Torah." The editor labels what follows in the Hoffmann edition as an addition by the Baal Midrash HaGadol. A similar version is found in Mishnat R.Elizer, p. 307:14-15, a work from the middle of the eighth century (E.J., 16: 1515).
 7. Jastrow, p. 604.
 8. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:33 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:8. Parallel versions are found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:18, Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b, Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 55b; M.H.G. 2, p. 352:14.
 9. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:37-165:41 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:10-12. Parallel versions are found in Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 55b. Ex.R. 27:8 = S. 2, p. 327 and Mish.R.El., p. 304:4-7 explain the name change from Jether to Jethro in terms similar to the above quoted sources, but state that the additional letter was added when Jether converted to Judaism, just like Abram/Abraham.
 10. A fourth generation Tanna ca. 139-165 C.E. according to Nizkiner, p. 31.
 11. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:15-16. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:29, p. 99a; Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:29, p. 96 have the same material, but quote it anonymously.
 12. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:2-5.
 13. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:34. Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 55b repeats this version.
 14. Mek.H.R., p. 189:9. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b repeats this comment, but places it in brackets. Buber in note 3 admits that his own mss. did not have this, but he added it in accordance with the Mekilta.
 15. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:34 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:8-9. Parallel versions can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:18; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b; M.H.G. 2, p. 352:15; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b. Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 55b which does not have the name Ben in its list includes it in the explanation of Hobab. "Hobab, because he was beloved of God like a son."
 16. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:18-19. These sources contain

Notes. (Continued)

- similar accounts: Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:6-7; Ex.R. 27:8 = S. 2, p. 327; Tan.HaMid.Yitro 4, p. 94a; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:29, p. 99a; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56a; Yal.Shim.R. 270, p. 83a; M.H.G. 4, p. 146:19-20.
17. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:5-7. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 262:25-28; M.H.G. 4, p. 146:8-12 contain parallel versions. Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:29, p. 96 just states that Hobab was Jethro's real name.
 18. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:35. Parallel versions are found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:19; Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b; M.H.G. 2, p. 352:15.
 19. See note 17 for those sources, excluding Mid.Ag. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:29, p. 99a also establishes that Reuel was the grandfather. Tar.Ps.Jon. translates Ex. 2:18 as "They came to Reuel their father's father." Emphasizing that Reuel is regarded as the grandfather, Tar.Ps.Jon. renders the Masoretic text's "daughters" in Ex. 2:20 and "daughter" in Ex. 2:21 as "the daughters of his son" and "the daughter of his son" respectively.
 20. Both Ex.R. 27:8 = S. 2, p. 327 and Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 2:18, p. 7b explicitly state that the Reuel in Ex. 2:18 is Jethro. That is also the obvious conclusion of the sources quoted in note 21.
 21. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:35 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:9. The following sources supply parallel versions: Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:7-10, supports the basic definition by quoting Ex. 18:12 to show that Jethro was God's friend. M.H.G. 4, p. 146:12-13 also uses this proof text. Sif. Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:13-15 gives Pr. 27:10 as the proof text for this. Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56a repeats this Sif.Num. for comment on Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:1-2 follows Sif.Num.H., p. 72:7-10. Mek. R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:19 follow the Mek. and do not give proof texts, neither do Ex.R. 27:8 = S. 2, p. 327 or Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:29, p. 96 or Yal.Shim. R. 169, p. 55b or Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b or M.H.G. 2, p. 34:11-12 or M.H.G. 2, p. 352:15-17.
 22. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b.
 23. For Philo's assessment of Jethro, see Ex. 3:1, note 9. Because Philonic material is ultimately outside the purview of this study, I did not want to repeat it earlier in this section as part of the discussion on the name Jethro. The following remarks on Reuel are new so I am including them here.

Notes. (Continued)

24. On the Change of Names, xvii, sec. 103-105 = L. 5, p. 195.
25. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libris (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), p. 754.
26. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
27. I supplied these brackets.
28. Sot. 43a = S., pp. 212-213. The final Soncino note on this section (n. 5, p. 213) clarifies the two lines of ancestry as "the name Putiel is spelt with a yod which is usually a sign of the plural. Hence, both the explanations given are possible, viz. Putiel can be identified either with Joseph or Jethro."
29. Tar.Ps.Jon. states this explicitly translating Ex. 6:25 as "from the daughters of Jethro. He is Putiel."
30. The rabbinic literature on Phinehas is voluminous. This material on Phinehas is a by-product of my research on Jethro. As a result, I do not feel that it warrants a separate section analyzing the different traditions and the ways which the oft repeated charge of descent from an idolatrous Jethro is used. However, I will supply the sources which I found: San. 82b = S., p. 547; B.B. 103a-110a = S., p. 454; Sif.Num.pis. 131 = H., p. 173:5-9, Ex.R. 7:5 = S.2, p. 113; Lev.R. 33:4 = S. 2, p. 420; Num.R. 2:20 = S.3, p. 58; Num.R. 21:3, = S.3, p. 829; Tan.6. Pinhas 3, p. 76a; P.R.K.pis. 13 = M., p. 236:4-9 = Brk., pp. 262-263; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 6:25, p. 17a; Ibid. on Num. 25:7, p. 131a; Ibid., Introduction to Parashat Pinhas, pp. 131a-b; Mid.Ag. on Num. 25:11; p. 148; Aruch Completum, v. 6, p. 311 on 59; Yal.Shim.R. 179, p. 58b, Ibid., R. 771, p. 267b; Ibid., R. 771, p. 268a; Ibid., R., 785, p. 277b; Ibid., v. 2 R. 72, p. 356b; Ibid., v. 2 R. 257, p. 407b.
31. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:36 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:9-10. Yal. Shim.R. 169, p. 55b; and Ibid., v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b are the parallels to the Mekilta.
32. Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b.
33. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:19-20.
34. Aruch Completum, v. 6, p. 311.
35. Jacob Levy, Worterbuch uber die Talmudim und Midraschin (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), v. 4, p. 25.

Notes. (Continued)

36. Jastrow, p. 1156 and Eliezer Ben Yehuda, A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew, (Jerusalem: Lezecher Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Ltd., 1940), v. 10, p. 4897.
37. Jastrow, p. 1156.
38. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86, note mem.
39. Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128, note to line 20.
40. Aruch Completum, v. 6., p. 310.
41. Ibid.
42. Mielziner, p. 42.
43. M.H.G. 2, p. 352:17-19. M.H.G. 2, p. 105:5-6 has the same account but just in the name of R. Joshua.
44. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 164:36-37 = Mek.H.R., p. 189:10. Parallel versions can be found in Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 55b; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b.
45. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:6. M.H.G. 4, p. 146:18-19 has the same thing.
46. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:13. Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56a; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b have similar versions as Sif.Num. Mek.R.S. offers a different suggestion for what Jethro acquired. "Keni, in that he acquired the world to come" (Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:18-19). M.H.G. 2, p. 352:19 parallels this.
47. Mielziner, p. 31.
48. Albright, C.B.Q., pp. 8-9.
49. Strack, p. 116.
50. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:10-12. Parallel versions can be found in Yal.Shim.R. 169, pp. 55b-56a and Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b, although they only have the first proof-text from Deuteronomy.
51. H., p. 72, note to line 11. However, Tar.Jon. translates the name קני as שלמאה which Jastrow renders as "Shalmaite, an Arabic tribe" (p. 1587).
52. Zohar 1, p. 28b = S. 1, pp. 108-109.
53. Zohar 3, pp. 9a-b = S. 4, p. 344.

Ex. 18:1 Jethro Priest of Midian [כהן מדין]

In the section on Exodus 2:15b-2:22, I presented some introductory material regarding Jethro's position in Midian as the כהן מדין. His own words establish him as the head of the Midianite cultus. "Until now I have served you. Now I am old; choose yourselves another כומר."¹ Jastrow notes that a כומר, an attendant or priest is "always used of idolators."² However, the sources presented earlier protected Jethro's reputation by showing him giving up idolatry and then being persecuted by his country-people.³

The Mekilta and the Targumim which parallel it show Jethro's suitability to be associated with Moses in a different way. They understand כהן, not in a religious sense as a pagan, but as the title of a civil office:

R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: He was a chief [שר], just as when it is said: 'And David's sons were chiefs' (Kohanim) [כהנים] (II Sam. 8:18).⁵

Emphasizing the governmental nature of a כהן according to R. Eleazar's definition, Sefer VeHizhir, a 10th century work,⁶ uses different terminology and tells us, "He was the head of the Boule..."⁷ Boule is Greek for city council, assembly or senate.⁸

Targum Onkelos renders every instance of כהן מדין as רבא במדין or chief of Midian.⁹ Targum Pseudo Jonathan uses אונוס for the references in Exodus 2:16 and Exodus 18:1 etc., and רבא in Exodus 3:1, Jastrow gives a choice of tyrannus, lord or ruler for אונוס.¹⁰ The rabbinic parallels from II

Sam. 8:18 and 11 Sam. 20:26 are understood by Targum Jonathan as רברבין, officials or great men,¹¹ and רב respectively. Even Philo seems to indicate some sort of official capacity for Jethro when he understands Midian as judgment or justice, hence "The priest of judgment or justice...."¹²

However, in spite of R. Eleazar's convincing exegesis, an equal number of sources follow the other understanding of כהן given in the Mekilta:

R. Joshua says: He was a priest of idolatry [כומר], just as when it is said: '[And the children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image]. And Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests (Kohanim) [כהנים]" (Judg. 18:30).¹³

R. Joshua's choice of a proof-text is most ironic considering that the priest mentioned in Judges 18 is Jonathan, supposedly, Moses' grandson. The "Manasseh" mentioned in the verse is regarded as a Masoretic emendation to protect Moses. There is a suspended נ in the word which changes משה to מנשה, Moses to Manasseh.

Rabbi Joshua's definition of כהן as כומר puzzles me for more reasons than just the verse used in his gezerah shavah. Much of the Jethro material cited in the Mekilta is in the name of R. Joshua b. Hananiah, a second generation Tanna (80-120 C.E.)¹⁴ and R. Eleazar of Modi'im who flourished around the Hadrianic Revolt.¹⁵ With but one exception,¹⁶ the two men's comments always appear together under the rubric of a specific verse, with R. Joshua's comment coming first. R. Joshua, whom Nitzlizer characterizes as "the more rational

and conciliatory element of that generation, and combined with great learning the amiable virtues of gentleness, modesty and placability which characterized the Hillelites"¹⁷ is constantly more favorable, enthusiastic and positive towards Jethro than R. Eleazar, as succeeding sections will show. What puzzles me is that R. Joshua's comment seems out of character. Bringing up Jethro's idolatrous past is something that R. Eleazar does with frequency. He is the one who explains "a strange land" (Ex. 18:3) as the place where Jethro made Moses swear to raise his first-born as an Akum.¹⁸ R. Joshua enhances Jethro's virtues and status. He makes it clear that Jethro and only Jethro is the author of פרשת הרינינים.¹⁹ It would seem to me then that the two comments have been reversed. R. Joshua should be describing Jethro as the ruler and R. Eleazar, Jethro the idolatrous priest. However, this change does not appear in any of the parallels or mss. surveyed by the editors of the critical editions.

If there does not seem to be any empirical evidence for switching the comments, I can think of one way to understand R. Joshua's definition of כהן that would be in keeping with his general opinions toward Jethro. That a כומר, one steeped in idolatry, should come and hear and convert is more praiseworthy and reflects a greater upward change in personal status than if a שר did the same thing. R. Joshua may be saying, "How great are the wonders of our God and how great is this כומר who let himself be touched!" Thus, R. Joshua's definition becomes a sort of elegant understatement, bearing

a moving testimony about Jethro of the same type as the Mekilta's comment on "in the wilderness" (Ex. 18:5):

Behold, scripture expresses surprise at him [Jethro]. He was dwelling in the midst of the splendor of the world and yet was willing to go out to the desert, a place of desolation where nothing was to be had.²⁰

However, whatever the meaning of כהן, whether good or bad, the biblical author clearly considers this title of less significance than חתן-משה which occurs much more frequently. The next section will show the esteem with which the Rabbis regarded Jethro's role as the father-in-law of Moses.

NOTES

1. Tan.HaMid.Shemot 11, p. 65b. Ex.R. 1:32 = S. 2, p. 40 and other sources presented in section Ex. 2:15b-2:22, note 3 present similar material. In addition, Tan.HaMid. Yitro 2, p. 93b and Tan.B. Yitro 5, p. 36a reports that Jethro was formerly a כוֹמֵר, as does the Zohar 2, p. 21a = S. 3, p. 69.
2. Jastrow, p. 621.
3. See Section Ex. 2:15b-2:22, notes 2, 3, 5.
4. The old J.P.S.A. English translation has "chief ministers" (p. 375).
5. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 166:60-61 = Mek.H.R., p. 190:7-8. Mek.R.S.H. p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:21-129:1 parallel the Mekilta of R. Ishmael save that the Epstein-Melammed edition quotes the authority as R. Leazar, a Palestinian variant of Eleazar and offers a second prooftext, "and Ira also the Jairite was chief minister to David" (II Sam. 20:26). Further parallels are found in Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b; Yal.Shim.R. 69, p. 56a; and Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82a; which only have the II Sam. 8:18 prooftext. M.H.G. 2, p. 353:1-8 has both prooftexts but they are separated by a talmudic discussion on the status of rabbinic students from Ned. 62a = S., p. 198.
6. J.E., 8:564.
7. Sefer VeHizhir Yitro, p. 34b. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 2:16, p. 7b has a similar statement though with Hebrew words in place of Boule as well as the prooftext from II Sam. 8:18.
8. Jastrow, p. 146.
9. Ibid., p. 1438.
10. Ibid., p. 29.
11. Ibid., p. 1446.
12. On the Change of Names, xix, sec. 110 = L. 5, p. 199.
13. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 166:58-60 = Mek.H.R., p. 190:6-7. See note 5 for the parallels to this, with these two changes to cite the exact place: Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:20-21 and M.H.G. 2, p. 353:19-20. Sefer VeHizhir cited in note 7 concludes by stating that Jethro was also "a priest to idolatry."

Notes. (Continued)

14. Mielziner, p. 25.
15. Strack, p. 112.
16. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 171:128-131 = Mek.H.R., p. 192:7-9 which has R. Joshua's statement followed by אמרו, an anonymous opinion instead of R. Eleazar. However, the parallel in Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 129:20-23 replaces the אמרו with R. Eleazar.
17. Mielziner, pp. 26-27.
18. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 168:93ff = Mek.H.R., p. 191:7ff. See the section on Ex. 18:3, note 9.
19. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 185:94-95 = Mek.H.R., p. 199:13-14. See the section on Ex. 18:24, note 1.
20. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 172:145-147 = Mek.H.R., p. 192:18-20.

Ex. 18:1 Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law
[חתן משה]

I have analyzed much of the preceding midrash in terms of showing how it tried to make Jethro seem like a suitable person to be associated with Moses as his father-in-law, despite his being a כהן. Rabbinic commentary on the word חתן indicates how seriously the role of father-in-law was taken, as well as the love between Jethro and Moses. During the long years in Midian, Moses acted like a proper son-in-law. From the Mekilta, an anonymous comment:

Formerly Moses would give the honor [and also deference] to his father-in-law, as it is said: 'And Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law' (Ex. 4:18).¹

Before Moses would leave Midian, he went back to seek Jethro's approval, properly deferring to his father-in-law's authority.

However, when Moses was elevated to the role of paterfamilias for all Israel, the relationship between Jethro and Moses was reversed without any rancor on Jethro's part. Continuing from the Mekilta:

Now, however, his father-in-law would give the honor to him. If they asked him: 'What is your distinction?' He would say to them: 'I am the father-in-law of Moses.'²

Jethro identified himself in terms of Moses in order to show him כבוד ("I am his," not "He is mine"). However, as Sifre to Numbers shows, that decision to call himself Moses' father-in-law garnered Jethro much honor also. "חתן-משה -- this is more beautiful for him than anything else. He is called the father-in-law of a king."³

No midrash explicitly states that "as a result of such and such, Jethro is deemed suitable to be Moses' father-in-law."⁴ However, since the relationship carried so much honor with it and since that honor was transitive, it is no wonder that the Rabbis did so many things to upgrade Jethro's reputation.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 166:62-63 = Mek.H.R., p. 190:9-10. See note 2 for the list of parallels since this note cites the first part of a single midrash.
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 166:63-63 = Mek.H.R., p. 190:10. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 129:1-4; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b; Yal.Shim. R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 353:9-11.
3. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 75:10-11. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:29, p. 99 and Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a quote the parallel versions.
4. The Zohar (2, p. 63a = S.3, p. 212) seems to indicate that both Jethro and Poti-phaera were called "father-in-law" rather than by their priestly titles out of deference to their lamed vav-nik son-in-laws.

Ex. 18:1 Jethro Priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard
[וישמע]

The first word of Exodus 18:1 is וישמע, literally "And he heard." The Rabbis were evidently impatient to tell us what Jethro heard, even though the verse does answer as it concludes with, "all that God had done for Moses and for Israel, how the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt." Perhaps, their impatience was because in Hebrew, the answer is separated from the statement of "He heard" by several words. However, in telling what Jethro heard, the Rabbis do, of course, supply their own special opinions.

The Talmud gives us three choices in the context of determining the nature of Jethro's sacrifice in Exodus 18:12.¹ Once again we see a difference between R. Joshua and R. Eleazar:

This is a controversy of Tannaim: 'Now Jethro, the priest of Midian heard' [Ex. 18:1]²: what news did he hear that he came and turned a proselyte?³ R. Joshua said: He heard the battle with the Amalekites, since this [Ex. 18:1]² is immediately preceded by 'And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword' [Ex. 17:13].² R. Eleazar of Modi'im said: He heard of the giving of the Torah and came. For when the Torah was given to Israel, the sound travelled from one end of the earth to the other....⁴ R. Eleazar⁵ said: He heard about the dividing of the Red Sea, and came, for it is said, 'And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites heard [...how the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the children of Israel']⁶ [Josh. 5:1].^{2,7}

Each of the three opinions is based on a different hermeneutical principle. R. Joshua used s'muchim because in Exodus 18:1 Jethro heard what happened in Exodus 17:13, the preceding verse. R. Eleazar of Modi'im employed the principle of Ein

mukdam ve-ein m'uchar ba-Torah stated in Pesachim 6b, since he would have us believe that Jethro's arrival reported in Exodus 18:1 follows the giving of the Torah as stated in Exodus 20.⁸ R. Eliezer is making a gezerah shavah between וישמע in Exodus 18:1 and Joshua 5:1; both acts of hearing refer to the dividing of water.

While the Talmud merely lists the things that Jethro could have heard, the sources which follow them supply certain specifics as well as other possibilities. The war against Amalek as a motivating factor is discussed thoroughly as are God's deeds for Israel. The comments concerning the war against Amalek are centered around Proverbs 19:25, "When thou smitest a scorner, the simple will become prudent." While some sources just quote the verse and tell that Amalek was the scorner and Jethro the simple one,⁹ Exodus Rabbah has a more elaborate account which provides some of Jethro's feelings:

It is written, 'When thou smitest a scorner, the simple [פתי] will become prudent' (Prov. 19:25), and also 'Where the scorner is punished, the thoughtless [פתי] is made wise' (Ibid., 21:11).¹⁰ Amalek and Jethro were of the advisors of Pharaoh; but when Jethro beheld that God had wiped out Amalek both from this world and the next, he felt remorse and repented, for first it says, 'For I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven' (Ex. 17:14), and then 'Now Jethro..heard.' Said he: 'The only thing for me to do is to join the God of Israel.'... Thus, 'When the scorner is punished' refers to Amalek; 'And the thoughtless one is made wise,' to Jethro.¹¹

Whether Jethro was actively involved with the evil Amalek as in Exodus Rabbah¹² or whether he was the simpleton, untutored

and unaware of the transcendent supremacy of the God of Israel,¹³ as the verse from Proverbs would suggest, the defeat of Amalek provided a dramatic lesson for Jethro. Thus, he came to Moses and changed his life.

If the deeds which God performed for our ancestors in Egypt still impress us today, how much more spectacular must those deeds have been in the time of Jethro. Tanhuma HaNidpas tells us the effects that the Exodus had on him:

'Therefore do the maidens love thee [Israel]' (S.S. 1:3). These are the nations of the world who came and converted. To whom [specifically] does this refer? To Jethro. At the time when he heard all the miracles that were done for Israel, he came and converted.¹⁴

The Zohar reports the specific things about the Exodus which persuaded Jethro of God's power and caused him to come to Moses.

But Jethro was not converted until later. Only when the Israelites had actually left Egypt, when he realized that all the bonds by which the Egyptian magicians had attempted to retain Israel in their power were futile, and when he saw that the Egyptians themselves had all perished in the Red Sea, only then did he turn to worship the Holy One, blessed be He.¹⁵

Jethro must have been from the biblical equivalent of Missouri because of the magnitude of his "show me" attitude.

However, the important thing is that regardless of what it took to convince him, at that moment, Jethro did listen. He made himself receptive to change and hearkened. The Zohar asks:

Was Jethro the only one who heard of all that God had done? Does not it say, 'Peoples heard, they were afraid' (Ex. 15:14)? Indeed, the

whole world did hear, yet Jethro alone renounced idolatry and accepted the Holy One to worship him.¹⁶

Exodus Rabbah and Tanhuma HaNidpas base their comments on the consequences of Jethro's intensive act of listening.

From Exodus Rabbah:

In the case of Jethro, likewise, you will find that because he heard, he merited life, for he heard [God's wonders]¹⁷ and became a proselyte....¹⁸

Tanhuma HaNidpas adds:

There are those who hearken and suffer a loss. There are those who hearken and are rewarded. Joash hearkened and suffered a loss. [See II Chron. 24:17-24]...But Jethro heard and was rewarded. He was a priest of idolatry, but came and cleaved unto Moses and entered under the wings of Shehina and was worthy to add the portion of the judges.¹⁹

Just as Jethro recognized God's power, so did Israel. Moreover, as a result of Jethro's actions, Israel realized the effect God's deeds had on others. From Song of Songs Rabbah:

R. Berekiah²⁰ said: Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, because Thou bringest light into the world Thy name is magnified in the world. And what is the light? Redemption. For when Thou bringest us light, many proselytes came and joined us, as for instance Jethro and Rahab.²¹

One can almost hear Israel saying in this midrash, "Don't forget us, Master of the Universe! If you want proselytes, You must continue to save us!"

The midrashic material presented in the last four sections on Exodus 18:1 serves as a background to the events which follow in the rest of the biblical chapter. Jethro's

closeness to God to which his names testify and his willingness to listen and change his status from a כהן מדין lay the foundation for the biblical profession of faith in Exodus 18:10-11 which should now come as no surprise.

NOTES

1. For a quick reference on this subject, see Zeb. 116a = S., pp. 573-574. The entire subject will be discussed in my section on Ex. 18:12, p. 151ff.
2. I supplied these brackets.
3. This phrase "and turned proselyte" is omitted by the Mekiltas and the other parallels quoted in note 7 which just report *מה שמועה שמע ובה*. Perhaps this is due to the fact that for the Talmud it was of critical importance to know when Jethro converted in order to settle the immediately preceding argument about what type of sacrifices Jethro brought. The other sources do not connect the two issues and hence, may not have felt the need to include the "and turned a proselyte" phrase. On the other hand, the phrase may have been included by the talmudic redactor working on this block of Tannaitic material to clarify the fact that Jethro did indeed convert, something not mentioned, but assumed by the Mekiltas.
4. I have omitted a lengthy interlude between the heathen kings and Balaam over the noise that the Torah was making. There is no indication at all that Jethro was included in this group, especially since what concerns the kings is that the tumult might be another Flood.
5. The identity of this Rabbi is somewhat ambiguous. He is cited as either ר"א or R. Eliezer in the printed texts, while *Dikduke Sofrim* (v. 14, p. 240) prefers the reading R. Eleazar. Though the Soncino translators use the name R. Eleazar, I prefer R. Eliezer, which follows the Mekilta and the other sources found in note 7. Mek.H.R., p. 189, note to line 11 does give sources where this Rabbi is called either R. Eleazar or R. Eleazar of Modi'im. In disagreeing with this reading of R. Eleazar, I am also following Mielziner, who states that R. Joshua's frequent partner in discussions is R. Eliezer b. Hyrkanos (p. 26). There are, however, two Eleazars who were contemporaries of R. Joshua, so Eleazar does remain a possibility. Even so, I do not believe that R. Eleazar of Modi'im is a possibility because when R. Joshua and R. Eleazar appear (at least in the Jethro material) each man is allotted one comment. Stylistically then, an extra comment by R. Eleazar of Modi'im would be out of place.
6. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
7. Zeb. 116a = S. pp. 574-575. Similar versions can be found in Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 162:1-163:20 = Mek.H.R., p. 188:1-12; Mek.R.S.H., p. 85 = Mek.R.S.E.H., p. 127:11-22;

Notes. (Continued)

- Y.Meg. 72b-c = gemorah on mis.1:13 has the same events but with different authorities; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, p. 60b only has the opinions of R. Joshua and R. Eliezer (splitting of Red Sea); Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:1, p. 149 bears only a partial resemblance telling us "he heard the war at the Sea. Another interpretation: he heard the Red Sea"; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, pp. 350:22-351:22.
8. The view that Jethro came after the giving of the Torah has implications for the section on Ex. 18:27. Briefly, many of the post-Tannaitic sources show Jethro being sent away, so that there would not be a stranger/enemy in Israel's midst. R. Eleazar's opinion might be an oblique way of stating this. However, since Jethro came to convert, which hardly indicates hostility, his comment may merely have been the jumping off point for the later sources.
 9. These sources with a shorter version include Tan.HaMid. Yitro 3, p. 93b; Tan.B. Yitro 3, pp. 35a-b; P.R.K., a fifth century Palestinian work (Brk., p. xlv), pis. 3 = M., p. 35:1-2 = Brk., p. 39; Sef.VeHizhir, p. 33b. Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82a; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R.959, p. 496b.
 10. None of the other sources use this second verse except Yal.Mak. on Prov. on 19:21, p. 10b which quotes in the name Ex.R. The two verses are apparently considered synonymous for Yal.Mak. refers the reader at Prov. 21:11 to Prov. 19:21.
 11. Ex.R. 27:6 = S., pp. 325-326. Yal.Mak. on Prov. cited in note 10 is the exact duplicate.
 12. Mid.Shmu. 12:2, p. 41a reports that Jethro was in Amalek's army. Amalek's defeat convinced Jethro to come and convert as suggested by Prov. 19:25.
 13. Sef.VeHizhir, p. 34a (bottom)-b and P.R.K.pis. 3 = M. p. 36:10-12 = Brk., p. 42, which are parallels, do not assign any particular role to Jethro as they report "As soon as Jethro heard of all the miracles which the Holy One worked against Egypt and Amalek, he came at once and was converted." They then quote Prov. 19:25.
 14. Tan.HaMid.Yitro 3, p. 93b. Parallels can be found in Tan.B. Yitro 2, p. 35a; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 981, p. 533a. Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82a quotes the same verse but uses the giving of the Torah as the deed which Jethro heard. Sefer HaYashar, p. 167; Zohar 2, p. 68a = S. 3, p. 213 and Ex. R. 27:4 = S. 2, p. 324 do not use the verse from

Notes. (Continued)

S.S. 1:3 but tell how God's mighty deeds in redeeming Israel convinced Jethro to come to Moses. In a similar vein, Mid.Lekah Tov, Intro. to Ex. 18:1, p. 60b tells us "When Jethro heard the mighty deeds of God, he gave thanks to the name of God."

