Food and Foreigners

How Eating and Drinking in Selected Biblical Texts Reflect Identity

Janet Roberts

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

February 22, 2005
Advisor: Dr. S. David Sperling

THE KLAU LIBRARY
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE
Jewish Institute of Religion
Brookdale Center
One West Fourth Street
New York, NY 10012

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

FINAL THESIS APPROVAL FORM

AUTHOR: Janet Roberts

TITLE: Food and Foreigners - How Eating and Drinking in Selected Biblical Texts Reflect Identity

S. David Sperling 2/24/05

SIGNATURE OF ADVISOR **Date**

Dana Fineman 2/24/05

SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR **Date**

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE YOUR THESIS WILL BE CONSIDERED ACCEPTED.

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT ALL INFORMATION ON THIS FORM.

2005

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Feast of Belshazzar, depicted in the Bible in the Book of Daniel, is a story whose influence extended beyond the world of religion into other cultural arenas. Over the centuries there have been examples of creative exploration of this text through painting[1], poetry[2], drama[3], and music[4]. Like the scene of Belshazar's feast in Dan 5, Joseph's story, too, has been treated in the arts, from literature[5], to plays, even a Broadway show and a movie[6]. The power of these narratives affected artists who were inspired to transmit meaning through their different genres. Most of the famous creative renditions of the biblical stories have come from a Christian perspective. Yet at the core of the narratives lies the theme of how one maintains a Jewish identity while living within a gentile world.

This paper seeks to explore that theme, with a primary focus on the role that eating and drinking play within the biblical context. Selected passages are examined for their linguistic and thematic connections to one another. It will be demonstrated through this comparison that some biblical texts are commentaries on others. Issues around food and

---

[1] "Belshazzar's Feast," Rembrandt von Rijn, ca. 1635.

[2] "Vision of Belshazzar," George Gordon, Lord Byron, from *Hebrew Melodies*, 1815.

[3] "Belshazzar's Feast," Calderon de la Barca, 1637.

[4] "Belshazzar's Feast," choral work by William Walton, 1931, as well as incidental music composed by Sibelius (opus 51) in 1906 for a play by Procope.

[5] Thomas Mann's masterful Joseph and His Brothers, 1933-1943.

[6] "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," original Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice London production 1968, Broadway production 1982; film version 2000.

drink deal with more than the need for physical survival.

The Jewish people has always been both inner-directed and outer-directed. In a way, the inner-direction drives the outer-direction, and the outer-direction allows the inner direction to survive and thrive. This is not a model of thesis-antithesis--synthesis, as in Hegelian thought. Rather, it is a constant tension, felt in different ways in different ages, and embodied in the lives and work of Jewish leaders across the generations. Gerson Cohen's essay, "The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish Life," makes clear that there has always been this tug toward the dominant, broader culture. Questions of what is essential to Jewish identity and what is adaptable, are confronted by every Jew in a foreign culture. How can a Jewish leader find a balance between these two poles, holding onto an inner core of values, the essentials of faith to that individual, maintaining a particularistic Jewish identity, while meeting the pragmatic needs of his people in their own time? Our biblical tradition contains various examples of attempts to strike this balance, beginning with the model of Joseph in the patriarchal period, and proceeding to the story of Daniel in the days of the closing of the biblical canon. *That* a balance was struck is apparent from history: in the centuries following the Babylonian exile, Jewish institutions and Jewish life survived and continued to develop. *How* the balance was achieved will be the question for this paper.

Chapter I. The nature of religious identity in the biblical world

In order to proceed with the discussion of the dominant culture's challenge to Jewish religious identity, it is necessary first to examine the nature of religious and ethnic identity as these began to emerge in the ancient world. Originally, *Yisrael*, 'Israelite,' was a technical biblical term, meaning one who dwelled in the geographical region known as Israel (that is, the northern area of modern-day Israel; a southern dweller was referred to as a Judahite, or Judean). The term 'Israelite' as used later in Roman times is, strictly speaking, an anachronism, since there was no Israelite kingdom after 721 BCE.

The problem of terminology stems from the Greek language. The term *Yehudi* for a Jew is already late biblical (see Est 2:5, "*ish yehudi*"). Greeks knew the Hebrew word *Yisrael* and translated it as *Yisraeliti*, 'Israelite.' Over time the term 'Israelite' expanded from its original geographical meaning, and began to be used by early Jews to refer to their religion, describing an 'Israelite' as a follower of the God of Israel, Yahweh, regardless of where the person lived. Greeks evolved terms such as *Hebraioi* and *Yudaioi*, which were attempts to supplant the newly-expanded meaning of *Yisrael* so as to encompass not just a geographical designation but a religious one. The Greek language was seeking a word for 'Jew.' The resultant preferred term was *Yudaios* (from which our English word 'Jew' derives).

The problem of terminology was compounded by the conflation of religious identity with ethnic identity. The notion of ethnicity has its origins in the classical Greek worldview.

A free Greek man belonged to the *politeia* - he was a citizen with certain rights. The Greek writer Hecataeus (300 BCE) described Judeans as having a *politeia*, too. Antiochus III recognized Torah as the *politeia* of the Jews of the land of Israel. Philo and Josephus both describe Judaism as a *politeia* and "speak of outsiders who become insiders by adopting the *politeia* of the Judeans"[7]. Torah law is the *politeia* of the Jews, a recognition of its status as constitution. Emerging in the Hasmonean period was the concept that one could be part of this Torah *politeia* even while living outside the land of Israel or Judea. Here we see geography (hailing from Israel or Judea) becoming separate from ethnicity (a way of life). By following their way of life (another way to translate *politeia*), one could become *Yudaios*, even if one were not born in Judea, or born a follower of Yahweh.

Greeks divided the world into Hellenes and non-Hellenes. Hellenes shared four common elements: blood, language, modes of worshiping the gods, and ways of life. The latter three are achieved identity and mutable; the first is ascribed and immutable. The same standards were used for *Yudaioi*. By changing the elements that could be changed, one could become a Hellene, or *Yudaioi*, even without the blood link. Being a Hellene or Jew became a matter of enculturation, not birth.

How may we define early Jewish ethnicity? Often ethnicity is defined by contrasting one

---

[7] Shaye Cohen, The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties (University of California Press: Berkeley and L.A., 1999), 126.

group's behavior to another's. One group does *x*; the other group does not do *x*. Or, 'we' do *x*, 'they' do the opposite of *x*. The displacement of populations in the late biblical period led to increased exposure to other ways of life, and interaction with peoples who heretofore might have lived, worked and observed religious rituals in separate spheres. The lines of demarcation between Israelite and non-Israelite were no longer so clearly drawn (if indeed they ever were completely demarcated) in "the economic, social, and judicial" spheres; in fact the boundaries were "permeable"[8]. Physically, the Israelite and non-Israelite groups must have been in close proximity on a regular basis, particularly in the cities once large populations were displaced.

Shaye Cohen noted that there was nothing externally distinctive about Jews in the 1st century BCE. Nothing in outwardly observable physical appearance distinguished a Jew from a Greek. According to Cohen, public nudity was uncommon (except in the gymnasia and the bathhouse) so that circumcision was not in evidence all the time. Cohen found nothing distinctive in dress[9] or haircut, beard or language. Most Jews spoke Greek, he says, and had Greek names (though some Jews also had Hebrew names). Tcherikover differs slightly:

> "It is sufficiently clear from anti-Semitic literature that Jewish religious customs – circumcision, the Sabbath, the festivals and the dietary laws – were the first things to attract the attention of the Gentiles, serving as signs which made the Jew

---

[8] Gary Porton, The Stranger Within Your Gates (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994), 4.

[9] Cohen maintains that *tzitzit* were either worn inconspicuously or not at all by those Jews who had contact with the Romans.

immediately recognizable"[10].

As Gerson Cohen observed, there were Jews who were attracted by many aspects of the thriving Greek culture, and began a process of acculturation. Lester Grabbe describes Hellenistic culture as a process, one in which Jews among others were actively engaged. Grabbe says, "There is no indication that the Jews were different from the other peoples in this world, both in adopting specific Greek elements and practices and in preserving their own cultural heritage"[11]. One aspect of Greek culture was its openness and ability to tolerate different ethnic and religious groups. It was not necessary to give up a particularistic non-Hellenic identity in order to become Hellenized. Remarks Grabbe, "the balance of the different elements and their relationships were not static, ... but constantly changing and developing"[12]. In other words, there was a spectrum of Hellenization. Being a Hellene was not an all-or-nothing proposition, and different individuals and different groups could be at different points along the spectrum, and were more or less acculturated to Greek ways of life, in an ongoing process.

In light of this ongoing process of acculturation, to what extent were diaspora Jews (at least, those wishing to do so) able to keep their ties with their Jewish identities? Or,

---

[10] Victor Tcherikover, Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews (Atheneum: New York, 1970), 354.

[11] Lester L. Grabbe, Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian, Volume One: The Persian and Greek Periods (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1992), 168.

[12] Ibid.

looking at the question from another perspective, how could the emerging Jewish religious establishment keep hold over diasporan Jewry? One attempt at an answer to the latter-phrased question is: through the dissemination of a new kind of Jewish literature, made available in Greek translation. One goal of this new kind of literature would be to keep Jews in far-flung communities connected and under the Palestinian/Babylonian political and religious influence. Tcherikover includes the Book of Esther as an example of this new literary genre.

The narratives examined in this thesis contain stories that may have originated in different eras of Jewish history. But the final form of the Bible took shape in the context of this emerging notion of ethnic identity in the Greek world. Despite differences in overall genre when examined from a literary or form-critical approach, the stories about Joseph and Daniel share a common aspect of reinforcing the Jewish identity of the 'hero' all the while he or she is deeply embedded in the foreign culture. These stories function, at least in part, as a guide for the Jews of the diaspora, to provide models of different ways in which Jews could maintain their Jewish identity. "Behavior is a reflection of and a reaction to social action and social understanding"[13]. In this regard, eating and drinking played a crucial, if seldom examined, role. The symbolic role that eating and drinking have played in maintaining religious identity are additional manifestations of outer-directed behavior that also have an inner-directed element. How does food serve to either

---

[13] Victor Harold Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative" (JSOT 65, 1995), 35.

maintain distinctions or blur identities?

Chapter II Joseph: Assimilation as a way of life

An easy entree into the discussion of Jewish identity and assimilation is the Joseph cycle in the Book of Genesis. The stories about Joseph form the longest narrative unit in the Torah, and provide a powerful example of leadership in a gentile environment. In a world threatened by famine, Joseph is the one who sustains the people, Israelites as well as Egyptians.

Setting and genre of the Joseph story

Scholars do not all agree as to the dating of the Joseph stories, though a large segment of the critical scholarship accepts pre-exilic dating. A minority view assigns the Joseph cycle along with the Book of Esther to the late post-exilic period, and views them both as stories intended for a diaspora audience[14]. Biblical scholars have tended to look to other Canaanite sources for insights into the Hebrew text of the Bible. There are some, however, who bring their knowledge of Egyptian culture to bear on biblical study, among them Joseph Vergote, Donald Redford, and James Hoffmeier. They have taken different positions on such significant matters as the dating of the biblical record and the relative importance of the Egyptian influence on Israelite culture. To date, there is no concrete evidence for an Israelite presence in Egypt, but these scholars and others base their writing on indirect and supporting evidence.

---

[14] Donald B. Redford, among others, holds to this view. See Redford,. A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50), in Supplement to Vetus Testamentum, Volume XX (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970).

This paper accepts the pre-exilic dating of the Joseph story. The Joseph story is viewed as an extension of the patriarchal narrative, a family saga, interleaved with a political narrative. In support of this composite origin, Westermann cites the fact that there is carry-over from earlier chapters of Genesis in the characters portrayed; the conflicts are among and between these characters, who are mainly members of one family[15].

Further argument in favor of pre-exilic dating is based in part on the depiction of Egypt in the Joseph story. Westermann says that it is largely positive in nature, and finds

> "amazing...the completely positive and friendly portrayal of the Egyptian people and the approval of the fact that one of Israel's fathers was an important man at Pharaoh's court. This is best understood from the period of Solomon when the young Israelite monarchy had friendly relations with the Egyptian court and there was a brisk cultural exchange between them. This too is the source of the lively interest in a foreign land, its people, and its royal court"[16].

The Joseph story is certainly set in Egypt, and plays a central role in the discussion of the "Egypt in Israel" question (see S. David Sperling's The Original Torah). The investigation of the possible Egyptian sources for the Joseph narrative frame another way of looking at the biblical text, beyond the literary and form-critical approaches.

In addition to disputes over the date of the Joseph cycle, there is a range of opinions as to its literary form, as we will see is the case with the stories in Dan 1-6. Von Rad ascribed parts of the Joseph story to the wisdom tradition, a theory that was widely accepted for a

---

[15] Claus Westermann, Genesis: An Introduction (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1992).

[16] Westermann 1992, Introduction, p. 245.

long time, then was questioned by Redford and others[17]. Part of the Egyptian Wisdom tradition is a form referred to as the 'Instruction.' It comprises "sage and practical advice" passed on by a nobleman or ruler to his heir or successor. The 'Instruction' also aimed to convey political advice. It served a didactic function that was "wide-ranging and especially well suited for one being trained to enter court service. The Instructions depict an ideal wise courtier...Several aspects of this motif" are present in the depiction of Joseph[18].

Who is Joseph?

Joseph is a dreamer. We might even term him a visionary. His ability to interpret dreams and faces makes him a 'reader' of 'texts.' This interpretative ability gives him a kind of advisory talent which advances him into a leadership position in Pharaoh's court. He is successful in the Egyptian milieu and becomes manager in charge on a grand scale. The nature of his authority is in the material realm; he is not a spiritual leader. Young, good-looking, a dreamer, his father's favorite; Joseph is a *tzaddik* according to later rabbinic tradition, and he is the only one of the tribes to be so designated. Joseph is the one son of Jacob who carries his family's ethnic and religious heritage into the gentile world (albeit passively, not by his own choice), and he is the one who carries

---

[17] Westermann, Introduction, 242.

[18] W. Lee Humphreys, Joseph and His Family (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, S.C., 1988), 139.

responsibility for the family's physical survival (decidedly through his own actions[19]). Later Jewish tradition reads into the text that survival of the people entails more than meeting physical needs; it requires holding onto something particularistic, including aspects of dress and diet. But on the most straightforward, indeed the pragmatic level, Joseph is the *mashbir* to Egyptians and Israelites alike. Food, or its lack, plays a central role in the Joseph narrative.

Centrality of food (or lack thereof) in the cycle

Against the larger literary canvas of reversals that operate within the Joseph narrative (moving from Joseph's servitude and incarceration to his leadership; from brotherly enmity to embrace; from the brothers' 'sin' to their repentance and Joseph's forgiveness), the leitmotif of famine/feast is noteworthy on its own terms. The stories in chapters 37 - 47 of Genesis have as their backdrop the pervasive famine that grips Egypt and all the earth (Gen 47:13). Food motifs predominate in the story, and the need for sustenance drives the narrative, as Joseph himself points out near the end (Gen 45:5,7). Images of food, or the lack thereof, recur, in ways both explicit and symbolic. Some instances among many are the opening scenes where Joseph's brothers are grazing their flocks (Gen 37:1, 12); Joseph's dream symbolism of sheaves of wheat bowing down to him (Gen 37:7); the empty pit with no water in it (Gen 37:24); Potiphar's euphemistic reference to

[19] Though Zornberg makes a point about Joseph having a sense of being part of an *alilah*, a plot.

lechem (Gen 39:6)[20]; dreams of the cupbearer (Gen 49:9-11) and the baker (Gen 40:17) in prison; Pharaoh's prefiguring dreams of years of plenty followed by years of famine (Gen 41:19-24); Jacob's adjuration to his ten sons that there is *shever* in Egypt (Gen 41:1,2) ....the list could go on. At the fulcrum of privation and provender stands Joseph.

Structurally, the famine functions as a plot device that serves to advance the story, to move the Abrahamic family to Egypt, where the drama of the Exodus will eventually unfold[21]. As a literary motif, famine may also serve a symbolic role, one that later commentators addressed[22].

---

[20] See footnote 26 below.

[21] The famine that drives the narrative in the Joseph cycle is not a form of divine punishment. It reflects fluctuating agricultural conditions in the Nile delta. Sharon calls it "theologically neutral" (Diane M. Sharon, Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible [Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, IN, 2002], 99). Other biblical texts explain famine as divine punishment. See, e.g., 2 Sam 21:1. A poet like Amos uses hunger as metaphor for needing the words of God. Amos 6:4, 6 depicts feasting and drinking of which the writer disapproves; the ensuing famine that follows the locust plague is "poetic justice if not gallows humour indeed" (Robert P. Carroll, "YHWH's Sour Grapes: Images of Food and Drink in the Prophetic Discourses of the Hebrew Bible," in Semeia 86: Food and Drink in the Biblical Worlds, [SBL: Atlanta, GA, 1999], 125). And see Eze 2:8-3:3, where equating physical famine with a lack of God's words comes to its logical extreme: the prophet eats the scroll containing the words of God (Jon D. Levenson, "Some Unnoticed Connotations in Jeremiah 20:9," in Catholic Biblical Quarterly 46 [1984], 223).

