

I, KOHELET, WAS KING OF ISRAEL IN
JERUSALEM:
THE ROLE OF DEMONS IN KING SOLOMON'S
FALL

ERIC DANIEL ROSENSTEIN

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
Los Angeles, California

Date: March 2019
Adviser: Dr. Reuven Firestone

Table of Contents:

Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	4
Source Analysis	6
Talmud Yerushalmi: Sanhedrin 20c	6
Translation:	6
Analysis and Commentary:	7
Pesikta deRav Kahana 27 (168b-169a)	11
Translation:	11
Analysis and Commentary:	12
Talmud Bavli: Gittin 68a-b	13
Translation:	14
Analysis and Commentary:	17
Kohelet Rabbah 1.12	36
Translation:	36
Analysis and Commentary:	36
Tanhuma Ahare 1:2	40
Translation:	40
Analysis and Commentary:	40
Midrash Al Yithollel	42
Translation:	42
Analysis and Commentary:	44
Source Contexts	50
On Sources and Origins	50
Context Analysis	51
Major Themes	55
Conclusion	60
Bibliography	62
Primary Sources	62
References	62

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Dvora Weisberg and Dr. Candice Levy for introducing me to this style of broad learning on a single topic or character during summers in the Bet Midrash, and in a seminar on midrashim. I want to express appreciation to Dr. Reuven Firestone for his guidance through the process, his expertise in folktale, and his encouragement to slow my learning and dig deeply. I would like to acknowledge my ordination class for their support and companionship during this writing process and for years of learning and transformation. Finally, I would like to thank Carly and Lilah, who give me the loving space to deepen my learning even as our family expands.

Introduction

This project began as an exercise in process. I wanted to choose a figure in Jewish literature who might have interesting stories written about him or her throughout genre, location, and time period of rabbinic literature. I centered my attention upon Solomon, and specifically around a story of his interaction with demons. Although this encounter is not attested to in Tanakh, the absence of demons provides an important data point from which to compare those traditions that do. Additionally, those rabbinic traditions that tell similar stories to the ones with demons, while omitting their presence, are also important to reference points from which to learn.

This paper draws upon six primary texts that span time and location, but have one difficulty in common. Each text cites Ecclesiastes 1:12 “אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלם” (I Kohelet was king over Israel in Jerusalem. Ecclesiastes which is a text attributed to Solomon, claims that there was a period of time when Solomon was not king during his lifetime. However, the section of 1 Kings that describes Solomon’s life and reign reports no such lapse.

According to the book of 1 Kings, Solomon was a wise king, one worthy to build a temple to God, but one who was unable to turn his legacy into dynastic longevity. When he ultimately sinned and followed after the cultic practices of his wives, God pronounced a punishment upon him that was commuted until the reign of his son, after which point, the unified kingdom splintered into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.¹

¹ 1 Kings 3:12; 1 Kings 5:17-19; 1 Kings 11:11-13.

The six texts find different ways to reconcile this discrepancy, and along the way they are forced contend with Solomon's life, his mythos, and his legacy. The outline of the "solution" takes on two general features. In order to satisfy the assumptions of Ecclesiastes, Solomon must change status from being king to being a commoner, yet remain alive - not a victim to regicide. In order to satisfy the assumptions of 1 Kings, the common people must not come to be aware that Solomon is no longer their king. Thus, the texts posit that Solomon was replaced by someone who took on his likeness and ruled in his stead.

What follows is an in-line commentary in the style of the classical rabbinic commentators through each of the six texts, which analyze themes, characters, and concepts. The next section analyzes the contexts for each of the six sources to glean what we can from information about their locations and dates of origin. The penultimate section ties together the major themes of the six sources, before a final concluding section.

Source Analysis

Talmud Yerushalmi: Sanhedrin 20c

ה'ו' / הלכ' ו' לא ירבה לו נשים כו' רב כהנא אמר על שם הששי יתרעם לעגלה ומה כתי' תמן ואם מעט ואוסיפה לך כהנה וכהנה לא ירבה לו סוסים אלא כדי מרכבתו על שם ויעקר דוד את כל הרכב וגו' וכסף וזהב לא ירבה לו אלא כדי ליתן אפסנייא רבי יהושע בן לוי אמ' ובלבד אפסנייא של שנה זו בלבד

אמר ר' אחא אמר שלמה שלשה דברים שסחקה עליהן מידת הדין חיללתים לא ירבה לו נשים וכת' והמלך שלמה אהב נשים נכריות רבי שמעון בן יוחי אמר אהב ממש לזנות חנניה בן אחי רבי יהושע אומר על שם לא תתחתן במ רבי יוסי או' למושכן לדברי תורה ולקרבתן תחת כנפי השכינה רבי ליעזר אומר על שם גם אותו החטיאו הנשים הנכריות אשכח תימר רבי שמעון בן יוחי וחנניה ור' ליעזר חזא ור' יוסי פליג על תלתייהון

לא ירבה לו סוסים וכת' ויהי לשלמה ארבעים אלף אוריות סוסים למרכב ושנים עשר אלף פרשים בטלנים היו וההדיוט מותר בכולן וכסף

וזהב לא ירבה לו מאד וכת' ויתן המלך את הכסף בירושלם כאבנים ולא היו נגנבות אמר ר' יוסי בן חנניה אבני עשר אמות ושמונה אמות תני רבי שמעון בן יוחי אפילו משקלות שהיו בימי שלמה לא היו של כסף אלא של זהב ומה טעם אין כסף נחשב בימי שלמה

כתיב לשחוק אמרתי מהולל אמר הקב"ה לשלמה מה עטרה זו בראשך רד מכסאי רבי יוסי בן חנניה אמר באותה שעה ירד מלאך ונדמה כדמות שלמה והעמידו מכסאו וישב תחתיו והיה מחזר על בתי כניסיות ובתי מדרשות ואומר אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלם והווי מרין ליה מלכא יתיב על בסיליון דידיה ותימר אני קהלת והווי מכין אותו בקנה ומביאין לפניו קערת גריסי' באות' שעה אמ' וזה היה חלקי אית דמרין חוטרא ואית המרין קניא אית דמרין קושרתיה

ומי קיטרגו אמ' ריב"ל יו"ד שבירבה קיטרגו תני ר"ש בן יוחי עלה ספר משנה תורה ונשתתח לפני הקב"ה אמ' לפניו רבון העולם כתבתה תורתך כל דייתיקי שבטלה מקצת' בטלה כולה והרי שלמ' מבקש לעקור יו"ד ממני א"ל הקב"ה שלמ' ואלף כיוצא בו בטילין דובר ממך אינו בטל

Translation:²

"He shall not add wives, etc." Rav Kahana said, because of *"the sixth, Yitream, by [David's wife] Egla (2 Sam 3:5)."* What is written there? *"and if that were not enough, I would give you twice as much more. (2 Sam 12:8)"* *"He shall not add horses"* beyond what was necessary for chariots, as in *"David hamstringed all the chariot horses, except for 100 which he retained. (2 Sam 8:4)"* *"And silver and gold he shall not add excessively"* beyond that which he needs to give wages. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said only for this year's payroll.

² Translation adapted by the author from Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed., *The Jerusalem Talmud: Fourth Order: Neziqin* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 98-102.

Rabbi Aha said: Solomon said, three things I desecrated where I got the better of the law. *“He shall not add wives.”* And it is written: *“King Solomon loved foreign women (1 Kgs 11:1).”* Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai said: “loved” truly as harlots. Hananiah, nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua, says, because *“you shall not intermarry with them. (Deut. 7:3)”* Rabbi Yosi said, to draw them to the words of Torah and bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence. Rabbi Eliezer said because *“yet foreign wives caused even him to sin. (Neh. 13:26)”* It turns out that one may say that Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai, Hananiah, and Rabbi Eliezer are of one opinion and Rabbi Yosi disagrees with those three.

“He shall not add horses” beyond what was necessary for chariots, as it is written: *“Solomon had 40,000 horse stables for his chariots, and 12,000 riders (1 Kgs 5:6).”* They were idle, but a private person is permitted all of these.

“And silver and gold he shall not add excessively,” and it is written, *“The king made silver in Jerusalem to be like stones [in their excess] (1 Kgs. 10:27).”* Were they not stolen? Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina said, there were stones of ten cubits and eight cubits. Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai stated: In Solomon’s times, even weights were not of silver but of gold. Why? *“Silver was not valuable in Solomon’s times. (1 Kgs 10:21)”*

It is written: *“Of revelry I said, ‘It’s mad!’ (Ecc. 2:2)”* The Holy One of Blessing said to Solomon, “What is this crown on your head? Get off My throne!” Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina said, at that moment an angel descended looking like Solomon, removed him from his throne, and sat in his place. And Solomon was going around in synagogues and study houses and saying, *“I Kohelet used to be king over Israel in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:12).”* They would tell him, the king sits on his throne, but you say *I Kohelet*? And they would hit him with a reed and bring before him a dish of beans. At that moment, he said: *“that is my portion (Ecc. 2:10).”* There are some who say [he was hit by] a staff, and others who say by a rod, and others who say by a knotted belt.

Who had accused him? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said the *yod* in the word *yarbeh* (ירבה) accused him. Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai taught that Deuteronomy ascended, bowed before the Holy One of Blessing and said before Him: Master of the Universe! You wrote in your Torah that any contract that was partially invalid is totally invalid, and now Solomon seeks to uproot a *yod* from me. God said to Deuteronomy: Solomon and a thousand like him will disappear, but a word from you shall not disappear.

Analysis and Commentary:

ה"ו/הלכ' ו' לא ירבה לו נשים כו'

This passage from Yerushalmi is based on Mishnah Sanhedrin 2:6-8, which address the injunction against kings acquiring too many wives, horses, and riches. The mishnayot

themselves derive from a passage in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 addressing laws surrounding kingship in Israel. The mishnaic language keeps much of the language from Deuteronomy enjoining “increasing” the number of his wives, of his horses, and excessively increasing the treasury. This passage from the Yerushalmi contends with the fact that the wise King Solomon violated these prohibitions in his lifetime, for which he was punished. The rabbis go back and forth about the nature of, and intention behind these violations. The section that follows describes the punishment.

כתיב לשחוק אמרתי מהולל

A citation from Ecclesiastes 2:2, a text attributed to Solomon. [JPS 1999]: “Of revelry I said, ‘It’s mad!’” The traditional authorship attribution of Ecclesiastes to Solomon serves as the catalyst for the midrash that follows.

אמר הקב"ה לשלמה מה עטרה זו בראשך רד מכסאי

God’s response to Solomon who, in the cited pasuk, seems to have lost himself in the trappings and perks of his office (עטרה זו בראשך) - that very office which was governed by Deuteronomic commands to refrain from undue indulgence and revelry. When God says, “get down from **My** throne (רד מכסאי),” the text imagines God dismissing God’s own anointed king from service for his misdeeds by reminding Solomon that the throne and the crown actually both belong to God. Just as God can punish the chosen people for their own misdeeds by means of subjugation under a foreign power, so too can God punish the anointed king. Additionally, it stands to reason that if God is willing to punish a person as great in

wisdom, stature, and power as King Solomon, then this same fall from grace can affect anyone among Israel.