15. Zohar 2, p. 69a = S. 3, p. 216.
16. Zohar 2, pp. 68-b = S.3, pp. 213-214.
17. These brackets were supplied by the Soncino translator.
18. Ex.R. 27:9 = S. 2, p. 330.
19. Tan.HaNid. Yitro 2, p. 931.
20. A fourth generation Amora, according to Hyman Tannaim Ve-Amoraim, p. 296.
21. S.S.R. on verse 1:3, mid.3 = S. 5, p. 39. Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 981, p. 533a repeats this. S.S.R. on verse 1:15, mid. 2 = S. 5, p. 87 and S.S.R. on verse 4:1, mid. 2 = S. 5, p. 177 have a comment in the name of Rabbi which has the same spirit as R. Berekliah's midrash. However, instead of being in terms of light attracting proselytes, it uses the motif of doves smelling the food given to another and flocking to her nest. Jethro and Rahab are used as examples of those who hear (smell the food) and come to convert (flock to the other's nest).

Ex. 18:2 So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home.

When the Bible last mentioned Zipporah, she and Moses were camped for the night on the road back to Egypt. After the episode reported in Exodus 4:25-26, when Zipporah saved her son's life by circumcising him, she is not mentioned again by name until Exodus 18:2. However, the Torah definitely leaves the impression that Zipporah continued to accompany Moses to Egypt. Hence, when the Rabbis read "So Jethro... took Zipporah," they were bound to ask when and why was she sent away. As is typical of much of the midrash on Exodus 18, the Mekilta is the basic source.

Reporting the opinions of R. Joshua and R. Eleazar, the Mekilta first explains how Moses sent Zipporah away and then when and why:

R. Joshua says: After she had been dismissed from him by a bill of divorce [בטל]. Here the term send (Shiluah) is used and there (Deut. 24:1) the term send (Shiluah) is used. Just as the term "send" used there implies a bill of divorce, so also the term "send" used here implies a bill of divorce. R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: After she had been dismissed from him by a mere speech.¹

The important difference between the two Rabbis lies not in the fact that R. Joshua used a gezerah shavah to establish his view and R. Eleazar did not, but that the former pays attention to the legal niceties of divorce and the latter seemingly does not. Though the Hillelite position of permitting a divorce without cause prevailed in Judaism

until the takana of Rabbeinu Gershon,² divorce was never by "mere speech" without a גט, à la the Arabic, "I divorce thee. I divorce thee. I divorce thee." Thus, assigning such an action to the great Lawgiver seems incomprehensible unless we understand "dismissed [פטר] from him by a mere speech" as something different than the parallel to "dismissed from him by a bill of divorce." Therefore, Baal Midrash HaGadol supplies the necessary clarification of Moses' action when he adds to "after she had been dismissed from him by a mere speech." "This is to say that he didn't divorce her [גירטה - the verb for divorce], but rather he said to her 'Go back to your father's house.'"³

The Targumim reflect aspects of the Mekilta when they translate Exodus 18:2. Targum Onkelos has two versions of its translation of אחר שלוחיה,⁴ either בתר דשלחה "after he sent her away" which reflects the view of R. Eleazar, or בתר דפטר "after he dismissed her" which is understood by Jastrow⁵ and the Biure Onkelos⁶ as a divorce, the position of R. Joshua. Biure Onkelos prefers the first reading because it preserves Moses' honor. "It would be a shameful thing in the eyes of the masses if Moses divorced Zipporah and then remarried his divorced spouse."⁷ Horovitz-Rabin, less midrashically concerned than Schefftel, follow the second reading.⁸ Targum Pseudo Jonathan follows R. Eleazar's opinion to a degree when it offers "after he sent her from his presence when he went out to the wilderness."

Embarking on such a personally risky mission, Moses

took no chances that Zipporah might come to harm. Consequently, he either divorced her to prevent her becoming an agunah or he sent her back to Midian to the safety of her father's house. Yet, what caused Moses to change his mind after he already started to bring Zipporah with him? The Rabbis found the answer in the juxtaposition of Exodus 4:26 where Zipporah is last mentioned and Exodus 4:27 in which Aaron met Moses in the wilderness, per God's instructions. A whole scenario was developed out of this meeting. Aaron naturally inquires into the identity of Moses' travelling companions. Informed that they were his family and were bound with him for Egypt, Aaron rebuked Moses, saying, "We are worrying about those already there [in Egypt] and now you are bringing upon us these newcomers."⁹ Moses then sent Zipporah home.

With these explanations, one can see why Zipporah had to be reunited with Moses in Exodus 18:1. Tanna debe Eliyahu makes Jethro's bringing of Moses' family to Sinai a praise-worthy action:

...For all those years that Moses was in Jethro's house, he [Jethro] saw all the deeds that he [Moses] did but he [Jethro] didn't do anything [in return] for him [Moses]. When he [Moses] went to Egypt, a great opportunity came into his [Jethro's] hands. He [Jethro] said, 'All those deeds which he [Moses] did in my house brought him [Moses] life in the world to come. But as for me [Jethro] I don't have any.' So he [Jethro] arose and did a great thing on his own. [As it says] 'So Jethro, Moses father-in-law, took....'¹⁰

This trip to the wilderness with its deed of kindness to Moses symbolizes the change in Jethro. Just as he advanced

to a higher level in politeness and human relations, so he will advance spiritually to a higher level, as succeeding sections will show.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 167:72-77 = Mek.H.R., p. 190:14-16. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:2, p. 61a and Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b are the parallel versions. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 128:7-11 contains the same information but assigns R. Eleazar's opinion to R. Joshua and vice versa. M.H.G. 2, p. 353:16-21 repeats the Mek.R.S. version along with the interpolation quoted in note 3. Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:2, p. 150 simply reports that Moses gave Zipporah a גט when he sent her away.
2. J.E., 4:625.
3. M.H.G. 2, p. 353:17-18 moved this quote from the end of the Mekilta's story of Aaron's advice to Moses not to bring Zipporah with him (to be cited in note 9). This would help allay suspicions that Moses might have been trying for an illegal divorce.
4. Schefftel, the author of Biure Onkelos, gives דשלח as a primary reading and דפטר as a נ"א (p. 90). The standard Mikrot Gedolot, however, uses דפטר for the text.
5. Jastrow, p. 1157.
6. Schefftel, p. 90.
7. Ibid.
8. Mek.H.R. p. 191, note to line 6 makes the observation that Onkelos follows R. Joshua.
9. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 167:177-168:191 = Mek.H.R., p. 190:17-191:6. Parallel sources for this story are Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 129:11-16; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:2, p. 61a; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:1, pp. 149-150; M.H.G. 2, pp. 353:21-354:3.
10. Tan.debe Eliyahu, ch. (5)6, p. 30. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:2, p. 61a says regarding Jethro's action "It was fitting for him [to do so]."

Ex. 18:3 And her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

If a man goes so far as to immortalize his feelings for the land where he is living by incorporating them in his son's name, then that man has strong feelings. Moses was such a man, for his son Gershom would go through life broadcasting Moses' sense of loneliness and isolation in Midian. What made Midian a foreign land? The Mekilta offers two possibilities:

R. Joshua says: It certainly was a land strange to him.

Moses was an Egyptian emigré living in a new land which was, of course, foreign to him.² R. Joshua's UWB type explanation thus conveys a neutral impression of Midian as opposed to R. Eleazar's:

R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: 'In a strange land' [Ex. 18:3]--where God was like a stranger. Moses said: Since the whole world is worshipping idols, whom shall I worship?³ Him by whose word the world came into being.⁴

R. Eleazar's interpretation conveys to us the pain that Moses must have felt as Jew among idolators. As a "Gershom" himself, Moses typified the experience of Jews everywhere.

That God was like a stranger to all the inhabitants of Midian, save for Moses, is illustrated by two midrashim. From Genesis Rabbah:

R. Simeon b. Gamliel⁵ said: Come and see the difference between one environment and another! In the other place [Midian] there

were seven and the shepherds wished to assault them, as it says, 'And the shepherds came and drove them away' (Ex. 2:17). Whereas here [in Paddan-aram with Rachel]⁶ there was but one and no man touched her because, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about (Sabib) them that fear Him' (Ps. 34:8), which means those who live in the environment (sebumim) of those who fear Him.

Midian was obviously not a land of God-fearing people. The injustice which Moses found there must have made him feel about as at home as he had been in Egypt.

Even more agonizingly, the hostility which the Midianites had for God intruded into Moses' immediate family, as the Mekilta reports in the continuation of R. Eleazar's comment:

For at the time when Moses said to Jethro: 'Give me your daughter Zipporah to wife,' Jethro said to him: 'Accept one condition which I will state to you and I will give her to you for a wife.' 'What is it?' asked Moses. He then said to him: 'The first son that you will have shall belong to the idol and the following may belong to God.'⁸ Moses accepted. Jethro then said: 'Swear unto me,' and Moses swore, as it is said: 'And he adjured (vayoei) Moses' (Ex. 2:21).⁹

Swearing not to circumcise his son thus becomes the fourth answer for the subject of Moses' oath to Jethro as discussed earlier.¹⁰

Though R. Eleazar is consistently less favorable and less enthusiastic than R. Joshua regarding Jethro, in this situation the Rabbis faced a real dilemma. Torn between the choice of protecting Moses' honor and protecting Jethro's, Moses had to be chosen. The Rabbis had to satisfactorily

explain how Moshe Rabbenu could have not circumcised his son and thus incurred God's wrath. Rather than ascribing this failure to Moses' negligence, Jethro became the "fall guy" to explain away this biblical anomaly. Far better to blame Jethro than to cast any aspersions on Moses. This story stands as one of the very few instances of Tannaitic comments hostile to Jethro.

NOTES

1. See note 4 for source of this statement as well as its parallels because the two possibilities are connected in the Mekilta.
2. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:3 calls Midian simply "a land that wasn't mine [Moses']."
3. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 129:18-19 phrases this differently and to my mind, more effectively. "For all the inhabitants worshipped idols and I worshipped the One who spoke and the world came into being, as it says, 'God, God, the Lord has spoken, and called the the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof' (Ps. 50:1)." Not only does this version emphasize God's creative power (in an unstated comparison with the power of idols) but by eliminating the question about which deity he should worship, Moses' sense of alienation is heightened.
4. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 168:92-96 = Mek.H.R., p. 191:7-9. Mek.R.S.H., p. 86 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 129:17-19 is one parallel with the change stated in note 3. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:3, p. 61a follows the Mekilta of R. Ishmael, but eliminates Moses' question in R. Eleazar's response. Interestingly, Yal.Shim. (R. 268, p. 82a) follows the Mekilta of R. Ishmael, while M.H.G. (2, pp. 37:7-11, 354:4-8) contains the version cited in Mek.R.S.
5. A fourth generation Tanna (139-165 C.E.), Mielziner, p. 31.
6. I supplied these brackets.
7. Gen.R. 70:11 = S. 1, p. 645. Parallels can be found in M.H.G. 2, pp. 33:23-34:3; Yal.Shim.R. 124, p. 37b; Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 720, p. 454a; Yal.Mak. on Ps. 34, p. 107b, mid. 10.
8. The sources vary as to which son was not circumcised. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:3, p. 61a; Sef.HaYashar, p. 160 (bottom); Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 4:24; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82a (which duplicates the Mekilta account) all repeat some version of Jethro's ordering Moses not to circumcise Gershom.

On the view that it was Eliezer who was not circumcised, the sources vary as to Jethro's role in the matter. Ex.R. 5:8 = S. 2, p. 85 eliminates Jethro from the whole episode. Eliezer was apparently eight plus days old when the family stopped at the inn on the way back to Egypt.

Notes. (Continued)

Moses himself was at fault for not circumcising his son at the proper time and thus incurred the angel's wrath. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 4:24, p. 13a also does not include Jethro and cites Moses as the cause for the delay. Mid.VaYosha (B.H.M.I, p. 43) and Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:3, p. 150 do have Jethro dividing up Moses' future sons, one to be and the other not to be circumcised as in the Mekilta, but both state that Eliezer was not to be circumcised.

9. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 168:96-169:104 = Mek.H.R. 191:9-13.
10. See sec.Ex. 2:21, note 12.

Ex. 18:5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons [וּבְנָיו] and his wife to him in the wilderness.

After explaining that Moses sent back or divorced Zipporah, the Rabbis needed to determine whose sons were whose. In the space of six verses, the Torah refers to "her two sons...Gershom...and...Eliezer..." (Ex. 18:3-4), "Moses' sons" (Ex. 18:5) and "her sons" (Ex. 18:6). Clearly, "her two sons...Gershom...and Eliezer..." are also "Moses' sons," but who is the father of the unnamed "her sons" in Exodus 18:6? Under the rubric of Exodus 18:5, the Mekilta answers the question:

But has it not already been said: 'And thy wife, and her two sons with her' (Ex. 18:6)? From this I might have understood that they were her sons from another marriage. Scripture, therefore, says here: 'Moses' sons and his wife to him' [Ex. 18:5]²--they were also the sons of Moses and not Zipporah's sons from another marriage.³

Thus, by means of a shomea ani argument, all suspicions are allayed and all the "sons" are identified as coming from Moses.

It surprises me a little that the Rabbis used Exodus 18:5 merely as the supporting verse to clarify the meaning of "her sons" in Exodus 18:6. In reality, Exodus 18:5 gives rise to a question of identity, as the old J.P.S.A. translation indicates, "And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses." While the new J.P.S.A. translation leaves no doubt as to whom Jethro brought by rendering וּבְנָיו as "Moses' sons," ambiguity does exist in the Hebrew.

One could suppose that Jethro brought his own sons and his own wife. However, the Rabbis felt no need to explicitly deny this possibility, relying perhaps on tradition and context to do so.

NOTES

1. Lauterbach used the old J.P.S.A. translation here which I have replaced with the new one for greater clarity.
2. I supplied this bracket.
3. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 172:140-148 = Mek.H.R., p. 192:15-17. Parallel sources include Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., pp. 129:26-130:2, Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:5, p. 61a; Yal. Shim.R. 268, p. 82b. M.H.G. 2, p. 354:17-21. The Zohar 2, p. 69a = S. 3, p. 217 has a long mystically oriented passage about the difference between "his sons" and "her sons" but it does not involve Jethro.

Ex. 18:5 Unto Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped,
at the mount of God.¹

More was involved in Jethro's coming to Moses than just a journey from Midian to Sinai. The Zohar derived the full meaning of the journey from a seeming redundancy in this verse:

Of Jethro we read: 'And Jethro...came with his sons...to Moses into the desert' When it says 'to Moses,' why add 'to the desert'? Because herein lay the whole significance of his coming; 'the desert' symbolized the 'mountain of the Lord,' the place for the reception of proselytes; in other words, Jethro came to Moses with the intention of becoming a proselyte and entering under the wings of the Shekinah.²

Since Jethro came to convert, the Rabbis found proof of his sincere motives in the fact that he would come into the wilderness:

Behold, Scripture expresses surprise at him. He was dwelling in the midst of the splendour of the world and yet was willing to go out to the desert, a place of desolation where nothing is to be had.³

As opposed to the nations of the world who could not be bothered with the commandments, Jethro could, and he left the comforts of home to accept them.

NOTES

1. This translation comes from the old J.P.S.A. version.
2. Zohar 2, pp. 69b-70a = S. 3, p. 218.
3. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 172:145-148 = Mek.H.R., p. 192:18-20.
Parallel versions can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 =
Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:2-3; Mid.Lekab Tov on Ex. 18:15, p.
61a; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 354:22-23.

Ex. 18:6 He sent word [ויאמר] to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons."

The new J.P.S.A. Torah translates Exodus 18:6 in accordance with the midrash. For faced with ויאמר אל משה understood literally, "He said to Moses" in verse 6 and then ויצא משה לקראת חתנו, "Moses went out to meet his father-in-law" in verse 7, the Rabbis wondered how Jethro could possibly speak to Moses if he had not yet arrived at the camp from which Moses had to emerge in order to greet his father-in-law.

From the Mekilta:

R. Joshua says: He wrote it [the message of Ex. 18:6] to him in a letter. R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: through a messenger he sent him the message...¹

The Mekilta of R. Shim'on offers an interesting alternative version of R. Eleazar's opinion:

R. Eleazar says: He sent it to him by a letter which he shot into the Israelite camp.²

The mechanics of history's first "airmail" letter are made clearer by Tanhuma Buber's explanation:

He wrote a letter and tied it to an arrow. He shot it and the arrow came to Moses.³

Thus, the translation "He sent word to Moses" summarizes the rabbinic solution to the problem of how Jethro and Moses could speak before they met.

However, Midrash Aggadah contains a hint that something besides politeness prevented Jethro from just "dropping in" on Moses and the children of Israel. In other words,

was verse 6 with its announcement of Jethro's presence necessary? Why didn't Jethro come directly to the Israelite camp and did Moses have to come out to meet him? Based on the tradition that the camp in the wilderness was completely surrounded by seven clouds of glory⁴ which kept out the mixed multitude and the cattle,⁵ Midrash Aggadah states in a comment unique to itself:⁶

Rather this [Ex. 18:6] teaches that Jethro couldn't enter the camp of Israel because of the cloud. He shot an arrow in it... Immediately, he [Moses] went out through the cloud and went to his father-in-law.⁷

Therefore, Jethro had to announce himself and then wait for Moses to escort him into the camp.

To continue with R. Eleazar's comment from the Mekilta which is cited above, it appears that something (aside from the clouds of glory, which are not reported in the Mekilta's version of the midrash) made Jethro hesitate from entering the camp, causing him to announce his arrival from afar. Jethro's message read:

Do it [come out to meet us]⁸ for my sake.
If you do not care to do it for my sake,
do it for the sake of your wife. And if
you do not care to do it for your wife's
sake, then do it for the sake of your
children.⁹

This three-fold exhortation to come out is R. Eleazar's understanding of why Jethro fully detailed who was with him in Exodus 18:6. What is not so understandable is why Jethro felt that Moses might be unwilling to receive him and so had to beg him, playing on his feelings for his wife and children. It is hard to know on what prior information R. Eleazar was

basing Jethro's apprehensions.

However, whatever negative feelings may have existed between Jethro and Moses (according to R. Eleazar), they were not allowed to prevent a friendly and fitting reception for Jethro. In fact, God Almighty stepped in, so to speak, and instructed Moses on his duty to welcome Jethro. R. Eliezer continues the Mekilta's commentary on Exodus 18:6:

This was said to Moses by God: 'I, I who said the word by which the world came into being, I am One who welcomes, not One who repels. I am He that brought Jethro near¹⁰, not keeping him at a distance...Do thou, likewise, befriend him.'¹¹

Tanna debe Eliyahu has both Jethro's plea to Moses and the resolution of the issue:

I adjure you by the God of your ancestors that you come out towards me and receive me pleasantly. Yet Moses did not go out towards him [Jethro] until God had spoken to him. 'Moses, Moses [said God] go out towards him and receive him pleasantly.' Immediately, Moses went out, as it says 'Moses went out to meet his father-in-law...'¹²

Jethro then cannot be kept at arm's length. God clearly supports Jethro's candidacy to join the House of Israel, as well as his basic human right to some hospitality after a long journey.

Having ensured that Jethro would be welcomed, God then set down the general rule for the reception of proselytes:

'So also thou, when a man comes to you wishing to convert to Judaism, as long as he comes in the name of God for the

sake of heaven, do thou, likewise,
befriend him and do not repel him.¹³

Thus, a full circle has been made in explaining Exodus 18:6.

Jethro was first outside the camp; now he will be brought into it. First there was one potential proselyte who faced a doubtful reception; now, all will be received.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 172:149-151 = Mek.H.R., pp. 192:21-193:1. Parallels can be found in Tan.HaNid.Yitro 6, p. 95a; Ex.R. 27:2 = S.2, p. 322; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b.
2. Mek.R.S. also has a minor variation for the view of R. Joshua, "He [Jethro] sent [his message] to him [Moses] by a messenger." Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:4-5 is the source for R. Eleazar's and R. Joshua's comments. M.H.G. 2, pp. 354:23-355:1 parallels Mek.R.S.
3. Tan.B.Yitro 6, p. 37a. Besides Tan.B. and Mek.R.S., Mid.Ag. (see note 7) and Sef. VeHizhir p. 35a also report Jethro's use of an arrow. The author of Anfe Yehuda, the commentary to Sef.VeHizhir, reports that the source of the arrow story is unknown to him (note 2). Buber, commenting upon this, says, "In truth he [the author of Sef.VeHizhir] drew from the Tanhuma ms. which is in front of us" (Tan.B., p. 37a).
4. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:33 = H., p. 266:10-13.
5. Zohar 2, p. 191b = S. 4, p. 146.
6. Buber reports, "I couldn't find the source for this" (Tan. B., p. 150, note 8). Mid.Ag. is the only source which explicitly connects the clouds of glory around the camp with Jethro's long distance greeting to Moses. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:7 does say "Moses went out from under the heavy cloud towards his father-in-law."
7. Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:6, p. 150.
8. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 172, note 16, supplied the information in brackets.
9. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 172:151-154 = Mek.H.R. p. 193:2. Parallel accounts can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:5-6; Tan.HaNid. Yitro 6, p. 95a; Ex.R. 27:2 = S. 2, p. 322; Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:6; Mid.Lekah Tov on 18:6, p. 61a; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 355:1-2.
10. Numbers Rabbah, a 12th century work based on material by Moses Ha-Darshan (J.E., 2:671) does not disagree, but makes a distinction between being chosen by God and being brought near to God, both of which are described as "happy is he whom..." (Num.R. 3:2 = S. 3, p. 67). The Patriarchs were chosen by God. However, Jethro was in the second category. "The Holy One, blessed be He, brought Jethro

Notes. (Continued)

near to Himself, but did not choose him" (Ibid., p. 68). The Soncino translator explains this difference as giving "them the opportunity of drawing near to Him, but they were not worthy in themselves of being chosen" (Ibid., note 2). I can't think of how this could be a negative comment about Jethro, even if it does come from a late source, especially since the point of the midrash really concerns eligibility for גִּיבוּר, not conversion.

11. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 172:154-173:157, 159 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:3-5,6. Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:7-9. 11; Ex.R. 27:2 = S. 2, pp. 322-323; Tan.HaNid.Yitro 6, p. 95a; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 355: 2-5, 7 contain parallel accounts. Sef.VeHizhir p. 35a says simply, "He [Moses] was spoken to by the voice of the Almighty."
12. Tan. debe Eliyahu ch.(5)6, p. 30.
13. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 173:158-159 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:5-6. Parallel accounts can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:9-11; Ex.R. 27:2 = S.2, p. 323; Tan.HaNidpas Yitro 6, p. 95a; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b; M.-H.G. 2, p. 355:5-7. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:7, p. 61a shortens the rule to "From here they say that the left should always push away while the right draws nigh." The source for this is the Mekilta (J.Z.L. 2, p. 173: 160ff. = H.R., p. 193:6ff). All the sources cited at the beginning of this note contain a version of this injunction which basically means "Be willing, but not too willing to accept proselytes." Sot. 47a = S., p. 246 and San. 107b = S., p. 735 discuss the basis of this rule which is Elijah's rejection of Gehazi.

Ex. 18:7 Moses went out to meet his father-in-law.

While Moses may have needed God's chiding before he would go out to greet Jethro, once he did go, Moses, according to the midrash, spared no efforts to welcome his father-in-law. In fact, the reception which Jethro received proved to be proverbial:

It is written, 'The wise shall inherit honour' (Prov. 3:35) - this refers to Jethro; what [great]¹ honour he inherited when he visited Moses!²

Not only did Moses go out towards Jethro, but the entire hierarchy of the House of Israel went also:

They say: Moses went out and with him Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the leaders of Israel. Some say: The Shekinah also went with them.³

With this august body in the forefront, the honor accorded to Jethro naturally increased and increased as other sources recount the episode:

Said R. Yudan⁴ in the name of R. Eibo: Two people saw greater honor from God than anyone else in the world. They were Jethro and Jacob. When Jethro came to Moses, this was written about him, 'Moses went out to meet his father-in-law' (Ex. 18:7). Now who could see Moses going out [to greet Jethro] and not himself go out. The leaders of the thousands and the hundreds went out, so wouldn't he [Ben Plonie also] go out? The seventy elders went out and so wouldn't he go out? Aaron the high priest went out, so wouldn't he go out? [As a result],⁵ all Israel began to go out towards Jethro.

With the exception of R. Yudan, all of the comments in this section are quoted anonymously or by אמרו. If אמרו is the

symbol of the majority, then commitment of normative Judaism to proselytes in general and Jethro in specific would be emphasized. As Jethro is enhanced, Moses' prestige rises. However, without a basic approval of Jethro's status as a proselyte, such aggrandizement and heaping on of honors would seem spurious. I believe that the midrash in this section demonstrates that approval.

NOTES

1. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
2. Ex. R. 27:2 = S. 2, p. 322. Tan. HaNid. Yitro 6, p. 94b has a parallel account.
3. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 173:162-164 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:8-9. Yal. Shim. R. 26^a, p. 82b duplicates this. Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M. p. 130:14-15 parallel this with one exception. Instead of "The Shekinah also went out with them," Mek.R.S. (along with Ex.R. 27:2 = S. 2, p. 323 and M.H.G. 2, p. 357:6-7) reads "Even the Ark went out with them." Though it does not say so explicitly, the view that the Ark also went out means that Jethro came after the Revelation at Sinai. This is the view of R. Eleazar in sec. Ex. 18:1 "Jethro...heard", note 7 and will be further discussed in sec. Ex. 18:8. Tan.HaNid. Yitro 6, p. 95 follows the Mekilta of R. Ishmael but mentions neither the Shekinah nor the Ark.
4. 4th century Palestinian Amora (J.E., 12:623). Strack calls him fourth generation (p. 129), which equals Mielziner's third generation, 320-359 C.E., (p. 48).
5. Tan.HaNid. VaYigash 3, p. 54b. Zohar 2, p.4a = S.3, p. 13 parallels this.

Ex. 18:7 He bowed low and kissed him; each [אִישׁ] asked after the other's welfare [לְשָׁלוֹם].

To unravel the question of who bowed to whom, the Rabbis made use of a gezerah shavah. Aside from affording them a chance to clarify an ambiguous phrase, the gezerah shavah led to the formulation of a general rule based on who showed the greater degree of deference to whom:

From this I could not know who bowed down to whom and who kissed whom. It continues, however, to say: 'And they inquired, each man of the other, about their welfare' [Ex. 18:7]--now, who is designated 'man' (Ish)--is it not Moses, as it is said: 'the man Moses was very meek' (Num. 12:3)? You must, therefore, say: It was Moses who bowed down and kissed his father-in-law.¹

This analysis depends on the fact that the same order is maintained in both parts of the verse. Unless the subject of the bowing and kissing is the same person as the Ish (אִישׁ - Moses) in the second part of the verse, then the two men's identities would remain tangled.

However, the lesson that the Rabbis wished to derive from this incident answered the question of who bowed to whom more than any hermeneutics:

Hence we learn that a man should show respect to his father-in-law.²

Therefore, Moses must have bowed to Jethro, just as Moses (Ish - "each") inquired of Jethro ("the other") about his welfare. While other midrashim showed Jethro honoring Moses,³ now Moses honors Jethro to attract him to the Torah and the God of Israel.⁴

Mekilta of R. Shim'on also uses Exodus 18:7 to illustrate the importance of hospitality and friendliness. Commenting on the fact that the first thing that Moses did was to inquire about Jethro's welfare (לשלוט), the midrash continues:

So great is peace (שלום) that it comes before praise of the Holy One, Blessed be He. From this we find that he [Moses] did not first begin to tell Jethro of the Exodus from Egypt or the Ten Commandments or the splitting of the Red Sea or the manna or the quails, but rather he first [began] with peace. Thus it says, 'Each asked after the other's welfare.' After which it says, 'Moses then recounted to his father-in-law [everything that the Lord had done...] [Ex. 18:8] on account of the fact that peace [i.e. peaceful treatment] had settled his [Jethro's] mind to listen to all this.⁵

Rather than bombarding Jethro with information about God and perhaps provoking an unthinking reaction, positive or negative, Moses set his father-in-law at ease by taking care of the social amenities and welcoming him graciously.