[22] E.g., "As Israel has preserved Torah, so Torah, like bread and water, milk and wine, has preserved and nourished Israel," (Introduction to *Tanna de Be Eliyahu*, Varda Books ebook edition, 2001, 32). A tradition of a 7-year famine is a common motif in Near Eastern literature, both in legend and history. An example is the 7-year drought in the Gilgamesh epic.

Joseph's descent into the pit in Gen. 37:24 foreshadows the famine that will afflict all the land. There is no water in the pit, which explains why Joseph does not drown. But the lack of water also comports with the larger story about lack of resources. In stark counterpoint to Joseph's dire predicament, his brothers sit down to eat a meal[23]. They callously "eat *lechem*," "perhaps enjoying delicacies Joseph had brought from their father (cf. 1 Sam 17:17-18)"[24]. In this moment of crisis, Joseph consumes nothing, yet the brothers eat. They go on with their lives, even conducting trade. Only one of the group, Judah, makes note that Joseph is "our brother, our own flesh"[25].

Identity issues in Joseph cycle

Joseph, the standard-bearer for the Israelite tradition, survives his descent into the empty pit, only to confront further challenges. He faces the potential for debasement in Potiphar's house, and goes down again, this time to the Egyptian prison, the *bor*. The temptation of Potiphar's wife in Gen 39, the *lechem* that his master left in Joseph's hand, is characterized by Joseph as a sin against his God[26]. This is the first time Joseph utters

---

[23] In Gen 37:25, the brothers eat bread. In Gen 37:26, Judah asks, מה בצע? Judah is asking, 'what will it profit us,' or colloquially, 'what is our "cut"?' In rabbinic Hebrew the verb בצע means 'to cut,' as bread.

[24] Gordon J. Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 16 - 50, volume 2 (Word Books: Dallas, TX, 1994), 354.

[25] JPS translation. Furthering the motif of food, בשר of course can refer to meat. And see Jacob's response in Gen 37:33, a beast "devoured" Joseph, using the root אכל, 'to eat.'

[26] Gen 39:9. *Lechem* in Gen 39:6 is generally taken to be a euhpemism for 'his wife.' Some see a connection to Prov 30:20 ("the way of an adulteress"): Mrs. Potiphar looks to

God's name, and it is noteworthy that he does so in the foreign land[27]. According to Leibowitz, Joseph's words serve to bring his Hebrew God into the Egyptian milieu. This prefigures the temptations to 'sin' that Joseph will face once he is elevated within the Egyptian court - only there the 'sin' will be, not the temptation to give in to improper sexual activity but the pressure, internal or external, to give up on his family and his Israelite culture.

Yet personal piety is not the point in the Joseph narrative, as it will be later for the writer of the Book of Daniel. The Joseph story is not a polemic against Egyptian practice. One evidence for this is the overwhelmingly positive treatment of the Egyptian milieu. Westermann writes, "There is no narrative in the Old Testament that reflects so immediately and vividly acquaintance with and wonder at a foreign land."[28] The biblical writer displays an interest, not in the history or grand architecture of Egypt, but in Egyptian institutions. Adds Westermann:

> "The interest centers around the Pharaoh's court;... Pharaoh's officers, their titles, investiture with robe, ring, and chain, court ceremonial, the king's birthday and his titles, the courtiers, Egyptian priests, the chief administrator, Joseph's position

---

Joseph to satisfy this appetite, David W. Cotter, ed., Berit Olam series, Genesis (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 2003), 291. Wenham disagrees, saying, "This may be a euphemism for 'his wife' but it seems more likely to be an idiom for 'his private affairs'", Wenham, 374. Compare below, Daniel's refusal to eat the food from the king's table.

[27] Nechama Leibowitz, New Studies in Bereshit, Aryeh Newman, translator (Hemed Press: Jerusalem, no year given), 436-7

[28] Westermann, Introduction, 245.

and all that pertains to it."[29]

Joseph achieves the highest influence in Pharaoh's court, and the trappings of his authority are vested in his outward appearance. Clothing and other physical objects figure prominently in the Joseph stories, of course. There is the cloak first given to him as a sign of favoritism, torn from him, grasped in Mrs. Potiphar's hand. But when he dons Egyptian robes and cuts his hair, we are moved to ask, who is the man behind the clean-shaven mask? In taking on a different appearance, Joseph looks more like an Egyptian than an Israelite. Has he also changed his allegiance? Wildavsky asks if the Pharaoh's signet ring that Joseph wears signals "that Pharaoh's values are imprinted on Joseph?" Does the gold chain around Joseph's neck, which marks his newly elevated status, also mark "a chain by which Joseph is held fast to Pharaoh?"[30] Similarly, "Joseph's physical transformation into an Egyptian makes him acceptable at the Egyptian

---

[29] Ibid. But see Redford, who claims that some elements within the Joseph story may *seem* like Egyptian background details but are not genuinely Egyptian in origin. An example he cites is Joseph's title in Gen 45:8 as "father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt" (JPS translation). Attempts to find such a title within Egyptian records have not been successful, Redford says. He notes the "vagueness" of the title, and its "Hebraic ring," and adds, "The same caution must be exercised with regard to other titles as well, e.g. the 'chief of the butlers,' and the 'chief of the bakers.'....*masqim* and *'opim* were prominent in the roster of servants in the Israelite royal courts." Redford, Genesis 37-50, 191-192.

Redford may be correct that these titles are not genuinely Egyptian. But his critique does not alter the listening audience's perception, which is more important than etymological authenticity.

[30] Aaron Wildavsky, Assimilation versus Separation: Joseph the Administrator and the Politics of Religion in Biblical Israel (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, NJ, 1993), 120.

court and it reflects his own acceptance of a new identity within the power structure of a foreign culture"[31].

The motif of clothing in Genesis as symbolic of status, power, employment, and relationships has often been explored by commentators. Clothing serves as a means of "visual communication"[32]. "Because Joseph is dressed as an Egyptian and acts like an Egyptian, he is unreservedly taken to be an Egyptian"[33]. Supporting this understanding, we see that in Gen 43 Joseph is served separately from his brothers, as would be appropriate to someone who is Egyptian (on this question, see below). Do the biblical texts that revolve around eating and drinking in the Joseph story provide any insights into the issue of religious identity?

Chapter 37 of Genesis is to be read in concert with chapter 43. The two meals form an inclusio, bracketing the narrative with two scenes of communal meals. In both chapters, a food motif is used to emphasize or demarcate identity. In Gen 37:28, the Israelite identity of Joseph and his brothers is thrown into relief by the sudden appearance of Midianite/Ishmaelite traders[34]. In chapter 43, Joseph sits apart from his brothers at the

---

[31] Matthews, 34.

[32] Ibid., 26.

[33] Ibid., 35.

[34] The items carried in trade also play out the food motif to a degree. Wenham notes that "gum, balm and ladanum...are rare terms, and the identity of the substances being traded is uncertain," but he agrees with "the suggestions of M. Zohary, Plants of the Bible," that

banquet table, signifying the difference between Egyptians and Hebrews.

Feasting scenes

So many significant encounters between people in the Bible occur around the setting of eating and drinking. Biblical feasts are more than depictions of commensality. Everyday matters like eating and drinking are seldom presented in the Bible, and when they do appear, it is noteworthy.

There are levels of significance attached to eating and drinking in biblical settings. Among these are eating and drinking as symbolic action in the context of making a covenant between two people[35]. There are biblical passages where eating and drinking perform the function of "miraculous reassurance,"[36] such as Gen 16:6-15; 21-17-20. Instances of etiologies in the Bible may involve motifs of eating/drinking[37]. There can also be sexual connotations to eating and drinking[38].

---

the items listed were used in medicines, perfumes, incense, and "manufacture of confections" Wenham, 355. Redford, Egypt, Canaan and Israel, 426, notes that Egypt and Transjordan engaged in regular trade of such aromatic spices, notably in the 7th - 3rd centuries BCE.

[35] See Isaac's covenant with Abimelech in Gen 26:26-33; Jacob's with Laban in Gen 31:43-46.

[36] Sharon, 55.

[37] *Nahal Eshkol*, Num 13:24.

[38] See Prov 5:15; Prov 30:20; Song 4:13-15. Aside from the reference in Gen 39:6 to *lechem*, such connotations do not appear apposite here.

All kinds of eating and drinking were done in the ancient world with reference to a deity; many instances of this occur in the Bible. In our time, people are often far removed from the sources of food production, and even more removed from contemplation, in a religious sense, of the ultimate source of sustenance. Ancient peoples were more cognizant of the deep relationship between divinity and keeping people alive. In this regard, food takes on a cultic role, though it is never completely severed from other, non-cultic settings as well. The slaughter of meat was not always for cultic purposes[39]. Sometimes "the setting of the table is consistent with the normal preparation for a meal...."[40]

Images of normal farming and viticulture can be used to reflect metaphors of "peace and security, of invasion and destruction, or of famine and starvation"[41]. Because of the harsh realities of time and place, where crops fail to thrive or are destroyed, these poles of feast/excess versus famine/lack are not unique to biblical literature, even in its time period.

The deity as provider appears in the Ugaritic story which is echoed in the Joseph

---

[39] See Exod 21:37; Prov 7:22; I Sam 25:11; Gen 43:16. The same is true regarding the mixing of wine, see Song 8:2; Isa 5:22; Prov 9:2.

[40] Judith McKinlay, Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink, JSOT Supp. Series 216 (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, England, 1986), 52. And an after-dinner cigar may be just a good smoke.

[41] Carroll, 116.

narrative, the *Tale of Aqhat*, which relates that "'Baal when he gives life gives a feast, gives a feast to the life-given and bids him drink'"[42]. Another parallel to the Joseph story, much later in time, is mentioned in the works of Josephus, both in his Wars of the Jews and Antiquities. He gives accounts of the dream of Archelaus, employing symbolic figuring of animals and grain[43].

"Provisioning of troops with food and water" is a significant "expression of leadership competence"[44], both divine and human. The Bible portrays God as the ultimate troop leader: without God at the lead, a battle becomes a lost cause. Not all depictions of military leadership, whether divine or human, include provisioning with food and water, but Sharon identifies 14 instances that do so, including 1 Kings 20:12 and 2 Kings 3:4-25.

A human troop leader can stand in for God. The best example of this is King David, who "is shown to provision his men (though almost always by means of gifts from loyal

---

[42] AQHT A(vi) line 30, ANET, p. 151, cited in McKinlay, 49. Another cross-cultural example: "At the dedication of Marduk's palace in Enuma Elish there is a banquet prepared and held in order to celebrate the event." Ibid.

[43] As noted in Robert Gnuse, "The Jewish Dream Interpreter in a Foreign Court," Journal for the Study of Pseudoepigrapha 7 (1990), 42, this account appears twice in Josephus, once in the Wars 2:111-113, once in Antiquities 17:345-348, with slight differences between the two accounts. The version in Wars has oxen eating up ears of corn. Archelaus was the ruler, though he was a bad one, according to Gnuse, "removed from his post and exiled to Vienna." Only Simon the Essene can interpret the dream. In the Antiquities version, oxen eat up the wheat.

[44] Sharon, 79.

subjects or enemy booty) in all contingencies[45]". Joseph plays this role in the Book of Genesis. In addition to acknowledging God's role above his own at dream interpretation, Joseph identifies God as the ultimate provider, in Gen 50:20. Though Joseph does claim a role for himself (Gen 45:5), he makes it clear that he is no substitute for God (Gen 50:19). The emphasis is squarely on the Hebrew God as the mover of all events, able to take evil actions and turn them to good purpose.

In Genesis 41 and following, Joseph is the one who sustains his people, through God's instrumentality. The Hebrew Bible keeps to the theological theme that God is the host[46]. In the ancient world hospitality was critical for survival. There is no word in the Bible for hospitalilty, but it is implied in the obligation to care for the sojourner; as evidenced in numerous passages[47].

Where food is simply consumed in a social context, "Table fellowship founded on hospitality implies mutual trust"[48]. The same will be discussed below about drinking together. Yet the meals in Gen 37 and 43 are not based on mutual trust. In the earlier scene, Joseph was absent from the 'table' by dint of being in the pit. In chapter 43,

---

[45] Ibid., 83.

[46] See, e.g., Ps 23:5.

[47] See Lev 19:33; Job 31:32; Gen 18:5; Exod 2:20; and from a negative perspective, see Deut 23:3, 4.

[48] Philip J. King, Hesed ve-Emet, "Commensality in the Biblical World" in Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs (Scholars Press: Atlanta, 1998), 54.

Joseph is physically present but conceals his identity from his brothers. There are really three tables: one for Joseph alone, one for the brothers, one for the Egyptians (Gen 43:32). "The removal of the Egyptian servants heightens the contrast with the scene in chapter 37"[49]. Afterwards, the brothers hurry to return to Jacob with news about Joseph. which is reminiscent of the scene in chapter 37. When the brothers go back to Joseph, they take some of the same goods as were on the Midianite caravan. "Thus the brothers unwittingly make restitution"[50]. The chiastic structure comes full circle.

Food at the feast

Westermann describes the meal in chapter 43 as "remarkable in many respects." In contrast to the earlier outdoor meal, the brothers are now seated at the banquet table of Pharaoh's second-in-command. To bring attention to the touching family scene, the narrator adds a level of national import. "The brothers become aware of the Egyptian prohibition to eat at table with Canaanites....This detail, in no wise necessary for the progress of the action, is taken up only because it is a piece of surprising information for both the narrator and his listeners"[51].

The Egyptians are served separately from the Hebrews, not because of any Israelite law but, according to the text, because it is *to 'evah* for the Egyptians to dine with Hebrews.

---

[49] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 72.

[50] Cotter, 310.

[51] Westermann, Gen 37-50, 126.

The statement is that *Egyptians* cannot eat with Hebrews, not the other way around. However, such a prohibition has been difficult to document from Egyptian sources. Wenham writes: "The Egyptian aversion to eating with foreigners is well attested in classical sources, such as Herodotus, Diodorus, Strabo listed by Dillmann,"[52] but not in Egyptian sources. *To'evah* is a very strong term, often translated as 'disgusting' or 'abomination.' It is used to describe "practices totally abhorrent to God (e.g., Lev 18:22, 26, 29). Other customs regarded as 'disgusting' by the Egyptians are mentioned in 46:34 and Exod 8:22 (26)"[53]. Humphreys, in a lengthy footnote on this issue, says:

> "Speiser, Genesis, suggests that it was a matter of rank, since 'the cultic and social taboo...against taking food with Hebrews would scarcely include the Vizier, who bore a pious Egyptian name.'....J. L. Crenshaw ('Method in Determining Wisdom Influence Upon "Historical" Literature,' JBL 88 [1969]: 137) suggests that Gen 43:31-34 deals with 'kosher food.'"[54].

---

[52] Wenham, 423.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Humphreys, 192. On the question of 'kosher food,' Soggin also suggests that the reference in Gen 43:32 is to the "later Israelite custom, with its severe dietary laws that made it practically impossible to share meals with foreigners. In this case the [biblical] author seems to be aiming at imparting a lesson to his countrymen: if the Egyptians were that strict, why cannot also you be at least as zealous?" Soggin, "Notes on the Joseph Story" in Understanding Poets and Prophets (pub info), 341. However, there is no mention of any ritual constraints on Israelites here.

The Rabbis raise questions that the text does not: how closely the dietary laws were followed. How can the brothers eat the meal Joseph orders prepared? Do they know the meat has been ritually slaughtered? Midrashically, the double use of *tavo'ach* indicates that two meals were prepared, one for Friday, one for Shabbat. The midrashic tradition shows a Joseph who, more than 22 years later, remembers kashrut law. Joseph shows concern that the brothers be able to dine at his Egyptian table, instructing his servants to show the brothers that the forbidden sciatic nerve was removed (cited in *Me'Am Lo'Ez* to Gen 43:16, volume 3b, 411).

The notion that Joseph would be forbidden by Egyptian custom to dine with Egyptians would create a tremendous difficulty for the story. Personal religious identity is not the issue for Joseph that it will be for Daniel. Joseph does not try to conceal his foreign origins; in fact he is referred to as *Ivri* in Gen 39:14, 17 and 41:12. Just as today, where business is transacted over meals at city and country clubs, it is most plausible to imagine that "little of political, economic, social, or cultural import took place without the sharing of food"[55] at the leadership level in Pharaoh's court. Joseph could not function as the highest official in the land and as an integral part of the Egyptian social and political structure if he were cut off from contact with the natives on such an essential level as eating with them.

The discussion of Egyptian separateness is an additional point of contention in the dating of the Joseph story. Redford notes that the remark about not dining together is

> "purely descriptive of a contemporary phenomenon: Egyptians (of my own time, implied the writer) do not mix with Hebrews (i.e. Israelites). Such a situation, at least insofar as the Hebrews are concerned, can only have prevailed at a time when Egyptians and Hebrews had for some time been coming into close contact. This fits the Saite and Persian periods, when racial tensions in Egypt were especially strong, but certainly not the New Kingdom, when there can scarcely be said to have existed a Hebrew people in the sense the writer uses". Redford, Genesis 37-50, 235.
>
> In opposition, Westermann writes,
>
> "The brief remark that Egyptians may not eat at table with foreigners (43:32; cf 46:34) can only be made by those who do not know such a custom. The note fits the period of Solomon well, but is impossible for the period of the exile (against D.B. Redford and A. Meinhold)". Westermann, Introduction, 245.

[55] Ibid., 183.

The reader is left to conclude that, at least on a *pshat* level, eating Egyptian foods and drinking their wine was not a problem for Joseph's family.