רבי יוסי בן חנינה אמר באותה שעה ירד מלאך ונדמה כדמות שלמה והעמידו מכסאו וישב תחתיו

Trans.: “Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina said, at that moment, an angel descended from heaven in the likeness of Solomon, removed Solomon from his throne, and sat in his place.” This tradition introduces the idea that although Solomon was no longer king, the people did not perceive a change in power because the angel sitting in his stead appeared in Solomon’s likeness.

אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלם

This particular version of Solomon’s dethroning addresses the concern raised by Kohelet 1:12, when Kohelet-Solomon describes himself as having been king in the past tense. In this case, the story turns on God rebuking Solomon for having transgressed the three above *mitzvah lo-ta’aseh* relating to kings.

והיו מכין אותו בקנה ומביאין לפניו קערת גריסי'

Kohelet is brought low by being rejected in his claim through physical violence and by receiving only the most basic of sustenances, thereby demonstrating the depths to which a man who had wives, armies, and money had fallen because of his excess.

ומי קיטרגו אמ' ריב"ל [רבי יהושוע בן לוי] יו"ד שבירבה קיטרגו

This midrash contends that a *yod* (or the entire book of Deuteronomy on behalf of a *yod*) came before God to complain that Solomon had broken the commandments found in Deut. 17. Specifically the *yod* in the word *לא ירבה לו נשים* of *ירבה*. This is a “fun” rhetorical device, to show the great Solomon brought low by a *yod*, but it does not stand up to scrutiny; even in the commandment read *לא רבה לו נשים* the force of the negative commandment actually resides with the *לא*: Were I to rewrite this midrash to make grammatical and contextual sense, I would explain that the word *לא* came before God and complained of being nullified. Midrash Al Yithollel, analyzed later in this paper, also repeats this theme of the *yod* accusing Solomon.

א"ל הקב"ה שלמ' ואלף כיוצא בו בטילין ודבר ממך אינו בטל

According to this telling of the midrash, the entire book of Deuteronomy came before God to plead the case that, just as a legal contract is made totally invalid when a small part is invalidated, so too was Deuteronomy in danger of becoming invalid because Solomon was ignoring one commandment therein. God’s response to the book of Deuteronomy is to say that no one is above the law-- that many will try to transgress the laws of Deuteronomy, but that its binding authority would endure those challenges.

Pesikta deRav Kahana 27 (168b-169a)

ד"א לשחוק אמרתי מהולל (שם /קהלת ב'). א"ר אחא א' שלמה דברים ששחקה עליהם מידת הדין הוללתים. כת' לא ירבה לו נשים (דברים יז: יז) וכת' ויהי לו נשים שבע מאות ופלגשים שלש מאות (מלכים א' יא: ג). כת' לא ירבה לו סוסים (דברים יז: טז) וכת' ויהי לשלמה ארבעים אלף אורות סוסים למרכבתו ושנים עשר אלף פרשים (מלכים א' ה: ו). כת' וכסף וזהב לא ירבה לו מאד (דברים יז: יז) וכת' ויתן המלך את הכסף בירושלם כאבנים וג' (מלכים א' י: כז). ולא היו ניגנבות, א"ר יוסה בר' חנינה אבנים שלימות של עשר אמות היו ושל שמנה אמות היו. תני ר' שמע' בן יוחי אפילו משקלות שהיו בימי שלמה של זהב היו, אין כסף נחשב בימי שלמה למאומה (דברי הימים ב' ט: כ).

ולשמחה מה זו עושה (קהלת ב: ב), א' לו הקב"ה מה עטרה זו עושה בידך, רד מכסאי. באותה שעה ירד מלאך בדמותו של שלמה וישב לו על כסאו והיה מחזר שלמה על כל בתי כנסיות ועל כל בתי מדרשות שהיו בירושלם וא' להם אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלם (קהלת א: יב), והם אומרים לו שלמה המלך יושב על כסאו ואת או' אני שלמה המלך. ומה היו עושים לו, היו מכים אותו בקנה ונותנים לפניו קערה של גריסין. באותה שעה הוא אומר הבל הבלים אמר קהלת וג' (שם שם /קהלת א' ב').

Translation:³

Another interpretation of "*Of revelry I said, 'It's mad!' (Ecc. 2:2a)*" Rabbi Aha said: Solomon said, [three] things I desecrated where I got the better of the law. It is written: "*He shall not add wives. (Deut. 17:17)*" but it is written: "*He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kgs 11:3)*." It is written: "*He shall not add horses (Deut. 17:16)*" but it is written: "*Solomon had 40,000 horse stables for his chariots, and 12,000 riders (1 Kgs 5:6)*." It is written: "*And silver and gold he shall not add excessively, (Deut. 17:17)*" but it is written, "*The king made silver in Jerusalem to be like stones [in their excess] (1 Kgs. 10:27)*." Were they not stolen? Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina said, there were stones of ten cubits and eight cubits. Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai stated: In Solomon's times, even weights were not of silver but of gold. Why? "*Silver was not valuable in Solomon's times. (1 Kgs 10:21)*"

"*Of joy [I said,] 'What does it do? (Ecc. 2:2b)*" The Holy One of Blessing said to [Solomon], "What is this crown on your head? Get off My throne!" At that moment an angel descended looking like Solomon, and sat upon his throne. And Solomon was going around to synagogues and study houses that were in Jerusalem and saying to them, "*I Kohelet used to be king over Israel in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:12)*." They would say to him, Solomon the king sits on his throne, but you say "I am Solomon?" And what would they do to him? They would hit him with a reed and give him a dish of beans. At that moment, he said: "*Vanity of vanities, said Kohelet... (Ecc. 1:2)*"

³ Translated by author in consultation with William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, eds., *Pesikta De-Rab Kahana: R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festival Days*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 529-530.

Analysis and Commentary:

This text simplifies the midrash brought in Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 20c by removing the connection to specific mishnayot of injunctions upon kings that derived from Deuteronomy, and instead, compares the places in 1 Kings where Solomon transgressed Deuteronomic law. Additionally, the text is in Hebrew, not in Palestinian Aramaic.

At its core, this text still reflects the overall thrust of the Yerushalmi text that Solomon was punished by God for having crossed legal boundaries against obtaining too much, and was replaced by an angel with his likeness who sat on the throne while he wandered, humbled in the streets, speaking the fatalistic words of Kohelet (“vanity of vanities”, Ecc. 1:2) that closes this section.

Talmud Bavli: Gittin 68a-b

בעשיתי לי שרים ושרות ותענוגות בני האדם שדה ושדות, שרים ושרות - אלו מיני זמר, ותענוגות בני האדם - אלו בריכות ומרחצאות, שדה ושדות - הכא תרגימו: שידה ושידתין, במערבא אמרי: שידתא. אמר רבי יוחנן: שלש מאות מיני שדים היו בשיחין, ושידה עצמה איני יודע מה היא. אמר מר, הכא תרגימו: שידא ושידתין.

שידה ושידתין למאי איבעי ליה? דכתיב: והבית בהבנותו אבן שלמה מסע נבנה וגו', אמר להו לרבנן: היכי אעביד? אמרו ליה: איכא שמירא דאיתי משה לאבני אפוד. אמר להו: היכא אישתכח? אמרו ליה: אייתי שידה ושידתין כבשינהו אהדדי, אפשר דידעי ומגלו לך. אייתי שידה ושידתין כבשינהו אהדדי, אמרי: אנן לא ידעינן, דילמא אשמדאי מלכא דשידי ידע. אמר להו: היכא איתיה? אמרי ליה: איתיה בטורא פלן; כריא ליה בירא ומליא ליה מיא ומיכסיא בטינרא וחתמיה בגושפנקיה, וכל יומא סליק לרקיע וגמר מתיבתא דרקיעא, ונחית לארעא וגמר מתיבתא דארעא, ואני סייר ליה לגושפנקיה ומגלי ליה ושותי, ומכסי ליה וחתים ליה ואזיל.

שדריה לבניהו בן יהודע, יהב ליה שושילתא דחקיק עלה שם ועזקתא דחקיק עלה שם, וגבבי דעמרא וזיקי דחמרא. אזל כרא בירא מתתאי, ושפינהו למיא וסתמינהו בגבבי דעמרא, וכרא בירא מעילאי ושפכינהו לחמרא וטמינהו, סליק יתיב באילנא. כי אתא סייריה לגושפנקא, גלייה אשכחיה חמרא, אמר, כתיב: לץ היין הומה שכר וכל שוגה בו לא יחכם. וכתיב: זנות ויין ותירוש יקח לב, לא אישתי. כי צחי, לא סגיא ליה, אישתי רוח וגנא. נחית, אתא, שדא ביה שושילתא, סתמיה. כי אתער הוה קא מיפרזל, א"ל: שמא דמרך עלך! שמא דמרך עלך!

כי נקיט ליה ואתי, מטא דיקלא חף ביה שדייה, מטא לביתא שדייה, מטא גבי כובא דההיא ארמלתא, נפקא איחננא ליה, כפא לקומתיה מיניה איתבר ביה גרמא, אמר, היינו דכתיב: ולשון רכה תשבר גרם. חזא סמיא דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסקיה לאורחיה. חזא רויא דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסקיה לאורחיה. חזא חדוותא דהוה קמחדי לה, בכה. שמעיה לההוא גברא דהוה קאמר לאושכפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שני, אחיך. חזא ההוא קסמא דהוה קסים, אחיך.

כי מטא להתם, לא עיילוה לגביה דשלמה עד תלתא יומי. יומא קמא אמר להו: אמאי לא קא בעי לי מלכא לגביה? א"ל: אנסיה מישתיא; שקל לבינתא אותיב אחברתה. אתו אמרו ליה לשלמה, אמר להו, הכי אמר לכו: הדור אשקיה. למחר אמר להו: ואמאי לא קא בעי לי מלכא לגביה? אמרו ליה: אנסיה מיכלא; שקל לבינתא מחברתה אותבה אארעא. אתו אמרו ליה לשלמה, אמר להו, הכי אמר לכו: נגידו מיניה מיכליה. [לסוף] תלתא יומי עייל לקמיה; שקל קניא ומשח ארבעה גרמידי ושדא קמיה, א"ל: מכדי כי מיית ההוא גברא לית ליה בהדין עלמא אלא ד' גרמידי, השתא כבשתיה לכולי עלמא ולא שבעת עד דכבשת נמי לדידי! א"ל: לא קא בעינא מינך מידי, בעינא דאיבנייה לבית המקדש וקא מיבעי לי שמירא, א"ל: לדידי לא מסיר לי, לשרא דימא מסיר ליה, ולא יהיב ליה אלא לתרגולא ברא דמהימן ליה אשבועתיה. ומאי עבד ביה? ממטי ליה לטורי דלית בהו ישוב, ומנח לה אשינא דטורא ופקע טורא, ומנקיט מייתי ביזרני מאילני ושדי התם והוי ישוב. והיינו דמתרגמינן: נגר טורא.