Midrash Lekah Tov then uses the verse to formulate a general rule:

From this [Ex. 18:7] they say that a man should always begin by asking about his fellow's welfare (שלום) - even if he [the acquaintance] is an idolator in the market place.⁶

Politeness is not restricted, then, to members of the House of Israel, but rather, is a basic human right established by Moses at Sinai.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 173:165-174:169 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:10-12. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:15-17; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:7, p. 150 offers a shortened version; Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:1, pp. 61a-b; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 357:8-10.
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 174:169 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:12-13. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 130:17; Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:7, p. 61a; Yal.Shim. R. 268, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 357:10-11.
3. See sec. Ex. 18:1 Jethro...Moses' father-in-law, notes 1, 2.
4. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:7 states this explicitly, "He [Moses - the identities are clear from the context] kissed him [Jethro] and converted him."
5. Mek.R.S.H., p. 87. Mek.R.S.E.M. does not consider this an integral part of Mekilta of R. Shim'on and omits it. Parallels do exist in Midrash Gadol u-Gedola (B.H.N. III, p. 129); Mish. R. El., p. 73:1-5, a work of the middle of the eighth century (E.J., 16:1515); and M.H.G. 2, p. 357:13-17.
6. Midrash Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:7, p. 61b.

Ex. 18:8 Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done.

Having properly and sociably greeted Jethro, Moses then retired to the house of study with his father-in-law.¹ Moses' narration of the events since the Exodus served a higher purpose than just conversational pleasantries. From the Mekilta:

'And Moses told his father-in-law.' In order to attract him and bring him near to the Torah. 'All that the Lord had done.' That he had given the Torah to his people Israel.²

The sooner Jethro becomes acquainted with the God of Israel, the less of an embarrassment he will be for Moses. The midrash here does not assume that Jethro gave up idolatry back in Midian, as do some sources.³ As a consequence, idolatry's power over Jethro must be broken as soon as possible. Hence, Moses told Jethro all that God had done for Israel and he emphasized the giving of the Torah.

Both here and in the previous section,⁴ the position is advanced that Jethro came after the giving of the Torah. Post-Tannaitic sources to be cited later will have a negative interpretation for Jethro's not being present at the Revelation.⁵ Here, however, having Moses tell Jethro about the giving of the Torah seems to be indicative of nothing more than the rabbinic rule of ein mukdam ve-ein m'uchar ba-Torah. Of all the miracles which had been wrought for Israel, Moses picks the most spectacular one, מתן תורה to impress his father-in-law and win him for the God of Israel.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 174:170 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:13 is the source for the interpretation of "tent" in Ex. 18:7 as "house of study."
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 174:171-174 = Mek.H.R., p. 193:14-15. Parallel sources exist in Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:8, p. 61b; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b. Mek.R.S.H., p. 87 = Mek. R.S.E.M., p. 130:19 and M.H.G. 2, p. 357:19 do not repeat the Mekilta's second comment "that He had given the Torah to His people Israel."
3. See sec. Ex. 2:15b-22, note 3.
4. See sec. Ex. 18:7, note 5. The reference there to the Ten Commandments is the same as the giving of the Torah.
5. See sec. Ex. 18:27, Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell. All the post-Tannaitic sources report that Jethro was sent away before the Revelation. As he did not share in Israel's misery and enslavement, he could not share in their joy. Being sent away before or arriving after the Revelation are two sides of the same issue, though the first is interpreted to Jethro's detriment, the second, neutrally.

Ex. 18:9 And Jethro rejoiced [וִיחַד] over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel.

The Tannaim and the Amoraim (and onward) had different ideas as to what was important in this verse. While the Tannaim discuss what exactly made Jethro rejoice (וִיחַד), the later Rabbis, questioning the meaning of וִיחַד, wonder just what action the verb signifies. From the Mekiltas come the different opinions of the now familiar R. Joshua, R. Eleazar, and R. Eliezer, representing the Tannaitic viewpoints:

R. Joshua says: It is of the goodness¹ of the manna that Scripture speaks...R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: It is of the goodness of the well that Scripture speaks...R. Eliezer says: It is of the goodness of the land of Israel that Scripture speaks...Therefore, instead of merely 'goodness,' or 'the goodness', or 'all the goodness,' it [Scripture] says: '[Jethro rejoiced] over all the goodness.'²

The long expositions on why the manna, the well, or the land of Israel represent God's special kindness are not important for this study. What is significant is that the three Rabbis had no problems with the meaning of וִיחַד and understood it in its literal/contextual sense "to rejoice." Faced with wonders such as the manna, the well, or the land of Israel, Jethro naturally rejoiced.

Yet for two first generation Amoraim (219-257 C.E.),³ the emphasis of their analysis is on the word וִיחַד itself and Jethro's resultant actions:

'And Jethro rejoiced.'⁴ Rab and Samuel [dispute its meaning].⁴ Rab said: He

caused a sharp knife to pass over his flesh.
 Samuel said: His flesh crept [with horror at
 the destruction of the Egyptians⁵].^{4,6}

Rab's comment is based on the second biblical meaning of וַיִּחַר to "be or grow sharp."⁷ Rashi explains the meaning of "caused a sharp (חַרָּה) knife to pass over his flesh" as "he circumcised himself and converted."⁸ Samuel's comment is subject to several interpretations. The Soncino translation is based on Rashi's substitution of קמטים קמטים, literally "to contract, curl"⁹ for the Talmud's חירורים חירורים. Jastrow understands the disputed expression as being based on the root, חרר, meaning "sharp" and so translates "he [Jethro] felt like cuts in his body."¹⁰ Either understanding of Samuel's comment seems equally unfavorable to Jethro. Jethro apparently identified more with the Egyptians than the Israelites and thus physically empathized with Egyptian pain. The conclusion of the Talmudic section would seem to emphasize Jethro's ties with the Egyptians:

Rab¹¹ observed: Thus people say: Before
 a proselyte even unto the tenth generation,
 insult not an Aramean.¹²

In Jethro's defense, it should be noted that even God did not rejoice in the death of the Egyptians.¹³ Furthermore, nothing else about Rab and Samuel¹⁴ indicates any sort of general hostility towards proselytes. Jethro's creeping flesh could have been some sort of "there but for...go I" from the former cohort of Balaam and Job. Thus, Rab's final observation could be seen as another of the laws designed to protect proselytes from embarrassment (by avoiding mention of their

past rather than an indictment of Jethro's reaction. As to the general hypothesis, while on the surface, both Samuel's and Rab's second comments do seem to be unfavorable, perhaps my understanding of them neutralizes them. However, even if these are unfavorable comments from an early period, only by the end of this study will it be known if they are statistically significant.

The post-talmudic sources continue with definitions of ויחד to determine Jethro's actions, but do not follow the talmudic interpretations. Tanhuma Buber interprets ויחד as coming from the root יחד, "to unite."¹⁵ Thus, Jethro "proclaimed the unity of God."¹⁶ Sefer VeHizhir follows this meaning of "to unite" stating, "He made his two wills one."¹⁷ Tanhuma HaNidpas reads the word as יִהְיֶה "in that he became Jewish (יהודי)."¹⁸

I am unsure if there is any specific reason to explain the difference in approach to this verse among the various strata. My only thought is that the (Palestinian) Tannaim had no trouble with the relatively rare Hebrew word ויחד. However, for the Babylonian Amoraim and others, ויחד was sufficiently unfamiliar to necessitate translations of the word itself (as in Targum Pseudo Jonathan) and to warrant homiletical explanations.

NOTES

1. "Kindness" is the new J.P.S.A. equivalent of "goodness" which Lauterbach uses.
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 174:177-175:190 = Mek.H.R., p. 194:1-9. Parallel versions can be found in Mek.R.S.H., pp. 87-88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., pp. 130:22-131:1; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:9, p. 61b defines ויחד as חרור, "joy", (Jastrow, p. 425) and then gives a shortened version of the Mekilta account. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:9 uses the word בדה "to be cheerful" (Jastrow, p. 139) and lists the manna and the watering holes which God had given Israel as the reasons for Jethro's good humor; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b, M.H.G. 2, p. 358:6-14.
3. Mielziner, p. 41.
4. These brackets were supplied by the Soncino translator.
5. This additional information is based on Rashi's comment on חירורים חירורים, San. 94a.
6. San. 94a = S., p. 632. Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:9, p. 150 repeats this but without any authorities' names. Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b and M.H.G. 2, p. 358:3-4 give the comments in the name of Rab and Samuel.
7. B.D.B., p. 292.
8. Rashi, loc. cit.
9. Jastrow, p. 1384.
10. Jastrow, p. 451.
11. Both Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b and M.H.G. 2, p. 358:4-5 have R. Pappa, a third generation (320-375 C.E.) Babylonian Amora, (Mielziner, p. 48).
12. San. 94a = S., p. 632.
13. San. 39b = S., p. 251.
14. E.J., 13:1576-1579; 14:786-787.
15. Jastrow, p. 573.
16. Tan.B. Yitro 5, p. 36a.
17. Sef. VeHizhir, p. 34b. M.H.G. 2, p. 358:5 parallels this.

Notes. (Continued)

18. Tan.HaMid. Yitro 7, p. 45a. M.H.G.2, p. 358:5-6
parallels this.

Ex. 18:10 "Blessed be the Lord [ברוך ה'], Jethro said, "Who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh."

Not only was Jethro honored by having a parashah in the Torah named after him, but rabbinic exegesis turned his statement into a major praise for him and a corresponding chastisement for Israel:

Said R. Pappias¹: This passage expresses a reproach of the Israelites. For, behold there were six hundred thousand people and not one of them rose to bless God until Jethro came and blessed God, as it is said: 'And Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord."' ²

This statement by R. Pappias is based apparently on the scarcity of the word ברוך "blessed," in the Torah. The word occurs only five times prior to Exodus 18:10. Three times ברוך appears as Noah (Gen. 9:26), Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and Abraham's servant (Gen. 24:27) bless God, and twice the word is used in Isaac's blessing of his sons (Gen. 27:29, 33). Whereas Israel's only praise of God for the Exodus is in the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1-21)³, after which the Israelites began to murmur at Marah (Ex. 15:23-25), Jethro immediately blessed God upon hearing of God's deeds for Israel. Jethro's "ברוך ה'" stands as the only formal invocation of God's name in a blessing through the end of the Book of Exodus. Thus, Jethro's exclamation is both unique and praiseworthy, coming as it does from a former idolator.⁴

Jethro's exuberant "ברוך ה'" came to be the proper and mandatory response for anyone hearing of God's wonders. From the Mekilta:

'The people then bowed low in homage' [Ex. 12:27]. This is to teach you that whoever hears these miracles which the Holy One, Blessed be He, did for Israel in Egypt should give praise, as it is said: 'And Moses told his father-in-law...And Jethro rejoiced...And Jethro said: "Blessed be the Lord."'5

The Talmud is even more explicit in deriving this general rule:

Whence is this rule [of saying a blessing over a miracle] derived?--R. Johanan said: Because Scripture says, 'Blessed be the Lord who hath delivered you.'6

While the sources cited thus far are unanimous in praising Jethro by singling out his statement as a unique contribution to the piety and politeness of Israel, Midrash Tehillim has an alternative interpretation which effectively downgrades Jethro's action:

And when the Holy One, Blessed be He, delivers the children of Israel, not only will they praise Him, but all men will praise Him. Thus long ago, when God delivered the children of Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians, all men praised God, as it is said, 'And Jethro rejoiced...And Jethro said: "Blessed be the Lord..."7

Although this selection from Midrash Tehillim does acknowledge that Jethro did praise God, it lumps him together with all the world and as a result, denies the unique nature of his action. Thus, praising God for His deeds is only the expected, rather than the special mark of piety and gratitude. Granted that Midrash Tehillim is not explicitly unfavorable toward Jethro, nevertheless it lacks the enthusiasm for him that characterizes the Mekilta. Perhaps the reason for this attitude, so contrary to the rest of Jewish tradition on this verse,

results from the late date of this part of Midrash Tehillim. Though scholarly theories differ, the Encyclopedia Judaica dates it to the eleventh century.⁸ This midrash then could be used as an example to support the general hypothesis.

NOTES

1. A second generation Tanna (80-120 C.E.), Mielziner, p. 25.
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 175:192-196 = Mek.H.R., p. 194:11-14. Parallel versions can be found in San. 94a = S., p. 632. Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 131:2-4; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:10, p. 61b; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 18:10, p. 150; Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b.
3. M.H.G. 2, p. 358:16-19 makes a related comment in an addition by its compiler. "Even though they [the Israelites] sang a song [at the sea], they didn't say לְרַגֵּל "n until Jethro came and praised God...."
4. Jethro's declaration of "Blessed be the Lord" (Ex. 18:10) is connected with his next statement in Ex. 18:11 by many sources, notably Tan.HaNid. See sec. Ex. 18:11, Now I know, note 7. Briefly, Jethro could truly praise God since he had discovered the weakness of "all the other gods" (Ex. 18:11).
5. Mek.J.Z.L. 1, p. 95:75-78 = Mek. H.R., p. 42:6-8.
6. Ber. 54a = S., p. 329. Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b repeats this. Mek.J.Z.L., 2 p. 175:191 = Mek.H.R., p. 194:9-10 has Jethro saying "Blessed be the Lord" after hearing about the things which are called "goodness" done by the Lord for Israel, viz., the manna, well or land. See sec. Ex. 18:9, note 2. Mid.Lekah Tov, intro. to Parashat Yitro, p. 60b gives this response after the unspecified "mighty deeds of God" which Jethro heard.
7. Mid.Teh. on Ps. 120, p. 252b, mid.l = Br. 2, p. 289.
8. E.J., 11:1511, 1519-20.

Ex. 18:11 Now [עתה] I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.

Faced with a time specific word such as עתה, "now," the Rabbis assumed that Jethro's declaration, "Now I know....," distinguished his present recognition of God from an earlier state of non-recognition. The Mekilta states, "Up to now he had not admitted it [that the God of Israel was the only true God]."¹ Other sources also found in עתה ידעתי, "Now I know," even more graphic evidence of Jethro's prior state of non-recognition of God. From Deuteronomy Rabbah, a work composed ca. 900 C.E.,² comes the clearest explanation of the degree of the change involved in Jethro's declaration:

Had another [besides Jethro] exclaimed, 'Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods' (Ex. 18:11), they [other people] might have said, 'Who is this one to declare "Now I know"? But Jethro did know, for he had visited every idolatrous shrine in the world...'

Something changed Jethro's allegiance to idols and caused him to recognize the God of Israel.

The Mekilta describes the incident which demonstrated the Lord God's power to Jethro and caused him to leave idolatry behind:

They say: No slave had ever been able to run away from Egypt. And at this time the Holy One, blessed be He, brought out six hundred thousand people from Egypt. Referring to this it is said: 'That the Lord is great.' (Ex. 18:11).⁴

The Zohar gives a related incident. After Pharaoh's power was broken:

His priest also, namely Jethro, the priest of On, i.e., idolatry, was also humbled, so that he came and acknowledged the Holy One, saying 'Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you...Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods....'⁵

Deuteronomy Rabbah does not relate the specific details of an incident which caused Jethro's change of heart, but does say:

[He] found no reality in them [idols] and had only then become a proselyte - for him it was fitting to exclaim, 'Now I know.'⁶

Jethro, then, had surveyed the field and knew from whence he spoke when he declared for the God of Israel.

However, while Jethro rejected the active practice of idolatry for himself, preferring the God of Israel, some sources found a conditional nature in his declaration "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods." The Mekilta did not, and its comment on "than all gods" is straight forward and does not suspect any holding back of commitment on Jethro's part:

They say: There was not an idol in all the world which Jethro failed to seek out and worship. For it is said: 'Than all gods.' Naaman, however, knew better than Jethro. For it is said: 'Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel' (2 Kings 5:15).⁷

Jethro denied his past idolatrous beliefs as he announced his allegiance to the God of Israel. Naaman who was not so steeped in idolatry as Jethro had been did not have to refer to what he was denying, i.e., מכל אלהים, "than all gods," but only to what he was affirming.

On the other hand, Deuteronomy Rabbah, a much later work than the Mekilta, relates the same material, but in a fashion that casts aspersions on Jethro's testimony:

The Rabbis say: Jethro attributed reality to idols, as it is said, 'Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods' (Ex. 18:11). Naaman partly acknowledged them, as it is said, 'Behold, now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel' (2 Kings 5:15).⁸

This version of the story has Jethro testifying to the meaningful existence of idols and relegating the God of Israel to the same category as an idol, only more powerful than the others around. In this scenario, Naaman is one step ahead of Jethro, because at least he limits the place of other gods to heaven and not earth. This clearly seems to me to be an example to support the general hypothesis. Deuteronomy Rabbah, a work of the early Middle Ages, reworks an earlier neutral comment into one hostile to Jethro.

Targum Onkelos, the official translation of the Torah, seems to settle the issue of Jethro's involvement with idolatry and clarifies his placement of the God of Israel vis à vis "all gods," "Now I know that God is great and there are no gods but Him."⁹ Jethro, then, is firmly on the record as supporting God and only God. There can be no doubts about his denial of idolatry and exaltation of the God of Israel.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 176:203 = Mek.H.R., p. 194:17-18. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek. R.S.E.M., p. 131:7; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:11, p. 61b. Yal.Shim.R. 269, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 360:9.
2. J.E., 4:488.
3. Deut.R. 1:5 = S. 3, p. 5. The motif of "Had another said it, they would have laughed at him" is used to refer to Moses, Jethro, Solomon and Nebuchadnezzar. Examples of this which include a version of the Deut.R. comment on Jethro can be found in Tan.HaNid. Yitro 7, p. 95a; Tan.B. Yitro 5, p. 37b; Sefer VeHizhir, p. 34b; Yal.Shim.R. 269, p. 82b; Yal.Shim.R. 795, p. 282b which has an abbreviated version; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 968, p. 542; M.H.G. 2, pp. 359:15-360:8 which omits Solomon. Ecc. R. on Ecc. 3:1, mid. 1 = S. 4, p. 87 only has a comment on Jethro, but with the lead in, "If another of the wise men of the heathen peoples had uttered this verse..."
4. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 176:204-206 = Mek.H.R., p. 194:17-19. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 131:7-8; Yal.Shim.R. 269, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 360:9-11.
5. Zohar 2, p. 67b = S. 3, pp. 210-211. Zohar 2, p. 68a = S. 3, p. 212 has a similar theme. Jethro's concession of faith follows that of Pharaoh and the other kings of the world.
6. Deut.R. 1:5 = S. 3, p. 5. Other sources also do not give the reason for Jethro's rejection of idolatry. For example, Tan.HaNid. Yitro 7, p. 95a states, "Jethro said, 'There was no form of idolatry which I didn't practice, but I didn't find any god save the God of Israel.'" Tan.B. Yitro 5, pp. 36a-b and Sefer VeHizhir, p. 34b are similar to this.
7. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 176:207-211 = Mek.H.R., pp. 194:19-195:2. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 131:9-11; M.H.G. 2, p. 360:11-14.
8. Deut.R. 2:26-27 = S. 3, p. 56. Yal.Shim.R. 269, p. 82b repeats this.
9. Tar.Onk. to Ex. 18:11.

Ex. 18:11 Yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people] [כי בדבר אשר זרו עליכם].

In a prime example of the composite nature of the midrash, the Mekilta which has just stated that Jethro did not know God before Exodus 18:11,¹ now shows how the second part of this verse strengthens Jethro's pre-existing belief in God:

I have acknowledged Him in the past, and now even more, for His name has become very great in the world. For with the very thing with which the Egyptians planned to destroy Israel, God punished them, as it is said: 'Yea, for with the very thing with which they acted presumptuously against them' [Ex. 18:11].²

The juxtaposition of עתה, "now" and ידעתי, understood literally, "I knew" (the past tense) in the beginning of Exodus 18:11, "Now I know (ידעתי) that the Lord is greater than all gods," motivated the Rabbis to explain what happened "now" for Jethro to restate his prior faith. The second part of the verse, the foiling of the Egyptian plot against the Israelites, was thus used by the Rabbis to give Jethro that opportunity and to re-establish his credentials as a figure sympathetic to Israel.

While the new J.P.S.A. Torah translation admits that the Hebrew in the second part of the verse is obscure,³ the Rabbis clearly understand אשר זרו עליכם as referring to midah ke-neged midah justice. In fact, the Talmud, in deriving the meaning of זרז states this like for like principle in a charmingly colloquial fashion:

What means that which is written, 'Yea, in the thing wherein they Zadu [dealt proudly]⁴ against them [Ex. 18:11]⁵? In the pot in which they cooked were they cooked. Whence is it learned that 'Zadu' means cooking? Because it is written, 'And Jacob sod [Wa-yazed] pottage' [Gen. 25:29].^{5,6}

The pot which the Talmud's gezerah shavah established was the Red Sea. From Tanhuma HaNidpas:

Thus, the Egyptians thought to destroy Israel by means of water [drowning the boys in the Nile]. But they were drowned in water. So it is written, 'Yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people].'⁷

Thus, justice was fittingly served. This divine intervention into the life of Israel provided the warrant for Jethro's profession of faith, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods."⁸

NOTES

1. See sec. Ex. 18:11 Now I know, note 2.
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 176:213-177:216 = Mek.H.R., p. 195:4-6. Parallels of this whole midrash can be found in Mek. J.Z.L. 1, pp. 244:18-245:22 = Mek.H.R., p. 110:13-15; Mek.R.S.H., p. 53 = Mek.R.S.E.M. p. 66:2-6; Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 131:12-14; Ex.R. 22:1 = S. 2, p. 275; Yal.Shim.R. 236, p. 73b; Yal.Shim.R. 269, p. 82b; M.H.G. 2, p. 278: 12-14, M.H.G. 2, p. 360:17-18. Tar. Onk. on Ex. 18:11 paraphrases the second part of the Mekilta's statement "For with the thing..."
3. J.P.S.A. on Ex. 18:11, note c-c.
4. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
5. I supplied these brackets.
6. Sot. 11a = S., p. 53. Parallel versions include Sefer VeHizhir, p. 35a at note N; M.H.G. 2, p. 360: 21-24. Parallel versions though without the proof-text from Genesis can be found in Ex.R. 1:9 = S. 2, p. 11; Est.R. 7:22 = S. 4, pp. 100-101; Mid.Lekah Tov on 18:11, p. 62.
7. Tan.HaNid. Yitro 7, p. 95a. Parallels include Tan.B. Yitro 5, p. 36b; Sefer VeHizhir, p. 35a; Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:11 has a paraphrase of this. Tan.HaNid., Sefer VeHizhir and M.H.G. 2, p. 360:18-20 introduce this discussion of midah justice with an earthy analogy, "Like a man who came to load a burden on his ass and then the burden was unloaded on him." Sefer VeHizhir and M.H.G. add "Thus Pharaoh came to make Israel's yoke heavier, 'No straw shall be issued to you, but you must produce your quota of bricks,' (Ex. 5:18) but it back-fired upon him, as it says, 'In the thing for which they were arrogant [the tasks assigned to Israel], He was above them [to do justice].'"
8. Tan.HaNid. and Tan.B. cited above begin their discussion of אשר זכר כי בדבר with the introduction "Now I know..."

Ex. 18:12 And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law brought [ויקח]
a burnt offering and sacrifices for God.

An anonymous comment in the Mekilta delivers a seemingly backhanded assessment of Jethro as it explains this part of Exodus 18:12.

Scripture expresses surprise at him. A man who has been a worshipper of idols, who would sacrifice, offer incense and libations and bow down to his idols, now brings a burnt offering and sacrifices to God.¹

The changes in Jethro's life were radical, but hardly surprising in terms of the general character enhancement which he has thus far received in the midrash and even in the Bible itself. As Buber has observed, "Jethro came to Israel not as the priest of Midian but as Moses' father-in-law."² Thus, the term "priest of Midian" occurs only once in Exodus 18, but Jethro's chief dignity, חמון משה, is in almost every verse. Ultimately, then, the surprise which the midrash expresses is directed at the magnitude of change and improvement possible in one life, and not at the fact that Moses' father-in-law would bring a sacrifice.

As opposed to the Mekilta, the vast majority of the sources which deal with this verse do not comment on the propriety of Jethro's bringing of a burnt offering. Rather they discuss his offering in terms of the types of sacrifices which the children of Noah³ were able to bring and how that related to the time when Jethro came to Mt. Sinai. Since the verse specifically mentions a burnt offering (עולה), the

word זבחים, "sacrifices", cannot be synonymous, but must refer to another type of offering. In the context of the several talmudic passages, the other type of sacrifice to which זבחים refers is taken to be a peace-offering:

For it was stated, R. Eleazar⁴ and R. Joseph Hanina⁵ [disagree]⁶. One maintained: The children of Noah offered peace offerings [i.e. this type of sacrifice existed before the Revelation at Sinai with its laws commanding sacrifices]⁷, while the others maintained: They did not....

But surely, it is written, 'And Moses said: "Thou must also give into our hands sacrifices [zebahim]⁶ [i.e. זבחים]⁷ and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God"' [Ex. 10:25]⁷? [He demanded]⁶ zebahim for food and burnt offerings for sacrifice [zebahim then, could not refer to peace offerings. Thus burnt offerings were the only type of sacrifice extant]⁷. But surely it is written, 'And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law took a burnt offering and sacrifices unto the Lord'? That was written after the giving of the Torah [Revelation]⁶ [if, according to the principle of ein mukdam ve-ein m'uchar ba-Torah, Jethro's arrival followed the Revelation, then with all the sacrificial laws in operation, Jethro could have indeed brought both a burnt offering and a peace offering]⁷. This is well on the view that Jethro came after the Revelation; but on the view that Jethro came before the Revelation, what can be said? For it was stated: The sons of R. Hiyya⁸ and R. Joshua b. Levi⁹ [disagree]⁶: one [side]⁶ maintains: Jethro came before the Revelation, while the other maintains: Jethro came after the Revelation! - He who maintains that Jethro came before the Revelation holds that the children of Noah sacrificed peace offerings [since Ex. 18:12 was not disproved as referring to two types of sacrifices as was the case with Ex. 10:25, then to accept the timing of Jethro's arrival as being before the Revelation, one must also accept the pre-existence of the peace offering before the Torah].^{7, 10}

It may seem far fetched by modern critical standards to say that Jethro came after the giving of the Torah,

especially as Jethro's arrival is reported in Exodus 18:1 and the giving of the Torah is not described until Exodus 19 and 20. However, one can readily understand the problems which are solved vis à vis the sacrifices by having him arrive after מתן תורה. In no way does Jethro's not being present at Sinai have any negative connotations, as it will in the later sources to be found in sec. Ex. 18:27, Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 177:218-222 = Mek.H.R., p. 195:7-9. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 131:15-17; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:12, p. 62a; Yal. Shim.R. 270, p. 82b, M.H.G. 2, p. 361:3-5.
2. Buber, Moses, p. 94.
3. "Children of Noah is a technical term denoting all people before the Revelation at Sinai, and all non-Israelites who did not accept the Torah after Revelation. In the present discussion, even Israelites technically ranked as children of Noah, until the laws of sacrifices as stated in Leviticus became operative" (Zebahim, S., p. 571, note 7).
4. A second generation (279-320 C.E.) Palestinian Amora, (Mielziner, p. 45).
5. A first generation (219-279 C.E.) Palestinian Amora, (Mielziner, p. 41).
6. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
7. I supplied these brackets.
8. First generation (219-279 C.E.) Palestinian Amoraim. This is based on R. Hiyya's being a younger contemporary of Rabbi, (Mielziner, p. 39).
9. A first generation (219-279 C.E.) Palestinian Amora, (Mielziner, p. 49).
10. Zeb. 116a = S., pp. 573-574. The following sources contain parallel versions: Gen.R. 22:5 = S. 1, pp. 182-183; Gen.R. 34:9 = S. 1, p. 273; Lev.R. 9:6 = S. 2, p. 111-112; Num.R. 13:2 = S. 3, pp. 498-499; S.S.R. on S.S. 4:16, mid. 1 = S. 4, pp. 226-227; Y. Meg. 72b = gemorah on mis. 11:3; Yal.Shim.R. 36, p. 11a does not have the names of the Rabbis. A.Z. 24a-b = S., p. 121 uses the structure and phraseology of the Zeb. passage to determine where Jethro got a proper animal for his sacrifices. If he came before מִתְּחִילָה then anyone's (Jew or gentile's) animals were fit to be offered; if after, then he bought a kosher animal from an Israelite.