There is only speculation about the actual foods consumed at the feasts in the Book of Genesis[56]. No doubt Joseph, as second in command to Pharaoh, would have the best food at his table. From wide-ranging archaeological records, it appears there were social distinctions in diet in the ancient world. Although written texts do not specify this, "the complexity of the terminology and procedures associated with the food suggests the potential for multiple cuisines"[57]. Hesse's evidence dates from a period earlier than the assumed time of redaction of the Books of Daniel or Esther, and is possibly earlier than the composition of the Joseph narrative as well. His primary "evidence of a royal diet, if not cuisine, comes from about 700 [BCE] at Bastam in Azerbaijan"[58].

From the Egyptian record, there is more detail. The Egyptian dictionary

> "lists 38 kinds of cake and 57 varieties of bread....These facts, while proving that the Egyptians were first-class gourmets, also give a particular significance to the words of the chief baker which may be literally translated, 'There were in the top basket all sorts of foods for Pharaoh, masterpieces of the pastry cook' (Vergote,

---

[56] However, see 1 Kings 5:2-3 for a list of foods consumed at King Solomon's daily table.

[57] Brian Hesse, "Animal Husbandry and Human Diet in the Ancient Near East," in Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, Volume 1, Jack M. Sasson ed. (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA, 2000), 213.

[58] Ibid.

Joseph en Egypte, 37)"[59].

Drinking

Information about drinking, and what people drank, is more extensive. From the root of the word *mishteh*, it is clear that while there may be other elements present at a feast, like food, or telling riddles, "drinking was a *constitutive* element of the social gathering," and getting intoxicated was probably expected[60].

The Bible uses the word שכר as a noun, to signify an "intoxicant"[61]. The words *yayin* and *shekar* often appear in parallelism. However, "the cereals and hops normal in beer production are never associated with *shekar* in the way grapes are linked to *yayin*....The brew did not appeal to the literary mind as much as wine"[62]. Beer was "a staple in Mesopotamia and Egypt"[63].

Sumerian texts mention wine "in the context of its being a very expensive and rare

---

[59] Wenham, 384. "KB, 339, suggests 'pastries made with white flour,' and this has been endorsed by M. Dhood on the basis of Eblaite texts (BN 13 [1980] 14 - 16)...."

[60] Carey Ellen Walsh, "Under the Influence: Trust and Risk in Biblical Family Drinking," in JSOT 90 (2000), 18. Italics the author's.

[61] See, e.g., Lev 10:9; Num 6:3.

[62] Jane M. Renfrew, "Vegetables in the Ancient Near East Diet," in Sasson, 198.

[63] Ibid.

commodity"[64]. In Ugaritic, *shkr* is used "to describe a drunken El who dirties himself (KTU 1.114). In the Akkadian story of Gilgamesh, Enkidu's heart merries with his first seven goblets of wine"[65]. Wine was never plentiful in Babylonia; according to the evidence from the cuneiform texts; while wine consumption appears to have gradually increased over the centuries, it always remained "the exclusive prerogative of the gods and the rich"[66]. There is extensive evidence of wine production and storage in Egypt; research has even uncovered estate-sealed bottles with labels.

The Hebrew Bible uses six (and some say, nine[67]) words for different kinds of wine, which reveals something about the place of wine in Israelite culture. "It is only in relatively late texts that we read of Jews refusing to drink wine produced among the gentiles"[68]. Other biblical texts cite wine 'of Lebanon' (Hos 14:8) or 'of Helbon' (Eze 27:18) without negative comments, though it is not clear if wine was imported from those places or perhaps the vine stock was originally from outside Israel. In general it may be said that "*shekar* designates any beverage produced by fermentation of either grain or

---

[64] Ibid., 199.

[65] Walsh, 15.

[66] Renfrew, 199.

[67] King counts nine words, though not all reflect different kinds of wine; some are synonyms.

[68] Renfrew, 201. The Talmud does prohibit this, see, e.g., BT Bava Batra 24a; AZ 58b, 73a.

fruit"[69]. *Yayin* occurs 140 times in the Bible, and is the most common word for wine.

The opinion of the biblical author(s) about drinking alcohol is mixed. At times the reaction is unreservedly negative, as in the depiction of Noah[70]. In the case of Lot (Gen 19:3ff), where survival is at stake, the treatment is more nuanced. "Not all biblical drunks are incapacitated,"[71] and being drunk is not automatically condemned. In fact, new wine "gladdens God and men"[72]. Drinking can blur the faculties, as in Prov 20:1; 31:4,6, and Isa 28:7. In the Joseph story, drinking has positive connotations. The scene in chapter 43 of Genesis shows the brothers re-establishing their connection[73].

---

[69] King, 60.

[70] See Gen 9:21-27. According to rabbinic tradition, Noah invents wine to comfort people for their labors, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Gen 5:29: 'this one will comfort us after our hard work.'

[71] Walsh, 14.

[72] Judg 9:13. JPS Translation.

[73] After the sale of Joseph, according to a midrash, the brothers took an oath not to drink wine, out of guilt, and Joseph also gave up wine because he was in mourning for the loss of his family. Now, 22 years later, they drink together. Bereshit Rabbah 92:5, Rashi to Gen 43:34.

The brothers may be worried about revealing too much information if they get drunk: a concern not for spilling the wine but for 'spilling the beans' about their guilt in selling Joseph. Nevertheless, a lower-status person shows very bad manners in refusing to drink the wine of a superior (see Yafeh Toar, and Sefer ha-Yashar, cited in *Me'Am Lo'Ez* vol. 3b, 420), to say nothing of the likely negative consequences. This is one way the later tradition reconciled the brothers' drinking Egyptian wine with the dictum that a Jew may not drink pagans' wine (citations above in n. 68).

The cup referred to in Gen 44:2 as Joseph's divining cup does not appear at the banquet table. Perhaps he uses it for drinking and for divination? It is not important, in

Drunkenness reflects something about social dynamics. Within the Bible, drinking marks certain rites of passage[74], or helps to solidify social bonds in cultic settings[75]. "Heavy drinking signals not the relaxation of cultural constraints, but rather is itself expressive of Israelite culture....The potential social benefit was an increased intimacy or the establishment of intimacy through a bond or agreement"[76]. Drinking together serves as a way to form or strengthen group identity: "One drinks, in short, with those one trusts or wants to trust"[77]. For the ancient Israelites, group identity begins with the patriarchal family. When Joseph and his brothers sit down to eat together (albeit at separate tables) in isolation from the Egyptian servants, they are doing more than coming together again as a family; they are renewing their social bond and reinforcing their group identity. Joseph's family "is not simply a family but the seed of the nation of Israel"[78]. "Against the gloomy background of a mounting famine,"[79] Israel the people, embodied in this

---

this context, whether or not Joseph practiced divination; the point is made about the cup so as to accuse the brothers. It is also not relevant here to consider the accusation as a theft of a sacred object. Divination was seen later as a pagan practice (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10). "It was enough for the author of the Joseph story to know that divination was practiced in Egypt; and the form mentioned here, using a drinking vessel, is attested elsewhere in antiquity [see Gaster]," Westerman, Gen 37-50, 132.

[74] A weaning party in Gen 21:1-8 ; marriage feasts in Gen 29 and Judges 14.

[75] "When eating and drinking occur at a celebration, this celebration is most often in a cultic context...", Sharon, 117.

[76] Walsh, 17.

[77] Ibid., 19.

[78] Cotter, 317. Note the food imagery, "seed."

[79] Westermann, Gen 37-50, 127.

patriarchal family, will continue to survive.

Conclusions about the role of food and drink in the Joseph story

Food and drink are central motifs in the Joseph narrative. "Four out of the six dreams in the Joseph cycle are concerned with consumption, and even Joseph's first dream of bowing sheaves is concerned with grain, a food commodity"[80]. The imagery of food is "fully appropriate in light of the concern of the Joseph stories with these same issues of life and death, abundance and famine"[81]. Yet as much as the need for food drives the narrative, the role that food and drink play is not determinative of identity.

There is no conflict in the Joseph story the way there is in the Book of Daniel over questions of what is appropriate for Israelites to eat. The need for food in the time of famine is universal, and Joseph, with God's help, provides for everyone, making no distinctions among Israelites and Egyptians. "The religious and racial exclusiveness of the Israelites"[82] that marks so much of the biblical text is not in evidence in the Joseph story. Indeed,

> "Joseph does not hesitate to mix with Egyptians; of course he has no choice. But he even marries an Egyptian girl, and is not condemned for it by the writer....there is no disapproval expressed at the thought that Joseph, a pious Israelite, is moving

---

[80] Sharon, 73.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 247.

among outright idolators!"[83]

"There is no sign of any anxiety to preserve what one has against what is foreign or any condemnation of the foreigner"[84]. Even the 'rule' against Egyptians and Hebrews dining together is promulgated as an Egyptian practice, not Israelite. Joseph himself acquires an Egyptian name[85] and title, and robes of linen[86]. Joseph's investiture with ring, robe and

---

[83] Ibid. Indeed, according to Sperling (in a private conversation) it may be a point of pride that Joseph married into a priestly Egyptian family, and the same may be said of Moses' marriage into a priestly Midianite family (see Exod 2:16, 21), and Solomon's marriage to a Pharaoh's daughter (see 1 Kings 3:1; contra 1 Kings 11).

> Asenath is the daughter of the Egyptian priest called Potiphera. Hoffmeier writes, "It is noteworthy that the final element of the priest's name is ...Re, the patron of On or Heliopolis, where the Sun-god's most important cult center was situated from the Old Kingdom through the Third Intermediate Period. It is at this precise religious center that Potipherah is said to have been a priest in Genesis 41:45," James K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition (Oxford University Press: NY, 1996), 84.

In a footnote, Redford says, "But note how Post-Biblical literature, fully aware of the implications, tries desperately to get around the embarrassing point by making Asenath a Hebrew!" (Redford, Genesis 37-50, 247, Note 5).

[84] Westermann, Introduction, 245.

[85] Gen 41:43. "Despite the disagreement among Egypto-Semitic specialists concerning the precise etymology of the four personal names discussed here [chapter 41] and their dating..., all agree that they are undeniably Egyptian. " Hoffmeier, 87. Likewise, the titles bestowed on Joseph

> "are apparently Hebrew equivalents of Egyptian ones and not of Egyptian etymology, [hence] there has been a range of opinion about the various offices. But all who have examined them in the light of actual Egyptian titulary concur that genuine Egyptian ranks are behind the Hebrew expressions. " Ibid., 93.

[86] Gen 41:42. Alter says the "Egyptian flavor of the chapter is heightened by the inclusion" of Egyptian loan words: for Nile, magicians, rushes, ring, שש. Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.:1997), 234.

gold necklace are widely attested practices in Egyptian sources[87].

"The conflict between the monotheistic Jew and the alien worshiper could arise only when a Jew became an officer of a foreign ruler"[88]. But there is no conflict about worship for Joseph. It is a construct of modern sociology and sensibility to read identity politics into the Joseph story. As a Hebrew in a foreigner's court, Joseph is not an anomaly for his time and place, and his role as "relief distributor" is "not without precedent in Egypt"[89].

---

[87] Redford lists some 32 examples, Redford, Genesis 37-50, 213. There is an Assyrian parallel from the inscriptions of Sargon II (722-705 B.C.): "'I clad him in linen and in garments with multi-coloured trim (and put rings on him),'" Redford, 225. These gifts from the king to his loyal servant are known within the Egyptian texts as "favors," ibid., 214. These are rewards for services rendered, not gratis marks of the king's favor. In contrast, Daniel receives *hen* from God.

[88] Elias Bickerman, Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther (Knopf: 1985), 88.

[89] Wenham, quoting Sarna, gives this example:

> "'Iti, the treasurer of the town of Imyotru, boasted that he supplied his fellow citizens with barley in years of famine and helped other towns as well. The steward Seneni of Coptus reported in his stele, or inscribed commemorative stone pillar, that "in the painful years of distress" he had rationed out barley to his town. Ankhtify, "the great cheiftain of Nekhen," recorded a seven-year famine in which the entire south of Egypt is said to have died of hunger and people devoured their own children. He took pride in having foreseen the event, caused by a low Nile, and in having been able to rush grain and grant loans of corn to various towns in order to alleviate the situation. Another famine inscription from this period comes from Ameny, a chief in the days of Senworse I (ca. 1971-1928 B.C.E.), who recalled that in years of famine he had supplied wheat and barley to the people so that no one went hungry "until the great Nile had returned"' (Sarna, 290)," Wenham, 398-9.

Joseph knows he is a Hebrew[90]; identity is not at issue for him. He must be part of the Egyptian court in order to feed everyone, always with God leading the plan. The need for food is what compels the narrative in Genesis. We turn now to an examination of the story of Daniel, where issues about food consumption initiate Daniel's conflict with the Babylonian king.

[90] Joseph says, "I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews," Gen 40:15.

Chapter III Daniel: a pious Jew in a foreign court

In the case of Joseph, there is certainly an issue of survival, but it is not the survival of the individual that is in doubt; it is the very real physical survival of an entire people. Closely linked to this is Joseph's rise to success in the foreign court. The writer(s) of the Book of Daniel was much influenced by, and derived material from, the Joseph cycle. The later writer transformed the story about an individual who achieves survival for all, into a text which advances certain points of view about religious identity, for consumption by a particular audience. This is not an issue considered on the face of the text in the Joseph narrative. The issue more to the fore in the Book of Daniel is the ability of an individual Jew to survive with his religious identity intact while he participates in the life of a foreign court. Where Joseph blends into Egyptian culture to a great degree, Daniel makes a conscious and stated choice to maintain his distinctiveness. Food is only one facet of a larger picture for Daniel: the need to demonstrate religious loyalty. Ultimately what is more important than food is recognition of the proper God.

Setting and genre of the Book of Daniel

The setting of Dan 1 refers back directly to the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem. While there is historical accuracy in this, in some sense it is a necessary set-up for the story of Daniel to unfold, just as Joseph's capture by Midianites sets up his eventual rise to power in Egypt.

The dating of the Book of Daniel has been called into question by numerous biblical

scholars. The story is set in the sixth century BCE, though this was long ago called into doubt. Porphyry, writing in the third century, ascribed at least the second half of the Book of Daniel to the time of Antiochus IV Ephiphanes (c. 165 BCE)[91]. This time setting is widely accepted among biblical scholars today. The dating of Daniel 1-6 is less widely agreed upon, though many believe it to be pre-Maccabean at least as to the origins of the tales, with final editing during the Maccabean period. Most likely the origin lies in the third or second century BCE. One suggestion is "that the story in Daniel 5 may have been composed as a fulfillment of such prophecies as Isa 21:1-10 or Jer 51:39, 57, both of which speak of feasting in connection with the fall of Babylon."[92]

In line with Porphyry, many scholars consider the Book of Daniel to have been written in two parts. Chapters 1-6, comprising what may be called the 'tales,' has been dated to circa third century BCE; chapters 7-12, the 'visions,' to circa second century BCE. Not all scholars are in agreement. An argument has been made to consider chapters 2-7 as a distinct unit, a set of "interpretation stories," a "sub-genre of courtier stories, Jewish in style"[93] . Some consider Daniel "a series of separate mysterious legends, visions and prophecies,"[94] others treat it as a unified work.

---

[91] Matthias Henze, "The Narrative Frame of Daniel: A Literary Assessment," in Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods 32 (2001), 6.

[92] John J. Collins, Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), 68. See also Isa 39:7.

[93] Philip R.Davies, Daniel (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 51.

[94] Michael Hilton, "Babel Reversed – Daniel Chapter 5" (JSOT 66,1995), 100.

Chapter 5 may be pivotal in answering questions about dating. Davies, for one, would date the writing of chapter 5 to the Maccabean era. He sees a parallel between the downfall of Belshazzar after he profaned the Temple vessels, and the downfall of Antiochus IV after he profaned the Temple itself in 165 BCE. Among the stories presented in the Book of Daniel, Davies finds the narrative contained in chapter 5 to be

> "unique... in the important respect that it ends with the destruction of the king. In all the other cases, the king is presented in a better light than here; either he is entirely sympathetic (ch. 6), or neutral (chs. 1 and 2), or finally repentant and even converted (chs. 3 and 4)"[95].

The message of chapter 5, by contrast with the other stories, paints a harsher picture, by "introducing the threat of divine destruction to a monarch and the replacement of his kingdom by another"[96]. For Davies this is clear evidence pointing to the composition of the Book of Daniel around the Maccabean period. Some scholars ascribe the Book of Daniel to a school known as Apocalyptic writing. In times of social, economic and political upheaval and dislocation, apocalypticism gains ground; certainly these conditions prevailed during the era of the Maccabees so Davies' position is plausible.

The Book of Daniel is written primarily in Aramaic. Aramaic was the lingua franca of the ancient near eastern world. The use of Aramaic in Daniel made the book more widely accessible to an early Jewish diaspora audience, and beyond it as well. The story

---

[95] Davies, 49.

[96] Ibid.

also could be used to spread word of the supreme power of the Hebrew God to gentiles. To some extent, therefore, Daniel can be seen as a missionizing work[97]. The Jewish writer(s) made use of gentile-type language and concepts, to appeal to this broader audience. For a gentile reader in this time period, a depiction of their king giving Daniel honors with religious symbol value[98] would have highly positive connotations. It showed that Nebuchadnezzar was acknowledging Daniel's God[99].