בדקו קינא דתרנגולא ברא דאית ליה בני, וחפויה לקיניה זוגיתא חיותת. כי אתא בעי למיעל ולא מצוי, אזל אייתי שמירא ואותביה עלויה, רמא ביה קלא שדייה, שקליה, אזל חנק נפשיה אשבועתיה. אמר ליה בניהו: מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא סמיא דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסיקתיה לאורחיה? אמר ליה: מכרזי עליה ברקיעא דצדיק גמור הוא, ומאן דעבד ליה ניחא נפשיה זכי לעלמא דאתי. ומאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא רויא דקטעי באורחא, אסיקתיה לאורחיה? א"ל: מכרזי עליה ברקיעא דרשע גמור הוא, ועבדי ליה ניחא נפשיה כי היכי דליכליה לעלמא. מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא חדוותא, בכית? אמר ליה: בעי מימת גברא בגו תלתין יומין, ובעיא מינטר ליבם קטן תליסרי שנין. מאי טעמא כי שמעתייה לההוא גברא דאמר ליה לאושכפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שנין, אחיכת? אמר

ליה: ההוא שבעה יומי לית ליה, מסאני לשב שנין בעי! מ"ט כי חזיתיה לההוא קסמא דהוה קסים, אחיכת? אמר ליה: דהוה יתיב אבי גזא דמלכא, לקסום מאי דאיכא תותיה.

תרחיה גביה עד דבנייה לבית המקדש. יומא חד הוה קאי לחודיה, אמר ליה, כתיב: כתועפות ראם לו, ואמרינן: כתועפות - אלו מלאכי השרת, ראם - אלו השדים, מאי רבותייכו מינן? א"ל: שקול שושילתא מינאי והב לי עיזקתך, ואחוי לך רבותאי. שקליה לשושילתא מיניה ויהיב ליה עיזקתיה, בלעיה, אותביה לחד גפיה ברקיעא ולחד גפיה בארעא, פתקיה ארבע מאה פרסי. על ההיא שעתא אמר שלמה: מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש. וזה היה חלקי מכל עמלי מאי וזה? רב ושמואל, חד אמר: מקלו, וחד אמר: גונדו. היה מחזר על הפתחים, כל היכא דמטא אמר: אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים.

כי מטא גבי סנהדרין, אמרו רבנן: מכדי שוטה בחדא מילתא לא סריך, מאי האי? אמרו ליה לבניהו: קא בעי לך מלכא לגביה? אמר להו: לא. שלחו להו למלכוותא: קאתי מלכא לגבייכו? שלחו להו: אין, קאתי. שלחו להו: בידקו בכרעיה, שלחו להו: במוקי קאתי, וקא תבע להו בנידוטייהו, וקא תבע לה נמי לבת שבע אימיה. אתיוה לשלמה והבו ליה עזקתא ושושילתא דחקוק עליה שם, כי עייל חזייה, פרח, ואפילו הכי הוה ליה ביעתותא מיניה. והיינו דכתיב: והנה מטתו שלשלמה ששים גבורים סביב לה מגבורי ישראל כולם אחוזי חרב מלומדי מלחמה איש חרבו על ירכו מפחד בלילות.

רב ושמואל, חד אמר: מלך והדיוט, וחד אמר: מלך והדיוט ומלך.

Translation:⁴

"I got myself male and female singers (sharim and sharot), as well as the luxuries of commoners-- coffers and coffers of them (shidda and shiddot) (Eccl. 2:8)." "Sharim and sharot": These are types of musical instruments. *"Luxuries of commoners"*: These are pools and bathhouses. *"Shidda and shiddot"*: Here, [Babylonia], they interpreted it as male and female demons (*shidda* and *shiddet*). In the West, [Eretz Yisrael], they said they were carriages (*shiddeta*). Rabbi Yohanan says: There were three hundred types of demons in a place named Shihin, but I do not know what a demon is. Mar said: Here they interpreted it: Male demons and female demons.

Why was it necessary for [Solomon, the narrator of Ecclesiastes, to have] male demons and female demons? The text answers: As it is written with regard to the building of the Temple: "For the house, when it was being built, was built of stone made ready at the quarry; and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was being built" (I Kings 6:7). Solomon said to the sages: How shall I make it so that the stone will be cut without using iron? They said to him: There is a *shamir*, which Moses brought and used to cut the stones of the ephod. Solomon said to them: Where is it found? They said to him: Bring a male demon and a female demon and torment them together. It is possible that they know and they will reveal it to you. Solomon brought a male demon and a female demon and tormented them together, and they said: We do not know where to find the *shamir*. Perhaps Ashmedai, king of the demons, knows. Solomon said to them: Where is Ashmedai? They

⁴ Translation adapted from *Koren Talmud Bavli*, ed. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, 1st Hebrew/English ed, Vol. 21, *Gittin* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2015).

said to him: He is on such-and-such a mountain. He has dug a pit for himself there, and filled it with water, and covered it with a rock, and sealed it with his seal. And every day he ascends to Heaven and studies in the heavenly study hall and he descends to the earth and studies in the earthly study hall. And he comes, checks his seal, and then he uncovers it and drinks. Then he covers it and seals it and goes.

[Solomon] sent for Benayahu, son of Jehoiada, and gave him a chain onto which was engraved with a name of God, a ring which was engraved with a name of God was carved, fleeces of wool, and wineskins of wine. [Benayahu] went and dug a pit lower down the mountain than Ashmedai's, drained the water, and plugged it with the fleeces of wool. And he dug a pit higher up the mountain than Ashmedai's, and he poured the wine into it and he plugged the pit. He [climbed] up and sat in a tree. When Ashmedai came he checked his seal, opened the pit, and found wine. He said that it is written: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is riotous; and whosoever wallows in it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1), and it is written: "Harlotry, wine, and new wine take away the heart" (Hosea 4:11). I will not drink! When he became thirsty, he was unable [to resist] and he drank, became intoxicated, and fell asleep. [Benayahu] descended, came and threw the chain around Ashmedai, and closed [the clasp]. When Ashmedai awoke he struggled, but Benayahu said to him: The name of your Master is upon you, the name of your Master is upon you.

When [Benayahu] took [Ashmedai] and came [to Jerusalem] he reached a palm tree and [Ashmedai] rubbed against it and knocked it down. He reached a house and knocked it down. He reached a small shack belonging to a certain widow. This widow emerged, and she begged him [not to knock it down]. He bent [his body away] from her, and broke one of his bones. He said: This is as it is written: "Soft speech can break a bone (Proverbs 25:15)."

Ashmedai saw a blind man who was veering on the road and he brought him back to the road. He saw a drunk who was veering on the road and he brought him back to the road. He saw the joy [of a wedding] in which they were celebrating, and he cried. He heard a certain man say to a shoemaker: 'Make me shoes that will last seven years,' and he laughed. He saw a certain sorcerer performing magic, and he laughed.

When Ashmedai arrived there in Jerusalem, they did not bring him before Solomon until three days had passed. On the first day he said to them: Why doesn't the king want me before him? They said to him: He was overcome by drink. Ashmedai took a brick and placed it on top of another brick. The servants came and told Solomon what he had done. Solomon said to them: This is what he said to you-- return and give him drink. The following day Ashmedai said to them: And why doesn't the king want me before him? They said to him: He was overcome by food. Ashmedai took the brick off the other brick and placed it back on the ground. The servants came and told Solomon what Ashmedai had done. Solomon said to them: This is what he said to you-- Take his food away from him. At the end of three days Ashmedai came before Solomon. Ashmedai took a reed and measured four cubits, and threw it before him. He said to Solomon: See, when that man dies, he will have nothing in this world except the four cubits [of his grave]. Now, you have conquered the entire world but you are not satisfied until you also conquer me? Solomon said to him: I need nothing from you. I want to build the Temple and I need the *shamir* for this. Ashmedai said to him: The

shamir was not given to me, but it was given to the minister of the sea. And he gives it only to the *hoopoe*, whom he trusts by the force of his oath to return it. And what does the *hoopoe* do with it? He brings it to mountains that are not inhabited, and he places the *shamir* on the craggy rock and the mountain splits. And he takes and brings seeds of trees, throws them there, and it becomes habitable. And this is why we translate the word *hoopoe* [*tarnegola bara* תרנגולא ברא in Aramaic, *dukhifat* דוכיפת in Hebrew] as a cutter of mountains [*neggar tura*].

They investigated and found the nest of a *hoopoe* in which there were chicks, and he covered its nest with translucent glass. When the *hoopoe* came it wanted to enter but was unable to do so. It went and brought the *shamir* and placed it on top [to crack the glass. Solomon's servant] raised his voice at the *hoopoe* and it threw down the *shamir*. [The man] took it [and the *hoopoe* went and strangled itself over its [broken] oath [by not returning the *shamir*].

Benayahu said to Ashmedai: What is the reason that when you saw that blind man who was veering from the road you brought him back to the road? Ashmedai said to him: They proclaim about him in heaven that he is a completely righteous man, and anyone who does good for his soul shall merit to enter the World-to-Come. Then Benayahu asked: And what is the reason that when you saw the drunk man who was veering from the road you brought him back to the road? Ashmedai said to him: They proclaim about him in heaven that he is a completely wicked man. And I did good for his soul so that he will consume [his reward] in this world [and not have any reward in the World-to-Come]. Benayahu asked: What is the reason that when you saw that joy [of the wedding] you cried? Ashmedai said to him: This man will die within thirty days. And his wife is required to wait for the husband's brother, who is a minor, to reach thirteen years old. Benayahu asked: What is the reason that when you heard that man say to a shoemaker: Make me shoes that last seven years, you laughed? Ashmedai said to him: That man does not have seven days to live; does he need shoes that last seven years? Benayahu asked: What is the reason that when you saw that sorcerer performing magic you laughed? Ashmedai said to him: Because he was sitting on the king's treasury. Let him use his magic to know what there is buried underneath him.