Ex. 18:12 And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.

When the Rabbis asked a question with an obvious answer, they were not asking for the sake of the answer, but for the lesson which was to be derived from the whole situation. Thus, while it should be obvious from the context that Moses was with Jethro and that it was into their presence that Aaron and the elders came, the Rabbis felt impelled to ask about the lack of a specific mention of Moses. They answered not so much in terms of Moses and Jethro, but in terms of their own day. From the Mekilta:

And where did Moses go? Was it not he who first went out to meet him, as it is said, 'And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law' (v. 7)? Where then was he now? Scripture thus teaches that Moses was standing and serving them. Whence did he learn this? From our father Abraham. They say: R. Isaac once mentioned this in a discourse. He said: When R. Gamaliel gave a banquet to the wise men, all of them sat reclining, while R. Gamaliel stood up and served them. They then said: 'We are not right in letting R. Gamaliel wait upon us.' But R. Joshua said to them: 'Leave him alone, let him do the serving. We find that one greater than R. Gamaliel waited upon people'. Said they to him: 'Who was it?' Said he to them: 'It was our father Abraham who waited upon the angels. And he believed them to be human beings, Arabs, worshippers of idols. All the more is it proper that R. Gamaliel should wait upon wise men, sons of the Torah.'

Knowing R. Gamaliel's reputation for haughtiness and his humiliation of R. Joshua, we can see that this passage represents a prime example of eisegesis or reading into the text. Moses

waited tables, as it were, to cure R. Gamaliel of his arrogance.

Accepting the fact that Moses was with Jethro and the elders either because obviously he had to be there or because he was serving the assembly, the Rabbis then wonder how one eats "before God." Continuing from the Mekilta:

Why does it say: 'Before God'? It is to teach that one who welcomes his fellow man, it is considered as if he had welcomed the Divine Presence.²

Thus, hospitality, always a Middle Eastern virtue, is elevated to the status of service to God. The welcome extended by Moses, Aaron, and the elders towards Jethro becomes the norm to be emulated by hosts everywhere, so that all can be "before God".

A full circle has been made. Jethro welcomed and now is welcomed. Exodus Rabbah makes the connection between the two welcomes:

It is written, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters for thou shalt find it after many days' (Eccl. 10:1). Are men such fools as to cast their bread upon the waters? Concerning whom, then, does it say this? - Concerning Jethro, who gave his bread to Moses, for it says, 'Call him, that he may eat bread' (Ex. 2:20). 'Cast thy bread upon the waters', 'the waters refer to Moses, of whom it says, 'Because I drew him out of the waters' (ibid. 10). Why so? [why should one then cast bread on the waters - to Moses] - 'For thou shalt find it after many days' - 'And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God' (ib. 18:12).³

As the Soncino translator puts it, "With this great honor

[the testimonial banquet described in Ex. 18:12] was he repaid 'after many days.'"⁴ We have seen how מרה כנגד מרה justice works to provide similar punishment; here a commensurate (if not greater) reward results. And the circle begins again, for in the next section, Jethro will repay his son-in-law's kindness with a kindness of his own.

Although the intricacies of Higher Criticism are outside the purview of this study, a few words must be said about the Kenite Hypothesis which is based primarily (and totally erroneously, I believe) on Exodus 18:12. Developed in the middle of the 19th century, this theory posits that Yahweh was the deity of the Kenites/Midianites and that Jethro, the priest of Midian, introduced belief in Yahweh to Moses when the latter was sojourning in Midian.⁵ While some scholars have explained much of the Jethro material according to the Kenite Hypothesis, their treatment of the sacrifices which Jethro brought and the meal of which he partook is indicative of the whole. From H. H. Rowley, "For Jethro offers a sacrifice and presides [both underlines are mine] at the sacred meal which follows."⁶ Oesterley and Robinson offer this interpretation, "This action is incomprehensible except on the supposition that Yahweh was the God of Jethro and his tribe, the Kenites, and that Jethro himself was Yahweh's priest."⁷

Such interpretations ignore two things, according to Buber.⁸ First, the Bible states that "Jethro brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God." The key word is

"brought" נָקַח. Jethro does not act as a priest and does not perform the actual physical ritual or sanctify the animals. He merely sponsors the sacrifices by bringing the animals as a donation. Jethro then is not the priest here and certainly not of Yahweh.

Second, to assume that Jethro was the presiding host at the meal which followed ignores the obvious. In verse 7, "Jethro and Moses went into the tent." To the tent (of meeting?), the logical locale for the sacrifices. Then came Aaron and the elders to dine and to celebrate Jethro's arrival. Moses' presence is not mentioned in Exodus 18:12 for the simple reason that he was already there at the tent, not because the meal was an initiation rite and in Midian he had "long earlier participated in the YHVH service and therefore no longer required acceptance in that community."⁹

Most of the other evidence for the Kenite Hypothesis can be similarly challenged. Yet in fairness to it, one should recall that this is a modern form of midrash, where the authors interpret a text with a preconceived goal or methodology in mind. The difference between the Kenite Hypothesis and rabbinic midrash is that Higher Criticism proports to be the truth, newly discovered and sifted from the chaff by scholarly tools, while the Rabbis merely supplemented the truth that they had in front of them. As a consequence, the Rabbis as a class cannot be refuted or challenged except on the basis of faith, while logic is a cogent weapon against Higher Criticism.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 177:223-178:243 = Mek.H.R., pp. 195:10 - 196:2. The whole passage includes another example of those greater than R. Gamaliel who stood and served. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 = Mek.R.S.E.M., pp. 131:17 - 132:5; Sef.VeHizhir, p. 35a; M.H.G. 2, p. 361:5-18. Kidd. 32b = S., p. 158 has the episode with R. Gamaliel, but does not make the connection back to Moses and Jethro. Yal.Shim.R. 270, p. 82b repeats the beginning of the Mekilta passage, but omits the R. Gamaliel incident. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:12, p. 62a has an abbreviated version of the Mekilta passage quoted in the text. Tar.Ps.Jon. 18:12 notes briefly that "Moses was standing and serving before them."
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 178:244-246 = Mek.H.R., p. 196:3-4. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 88 (not found in Mek.R.S.E.M.); Y. Erub. 22b = gemorah on mis. 5:1; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:12, p. 62a; Yal.Shim.R. 270, p. 82b. Ber. 64a = S., p. 402 interprets "before God" as before Moses which also equals before a scholar. It then formulates a rule that welcoming a scholar is like welcoming the Shehinah. Several parallels of this equation exist. The Zohar 3, pp. 9a-b = S. 4, p. 344 interprets "before God" as an indication of the approval that Jethro's sacrifice found in God's sight.
3. Ex.R. 27:7 = S. 2, pp. 326-327. A parallel can be found in Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:20, p. 127.
4. S. 2, p. 327, note 1. Ex.R. 27:3 = S. 2, p. 323 makes a similar connection. "See how many benefits and blessings came to Jethro from the moment he allied himself in marriage to Moses! For what does it say? - 'Aaron came...'"
5. J.E., 7:467 and E.J., 10:906-907 offer a good survey of and bibliography for the Kenite Hypothesis, as do the sources which follow in notes 6, 8.
6. H. H. Rowley, From Joseph to Joshua, p. 150. Pages 149-156 give many details about the Kenite Hypothesis.
7. W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion, p. 113.
8. Buber, Moses, pp. 94-100. This section not only deals with all the Jethro material but convincingly refutes the Kenite Hypothesis. See especially pp. 95-96 for the points raised in the text of this study.

Notes. (Continued)

9. Karl Budde, Religion of Israel to the Exile, p. 24, quoted in Buber, p. 96.

Ex. 18:24 Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he said.

Though Jethro's name is featured prominently in this section of the Bible from Exodus 18:13-26, most of the midrashic material generated from it deals more with Moses and his travails as a leader than with Jethro. The material specifically on Jethro is concerned with his role as the "author" of פרשת הריינים. Did Jethro originate the system of the leaders over the thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, or rather was this section included as a part of the Revelation at Sinai? The Mekilta answers both questions affirmatively when it presents the differences between R. Joshua and R. Eleazar:

'So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law' - to be taken literally - 'And did all that he had said.' That is, all that his father-in-law told him - these are the words of R. Joshua. R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: 'So Moses hearkened to the voices of his father-in-law' - to be taken literally - 'And did all that he had said.' That is, what God had said.

Thus, while R. Joshua gives Jethro the entire credit for the innovation, R. Eleazar splits the credit by making God the ultimate source for the chapter on the judges, and Jethro, His spokesman.

The weight of tradition supports R. Eleazar's interpretation. Yet more important than giving Jethro the status of the proponent of this legislation was the need to establish the unity of the Revelation. All the Torah came from God,

not from Moses or even his father-in-law. However, Mishnat R. Eliezer shows how both Jethro's status can be enhanced and, at the same time, the sanctity of the Revelation can be maintained:

Beloved was Jethro, for God gave him a section in the Torah in which to distinguish himself. Which one was it? It was the election of the elders as it says, 'You shall seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God...' (Ex. 18:21). But wasn't the election of the elders an important matter for God? Why didn't God command Moses first? Rather it was to give Jethro stature in the eyes of Moses and Israel, saying 'Great is Jethro for God agrees with his opinion.' However, Jethro only spoke this on the condition that God agree with his words, as it says, 'If you do this-and God so commands you-you will be able to bear up' (Ex. 18:23).²

By breaking up Exodus 18:23 into two parts, Jethro's advice is placed in its proper perspective. Moses will carry it out (Exodus 18:23a) only if God so ordains it (Ex. 18:23b). As Tractate Semahoth states succinctly, "The section of the judges would have been worthy to be promulgated even if Jethro had not arisen."³

Though Jethro was not the final authority in the matter of the selection of the leaders, nevertheless, the Zohar considered his role of sufficient import to formulate a general rule based upon it:

It was Jethro who gave Moses sound advice concerning the administration of justice. So one must be aware of despising anyone, since the words of an ordinary person may be of great consequence, as it says of Moses that he 'hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said' (Ex. 18:24).⁴

Thus, the exchange between Moses and his father-in-law was to have consequences not just for the generation of the Wilderness but for all times as a guide to behavior.

Whereas the midrash previously cited manages to enhance Jethro's reputation and emphasizes the unity of the Sinaitic Revelation, Pesikta de Rab Kahana, a fifth century work⁵, in a comment unique to itself, does neither and in a fashion which demeans all principals involved:

[Immediately after Jethro's departure, Scripture declares:]⁶ 'The same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai' (Ex. 19:1). R. Joshua b. Levi said: Consider the parable of a prince who was walking in the market place where a friend of the king met him and filled his bosom with precious stones and pearls. Thereupon the king, [who had long been amassing great riches for his son] said: For my son's sake open up my treasures right away, lest he say, 'But for the example of my father's friend, my father would have given me nothing.' Likewise the Holy One, [who had been treasuring the Torah against the day he would give it to Israel]⁶, said to Moses: Lest Israel say to you, 'Had not Jethro come and taught you laws, God would not have given us the Torah'; I herewith open for Israel the treasury of Torah with its entire riches of law.⁷

Jethro is here given the full credit for his advice, rather than humbly deferring to God's authorship. The children of Israel are their usual doubting selves, here questioning God's plans and concern for them. And God Almighty seems dangerously lacking in confidence in His own product, the Torah. The image created is one of God rushing the Torah to Israel for fear that the Ten Commandments and the Holiness Code on their own merit might not seem more

important to the Israelites than Jethro's advice. Though the motif of the king and his son appears frequently in the midrash, it is generally used to greater advantage for both Israel and God.

Finally, Philo and Josephus have their opinions of Jethro's advice. The former is as metaphorically removed from the simple meaning of the text as the latter is devoted to it. From Philo comes a hostile comment:

And he [Jethro] ventures to come self-bidden and take the position of an advisor and suggests to the sage [Moses] that he should not teach the only thing worth learning, the ordinances of God and the law, but the contracts which men make with each other....And the great ones of the earth accept all he [Jethro] says, and think that he is right to give great justice to the great and little justice to the little.⁸

Philo seems off target, not realizing that without "the contracts which men make with each other" there cannot be a climate in which the Torah will flourish. Likewise, the system of delegated authority which Jethro proposes assures the best possible justice rather than different justice dispensed to the thousands or the tens.

Josephus fairly bubbles over in his enthusiasm for Jethro and especially Moses:

This [the section of the judges] was the admonition of Raguel; and Moses received his advice very kindly, and acted according to his suggestion. Nor did he conceal the invention of this method, nor pretend it to himself, but informed the multitude who it was that invented it. Nay, he has named Raguel in the books he wrote, as the person who invented this ordering of the people, as

thinking it right to give a true testimony to worthy persons, although he might have gotten reputation by ascribing to himself the inventions of other men. Whence we may learn the virtuous disposition of Moses: but of such his disposition, we shall have proper occasion to speak in other places of these books.⁹

Moses epitomizes all noble Roman virtues. Jethro's advice does not threaten him, but rather gives Moses a chance to show that he is the very ideal of a leader of men.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 185:94-97 = Mek.H.R., p. 199:13-15. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 134:12-14, Yal.Shim.R. 271, pp. 83 a-b; M.H.G. 2, p. 368:13-15.
2. Mish.R.El., pp. 307:14 - 308:1. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 189 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 132:19-23; M.H.G. 2, p. 363:9-14. Many sources paraphrase this midrash. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:16-18; Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 77:3-6; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56a; Yal.Shim.R. 270, p. 82a; Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238b all deal with the pre-existing divine legislation being hidden from Moses in order to enhance Jethro's standing in Israel. Sec.Ex. 18:1 Jethro on the names Jether and Jethro has much about Jethro being worthy to add a section to the Torah as does Sef.VeHizhir, p. 33b. Concerning the conditional nature of Jethro's advice, the Mekilta forms the basis for the comment in Mishnat R. Eliezer. Splitting Ex. 18:23, the Mekilta emphasizes that God's approval is needed for Jethro's idea. "'And God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure' (Ex. 18:23). If He gives you his consent, you will be able to endure, but if not you will not be able to endure" (Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 185:89-91 = Mek.H.R., p. 199:10-11). Mek.R.S.H. p. 90 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 133:28-29; Ex.R. 27:6 = S., p. 326; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:24, p. 63a; Tar.Ps.Jon. on Ex. 18:23; M.H.G. 2, p. 367:15-16 all echo the Mekilta of R. Ishmael.
3. Sem. 47b = S. 1, p. 370.
4. Zohar 2, pp. 68b - 69a = S. 3, pp. 214 - 215.
5. E.J., 13:334.
6. The translators supplied the material in these brackets.
7. P.R.K.pis. 12 = M., p. 211:7-11 = Brk., pp. 235 - 236.
8. On the Change of Names, xvii, sec. 104 = L. 5, pp. 192, 195. On Drunkenness, x, sec. 36 - 38 = L. 3, pp. 337, 339 has a similar theme.
9. Antiquities 1, iv:2, sec. 73 - 74 = Wh., p. 64.

Ex. 18:27 Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell.

The rabbinic commentary on Exodus 18:27 provides one of the clearest examples, I believe, of the general hypothesis. The midrashic material can be divided neatly between Tannaitic material, here, the Mekiltas, and post-Tannaitic material, notably Pesikta de Rab Kahana and Tanhuma Buber. In the former, Moses lets his father-in-law depart; in the later, Jethro is unceremoniously sent away. Either meaning is consistent with the verb of the sentence וישלח. Though the time separating the two strata is not great, the material with a hostile and, as it turns out, literalistic attitude toward Jethro is of a later date than the favorable midrash.

The Mekilta depicts a typical Middle Eastern departure scene as Jethro takes his leave of Moses:

R. Joshua says: He [Moses] sent him [Jethro] off with all the honors in the world. R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: He gave him along many gifts.

Though it may be argued that R. Eleazar was perhaps less enthusiastic than R. Joshua (gifts, after all were de rigueur at Middle Eastern departures), nonetheless, even his attitude was a very positive one. Nothing out of the ordinary is involved in Jethro's departure. In fact, nothing much can be said about it, except in contrast to what follows.

The comments from Pesikta de Rab Kahana are clearly set before מתן תורה. In this timing lies the significance of the midrashic slant. Jethro had to be sent away because

he could not be allowed to participate with the children of Israel in the Revelation:

[In connection with Jethro and the giving of the Torah in the third month]² a verse of Solomon's is cited: 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness' (Prov. 14:10); therefore, 'with its joy no stranger is to intermeddle' (ibid.). The Holy One said: While Israel was in servitude to clay and bricks in Egypt, Jethro dwelt in quietness and security in his own home. Now he has come, [a stranger]², to behold the joy of Torah with My children. Therefore 'Moses sent his father-in-law away' (Ex. 18:27). And after these words: 'In the third month' (Exod. 19:1). Another comment: What reasoning led Moses to send Jethro away? Drawing an inference *a fortiori*, Moses reasoned: If, when only one commandment was involved at the time when the Holy One was about to give the commandment concerning the Passover lamb, He decreed that 'no alien shall eat thereof' (Ex. 12:43), now that He is about to give the entire Torah to Israel, shall Jethro, an alien, be present and watch us? Therefore 'Moses sent his father-in-law away' (Exod. 18:27). And after these words: 'In the third month' (Exod. 19:1).³

As Jethro had not suffered with Israel, so he cannot share the reward for the suffering and thus must be sent away.

This notion that מתן תורה was not open to outsiders runs counter to numerous sources.⁴ For example, from the Mekilta:

Why was the Torah not given in the land of Israel? In order that the nations of the world should not have the excuse for saying: Because it was given in Israel's land, therefore we have not accepted it.... Therefore, the Torah was given in the desert, publically and openly, and in a place belonging to no one.... So also are the words of Torah free to all who come into the world.⁵

Thus, the comment from Pesikta de Rab Kahana displays a particularistic tendency as opposed to the Mekilta's universalistic theme.

The sources which have Jethro being sent away follow the biblical verse in a literalistic way. As far as the written order of the Bible goes, Jethro's departure does precede the giving of the Torah. Something was then needed to explain why, of all things, Moses' own father-in-law did not stay for מתן תורה. Hence, the homiletical midrash proposed the view that Jethro was a stranger who did not suffer and therefore did not merit being at Sinai. However, this evaluation of Jethro seems harsh and definitely out of harmony with the spirit of the Bible which describes Jethro as a man who waxed exultant over the miracles and wonders which he heard from Moses.

In contrast, the exegetical Tannaitic sources organized by verse, such as the Mekiltas, have a different explanation for Jethro's departure. They incorporate the other Jethro story, Numbers 10:29-32 in their account to remove all suspicion that Jethro was sent away:

It is said: 'And he [Moses] said: "Leave us not, I pray thee"' (Num. 10:31). Moses said to him: You have given us good advice, fair advice: And God agreed with your words. 'Leave us not, I pray thee.'⁶

Because of the principle of ein mukdam ve-ein m'uchar ba-Torah, the events of Exodus 18 are seen as coming after the giving of the Torah. As a result, the material in Exodus and Numbers dovetails, the former supplying the details; the latter, the true chronology of events. This ingenious harmonization of the two sections which is found in sources concerned with each and every verse resolves the puzzle of

how Jethro could depart from Moses' presence in Exodus 18:27, only to reappear in Numbers 10:29 as one ready to take his leave, albeit in the guise of Reuel. Jethro arrived at the Israelite camp at some time post-Sinai, learned of all that God had done, resisted Moses' entreaties to stay (Nu. 10:31) and departed (Ex. 18:27). As the next section will amply demonstrate, Jethro departed, not because he was unwilling to be associated with God and Israel, but because he wished to increase their glory throughout the world.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 185:98-100 = Mek.H.R., p. 199:16-17. Parallels exist in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 134:21-22; Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:27, p. 63a; Yal.Shim. R. 271, p. 83b; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:1-2.
2. The translators supplied the information in these brackets.
3. P.R.K.pis. 12 = M., p. 216:4-12 = Brk., p. 240. Tan.B. Yitro 11, pp. 37b - 38a; Yal.Shim.R. 271, p. 83b; Yal. Shim.v. 2 R. 950, p. 493b parallel this. P.R.K.pis. 12 = M., p. 210:2-4 = Brk., p. 234 presents a shortened version with just an exegesis on the Prov. verse. Mid. Ag. on Ex. 18:27, p. 151 develops the same theme of a lack of suffering, but without Prov. 14:10. Ex.R. 29:6 = S. 2, p. 340 and P.R.K. 12 = M., p. 208:8 = Brk., p. 232 use I Sam. 43:12 "And there was no stranger in your midst." to show why Jethro had to be sent away. Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 455, p. 398b just establishes that the verse refers to Jethro.
4. See Montefiore and Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology, p. 166 for several examples.
5. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 236:92-95, 97-237:98, 100-101 = Mek. H.R.p. 222:2, 4-5, 6.
6. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 185:101 - 103 = Mek.H.R. p. 199:17 - 200:2. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 134:23 - 24; Mid. Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:27, p. 63a; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:32, p. 99b; Yal.Shim.R. 271, p. 83b; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:4 - 5.

Ex. 18:27 And he went his own way to his own land.

Though Exodus 18 does not record Moses' entreaties, we know from Numbers 10:29 - 32 that he urged Jethro to stay with the children of Israel. However, Jethro demurred and preferred to return to his own land. What could Midian have possessed in contrast to the land of Israel and the great adventure of the Israelites which could lure Jethro back home? According to the Rabbis, Midian was not filled with competing glories, but rather Jethro wished to fill Midian with knowledge of the glories of God and Israel:

But Jethro said to him [Moses, in answer to his request that he stay]: Is a lamp of any use except in a dark place? Of what use could a lamp be with the sun and the moon? You are the sun and Aaron is the moon. What should a lamp be doing where there are the sun and the moon? No! I shall go to my land and tell everybody and convert all the people of my country, leading them to the study of the Torah and bringing them nigh under the wings of the Shekinah.

Jethro has learned modesty at Moses' side, as well as the wonders of the God of Israel. As Moses has shared with Jethro and conveyed information which has changed his life, so Jethro ventured to do the same with his Midianite kinfolk. Jethro's actions on the biblical level clearly make him the first named proselyte since Abraham and Sarah. Now the Rabbis cast him as one of the vigorous proselytizers who existed in their day.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 185:103 - 186:108 = Mek.H.R.p. 200:2-4. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 134:24 - 25 which is more concise in conveying the candle-sun analogy; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:27, p. 63a has a shortened form of this, as do Yal.Shim.R. 271, p. 83b and M.H.G. 2, p. 369:5-7. Sif.Zut on Num. 10:30 = H., p. 265:9-13; Mish.R.El., p. 306:10-14; M.H.G. 4, p. 151:13-18 all have the candle-sun analogy, but with a lead-in and conclusion more fittingly discussed in sec.Num. 10:30. Tan.B.Yitro 6, p. 37a and Tar.Ps.Jon. on 18:27 both briefly state that Jethro left to convert Midian.

Num. 10:29 Moses said to Hobab, son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place."

Moses' statement to Jethro reveals the personal courage of the great leader. For though his own fate was sealed and the Promised Land closed to him, Moses intimated to Jethro that he himself was going to Israel. Sifre to Numbers shows that Moses was not engaging in wishful thinking, but rather brought up the personally painful subject of their journey's end for a noble purpose:

For what reason did Moses attach himself to them [that would enter Israel]? In order that Jethro should not say, 'Moses cannot enter so I cannot enter.'

Midrash HaGadol states Moses' rationale even more explicitly. Moses included himself in "We are setting out..." "in order to strengthen Jethro's determination [lit., hand] to be with them."² So highly did Moses desire Jethro's continued presence that he spared no pains to ensure that he would accompany them. As the next section will show, the force of Moses' words to Jethro was to convey the boons that even he, a proselyte, can expect if he continues on to the Land of Israel.

NOTES

1. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 75:18-19. Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a repeats this.
2. M.H.G. 4, p. 149:19-20. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:19 is phrased differently, but expresses the same idea.

Num. 10:29 The place of which the Lord has said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will be generous to you, for the Lord has promised to be generous to Israel.

Though there are three distinct phrases in this part of the Numbers 10:29, all the midrash generated has a single theme. Jethro who has become the paradigmatic convert is important for the midrash not in and of himself, but for the rules derived from his experiences.

First, an ambiguity must be resolved. Moses describes the land of Israel as "the place of which the Lord has said, 'I will give it to you.'" In quoting the Lord, Moses neglects to clarify the referent of "you." We may assume that it refers to the Israelites, but might Jethro have assumed that he, a proselyte, would receive a portion of land in Israel? Sifre to Numbers answers this question by correcting an impression left by another biblical verse:

Proselytes don't have a portion of it [Israel]. How am I to reconcile this [with the verse], 'And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there ye shall give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God' (Ez. 47:27)? [The intention of the Torah that the Land of Israel goes only to Israelites takes precedence over a verse from the second part of the Bible]. Since it [the verse from Ezekiel] is not a matter of inheritance, explain it as a matter of expiation. For if he [the proselyte] is in the tribe of Judah, he is forgiven along with the tribe of Judah [for mistakes made in the sacrificial ritual by accident or ignorance]. [If he is in] the tribe of Benjamin, he is forgiven with the tribe of Benjamin. Another interpretation: If it [Ez. 47:23] is not a matter of inheritance, explain it as a matter of burial. He [God] will give proselytes burial space in the land of Israel.²

Thus, while proselytes do not share in the tribal division of Israel, since their ancestors were not promised a part of it, nonetheless, they have all the other rights of the children of Israel. Sifre Zuta, after making sure that there will be no future questions about proselytes sharing in the Land, concludes that it is still worthwhile for Jethro/proselytes to accompany Israel. "In spite of this [no inheritance rights] 'come with us and we will be generous to you [Num. 10:29].'"³

Second, the phrase, "Come with us and we will be generous to you" is interpreted by the Rabbis as a further encouragement for proselytes. Sifre to Numbers makes good treatment for proselytes axiomatic:

Can there be a member of one's household to whom one wouldn't be generous? Behold this is a matter of kal vehomer: If one would be generous to a member of one's household, how much the more so to a member of God's household?⁴

What recognition is given to proselytes! Of course, they need fear nothing from Israel. And if a further demonstration of that which awaits proselytes is needed, consider this comment from Mishnat R. Eliezer under the heading of "Beloved are proselytes":

A stranger who converts, they give him a reward as if he had been laboring in the Torah all his days. As it says, 'Come with us and we will be generous to you'-- as one of us.⁵

This echoes the biblical injunction in the Holiness Code.

"The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself" (Lev. 19:34).

Third, the final phrase of the verse, "For the Lord has promised to be generous to Israel," prompted the Rabbis to question the timing and placement of that promise. What was the relation of God's promise for Israel to Israel's promise to Jethro? From Sifre to Numbers:

Can it be that the Lord had not promised to be generous to Israel before now? [No] behold God always promises to be generous to Israel, but [here] He commands Israel to be generous to converts and to treat them kindly.⁶

Sifre Zuta phrases this message differently as it states both the general and specific applications of the verse:

Doesn't God promise to be generous to Israel at all times? But [here] God spoke to us [the Israelites] to be generous to proselytes and we will be more generous to you [Jethro] than all other proselytes!⁷

Thus God's promise to Israel is appended to Moses' entreaty to Jethro as a sort of reminder to Israel of their past--"You shall love him [the stranger] as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."⁸ Now that the Israelites have been redeemed, they were being warned not to forget how it felt to be strangers. In a *מרה כנגד מרה* statement, as God is generous to them, so should they be generous to the proselytes. The next section will indicate Jethro's response to the treatment proposed in his behalf.