Joseph and Daniel are not the only characters to play a role of influence or authority in a foreign court. Most prominently within the biblical corpus, they have been compared with the stories about Esther and Moses. There are other examples of extra-biblical characters as well. Susanna and Bel and the Dragon are Greek additions to the six stories in Daniel 1-6. Wills notes, "There are enough common motifs in the Danielic materials, including *Prayer of Nabonidus*, to justify the hypothesis of a 'Danielic school,' through which these materials have passed"[100]. Davies comments, "Jewish stories of this genre

---

[97] These observations are from a private conversation with Dr. S. David Sperling.

[98] See Dan 2:46, where King Nebuchadnezzar prostrates himself to Daniel, and presents him with sacrificial offerings of a religious nature (מִנְחָה, נִיחֹחִין).

[99] For later Jewish readers, however, this presented a difficulty. Bowing (literally, falling on one's face) alone would not raise this difficulty, as bowing to another is widely attested in the Bible. Jacob bows to Esau in Gen 33:3; Abraham bows to the Hittites in Gen 23:7. However, in juxtaposition with the ritual offering incense and a sacrificial meal, the honors to Daniel are idol worship in the eyes of the later Rabbis.

[100] Lawrence M. Wills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 76. Also to be considered in this genre are Tobit and 3 Esdras.

add a further dimension in the contrast between the supposedly superior culture of the Gentile and the divinely guided, and therefore truly superior, Jewish hero"[101].

Jewish tales of court conflicts, featuring a Jew in the gentile court who, though innocent and righteous, is persecuted and then ultimately vindicated, draw on Persian literary motifs featuring "Zoroaster in the court of his patron-king, Vishtaspa"[102]. There is a different focus, however, in the Jewish court tales. The conflict between a Jew and the gentile king does not revolve around an external threat, nor is there a challenge to the king's temporal authority. Instead the focus is on the wisdom of the Jewish figure. This is in line with what we read in the biblical text about Joseph and Daniel.

Each of these canonical and non-canonical individuals reflects, to a greater or lesser degree, the motif of how Jews survive and even prosper in an exilic community. In addition to the use of food and drink to mark a particular life-style, either gentile or Jewish, there are other common motifs within these tales. Among the stratagems employed by the various characters in the Bible are the use of language, proper name, clothing, dream interpretation, and superior wisdom. The latter two are credited to God's influence. Indeed, Davies remarks,

> "The Jewish hero does not as a rule conquer by his own abilities, but because his God endows him with superior resources. The Jewish hero, then, is not simply an individual hero, but represents his race and his religion, in that it is his own God

---

[101] Davies, 51.

[102] Wills, 40.

who provides him with wisdom and opportunity to succeed"[103].

Linguistic parallels between the Book of Daniel and the Joseph narrative

It is clear from internal evidence that the writer(s) of the Book of Daniel had knowledge of other parts of the biblical corpus[104]. "As early as 1895 L. Rosenthal [in German] suggested that there are several literary links between the Joseph narrative and the books of Esther and Daniel"[105]. Whether the Joseph narrative came from the early Hyksos period or a later pre-exilic date, it is an earlier work than the Book of Daniel. The large number of linguistic similarities between the stories of Daniel and Joseph provide important support for this proposition. The following examination of verbal connections will document this.

Dan 1:2 - בידו - in his hand. A motif and/or leitwort for the Joseph story[106]. This verse also is a necessary precursor to chapter 5, since it places some of the Jerusalem Temple vessels into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

Dan 1:3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 - רב סריס - the chief 'eunuch.' See Gen 37:36, 39:1; also the word used to describe the offices of chief cupbearer and chief baker in Gen 40.

---

[103] Davies, 51.

[104] Dan 9:2 refers to the writing of the prophet Jeremiah.

[105] Humphreys, 120.

[106] Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (Basic Books, 1981), 95.

Eunuchs played varying roles at courts in many of the cultures that were contemporaneous with Israelite and early Jewish culture. Some societies made use of eunuchs as slaves, while others regarded eunuchs as suitable for positions of royal access and influence. Grayson does not treat the situation in Egypt[107]. In ancient Turkey/Armenia, Grayson notes that "expert opinion on Urartu states that the majority of officials of court were eunuchs"[108]. Both Assyrian and Babylonian societies included eunuchs among their court administrations and armies, sometimes in positions of great prestige. Numerous Assyrian reliefs depict beardless men, who are likely eunuchs; Assyrian texts speak of court officials as *sa resi (*from earlier *sha reshi*), which means castrated males. The Hebrew *saris* is an Akkadian loan word[109]. The Septuagint renders the term 'eunuchs.'

The Greeks had eunuchs in the court of Alexander and later, into the Ptolemaic period. Among the Greeks, eunuchs were generally men who had been taken prisoner, enslaved and then castrated. Imperial Rome had some non-slave eunuchs at court, who rose to

---

[107] He states that it is "well-known that Potiphar, Joseph's master, was both a high officer under pharaoh and a eunuch," A. Kirk Grayson, "Eunuchs in Power" in Vom Alten Orient Zum Alten Testament. Dietrich, Manfried and Loretz, Oswald, editors (Festschrift for Wolfram F. von Soden,Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, Neukirchen, Germany, 1995), 89.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Hayim Tadmor,"Was the Biblical *saris* a Eunuch?" in Solving Riddles and Untying Knots. Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield. Z. Zevit, S. Gitin and M. Sokoloff, eds. (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN, 1995), 318.

positions of influence, "including the military and close advisors to the emperor"[110]. In addition, "Eunuchs had a substantial presence in both the Median and Persian bureaucracy and court and they could hold the highest offices"[111].

Besides playing roles at court and in the army, in Assyria eunuchs were employed in private dwellings as servants and harem guards[112]. Their presence was wide-ranging and well-known. Grayson considers it a settled matter that Potiphar in the Joseph story is a eunuch. 2 Kings 9:31-33 refers to Jezebel's servants as *sarisim*. It seems unlikely that any males other than eunuchs would be in attendance upon the queen in her chambers. Jer 29:2 also depicts *sarisim* in service to the queen mother.

Why do most translations then render *saris* as 'officer' or 'courtier' rather than 'eunuch'? Most likely this is because the biblical text assigns a wife to Potiphar. Notes Tadmor:

> "Egyptologists who have treated this story have noted that there is hardly any evidence of native castrates at the court in Pharaonic Egypt. This may well be so, but Joseph's story was composed, after all, by a Hebrew speaker and was addressed to an Israelite audience"[113].

It is, however, conceivable that a court eunuch would be permitted to have a wife, indeed there is evidence that such men adopted children, who were credited to them in language

---

[110] Grayson, 88.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid., 94.

[113] Tadmor, 321.

identical to 'son of'[114].

Other biblical texts show that post-exilic Israel knew of eunuchs at court. Most translations render *saris* in these verses as 'eunuch,' and describe such a man as "a withered tree," a clear reference to his physical condition[115]. Tadmor claims, "the meaning of the Hebrew *saris*, defining a class of royal servants, could not have changed drastically in the course of the century that separated the editors of Kings and Jeremiah from the author of Isaiah 56"[116]. The meaning of *saris* for the writer of Daniel is also likely the same, whether the text emerged in a Babylonian or a Persian setting.[117]. Tadmor thinks there is little likelihood that biblical Hebrew would use one term for both kinds of courtiers, castrated and not:

> "Biblical Hebrew already possessed indigenous terminology for royal courtiers/officers (עבדי המלך, שרים, etc.). There would have been no reason to borrow it had a Hebrew equivalent to 'eunuchs' existed in the language and in practice"[118].

---

[114] Redford (among others) notes that the Bible assigns to Potiphar a family, making it less likely that he has been castrated. Redford says, "it seems quite clear from the duties normally undertaken by such officials that the designation was simply an administrative title which cast no reflexions [*sic*] on its bearer's masculinity. The word turns up in Aramaic as *sarisa*, whence seemingly it passed into Egyptian in the Fifth Century B.C. as *srs*". Redford, Genesis 37-50, 51.

[115] Isa 56:5 removes any doubt about the meaning: it refers in one packed verse, probably punningly, to sons, daughters and כרת, the verb also used in Deut 23:2 for castration.

[116] Ibid., 322.

[117] The same term is used in Est 1:12, 15; 2:21; 4:5; 6:14; and 7:9.

[118] Ibid., 323.

From a modern reader's perspective, where questions of Joseph's divided loyalty have been raised, it is instructive to note that "eunuchs were believed to have had only one loyalty, and that was to their master"[119]. Introducing a trusted figure like Potiphar into the Joseph narrative raises a subtle, almost subliminal note. The writer may be calling attention to the question of Joseph's loyalty, by presenting him in the same scene with Potiphar the eunuch. From an Israelite perspective, it may be said that Joseph rises to the unstated challenge about where his true loyalty lies, by resisting the pull of the Egyptian seductress. On the face of it, Joseph is loyal to his Egyptian master. But beneath the surface, Joseph remains loyal to his true master, God.

Dan 1:4 - ילדים - the youths. Not נער, which is used to describe Joseph in Gen 37:2; however, the meaning is the same.[120] These youths must be blemish-free.[121] They are also מראה - טובי. This is similar to the way that Joseph is described in Gen 39:6 and in this he is said to resemble his mother Rachel, see Gen 29:17. Also see מראה טוב in

---

[119] Grayson, 96.

[120] Though in modern Hebrew, there may be a difference in age between ילד and נער.

[121] Those who serve the king are like those who are in service to Yahweh. This sets up the parallel and then the conflict between the God of the Hebrews and the king of Babylon. It raises a question about whether the youths are to be used as sacrifices; see the scene in Dan 3:19 ff. The Talmud makes indirect use of a connection with food. BT Pes 53b tries to explain why the three youths entered the fiery furnace willingly: they argued to themselves that in Exod 8:12, frogs willingly jumped into the oven and the kneading trough, to sanctify God's name even though frogs were not commanded to sanctify the divine name. How much more so should these lads, who are so commanded, be willing to enter the oven. And when are kneading bowls near an oven? When the oven is hot. See also Midrash Tehillim 28.

Dan 1:15. The note about appearance may also remind the listener that Joseph was taken out of the pit and cleaned up prior to his presentation to Pharaoh. There is a parallel in Est 2, where the women undergo a preparation time in order to be presentable to the king.

Dan 1:4 - The youths must have שכל in all חכמה, and they must 'know knowledge,' using the root ידע. Knowledge and wisdom are key words in the Joseph story: compare, e.g., Gen 41:39, uses of ידע, בין, חכם. "Stories involving wisemen or magicians were very popular in the Ancient Near East"[122]. This applies to the dream interpretation scenes in the Joseph story, with its Egyptian setting, as well as the Babylonian context.

Dan 1:5 - בג - פת - most likely, bread. The meaning is uncertain. Probably the expression is derived from a combination of a Hebrew word, פת, 'bread,' and an Iranian word that seems to indicate 'lord' or 'god.' 1 Sam 2:36 refers to פת-לחם, as well as ככר-לחם, both meaning bread in some form, from a semitic root פתת, to break up into pieces (see Lev 2:6; Ps 147:17). Clearly the item being served is something desirable and good, because the king eats it. Gen 18:5 shows Abraham serving פת-לחם to his esteemed guests. Compare king Nebuchadnezzar giving Daniel some bread from his own table with Potiphar putting all but his 'bread'[123] in Joseph's hands (Gen 39:6). Both

---

[122] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 94.

[123] Midrashically, this is taken as a euphemistic reference to 'Mrs.' Potiphar. See Rashi, among others, on this verse. It is unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar is serving up wenches in this context, since the story clearly concerns Daniel's refusal to eat food. Nevertheless the defilement through actual bread in Daniel's case parallels the potential defilement in Joseph's case.

Joseph and Daniel, in refusing dainties from the lord's table, express that they serve another, Lord with an upper case l[124]. See Dan 1:8, below.

The word for portions here is מנה, not identical with the portions served to the brothers at the dinner in Gen 43:34 (משאת).

Dan 1:5 - מקץ - at the end of a period of time. A possible echo of מקצת in Dan 1:2 (where its meaning is 'some of the'). It echoes, on hearing read aloud, with the beginning of Gen. 41[125]. Also used in Dan 1:15, 'at the end of the 10 days of trial,' which is akin to 'at the end of two years in the pit' for Joseph.

Dan 1:8 - גאל - Daniel seeks to avoid defiling himself by eating the king's food. Joseph refuses to be defiled in Gen 39:9, though the text does not use this word. In like manner, Joseph calls the proposed liaison with Mrs. Potiphar a 'great wickedness' (רעה גדלה) and a sin (חטאה) before God. Farther into the Genesis narrative, the text uses the term תועבה twice. The semantic range is similar, though the words are different. גאל /געל is a later Hebrew/Aramaic root. See Isa 59:3, defilement of the hands.

---

[124] "Eating from the king's table is symbolic of political covenant and compromise. When David stops eating at Saul's table, Saul surmises that David has rebelled against him (1 Sam. 20:30-34)," Dana Nolan Fewell, Circle of Sovereignty, JSOT Supp. Series 72 (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, England, 1988), 37. By proffering food and wine from his own table, "Nebuchadnezzar imposes political allegiance," ibid.

[125] "In Achaemenid Persia the celebration of a king's birthday was so fashionable that the festivities to mark the occasion became for the Greeks proverbial of luxery [*sic*]" Redford, Genesis 37-50, 206.

Dan 1:9 - God grants Daniel חסד and רחמים before the chieftains. This follows Daniel's refusal to eat the king's food. The closest parallel for Joseph, before he intrepets any dreams, is found in Gen 39:2: Potiphar, the chieftain to Pharaoh, sees that God is 'with' Joseph, and brought him success. Note that Daniel makes the first move, before receiving some sign of God's grace, whereas Joseph receives grace before he does anything to merit it. See also Gen 43:14, Deut 13:18, 1 Kings 8:50.

Dan 1:10 - זעף - disturbance in visage. See Gen 40:6, the chief baker and cupbearer have this look about them. They are 'out of sorts,' 'disturbed,' "wan, disgruntled, morose, touchy"[126]. It is reflected in their faces in verse 7, just as in Dan 1:10. The root is seldom used beyond these two instances (it is used in Prov 19:3), and only in one case is it used with the word for face (see 2 Chron 26:19). Note that the chief officer has fear of his lord, the king, who apportions rations. Whereas, for the Israelites, it is Yahweh who is to be feared, Yahweh who provides rations.

Dan 1:10 - חוב - inculpate. No other usages. The sense here is, 'you will inculpate my head with the king,' i.e., get me in trouble with him. The juxtaposition with ראש is reminiscent of the chief baker's situation in Gen 40:19, where the king lifts up his head - off his very shoulders. This root is used only in Aramaic/later Hebrew. There are two Arabic cognates, *hwb*, 'to do wrong,' and *hyb*, 'to be disappointed in one's hopes, to

---

[126] Ibid., 58.

make efforts to no avail.' Also see the South Arabian root *hb*, 'sin, guilt'[127]

Dan 1:11 - מלצר - translated as 'steward'or 'guard' in many modern versions; used as a proper noun in KJV. It is used only here and in Dan1:16. 'Guard' reflects the meaning in Akkadian; this is a loan word[128]. Probably because this is the official who serves Daniel his food, modern Hebrew uses this word for 'waiter.'

Dan 1:15 - טוב ובריאי בשר - good-looking, healthy, full-fleshed. This description of Daniel and his companions is the same as the description of the full-fleshed cows that appeared in Pharaoh's dream in Gen. 41:18.

Dan 1:17 - מדע, שכל, חכמה - as Dan 1:4 described the youths, Daniel no less than the three companions has been given these attributes by God; in addition, Daniel is given the understanding of חזון and חלום, vision and dream. The noun form חזון is not used in Torah (but the form מחזה is used twice in Balaam's speech in Num 24:4, 16). The verbal root חזה appears 26 times in chapters 2 - 5 and chapter 7 in the Book of Daniel, qualifying for key-word status. Daniel is a visionary.

חזה often marks a prophecy, although the root is not restricted to prophecy. See Amos

---

[127] Koehler, Ludwig and Baumgartner, The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (E.J. Brill: New York, 1994), 295.

[128] Ibid., 718.

1:1, Mic 1:1 and Hab 1:1[129]. The listener is alerted at the beginning that Daniel has special abilities, in advance of chapter 5. The parallel for Joseph is Gen 37:6, 9: we are told that Joseph has dreams and is self-aware enough about his dreams to relate them to his brothers. For further discussion of the nature of dream interpretation in the two narratives, see below.

Dan 1:18 - מקצת - again, a period of time, here days. There is no rush in bringing the lads to the king , as there is in Gen 41:14.

Dan 1:19 - לא נמצא מכלם - 'none can be found like/to be the equals of' Daniel and his companions; this finds its parallel in Gen 41:38, הנמצא כזה, 'can we find one like' Joseph? In a similar vein, no one can find fault with Daniel in Dan 6:5.

All four youths enter the king's service. The verb used here is עמד, whereas in Genesis, Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of his household using the verb נתן (Gen 41:41, 43) , or simply the preposition על (41:40, 41:43). But the idea is the same. The dreamer is part of the ruler's retinue. Gen 41:46 does say that Joseph entered Pharaoh's service using the

---

[129] Joseph is considered a prophet in both Christian and Islamic tradition; Daniel is a prophet for the Christian faith. Why are neither of them considered prophets in Jewish tradition, especially in light of the fact that Daniel's visionary ability shares a linguistic link with the prophets Amos, Micah and Habakuk? Not every one of the prophets who are part of the Jewish canon are denominated as נביא, e.g., Jonah. Although Amos' prophecy takes the form of חזה, the narrative has him reject the title נבי א (Amos 7:14). Decisions about canonization are generally invisible to the reader and in any event, beyond the scope of this paper.

verb עמד, but note that the JPS translation chooses the parallel English phrasing, "entered the service of Pharaoh" in both Dan 1:19 and Gen 41:46.