Solomon kept Ashmedai with him until he completed building the Temple. One day he stood with Ashmedai alone. He said to Ashmedai: It is written: "*For him like the lofty horns of the wild ox*" (Numbers 24:8), and the Sages say in explanation of the verse: "Like the horns"; these are the ministering angels. "The wild ox"; these are the demons. In what way are you greater than us? Ashmedai said to him: Take the engraved chain off me and give me your engraved ring, and I will show you my strength. Solomon took the chain off him and he gave him his ring. Ashmedai swallowed [the ring and grew until] he placed one wing in the heaven and one wing on the earth. He threw Solomon four hundred parasangs. With regard to that moment Solomon said: "*What profit is there for a person through all of his toil under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:3).*" "*And this was my portion from all of my toil (Ecclesiastes 2:10).*" To what does "this" refer? Rav and Shmuel disagree. One said: his staff [that remained in his hand.] And one said: his cloak. Solomon would circulate from door to door and wherever he arrived he would say: "*I, Kohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:12).*"

When he arrived at the Sanhedrin [in Jerusalem] the sages said: Now, a fool does not fixate on one matter, so what is this matter? The sages said to Benayahu: Does the king require you to be with him? Benayahu said to them: No. They sent to the queens and asked: Does the king come to be with you? The queens sent back to them: Yes, he comes. They sent to the queens: Check his feet. The queens sent back to the sages: He comes in socks [*bemokei*], And he makes demands of them [the queens] when they are menstruating. And he also makes demands of Bathsheba his mother. [The Sanhedrin] brought Solomon, gave him a ring and the chain on which the Name was carved. When Solomon entered, Ashmedai saw him and fled. But even so, [Solomon] was fearful of him, and this is as it is written: “*Behold the bed of Solomon surrounded by sixty strong men from the warriors of Israel. All of them holding swords and trained in war, each man with his sword on his thigh from fear in the nights (Song of Songs 3:7–8).*”

Rav and Shmuel [disagreed]. One said: He was a king and then a commoner. And one said: He was a king, then a commoner, and then a king.

Analysis and Commentary:

בעשיתי לי שרים ושרות ותענוגות בני האדם שדה ושדות

The incipit for this passage comes from Kohelet 2:8b: “[NJPS] and I got myself male and female singers, as well as the luxuries of commoners-- coffers and cofferers of them.” The NJPS notes that the Hebrew word which it translates as cofferers (שדה\שדות) is a *hapax legomenon* for Tanakh, and that the Mishnah suggests that it refers to some kind of chest, from which NJPS derives its translation. Rashi defined the word as some sort of wagon used to transport women and nobles.

The wider literary context for the incipit is important for understanding this midrash. Kohelet in general is about the vanity and impermanence of the human condition. In particular, Chapter 2 describes how the narrator (and it is attributed to Solomon here) acquired wealth, luxuries, and experiences while at the same time acquiring wisdom. He realized that material possessions were of no value, but that wisdom was not much better, because wise men and fools will eventually be forgotten in equal measure.

This Gittin passage looks at a time when Solomon's material possessions and his wisdom were at their zenith, around the time of building the temple. In it, he acquires the *shamir* after the subjugation of Ashmedai, and only after building the temple did he fall at the hands of Ashmedai who, by casting him out, proved the fleeting nature of possessions and wisdom in Kohelet, and fulfilled the implications of the Ecclesiastes text that Solomon lost his kingly status.⁵

שידה ושידתין למאי איבעי ליה?

The *stam* voice asks why are we even bringing up demons in the first place? The Gemara first seeks to understand what these two words meant. Upon determining that these words meant “male and female demons,” the Gemara (cited again here) then asked why Solomon needed demons in the first place. They will be useful, we learn in finding the *shamir*, who would be used in conjunction with building the Temple. The *shamir* is a mythical creature, created *bein hashmashot* (the final hours of God's six days of creation), who helped quarry the gems for the priestly breastplate, and is able to bore through stone.⁶ Solomon asked the rabbis how he might follow the command of using finished quarry stones, untouched by tools in the temple precinct, to build the temple. The rabbis responded that he can by harnessing the shamir, and that if he captured a male and female demon, they might reveal the shamir's location by squeezing them together.⁷

⁵ Eccl. 1:12: I **was** king over Israel [emphasis added].

⁶ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, *Bible Times and Characters from the Creation to Jacob*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1954), 34.

⁷ Rashi to this section explains that squeezing them together would be stressor that would cause them to reveal the location of the *shamir* - perhaps an act of “enhanced interrogation.”

In simpler terms, Solomon, at the advice of the rabbis, decided to “exert pressure” on demons to reveal the location of the *shamir*, so that he could harness the creature to build the holy temple. After exerted “questioning,” the demons explained that they did not know the location, but that Solomon could ask Ashmedai, king of the demons.

איתיה בטורא פלן; כריא ליה בירא ומליא ליה מיא ומיכסיא בטינרא וחתמיה בגושפנקיה

Rabbis told Solomon that Ashmedai was on some mountain, where for whatever reason, he had dug a pit and filled it with water, and taken pains to make sure that the water source was kept free of impurities. Perhaps he went to such great lengths to prevent his capture in the way that we will see. Later, Benayahu - Solomon’s military commander and advisor - would take advantage of Ashmedai’s trusting his water source by surreptitiously replacing it with wine, but it remains unclear what we might learn about Ashmedai other than this being a detail to later advance the plot. We might say that Ashmedai, in being so careful about his habits of drinking water, was not trusting of others, but then we learn that he studies in yeshivot all day around other people. We might say that he put too much trust in his habits or practices, and that they would lead to his capture.

וכל יומא סליק לרקיע וגמר מתיבתא דרקיעא, ונחית לארעא וגמר מתיבתא דארעא

Ashmedai studies in both the heavenly and earthly yeshivot. He will become a foil to Solomon in his wisdom, especially given the fact that he is a king of demons, which tradition says fall under Solomon’s dominion.⁸ But Ashmedai is not an easy vassal to hold, and that is

⁸ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 4, *Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1954), 142.

why Solomon must have even more “wisdom” than him in order to keep him in the fold. But all this to say, the rabbis imagine the king of the demons to be a Torah scholar, which is a theme that will arise later, as he demonstrates a knowledge both of scripture and of arcane wisdom.

וחתים ליה ואזיל

After returning from study, he took a drink of water from his well that he examined for tampering and resealing, then Ashmedai “went.” What is the nature of his habitual action? Does he live near his well on this mountain peak and travel to the yeshivot? Or does Ashmedai reside/live somewhere apart from this protected water source?

שדריה לבניהו בן יהוידע, יחב ליה שושילתא דחקיק עלה שם ועזקתא דחקיק עלה שם, וגבבי דעמרא וזיקי דחמרא

The unwritten subject of this sentence is Solomon who sent Benayahu and gave him this list of four objects with which to subjugate Ashmedai. Solomon, the unwritten subject, is referred to sparingly through this section of the story, and the actions that Benayahu took could be construed as his own wise actions that serve to [*kal v' homer*] refract a greater wisdom upon Solomon his master. However, the fact that Solomon sent his trusted advisor, and gave him four specific objects with which to subjugate Ashmedai, implies that Solomon has a more outsized influence upon Benayahu’s tactics than the text might suggest at first glance. This second reading recasts the interaction as a more direct battle of wisdom and wits between Solomon and Ashmedai, with Benayahu serving simply as agent, and not as an independent actor.

שושילתא דחקיק עלה שם

This chain is a type of religio-magical object which, by virtue of the magic of God's inscribed name, was an efficacious talisman that served to control the actions of those who would not comply. The presence of the two objects engraved with the name of God suggest that Solomon held the arcane knowledge (personally or among his courtiers) to be able to control the world using the coercive power of God through these objects. I'm curious what it means for a wise king to exert coercive power of the Divine. Certainly a wise king might need to use force in exerting control over subjects, but control that cannot be questioned - of the type provided by such magical objects - may not be appropriate, even for a king as wise as Solomon. According to the rabbinic imagination, Solomon may have only used this ring in connection to Ashmedai, and not among flesh and blood.

ועזקתא דחקיק עלה שם

The Maharsha (HaRav Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eidels) and the Riaz (HaRav Yoshihu Pinto) [as cited by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz]: The commentators asked, what is the reason for including this engraved ring when Benayahu would already have used the engraved chain. They answered that although the chain shackled Ashmedai, he still had (as the gemarra will state) much power, so the ring was an extra means of protection for Benayahu himself. The Iyyun Ya'akov [cited by Rabbi Steinsaltz] explains that the power of the ring gave Benayahu

a measure of control to force Ashmedai to do as he desired [that the chain must not have provided.]⁹

אשכחיה חמרא

Benayahu went through an elaborate deception to ensure that the seal on Ashmedai's well was unbroken while replacing water with wine. However, upon opening his well, Ashmedai was not deceived, and immediately understood that he no longer had water. Benayahu might have simply broken the seal on the well and replaced the liquid directly and obtained the same result.

כתיב: לץ היין הומה שכר וכל שוגה בו לא יחכם. וכתיב: זנות ויין ותירוש יקח לב

Ashmedai, the yeshiva-going student of tradition that he is, quotes Proverbs 20:1 and Hosea 4:11 as prooftexts for not drinking wine. Not only are these quotes from *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*, but his *Ketuvim* quote cites Solomon himself - according to the tradition that Solomon wrote Proverbs - in an attempt to prevent his capture at Solomon's command. In a battle of dueling wits and wisdom between Ashmedai and Solomon, this quote from Proverbs citing wine as a foil to wisdom is a perfect text to use.

א"ל: שמא דמרך עלך!

Benayahu exclaims that “your master's name is upon you” as a means to stop Ashmedai's struggling. Steinsaltz: by struggling and breaking the collar, Ashmedai risks breaking the

⁹ *Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 21, *Tractate Gittin*, ed. Adin Steinsaltz (Jerusalem, Israel: The Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1993), 295.

name of God inscribed upon it. That Ashmedai will stop struggling out of respect for God implies that the rabbis want to understand demons as creatures under God's dominion and not as "evil" forces external to God's control. This central assumption points to syncretism in the Babylonian Jewish context. Stories about Solomon's downfall and displacement from the Palestinian context do not mention Ashmedai as character, rather they use angels sent by God to achieve the same plot point. In Gittin's telling, the rabbis may have used the demon king to tell the same story. Ashmedai was probably a character in the folk religion of Babylon and surrounding areas that, although foreign to orthodox Jewish belief, was not threatening to Jewish monotheism. By casting Ashmedai in their story, and making him a God-fearing yeshiva student, the rabbis could show Ashmedai-believing Jews that their Babylonia-influenced beliefs were inherently Jewish, rather than attempting to deny his place in a Jewish system and risking the loss of religious adherents.

נפקא איהננא ליה

Ashmedai heeded the worlds of the widow who pleaded with him not to destroy her house. Demonstrates his "humanity" or sense of compassion, even in his frustration and anger. Perhaps he was heeding the commanded ethic to protect widow, orphan, and stranger.

כפא לקומתיה מיניה איתבר ביה גרמא, אמר, היינו דכתיב: ולשון רכה תשבר גרם.

In the face of the widow's request, Ashmedai was forced to shrink his height, and broke a bone in the process, at which point he says -- "this is the fulfillment of the verse: 'a gentle tongue can break bones' (Prov. 25:15)." This brief scene demonstrates Ashmedai's command

of scripture to be able to understand his circumstances in their light. Additionally, because the verse comes from Proverbs, the reader can see that the rabbis have constructed a story whereby Ashmedai's life mirrors scripture attributed to Solomon himself.

חזא סמיא

This section exemplifies a common trope in folklore when a mythic or wise character acts in ways that may defy understanding, and will provide later explanation as to their actions. He helped return a blind man and a drunk to their path, he cried at seeing a wedding reveler, he laughed at seeing a man order long-lasting shoes, and he laughed at a magician doing magic. In this case, the riddle will be solved only later in the story, after Solomon interacts with Ashmedai and obtains the *shamir*.