NOTES

1. This bracketed material is based on H., p. 75, n. to line 21 which also refers the reader to Sif.Zut. on Num. 15:26 = H., p. 285:21-23. See Num. 15:22-26 for the biblical background material dealing with mistakes in the sacrificial ritual.
2. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 75:20-24. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:29, pp. 99a-b and Yal.Shim.R. 736, p. 238a parallel this.
3. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:21-24 has the whole midrash. M.H.G. 4, p. 150:1-5 parallels this. Both Sif. Deut.pis. 352, p. 412:6-7 and Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:29, p. 96 also specifically exclude proselytes for sharing in the tribal division of Israel, but still encourage them to stay with Israel through the inclusion of "Come with us and we will be generous to you."
4. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 76:1-3.
5. Mish.R.El., p. 304:9-10.
6. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 75:4-6. Yal.Shim.R. 736, p. 238a parallels this. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:29, p. 99b and Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:29, p. 96 make the same point that Israel should be kind to proselytes, but that comment is under the rubric of "Come with us and we will be generous to you." No connection is made between that directive and God's promises for Israel. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Num. 10:29 makes a link as it states "Since God has spoken to do good to proselytes for the sake of Israel."
7. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:23-25. M.H.G. 4, p. 150:5-7 parallels this.
8. Lev. 19:34.

Num. 10:30 "I will not go," he replied to him, "but will return to my native land."

Despite Moses' entreaties to Jethro and the divine promises which came out of them (see last section), Jethro disagreed with his son-in-law and did not accede to his wishes. Lest we think that Jethro was willfully disobeying his betters, Sifre Zuta answers any suspicions as it protects Jethro's reputation:

Why did he return to his native land? Is it possible that one such as Jethro would rebel against the words of Moses? Rather this is what Jethro thought, 'What can the candle possibly be between sun and moon?'

The candle-sun analogy quoted earlier² provides the rationale for Jethro's initially puzzling refusal. Jethro, who will not accompany Moses, leaves to convert the Midianites, so that his descendants may accompany the children of Israel in the service of God.

Aside from returning to proselytize in Midian, Sifre Zuta offers two other דבר אחר comments, as choices for what motivated Jethro to refuse Moses' request. Both continue the theme of Jethro's noble reasons for returning and emphasize Jethro's sense of communal responsibility:

Why did he return to his land? This is what Jethro thought and said, 'All these years, people have entrusted me with pledges because I was the most trustworthy in the city. But if I leave them behind and go [with you], they will say, 'This Jethro fled and took all of his pledges and gave them to his son-in-law.'³ It will turn out that I will have brought a bad name on me and on you. Therefore, I myself will go back and return all.'⁴

The immediately following דבר אחר comment uses the same format and gives Jethro's reason as wanting to help the victims of a drought in Midian. The midrash concludes, "If I don't go and take care of [my] duties, it will turn out that I have profaned the name of God."⁵ Either explanation is an adequate reason for not accompanying the children of Israel. Before Jethro can join the community of Israel, he cannot separate himself from his native community without fulfilling his obligations to it. This view of Jethro as the community parnas contrasts sharply with his status as an excommunicated former priest seen earlier in Exodus Rabbah.⁶ However, faced with the necessity of explaining why Jethro wished to return to "mine own land, and to my kindred"⁷ (Num. 10:30), a double emphasis on "the folks back home," Jethro's role there had to be elevated and explained.

Though the new J.P.S.A. translation renders the Hebrew for Jethro's destination as "to my native land," this single expression covers the fact that the Hebrew literally means "to my land and to my kindred." Several sources discuss the seeming redundancy of Jethro's statement. Wouldn't either "my land" or "my kindred" have been enough to indicate Jethro's destination? These sources convey the impression that Jethro wished to leave precisely because of what Midian offered, namely, a familiar land and family. From Sifre Zuta, the first comment under the rubric of Numbers 10:30, which actually precedes the דבר אחר midrashim cited above:

Either for land or for possessions, I will go [home]. [If] you had a person who had land, but no possessions [or] possessions, but no family [that person would go with you]. I am not like that for I have land and possessions and family and a place⁸ in my city. So if I don't go [home] for my land, I will go [home] for my family, and if I don't go home for my family, I will go home for my land.⁹

Thus, according to this midrash either homeland or family would have been more than enough to lure Jethro away from the adventure and destiny awaiting the Israelites. Furthermore, it rather snidely depicts Jethro's assuming that it is only for material reasons that anyone would want to accompany the Israelites.

This midrash from Sifre Zuta seems decidedly hostile to Jethro. While it does acquit the biblical verse of redundancy, it does so in a way which makes Jethro into a shortsighted materialist who could not see the real treasures that Israel was offering. As to the place of this midrash in regard to the general hypothesis, there is unquestionably a section of even Tannaitic midrash that is hostile to converts. Yet what I find interesting is that while faithfully reporting one bit of the tradition, the editors of Sifre Zuta apparently disagreed with it. They gave Jethro more plausible reasons for leaving, namely the דבר אחר comments - to convert Midian, to return the pledges or to aid drought victims - all of which immediately follow the hostile comment in the text. Unfortunately, beyond stating that דבר אחר is a sign of an editorial seam, nothing further can be said about the respective "authors" or dates of these

two views on Jethro. A parallel source, Sifre to Numbers, which also has what I am calling the hostile comment, but not the favorable comments, uses its own דבר אחר under the rubric of the next verse, Numbers 10:31, to show another noble reason that Jethro had for leaving (see the next section). In short, while both Sifre to Numbers and Sifre Zuta repeat an unfavorable view of Jethro at the beginning of their sections, the resultant Tannaitic editorial work puts the best possible face on Jethro's reluctance and counters the hostility towards him.

Philo uses this biblical section for another of his analogies which pits Jethro against Moses. Typically, Moses is the symbol of higher truth while Jethro is an earthly cretin:

'Come with us and we will do thee good' (Num. 10:29). For you will lose the most harmful of evils, mere seeming, and gain the most profitable of blessings, truth. But even to words of such charm as these Jethro will pay no heed, nor ever follow knowledge in any way, but will hasten to return to the empty vanity which is indeed his own. For we read that he said to Moses, 'I will not go, but I will go to my land and my generation' (Num. 10:30); that is, to the unfaith of false opinion which is his kinsman, since he has not learnt the true faith, so dear to real men.¹⁰

Needless to say, this sort of reasoning for Jethro's departure is foreign to midrash in this section or the next.

NOTES

1. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:30 = H., p. 265:9-13. Parallels can be found in Mish.R.El. p. 306:10-14 and M.H.G., 4, p. 151:13-18.
2. See sec. Ex. 18:27, And he went his own way to his own land, note 1.
3. The reading of "to his son-in-law" is an emendation of the printed text's לחותנו, "to his father-in-law." Horovitz (p. 265, note to line 17) points out that the correct reading לחתנו, "to his son-in-law" differs only from the printed text's version by one vav. M.H.G. 4, p. 152, note to line 2 gives a ms. source for the change, besides the contextual reasons.
4. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:30 = H., p. 265:14-18. Parallels can be found in Mish.R.El., pp. 306:16-307:3 and M.H.G. 4, pp. 151:20-152:3.
5. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:30 = H., p. 265:18-22. Parallels can be found in Mish.R.El., p. 360:3-10; M.H.G. 4, p. 152:4-9.
6. See sec. Ex. 2:15b-22, note 3.
7. Num. 10:30, J.P.S.A., 1917 ed.
8. Sif.Num.pis. 79 = H., p. 76:9 has "I was a judge in my city." Horovitz speculates that Sif.Zut. should read קומים, "an attendant of magistrates" (Jastrow, p. 1333), instead of מקום, a change resulting from a scribal switch of letters (H., p. 265, note to line 7).
9. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:30 = H., p. 265:5-9. Parallels can be found in Sif.Num.pis. 79 = H., p. 76:7-9; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:30, p. 99b; Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a; M.H.G. 4, p. 151:6-11. Several sources have Jethro leaving to go to his own land and possessions because he realized that none of the tribes would give him a portion in the land of Israel. These sources are Sif. Deut.pis. 352, p. 412:6-11; Mid.Tan. on Deut. 33:12, p. 217; Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:29, p. 96; Yal.Shim.R. 957, p. 342b. The Tannaitic midrash, Sif.Deut. and Mid.Tan., while seemingly hostile toward a selfish Jethro, continue in such a manner that Jethro is enhanced in spite of leaving Moses and the Israelites.
10. On Drunkenness, x, sec. 40 = L. 3, p. 339.

Num. 10:31 'Please [אנא] do not leave us.'

The first midrash on this part of the verse reveals the Rabbis' concern with a turn of phrase. Moses did not command "Do not leave us," but rather the inclusion of אנא "please" or "I pray you" transformed his remark into a request which Jethro could refuse. However, the Rabbis were unwilling to let the matter of Jethro's departure depend upon a polite entreaty. From Sifre to Numbers:

אנא is only used with the sense of a request. Said he [Moses] to him [Jethro], 'If you do not accept this request [to accompany us] I shall surely order you [to do so].'¹

Thus, whether Moses was the properly deferential son-in-law ("I pray you") or had to be the commanding leader of the 600,000, Jethro was bound to come along with Israelites.

Jethro's wish to return to Midian could not be allowed, not only because of the negative example it would set (since the Israelites always seemed one step away from turning back), but because of what people might think of Jethro (and by extension Moses). Sifre to Numbers continues:

Now Israel would say, 'Jethro did not convert out of love, but because Jethro thought that proselytes have a portion in the land of Israel. Now when he saw that there was no portion for them, he left them [the Israelites] and went his own way.'²

With Israel ready to think the worst, no wonder Moses had to dissuade Jethro, one way or the other.

Unlike Sifre Zuta, Sifre to Numbers does not deal with Jethro's motives for wanting to leave under the heading of Numbers 10:30. However, in an analogous fashion to the Sifre Zuta passages cited in the last section, a דבר אחר comment in Sifre to Numbers on Numbers 10:31 offers a noble reason for Jethro's desire to depart. Jethro had thought to leave in order to proselytize in Midian. Yet Moses had to point out certain consequences of this action which Jethro might not have anticipated:

You thought to increase the glory of God [by converting the Midianites]³ but you will only diminish the number of proselytes that you would have brought under the wings of the Sheh'inah.⁴

With this explanation, it becomes obvious that Jethro did not leave in a huff because proselytes would not receive a portion in Israel. Again, some editorial surgery in the form of a דבר אחר counters an unfavorable comment with another point of view from a different stratum.

What is not so clear is why proselytes would not flock to Israel's side if Jethro goes out to do more proselytizing. The Rabbis feared that would-be proselytes would only see Jethro's departure and suspect the worst. Was he banished by the inhospitable Israelites? Thus, the Rabbis used a phrase in this verse, "thou shalt be to us instead of eyes"⁵ as the locus for their fears and as another plea for Jethro to stay:

If you would not be eyes for us before all the inhabitants of the world, they will say, 'It seems that we [Jews] don't want to receive proselytes.'⁶

Jethro must stay and guide⁷ the Israelites through the wilderness or risk maligning his son-in-law's people.

Other sources use the same phrase to derive another damaging consequence which would result from Jethro's desire to leave:

[If you go] you will close the door on future proselytes who will say, 'If Jethro the father-in-law of the king did not accept [Moses' command/the Jewish religion?] upon himself how much the more so for the rest of the people!'⁸

Midrash Lekah Tov in repeating this comment makes clear the connection between Moses' injunction and the verse. "But rather [than leaving with all the trouble that that will cause] 'thou shalt be to us instead of eyes.' Open the eyes for the proselytes."⁹ Jethro is urged to stay for the good example he will provide.

Jethro's bold statement of "I will not go" (Num. 10:30) could not be allowed to stand. Thus, when Moses points to the unfortunate misconceptions to which Jethro's action would give rise, the assumption is that Jethro will, of course, stay. To compensate for the fact that the Bible does not explicitly state if Jethro did accompany the Israelites, the midrash continues to advance reasons why Jethro should stay, as the next section will show.

NOTES

1. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 76:11-12. Parallels include Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:31 = H., p. 265:23-24 which concludes emphatically, "You are not permitted to depart from us"; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:31, p. 99b; Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a; M.H.G. 4, p. 152:10-11 which concludes as does Sif.Zut.
2. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 76:12-14. This account continues with a bracketed ח"ו (omitted in the ed.princ., Venice, 1545) which uses the same structure but has Moses telling Jethro to accept Jericho, lest people accuse him of leaving because he wasn't satisfied with it. Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a parallels the entire Sifre account. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:31, p. 99b parallels the Sifre passage quoted above in the body of this study.
3. H., p. 76, note to line 17 is the basis of this bracketed material.
4. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 76:16-18. Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a parallels this.
5. J.P.S.A., 1917 ed.
6. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:31 = H., p. 265:27-28. M.H.G. 4, p. 152:16-17 parallels this. Both of these passages continue with a related reason for Jethro not to leave. If Jethro, the father-in-law of the king, is seemingly not accepted (why else would he leave?), what reception can ordinary proselytes expect? Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:31, p. 96 asks Jethro to stay to avoid giving other proselytes פתחון פה, loosely translated as, an occasion for fault-finding.
7. The new J.P.S.A. translation renders the phrases cited in note 5 as "can be our guide."
8. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 76:18-19. Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a parallels this.
9. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:31, p. 99b.

Num. 10:31 Inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness.

With the pillar of cloud and fire to guide the Israelites, the Rabbis apparently felt that Jethro's skills as a desert-worthy guide were not needed. Though Targum Pseudo Jonathan states that Jethro's departure would leave Israel naked,¹ there is no referent for this nor is there any indication that the Israelites would be bereft of protection or leadership. Consequently, what appears on the biblical level to be a very literal statement that Jethro knew the hospitable campgrounds in the Sinai is transformed by the Rabbis into a midrashic declaration of another type of knowledge. From Sifre to Numbers under this rubric:

He [Moses] said to him [Jethro], 'If another who had not seen the miracles and mighty deeds in the wilderness and left and went his own way, it is understandable [literally, the matter is fitting]. But you who saw, you are going to leave and go your own way?'²

As interpreted by the Rabbis, Jethro's knowledge does not concern the future, where the Israelites should camp, but the past, the deeds of God in the wilderness.³ No source explains if there is any hermeneutical reason for reading חנתנו, "where we should camp," as mighty deeds, etc., but logically such a reading takes its place as another of Moses' reasons to convince Jethro to stay. Now, having shown the harm that Jethro's departure would cause,⁴ as well as amazement that he could even think about leaving with what he knew, Moses will use flattery in order to persuade Jethro to stay, as the next section will show.

NOTES

1. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Num. 10:31.
2. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 76:20-22. Parallels with minor variations in wording are found in Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:31 = H., p. 265:24-27; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:31, p. 99b; Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:31, p. 96; Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238a which duplicates the Sif.Num. account quoted in the text; M.H.G. 4, p. 152:12-15. Tar.Onk. on Num. 10:31 adds after "you know where we should camp in the wilderness" "and the mighty deeds that were done for us you saw with your eyes." This is faithful to both the text and the midrash. Tar.Ps.Jon. on Num. 10:31 has the same insert as Tar.Onk. and adds "you taught us to be engaged in matters of justice," a reference to the selection of the elders.
3. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., pp. 76:22-77:2 which immediately follows the midrash quoted in note 2 adds in the name of R. Judah a comment which shows something else similar which Jethro knew:

You who have seen the favor which God gave
to our ancestors in Egypt, 'And God gave
the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians'
(Ex. 12:36), are you going to leave us and
go?

This comment does not appear anywhere else save in Yal. Shim.R. 726, p. 238a.
4. See the last section, especially notes 2, 4, 6, 8. Mid. Ag. on Num. 10:31 has a unique comment which is in the spirit of the above notes, but is under the rubric of "Inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness":

What will all the proselytes say about us?
That we are ungrateful. Behold Jethro stood
with them all that time and they didn't do
any good thing for him.

This comment may be indicative of Mid.Ag.'s belief that Jethro did do guiding in the wilderness or it could simply be another misconception that Jethro's departure would cause.

Num. 10:31 And thou shalt be to us instead of eyes.¹

Though there is a disagreement in the sources regarding the exact degree of involvement that Jethro had with the selection of the elders,² Moses had no hesitancy in praising Jethro to the highest for his suggestion. As he flattered Jethro, Moses sought to make Jethro feel indispensable and thus gave him an additional reason for staying. Sifre to Numbers refers to Jethro's vision perhaps as a guide and then goes on to another use for his eyes:

'And thou shalt be to us instead of eyes'--
If that weren't enough for you, then all the
matters which are hidden from our eyes, you
will enlighten our eyes about them as [you
did previously] in the matter of which it is
said, 'You shall also seek out...capable men...'
(Ex. 18:20).³

How could Jethro even dream of leaving, seeing how much he is needed by Moses and the Children of Israel?

Continuing the campaign to convince Jethro to stay, Sifre to Numbers presents another image suggested by the verse's use of "eyes":

You shall be as beloved to us as is the
eyeball. As it says, 'You too must befriend
the stranger' (Deut. 10:19); 'You shall not
oppress a stranger' (Ex. 23:9); 'You shall
not wrong a stranger or oppress him' (Ex.
22:20).⁴

Since all three of the prooftexts remind the Israelites that they too were once strangers in the land of Egypt, Jethro's position with the Israelites must be seen as very secure indeed. Being beloved as the eyeball, Jethro cannot be

harmd without the Israelites harming themselves both physically and spiritually.

It is by no means clear on the biblical level whether or not Jethro heeded Moses' request to stay. The Bible simply does not say though we may perhaps assume this from the fact that Numbers 10:33, the verse which immediately follows Moses' dialogue with Jethro, begins "They marched from the mountain of the Lord..." On the other hand, the "They marched" which could have included Jethro may only be a unifying tie-back to Numbers 10:28, the verse before Moses' entreaties, which ended with וַיֵּלְכוּ, "and they marched."

The Rabbis with their interest in harmonizing a number of different verses believe that Jethro did not stay but departed per Exodus 18:27 which in their view is the conclusion of Numbers 10:29-32. In departing, Jethro is not rejecting Moses' entreaties or Israel, but is serving the God of Israel by spreading knowledge of Him among the Midianites.⁵ The results of Jethro's proselytizing will be discussed in Part III of the study, The Descendants of Jethro - Their Identity and Activities.

NOTES

1. This translation comes from the 1917 J.P.S.A. edition, as the midrashic material is based predominantly on Moses' assertion that Jethro will be the eyes for the Israelites, the old translation is preferable to the new one, "And can be our guide."
2. See sec. Ex. 18:24, notes 1, 2.
3. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 77:3-6. Parallels with slight changes in wording can be found in Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:31, p. 99b; Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:31, p. 96. Yal.Shim. R. 726, p. 238a parallels Sif.Num. exactly.
4. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 77:6-8. Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 238b is the parallel. Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:31, p. 99b does not have any prooftexts, stating "We shall honor and love you as the eyeball of our eyes." Tar.Ps.Jon. renders the Hebrew of the verse as "You will be beloved to us as the eyeball."
5. See sec.Ex. 18:27 And he went his own way to his own land, note 2.

PART II

MISCELLANEOUS MIDRASHIM INVOLVING JETHRO

As might be expected, the midrash on Jethro is not limited to just those verses in the Bible where Jethro is specifically mentioned. Because of the type of person that Jethro represents, he is frequently cited in many contexts as a praiseworthy person or as an example to others. Thus, Part II of this study will consist of four sections which will deal with the miscellaneous midrashim involving Jethro.

Manna Fell for Jethro's Sake

In considering all the details of Jethro's visit to the Israelites, the Rabbis wondered what Jethro ate. The issue was not kosher or non-kosher food, but rather whether Jethro received a portion of manna as did the children of Israel. Exodus Rabbah answers this question in a comment on Job 31:32:

'My doors I opened to the roadside' (Job loc. cit.) - this refers to Jethro, for whom God brought down the manna, as it says, 'And he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven' (Ps. 78:23).¹

Psalm 78:23ff. which deals explicitly with the fall of manna thus determines the meaning of "doors" in the Job verse. In conjunction with the "A" part of the verse, "The stranger did not lodge in the street," Jethro, the stranger, received a portion of manna, God's "door" which was opened to him.

Midrash Tehillim provides some additional details about the manna which serves to aggrandize Jethro. Quoting in the name of R. Aibu, an Amora²:

R. Aibu taught that Jethro arrived in the sixth hour of the day: For his sake, manna enough for the sixty myriads of Israel came down; for his sake enough came down for every organ of each body in Israel. Hence it is said, 'Man did eat the bread of the mighty; He sent...provisions to the full' (Ps.78:24).³

R. Aibu apparently based Jethro's arrival time on a bit of folk wisdom that one does not set out on a journey while it is dark.⁴ Since manna was only for one's personal use and the manna on the ground melted by afternoon (Ex. 16:16, 21)

God did not want his honored guest to go hungry. Consequently, God suspended the rules and manna fell for a second time that day. In addition, since enough manna then fell for all Israel ("provision to the full"), the day of Jethro's arrival became like the day before the Sabbath which also enjoyed a double portion of manna. Both of these midrashim give us an indication of the whole-hearted welcome which Jethro received - his needs were met in a fashion which indicated God's approval of his presence.

NOTES

1. Ex.R. 27:5 = S. 2, p. 325.
2. "By this name, unaccompanied by patronymic or cognomen, are known four amoraim, three of whom were members of the family of Abba Arika (Rab) in Babylonia, and the remaining one was a distinguished Palestinian" (J.E., 1:298).
3. Mid.Teh. on Ps. 78, pp. 173a-b, mid. 4 = Br. 2, p. 24. Parallels can be found in Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 819, p. 467b and Yal.Mak. on Ps. 78, p. 13b, mid. 25.
4. Gen.R. 92:6 = S. 1, pp. 852-853 graphically illustrates the desirability of waiting until morning. This and the biblical rules for manna come from Moses A. Mirkin, Shemot Rabbah, v. 6, p. 12, note to Ex.R. 27:5.

Jethro and Esau

Taking into consideration only our Pentateuchal knowledge of Jethro and Esau, a comparison between the two of them would seem about as useful as one between apples and oranges. Yet to the Rabbis, each represented a distinct type, diametrically opposed to the other. Exodus Rabbah begins its section on parashat Yitro by contrasting Jethro and Esau based on an exegesis of Proverbs 27:10, "Better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off":

Another explanation: 'Better is a neighbour that is near' refers to Jethro, who was 'far' from Israel, [yet was better]¹ than Esau the brother of Jacob [Better is a neighbor near (in spirit) though far (in relationship) than a brother like Esau²]³. For what does it say of Jethro? - 'And Saul said unto the Kenites... for ye showed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt' (I Sam. 15:6), and of Esau it is written 'Remember what Amalek did unto thee' (Deut. 25:17). You will find many things written of Esau to his discredit, but of Jethro in praise. In reference to Esau it is written, 'They have ravished the women in Zion' (Lam. 5:11), but of Jethro it is written, 'And God commanded thee so' (Ex. 18:23). Esau put a stop to the sacrifices, but of Jethro it says, 'And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God' (ib. 12). When Esau heard of Israel's departure, he came to do battle with them, for it says, 'Then came Amalek' (ib. 17:8) but when Jethro heard Israel's praises sung, he joined them, as it says, 'Now Jethro...heard, etc.'⁴

Esau, the brother, is pictured by the Rabbis as the arch-enemy of Israel, whereas Jethro receives their praise. Furthermore, a neighbor can make himself more beloved than a brother through good deeds. Birth or blood do not matter

in God's eyes, but only the godliness in an individual. Thus, to those who would say that Israel does not or will not welcome the stranger, the midrash provides a powerful answer, a conclusion seemingly more significant coming as it does in a late source.

NOTES

1. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
2. The information in these brackets comes from S.2, p. 322, note 1.
3. I supplied these brackets.
4. Ex.R. 27:1 = S.2, pp. 321-322. Parallels can be found in Tan.HaNid.Yitro 5,p. 94b; Yal.Shim.v.2 R. 38, pp. 355a-b; M.H.G. 4, p. 145:16 - 146:4; Yal.Mak. on Pr. 27:10, pp. 67b - 68a; Menorat HaMaor 4, p. 322.

Jethro and Abraham

Not only did Balaam praise and bless Israel (Num. 24:1-9), but according to the Rabbis, he also congratulated Jethro - "He [Balaam] saw the Kenites and, taking up his theme, he said, Though your abode be secure [איתן]" (Num. 24:21). On the biblical level, Balaam's praise of Jethro is not really obvious, for his observation about the firmness of the Kenites' (one of Jethro's seven names) abode is followed by a prophecy of doom--"Yet shall Kain be consumed, /when Assur takes you captive" (Num. 24:22). However, the Rabbis chose to ignore the second verse and by concentrating on the word "secure" (איתן) found a blessing for Jethro. From Exodus Rabbah:

Similarly, of the wicked Balaam, it says, 'And he saw Amalek' (Num. 24:20), - viz. that he did not retract from his evil way; but when he saw that Jethro had repented, what is said? 'And he looked on the Kenite', etc. (ib. 21). It can be compared to a hunter of birds; he had captured one and was about to catch another, when the bird perched itself on the statue of a king. Whereupon the hunter became perplexed and spoke thus to the bird: 'If I throw a stone at you, I may forfeit my life, and if I use the pole, I fear lest it will not reach as far as the king's statue. I know not what to do; all I can say is that you have made a very good escape.' Likewise, when Balaam, knowing that Amalek and Jethro had been among the counsellors of Pharaoh,¹ saw that Amalek's name had been blotted out, whereas Jethro had repented, he said to the latter: 'Thou has escaped well; 'Firm be thy dwelling-place' - like that of Abraham.²

The midrash's conclusion that Jethro can be considered like Abraham results from an unstated gezerah shavah. The Talmud

identifies Ethan (אֶתָן, literally "secure") the Ezrahite referred to in the superscription to Psalm 89 as Abraham based on its own gezerah shavah³. Therefore, since אֶתָן as the name Ethan or as an adjective meaning "secure" is applied to both men, Jethro shares the same security of abode and strength as Abraham.⁴ Again such a linking of Jethro with other noble figures from the Jewish past cannot help but raise his reputation in the community of Israel. This very favorable attitude toward Jethro comes from what is acknowledged to be one of the later midrashim.⁵ Such an instance of a favorable attitude in a late source will have to be taken into consideration in evaluating the general hypothesis.

NOTES

1. Other versions which discuss Pharaoh's advisors list them as Balaam, Jethro, and Job (see Jethro in Egypt, notes 3, 6). Obviously, for this midrash on Balaam's prophecy, Balaam himself could not be one of the advisors. Amalek is a handy substitute and if anything is a greater symbol of evil than Balaam. Consequently, Jethro's act of repentance is highlighted to an even greater degree.
2. Ex.R. 27:6 = S. 2, pp. 325-326. Ex.R. 27:3 = S. 2, pp. 323-324 has a shorter version though without the identification with Abraham.
3. See B.B. 15a = S., p. 73 for the complete account.
4. "Abraham is mentioned as being the first of the proselytes; thus Jethro's strength too lay in turning to the true God" (S. 2, p. 326, note 1).
5. Chapters 12-40 of Exodus Rabbah date to the ninth century acc. to E.J. 6:1068.

Jethro Serves as an Example to the Nations and Israel.

Jethro, the priest of Midian, gave up his idols and accepted the God of Israel. This action had a happy ending not only for Jethro, but for all the nations of the world according to the Zohar:

Jethro, the high priest of paganism, was converted to the worship of the true God of Israel: the whole world, hearing of the mighty works of the Holy One, and seeing that the great sage, Jethro, had been drawn to worship the God of Israel, gave up their idols, realizing their impotence, and in this way the glory of the Holy Name of God was exalted on all sides. For this reason the narrative concerning Jethro has been preserved in the Torah, with Jethro's name at the head.¹

If Jethro gave up idols, how much the more so should the lesser idolators do likewise and according to the Zohar they did!