Dan 1:20 - The magicians enter the story here in Daniel; they are accompanied by אשפים (a word used only in Daniel), just as the king is becoming agitated. In Genesis, the magicians enter at the same juncture, see Gen 41:8.

At the beginning of Dan 2, the language switches to Aramaic.

Dan 2:1 - תתפעם - to be troubled, agitated, from a Middle Hebrew root meaning 'to push.' Possibly it is related to a Ugaritic root having the sense of 'to beat out a rhythm, with one's foot'[130] The word also occurs in Ps 77:5 and Judges 13:25. Most other occurrences are with רוח, except in the Psalms verse. A different root is used to describe the king's mindset in Dan 4:2, using the Aramaic root בהל. In Daniel 2:1, the king's spirit is agitated, just as Pharaoh's spirit is agitated in Gen 41:8. This describes an emotional and perhaps physical reaction (nervous foot-tapping?) to nightmares he can see but not understand. It is not the same word that is used in Gen 45:24, רגז, which is also found in Ugaritic and Phoenician. It connotes a different kind of disturbance, more nervous trembling or quaking[131].

---

[130] HALOT, 952.

[131] HALOT, 1183. And see Alter, Genesis, 271: "occasionally used in contexts that associate it with anger...but the primary meaning of the verb is to quake or shake, either physically (as a mountain in an earthquake) or emotionally (as a person trembling with

Dan 2:2 - חרטמים, אשפים, מכשפים - practitioners of various kinds of magical arts. The writer of Daniel elaborates, whereas the writer of the Joseph story is more concise, calling only for the wise men and the חרטמים. אשפים is a loan from Akkadian *ashipu*, one who gets rid of a demon. מכשפים is a sorcerer, one who performs 'black magic.' Its range of meaning is always negative; such a practitioner meant to harm people. חרטמים refers to "the Egyptian title of 'chief lector priest (hry-hb hry-tp)'"[132], one who read spells. In Akkadian of the late pre-exilic period, this meant a dream interpreter. The word was borrowed into Akkadian as *hartibi*. All of these have a negative valence for the Hebrew writer. It is as if the writer of Daniel is saying the king called in 'experts' who were no experts at all. It serves to highlight Daniel's role.

Dan 2:4 - פשר - interpret, solve, used in relation to dreams. This is the first time the root is employed. It will occur again throughout the narrative. This word is used almost exclusively in Daniel (the sole exception being Koh 8:1)[133].

---

fear), and it is the antonym of being tranquil or at peace."

[132] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 203.

[133] In the Joseph story, the word most often used in connection with dream interpretation is פתר, and it is used exclusively in Gen 40-41.

Were these two roots merely an instance of orthography changing over time, it would be expected that the *tav* should occur in the Aramaic, not in the Hebrew; and that the *shin* would be in the Hebrew, not in the Aramaic. Though the etymological relation between the forms is unclear, they have the same meaning. (Based on a private conversation with Dr. S. David Sperling, whose own doctoral work delves into the specifics of this question at some length.)

Interestingly, in the narration of Joseph's early dreams, while he is yet at home

Dan 2:9 - חד - one. Gen 41:25 has the Hebrew אחד. "'One' [is used] in the sense of an unambiguous unity, '(one and) the same'"[134]. It is also used in Dan 2:9 to refer to one and the same penalty.

Dan 2:14 - רב טבחיא - chief guard. See Gen 37:36, 39:1, where Potiphar's title is שר טבחים; Gen 40:3,4 and Gen 41:10, 12, where the same title applies to the chief of Pharaoh's guards. Also see 2 Kings 25:8 ff and Jer 39:9, where the 'chief of the guards' is the title of the Babylonian Nebuzaradan. "These 'butchers' were soldiers under royal command, who carried out policing operations of a military nature"[135]. שר itself denotes a person in charge or of some import[136].

Dan 2:25 - התבהלה - an expression of haste, used when calling a person to come before the king. See in comparison Gen 41:14, וירוצהו. A root with this meaning is used in the Egyptian texts II Khamois 2, 33, "they ran and brought him (Setna) at once" and Onkhsheshonqy 3, 20-21, "They ran for <Onkhsheshonqy son of >Tjanufer, then ran and returned, bringing him before Pharaoh at once"[137].

---

with his brothers, this word is not used. Joseph merely relates his dreams in Gen 37:5 - 10. Interpretation, though proffered, is not described as such. The term פשר is used in the Dead Sea scrolls to refer to scriptural interpretation.

[134] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 60. Parentheses the author's.

[135] Ibid., 56.

[136] HALOT, 1351.

[137] Cited in Redford, Genesis 37-50, 59.

Dan 4:5 and 4:15 - בה ... רוח אלהין - the spirit of God is within him. See Gen 41:38, רוח אלהים בו. Both Daniel and Joseph possess this.

Dan 5:2 - טעם - The meaning here is not 'order' as in Dan 3:10, 12, 29; or 4:3; or as the word is used in Ezra 4-6. The meaning here is more closely related to that in Ps 119:66, 'good sense.' In this case, its use constitutes a deliberate word-play, an oxymoron. It is as if the king made his remark 'by reason of' the wine, yet drinking wine takes away reason and sense. The pun is also on טעם in its meaning 'order,' as if the king is acting under 'order' of the wine. The meanings coalesce: the wine orders/causes the king to act in a manner that is against reason, stupidly.[138] I see no verbal connection to the drinking scene between Joseph and his brothers in Gen 43:34.

Dan 5:2 - מאן - vessel. There is no linguistic relation between this word for a drinking vessel and גביע, the word used for Joseph's 'divining cup' in Gen 44:2, 12, 16, 17. גביע is used also in Ex 25:31 and 37:17, to describe the cups on the menorah ("presumably from the period of the Second Temple"[139]). In the Joseph story, the cup is probably "something the size and with the function of a punch-bowl"[140].

---

[138] See Prov 31:4, where King Lemuel's mother adjures him not to give in to the temptations of wine, because wine disorders the thinking. It is suitable for the lower echelons; it will make them forget that they are poor and downtrodden. Kings should avoid this bad influence. The connection to the target verse here is that Belshazzar is not acting in a proper, king-like manner by imbibing.

[139] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 48.

[140] Ibid., 130.

Dan 5:29 - robe; gold chain on the neck. These bear a close parallel to the scene in Gen 41 where Joseph is installed as vizier of Egypt, though שש is an Egyptian word[141], whereas Daniel's robe is the royal purple.

Dan 6:29 - צלח - Daniel prospers, like Jospeh who also succeeds (Gen 39:2, 3, 23). The same root occurs in both Aramaic and Hebrew.

A note on names for God in the Daniel and Joseph narratives

In the Joseph story, the word used with most frequency is Elohim, which can mean a generic 'god.' YHWH is used at the beginning of the story, when Joseph is with Potiphar and when he is jail. YHWH is used in the Joseph cycle in Gen 39:23 and not again until much later, at Gen 49:18. It is Elohim who is linked to dream interpretation (Gen 41:16); the names of Joseph's sons (Gen 41:51, 52); Elohim who sees to the money in the sacks of the brothers (Gen 42:28); Elohim who Joseph credits with setting the plot in motion (Gen 45:5, 7); and through the end of the cycle in chapter 50, when Joseph forgives his brothers. Of course one must be cautious in drawing any conclusions from the occurrence or non-occurrence of a particular name for God. Source criticism is a field that has undergone much development since the early days of ascribing verses to the so-called J, E, D or P strands. "The distinction in the appelation of the deity does nothing more than point to the distinction between adjacent sections; it does not automatically

[141] HALOT, 1534.

prove the unity of all passages which share the use of one term"[142]. The name YHWH is used only in chapter 39, whereas Elohim appears throughout the narrative. "The narrator never uses Elohim in his own narrative or commentary, but reserves it exclusively for the utterances of his characters. On the other hand, Yahweh is never heard upon the lips of a character, only in the comments of the writer, and only in chapter 39"[143]. In Daniel the name used for God is exclusively a form of Elohim, in Hebrew in chapter 1, in Aramaic in chapter 2. Note the locution in Dan 2:47: Daniel's God is called the God of gods, the lord (king) of kings. Redford writes that "a preference for the generic 'god' as opposed to the name of the deity" helps to contribute to a sense of "timelessness and placelessness in the setting of the story"[144].

Other comparisons between Joseph and Daniel

In addition to the many linguistic parallels between the stories of Daniel and Joseph, there are motifs common to the two narratives. Both characters are thrust into contained spaces fraught with danger (Daniel in a lion's den, Joseph in a pit), yet both are brought up and emerge unscathed. The stories share the motif of a young man who triumphs over his brothers. This theme is slightly transformed in the Daniel story, where the three companions are not Daniel's brothers by blood, though they are his brother Israelites. He

---

[142] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 108.

[143] Ibid., 130.

[144] Donald B. Redford, Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 423.

does not triumph 'over them' but he does succeed where they do not, achieving pre-eminence. Here the similarity to Joseph is only in passing, since Joseph does indeed come to rule over his brothers. A difference between the two narratives is that Daniel's compatriots are elevated along with him, whereas Joseph stands alone.

Both Daniel and Joseph are elevated in status by their respective rulers. Joseph receives a new name from the Pharaoh. Daniel already has a new name (Dan 1:7), one that was given not by the king but by his chief courtier[145]. They are each rewarded for their skill at dream interpretation. Daniel is promised rewards ahead of time (and threatened for failure to interpret); Joseph's gifts come with no expectation that he will be rewarded (nor is he threatened, although there is the implied threat of continuing to languish in prison). Joseph's gifts are specified in Gen 41:40-43, and include a ring, robes, gold chain, an

---

[145] It seems no coincidence that Daniel has two names in different languages, one of which "is practically identical with that of the King[.] Words are no longer what they seem after Babel"(Hilton, 107). The use of two languages to tell the story of Daniel reflects this post-Babel confusion. Notes Hilton, "Our author subtly explores and deplores the confusion brought to the world by misunderstood language, and reflects this confusion in his book of two languages. He has confused the scholars ever since," ibid., 110.

Pseudo-Saadia comments on Dan 5:1 concerning the similarity of the two names. As Hilton writes,

> "the King was known as Belshazzar with a tet because he stretched out his hand against the holy vessels of the temple — he 'bet-lamed-shin' (searched, ransacked) the treasury, and the day on which he did this, the day on which our story takes place, was the day foretold as the precise end of the seventy years of the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. The implication of pseudo-Saadiah's remarks, then, is that Belshazzar's crime is thus encoded in his name: it is another example of a word in his own Aramaic language of which he himself could not understand the full significance," ibid., 107-108.

Egyptian wife (of priestly lineage). These are symbols of his new role. Daniel is likewise elevated, and receives gifts, although they are not itemized in Dan 2:48[146]. Under the rule of the next king, Belshazzar, Daniel is the recipient of a cloak and a gold chain (Dan 5:16). Both Daniel and Joseph are placed in charge: Daniel of *medinat* Bavel and over all the wise men of Bavel; Joseph over the Pharaoh's court and over all of Egypt[147]. All these gifts reward mantic ability.

The Dreams

The dreams in the Joseph story are about food and drink, from Joseph's early dream about sheaves of wheat to the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, to Pharaoh's pair of dreams. In Daniel, this is not the case. The subject matter of dreams in the Book of Daniel is not as important as the characters in the drama.

According to one narrative convention, we expect that the king, whose job it is to protect his people, will have some form of revelation. Or one expects that a local hero will excel at interpreting dreams that portend well or poorly for his people. Instead, the stories about Joseph and Daniel present a different convention: a youth, and (from the perspective of the *sitz-im-leben*) a foreigner, fills this role. Pharaoh has a dream; so does Belshazzar. But neither one of them is able to interpret. This is where the

---

[146] Note that Daniel cannot have received the king's signet ring among his gifts, since the signet is used to seal the lions' den in Dan 6:18.

[147] No one bows down to Joseph, though there is some question as to what *Abrek* means in Gen 41:43. The king does bow to Daniel, in Dan 2:46. See footnotes 98 and 99.

Hebrew/Israelite hero comes in. Redford writes:

> "A well-defined story-type does indeed exist which pictures the wiseman as the only hope of the kingdom in time of peril, much as the Joseph Story depicts Joseph....The land has suffered, or is about to suffer, a terrible calamity. In his distress over the situation, and his ignorance of the proper measures to take, the king encounters a wiseman. The advice this person gives, when adopted by the king, proves to be precisely what was required, and the impending catastrophe is averted"[148].

The story in chapter 2 of the Book of Daniel also fits this type-scene. This is not the situation in Daniel 5. The king there is unaware of the calamity about to befall his empire; it is only through Daniel's interpretation of the mysterious handwriting that the king becomes aware of a threat. No advice is proferred by Daniel; he merely gives a prediction of what will come to pass. The catastrophe is not averted. The king in Daniel 5 does not seem anxious at all: as the chapter plays out, he proceeds with his banquet.

Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream in chapter 2 bears a striking parallel to Joseph's reading of the Pharaoh's dreams in Gen 41.[149] The similarities begin with the time setting: two years into Joseph's incarceration, two years into Nebuchadnezzar's reign. In both instances, Dan 2:1, 3 and Gen 41:8, the gentile ruler's spirit is agitated.

---

[148] Redford, Genesis 37-50, 96. Another permutation of this motif occurs in the legends about the Egyptian god Osiris who, like Joseph provided food. Redford says it is possible the Joseph Story was "the means in Judaic thought of rationalizing by historification the pagan myths of the Egyptian fertility god," Ibid., 181.

[149] One significant difference between the two stories is that Pharaoh himself narrates the content of his dreams, relying on Joseph for interpretation, whereas Nebuchadnezzar does not narrate his own dream. Further on this paper will consider the implications of this.

The stories share the motif of the dream which the dreamer is unable to interpret, and which disturbs him.[150] Court sages are summoned to interpret (Dan 2:2, Gen 41:8). None of the wise men of the kingdom are able to interpret for the king, save Daniel or Joseph, each of whom has the spirit of God in him.

Next the wise Israelite is rushed into the sovereign's presence, upon recommendation by someone close to the king,[151] and introduced to the ruler as one with the ability to make known the meaning of dreams. Joseph and Daniel each credit God for their talent[152]. Joseph does so in a public fashion. Daniel at first acknowledges God's power in his private prayer (Dan 2:23), and subsequently does so to the king (Dan 2:28).

Both dreams involve a sequence of events that spans a period of years. At the outset, conditions are good for the dominant nation. Her rulers wield power and are in control. But then the dreams foretell bad times to come for the ruling kingdom. Daniel and Joseph each interprets two dreams for their respective royal patron. Daniel goes beyond

---

[150] Judging by the number of times the words for 'interpret' or 'solution' occur in the narratives, it would seem that the allusive but unsolvable dreams disturb the dreamer more than a little. In the first 5 chapters of the Book of Daniel, the word for the 'solution', or 'interpretation' for the dream, פשר, is used no fewer than 30 times. Similarly, the word פתר is used 9 times in Genesis between 40:8 and 41:15.

[151] Joseph is introduced and promoted by the chief cupbearer in Gen 41:14, 15. Daniel has to do a bit of self-promotion first, in Dan 2:24, before being recommended by the captain of the guard in verse 25.

[152] Joseph's ability is God-given, he maintains (Gen 41:16). The cupbearer merely says that the *na'ar Ivri* was able to interpret.

this when he interprets the handwriting on the wall for his patron's successor.

What is different about the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar compared with. the dreams of Pharaoh? In the Joseph story, the dreams play into a larger motif of Joseph coming into his greatness. The king's dreams as interpreted by Daniel portend the end of his reign, a personal sense of destruction to come, and an adjuration that the king change his ways in order to escape this fate. The king does not heed the warning, and so his fate is sealed. Missing in the Joseph story is any sense of personal responsibility on Pharaoh's part for the impending famine. Nothing happens to Pharaoh himself. He does not suffer personal ruin as does Nebuchadnezzar. However, Nebuchadnezzar goes on to proclaim praises to the Israelite God (Dan 4:31-32, 34) and his throne is restored to him. It will take several generations in the Torah narrative before the then-current Pharaoh of Egypt is called upon to acknowledge the power of the Israelite God. By then, Joseph will long have been forgotten.

Daniel and Joseph, both ethnically Israelite[153], share abilities at dream interpretation. Both are able to best the local population of sages, experts and magicians, because God is with them. As their stories play out, it becomes apparent that Daniel outdoes Joseph in this special, God-given ability. Joseph indeed displays a talent for interpreting; he can

---

[153] Among other descriptions of Joseph as a Hebrew, he is presented to Pharaoh as "a Hebrew youth" in Gen 41:12. Similarly, Daniel is presented to the Babylonian king as a man "of Judah" in Dan 2:25, and acknowledged before his successor as a Judahite in Dan 5:13.

hear a dream and immediately divine its meaning. But Daniel's talent goes one step further: Daniel is able to know what the dream was, without being told. In a private conversation with Dr. S. David Sperling, he explored the idea that both Daniel and Joseph fit a motif in common with Aaron and Moses, who are able to outdo the Egyptian ritual experts in the plagues' narrative of the Book of Exodus. The Egyptians may have skills, as they demonstrate in replicating some of the Israelites' "marvels" (Exod 7:22; 8:3). But what makes Moses and Aaron true diviners is the fact that God is with them. In these texts, the Israelite God is proven superior to the foreign deities. Questions about the loyalty of Joseph or Daniel to their people pale in significance to this overriding fact of the Hebrew God's demonstrated triumph over the alien god.