כי מטא להתם, לא עיילוה לגביה דשלמה עד תלתא יומי. יומא קמא אמר להו: אמאי לא קא בעי לי מלכא לגביה?
 א"ל: אנסיה מישתא; **שקל לבינתא אוטיב אחברתה**. אתו אמרו ליה לשלמה, אמר להו, הכי אמר לכו: הדור
 אשקיוה. למחר אמר להו: ואמאי לא קא בעי לי מלכא לגביה? אמרו ליה: אנסיה מיכלא; **שקל לבינתא מחברתה**
אותבה ארעא. אתו אמרו ליה לשלמה, אמר להו, הכי אמר לכו: נגידו מיניה מיכליה.

Here begins the “face to face” power play between Solomon and Ashmedai. After sending Benayahu to kidnap him by harnessing the power of divinely-inscribed objects, Solomon refused to grant him an audience, and kept him captive. As a result, Ashmedai began to take **symbolic actions that his servants cannot explain**. (examples bolded above in the Aramaic) After hearing the excuse that Solomon could not see him because he was recovering from a drinking party, Ashmedai placed one brick upon another, which Solomon

understood to mean that he was thirsty (for water). After hearing the excuse that Solomon could not see him because he had eaten too much, Ashmedai removed the stacked brick from atop the first and placed it back on the ground. Solomon commanded his servants to remove Ashmedai's food (but Rashi qualifies, except for a little bit).

When Benayahu noticed Ashmedai taking symbolic actions on the journey to Jerusalem, he wondered at their significance, and would later ask Ashmedai about them. In the case of these symbolic actions, Solomon demonstrated his vast wisdom when he understood their significance, required no clarification, and issued orders to his servants in accordance with Ashmedai's needs. Ashmedai and Solomon demonstrated their duel of wits, as Solomon made Ashmedai wait, Ashmedai responded and tested Solomon with strange actions, which Solomon interpreted with a (presumably appropriate) response.

שקל קניא ומשח ארבעה גרמידי ושדא קמיה, א"ל: מכדי כי מיית ההוא גברא לית ליה בהדין עלמא אלא ד'

גרמידי, השתא כבשתיה לכולי עלמא ולא שבעת עד דכבשת נמי לדידי!

Ashmedai finally came before Solomon with theatrics. He measured out four cubits with a rod, in what seems to be a reference to the space of a gravesite, and threw it before Solomon. He exclaimed that when Solomon dies, he'll only have those four cubits to call his own in this world. He asked that after conquering the whole world, would he not be satisfied until he conquered Ashmedai as well. By reminding Solomon of his own mortality and the impermanence of rule over his domain, Ashmedai complained of his treatment and intimated at Solomon's hubris in needing to have domain over the whole world.¹⁰ This theme of hubris

¹⁰ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 4, *Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1954), 142. Solomon, in the midrash, has dominion over all creation.

will come back to haunt Solomon later in the midrash. It also connects back to the larger theme of Ecclesiastes from which the scriptural incipit to the story derives - that all acquisitions of wealth and wisdom are fleeting because of the impermanence of the human condition.

א"ל: לא קא בעינא מינך מידי, בעינא דאיבנייה לבית המקדש וקא מיבעי לי שמירא,

Solomon replied, perhaps to add insult to injury, that he had wanted nothing from Ashmedai himself except what was necessary to find the *shamir* that would help him build the Temple. Perhaps we might symbolically read that through his wisdom, Solomon marshalled all the powers of the world, including demons, to help build the Temple. But in the context of the interaction between these dueling fonts of wisdom, Ashmedai seems the afterthought, who will only later become important when Solomon loses some of his cunning, and leaves himself open to a fall.

לשרא דימא מסיר ליה

If the rabbis have no problems discussing demons and the demon-king, then certainly they have no qualms contemplating the “prince/minister of the sea” who holds dominion over the earth, and who entrusted the *shamir* to the *hoopoe* for safekeeping.

בדקו קינא דתרנגולא ברא דאית ליה בני, וחפויה לקיניה זוגיתא חיורתא. כי אתא בעי למיעל ולא מצו, אזל אייתי שמירא ואותביה עלויה, רמא ביה קלא שדייה, שקליה, אזל חנק נפשיה אשבועתיה.

Solomon demonstrated his wisdom through the actions of his servants who tricked the hoopoe and took the *shamir* entrusted to it.

אמר ליה בניהו: מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא סמיא דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסיקתיה לאורחיה? אמר ליה: מכרזי עליה ברקיעא דצדיק גמור הוא, ומאן דעבד ליה ניחא נפשיה זכי לעלמא דאתי. ומאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא רויא דקטעי באורחא, אסיקתיה לאורחיה? א"ל: מכרזי עליה ברקיעא דרשע גמור הוא, ועבדי ליה ניחא נפשיה כי היכי דליכליה לעלמא. מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא חדוותא, בכית? אמר ליה: בעי מימת גברא בגו תלתין יומין, ובעיא מינטר ליבם קטן תליסרי שנין. מאי טעמא כי שמעתיה לההוא גברא דאמר ליה לאושכפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שנין, אחיכת? אמר ליה: ההוא שבעה יומי לית ליה, מסאני לשב שנין בעי! מ"ט כי חזיתיה לההוא קסמא דהוה קסים, אחיכת? אמר ליה: דהוה יתיב אבי גזא דמלכא, לקסום מאי דאיכא תותיה.

In this section, Benayahu returned to Ashmedai at some point after the collection of the *shamir*, and interrogates him about the symbolic, confusing actions he took while they travelled together. This contrasts with the symbolic actions he took while in Solomon's captivity, which Solomon understood immediately.

What follows are the five symbolic actions Ashmedai took, along with conclusions we might make about how the rabbis understood Ashmedai.

1. Ashmedai helped the blind man because he heard in heaven that the man was a completely righteous man, and that anyone doing him a kindness would themselves merit the World to Come.

- Knows the status and fate of people by hearing about them from heaven.
- Desires the goodness of the World to Come for himself. Does this imply Ashmedai's own mortality?

2. Ashmedai helped the drunk because he heard in heaven that the man was a complete evildoer, and by doing him a kindness in this world, he “eats of this world” and reaps the rewards in this world such that he will suffer all the more so in the World to Come.

- Knows the status and fate of people by hearing about them from heaven.
- Serves as an agent in providing reward/punishment to sinners-- a kindness he received in this world ensure more suffering in the next.

3. Ashmedai cried when he saw the man rejoicing at the wedding because he knew two things: the man was destined to die within thirty days; the man’s wife would be subject to levirate marriage but would have to wait thirteen years for her husband’s brother to come of age.

- Shows compassion
- Shows knowledge of people’s fate
- Understands *halacha*

4. Ashmedai laughed when he saw a man asking the cobbler for sandals that would last seven years, because he knew he wouldn’t live seven days.

- Shows knowledge of people’s fate.
- Laughing in the face of death-- perhaps this is a laugh of situational irony, and not one rejoicing at death.

5. Ashmedai laughed at the magician doing magic because he sat above a huge royal treasury but could not reveal it through his magic.

- Laughs at situational irony and the folly of individuals.
- Can see what others cannot see.

Through all of these situations, Ashmedai proved that he has knowledge of things that most humans do not have, including knowledge of fate and things that are hidden. He proved his extra-human knowledge when he perceived that his water source had turned to wine. Given his extra sight, and knowledge of the unknown, could not he have perceived that he was walking into a trap and refrained from drinking the wine? Might not he have seen Benayahu sitting in the tree, waiting for Ashmedai to give into thirst, and acted preemptively to defeat his would-be captor? I'm struck by the juxtaposition of Ashmedai having such power of sight, and yet losing his sight in the critical moment that spelled his capture.

תרחיה גביה עד דבנייה לבית המקדש.

Solomon only captured Ashmedai for knowledge of the *shamir*, and yet he kept him through the entire creation of the Temple. What reason did Solomon have to keep him? With the protective charms of the engraved ring, Solomon had no reason to fear reprisal. But “one day” [i.e.: at some point] after the completion of the Temple, Solomon visited Ashmedai. Does this imply that Solomon planned to keep the king of the demons indefinitely? This may be an indication of the hubris that will lead to Solomon's downfall.

כתיב: כתועפות ראם לו, ואמרינן: כתועפות - אלו מלאכי השרת, ראם - אלו השדים, מאי רבותייכו מינן?

Solomon approached Ashmedai with a question based in scripture (Numbers 24:8) - a passage from Bilaam's third prophecy. Although the text is directly translated as “like the horns of the wild ox for him,” the midrashic leap that Solomon makes in his question turns

on grammar. The words **לֹא כְּתוּעָפוֹת רָאֵם** can mean that **רָאֵם** is like (the conjunction **כ**) the **תוּעָפוֹת**. The implication is that if **תוּעָפוֹת** are the ministering angels (**אלו מלאכי השרת**) and **רָאֵם** are the demons (**אלו השדים**) then ministering angels and demons are equated in some way. Based on these assumptions, Solomon asks Ashmedai: “What makes you superior to us? (**מַאי רְבוּתִיכּוֹ מֵיֵנּוּ**)” This could be Solomon’s attempt to genuinely ask Ashmedai a question about scripture wherein he cites a verse, then its midrashic reading, before asking Ashmedai to explain. But it is possible that Solomon was taunting Ashmedai through this exchange. If the midrashic reading of the verse is that demons are like the ministering angels in being more powerful than humans, then Solomon is asking Ashmedai to explain the extent of his superiority to humans in the face of being held captive by humans. This exchange demonstrates Solomon’s sense of security, such that he will feel comfortable releasing Ashmedai.

א"ל: שקול שושילתא מינאי והב לי עיזקתך, ואחוי לך רבותאי.

Perhaps Solomon does not remember the reasons (cited above) for having both the engraved chain and ring; or perhaps he did not appreciate the full power of having both, having sent Benayahu to do the dirty work of actually capturing the demon king. Despite having completed the Temple and having great dominion over much territory, does he really feel so safe and confident to cede to Ashmedai the very two items that gave him control in the first place? Imagine how powerful his adversary would become as a result of being freed from powerful chains, and holding a ring of power.

אותביה לחד גפיה ברקיעא ולחד גפיה בארעא

It seems that Ashmedai's supernatural scale and ability had been hidden until this moment - forced into human form and proportion in the face of captivity.

על ההיא שעתא אמר שלמה: מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש. וזה היה חלקי מכל עמלי

What is the emotion behind Solomon's citation of Ecclesiastes 1:3 and 2:10? Both express frustration at reaping earned rewards that are not in balance with the work put in to earn them. In this case, having accomplished regional dominion and completed the Temple, Solomon's reward was being flung some four hundred parasangs¹¹ away from the capital, and into exile. Does his citation of Ecclesiastes - importantly a text already attributed to him - express frustration and anger over an unjust reward for having completed God's house, or does Solomon acknowledge his hubris with words of resignation and humility?

אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים.