Other sources are less certain of Jethro's influence on the nations of the world. Rather than serving as the inspiration to abandon idolatry, Jethro is held up as a reproof for those who didn't change their ways:

'But he will minister judgement to the heathen peoples according to the upright' (Ps. 9:9). What is meant by 'according to the upright'? R. Alexandri² said: He will minister judgement to the heathen peoples by citing as examples the upright ones among them, the example of...Jethro.... How will he do so? He will say to each man of the peoples of the earth, 'Why didst thou not bring thyself close to me?' And each man of them will answer: 'I was wicked, so steeped in wickedness I was ashamed.' And God will ask: Wast thou more so than...Jethro who was a priest unto idols. When he came to me, did I not receive him and raise up Prophets and righteous men out of him?³

Clearly, according to the midrash, there can be no valid excuse for not embracing the God of Israel for even Jethro came and converted.

The Jerusalem Talmud uses the same verse in a different way. Jethro is cited in a zebut avot sense - through the merit of Jethro the heathen peoples will be judged:

How does Samuel interpret 'He will minister judgement to the heathen peoples according to the upright' (Ps. 9:9)? He [God] will judge them according to the righteous ones among them. He will remember the deeds of Jethro for their sake.⁴

God thus tempers judgement with mercy, giving the nations of the world every possible chance. Just as He judges them at night when they aren't sinning, He remembers that good people (Jethro, Rahab) can come from the nations. Therefore, the nations should not be completely destroyed.

Not only is Jethro held up as an example for the nations of the world and intercedes on their behalf, but he even serves as an example for Israel:

Just as one who is from the nations of the world and the families of the earth, who acted out of love and so God gave him [a reward] out of love how much the more so for Israel!⁵

Again, the sense of the midrash is that of a kal vehomer.

If a mere heathen acted so nobly and piously, how could Israel, God's chosen, fail to act in the same manner.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah cites Jethro in a different fashion. Here, Jethro does not serve to inspire Israel to righteousness, rather when Israel is righteous, Jethro-types are joined to Israel:

R. Berekiah said: To what may the matter be likened? To a king who had a park which he handed over to his son. So long as his son did his bidding, the king used to look out for the finest plants in the world and plant them in his son's park; but when his son did not do his bidding, he used to look for the most beautiful and gorgeous plant in the park and uproot it. Thus the king is the Holy One, blessed be He; the park is the world or, as some say, Israel. So long as they do His bidding, the Holy One, blessed be He, looks out for a righteous person among the peoples of the world as, e.g., Jethro, Rahab, Ruth, or Antoninus, whom He brings and attaches to Israel; but when they do not do His bidding, He looks for a righteous man in Israel and removes him from their midst.⁶

Here Jethro does not serve as an example for Israel, but as an example of Israel's righteousness. Thus, the righteous person such as Jethro may both inspire righteousness and advertise it.

NOTES

1. Zohar 2, 69a = S. 3, p. 215.
2. Two Palestinian Amoraim shared this name (J.E., 1:360-361).
3. Pes.R.pis. 40, p. 163b = Br. p. 706. Pes.Rab.pis. 35, p. 161a = Br., p. 674 cites Jethro in an explanation of Zec. 2:14-15 in order to rebuke those who didn't join the God of Israel.
4. Y.R.Sh. 57a = gemorah on mis. 1:3. Mid.Teh. on Ps. 9, p. 44a, mid. 11 = Br., p. 142 uses the same proof text, but is not quite so explicit. R. Alexandri asks, "Didn't Ruth, Rehab, Zipporah and Jethro come from them [the nations of the earth]?"
5. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:13-14. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 1-3; M.H.G. 2, p. 371:2-3; M.H.G. 4, p. 147:4-5.
6. Ecc.R. on Ecc. 5:11, mid. 1 = S. 4, pp. 150-151. Parallels can be found in S.S.R. on S.S. 6:2, mid. 3 = S. 4, pp. 257-258, Y.Ber. 5b = gemorah on mis. 2:8.

PART III

THE DESCENDANTS OF JETHRO - THEIR IDENTITY AND ACTIVITIES

The story of Jethro did not end with his departure to Midian as described in Exodus 18:27. From other places in the Bible, notably the Book of Judges and First Chronicles, peoples appear who are linked either explicitly or exegetically with Jethro. Clearly then, Jethro's line did not either die out or become completely subsumed under Israel as say, Zipporah's children would have been. The following sections attempt to trace Jethro's progeny and to give their history. For the sake of uniformity, I will call them Kenites, though they were also known by other names.

Who Were Jethro's Descendants?

Before answering the question of who were Jethro's descendants, the Rabbis had to show that the question was not moot. After all, with seven daughters specifically mentioned in the Bible, where were the sons to carry on the family name? A laudatory account from Tanhuma HaNidpas shows that Jethro was rewarded with sons later in life:

Two people received two righteous men and were blessed on their account. They didn't have sons in the beginning, but when they [the righteous] entered their houses, God gave them sons. These [hospitable people] were Laban and Jethro....About Jethro was written, 'The priest of Midian had seven daughters' (Ex. 2:16). Is it possible that he [already] had sons and his daughters were shepherding? Rather he didn't have them until Moses entered his house and blessed him and [then] he had sons. As it is written, 'And the children of Keni, Moses' father-in-law...' (Ju. 1:16).¹

Judges 1:16 occurs over and over again in the midrashic literature dealing with Jethro's descendants. This verse which was used by the Rabbis to establish that Jethro did have sons also linked his offspring with the tribe of Judah and situated them in the land of Israel. Since the prevailing midrashic view holds that Jethro "went his own way to his own land" (Ex. 18:27), how did it come about that, "And the children of Keni, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah..."? From the Mekilta comes the reminder that though Jethro went back to Midian, he went back solely to proselytize:

I shall go to my land and tell everybody and convert all the people of my country... One might think that he merely went back and did nothing, but Scripture says: 'And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of the palm-trees with the children of Judah' (Ju.1:16).²

Thus, Judges 1:16 for the Rabbis records the success of Jethro's missionizing. Not only did his descendants (both from his clan and his family), known as Kenites, become Jewish, but they settled with the tribe of Judah.

As the story of Jethro's descendants unfolds, the Kenites came to be known by different names. 1 Chronicles 2:55 equates the Kenites with the Rechabites, "These are the Kenites that came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab." Numerous midrashic sources identify the Kenites of 1 Chronicles 2:55 with Jethro's descendants:

Who were these people [1 Chron. 2:55 was cited previously]? They were the Kenites who came from the descendants of Jethro, the descendants of Keni, the father-in-law of Moses.³

By specifying both Jethro and Keni, the midrash demonstrates that both sets of Kenites are the same.

Besides being called Rechabites, the Kenites are sometimes referred to as בני יונדב, the descendants of (the most famous Rechabite) Jonadab. 11 Kings 10:15-23 and Jeremiah 35:1-19 contain the biblical accounts of Jonadab, the son of Rechab. He acted zealously for God in his lifetime and served as an inspiration to his descendants to keep their pious nazirite vows. Midrashically, 1 Chronicles 4:33 is interpreted as referring to the descendants of Jonadab

precisely because of their steadfast observance of their ancestral obligations:

'These were the potters [יוצרים]...they dwelt occupied in the king's work' (1 Chron. 4:23). 'These were the potters' refers to the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab who kept [נצרו] the oath of their father [see Jer. 35:8, 18]⁴.

Playing off the similarity between יצר and נצר, the Rabbis saw in יוצרים, not an occupation (pottery making), but an indication of the Kenites' faithfulness.

The Mekilta of R. Shim'on also states the connection between Jethro and Jonadab b. Rechab. Again, 1 Chronicles 4:23 is used to yield midrashic interpretations:

About them [Jethro's offspring to whom the midrash previously referred] does this verse apply, 'These were the potters (יוצרים)' (1 Chron. 4:23). These are the descendants of Jonadab the son of Rechab who knew the power of the Creator [יצירתו] being similar to יוצרים, "potters" of the world. Another interpretation: They would be supported without travail [מצירה] was considered to be related to יוצרים. Another interpretation: They kept the oath concerning the commandments of their father.⁵

How fitting it is that the God-fearing qualities in Jethro showed up in his descendants.

Thus, an intricate process connects Jethro with various peoples in the Bible. The Kenites testify to Jethro's power of propagation and proselytization. The Kenites from Judges 1:16 are assumed to be the same Kenites in 1 Chronicles 2:55, hence they can be equated with the Rechabites. When they are called the descendants of Jonadab b. Rechab, that appellation reminds one and all that they knew God, did what

was commanded of them and would easily earn their living.

The next section will show how Jethro's descendants came to enjoy sustenance without travail, since it explains how they came to settle in the city of the palm-trees with the tribe of Judah.

NOTES

1. Tan.HaNid.Shemot 16, p. 67a. Parallels can be found in M.H.G. 1, p. 542:9-17. Menorat Ha-Maor 1, pp. 40:17 - 41:8 has the same comment in the name of Gen.R. However, present editions of Gen.R. do not include it. Zohar 2, p. 69b = S. 3, p. 217 paraphrases the Tan.HaNid. account and concludes "For Moses' sake, and through his merit, did Jethro beget sons."
2. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 186:105-109 = Mek.H.R., p. 200:5-6. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 134:25-26; Mish.R.El., p. 306:13-14, Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:30 = H., p. 265:13-14; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:27, p. 63a; Yal.Shim.R. 271, p. 83b; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:7-9; M.H.G. 4, p. 151:18-19. According to the Zohar passage quoted in note 1, Jethro had Jewish descendants even before his return to Midian. "He then brought them [his sons] with him to Moses, so that they might all enter together under the wings of the Shekinah." Zohar 3, 9a = S. 4, 344 also refers to the Jewish Kenites as descendants of Jethro.
3. Tan.HaNid.Yitro 4, p. 94a. Parallels which make the same identification are Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:18-19; Tan.HaNid.VaYakhe! 8, p. 131a; Mish.R.El. p. 305:3-4. However, the Targum to 1 Chron. 2:55 makes a different connection, translating the verse, "The family of Rechab, the son of Eliezer the son of Moses....These were the Kenites, the sons of Zipporah whose genealogy was listed with the tribe of Levi since they came from the seed of Moses, Master of Israel, which was of more merit for them than horsemen or chariots." I am at a loss to explain why this genealogy takes the Kenites back to Moses rather than to Jethro except to conclude as does the text that it was more meritorious to be associated with Moses than with anyone else. The Targum is an 8/9th century work (E.J., 4:850) whose late date may account for its non-recognition of Jethro.
4. B.B. 91b = S., p. 379. Yal.Shim.vol. 2 R. 600 parallels this. A.R.N.ch. 35 = S., p. 53a(A) = Goldin, p. 145 uses 1 Chron. 4:23 to answer the question, "Now how did the descendants of Jethro make their living?" However, no explanation is given there as to why this verse applies to the Kenites. We can assume that the tradition linking the Kenites and the potters was firmly established by the time of A.R.N. Therefore, no need was seen to provide the connecting exegesis as the talmudic passage does.

Notes. (Continued)

5. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92. M.H.G. 2, p. 371:6-8 parallels this. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 189:147-149 = Mek.H.R., p. 201:9-10 merely asks how we know that the descendants of Jonadab are descendants of Jethro. 1 Chron. 2:55 is quoted as the answer.

The Jericho Connection

"The city of the palm-trees" in which Judges 1:16 places Jethro's descendants is identified as Jericho by Targum Jonathan¹. Having dealt with the other problems implicit in the verse (see the last section)², the Rabbis had to explain why the Bible placed the Kenites in Jericho. The answer lay in an exegesis of Numbers 10:32. The "fat pastures"³ of Jericho, the rich land of "the city of the palm-trees" were offered to Jethro as an incentive to accompany the Israelites, something which he seemed disinclined to do according to Numbers 10:29-32. Though proselytes could not have a share in the land of Israel when it would be divided,⁴ nonetheless, according to the midrash, Moses offered Jethro a long-term tenancy in Jericho in order to give him a stake in Israel. Though Jethro apparently rejected this offer for himself in favor of returning to Midian⁵ (to proselytize), his descendants, the now Jewish Kenites (or Rechabites, as Sifre to Numbers prefers) came to Israel and settled in their "promised land" - Jericho:

'So if you come with us, we will extend to you the same bounty [that the Lord grants us]' (Num. 10:32). What was the good that they would do for him [Jethro]? They said, 'When Israel would divide up the land, they would leave out the fat pastures of Jericho, 500 cubits by 500 cubits'. They said, 'The one who builds the Temple on his [tribal] portion would take the fat pastures of Jericho.' [In the meant[me] they gave Jonadab the son of Rechab⁶ the first right to the portion. They enjoyed its advantages for 440 years⁷, as it says, 'In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left

the land of Egypt...[Solomon began to build the House of the Lord]' (1 Kings 6:1). Subtract from them [the 480 years] the forty years that Israel was in the wilderness. It will be seen that they [Jethro's descendants] enjoyed its [Jericho's] advantages for 440 years. When the Shehinah dwelt in the portion of Benjamin [signaling that the Temple would be built there - or at least on the border of Benjamin], the Benjaminites came and took their portion [Jericho]. They [the Kenites] rose up and turned from them as it says, 'And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees...' ⁸

Thus, Jericho was the home for the Kenites from the time of the conquest of Canaan until the building of the Temple.⁹ As Jericho was legendary for its fertility and wealth¹⁰, one can see why as יוֹצְרִים (1 Chron. 4:23) Jethro's descendants were able to support themselves without travail. Yet when it was time to leave the "fat pastures" of Jericho, the Kenites did so and "went up out of the city of palm-trees...into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad, and they went and dwelt with the people" (Ju. 1:16). This move brought them a spiritual richness and closeness to God, as the next section will show.

NOTES

1. Tar.Jon. on Ju. 1:16. This identification comes from Deut. 34:3 and 11 Chron.28:15, both of which explicitly refer to Jericho as "the city of palm-trees." All of the midrashim quoted in this section (see note 8) place Jethro's descendants in Jericho.
2. Did Jethro have descendants? Why would Jethro's descendants have settled in Israel? See Who Were Jethro's Descendants, notes 1, 2.
3. This is a translation (Jastrow, p. 291) of נָטַח, a word which the midrash uses in describing Jericho.
4. See sec.Num. 10:29 ...Come with us and we will be generous to you, notes 3, 4.
5. One of Moses' arguments used to persuade Jethro to stay was that if Jethro left people would think that he was unsatisfied with the gift of Jericho (Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 76:14-16. The ed.princ., Venice, 1545, does not have this). See also sec.Num. 10:31, Please..., note 2.
6. This is an anachronism since Jonadab is first mentioned in the time of King Jehu (11 K.10:15-17). However, ein mukdam ve-ein m'uchar ba-Torah.
7. The translations for this sentence came from Goldin, p. 145. It literally means "they ate of it for 440 years."
8. Sif.Num.pis. 81 = H., p. 77:9-16. Parallels come from Yal.Shim.R. 736, p. 238a; Yal.Shim.R. 957, p. 342b; M.H.G. 4, p. 150:7-14. Many sources have partial parallels or paraphrases. These include A.R.N. ch. 35 = Sch.p. 53a(A) = Goldin, p. 145; Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:26-30; Sif.Deut.pis. 62, p. 128:7-11; Sif.Deut.pis. 352, p. 411:16 - 412:5 (Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b parallels this); Mid.Tan. on Deut. 12:5, p. 48; Mid.Tan. on Deut. 33:12, p. 217; Mek. on Deut., p. 191:1-6; Mish.R.El., p. 304:10-15; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:32, p. 99b; Mid.Ag. on Num. 10:32, p. 96. Zohar 2, p. 195a = S. 4, p. 155-156 asks in the context of 1 Sam. 15:6, "Was not Jericho their [the Kenites'] home?" -- Jericho, as opposed to along-side Amalek. Tan.HaNid. Yitro 4, p. 94a under the explanation of the name Hobab reads, "When he [Hobab] came to the land, they gave him the fat pastures of Jericho." Whether Hobab is equated with Jethro here or is a separate person is not clear. However, Hobab/Jethro was plainly somewhere else and then came to Israel, to Jericho.

Notes. (Continued)

9. On a literal, biblical level, Judges 1:16, which has the Kenites leaving Jericho, is set in the time of the conquest of Canaan. This would make the Kenites' occupation of Jericho a brief one. Almost immediately after the entry into Canaan, they left acc. to Judges 1:16. However, for the purposes of this study, what matters is how the Rabbis understood the time-sequence of the verse -- at the time the Temple was built, the Kenites left Jericho.
10. J.E., 7:112.
11. See the various interpretations of this word in section Who Were Jethro's Descendants, note 5.

Jabez

As understood by the Rabbis, the last phrase in Judges 1:16 "and they went and dwelt with the people" explains where the Kenites went when they left Jericho. "In the wilderness, south of Arad" (Jud. 1:16) stood a house of study to which the Kenites hied. A gezerah shavah connects dwelling with the people in the wilderness with Jabez, the Rosh Yeshiva who is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 2:55, the verse used by the Rabbis to fix the location of the Kenites after they left Jericho:

'and they went and dwelt with the people.'
The term 'people' here is but a designation for 'wisdom' as in the passage: 'No doubt but ye are the people and with you is the perfection of wisdom' (Job 12:2)...They went and sat with those sitting before Jabez - for were there inhabitants of Jabez? [No] There were only disciples of Jabez - as it is said: 'And the family of the scribes who sat before Jabez [יְוֹשְׁבֵי יַעֲבֵץ]: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab' (1 Chron. 2:55).¹

Thus, the Kenites left Jericho and sought a place where they could obtain wisdom ("dwelt with the people"). Jabez provided that opportunity in a place whose only industry was study (i.e., there were no ordinary inhabitants there, only disciples).

However, another look at 1 Chronicles 2:55 reveals a problem concerning the identity of Jabez. "The family of the scribes" (=Kenites) are described as יְוֹשְׁבֵי יַעֲבֵץ, which Lauterbach translates, as "who sat before Jabez." A literal

translation, on the other hand, as well as the J.P.S.A. translation, "that dwelt at [underlining mine] Jabez", would seem to indicate that Jabez is a place name - the yeshiva at which the Kenites studied was located in Jabez. Nevertheless, by ignoring the literal meaning of 1 Chronicles 2:55, a typical exegetic characteristic, the Mekilta expresses the prevailing midrashic view which regards Jabez as a person. Hence, Lauterbach's translation of יַעֲבֵץ - יוֹשֵׁבִי as "who sat before Jabez" conforms with that belief.

The biblical evidence which led the Rabbis to understand 1 Chronicles 2:55 in terms of a person named Jabez who raised up disciples came from 1 Chronicles 4:9-10:

And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren...And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying: 'O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest work deliverance from evil, that it might not pain me!'

Since these verses occur in the middle of a rather long list of almost entirely unidentifiable descendants of Judah, the Rabbis felt impelled to provide more details about Jabez, especially about his identity:

A Tanna taught: Othniel is the same as Jabez. He was called Othniel because God answered him [עֲנָה אֱלֹהִים, "God answered" is similar to עֲתַנִּי אֱלֹהִים, "Othniel"] and Jabez because he counselled [יַעֲבֵץ, "counselled" is similar to יַעֲבֵץ, Jabez]...And whence do we derive that God answered him? - Since it says: 'And Jabez called on the God of Israel...And God granted him that which he requested' (1 Ch. 4:10).²

Othniel, a judge of Israel, is a significant figure in the rabbinic literature.³ One can see why Othniel, renowned for

his learning⁴ would be identified with Jabez the Rosh Yeshiva, or vice versa to connect a scholarly figure who appears but three times in the Bible with his more prominent alter-ego. In any case, what matters for this study are not Jabez or Othniel per se but how the Kenites interacted with them.⁵

The Kenites' journey from Jericho became for the Rabbis the example of how Jabez/Othniel was answered and how he fostered the Torah in Israel. From the Mekilta:

They [the Kenites] sought a teacher. And Jabez was seeking pupils as it is said... 'Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed', with the study of the Law; 'and enlarge my border,' with disciples; 'and that Thy hand might be with me,' so that the evil inclination should not cause me trouble to hinder me in the study of Thy Torah; 'And God granted him that which he requested [1 Chron. 4:10]; this teaches that He gave to him [Jabez] what he asked for and to them [the Kenites] He gave what they asked for.⁶

Thus, with a sort of divine economy, when the Kenites had to leave Jericho, Jabez needed students. By going to study with Jabez, the Kenites were continuing in a family tradition. Jethro had studied Torah from the greatest teacher in his generation; now, the Kenites were doing the same.

NOTES

1. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 186:110-111, 115-187:118 = Mek.H.R., p. 200:5-6, 8-10. Complete parallels can only be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91; and M.H.G. 2, p. 369:9-13. Two sources (Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 906, p. 505a) quote "and they went and dwelt with the people" (Ju. 1:16) and make the connection that "people" means wisdom. Other sources just mention that the Kenites left Jericho and/or went to study with Jabez: Sif.Num. pis. 78 = H., p. 73:9-11; Sif.Deut.pis. 62, p. 128:11-13, Mid.Tan. on Deut. 12:15, p. 48; Mid.Tan. on Deut. 33:12, p. 217; Mish.R.El., pp. 304:16-305:1; Sif.Zut.on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:35-36; Mid.Lekah Tov on Num. 10:32, p. 99b; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b; M.H.G. 4, pp. 150:19-151:1. Targum to 1 Chron. 2:55 begins, "The family of Rechab, the son of Eliezer, the son of Moses were students of Jabez...". Pes.Rab.pis. 31, p. 147a = Br., pp. 617-618 establishes by inference that the Kenites settled with Jabez. Talking of the peoples who will be gathered up to Jerusalem when the Messiah comes Pes.Rab. explains, "And these from the land of Sinim" (Is. 49:12) as "these are the children of Jonadab the son of Rechab." This exegesis is apparently based on Targum Jonathan's translation of "the land of Sinim" as a "southern land". In the exegete's mind "a southern land" is identified with Arad, south of Jericho where Ju. 1:16 placed the Kenites. Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 469, p. 400a repeats this.
2. Tem. 16a = S., pp. 111-112. Targum to 1 Chron. 2:55 and 1 Chron. 4:9 follows each mention of Jabez with "he is Othniel b. Kenaz." Targum to 1 Chron. 2:55 continues as does the Talmud, "he was called such since a study hall was established at his advice (בְּעִצְתָּו)". S.S.R. on S.S. 4:7, mid. 1 = S. 4, p. 205 also identifies Jabez with Othniel as does Yal.Shim.R. 957, p. 342b.
3. These are the biblical references to Othniel: Josh. 15:17, Ju. 1:13, 3:9, 3:11, 1 Chron. 4:13. For Othniel's role in the leadership chain of Israel and his activities, see Gen.R. 58:2 = S. 1, p. 510; Ex.R. 3:2 = S. 2, p. 61; Mid.Shmu., p. 37a; Ecc.R. on Ecc. 1:5, mid. 1 = S. 4, p. 17; Est.R., proem 10 = S. 2, p. 10. See also Ginzberg, v. 4, pp. 29-30; v. 6, pp. 185-186.
4. Othniel is credited with restoring 1700 traditions forgotten during the mourning period for Moses. See Tem. 16a = S., p. 110. Regarding Jabez's scholarly credentials, see Ex.R. 38:5 = S. 2, p. 453; Tan.HaNid. Ttizaveh 9, p. 113b, Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 935, p. 483a; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 1074, p. 517a; Midrash on Proverbs 3:19, B.H.M.V., p. 69.

Notes. (Continued)

Tanna debe Eliyahu ch.(5)6, p. 30 comments on Jabez's teaching skills and his rewards for it. 2 Alphabet of Ben Sira (Steinschneider, p. 29a) also comments on his reward.

5. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 connects Jabez with Jethro in this way. "Rabbi Abahu said, 'Jethro was worthy that from his sons came great fosterers of Torah in Israel. Who was this? It was Jabez as it says, "And Jabez called on the God of Israel...And God granted him that which he requested." (1 Chron. 4:10)'". To see Jabez as a descendant of Jethro would contradict the weight of the tradition on this subject. Hoffman calls the attribution of this comment to a third generation Amora, a scribal error (p. 92, note mem). Nonetheless, while this genealogy raises questions as to the Kenites' relationship to Jabez and to why wasn't Jabez with the Kenites to begin with, etc., it does reflect very positively on Jethro that such a sage came from him. This attitude from an early source would seem to support the general hypothesis. However, the Epstein-Melammed edition of Mekilta of R. Shim'on omits this comment which is only repeated in an interrelated source, M.H.G. 2, p. 371:8-11.
6. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 189:149-190:158 = Mek.H.R., p. 201:11-16. Tem. 16a = S., p. 112 has the same exegesis of 1 Chron. 4:10. Targum to 1 Chron. 4:10 has a shorter version. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:11-13 reports that "they lacked someone to teach and he lacked someone to study. The ones who lacked teaching came to the one who lacked students." Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:27, p. 63a has a similar version.

"And the families of scribes who sat before Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites..." (1 Chron. 2:66).

As 1 Chronicles 2:55 indicates, the Kenites were known as Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites when they sat before Jabez as his students. These three names do not occur elsewhere in the Bible. Consequently, the Rabbis felt the necessity of explaining how and why the Kenites (also known as the Rechabites from the end of the verse) came to be known as Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites.

Sifre Zuta accounts for these names by referring to the Kenites' arrival at Jabez's house of study:

They [the Kenites] went and found Jabez sitting in the house of study. Priests, Levites and Kings were sitting with him; and all Israel was sitting there. They [the Kenites] said, 'We are proselytes. How can we sit with them?' What did they do? They sat at the gates of the house of study. They heard and learned as it says, 'And the families of the scribes who sat before Jabez...' (1 Chron. 2:55). Tirathites (תִּרְעָתִים) because they sat at the gate [תִּרְעָ means "gate" in Aramaic]. Shimeathites (שְׁמֵעָתִים) because they heard [שָׁמַע means "heard"] and studied. Sucathites (סוּכָתִים) because Israel looked [מִסְכִּין, מִסָּכָה means "look"] to them.

Each of the names is interpreted in a simple פשוט manner, consistent with the theme of newcomers at the house of study. Though the Kenites feared that they might not be accepted and hence sat outside, at the gate, the last name, Sucathite, indicated their ultimate acceptance, as succeeding sections will show.²

Other sources do not use the story of the Kenites' arrival as the basis of their exegesis, but explain the names independently of each other. Relying on etymological similarities, no fewer than a total of fourteen meanings have been generated for the three names. Each explanation explores some facet of the Kenites' history, nazarite piety or future position.

Tirathite, the first name applied to the Kenites is seen by many sources as coming from the root תרע, "to blow the shofar."³ Hence, from the Mekilta, "They were called Tirathites because when they sounded the horn in supplication [מתרועעים], they were answered."⁴ No specific incident that I can discern is referred to here. Sifre to Numbers, using the same root in a different fashion, offers, "They were called Tirathites because they heard the shofar blast (תרועה) from Mt. Sinai."⁵ The Targum to Chronicles continues the shofar theme with "They were called Tirathites because when they raised their voice in song it was like the sound of the shofar."⁶ Thus, from this one name, we know that the Kenites were the recipients of divine providence, stood at Mt. Sinai and were mighty in their praise of God.

Turning to the Aramaic meaning of תרע, "gate,"⁷ another passage in Sifre to Numbers states, "They were called Tirathites because they sat at the opening of the gates [שערי - the Hebrew word is used] of Jerusalem."⁸ The gate of a city was where the elders of that city sat when they fulfilled their juridical functions. The Kenites were

destined to become judges in Israel.⁹

A slight change in the arrangement of the letters in the root תרע produces תער "razor."¹⁰ Since the Kenites observed a number of nazirite rules (as indicated in Jer. 35:6), it may be assumed that they also refrained from shaving, a nazirite prohibition from Numbers 6:5. Sifre to Numbers confirmed that the Kenites observed this prohibition, "They were called Tirathites because they did not shave."¹¹ This adherence to their vows reaped a reward for the Kenites as the Bible indicates in Jeremiah 35:18-19.