The most striking parallel between the dreams in the two narratives concerns the motif of feast/famine. The Joseph story is driven by the need for sustenance, and so it is not surprising to find that the Pharaoh's dreams are suffused with images that portend first, years of plenty, then years of famine. In chapter 4 of Daniel, the king's dream also contains a feast/famine motif. The tree (Dan 4:7 ff) itself is a metaphor for providing food. The tree in the dream has fruit "so abundant that there was food for all in it" (Dan 4:17, JPS translation). When the tree is cut down and denuded of branches, there is nothing to eat but the grass of the field (Dan 4:12, 20). While this is not a total famine, for the king of Babylon to be brought as low as the beasts who graze for food is certainly a reversal. The contrast is highlighted by the royal banquet that occurs in chapter 5.

The role of eating and drinking in Daniel

Daniel is an example of how Jews in exile can preserve their Jewish identity while serving a foreign ruler. Dietary considerations play a significant part in this effort to maintain religious integrity within a diaspora community.

The stage is set in chapter 1 of the Book of Daniel. In refusing to eat the food and drink the wine of the gentile host (Dan 1:8), Daniel displays adherence to his religiously imposed dietary customs. This includes an abstemiousness that, chapter 5 will reveal, is the opposite of gentile behavior. Daniel insists on his diet of grains and greens because, it has been argued, he realizes "that getting used to foreigners' food is a step toward accommodation to their values"[154].

---

[154] Wildavsky, 126. The Talmudic Rabbis and later commentators expand on this. BT AZ 35b contains an outright prohibition on eating the bread of idol-worshipers, despite the fact that earlier sources (Tosefta) did not have a problem at least with the bread. From a reading of the *sugya*, it appears there is nothing in the nature of the bread itself that makes it forbidden (such as that it might absorb non-kosher flavors). Instead, the prohibition stems from a concern over intermarriage. It is as if to say, if you eat the bread of the gentiles, next you will be breaking bread with them, and before you know it your daughter will marry one of them. The later codes go further, outlawing not only bread but also cakes and cookies baked by gentiles, thereby affirming the issue: cake and cookies are eaten in a social situation, not a survival situation. Implicit in the Gemara is the idea that Jews were living in close proximity to gentiles, and perhaps some were eating with them, too. And there is a suggestion that some among the Rabbis did not denounce this.

Daniel rejects the king's food *before* he even sees it; he cannot know what the food is. This suggests there is something inherently prohibited about the king's food, if not on cultic grounds then at least as a matter of politics. Daniel 'gets' the political implications of eating at the king's table. For other biblical messages about the inherent impurity of foreign food, see Eze 4:13, Hos 9:3,4. But a captive has little choice.

From the standpoint of historical detail, the account in the Book of Daniel about the fall of Babylon is widely regarded as containing some inaccuracies. There is no record of any Babylonian king named Belshazzar during the time period of the fall of Babylon[155], though there is an individual known by that name[156]. "The King 'Darius the Mede' (Dan 6.1) is unknown to historians: Babylon was taken by Cyrus the Persian"[157]. There are, however, other historically accurate points of reference in the story. Archaeological evidence reveals the existence of a sixth century BCE palace and throne room, whose walls were plaster-covered[158]. Reports of Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, and of Xenophon in the fourth century BCE told of the fall of Babylon, incorporating a story about a great feast taking place within the besieged city walls during the night of a surprise attack by the Persians and Medes. Herodotus wrote:

> "Because of the great size of the city — so the residents say——after the outer parts of the city had been captured, those living in the centre did not know that the city had fallen, but (they happened to be holding a festival) continued dancing and enjoying themselves, until they discovered the inevitable and their defeat"[159].

---

[155] Hilton, 102. Nabonidus, the last native Babylonian king, had a son named Belshazzar, who was never officially king. Outside sources such as the Hebrew Bible call him a king.

[156] Rashi's comment to Isa 21:5 addresses the connection of the Book of Daniel with biblical prophecies concerning the fall of Babylon. Rashi reads צפה הצפית "Let the watchman watch!" (JPS translation) in Isa 21:5 as a reference to Belshazzar's lampstand in Dan 5:5 (נברשתא - probably a Persian loan word, based on an interpretation in Gen Rab 63:14 and Song of Songs Rab 3:4). In the middle of the king's feast, Babylon's enemies returned and Babylon fell (Isa 21:9).

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 103.

[159] Herodotus with a Commentary, J. W. Blakesley, editor. Bibliotheca Classica, 3; London: Whittaker and George Bell, 1854, 1.191. Quoted in Hilton, 104.

Hartman notes that the banquet setting helps to place the story of Daniel 5 in its purported historical context:

> "At the court of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian kings magnificent state banquets were held, and archaeology has shown that in the palaces of these kings, particularly in the royal palace at Babylon, there were halls where a large crowd of people could assemble for a meal. In such a banquet hall the king would sit at one end, with his back to the wall and with his nobles facing him; hence, the present story has an accurate touch in depicting him as drinking wine 'before' (in front of) his guests...."[160].

About the Temple vessels

The author of the Daniel stories also prepared the setting for the bacchanal of chapter 5, by narrating the plunder of the Jerusalem temple by Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 1:2. "With the temple destroyed the vessels were the only relics of the ancient Jewish cultus and so especially revered by the Jews (see Ezra 1:7-8; Isa 52:11)." The author of Daniel 5 regards the Temple vessels "as preserved in their original form, whereas 2 Kings 25:15 suggests that the vessels were melted down into their respective metals"[161].

Ezra 1:10 gives an accounting of the Temple vessels, custody of which was given to Sheshbazzar when Cyrus of Persia issued his edict permitting the Jews to return. This gives an idea of how much gold and silver was involved in the banquet. Even if Dan 5: 1

---

[160] Hartman, Louis F., Book of Daniel (Anchor Bible series). (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, 1978), 187.

[161] Raymond Hammer, The Book of Daniel (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1976), 61.

is read literally, that there were a thousand guests present, each could have had use of a Temple vessel so as to participate in the bacchanal.

Applying Robert Alter's interpretative technique, where there is near-verbatim repetition of basic content in two biblical verses, the minor additions and omissions from one verse to the next become significant for adducing meaning. Dan 5:2 omits 'and silver' and omits the name of Nebuchadnezzar, but adds three words to the description of the Temple. "Not only is this the Temple in Jerusalem, but the Temple *which is the house of God in Jerusalem*!"[162] The listeners could not have been confused about which Temple was being described. "Instead, this is the phrase which gives us the narrator's point of view and emphasizes his concerns"[163]. Taking the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple for use in the king's banquetting hall is an important matter for the author of the Book of Daniel. "This ravenous act of Belshazzar was more than drunken recklessness. It was blasphemy against the God of Israel, whose Temple is in Jerusalem"[164].

It is tempting to see a parallel to the idolatrous worship of deities whose images were created of various precious and base metals, gold, silver, bronze and iron, as well as elements like wood and stone. Nowhere are these gods referred to by name. "It is not

---

[162] Bill Arnold, "Wordplay and Narrative Techniques in Daniel 5 and 6," JBL 112, 3 (1993), 481. Emphasis the author's.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

they who do battle with the Jewish God, but their champion Belshazzar. The terms of the challenge are such that it can only be met, as it is met, by the destruction of the king"[165]. Repetition of the root נפק in Dan 5: 2, 3 and 5 is, according to Arnold, a use of wordplay "to dramatize divine retribution against human sin. And the irony is that he [the author] uses the same verb, albeit in different derived stems, to denote both sin and punishment"[166]. The writer

> "subtly, and without mentioning God directly, introduces the divine reaction to human insolence. This skillful use of *nepaq* uses irony to contrast the arrogance of human rebellion with the omnipotence of God's response. Nebuchadnezzar may have exercised his royal power in capturing the sacred vessels, but now God exercises his divine prerogative in bringing the blasphemy to an end. The powerful effect of the divine response in v. 5 is made more riveting by v. 4, which is the orientation's climax in profanation. While Belshazzar drank from the vessels of Yahweh, he praised the worthless deities of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. The use of *nepaq* in v. 5 demonstrates God's response both to Belshazzar's mindless sacrilege and to Nebuchadnezzar's former arrogance in 'bringing forth' the vessels from God's temple"[167].

<u>About the banquet setting</u>

The opening banquet in chapter 5 of the Book of Daniel may be viewed as a type-scene "for the elaborate, royal banquet in which an intoxicated monarch gives an irrational decree, as seen also in Esth 1:3-11"[168]. The feast in Daniel 5 may well be elaborate but it is not the most lavish depicted in the Bible. Ahasuerus' feast lasted 180 days, as we read

---

[165] Davies, 95.

[166] Arnold, 482.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid., 480, footnote 7.

in Est 1:1-8[169].

There may have been a certain harmonizing appeal to the author of Daniel 5 in setting the confrontation between the Hebrew God and the gentile gods at an occasion of commensality. "The themes of meeting and dining at God's mountain (Exod 18:12) are rooted in Canaanite myth. The Ugaritic gods' ... 'assembly meeting' convenes on a mountain....The gods also banquet in Ba'lu's palace on Mount Zaphon..."[170].

The banquet setting allows the author of Daniel 5 to portray the gentile life-style as grossly indulgent in its consumption of wine (at least by the king - it is not clear if everyone else is drinking as much). This is in contrast to Daniel's restrained Jewish way of life. Further evidence for the point of view that the Babylonians are licentious comes in 5:3. Hammer notes that "wives did not usually attend feasts," therefore the presence of 'concubines' and 'consorts' "adds a more lascivious note to the proceedings. Regular members of the royal harem were absent, but the female entertainers are regarded as present. (The Septuagint removes all reference to women at the banquet both here and in

---

[169] Chapter 5 also held an important place in the minds of some rabbinic and later medieval commentators. The lengthy aggadah in BT Meg 11b interprets the prophecy of Jeremiah 29:10: after the completion of 70 years, God will take note of Israel and bring her back to her own land. The commentary notes a miscalculation by Belshazzar, about the timing of Jeremiah's prophecy, and claims this was the instigating factor for the drinking party.

[170] William H.C. Propp, Exodus 1-18 (Anchor Bible series) (Doubleday: New York, NY, 1999), 634.

5:23)"[171].

It may be assumed that there was food present at this banquet, though the most prominent feature is the drinking. The word לחם in 5:1 is generally translated as feast. According to Hartman, לחם originally meant food, in general. Most often it is translated in the Bible as 'bread,' though 'meat' is a possible translation among pastoral groups. More commonly in Hebrew we encounter the word משתה for 'feast,' from the root שתה, meaning 'to drink.' Furthermore, טעם as used in 5:2 is "the only occurrence in biblical Aramaic ... in its original meaning of 'taste'"[172]. The use of food in chapter 5 advances a different message than in chapter 1 of the Book of Daniel. But the two stories are connected in exemplifying a certain gentile life-style that is decadent and more: the Babylonian king, the leader of his people, is not God-fearing.

All that Belshazzar has offered to Daniel, the clothing and the elevated status, comes to naught. With his downfall in chapter 5, Belshazzar cannot deliver on his promise. The offer becomes an "irrelevant gesture," "as empty as the building of the Tower of Babel"[173]. This may be compared to a feast which fills the mouth but will always leave

---

[171] Hammer, 62.

[172] Hartman, 183. And see above, on word-play using טעם.

[173] Hilton, 109. With particular reference to the clothing (which is a common motif in the Joseph and Daniel stories), Belshazzar provides nothing. It is God who clothes the naked, just as it is God who gives food to the hungry. Hilton sees use of sound-play on the letters ב, ל and ש in Dan 5, most clearly in verse 29. It is "as if our author is making a pun on the King's name: it is Belshazzar who clothes (elbash)" but Daniel who

you hungry.

Appropriation of sacred vessels for profane use

It is more than the Babylonian king's indulgent life-style that warrants the opprobrium of the author of Daniel 5. Belshazzar has done more than simply drink wine to excess, using vessels that were taken from the Jerusalem Temple. His decadence is shown by drinking 'in front of thousands' (Dan 5:1), with concubines in attendance. Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra say that Belshazzar was, in fact, drunk at the time of the feast. From the standpoint of the Jewish listener, Belshazzar could be as drunk as he pleased; this would serve to confirm the stereotypical view of the gentile culture. But it is not the king's state of inebriation that is at issue. Even if he was not drunk, imbibing any quantity at all from the Temple vessels while pouring out libations to his gods was, "in the storyteller's judgment, a rash and perverse act for which his downfall and death could be the only just outcome"[174]. It is the misappropriation and conversion of these sacred Jewish vessels for profane use that constitutes sacrilege and calls down the wrath of the Hebrew God.

In using the Temple vessels to pour libations to his gentile gods, Belshazzar

> "failed to realise that the tokens of Israel's defeat, the captured sacred objects of the God of Israel, were in fact the sure signs of God's victory. Israel had gone into captivity not because of the weakness of its God but because of his strength. The seemingly victorious gods whom Belshazzar now praised were totally unable

---

reveals, because he does so in the name of the Hebrew God, ibid.

[174] Robert A. Anderson, Signs and Wonders, a Commentary on the Book of Daniel (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), 53.

to come to his aid. They were no more than they appeared to be, gold, silver, wood, and stone (v. 23). What he had failed to recognise was that ultimately he was answerable not to them but to the God of history and creation, in whose very power was his life's breath. His sin was not so much the desecration of the sacred temple vessels as the blasphemous spurning of the universal God"[175].

Consequences of misappropriation

Chapter 5 of the Book of Daniel demonstrates what happens to a gentile ruler (appropriately so, in the view of the biblical author) when he does convert sacred vessels of the cultic apparatus to profane use. The punishment meted out to King Belshazzar is in keeping with the words of Isa 1:19-20: "If, then, you agree and give heed, you will eat the good things of the earth; But if you refuse and disobey, you will be devoured by the sword" (JPS translation).

The words that mysteriously appear on the wall in Belshazzar's presence, though undecipherable by him, are terms describing standardized weights. The overall context of chapter 5 is the theme of divine judgment, here depicted quite literally as the scales of God's justice. The imagery of scales in Dan 5:26-28 is generally treated as an instance of God exercising the role of weighing out human deeds. The balance scale, still in use today, works by placing an unknown amount of a precious metal (or other material) in one pan of the balance, and a standard, known weight in the other pan. Standardized weights are well-attested in the archaeological record. If the balance fails to equilibrate, then the gold or silver does not measure up, i.e., it is too light in comparison with the

[175] Ibid., 60.

standard weight. Sovereigns set the standard of weight for their kingdom. So, too, God, the sovereign of sovereigns, has standards of justice, which are akin to the standardized weights. Belshazzar and his idolatrous behavior failed to measure up. In consequence, God exercised judgment and meted out justice. Wolters writes, "Just as the nations of the ancient Near East often had a royal standard of weight measurement, represented by authorized official weights, so Daniel's God, the universal king of all nations, had a royal standard by which the nations and their kings were judged"[176].

Such standardized weights in antiquity were most often used to test the measure of an unknown quantity of precious metal. However, other items were weighed out in commerce as well. Is it too far-fetched to imagine a Babylonian butcher or baker checking his scales to see if the ingredients would be sufficient, or would fall short of the required amount? From this supposition, it is a lesser leap of analogy to picture God as a master chef. If Bereshit Rabbah 1:15 can posit God as a potter, then why not this image of God weighing out the deeds of humanity as if they were ingredients, checking proportions in order to craft a dish fit for the holiest of holy tables?

---

[176] Al Wolters, "The Riddle of the Scales in Daniel 5," HUCA 62 (1991), 164. An Egyptian wall-painting shows a heart being weighed after death, as a way to judge the soul, thus pointing up again the "connection between weights and divine justice...; human life is judged by the principles of cosmic justice" (Wolters, HUCA,164). A foreign ruler such as the Egyptian Pharaoh of the Exodus narrative may exhibit behavior so sacrilegious, he may fail so utterly to acknowledge the power of the God of Israel, that God hardens his very heart, the seat of the soul. The hardened heart is shrunken in size with the normal heart; it comes up short in the balance scale.

According to a rabbinic hermeneutic, God metes out punishment 'measure for measure.' This can occur directly, though plot details within the Bible, or through outright declaration. It can also take place indirectly, "by drawing various links between the crime and punishment, through a ... common motif (fire, water, food)"[177]. In Daniel, punishment is meted out to Belshazzar for making use of the sacred vessels for his own purpose. Belshazzar presumes to act like a god; in consequence the Hebrew God demonstrates that he is not a god. And the text accomplishes this by using a motif of actual measures, as part of its warning.