This quote (Ecclesiastes 1:12) is the central verse driving this larger narrative. According to the tradition that assigns the book to Solomon's voice, he expresses in the past tense that he was the king of Israel. Barring extenuating circumstances, Israelite monarchs retained their status until death. If the speaker can say that he "was [previously] a king over Israel in Jerusalem" then the reader must assume that this is no longer the condition. Thus, the rabbis

¹¹ Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud, the Steinsaltz Edition: A Reference Guide* (New York: Random House, 1989), 283-284. Steinsaltz presents the relationships between units of measure described in Talmud, including that one parasang equals 8000 cubits (an arm's length). However, these units of measure have no standardized translation into imperial or metric units. Depending on different 20th century authorities, Steinsaltz explains that the cubit measures either 18.9 or 22.7 inches. This would mean that the distance that Solomon was thrown was roughly either 954 miles or 1146 miles. For reference the distance from Jerusalem to Tehran is 970 miles, and the distance from Jerusalem to Khartoum, Sudan is 1126 miles.

told a story of Solomon being overthrown by Ashmedai to explain how it could be that Solomon was no longer king.

מכדי שוטה בחדא מילתא לא סריך

Lit.: “Now a fool does not fixate on one matter.” Having endured humiliation in begging from door to door, Solomon continued to disclose that he was king. Because of this persistence, the rabbis went from thinking that this man was an impoverished, foolish beggar, to wondering if his claim had merit.

מאי האי?

Solomon’s claim sowed the seeds of doubt such that the rabbis began to investigate what was happening. It seems like before this beggar came to their door claiming to be Solomon, the rabbis had no reason to question the identity of the person sitting on the throne, but that after encountering the real Solomon, their attention was piqued. This leads the reader to suspect that Ashmedai was impersonating Solomon while sitting on the throne.

אמרו ליה לבניהו: קא בעי לך מלכא לגביה? אמר להו: לא. שלחו להו למלכוותא:

To interrogate their suspicion, the rabbis called upon people with the most intimate knowledge of the king. First, they asked Benayahu, the advisor and general who had captured Ashmedai, whether he had seen the king, to which he answered no. Then they asked Solomon’s wives who had intimate access to Solomon-Ashmedai in a way that Benayahu did

not. In doing so, they put the wives in danger by asking them to speak about private encounters with their royal husband.

שלחו להו: בידקו בכרעיה, שלחו להו: במוקי קאתי

That the rabbis asked the wives to check Solomon's legs seems to imply that they suspected the person who looked like Solomon might be a demon. In a comment, Rashi explained the folk belief that demons had chicken legs, and that this was what the women should search for. Perhaps knowing that chicken legs was a sign for his true identity drove Ashmedai's decision to enter the wives' bedchambers with socks on as a way to cover evidence of his true identity.

וקא תבע להו בנידותיהו, וקא תבע לה נמי לבת שבע אימיה.

We know from earlier in the story that Ashmedai made it a habit to study Torah in both the heavenly and earthly yeshivot, and that he had a command of Torah that informed his initial abstinence from the alcohol that Benayahu had placed in his pit. Yet here, his apparent deviance from halacha with regard to approaching a wife in niddah and initiating a sexual encounter with his (supposed) mother were the giveaways in this case of mistaken identity.

והבו ליה עזקתא ושושילתא דחקוק עליה שם

The rabbis gave Solomon another engraved ring and engraved chain, or the same ones he had before? If they are a new set, how might Solomon and Ashmedai compete against each other

were both to be armed with “rings of power?” Or did Ashmedai spurn using those items, leading to his flight from the city?

פרח

Vb.: fled. Also a noun: young chicken, perhaps a playful connection to the chicken feet of demons.

ואפילו הכי הוה ליה ביעתותא מיניה.

Solomon was changed from his encounter with Ashmedai, and this story helps illuminate the meaning behind the two quoted psukim from Song of Songs 3:7-8, attributed to Solomon, that Solomon surrounded himself with sixty warriors while he slept. Perhaps the text is interpreting פחד בלילות “terror in the night” (Song of Songs 3:8) as Ashmedai.

רב ושמואל, חד אמר: מלך והדיוט, וחד אמר: מלך והדיוט ומלך.

Rav and Shmuel disagree about the final part of the story. One takes the position that Solomon was a king, then he became a commoner, perhaps with this expulsion at Ashmedai's hand. The other takes the position that Solomon was a king, then a commoner, then a king again, perhaps through the story of return told by the Bavli. In either case, both amoraim have a tradition that Solomon was not king for the entirety of his life, perhaps because this was the only way they could make sense of Kohelet 1:12 - “I Kohelet *was* king over Israel in Jerusalem.”

Kohelet Rabbah 1.12

... ודכוותיה אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל זה היה ראוי להיות תחלת הספר אלא שאין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה, אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל הוינא כד הוינא וכדו לית אנא מידי, ר' חנינא בר יצחק אמר כד הוינא הוינא וכדו לית אנא שוי מידי, שלשה עולמות ראה בימיו ובחיו, ר' יודן ורבי אוניה, ר' יודן אמר מלך והדיוט ומלך, חכם טפש וחכם, עשיר עני ועשיר, ומאי טעמא את הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי, לית בר נש מתינהו אנוקי ידיה אלא בשעת רווחיה כשיחזור לעותריה, ור' אוניה אמר הדיוט מלך והדיוט, טפש וחכם וטפש, עני עשיר ועני, ומה טעם אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים.

Translation:¹²

... And similarly, with, “*I Kohelet was king over Israel (Ecc. 1:12).*” This would have been fitting to be at the beginning of the book if not for the fact that there is no first or last in Torah.

“*I Kohelet was king over Israel (Ecc. 1:12).*” means “once I was [king], and now I am not like him.” Rabbi Hanina bar Yitzhak said it means, “once I was [king], and now I am not similar to him.”

Solomon saw three worlds in his life. Rabbi Yudan and Rabbi Oniyah [disagree.] Rabbi Yudan said: king, and commoner, and king; wise, foolish, and wise; rich, poor, and rich. How is this so? “I saw everything in the days of my permanence (Ecc. 7:15)?” [Meaning,] a person only teaches about his distress in the moment of his release, when he would return to his joy. Rabbi Oniyah said: commoner, king, and commoner; foolish, wise, and foolish; poor, rich, and poor.” How is this so? “*I Kohelet was king over Israel (Ecc. 1:12).*”

Analysis and Commentary:

ודכוותיה אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל זה היה ראוי להיות תחלת הספר אלא שאין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה

- אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה This ends a string of comments that fall under the principle of

statements in Tanakh that a person might think fall out of chronological order, do not pose a logical problem because Torah exists outside the bounds of logical time.

¹² Translation by author

אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל הוינא כד הוינא וכדו לית אנא מידי, ר' חנינא בר יצחק אמר כד הוינא הוינא וכדו לית אנא שוי מידי,

Stating the verse from Ecclesiastes 1:12 presents the now-familiar problem of how a reader is to understand Solomon's life, given that the narrator of a text attributed to him speaks about his own kingship in the past tense. The two versions of the tradition presented here say mostly the same thing - namely "once I was [king], and now I am not like him" or "once I was [king], and now I am not similar to him." However, read through the lens of the recurring debate about whether or not Solomon returned to the throne, the *stam* voice may take the view that he did not return, whereas the tradition attributed to Rabbi Hanina bar Yitzhak may argue that he returned to the throne but was changed by his ordeal. See the Gittin text where after his return, a traumatized Solomon sleeps under the protection of sixty warriors.

שלשה עולמות ראה בימיו ובחיו,

The midrash presents a tradition that Solomon did not simply go from being king to commoner, but rather that he transitioned through three phases of his life. Rabbi Yudan argues that he started with high statuses [in the areas of kingship, wisdom, and riches], was brought low, then returned to his previous state. Rabbi Oniyah argues the opposite - that he began at low statuses, achieved heights, and returned to his low origins.

ר' יודן אמר מלך והדיוט ומלך, חכם טפש וחכם, עשיר עני ועשיר, ומאי טעמא את הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי, לית בר נש מתינהו אנוקי ידיה אלא בשעת רווחיה כשיחזור לעותריה,

Rabbi Yudan's argument is based out of logic, using the statement attributed to Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:15 - "I saw everything the days of my impermanence (lit.: vanity)." According to his logic, Rabbi Yudan argues that a person would not teach about their distress until after they had been released to their prior status. Hence a height, a fall, and a return. Yudan could have used the verse from Ecclesiastes 1:12 to make the same argument - that a person would never speak about their distress at no longer being king over Israel until having returned to that status.

ור' אוניה אמר הדיוט מלך והדיוט, טפש וחכם וטפש, עני עשיר ועני, ומה טעם אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים.

Rabbi Oniyah makes the opposing argument, that Solomon never returned to his previous status, based on the logic of the past tense in Ecclesiastes 1:12. However, the position does not really hold up to scrutiny. Certainly, Solomon did not begin life as king, but as prince to David he was hardly the "ordinary person" that הדיוט denotes. Unless, of course, הדיוט just refers to anyone who is not king, then the statement makes sense. Solomon was rich and then lost those riches in his exile, but he hardly began life as a pauper. I could understand his trajectory from folly to wisdom and back because Solomon only received wisdom from God after the beginning of his reign [1 Kgs. 3] before presumably losing it.

The important part of the disagreement concerns the question of whether or not a person believes Solomon ended his life in disgrace, or whether he returned from that disgrace. This is the disagreement reflected by Rav and Shmuel in Bavli Gittin 68b where Rav holds the former position (מלך והדיוט) and Shmuel holds the latter one (מלך והדיוט ומלך). The problems

discussed above of Rabbi's Oniyah's position, which is similar to that of Rav, stem from the fact that in order to conform to the introduction of the disagreement ("he saw three worlds in the days of his life"), Rabbi Oniyah introduced the problematic הדיוט (commoner) world before Rav's "king then commoner (מלך והדיוט)."

This particular text simply unpacks the notion that Solomon changed status in his lifetime, without engaging the question of why he fell from his height, and without engaging the question of how and why he might have returned. If we were to understand the question about Solomon's trajectory as an allegory for the Jewish people, then perhaps the rabbis used Solomon's life as a way to question our own fate after sin. If we follow Rabbi Yudan - and Shmuel by extension - that after Solomon sinned, there was no return for him, then might we learn that we have no hope for teshuvah after our own transgressions. If we follow Rabbi Oniyah - and Rav by extension - that after Solomon sinned that we can be redeemed in our lifetime, then we might believe in the redemptive possibility, that Solomon himself prays for in 1 Kings 8:31-53. However, neither of these possibilities reflect Solomon's story that we find in 1 Kgs. 1-11. Having turned from God in his old age (1 Kings 11:4-10), God punished him by passing the sentence of tearing away his kingdom, and delaying that sentence until after Solomon's death. (1 Kgs 11:11-13) Solomon could not be redeemed, yet he was not punished.