The interpretations of the second name, Shimeathites (שמעתים) are largely based on the meanings of its root שמע - "to hear, to obey."¹² From the Mekilta, "Shimeathites because they heard [שמעו] the sound of the trumpet blast [תרועה] at Sinai."¹³ The Mekilta of R. Shim'on states, "Another interpretation: Their prayers were heard (נשמעת)."¹⁴ Continuing with the usage of שמע as "to hear", Tanhuma HaKidpas offers, "They were called Shimeathites because all Israel heard [שומעים] the law from their mouths."¹⁵ This explanation refers to the time when the Kenites would sit in the Sanhedrin. Switching to the meaning שמע as "to obey", Sifre to Numbers recalls the Kenites' piety with "They were called Shimeathites because they obeyed (שמעו) the commandments of their father [Jonadab b. Rechab; vid. Jer. 35:18]."¹⁶

The Targum to Chronicles has a completely different explanation for the name Shimeathite. Based on the word שמענותא, "traditional law"¹⁷ which does contain the root שמע,

the Targum to 1 Chronicles 2:55 reads, "The Shimeathites were called so because they were cheered in [the study of] the law."¹⁸ This exegesis, like the others on the name Shimeathite, emphasizes the Kenites' piety and commitment to traditional values.

The final name by which the Kenites were known in 1 Chronicles 2:55, Sucathites, (סוכתיים), also is interpreted midrashically according to its root סוּךְ, "to anoint"¹⁹ or סוכה, the sukah, the festival booth for the Feast of Tabernacles. As a nazirite group, the Kenites refrained from all sorts of vanities and fripperies, such as perfuming themselves (i.e., anointing). Sifre to Numbers confirms this by stating, "They were called Sucathites because they did not anoint themselves with oil."²⁰ Interpreting "anointing" figuratively, Tanhuma HaNidpas offers, "They were called Sucathites because they were covered (נסתוככו) with the Holy Spirit."²¹

The sources which derive Sucathite from sukah also use it in both a literal and figurative way. The Mekilta of R. Ishmael reads:

They were called Sucathites because they dwelt in booths [סוכות] as it is said: 'But we have dwelt in tents and have hearkened, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us (Jer. 35:10).'²²

This proof-text which makes the useful connection between those who studied with Jabez and the Rechabites (= Kenites) does not completely "prove" the midrashic understanding of the name because it uses "tents," אהלים rather than "booths," סוכות. However, since the context of Jeremiah 35:10 implies

a non-permanent dwelling place which is exactly what a sukah symbolizes, "tents" and "booths" may be thought to be synonymous here. However, of all the parallel sources which follow the Mekilta's explanation, only Midrash HaGadol cites the prooftext.²³

The figurative usage of the root sukah, booth, typifies the midrash in this section. The Kenites are lauded and their link with other Israelites is emphasized. Thus, from the Mekilta of R. Shim'on, "They were called Sucathites because they sheltered (מסכין) Israel and protected them."²⁴ Though the specific case referred to here is not certain, the regard which the midrash has here for the Kenites is clear.

NOTES

1. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:36 - 265:4. TanHaNid. Yitro 4, p. 94a and M.H.G. 4, p. 151:1-4 repeat this.
2. The Kenites were destined to become members of the Sanhedrin as the sec. The Kenites in the Sanhedrin will show. Hence Israel would look to them for justice.
3. Jastrow, p. 1700.
4. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 187:118-119 = Mek.H.R., p. 200:10-11. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., pp. 91-92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:14-15; Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:6, Mish.R.El., p. 305:2; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:22-23.
5. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:6. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:14; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:22.
6. Targum to 1 Chron. 2:55.
7. Jastrow, p. 1701.
8. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:7. Yal.Shim.vol. 2 R. 38, p. 352b repeats this account.
9. Tan.HaNid.VaYakhel 8, p. 131a reads "They were called Tirathites because they sat in the Chamber of Hewn Stone [the Sanhedrin]." The commentary Etz Yosef to this passage makes the connection between the Sanhedrin and the elders of a city sitting in the gateway. See the final section of this study, The Kenites in the Sanhedrin, for further details.
10. Jastrow, p. 1684.
11. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:7. Parallels can be found in Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:13 and M.H.G. 2, p. 369:21. Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b states that the Tirathites did shave. This reading is confirmed by the ed.princ., Salonica, 1521. Horovitz in Sif.Num., p. 73, note to line 7 gives other sources which support this reading, including a ms. of Sif.Num. However, to interpret "Tirathite" as a group which did shave seems to be an error, going contrary to nazirite rules. However, even if this reading is correct, I cannot see any midrashic reason for saying that the Kenites were a group which shaved.

Notes. (Continued)

12. Jastrow, p. 1598.
13. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 187:119 = Mek.H.R., p. 200:11. Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b repeats this. Since this explanation incorporates תרע in addition to שמע, the sources quoted in note 5 were able to use it to explain Tirathites as well as Shimeathites.
14. Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:15. Mish.R.El., p. 305:2 - 3 and M.H.G. 2, p. 369:22-23 repeat this account.
15. Tan.HaNid.VaYakhel 8, p. 131a.
16. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:8. Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek. R.S.E.M., p. 135:14, and M.H.G. 2, p. 369:21-22 substitute "the voice" of their father for "the commandments..."
Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:15 has another substitution using "the voice of the Torah."
17. Jastrow, p. 1600.
18. Targum to 1 Chronicles 2:55. The bracketed insertion comes from the French translation of the Targum (LeDeaut, v. 1, p.46).
19. Jastrow, p. 963.
20. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:8. These sources contain parallels: Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:13-14; Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:22.
21. Tan.HaNid.VaYakhel 8, p. 131a. Targum to 1 Chron. 2:55 reads, "They were covered by the Holy Spirit in prophecy."
22. Mek.H.R., p. 200:11-12 = Mek.J.Z.L., p. 187:120-121. The translation is mine.
23. M.H.G. 2, p. 370:1 cites only the first two words of Jer. 35:10. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:15-16; Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:8-9 and Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352 all do not use it.
24. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:16. Mish.R. El., p. 305:3 and M.H.G. 2, p. 370:1-2 repeat this.

Piety of Jethro's Descendants.

For the Rabbis, more was involved in the Kenites' move from Jericho to the Jabez's house of study than a simple progression from Judges 1:16 to 1 Chronicles 2:55. Such a trip from the "fat pastures" of Jericho to "the wilderness south of Arad" testified to the Kenites' piety and devotion to the Torah. Sifre Zuta gives an indication of the magnitude of the changes involved in the Kenites' journey:

Thus you find that at the hour that they went up from Jericho, behold, they were leaving all the land of Israel, a place of fruit, and food and drink. They went to Arad in the wilderness [underlining mine] to Jabez.¹

Abot de Rabbi Nathan shows what the Kenites sacrificed to move:

They had been people of importance, householders, owners of fields and vineyards, but for the sake of the service of the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, they gave up everything and went off. Where did they go to? To Jabez, to study Torah; and (thus) they became God's people.²

However, rather than regretting their loss of personal possessions, the Kenites are depicted in Sifre Zuta as abandoning their material concerns for the sake of study:

They [from the context and previous line, this refers to Kenites, yet for some reason the subjects and verbs here are in the singular] said, 'We didn't come with all our possessions and will leave all that we have in order to study Torah. Now we plant and harvest, so when shall we study Torah?' They [the Israelites] said to them, 'There is a man who studies Torah in the city, but it is a cold place, it is a desert and there is no wheat there.' When they heard this from

them, they went as it says, 'And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees...' (Ju. 1:16). They [plural subject] went [הלכו] and found Jabez sitting in the house of study.³

This eagerness to devote themselves to God's word became the Kenites' trademark through the generations.

In the time of Jeremiah, the Kenites' piety was lauded as they took additional (nazirite) devotions upon themselves:

Come and see the degree of righteousness of the descendants of Jethro. Behold, Jonadab b. Rechab heard from the prophet that the Temple would be destroyed in the future. He arose and decreed three commandments on his descendants - that they would not drink wine, that they wouldn't build houses and that they wouldn't plant vineyards. As it is said, 'But they said, "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us saying: Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons, forever; neither shall ye build a house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents, that ye may live many days in the land wherein ye sojourn"' (Jer. 35:8-10)⁴.

Such acts of grief may seem extreme to us, especially in advance of the Temple's destruction, yet so great was the Kenites' dedication to God that they felt they could not lead normal lives in the face of the loss of their greatest joy.

The Kenites' willingness to leave home and hearth for the sake of study and their spartan regimen adopted to mourn the loss of the Temple caused them to be held up as an example for other Israelites. Numbers Rabbah exhorts Israel to change her ways and emulate the Kenites:

So will I honor all who fear me...as a reward for having performed my will. Now if I [God] have done so much⁵ for those who are proselytes [the Kenites], is it not all the more to be expected that Israel, who are my loving children, my dear children, should, provided they act in accordance with My wish, stand before Me forever? As it says: 'Oh that thou wouldst hearken to My commandments.'...His name would not be cut off nor destroyed from before Me.' (Isa. 48:18, 19).⁶

If those who have but recently met the God of Israel can so completely follow His ways, how much the more should be expected of those who have known God since the days of Abraham. The midrash conveys an image of God eagerly awaiting the day when He can reward Israel - but only when they are as righteous as the Kenites.

NOTES

1. Sif. Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:8-11. M.H.G. 4, pp. 146:22 - 147:1 parallels this. Yal.Shim.R. 957, p. 342b reports a similar episode involving Othniel b. Kenez (=Jabez) who left Israel and went to Arad in order to study Torah. However, the Yalkut does not have a similar statement involving the Kenites. Since the Yalkut's version of this story occurs in the middle of information about Jethro, it is possible that some error is involved here and that the Kenites, not Jabez, were intended by the compiler of the Yalkut.
2. A.R.N. ch. 35 = Sch., p. 53a(A) = Goldin, p. 145.
3. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 264:32-36. Tan.HaNid. Yitro 4, p. 94a and M.H.G. 4, p. 150:15-20 parallel this. Zohar 3, pp. 9a-b = S. 4, p. 344 also depicts the Kenites giving up luxury for the study of Torah, though the wording is different than the other sources cited.
4. Mish.R.El, p. 305:4-8. Parallels occur in Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 135:19-24; Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:2-4; Tan.B. Shemini 9, p. 14a; M.H.G. 2, p. 370:6-12.
5. That which God did for the Kenites as a reward for their faithfulness and piety will be fully discussed in the next two sections.
6. Num.R. 5:9 = S. 3, p. 155. Tan.HaNid.BaMidbar 26, p. 53b and Yal.Shim.R. 695, p. 221b parallel this. Sif.Num. pis. 78 = H., p. 73:18-9 contains a shorter version of the same theme. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M., p. 136:1-2; Yal.Shim.R. 695, p. 221b; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352a; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R.352, p.416a and M.H.G. 2, p. 371:1-2 all repeat this version.

How Jethro's Descendants Were Rewarded.

Because of their piety and devotion to God (and their yihus), the Kenites were rewarded in four different ways. Though proselytes, they enjoyed certain rights of the native-born Israelites. An everlasting covenant was established with them. They would become the messengers of good tidings at the end of time. Fourth, they were privileged to sit in the Sanhedrin. The first three of these distinctions will be discussed in this section. Due to the amount of material dealing with the Kenites' tenure in the Sanhedrin, the following section will be devoted to that.

As part of the rituals associated with the presentation of first fruits, the person involved made the declaration contained in Deuteronomy 26:3, 5-10. Since Deuteronomy 26:3 reads in part "I acknowledge this day...that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our fathers [underlining mine] to give to us" and Deut. 26:5-10 contains several references to one's (Jewish) ancestors being redeemed from Egypt, the Rabbis had to decide on the permissibility of proselytes making that declaration when they brought their first fruits. The answer, a negative one, is found in Tractate Bikkurim (First Fruits):

These bring [the first fruits] but do not make the recital: the proselyte [may bring but does not make the declaration] since he cannot say 'which the Lord hath sworn to our fathers to give unto us' [Deut. 26:3].¹

However, the Tosefta specifically excludes the Kenites from this prohibition:

R. Judah said: Every single proselyte brings [the first fruits] but does not make the declaration. However, the descendants of Keni, the father-in-law of Moses, bring and make the declaration since it was said, 'So if you will come with us [we will extend to you the same bounty that the Lord grants us]' (Num. 10:32).²

Though Moses' words to Jethro were not to promise him land,³ R. Judah, a fourth generation Tanna,⁴ apparently regarded Numbers 10:32 as some sort of ancestral promise, thus enabling the Kenites to make the declaration. Ultimately, in the Yerushalmi, R. Judah extended this privilege to all proselytes by regarding Abraham as the father of all nations. Hence, proselytes from any nation would have shared in the promise for the land of Israel and so could make the declaration of Deuteronomy 26:3.⁵ Not all the authorities concurred with R. Judah's decision regarding all proselytes,⁶ but his position on the Kenites was not challenged. Thus, we may assume that the Kenites' status was higher than other proselytes, being more akin to native Israelites, and that their being accorded the privilege of another mitzvah was a reward.

Another area in which the Kenites' status did not differ from that of native Israelites was in regard to marriage into priestly families. Though the authorities are divided as to whether a union between a regular proselyte and a priest is permissible,⁷ the Kenites definitely enjoy that right:

There are those who say that he [Jonadab b. Rechab] will marry his daughters to priests and that from those unions will arise High Priests.⁸

Bamberger points out that "the priests...laid great stress on an unblemished family tree, and...married only with families whose origins were known to be among the highest."⁹ Thus, the permission accorded to the Kenites to marry into priestly families can be nothing less than a recognition of and reward for the piety and past deeds of their clan as far back as Jethro.

Not only did the Kenites marry into the best families of the realm, but in one way, they were even superior to them.¹⁰ Though they were newcomers, the Kenites' behavior assured them of an everlasting covenant which was a closer link with the Almighty than that granted to Israel. From the Mekilta come the details of the Kenites second reward:

R. Nathan¹¹ says: The covenant with Jonadab the son of Rechab was greater than the one made with David. For the covenant made with David was only conditional, as it is said, 'If thy children keep My covenant,' etc. (Ps. 131:12), and if not: 'Then will I visit their transgression with the rod' (Ps. 89:33). But the covenant with Jonadab the son of Rechab was made without any condition. For it is said: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: There shall not be cut off unto Jonadab the son of Rechab a man to stand before me forever' (Jer. 35:19).¹²

Naturally, the Kenites with their unbreakable ברית continued their good behavior. On the other hand, the Israelites who were on probation, as it were, had to be constantly exhorted to follow the right path (and be at least as good as the Kenites), so God could have the pleasure of rewarding them.

The promise that the Kenites would not be cut off from God had certain practical consequences. Death and destruction held no sway over them. From Alphabet of Ben Sira, a work "perhaps written in the geonic period":¹³

The angel of death has no power over the offspring of Jonadab. There are those who say that some human beings enter alive into the Garden of Eden...who are they?...all the seed of Jonadab...The offspring of Jonadab because he wrote all the commands that are in the book of Jeremiah [the nazirite regulations in Jer. 35:6-9] and because he was a righteous person and because he rebuked Israel [perhaps a reference to his aid to King Jehu in destroying the worshippers of Baal in II Kings 10:15-28], he is alive in the Garden of Eden.¹⁴

Being exempt from death placed the Kenites in the company of worthies ranging from Enoch to R. Joshua b. Levi.

With such a destiny ahead of them, even when society crumbled about them, the Kenites were not harmed. Midrash Aggadah states:

Even when the Temple was destroyed, those from the descendants of Jonadab b. Rechab were not exiled since they were descendants of Keni [Jethro]. God sent them to the Mountains of Darkness.¹⁵

The Mountains of Darkness serve a similar function to the land behind the River Sambatyon. Both are places out of real time and space. They serve as protective reservations for Jews who would have been molested or exiled.¹⁶ Since the prophecy in Jeremiah 35:19, the everlasting covenant, had to be fulfilled, the Mountains of Darkness became the refuge for the Kenites at the time of the greatest of all tragedies in the Rabbi's world.

The Kenites' third distinction or reward arose from the fact that there would always be Kenites. At the end of time, the Kenites will serve as the messengers of the end of this era: Pesikta de Rab Kahana describes the scenario:

Those bringing good tidings will be the descendants of Jonadab the son of Rechab, who upon entering the Temple will bring offerings, procure expiation, and bring tidings of redemption to Israel, for it is said of Jonadab's descendants, 'There shall not be cut off unto Jonadab the son of Rechab a man to stand before me forever' (Jer. 35:19).¹⁷

Another place in Pesikta de Rab Kahana makes it clear that the Kenites will be the first to offer sacrifices in the Temple when the Messiah comes.¹⁸ Again, a sort of divine cycle can be seen in the history of the Kenites. The forebearer of their clan began his association with Israel with sacrifices and praises of God. Jethro's descendants thus will be privileged to bring the first sacrifices in the newly restored Temple and to spread news of God's praiseworthy actions, the Redemption, to the children of Israel.

NOTES

1. Mish.Bikk. 1:4 = S., p. 390.
2. Tos.Bikk. 1:2, p. 100:4-5.
3. See sec.Num. 10:29 The place to which the Lord has said, note 1.
4. Mielziner, p. 31.
5. Y.Bikk. 64a = gemorah on mish. 1:4.
6. See Bamberger, pp. 66 and 112, notes 24-25, for the differing opinions.
7. See Bamberger, pp. 84-85 and 117, notes 100-109 for a full discussion of this issue.
8. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92. M.H.G. 2, p. 370:21-22 repeats this. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:17-18 also mentions marriage to priests, but not future High Priests.
9. Bamberger, p. 85.
10. Despite the Kenites' piety and closeness to God, some Israelites were nonetheless scornful of their (proselyte) co-religionists. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, p. 187:122-125 = Mek.H.R., p. 200:13-14 shows that scorn and the rebuke from heaven which followed:
 It happened once that one said [mockingly]
 [the preceding bracket was supplied by
 Lauterbach]: 'Today there is a sacrifice
 of the sons of the water-drinkers [the
 Kenites avoided drinking wine per Jer. 35:6]!'
 And a heavenly voice came forth from the Holy
 of Holies and called out: 'He who received
 their offerings in the desert, He will also
 receive their offerings now.'
 'Their offerings in the desert' no doubt refers to Jethro's
 sacrifice mentioned in Ex. 18:12. These sources contain
 parallel accounts: Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M.,
 p. 135:16-18; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 323, p. 416b; M.H.G. 2,
 p. 370:2-4.
11. A fifth generation (165-200 C.E.) Tanna, (Mielziner, p. 36).
12. Mek.J.Z.L. 2, pp. 187:125-188:132 = Mek.H.R., p. 200:14-19.
 Parallels come from Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek.R.S.E.M.,
 p. 135:27-41; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b; Yal.Shim.v.
 2 R. 323, p. 416b. Mish.R.El., p. 305:12-16 and M.H.G. 2,

Notes. (Continued)

p. 370:16-22 repeat this same account, but in the name of R. Yohanan (יוחנן). However, M.H.G. does include a variant reading of "R. Nathan" (see note to line 16). Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:14-16 quotes Jer. 35:18-19 to answer the question about the reward which the Kenites received for obeying the Law.

13. E. J., 4:548.
14. Steinschneider, pp. 28b, 29a.
15. Mid.Ag. on Num. 24:22, p. 145.
16. See Ginzberg v. 6, p. 408-409, notes 57-58 for more information on the Mountains of Darkness and J. E., 10:681-683 for an article on the River Sambatyon.
17. P.R.K., supplement 5 = M. 2, p. 466:16-18 = Brk., p. 448.
18. P.R.K., supplement 5 = M. 2, p. 464:11-14 = Brk., pp. 481-482. Yal.Mak. on Is. 52:7, p. 195:18-24 parallels this.

The Kenites in the Sanhedrin.

It seems fitting to me that this last section should embrace material from both the beginning and end of this study. The Kenites were rewarded in history because of (their) history. Through the principles of זכות אבות, the merit of their ancestors, specifically Jethro, and מדה כנגד מדה, like causes like, the Kenites were privileged to sit in the Sanhedrin. Jethro had made the Torah beloved and had added to Israel's knowledge of it. His descendants who sat in the Chamber of Hewn Stone as members of the Sanhedrin did much the same as they refined the Law.

Over twenty sources testify to this fourth distinction of the Kenites. Yet ironically, so well accepted was the Kenites' position in the Sanhedrin that no source really explains why the Sanhedrin was chosen as the reward for the Kenites' piety and ancestry (yihus). Aside from my own deductions about זכות אבות and מדה כנגד מדה, three sources provide a few hints. The Talmud reads in the name of R. Joshua b. Chanina, a second generation Tanna (80-120 C.E.),¹ "The early [scholars]² were called soferim [Scribes, סופרים]³ because they counted all the letters in the Torah."⁴ Rashi connects these Scribes about whom almost nothing is known with certainty⁵ with the Kenites by quoting the familiar verse, 1 Chronicles 2:55, "And the families of the scribes [soferim סופרים] who sat before Jabez...These are the Kenites..."⁶ Sifre to Numbers accents the Kenites' piety as it quotes the same verse to show their reward. "Because they hearkened to

the commandments of Jonadab their ancestor, God raised up scribes from them as it says, 'And the families of the scribes who sat before Jabez...' ⁷ Though neither Rashi nor Sifre to Numbers explicitly state that the Kenites sat in the Sanhedrin, since they were designated as soferim (scribes, סופרים) by the Bible, where else would Scribes hold their deliberations if not in the Sanhedrin?

This understated chain of logic that seats in the Sanhedrin were the natural way for the Kenites to be rewarded receives some bolstering from a comment in Midrash Aggadah. From its exegesis of Balaam's parable on the Kenites (Numbers 24:21) "And though thy [Keni's] nest be set in a rock [סלע]:"

Said our Sages of blessed memory, 'Jethro's descendants sat in the Chamber of Hewn Stone and taught Torah to the masses as it says: 'And the families of the scribes who sat before Jabez, the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites' (1 Chron. 2:55). סלע is only an expression for the Temple, as it says: '[She dwelleth...] upon the crag of the rock (סלע)' (Job 39:28). ⁸

No other source places a discussion of the Kenites' tenure in the Sanhedrin under the rubric of this part of Numbers 24:21. Since the Sanhedrin met in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, the biblical description of the Kenites' dwelling place as "thy nest be set in a rock" has apparently been interpreted as a reference to the Sanhedrin. Furthermore, Midrash Aggadah interprets the word "rock" (סלע) in the verse as meaning the Temple based on the Job verse. As we know, the Chamber of Hewn Stone stood on the south wall of the Temple complex adjoining the Court of the Israelites. ⁹ Thus, Midrash

Aggadah contains the most complete explanation of why the Sanhedrin was the Kenites' reward. Why Midrash Aggadah contains the most complete account is not clear. Perhaps the additional exegesis was motivated by the fact that 900 or so years had passed since the Temple had been destroyed and contemporary readers (not just me) were puzzled by the choice of this particular reward.

However, to move from the realm of my own conjecture to reality for the Rabbis, their exegetic powers were not engaged to explain why seats in the Sanhedrin were the Kenites' reward, but to explain for what specific reasons did that reward accrue. As stated above in Sifre to Numbers, the Kenites were thus rewarded for their personal piety. Four other explanations are also advanced which, as indicated at the beginning of this section, connect Jethro's actions with the Kenites' ultimate reward.

First, a passage in Tractate Sota hearkens back to Jethro's response to the planned destruction of the Israelites in Egypt:

There were three in that plan, viz. Balaam, Job and Jethro. Balaam who devised it was slain, Job who silently acquiesced was afflicted with sufferings; Jethro who fled, merited that his descendants should sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, as it is said, 'And the families of scribes who sat before Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab' [1 Chron. 2:55]; and it is written, 'And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, etc.' [Jud. 1:16].¹⁰

As is typical with all the material in this section, Jethro

did something praiseworthy and his descendants are rewarded (according to the unstated implications of 1 Chron. 2:55) with seats in the Sanhedrin. With the inclusion of the second proof-text, the passage confirms that Kenites who became Scribes were indeed the Kenites who came from Jethro.

Second, Jethro's generosity in welcoming the way-faring Moses into his house had profound consequences for his descendants through the ages. Tractate Sanhedrin, quoting in the name of R. Johanan, a first generation Amora (219-279 C.E.)¹¹ gives one of them:¹²

For R. Johanan said: As a reward for [Jethro's saying]¹³ 'Call him, that he may eat bread' [Ex. 2:20],¹⁴ his descendants were privileged to sit in the Hall of Hewn Stones [as scribes]¹³ as it is written, 'And the families of the scribes who sat before Jabez... These are the Kenites' [1 Chron. 2:55];¹⁴ whilst elsewhere it is written, 'And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law...' [Ju. 1:16].^{14, 15}

Hospitality seems to be the eleventh commandment in Judaism with significant benefits accruing to those who offer it. Again, as in the last passage, the midrash takes pains to identify the Kenites with Jethro by means of the second proof-text.

Third, membership in the Sanhedrin was offered to Jethro as some sort of an incentive to persuade him to accompany the children of Israel to the Promised Land. Sifre to Numbers makes this clear as it gives an additional comment (א"ד) on Numbers 10:31:

'Thou shall be to us instead of eyes.' If that is not sufficient for you, you shall sit

with us in the Sanhedrin and be a teacher in matters of the Torah.¹⁶

Though the issue is never resolved whether or not Jethro decided to go with the Israelites at this time, the fact that there were Kenite scribes (1 Chron. 2:55) indicates that at some time someone in Jethro's family accepted Moses' offer.

Fourth, reverence for the Torah was a family tradition. The Kenites were rewarded with a place in the Sanhedrin, the highest seat of Jewish Torah study, because Jethro's whole life after he met Moses was one long act of cherishing the Torah and the God of Israel. After stating, "We don't find any proselyte who made the Torah as beloved as Jethro,"¹⁷ Sifre to Numbers continues, "since Jethro made the Torah beloved, so would his descendants make the Torah beloved."¹⁸ Connecting Jethro's piety with the Kenites' reward, Midrash Lekah Tov states:

[Because Jethro said, 'Blessed be the Lord' (Ex. 18:10)] therefore his descendants were found worthy and would sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone.¹⁹

Midrash Aggadah offers an even simpler connection:

What caused all these good things for Jethro? Because he cleaved unto Moses, he was worthy to raise up sages and prophets as it says, 'And these are the families of the scribes who sat before Jabez' (1 Chron. 2:55).²⁰

Repenting of his past ways and coming to Moses with all that that implied established Jethro as a worthy person in Israel and established his progeny in the Sanhedrin.²¹

Naturally, objections were bound to arise about the propriety of proselytes (!) having such an exalted status. Sifre to Numbers shows both the objection and the swift rebuke:

R. Joshua asked, 'Can proselytes enter the Temple?' Indeed, no Israelites should enter the Temple unless they have sat in the Sanhedrin and taught matters of Torah.²²

Clearly, the rights of proselytes are upheld. Indeed, the sense of the passage seems to be that if the other Israelites had true Torah learning (worthy of sitting in the Sanhedrin), there would have been no objection in the first place.

However, far from questioning their place in the Sanhedrin, the prevailing midrashic view emphasizes that the Kenites would be there forever. Sifre Zuta states:

Since he [Jethro] acted out of love, so God will deal with him out of love. Thus God said to Jeremiah, 'There shall not be cut off unto Jonadab the son of Rechab a man to stand before Me for ever' (Jer. 35:19). They shall not ever cease being members of the Sanhedrin.²³

Thus, the unbreakable covenant which united the Kenites and God also assured them their place in the Sanhedrin.