From the ancient art of astrology comes another possible reading of the scales imagery. Wolters observes that the historical dating of the Babylonian downfall "comes immediately after the annual morning rising of the constellation Libra, which in Akkadian was called *zibanitu* 'the scales'." He believes that, among the wise men in attendance on the king (see Dan. 5:15) were court astrologers, who must have been aware of the timing of this astrological event:

> "The extremely ingenious interpretation of the riddle which Daniel gave therefore did not only show up the wise men in general, but more particularly turned the tables [!] on the astrologers among them, who took the stars and constellations to be gods who ruled terrestrial affairs....Libra is not a great god of heaven with power over the fate of nations, but rather an instrument in the hand of Daniel's God, who uses it to weigh the nations against His standards, and to punish them if they do not measure up....Daniel is enabled by God to beat them at their own

---

[177] Yael Shemesh, "Measure for Measure in Biblical Narrative," in Hebrew in Beit Mikra 158 (1999). The translation is from the published English abstract. As noted above, the famine in Genesis does *not* seem to reflect divine punishment.

game"[178].

Within the narrative convention, Daniel possesses some special wisdom. "The wisdom in which he is trained is not the wisdom of the Old Testament as represented in the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or Job. It is the wisdom of divination," shared to some degree with the Babylonian court sages[179]. The editorial position in the Book of Daniel is not opposed to this kind of wisdom; it views Daniel's wisdom as coming from God, not from his Babylonian education.

Daniel is a man who can 'untie knots' or 'solve problems' (Dan 5:6,12,16). One writer has suggested a more literal, and visceral translation for this expression of Daniel's special ability. Consonant with the overarching theme of feasting and drinking to excess, the king's terror at being unable to interpret the handwriting on the wall takes on a range of gastrointestinal expressions. Belshazzar's response details "in descending order four bodily manifestations of fear: the blanching of the face, the anxiety of the mind (that is, the heart), the loosening of the loins, and the knocking of the knees"[180]. It is the 'loosening of the loins' that draws Wolters' attention. He suggests that this "refers to the king's panic-stricken loss of sphincter control and that vv. 12 and 16 are a mocking and

---

[178] Wolters, HUCA, 177.

[179] Davies, 53.

[180] Al Wolters, "Untying the King's Knots: Physiology and Wordplay in Daniel 5," JBL 110, 1 (1991), 117.

ironic allusion to this ignominious incontinence on the king's part"[181]. The repetition of the expression is a double entendre. It refers to Daniel's mantic ability to untie knots, while also making a derisive comment about the king of Babylon for the benefit of an Israelite audience. As Wolters envisions the scene,

> "Finally the king himself comes face to face with Daniel — the pagan king named Belshazzar before the Israelite prophet named Belteshazzar — and says, in effect, 'I understand that you can untie my knots for me.' Again, we can imagine the audience's uproarious laughter as the hapless pagan king unwittingly makes a fool of himself before the prophet of the Lord. We see how the story uses burlesque humor to underscore the sovereignty of the Israelite God, before whom the great kings of the earth can at a moment's notice be reduced to figures of fun, preparatory to being brought to justice"[182].

In other words, by holding fast to his Jewish identity, the story's hero not only achieves success as the transmitter of divine wisdom to the gentile king. Daniel is also able to undermine the foreign authority in a subtle, farcical way. Subversion of the officially constituted authority is a time-honored technique for a minority culture's survival[183].

Daniel 5 in concert with Daniel 4

According to several scholars, Daniel 5 should be read in concert with Daniel 4. The two stories point up the contrasting treatment of kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. The first king exhibits overweening pride, is subsequently debased, and ultimately comes to acknowledge, praise and exalt the Hebrew God. The second king does not humble

---

[181] Ibid., 118.

[182] Ibid., 121.

[183] See Isa 21:3, Eze 21:12, Nahum 2:11 and Ps 69:24 for other instances of loosening of joints as symptoms of panic.

himself, and is killed. These two tales comprise "two sides of the Jewish attitude to the Gentile powers," showing what happens to a king who does not repent nor acknowledge God:

> "Even though Belshazzar is given no time to repent, Daniel 5 does not envisage the overthrow of gentile power as such. The kingdom passes to Darius the Mede. The judgment on the king takes place within the context of continuing gentile rule. The message is that there are good gentile kings and bad ones. The good ones are those who humble themselves, treat the sacred things with respect and acknowledge the God of heaven"[184].

The combined effect of these two stories is to demonstrate for diaspora Jews the importance of maintaining religious fealty through outward behavior. Jews can find themselves at home in the gentile environment, and need not seek the overthrow of the gentile monarch, but all the while Jews should continue to act in accordance with the belief that the God of Israel is the ultimate source of power and control. Chapter 5 "reinforces the message of the previous chapter that the mighty can be brought low..."[185]. This echoes a theme found throughout the Bible, that those who usurp the place of God will be brought low[186].

The mystery of the writing on the wall which cannot be understood is ironic, here in

---

[184] Collins, Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, 70.

[185] John J. Collins, Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees (Michael Glazier, Inc.: Wilmington, DE, 1981), 60-61.

[186] See Eze 28, Isa 14. This is also a prominent theme in Greek literature: 'pride goeth before a fall.'

Babylon, of all places[187], where misunderstanding and confusion over language began. Surely the king of Bavel would realize that only God can be master, and only someone in whom the spirit of God resides can be master of mysterious language. Babylon, the city that was born in misunderstanding and confusion of languages, meets its doom in the same way. God is responsible, in both instances. Hilton sees the story of Babylon's second downfall as a reversal of the version in Genesis: where the Genesis tale began with one language, Daniel's story begins with more. There is no parallel role in the Genesis 11 story for a hero like Daniel; there, it is God who directly intervenes to scatter the people.

Daniel as a commentary on Joseph

Wildavsky has contrasted Joseph and Moses, tracing the path of each man from his roots to the position of power he attains. The poles of their paths are similar but reversed in order of attainment: Joseph starts out among his brethren, and ends up in a position of authority within the foreign court; Moses starts out in the foreign court, and ends up among his brethren. A similar contrast can be drawn between Joseph and Daniel.

One way to view Joseph and Daniel is that they are individuals undergoing similarly dramatic changes, but in opposing directions. Joseph begins his career trajectory as a dreamer. But at the end of his rise to prominience, he is no longer a dreamer, rather he is

[187] The name 'Bavel' is etymologized in Gen 11:9, as a place where there is confusion of tongues.

an interpreter of dreams. In counterpoint to Joseph, one author argues that Daniel's career path takes him in the opposite direction. He begins as a dream interpreter, and becomes a visionary himself.[188]

I am not in complete agreement. Naor reads the Book of Daniel as a whole, not separating out the two discrete halves that most biblical scholars credit to different redactional hands. Though he acknowledges this source-critical view, he prefers to read the Book of Daniel as a unity. He bases this on the traditional religious understanding that the Book of Daniel was redacted by the Men of the Great Assembly.[189]

If one reads the Book of Daniel as two distinct sections, it is difficult to credit Daniel with any visions in the first half (i.e., the first six chapters). In Dan 1:17 we read that Daniel has an understanding of visions, not that he himself 'has visions.' In Dan 2:19 Daniel has a vision, but it is a vision which reveals the interpretation of the king's dream. It is not a dream of his own, nor is it Daniel's vision for the future of Israel. It is the king's dream and accordingly, the vision concerns the future of the Babylonian empire.

Naor discerns a defining difference between the characters Daniel and Joseph: Joseph

---

[188] Bezalel Naor, "Joseph and Daniel: Court Jews and Dreamers," Jewish Bible Quarterly, Vol. 30, No.1, 2002, p. 11.

[189] See BT Bava Batra 15a. As a document written by the earliest stratum of rabbis, Naor says that any "liberties taken with chronology are the signature of *ru'ach ha-Kodesh*," Naor, 15. And see Gen Rab 85:2 and the gloss there of the Rashash.

moves from being a dreamer to interpreting for others; Daniel moves in the opposite direction. Naor's "simple explanation" states that

> "Joseph marks the beginning of *galut mizrayim*. We are observing a Hebrew moving from sovereignty to servitude, from Canaan to Egypt. In his own land, the Hebrew is master of his own fate, of his own dreams. He is his own visionary, his own man....Daniel, on the other hand, is coming out of *galut bavel*.... In captivity, he has no dreams of his own. He is merely an appendage to the body of Babylon, a functionary of Nebuchadnezzar's....By the end of the book, hope beckons, hope of redemption and deliverance form Babylonian captivity....Daniel moves into the driver's seat. He is now an active visionary of Israel's redemption, of the Messiah."[190]

I incline toward a view that Daniel is a dream interpreter in chapters 1-6, and only becomes a visionary, as revealed to the reader by the final redactor, in later chapters of the book (beginning at chapter 7). Daniel's first vision is an interpretation of the king's own dream, and deals with the fate of the Babylonian empire. Later in the Book, Daniel's own visions are a bridge to apocalyptic literature. There is no parallel to the ego-driven dreams of personal glory which Joseph dreams. Daniel's dreams for the Jewish people arise only after the first half of the book, where, it is generally acknowledged, there is a different redactional hand. These later chapters have clear apocalyptic resonance (something not dealt with in this paper). Author Naor sees Joseph's rise from rags to riches as a personal tragedy. In his opinion, "Joseph has gone from a very active dream life, from being a visionary, to armchair interpreter of other men's dreams." [191] Joseph has lost something of his inner life. The countervailing argument is that Joseph first had to experience his own

---

[190] Naor, 14-15.

[191] Ibid., 12.

dreams, to practice interpretation, so to speak, on himself, in preparation for his role in Pharaoh's court. But why does Joseph have no more dreams? The biblical text is silent; no doubt Joseph's dream life is no longer relevant to the artfully drawn plot.

As for Daniel being a 'visionary,' we see that within chapter 7, Daniel himself appears unable to interpret his own vision (see Dan 7:15, 16).[192] He needs the interpretative skill of one of the attendants (heavenly? courtly?). Daniel has another vision in chapter 8, the meaning of which he is likewise at some difficulty to grasp (see Dan 8:16, 17). Daniel is not the one who gives the meaning of this vision; it is Gabriel who makes an attempt at interpretation (8:19 ff). Furthermore, Daniel has to keep the vision about the End of Days a secret, and at the end of the chapter, it is clear that "no one could explain it" (8:26; 27). It is here that the Book of Daniel is most clearly apocalyptic.[193]

Ultimately the two stories have more in common than they differ. Individual visions, no matter how grand, are not significant at all. What matters is being connected to God, whose gift it is to have visions in the first instance. This is also the point of the two men's dreams: God is the source of all divination.

The intended audience for the Book of Daniel

As was noted at the outset, the Book of Daniel contains historical inaccuracies, enough to

---

[192] Note that this vision makes reference to eating meat, Dan 7:5.

[193] Dan 8:19 refers to the 'End of Days.'

lend credence to the idea that the narrative is a fiction, "intended for a Jewish audience, not an actual prophetic address to a king....Daniel could, however, serve as an idealized role model for lesser officials, and urge them, by his fictional example, to reject idolatry and worship the one true God"[194].

Davies, for one, holds to a diaspora setting for the stories in the Book of Daniel. Without a diaspora context, he says, "the stories have no relevance to the lives of their audience, but function as entertaining anecdotes about another time and place"[195]. The author of Daniel does not condone specific behaviors of the Babylonian rulers, but neither does he condemn gentile sovereignty in principle. The biblical writer sees Babylonian rule as temporary, with the succession of kingdoms ordained by the Jewish God (see Dan 2:21, 7:17).

The atmosphere between Daniel and the foreign ruler, while not as positive as that between Joseph and Pharaoh, is certainly not as negative as one might expect. "This is most surprising in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the destroyer of the Jerusalem Temple and the architect of the Babylonian Exile (Dan 1:1-2), who is criticized fiercely by other voices in the Hebrew Bible"[196].

---

[194] Collins, Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, 70.

[195] Davies, 54.

[196] Henze, 12. See, e.g., Isa 13; 47. Yet note that in Jer 27:6, God calls Nebuchadnezzar 'my servant.' The Hebrew God is in charge of the political system for the entire world, and Nebuchadnezzar is merely carrying out God's will. In keeping with biblical

Nowhere does Daniel advocate the overthrow of the regime. Even as King Belshazzar meets his end in chapter 5, rulership passes to another Babylonian king as part of the standard course of events. Foreign rule goes on.

The expected tension with the monarch is expressed instead in relations with the courtiers. Rivalries no doubt existed within the court, where Jews were well-regarded members. This is similar to the situation between Mordecai and the courtiers around Haman. Can this literary situation be any reflection of social reality for the Jews at the time of its writing? Henze writes that "accurate information about life at the court was not the dominant concern of the biblical author"[197]. There are probable distortions and exaggerations: a thousand guests; the ridiculously arbitrary nature of the king's orders in Dan 2:2 ff and 3:19[198]. Unlike the apparently accurate knowledge of the *sitz-im-leben* of the Pharaonic court,

> "A text [i.e., Daniel] with such exaggerations is not likely to stem from circles who had an intimate knowledge of the Babylonian court. To the contrary, the extravagant descriptions are wishful projections of the disenfranchised, reflecting the social misery of those who seek comfort in such fantasies. Hardly the product

---

ideology, Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Temple was not an act of evil, but was a part of God's plan to punish wayward Israel; even God's own Temple would not be inviolable if Israel acted wrongly. In contrast, Belshazzar's behavior in misappropriating Temple vessels for profane worship is distinctly not in keeping with biblical ideology. Rabbinic tradition was bothered by Daniel's display of concern for Nebuchadnezzar's welfare, and tried to read it as calculating in a political way; see Tanchuma to Mishpatim 4.

[197] Ibid., 16.

[198] There are similar ridiculous decrees in Esther, which the king himself cannot revoke.

> of the well-to-do Jews in exile, the legends originally circulated 'among the poorest of the Babylonian Jewry'"[199].

That is to say, among the diaspora community.

The elevation of Daniel through the ranks to such high status strikes Levenson as a "recall [of] the prophetic visions of restoration after the Babylonian exile (e.g., Isa 54)"; such transformations of status are "allegorizations of Israel's national destiny"[200]. The tales are fantasies to lend emotional support to diaspora Jews who are displaced, to give them hero stories that will help to foster and maintain Jewish identity.

As is often the case with biblical narrative, "One of the most prominent features of the tales [in Daniel] is their narrative economy." Descriptions of key characters and details of life are "deliberately sparse... apparently in an effort to place the emphasis squarely on the glory of his [the writer's] God rather than on that of his characters." Compare Dan 2:28 with Gen 41:16: "The ultimate emphasis is on the message, not on the messenger – as Daniel himself ... points out"[201].

One use of the Daniel stories is to relate some ways in which Jews can and should

---

[199] Ibid., citing Hans-Peter Muller, "Marchen, Legende und Enderwartung: Zum Verstandnis des Buches Daniel," VT 26/3 (1976), 338-50, 341.

[200] Jon D. Levenson, Esther: A Commentary, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 26.

[201] Henze, 19.

maintain their religious individuality in the foreign environment. Daniel and the other young men with him are magnificent specimens of Israelite stock. They are handsome, indeed near-flawless, and filled with a spirit of wisdom. In short they are heroic figures to the Jewish audience hearing these tales. The threat to their Israelite identity comes immediately in Dan 1:6, when Daniel and his companions are given Babylonian names. Change of name in the Bible generally bears significance, even when (as here) the new name is not used consistently in subsequent verses.

Daniel's 'new' name is conferred using the same verb, the Hebrew שׂים, that reveals his intent not to defile himself with the king's food or drink. The text does not elaborate on the motive for Daniel's behavior, or tell what could be wrong with the king's food and drink. "By making the shift of perspective pivot on the verb 'to set or fix,' the narrator suggests that the assignment of the new identity may be part of what spurs Daniel to show resistance"[202]. This may be part of Daniel's attempt to curb the (forced?) assimilation process.

The biblical author approves of Danile's attainment of high station in the foreign court. Yet there is always an acknowledgment that Jews are different from gentiles, in their religious beliefs and practices, and should continue to maintain their differences. One of the signal ways in which the Jewish audience could heed this lesson was by following

---

[202] Fewell, 39.

Jewish dietary customs. Daniel, like Joseph in his setting, has assimilated to a degree into the gentile culture. He has a Babylonian name, speaks the local language, adopts the gentile dress. He accepts the political and economic dominance of the Babylonian society. But the writer makes a point that there is a threshold Daniel will not cross, his religious observance. He spurns the diet of the king's table as a defilement of his Jewish beliefs, and he does this in a public way.

The defilement, expressed as a matter of religious observance, does not seem to have anything to do with the actual food and drink of the king. Fewell suggests that Daniel's behavior has more to do with the source of the food than the food itself:

> "It is the *king's* special food and the wine which the *king* himself drinks. It is, in other words, the symbol of political patronage, the eating of which would be tantamount to declaring complete political allegiance. This reading does not deny that Daniel's decision is religiously motivated; it simply suggests that Daniel's religiosity is of a more complex nature. His piety extends beyond cultic or ritual concerns"[203].

Daniel's behavior ultimately forces the Babylonian king to acknowledge the power of the Hebrew God, to the whole world. There is nothing like this in the Book of Genesis; it takes the Book of Exodus to bring this point home to the Pharaoh of Egypt. No wonder the Rabbis transformed their reading of the Joseph narrative by reading the story of Daniel back into it.

---

[203] Fewell, 40.

Conclusion

In the face of an external threat, Jews have often become more insular, and perhaps more observant of religious norms. It is as if the circle of 'club membership' is drawn tighter. Behavioral customs serve to unite a community, furthering group cohesion by defining one's group against the 'other.' Without an external threat, there is more tendency to let the 'other' in, and towards assimilation.