Tanhuma Ahare 1:2

[ב] [אחרי מות שני בני אהרן]. ... ד"א לשחוק אמרתי מהולל. אמר ר' אחא אמר שלמה דברים ששחקה עליהם מדת הדין, כתיב לא ירבה לו נשים (דברים יז), וכתיב ויהי לו נשים שבע מאות וגו' (מלכים א' יא ג), כתיב לא ירבה לו סוסים (דברים שם טז), וכתיב ויהי לשלמה ארבעים אלף אורות סוסים (מלכים א' ה ו), [כתיב] וכסף וזהב לא ירבה לו מאד (דברים יז), וכתיב ויתן המלך את הכסף וגו' (מלכים א' י כז), ולא היו נגנבות, אמר ר' יוסי בר חנינא היו כאבני עשר אמות, וכאבני שמונה אמות, תני ר' שמעון בן יוחי אפילו משקלות שהיו בימי שלמה של זהב היו.

ולשמחה מה זו עושה, א"ל הקב"ה מה העטרה הזו בידך, רד מכסאך, מיד ירד מלאך בדמות שלמה וישב על כסאו, והיה שלמה מחזר בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות, ואומר אני קהלת הייתי מלך [על ישראל בירושלים] [קהלת א יב], והם אומרים לו שלמה המלך יושב על כסאו, ואתה הולך ומשתטה, והיו מכין אותו בקנה, ונותנין לפניו קערה של גריסין, באותה שעה אמר שלמה וזה היה חלקי מכל עמלי (קהלת ב י).

Translation:¹³

[“After the death of Aaron’s two sons, (Lev 16:1)”]. Another interpretation of: *“Of revelry I said, ‘It’s mad!’ (Ecc. 2:2a)”* Rabbi Aha said: Solomon said, [three] things I desecrated where I got the better of the law. It is written: *“He shall not add wives. (Deut. 17:17)”* but it is written: *“He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kgs 11:3).”* It is written: *“He shall not add horses (Deut. 17:16)”* but it is written: *“Solomon had 40,000 horse stables for his chariots (1 Kgs 5:6).”* It is written: *“And silver and gold he shall not add excessively, (Deut. 17:17)”* but it is written, *“The king made silver in Jerusalem [to be like stones in their excess] (1 Kgs. 10:27).”* Were they not stolen? Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina said, there were stones of ten cubits and eight cubits. Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai stated: In Solomon’s times, even weights were not of silver but of gold.

“Of joy [I said,] ‘What does it do? (Ecc. 2:2b)” The Holy One of Blessing said to [Solomon], “What is this crown on your head? Get off your throne!” At that moment an angel descended looking like Solomon, and sat upon his throne. And Solomon was going around to synagogues and study houses that were in Jerusalem and saying [to them], *“I Kohelet used to be king [over Israel in Jerusalem] (Ecc. 1:12).”* They would say to him, Solomon the king sits on his throne, but you go and are mad! And they would hit him with a reed and give him a dish of beans. At that moment, Solomon said: *“And this was my portion from all of my toil (Ecc. 2:10).”*

Analysis and Commentary:

אמר ר' אחא אמר שלמה דברים ששחקה עליהם מדת הדין

¹³ Translation adapted by author in conjunction with the translation of (the above text) Pesikta deRav Kahan.

This first section parallels the passage in Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 20c and Pesikta deRav Kahana 27 (168b-169a) in describing the three ways that Solomon violated the prohibition incumbent upon kings against taking too many women, too many chariots or standing army, and too much money. The passage uses the same verse from Ecclesiastes 2:2, found above, for its exegesis. The first half of the verse explains Solomon's folly, and the second half of the verse connects to his punishment.

א"ל הקב"ה מה העטרה הזו בידך, רד מכסאך, מיד ירד מלאך בדמות שלמה וישב על כסאו

There are only slight variances between this text, the Yerushalmi Sanhedrin text, and the Pesikta deRav Kahana text. First -- this text asks "why is this crown in your hand" where the other asks "why is this crown upon your head." Second, God commands, "descend from your throne" whereas the Yerushalmi texts demands, "descend from My throne." But both texts share the understanding that an angel in the likeness of Solomon will be the one to replace Solomon on the throne, while he is forced to wander around the streets of Jerusalem.

Unlike in the Gittin text, there is no discussion here of Solomon returning to his throne; nor does the king-commoner-king conversation come to bear.

Midrash Al Yithollel

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־תְהַלֵּל חֶכְמָתוֹ וְאֱלֹהֵי־תְהַלֵּל הַגְּבוּרָתוֹ אֱלֹהֵי־תְהַלֵּל עֲשִׂיר בְּעֶשְׂרֵי: אֵל יִתְהַלֵּל חֶכְמָתוֹ זֶה שְׁלֹמֹה מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, בִּשְׁעָה שִׁישַׁב עַל כֶּסֶּא מַלְכוּתוֹ נִשְׁתַּבַּח וְנִתְגַּאֵה וְעָבַר עַל מָה שְׁכָתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה לֹא תִקְרָה־לּוֹ נָשִׁים, אָמַר אֲנִי אֲרַבָּה נָשִׁים וְלֹא אֶסּוּר מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ,

מה עשה יו"ד של ירבה, עמד לפני הקב"ה ואמר לפניו: רבש"ע כלום כתבת בתורתך אות אחת לבטלה? אמר לו: לאו. אמר לפניו: הרי שלמה בטלני ונשא לו אלף נשים ועבר על תורתך. אמר הקב"ה ליו"ד: עלי לריב את (את) ריבך ולדון דינך. מיד אמר הקב"ה לאשמדיי מלכא דשידי, לך אצל שלמה, וטול חותמו מידו, נדמה כדמותו וישב על כסאו, והיה סבורים ישראל שהוא היה שלמה, והיה שלמה משוטט בעיירות ובכפרים, ואומר אני קהלת הייתי מלך, עד שעברו עליו ג' שנים. ובני אדם משיבין זה לזה, כמה שוטה הוא זה, המלך יושב על כסאו, והוא אומר אני קהלת הייתי מלך, אמר הקב"ה כבר עשיתי דין יו"ד,

מה עשה אשמדיי אותם ג' שנים עבר על נשיו של שלמה, עד שבא אצל אחת מהן והיא פירסה נדה, כיון שראתה אותו אמרה לו: למה שניתה מנהגך אשר היית נוהג בו - מיד שתק, אמרה לו: אין אתה שלמה. ועוד הלך לבת שבע אם שלמה ואמר לה: כך וכך אני רוצה ממך, מיד הלכה אצל בניהו, אמרה לו: כך וכך תבע ממני שלמה בני. מיד נודעזע בניהו וקרע את בגדיו ואמר: אם כן ח"ו אין שלמה בנך זה, אלא אשמדיי הוא, ואותו הנער היה משוטט ואומר אני קהלת הוא שלמה בעצמו. מיד שלח וקרא לאותו הנער, אמר לו: בני כיצד היו הענינים? אמר לו: יום אחד הייתי יושב במקומי ובא רוח סערה והשליכני, ומאותו היום ועד עכשיו ניטלה דעתי ממני, ולפיכך הייתי משוטט. אמר לו: כלום סימן יש לך? אמר: הן, שבשעה שמלכתי נטל אבי ידי אחת והניחו בידך וידי אחרת ביד נתן הנביא, ועמדה אמי ונשקה על ראש אבי.

כיון ששמע בניהו דבריו, קרא לסנהדרין ואמר כך וכך המעשה, אמר להם: כתבו שם המפורש וקבעוהו על לבבכם. הלכו וקבעו ובאו אצל בניהו, אמרו לו מתיראין אנו מן השם החקוק על לבו. אמר להם: וכי שם אחד יכול לכמה שמות. מיד הלך עמהם בניהו ונטל בניהו והחרב והכה את אשמדיי מכה גדולה ונטל החותם מידו וביקש להורגו. יצתה בת קול ואמרה: אל תגעו בו כי ממני יצא הדבר ומפני שעבר שלמה על מה שכתוב בתורה. מיד חזרו [החזירו] את שלמה בכסאו, וחותרו בידו. ונדמה כדמותו, וחזר ליופיו. אמר שלמה איה מלכותי איה גבורתי לא הועילוני כלום אלא כל המשפיל עצמו הקב"ה מגביהו שנאמר זָבַחַי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נְשִׁפָּרָה לִבִּי־נִשְׁפָּר וְנִדְּפָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבָּזֶה:

Translation:¹⁴

“Thus said the Eternal: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; Let not the strong man glory in his strength; Let not the rich man glory in his riches (Jer. 9:22, NJPS).” Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom: This is Solomon, king of Israel. At the time he sat upon his kingly throne he was praised and became haughty and transgressed that which was written in Torah - *he shall not increase for himself [too many] wives (Deut. 17:17)*. Solomon said: “I shall increase for myself wives but I shall not stray from the [righteous] path.”

¹⁴ Author's translation

What did the *yod* in the word ירבה (increase) do? He stood before the Holy One of Blessing and said before [God]: “Master of the Universe! You wrote nothing in Your Torah - not even a single letter - for a null purpose?” God said to him, “No I did not.” The *yod* said before God: “Behold, Solomon nullified me when he married for himself 1000 wives and transgressed Your Torah.” The Holy One of Blessing said to the *yod*: “It is incumbent upon me to fight your fight and adjudicate your complaint.” Next God said to Ashmedai, king of the demons: “Go to Solomon, and take his seal from his hand, appear in his likeness, and sit upon his throne.” And it was thought in Israel that Ashmedai was Solomon. And Solomon was roaming through the cities and the villages and saying, “*I Kohelet was king [over Israel in Jerusalem] (Ecc. 1:12),*” until after three years passed. And people said to one another: “What a fool is this man! The king sits upon his throne, but he says, ‘*I Kohelet was king.*’” The Holy One of Blessing said, “I have done justice for the *yod*.”

What did Ashmedai do those same three years? He went to Solomon’s wives, until he came into the chambers of one who was menstruating. When she saw him, she said to him: “Why did you change from your custom with which you normally behaved?” From this Ashmedai was silent. She said to him: “You are not Solomon.” Additionally he went to Batsheva, Solomon’s mother, and said to her: “Such and such I want from you.” Immediately she went to Benayahu [Solomon’s advisor], and she said to him: “Such and such he demanded from me - Solomon my son.” Immediately Benayahu was shocked and tore his clothing and said: “If this is so, God forbid, then he is not Solomon your son, but rather he is Ashmedai, and this same young man who is roaming around and saying ‘*I Kohelet*’, he himself is Solomon. Immediately he sent for and called to this same young man and said to him: “My son, how did this matter come to be?” Solomon said: “One day, I was sitting in my place and a mighty wind came and expelled me. And from then until now, my knowledge was taken from me and thus I have been wandering.” Benayahu said to him: “Do you have any proof [of your identity]?” Solomon said: “Yes, at the moment I began my rule, my father took one of my hands and placed it in your hand, and my other hand in the hand of Nathan the prophet, and my mother rose and kissed my father’s head.”