As this section and the last one have shown, the Kenites were the subject of numerous fantastic and flattering tales. The lack of negative attitudes in midrashim, even in the medieval sources, would seem contrary to the general hypothesis. However, I believe that a different standard of evaluation must be applied to the midrashim from Part III of this study. While Jethro could be identified with evil paganism (if one so desired), the Kenites who by the time of Jeremiah were rewarded with the everlasting covenant were more than ten generations removed from their proselyte roots. Who could say that they were suspect or not Jewish? Furthermore,

as conditions in Jewish life became more desperate, the Kenites were bound to become a touchstone. Something of the Jewish people would remain. There would be a remnant of the House of Israel to be gathered up from behind the Mountains of Darkness. Someone would be left to announce the Messiah and bring the first sacrifices to the restored Temple. Thus, no taint could touch the Kenites for the sake of folk consciousness and morale. As a consequence, my final concluding section will only consider the material relating to Jethro to assess the validity of the general hypothesis.

NOTES.

1. Mielziner, p. 25.
2. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.
3. I supplied these brackets.
4. Kidd. 30a = S., p. 144.
5. See E. J., 15:79-81 for a brief survey of what is and is not known about the Scribes.
6. Rashi to Kidd. 30a. S., p. 144, note 7 partially cites Rashi.
7. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 73:3-4. Zohar 3, p. 196a = S. 5, p. 282 also accents the Kenites' piety when it states that "their yearning" for the Torah caused God to establish them in the Sanhedrin.
8. Mid.Ag. to Num. 24:22, p. 145.
9. E.J., 15:966; see also a diagram of the Temple, E.J., 15:961-962.
10. Sot. 11a = S., p. 53-54. Parallels can be found in San. 106a = S., p. 722; Ex. R. 1:9 = S. 2, p. 11-12; Yal.Shim. v. 2 R. 1074, p. 517a. P.R.K.pis. 3 = M., p. 36:13-14 = Brk., p. 42 which is related, though different, reads:
 As soon as Jethro heard of all the miracles which the Holy One worked against Egypt and Amalek [Balaam and Amalek are relatives], he came at once and was converted...What was his reward. His descendants had the privilege of sitting as judges in the Chamber of Hewn Stone.
11. Mielziner, p. 42.
12. In addition to becoming members of the Sanhedrin because of Jethro's hospitality to Moses, the Kenites were spared by Saul during his war against the Amalekites. Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer has the most complete account of this:
 Rabbi said: When Saul came to the camp of Amalek, he saw the descendants of Jethro [I substituted this reading for the printed translation's "the children of Israel" based on parallel sources, the sense of the passage, the Hebrew text in front of me, and Friedlander, p. 350, n. 2] tarrying in the midst of Amalek.

Notes. (Continued)

He said to them: Separate yourselves from the midst of Amalek, as it is said, 'And Saul said to the Kenites, go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them [for ye showed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt]' (1 Sam. 15:6). But did Jethro show loving-kindness to all Israel? But did he not show loving-kindness to Moses our teacher alone? Hence thou mayest learn that whosoever shows loving-kindness unto one of the great men of Israel is considered as though he had showed loving-kindness unto Israel. Because of the loving-kindness which he showed, his children were saved from among the Amalekites, 'So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites' (1 Sam. 15:6) (P.R.E. ch. 44, p. 106a = F., p. 350).

The following midrashim contain various aspects of the above account: Mid.Shmu. 18:3, p. 51; Mid.Ag. on Num. 24:20, p. 144 and Yal. Shim.R. 82, p. 25a give the basic story but do not question if Jethro showed kindness to all of Israel. Zohar 2, p. 195a = S. 4, pp. 155-156 traces the history of the Kenites among the Amalekites, but does not attribute Saul's kindness to them as a reward for Jethro's actions. Ber. 63b = S., p. 402 and Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 121, p. 362b interpret 1 Sam. 15:6 as the reward for Jethro's hospitality and use it to posit a reward for those who support the scholar class. Lev.R. 34:8 = S. 2, pp. 433-434; S.S.R. on S.S.2:5, mid. 3 = S. 4, p. 111 contain a discussion of Jethro's reward and the doctrine of showing kindness to one of the great in Israel.

Ex.R. 4:2 = S. 2, pp. 78-79 and Tan.HaMid. Shemot 16, p. 67a and M.H.G. 2, p. 73:3-12 continue the theme that good deeds resound and are felt through the ages:

The good deed of Jethro was that he received an avenger in his house who was fleeing from the enemy; hence there arose one from his house [Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite] who received the enemy [Sisera], who was fleeing from the redeemer [Deborah and Barak], and killed him (Ex.R. 4:2 = S. 2, p. 79).

In this case, though the congruence between Jethro and Jael seems reversed, the point is made that the "good deed will never cease to reappear from his house" (Ex. R. 4:2 = S. 2, p. 79).

13. The Soncino translator supplied these brackets.

Notes. (Continued)

14. I supplied these brackets.
15. San. 104a = S., p.705. These sources contain parallel versions, though not all have the second proof-text: TanHaNid.Yitro. 4, p. 94a; Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 2:20, p. 7b; Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:20, p. 127; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56a; Yal.Shim.R. 933, p. 322b; Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 130, p. 364a; M.H.G. 2, p. 35:1-10. Three sources (Mek.R.S.H., p. 92; Yal.Shim.R. 771, p. 267a; M.H.G. 2, p. 371:3-6) have a different lead-in. In them, Balaam complains about the size of the reward which two loaves of bread garnered for Jethro's descendants. Ex.R. 27:3 = S. 2, p. 323 has an incomplete reference of Balaam's complaining.
16. Sif.Num.pis. 80 = H., p. 77:2-3. Yal.Shim.R. 726, p. 328a parallels this. Continuing with the theme of an incentive offered to Jethro, Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:32 = H., p. 265:34-36 and Mish.R.El., p. 307:8-13 provide three explanations for the בן, the bounty, which the Israelites would extend to Jethro (see Num. 10:32). The passages conclude, "They promised that his sons would have a part in all of them [the Temple, the Torah and reward for the righteous]." Though these things are not the Sanhedrin per se, a case could be made that a seat in the Sanhedrin for the Kenites would combine Torah, Temple (Chamber of Hewn Stone) and reward for the righteous.
17. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 72:19.
18. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., pp. 72:19-73:1. These sources contain parallel versions: Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:7-8; Mek.R.S.H., p. 91 = Mek.R.S.E.H., p. 135:8-13; Yal.Shim.R. 169, p. 56a; M.H.G. 2, p. 369:14; M.H.G. 4, pp. 146:24-147:1.
19. Mid.Lekah Tov on Ex. 18:10, p. 61b.
20. Mid.Ag. on Ex. 2:20, p. 127.
21. Ecc.R. on Ecc. 3:11, mid. 1 = S. 387-388 contains information about Jethro's repentance and his subsequent reward. Tanna debe Eliyahu, ch.(5)6, p. 30 and Yal.Shim.R. 268, p. 82b state that since Jethro came to Moses, the houses of study will not lack for his descendants to fill them. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 and M.H.G. 2, p. 371:8-11 read in the name of R. Abahu, a second generation (279-320 C.E.) Palestinian Amora, (Mielziner, p. 45), "Jethro was worthy that from his sons would come great fosterers of the Torah. Who was this? It was Jabez." The concluding

Notes. (Continued)

part of this statement cannot be correct. Perhaps it should read "those who sat before Jabez."

22. Sif.Num.pis. 78 = H., p. 78:16-17. Yal.Shim.R. 323, p. 416a and Yal.Shim.v. 2 R. 38, p. 352b repeat this.
23. Sif.Zut. on Num. 10:29 = H., p. 263:11-13. M.H.G. 4, p. 147:1-4 parallels this. Mek.R.S.H., p. 92 = Mek. R.S.E.M., p. 135:31 - 136:1 and M.H.G. 2, pp. 370:23 - 371:1 interpret a promise that the High Priests would be Kenites to mean that the Kenites would always be in the Sanhedrin since the priesthood no longer existed. Gen. 49:10, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet" is also used by a number of sources to show that the Kenites would always be in the Sanhedrin (Gen.R. 97 (XV) = S. 1, p. 906; Yal.Shim.R. 160, p. 51b; Yal.Mak. on Is. 18:7, p. 106:15-16).

Conclusions

The search is now finished; the inquiry completed, and behold Jethro. While the Cambridge don referred to by the introduction began with one Homer and found another, this study began with many possibilities for the identity of Moses' father-in-law and found one Jethro. Following Jethro from the courts of Pharaoh to the fields of Midian to the wilderness of Sinai and beyond, this study has chronicled his history and that of his descendants to the end of time. After studying Jethro's names and deeds, his piety and rewards, and the rabbinic enhancements to his character, I can conclude that for the Rabbis Jethro was an admirable figure, a fitting father-in-law for Moses and the equal of Ruth and Rachab, the other two paradigmatic proselytes.

Yet what of the negative rabbinic assessments of Jethro cited in the course of this study? These negative comments can be divided into three categories: narrative, protective, and gratuitous. Only the gratuitous negative comments are truly anti-Jethro.

Those comments in the narrative category seem to be literary flourishes or embellishments whose negative nature is quickly blunted. Describing Jethro as one of Pharaoh's advisors as does the Talmud¹ gives some idea of his pre-biblical background. However, by stating that he fled, the Talmud quickly negates the "evil by association" of which one might suspect Jethro. Likewise, by exaggerating Jethro's

former idolatry², the midrash ultimately makes his conversion more wondrous and sincere, rather than leaving an image of an unredeemed heathen.

The negative comments in the protective category transcend their literal meaning to serve a higher purpose for the good of Judaism. For example, just as Jethro is subject to character enhancement to make him worthy of Moses, he also serves as a scapegoat to protect Moses. Moses did not forget or refuse to circumcise his son, rather Jethro prevented him from carrying out the mitzvah of ברית מילה.³ In midrashim of this type, Jethro does not represent a real person so much as a handy target or as a solution to biblical anomalies.

The gratuitously negative comments present a completely negative picture of Jethro without any mitigating factors as exist in the above two categories. Without any rhyme or reason, Jethro casts Moses in a pit to kill the savior of Israel.⁴ Another midrash depicts Jethro being sent away ignominiously, unworthy to share the Revelation at Sinai.⁵ In examples such as these, hostility is directed toward Jethro because he is the stranger, the outsider, the goy. Significantly, the midrashim which espouse this unrelieved hostility toward Jethro are of a late origin.

What conclusions then can be made regarding the general hypothesis? First, the great majority of the rabbinic material portrays Jethro in a favorable light. Midrash with this positive attitude can be found in sources of all dates.

However, the post-Tanhuma or Pesikta sources contain almost no original material that is favorable to Jethro. This raises again the unresolved problem of the role of copying versus editorial choice in the compilation of midrashic work.

Second, while seemingly negative material can be found in the Mekilta or the Talmud, they are of the narrative or protective categories. The fact that the inexplicable (gratuitous) negative comments come from sources such as Sefer HaYashar or Divre HaYamim Shel Moshe Rabbenu would seem to validate the general hypothesis. However, I would still hesitate to completely endorse the general hypothesis because the amount of negative material is small and scattered compared to the corpus of Jethro material as a whole. Though there does seem to be an observable correlation between the late date of a midrash and its negative attitude toward converts in the Jethro material, I would want to examine those late midrashic works as a whole for their attitudes towards converts and gentiles in general before finally assessing the evidence offered about Jethro. So I conclude by saying הדרן עלך וישמע יתרו.

NOTES

1. Sec. Jethro in Egypt, note 25.
2. Sec. Ex. 18:11 Now I know..., note 3.
3. Sec. Ex. 18:3 And her two sons..., note 9.
4. Sec. Ex. 2:15b - Ex. 2:22, note 10.
5. Sec. Ex. 18:27 Then Moses bade..., note 3. See first paragraph of that section also.

Appendix 1: Tools for finding rabbinic references to
Jethro - works with subject or verse indices.

Banberger, Bernard J. Proselytism in the Talmudic Period.
Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939.

Braude, William G., trans. The Midrash on Psalms. New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1959.

_____. Pesikta Rabbati. New Haven: Yale University
Press, 1968.

Braude, William and Kapstein, Israel, trans. Pesikta de
Rab Kahana. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society
of America, 1975.

Cohen, A., ed. The Minor Tractates of the Talmud. London:
The Soncino Press, 1965.

Edelman, Rafael, comp. Subject Concordance to the Babylonian
Talmud by Lazarus Goldschmidt. Copenhagen: Enjarminkgaard,
1959.

Epstein, Isadore, ed. The Babylonian Talmud. London: The
Soncino Press, 1948.

Freedman, Rabbi Dr. H. and Simon, Maurice, eds. The Midrash
Rabbah. New Compact Edition. London: The Soncino
Press, 1977.

Friedlander, Gerald, trans. Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer. 2nd.
ed. New York: Hermon Press, 1970.

Ginzberg, Louis, ed. The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia:
Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947.

Goldin, Judah, trans. The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

Lauterbach, Jacob Z., trans. Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael.
2nd. ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society
of America, 1976.

Montefiore, C. G. and Loewe, H., eds. A Rabbinic Anthology.
Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America,
1960.

הימאן, אהרן. תורה הכתובה והמסורה. תל אביב: הוצאת
"דביר", תרצ"ז.

Appendix 2: Historical and legal studies on proselytism.

Bamberger, Bernard J. Proselytism in the Talmudic Period. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939.

Bloom, Paul. The Gentile in Relation to Jewish Custom and Law According to Tannaitic Literature. Unpublished M.A.H.L. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1956.

Borowitz, Eugene. Universalism and Particularism in the Tannaitic Midrash. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College, 1952.

Braude, William G. Jewish Proselytizing in the 1st Five Centuries of the Common Era. Providence, R. I.: Brown University Press, 1940.

Eichhorn, David Max. Conversion to Judaism: A History and Analysis. New York: Ktav, Inc., 1966.

Franklin, Stephen David. A Section of the Sugya on Proselytism: B. Yeb: 44a-45b. Unpublished M.A.H.L. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1969.

Okamoto, Hiroshi. Translation and Observation of Hilkoth Gerim in the Shulhan Aruch. Unpublished M.A.H.L. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1964.

Ranson, Marius. The Jewish Doctrine of Proselytism and Propaganda. Its Relation to Pharasaic Theology and its Development to the Close of the Mishna. Unpublished M.A.H.L. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1914.

Rosenbloom, Joseph R. Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978.

Wacholder, Ben Zion. "Attitude toward Proselytizing in the Classical Halaha." Historia Judaica, 20:2 (October, 1958), 77-96.

רפ. ורט, אוריאל. תעמולה דתית של יהודים ותנועת ההתגיהת בימי הבית השני. ירושלים: האוניברסיטה העברית, 1965.

Appendix 3. Verses which deal with Jethro or the Kenites.

- Ex. 2:15
When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to have Moses killed; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well.
- Ex. 2:16
Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock;
- Ex. 2:17
but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock.
- Ex. 2:18
When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?"
- Ex. 2:19
They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; what is more, he drew water for us and watered the flock."
- Ex. 2:20
He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread."
- Ex. 2:21
Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife.
- Ex. 3:1
Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
- Ex. 4:18
Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."
- Ex. 6:25
And Aaron's son Eleazar took to wife one of Putiel's daughters, and she bore him Phinehas. Those are the heads of the fathers' house of the Levites by their families.
- Ex. 18:1
Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out from Egypt.
- Ex. 18:2
So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home,
- Ex. 18:3
and her two sons - of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land";
- Ex. 18:4
and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, "The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."

Appendix 3. (Continued)

Ex. 18:5

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.

Ex. 18:6

He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons."

Ex. 18:7

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent.

Ex. 18:8

Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them.

Ex. 18:9

And Jethro rejoiced over all the good that the Lord had done to Israel in delivering them from the Egyptians.

Ex. 18:10

"Blessed be the Lord," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians."

Ex. 18:11

Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people]..."

Ex. 18:12

And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.

Ex. 18:13

Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening.

Ex. 18:14

But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you have undertaken for the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"

Ex. 18:15

Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God."

Ex. 18:16

When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I arbitrate between a man and his neighbor, and I make known the laws and teachings of God."

Ex. 18:17

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right;

Ex. 18:18

you will surely wear yourself out, you as well as this people. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

Appendix 3. (Continued)

Ex. 18:19

Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You act for the people in behalf of God: you bring the disputes before God,

Ex. 18:20

and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.

Ex. 18:21

You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain; and set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

Ex. 18:22

Let them exercise authority over the people at all times; let them bring every major dispute to you, but decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself, and let them share the burden with you.

Ex. 18:23

If you do this - and God so commands you - you will be able to bear up; and all these people will go home content."

Ex. 18:24

Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said.

Ex. 18:25

Moses chose capable men out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people - chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

Ex. 18:26

And they exercised authority over the people at all times: the difficult matters they would bring to Moses, and all the minor matters they would decide themselves.

Ex. 18:27

Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land.

Num. 10:29

Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the Lord has said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will be generous with you; for the Lord has promised to be generous to Israel."

Num. 10:30

"I will not go," he replied to him, "but will return to my native land."

Num. 10:31

He said, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness and can be our guide.

Num. 10:32

So if you come with us, we will extend to you the same bounty that the Lord grants us."

Num. 24:21

He saw the Kenites and, taking up his theme, he said: Though your abode be secure, And your nest be set among cliffs,

Appendix 3. (Continued)

Ju. 1:16

And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad and they went and dwelt with the people.

Ju. 4:11

Now Heber the Kenite had severed himself from the Kenites, even from the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far as Elon-bezaananim, which is by Kedesh.

Ju. 4:17

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

1 Sam. 15:6

And Saul said unto the Kenites: 'Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye showed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt.' So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites,

Jer. 35:3

Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites;

Jer. 35:4

and I brought them into the house of the Lord, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaiah, the man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door;

Jer. 35:5

and I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites goblets full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them: 'Drink ye wine.'

Jer. 35:6

But they said: 'We will drink no wine; for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying: Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons, for ever;

Jer. 35:7

neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents, that ye may live many days in the land wherein ye sojourn.

Jer. 35:8

And we have hearkened to the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we our wives, our sons, nor our daughters;

Jer. 35:9

nor to build houses for us to dwell in, neither to have vineyard, or field, or seed;

Jer. 35:10

but we have dwelt in tents, and have hearkened, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.'

Appendix 3. (Continued)

Jer. 35:14

The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed, and unto this day they drink none, for they hearken to their father's commandment; but I have spoken unto you, speaking betimes and often, and ye have not hearkened unto Me.

Jer. 35:16

Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but this people hath not hearkened unto Me;

Jer. 35:18

And unto the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said: Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Because ye have hearkened to the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he commanded you;

Jer. 35:19

therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: There shall not be cut off unto Jonadab the son of Rechab a man to stand before Me for ever.'

I Chron. 2:55

And the families of scribes that dwelt at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab.

I Chron. 4:9

And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying: 'Because I bore him with pain.'

I Chron. 4:10

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying: 'Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest work deliverance from evil, that it may not pain me!' And God granted him that which he requested.

I Chron. 4:23

These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plantations and hedges: there they dwelt occupied in the king's work.

Bibliography

- Albright, William Foxwell. "Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Hebrew Tradition." Catholic Bible Quarterly, XXV, 1-11.
- _____. Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan. Jordan Lectures, 1965. London: University of London, the Athlone Press, 1968.
- Bamberger, Bernard J. Proselytism in the Talmudic Period. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939.
- Braude, William G., trans. The Midrash on Psalms. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- _____. Pesikta Rabbati. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Braude, William and Kapstein, Israel, trans. Pesikta de Rab Kahana. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975.
- Brown, Francis; Driver, S. R.; and Briggs, Charles A. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Corrected Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Buber, Martin. Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1958.
- Cohen, A., ed. The Minor Tractates of the Talmud. London: The Soncino Press, 1965.
- Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1972.
- Epstein, Isadore, ed. The Babylonian Talmud. London: The Soncino Press, 1948.
- Freedman, H. and Simon, Maurice, eds. The Midrash Rabbah. New Compact Edition. London: The Soncino Press, 1977.
- Friedlander, Gerald, trans. Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer. 2nd ed. New York: Hermon Press, 1970.
- Ginzberg, Louis, ed. The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947.
- Goldin, Judah, trans. The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.
- Jastrow, Marcus. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. New York: Title Publishing Co., 1943.

Bibliography. (Continued)

Jewish Encyclopedia. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1901.

Josephus, Flavius. The Works of Flavius Josephus. Translated by William Whiston. Newly edited by D. S. Margoliouth. London: George Routledge & Sons Limited, 1906.

Lauterbach, Jacob Z., trans. Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael. 2nd. ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976.

LeDeaut, R. and Robert, J., eds. and trans. Targum Des Chroniques (Cod. Vat. Urb. Ebr. I). Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971.

Mielziner, Moses. Introduction to the Talmud. 4th. ed. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1968.

Montefiore, C. G. and Loewe, H., eds. A Rabbinic Anthology. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960.

Oesterley, W.O.E., and Robinson, Theodore H. Hebrew Religion. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930.

Philo Judaeus. Philo. Translated by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958-63.

Rowley, H. H. From Joseph to Joshua: Biblical Traditions in the Light of Archaeology. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1948. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1952.

Sperling, Harry and Simon, Maurice, trans. The Zohar. 3rd. ed. London: The Soncino Press, 1970.

Strack, Hermann L. Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1931.

ספרים בעברית

- איש שלום, מאיר. סדר אליהו רבא וסדר אליהו זוטא. הדפסה שלישית. ירושלים: ספרי ואהרמן, תשכ"ט.
- _____. פסיקתא רבתי. ווינא: הוצאת ר' יוסף קאיזער, 1880.
- אפשטיין, י. ג., ומלמד, ע. ג. מכילתא דרבי שמעון בן יוחאי. ירושלים: הוצאת מקיצי נרדמים, תשס"ו.
- באנער, שלמה. ילקוט המכירי על ספר תהלים. ברדיטשוב: בדפוס חיים טעטל. צולם ונדפס מהדש. ירושלים: ש. מונזון, תשכ"ד.
- _____. מדרש אגדה. הוצאת חדשה. ניו-יורק: הוצאת מדע, תש"ך.
- _____. מדרש לקח טוב. ווילנא: הוצאת האלמנה והאחים ראם, תרמ"ד.
- _____. מדרש שמואל. קראקא: דפוס של יוסף פייטער, תרנ"ג.
- _____. מדרש תהלים. ווילנא: הוצאת האלמנה והאחים ראם, תרנ"א.
- _____. מדרש תנחומא. ווילנא: הוצאת האלמנה והאחים ראם, תרע"ג.
- גינזבורגר, משה. תרגום יונתן בן עוזיאל על התורה. ברלין: ס. קאלוארי ושותפיו, תרס"ג. נדפס מחדש. ירושלים, 1969.
- _____. תרגום ירושלמי לתורה. ברלין: ס. קאלוארי ושותפיו, תרנ"ח. נדפס מחדש. ירושלים, 1969.
- גרינהוס, אלעזר. ילקוט המכירי על משלי. ירושלים: בדפוס פרומקין, תרס"ג.
- _____. ספר הלקוטים. ירושלים, 1898.
- האפפמאנן, דוד צבי. מדרש תנאים על ספר דברים. ברלין: צבי איטקאווסקי, 1908.
- _____. מכילתא דרבי שמעון בן יוחאי. גראנקפורט א. מ.: י. קויפמאנן, תרס"ה.
- האראוויטץ, חיים שאול. ספרי על ספר במדבר. וספרי זוטא. לייפציג: גוטטאו פאק, תרע"ז.

האראוויטץ, ח. ש., ורבין, י. א. מכילתא דרבי ישמעל. מהדורה שניה. ירושלים: ספרי ואהרמן, תש"ל.

הימאן, אהרן. תולדות תנאים והאמוראים. לונדון: דפוס "העקספרס", 1910.

_____. תורה הכתובה והמסורה. תל אביב: הוצאת "דביר", תרצ"ז.

הימן, דוב. מקורות ילקוט שמעוני לנביאים וכתובים. ירושלים: הוצאת מוסד הרב קוק, תשכ"ה.

הימן, דוב וטילוני, יצחק. ילקוט שמעוני-ספר שמות. ירושלים: הוצאת מוסד הרב קוק, תשל"ז.

ורטהימר, שלמה אהרן. בתי מדרשות. ירושלים: דפוס מטה לילי-ענטהאל, תרנ"ג.

(ספר ה) זהר. ווילנא: הוצאת האלמנה והאחים ראם, תרפ"ב.

יחיאל, נתן בן. ספר ערוך השלם. עורך, הנוך קאהוס. ניו-יורק: פרדס, תשט"ו.

ילקוט שמעוני. ירושלים: הוצאת ספרים לוין-אפשטיין, תשכ"ז.

יעללינעק, אהרן. בית המדרש. מהדורה שניה. ירושלים: הוצאת במברגר את וואהרמן, ירושלים, 1938.

(ספר ה) ישר. עם הגהות של ר' יוסף שמואל הקטן. לבוב: דפוס האחים עבנער, תרפ"ט.

כשר, מנחם מ. תורה שלמה. ניו-יארק: דפוס האחים שולזינגר, תש"ד.

מדרש רבא. ווילנא: הוצאת האלמנה והאחים ראם, תרמ"ה.

מדרש תנחומא. עם הפירושים עץ יוסף וענף יוסף. ירושלים: הוצאת ספרים לוין-אפשטיין.

מירקין, משה א. מדרש רבא. תל אביב: הוצאת "יבנה", 1956.

מנדלבוים, דוב. פסיקתא דרב כהנא. נויארק: הוצאת בית המדרש לרבנים שבאמריקא, תשכ"ב.

מקראות גדולות. עם ל"ב פירושים. ניו-יארק: פרדס, תשי"א.

מרגליות, מרדכי. מדרש הגדול על ספר בראשית. ירושלים: הוצאת מוסד הרב קוק, תש"ז.

_____. מדרש הגדול על ספר שמות. ירושלים: הוצאת מוסד

הרב קוק, חשט"ז.

_____ מדרש ויקרא רבא. ירושלים: "אדרס", תשי"ד.

ענעלאו, הימן. מנורת המאור. ניו-יורק: הוצאת בלוק, תרפ"ס.

_____ משנת רבי אליעזר. ניו-יורק: הוצאת בלוק, תרצ"ד.

פינקלשטיין, אליעזר ארי'. ספרי על ספר דברים. ברלין: הוצאת האגודה התרבותית היהודית בגרמניה, ת"ש.

פרייאמאן, ישראל מאיר. ספר והזהיר. מהדורה שניה. תל אביב, תשכ"ה.

פרקי רבי אליעזר. ווארשה: צבי באמבערג, תרי"ג. צולם ונדפס. ירושלים, תשכ"ג.

צונץ, יום-טוב, ואלבעק, הנוך. הדרשות בישראל. ירושלים: הוצאת מוסד ביאליק, תש"ז.

צוקרמאנדל, משה שמואל. תוספתא. ירושלים: הוצאת ספרי ואהרמן, תש"ל.

רבינוביץ, צבי. מדרש הגדול על ספר במדבר. ירושלים: הוצאת מוסד רב קוק, תשכ"ז.

סטינשניידר, מ. אלפאכיתא דבן סירה: ראשונה ושניה. בערלין: דפוס פרידלענדער, 1858.

שעכסער, שניאור זלמן. אבות דרבי נתן. ווינא: הוצאת המוציא לאור, תרמ"ז.

שעפטעל, ש., ופערלעס, פ. באורי אונקלוס. מינכען: סהעאדאר אקערמאנן, תרמ"ח.

שפירא, יהודה. ילקוט המכירי על ישעיהו. ברלין: צבי איסצקאווסקי, 1894.

תלמוד בבלי. ניו-יורק: הוצאת אוצר הספרים, 5718.

תלמוד ירושלמי. ירושלים: מכון חתם סופר, תש"ל.

תלמוד ירושלמי. קראטאשין: דוב בער מאנאש, תרכ"ו.