Today many in the Jewish community perceive assimilation itself to be a threat. There is no Pharaoh, no Babylonian king, who seeks the destruction of the Jewish people (putting to the side the conflict in the Middle East). On the surface, modern western society resembles a veritable feast for a people so long persecuted. Questions of what is essential to faith and what is adaptable, are faced by every thoughtful Jew who is embedded in our culture. What is essential to one's understanding of Judaism, what can be accommodated, and what assimilated? Can a Jew be successful, 'do well' in the secular world and still 'do good' in a Jewish sense? Our biblical texts provide us with models for staying within our culture while holding on to core beliefs.

The balance can be difficult to negotiate. There is a potential threat from the outside in being too far removed from the traditions of the Jewish people. There is the inner need to hold onto one's core values. This reflects the dichotomy between being inner-directed and other-directed. How does one find a balance that is meaningful and workable, at the same time? It can start with an acknowledgment of the challenge. In modern America,

people can choose and invent identities.

Daniel is more of a model than Joseph for how to behave, or, better, a cautionary tale of how not to behave, in the face of external threats, like a famine, or a fiery furnace, and internal ones such as challenges to religious identity presented through food. As the rabbinic tradition treats him, Daniel is 'more Jewish' than Joseph. In Daniel, it is very clear that the Jew must live his life differently from the gentile. That is not as clear a point in the Joseph story. The Rabbis try to draw out what some of the difficulties and conflicts are in both narratives, and to articulate that which remains inarticulate in the biblical tale. The Rabbis are interested in exegesis of texts, but also in how these texts fit in with their own *Weltanschaung*. We do the same today, bringing in discussion of identity politics and sociology to the biblical texts.

Excursus: Joseph and the god Serapis

We read in the Mishnah: If one finds utensils/vessels [כלים] upon which is the [idolatrous] figure of the sun or moon or a dragon, he casts them into the salt sea.[204]; i.e., these utensils are impermissible for use by a Jew. More than likely, the vessels under discussion in this mishnah are items of value and ornamentation, but the range of rabbinic opinions suggests the possibility that these might be cooking or eating utensils. On the types of graven image that invalidate the licit use of such vessels, BT AZ 43a adds a baraita: "R. Judah also includes the picture of a woman giving to suck, and Serapis." These images probably allude to Isis (the queen of the gods) and Osiris (the god who supplies grain), both major divine figures in the Egyptian pantheon. The Gemara goes on: "'A woman giving to suck' alludes to Eve who suckled the whole world; 'Serapis' alludes to Joseph who became a prince [*sar*] and appeased [*hafis*] the whole world" [during the seven years of famine].[205] Perhaps the mention of the sun and the moon in the mishnah triggered the association with Joseph for the anonymous compiler.[206] If the vessels that form the context of the talmudic discussion may be eating utensils that contain graven images, then the confluence of a food-related topic and the allusion to Joseph is notable. Joseph does indeed supply food to all the world (Gen 42:57). But the

---

[204] M Avodah Zarah 3:3

[205] "The identification of Serapis with Joseph occurs frequently in writings of antiquity. V. Blaufuss, Gotter etc. p. 19," footnote 3 to BT AZ, in CD-ROM Soncino Talmud.

[206] Gen 37:9, which might have an idolatrous ring to the ears of the later rabbinic commentators: bowing down to anything or anyone other than God would be in the category of *avodah zarah*.

implicit question in Rabbi Judah's baraita is, did Joseph go too far towards identifying with his Egyptian master, so far as to serve the Egyptian gods?[207] There are certainly instances where Joseph's behavior wins plaudits for his character from the Rabbis, generally after he has moved to the Egyptian milieu.[208] But other aspects of Joseph's behavior must have given the Rabbis pause. Questions about Joseph's blended identity seem troublesome, at least to Rabbi Judah. We ask these same questions today.

Rabbi Judah's baraita enlarges the halachic discussion by adding a bit of historical information. He mentions the name of Serapis, a major deity in the Greco-Roman world, which shows his awareness of his contemporary culture. He breaks Serapis into two words, סר (though it is spelled שר in Tanach, this orthographic change is typical of later Hebrew) and אפיס, from the root פיס. שר/סר, meaning prince, is well-attested in Biblical Hebrew. פיס is not attested in Biblical Hebrew, but comes into usage in rabbinic times.[209] Its usage in the piel form generally means 'to pacify, conciliate;'

---

[207] Perhaps some of this discomfort goes to explain why Joseph is not considered a prophet by the rabbinic tradition. Of course it is impossible to know why anything was canonized or not, so this is only a guess at the motives of the Rabbis.

[208] Two examples where Joseph is held up for praise by the Midrash, in the context of avoiding *avodah zarah*: he refuses even to lie alongside Mrs. Potiphar without sexual relations, see Ber Rab 87:6; Asenath is really Dinah's daughter, according to aggadah in *Me'Am Lo'Ez*, vol.3b, to Gen 41:45, 377.

[209] In addition to the usage in piel, see the word-play in Gen Rab 84:8 on Gen 37:23 regarding Joseph's striped coat, פסים: the brothers drew lots about who should carry the bloodied garment to their father; פיס in hifil can have the sense of 'to arbitrate, decide,'especially, 'to decide by drawing lots.' The root פייס comes from a Greek word meaning 'to appease, reconcile' (Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period, Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990,

appease is a fair translation. סר seems to be a clear reference to Joseph, who (despite the 1998 animated movie that refers to Moses as 'Prince of Egypt') was a prince second in command only to Pharaoh (though Joseph is not referred to by the term). In addition to being סר, the aggadic comment makes Joseph מפיס to the whole world, where the hifil participle would seem to have the meaning 'distributor,' that is, the one who distributes rations.[210]

The possible link between Joseph and Serapis is intriguing. Serapis was a god who was blended from Egyptian and Greek deities.[211] The syncretism seems to have been an attempt to bring closer the two communities which found themselves living side by side. It was a deliberate strategem to give the two peoples, Greek and Egyptian, a divinity in common, by utilizing features of a god that was important to each community. Such a blended godhead was intended not to detract from worship of either of the earlier gods.

---

431). A similar root is semitic in origin, meaning 'to break up' and is used with casting lots. The usage here puns on both roots.

[210] The mem prefix makes מפיס a participle; the vocalization that rhymes most closely with Serapis calls for a patach for the beginning vowel; hence, a hifil construction. However it is the kal meaning that is applied here.

Another instance of פיס used in the piel form is found in Gen Rab 93, 94, commenting on Gen 45:2, Joseph weeping on Benjamin's neck: Joseph appeases his brothers only by weeping. Interestingly, in light of the comparisons being made in this paper between Joseph and Daniel, shortly after this midrash we read of the appeasement of Nebuchadnezzar (Gen Rab 96 or 97).

[211] "The god is not connected with any myths; therefore it was believed that the cult was 'artificially' introduced by Ptolemy I." From the website, http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/memphis/uc50470.html.

The major temple to Serapis was in located Alexandria, and stood into the Greek and Roman period. Serapis was derived in part from the Greek god Helios, the sun god, who also respesented the notion of sovereignty. On the Egyptian side, Serapis was closely associated with Osiris, the god of grain. Serapis is depicted in a marble bust from circa second-third century CE[212], which shows him bearing a measure of grain on his head in a *modius*, or *kalathos*. Though this was a measure of grain in ancient Rome, equivalent to approximately one-quarter bushel, to the modern eye, the image resembles nothing so much as a basket. This suggests a parallel with the chief baker in the Joseph narrative, who bears three baskets on his head (Gen 41:16). A further element in common is the fact that "Serapis was thought to appear to mortals in dreams."[213]

The mention of Serapis in R. Judah's baraita seems to trigger, for the talmudic *stam*, some connection with Joseph. Can it be that some amoraic rabbis knew of the probable syncretistic nature of the deity Serapis? It is impossible to say what contemporaneous understanding there would have been as to the god's origins, either among the Rabbis or

---

[212] Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College, London.

[213] http://itsa.ucsf.edu/~snlrc/encyclopaedia_romana/greece/paganism/serapis.html.

The great library at Alexandria had an annex in the vicinity of Serapis' temple. Possibly, though less likely, there could be a connection with Joseph, who is described in the biblical text as a figure of great wisdom (Gen 41:39). In the ancient world, where divinity was deemed the source of all wisdom, there would not have been any distinction between 'secular' and 'divine' knowledge, the way we know it today (that is, keeping 'religion' out of the 'public' schools would have been an impossibility in the ancient world).

among the population which worshipped Serapis[214]. But this does suggest that there was some early question about blended loyalties in the character of the biblical Joseph.

Of Joseph, it could be said that he emerges out of two discrete cultures while maintaining elements of both, and that he is a figure who provides physical sustenance to two groups of people. Of the god Serapis, it could be said that he emerges out of two discrete cultures while maintaining elements of both, and that he is a figure who provides religious sustenance for both groups. Serapis becomes a focal point, something the two cultures can share in common, without detracting from worship of either group's original deities. In one sense, Joseph serves two masters, Yahweh and Pharaoh, and he subsumes aspects of his Hebrew heritage in order to succeed in the Egyptian court. In this view he is neither completely Hebrew nor completely Egyptian. But a more radical way of looking at Joseph's situation is that Joseph tries to bring the two cultures, one his by birth, one adopted, closer together. Joseph becomes the focal point for a world in crisis.

---

[214] It is hard even today to gauge the understanding by the general public about the origin of a deity's name. We do not generally make the association between Thursday and the god Thor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alter, Robert. Genesis: Translation and Commentary. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

_____. The Art of Biblical Narrative. New York: HarperCollins, 1981.

Anderson, Robert A. Signs and Wonders, a Commentary on the Book of Daniel. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,1984.

Arnold, Bill. "Wordplay and Narrative Techniques in Daniel 5 and 6." Journal of Biblical Literature 112, no. 3 (1993): 479-485.

_____. "Word Play and Characterization in Daniel 1." In Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000, 231-248.

Asen, Bernhard A. "The Garlands of Ephraim: Isaiah 28:1-6 and the Marzeah." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 71 (1996): 73-87.

Berlin, Adele. Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983.

Bickerman, Elias. Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther. Knopf, 1985.

Carroll, Robert P. "YHWH's Sour Grapes: Images of Food and Drink in the Prophetic Discourses of the Hebrew Bible." In Semeia 86: Food and Drink in the Biblical Worlds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999.

Clines, David J.A., ed. Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Cohen, Gerson. "The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish Life." Commencement address given to the graduating class of Hebrew College, Boston, 1966. Reprinted in Cohen, Gerson D. Jewish History and Jewish Destiny. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997.

Cohen, Shaye. The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties. Berkely and L.A.: University of California Press, 1999.

Collins, John J. Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984.

_____. Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981.

Cotter, David W., ed. Berit Olam series. Genesis. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003.

Culi, Jacob. *Me'Am Lo'Ez* (The Torah Anthology). Vol. 3b, Joseph in Egypt. Translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1991.

Davies, Philip R. Daniel. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Encyclopedia Mikrait. "*Achila*," Vol. 1, 279 - 281; "*Yayin*," Vol. 3, 675 - 682; "*Lechem*," Vol. 4, 487 - 493. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1962.

Fewell, Dana Nolan. Circle of Sovereignty. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 72. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988.

Fox, Michael V. "Wisdom in the Joseph Story." Vetus Testamentum 51 (2001): 26-41.

Freedman, David N. The Anchor Bible Dictionary. "Eating and Drinking in the Old Testament," "Bread". New York: Doubleday, 1992. Libronix Digital Library System 1.1a, 2002 CD ROM edition.

Gnuse, Robert. "The Jewish Dream Interpreter in a Foreign Court: The Recurring Use of a Theme in Jewish Literature." Journal for the Study of Pseudoepigrapha 7 (1990), 29-53.

Grabbe, Lester L., Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian, Volume One: The Persian and Greek Periods. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

_____. "The Belshazzar of Daniel and the Belshazzar of History." Andrews University Seminary Studies, Spring 1988, Vol. 26, No. 1: 59-66.

Grayson, A. Kirk, "Eunuchs in Power." In Vom Alten Orient Zum Alten Testament. Dietrich, Manfried and Loretz, Oswald, editors. Festschrift for Wolfram F. von Soden. Neukirchen, Germany: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1995.

Hammer, Raymond. The Book of Daniel. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Hartman, Louis F. Book of Daniel (Anchor Bible series). Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978.

Henze, Matthais. "The Narrative Frame of Daniel: A Literary Assessment." Journal for

the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods 32 (2001): 5-24.

Hilton, Michael. "Babel Reversed – Daniel Chapter 5." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 66 (1995): 99-112.

Hoffmeier, James K. Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Humphreys, W. Lee. Joseph and His Family. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

_____. "A Life-Style for the Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel." Journal of Biblical Literature 92 (1973): 211 - 223.

Hurowitz, Victor (Avigdor). "A Forgotten Meaning of Nepes in Isaiah lviii 10." Vetus Testamentum 47 (1997): 43 -52.

Kearney, Peter J. "Understanding the Biblical Symbols for Life." Review for Religious 39 (1980): 513-532.

King, Philip J. "Commensality in the Biblical World." Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

Klaus, Nathan. "The Pivot Pattern (Gen 43:3-5)." (*Bereishit 43:3-5 - ha-Mivneh ha-Kadkudi.*) Beit Mikra 158 (1999): 244-251.

Koehler, Ludwig and Baumgartner. The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. New York: E.J. Brill, 1994.

Leibowitz, Nehama. New Studies in Bereshit. Aryeh Newman, translator. Jerusalem: Hemed Press (n.d.).

Levenson, Jon D. "Some Unnoticed Connotations in Jeremiah 20:9." Catholic Biblical Quarterly 46 (1984): 223-225.

_____. Esther: A Commentary. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

Matthews, Victor Harold. "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 65 (1995): 25-36.

McKinlay, Judith E. Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 216. Sheffield, England:

Sheffield Academic Press, 1986.

Meadowcroft, Tim. "Metaphor, Narrative, Interpretation, and Reader in Daniel 2-5." Narrative Vol. 8, No. 3 (October 2000): 257-278.

Niskanen, Paul. The Human and the Divine in History: Herodotus and the Book of Daniel. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 396. London and New York: JSOT, 2004.

Phillips, Judith R. "Zechariah's Vision and Joseph in Egypt: An Ancient Dialogue About Jewish Identity." Conservative Judaism 53, 1 (2000): 51-61.

Porteous, Norman W. Daniel. London: SCM, 1965.

Porton, Gary. The Stranger Within Your Gates. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Propp, William H.C. Exodus 1-18. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

Redford, Donald B. Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

_____. A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50). Supplement to Vetus Testamentum, Volume XX. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970.

Reis, Pamela Tamarkin. "Eating the Blood: Saul and the Witch of Endor," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 73 (1997): 3-23.

Sasson, Jack M., ed. Civilizations of the Ancient Near East. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Nov 2000.

Sharon, Diane M. Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

Shea, William H. "Further Literary Structures in Daniel 2-7: An Analysis of Daniel 5, and the Broader Relationships within Chapters 2-7." Andrews University Seminary Studies 23,2 (1985) 193-202; 23,3: 277-295.

Shemesh, Yael. "Measure for Measure in Biblical Narrative." (*Middah k'neged Middah b'Sipporet ha-Mikrait*) Beit Mikra 158 (1999): 261-277.

Soggin, J.A. "Notes on the Joseph Story." In Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson, A. Graeme Auld, editor. Sheffield, England:

JSOT Press, 336-349, 1993.

Sokoloff, Michael. A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990.

Soncino Talmud. Brooklyn, NY: Soncino Press, Ltd., 1990. Davka Corporation CD-ROM Version 2.2, 2001.

Speiser, E.A. Genesis. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1964.

Sperling, S. David. The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Tadmor, Hayim. "Was the Biblical *saris* a Eunuch?" In Solving Riddles and Untying Knots. Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield, Z. Zevit, S. Gitin and M. Sokoloff, editors. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 317-325, 1995.

Tanna de be Eliyahu. E-book copyright 2001 Varda Books, original copyright 1981 by Jewish Publication Society as *Tanna debe Eliyahu*.

Tcherikover, Victor. Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

Walsh, Carey Ellen. "Under the Influence: Trust and Risk in Biblical Family Drinking." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 90 (2000): 13-29.

Wenham, Gordon J. Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 16 - 50, volume 2. Dallas: Word Books, 1994.

Westermann, Claus. Genesis 37-50. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982.

_____. Genesis: An Introduction. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Wildavsky, Aaron. Assimilation versus Separation: Joseph the Administrator and the Politics of Religion in Biblical Israel. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993.

Wills, Lawrence M. The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Wolters, Al. "The Riddle of the Scales in Daniel 5." Hebrew Union College Annual 62 (1991): 155-177.

_____. "Belshazzar's Feast and the Cult of the Moon God Sin." Bulletin for Biblical

Research 5 (1995): 199-206.

_____. "Untying the King's Knots: Physiology and Wordplay in Daniel 5." Journal of Biblical Literature 110, 1 (1991): 117-122.

Zornberg, Avivah Gottlieb. Genesis: The Beginning of Desire. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my husband, Dr. Eric Stern, for his technical support with the production of this thesis.

To my advisor, Dr. S. David Sperling, whose words I always drink with zeal, I express my appreciation for his erudition, and my gratitude for his teaching, his guidance, and his friendship.