When Benayahu heard his words, he called to the Sanhedrin, told them such-and-such of the story, and said to them: “Write the Ineffable Name and affix it upon your hearts.” They went and affixed the Name, and came to Benayahu, and said: “We are afraid of the name inscribed upon [Ashmedai’s] heart.” He said to them: “Can it be that one Name overcomes many Names?” Then Benayahu went with them and took a sword and struck Ashmedai with a great blow. And he took the seal from his hand and sought to kill him. A *bat kol* went out and said: “You shall not touch him, for this matter came about because of me, and because Solomon transgressed that which was written in the Torah.” Then they returned Solomon to his throne and his seal to his hand. And Solomon returned to his former appearance and beauty. Solomon said: “Where is my kingdom, where is my strength - they did not help me at all. Rather, all who degrade themselves, the Holy One of Blessing raises them up, as it is said: *True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart (Ps. 51:19).*

Analysis and Commentary:

This text seems to be an amalgamation of the five preceding texts. A table and description in the analysis section below will demonstrate this in further detail.

בשעה שישב על כסא מלכותו נשתבח ונתגאה ועבר על מה שכתוב בתורה

This statement combines the two themes that try to explain why Solomon may have lost his throne. As with most of the texts, this one attributes his fall to transgressing the commandments in Deuteronomy 17 (עבר על מה שכתוב בתורה). However, this text also mentions pride and hubris (נשתבח ונתגאה), which are the reasons why Solomon let his guard down in the Gittin 68a-b story, and allowed Ashmedai the opening to overpower him.

אמר אני ארבה נשים ולא אסור מן הדרך, מה עשה יו"ד של ירבה, עמד לפני הקב"ה ואמר לפניו: רבש"ע כלום כתבת בתורתך אות אחת לבטלה? אמר לו: לאו. אמר לפניו: הרי שלמה בטלני ונשא לו אלף נשים ועבר על תורתך.

This section fleshes out the sparse description in Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 20c where the *yod* in Deuteronomy 17:17 “he should not increase wives for himself (לא ירבה לו נשים),” complains to God that it had been nullified through Solomon’s actions. The *yod* complained that its presence, having been ignored, allowed Solomon to take more wives. But the phrase without the *yod*, (לא רבה לו נשים) simply means “he did not increase wives for himself,” which does not make sense for this midrashic reading. This text attempts to clarify this issue, as it imagines Solomon changing the *yod* to an *alef*, expressing his intent to increase his harem while maintaining his commitment to Jewish practice.

אמר הקב"ה לאשמדיי מלכא דשידי, לך אצל שלמה, וטול חותמו מידו, נדמה כדמותו וישב על כסאו, והיה סבורים
 ישראל שהוא היה שלמה

Here, Ashmedai is God's agent of punishment, told explicitly to take Solomon's seal and render after his likeness, such that all Israel might remain unaware of the switched identity.

וטול חותמו מידו

This detail makes sense in the royal context, in that that signet ring or seal is the sign of royal authority for decrees sent out in the king's name. However, there is an assumption, only apparent at the final scene between Benayahu and the rabbis and Ashmedai that this seal was engraved with the name of God, which was a detail we learned more explicitly from the Bavli Gittin text.

עד שעברו עליו ג' שנים

Here we learn a time frame for Solomon's punishment, which is not a detail that any of the other versions of the story included. In doing so, the text tacitly takes a position on the issue posed by the disagreements between Rav and Shmuel and those between Rabbi Yudan and Rabbi Oniyah. Their disagreements, in part, question whether or not Solomon actually return to his royal position. By describing a finite time for Solomon's punishment, this telling follows Shmuel and Rabbi Yudan's opinion that he returned to kingship.

מה עשה אשמדיי אותם ג' שנים

Here, and in the text that follows, Ashmedai makes mistakes that hinted to an unnamed wife, to Batsheva, and ultimately to Benayahu, about his real identity. The mistakes or signs from this texts are also found in the Gittin text, but this text only describes those signs concerning mistakes in the area of sexuality. But in Gittin, Benayahu asked a wife to examine her husband's feet for evidence that he might have the tell-tale chicken legs of a demon.

עבר על נשיו של שלמה, עד שבא אצל אחת מהן והיא פירסה נדה, כיון שראתה אותו אמרה לו: למה שניתה מנהגך אשר היית נוהג בו - מיד שתק, אמרה לו: אין אתה שלמה.

Ashmedai's first mistake was to initiate a sexual encounter with one of Solomon's wives during her menstrual impurity. This "mistake" is predicated on the rabbis' belief that Solomon strictly followed the laws of family purity. In any case, this text depicts a woman as the first person to realize that the man with her husband's likeness was not in fact Solomon.

ועוד הלך לבת שבע אם שלמה ואמר לה: כך וכך אני רוצה ממך, מיד הלכה אצל בניהו, אמרה לו: כך וכך תבע ממני שלמה בני.

By saying כך וכך (such-and such) the text does not make clear what Ashmedai wants from Batsheva, but from context of how she, and later Benayahu react to his request, we might conclude that he wants to initiate a sexual encounter, seemingly unaware that Jews hold a son-mother sexual relationship as an incestuous, taboo one. An additional clue that this reference is to sex, and not that he was making some other odd request or demand of Batsheva that raised concern, comes from the Gittin text: וקא תבע לה נמי (He would demand of them during their time of menstrual impurity and he

would also demand of Batsheva his [Solomon's] mother.) The mention of menstrual impurity implies that Ashmedai's demand was sexual in nature, and the immediately subsequent use of the same verb (תבע) in relation to Batsheva, implies that he demanded sex from her as well. We find the same verb that implies a sexual demand in the Gittin selection in this text as well - כך וכך תבע ממני (such and such he demanded from me.)

מיד נזדעזע בניהו וקרע את בגדיו

Tearing clothing is an act of mourning.

ומאותו היום ועד עכשיו ניטלה דעתי ממני, ולפיכך הייתי משוטט.

My knowledge was taken from me (ניטלה דעתי ממני): This detail is not one that Gittin gives. Neither that text nor this one makes explicit that Solomon's appearance was changed in his expulsion, if it were not, then the rabbis - or certainly Benayahu - might have recognized him. But this text is unique in describing that the expulsion changed the nature of mental state (דעת). Perhaps this explains why he appeared as a foolish vagrant; had Solomon retained his full faculties, he might have had the presence of mind and the ability to prove his true identity without reports of strange encounters with a wife and with Batsheva.

כלום סימן יש לך? אמר: הן, שבשעה שמלכתי נטל אבי ידי אחת והניחו בידך וידי אחרת ביד נתן הנביא, ועמדה

אמי ונשקה על ראש אבי.

As convincing as Benayahu finds this proof in the midrash, the biblical text (1Kgs 1-2) regarding the transfer of power from David to Solomon does not corroborate this story.

כתבו שם המפורש וקבעוהו על לבבכם

In the dueling magic that will follow, the text does not clarify what it means to affix the Ineffable Name upon the heart. Perhaps this refers to a piece of engraved jewelry that would be worn on a chain around the neck. This might explain what was meant when the rabbis expressed fear about the Name worn around Ashmedai's neck (lit.: upon his heart). But the only thing we know that Ashmedai has engraved with the Ineffable Name is Solomon's seal. Perhaps Ashmedai is wearing this seal around his neck, as we find in the verse: *Let me be a seal upon your heart* (Song of Songs 6:8).¹⁵

וכי שם אחד יכול לכמה שמות

A sign that the rabbis' and Benayahu's manipulation of God's name into magic would overpower the magic of a single, albeit powerful demon - even one sent by God for an explicit purpose.

יצתה בת קול ואמרה: אל תגעו בו כי ממני יצא הדבר ומפני שעבר שלמה על מה שכתוב בתורה.

God, through the rabbis, acknowledging Ashmedai as an agent of divine justice.

ונדמה כדמותו, וחזר ליופיו.

The evidence that Solomon had been transformed in his exile to look differently, and less beautifully, than he was known to appear.

¹⁵ Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 667. This commentary describes the ancient practice of wearing the signet ring (חותם) around the neck.

אמר שלמה איה מלכותי איה גבורותי לא הועילוני כלום אלא כל המשפיל עצמו הקב"ה מגביהו שנאמר זְבַחְי

אֱלֹהִים רֵוִחַ גִּשְׁפָּרָה לִב־גִּשְׁפָּר וְגִדְּגָה אֱלֹהֵי יָם לֹא תִבָּזֶה:

Here we find the moralistic end to the story that finds Solomon admitting his hubris,
reaffirming his trust and faith in God, after enduring exile at Ashmedai's hand.

Source Contexts

On Sources and Origins

Source	Location	Era
Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 20c	Eretz Yisrael	300-400 CE
Pesikta deRav Kahana 27 (168b-169a) ¹⁶	Eretz Yisrael	500-640 CE
Talmud Bavli Gittin 68a-b	Bavel	500-600 CE
Kohelet Rabbah 1.12 ¹⁷	Drawn primarily from Eretz Yisrael material	640-900 CE
Tanhuma Ahare 1:2 ¹⁸	Probably Eretz Yisrael in origin, with other traditions' strands included	775-900 CE
Midrash Al Yithollel	Unknown	Unknown

¹⁶ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Midrash."

¹⁷ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.vv. "Midrash," "Ecclesiastes Rabbah."

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.vv. "Midrash," "Tanhuma Yelammedenu"; H. L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. by Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 302-306.

Context Analysis

The sources that this paper analyzes touch on interrelated themes in, and questions about, the life of Solomon, but they differ in sharpest contrast where it concerns the presence of Ashmedai as a character in those texts. The comments that follow are built upon scholarly conjecture about the sources' dates and locations of origin.

Based on my research, of the five early sources (Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesikta deRav Kahana, Talmud Bavli, Kohelet Rabbah, Tanhuma), all but Talmud Bavli originate in, or owe much source material to the midrashic tradition of Eretz Yisrael. Only the Bavli, which was compiled and redacted in Sasanian Persia, includes Ashmedai as a character in the story of Solomon's dethroning, whereas Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesikta deRav Kahana, and Tanhuma all see an angel sent by God as the agent of that dethroning. In the Bavli Gittin text, the rabbis demonstrated comfort referencing demons, Ashmedai the king of demons, and the "prince/minister of the sea."¹⁹ As I suggested above, these references hints at the syncretism in Babylonian Judaism, that had to contend with Persian religious traditions and folk beliefs that may have been foreign to early tannaitic Judaism or Palestinian Amoraic Judaism. This is not a paper that sets out to speculate about the Babylonian rabbinic impulse to include outside elements into a story about an archetypal Jewish hero. In particular, the character of Ashmedai removes the great Solomon from his throne in a way that the Palestinian rabbis are only willing to describe happening as an act of explicitly divine punishment, accomplished through angels.

¹⁹ See the comment to ש"א:ל: שמא דמרך עלך in the section on Bavli Gittin 68a-b

However, I must acknowledge that the approximate date of a text's redaction does not speak to the origin date of any particular story within. It is possible that the tradition of Ashmedai dethroning Solomon was present in the rabbinic consciousness prior to the redaction of either Talmud Yerushalmi and Talmud Bavli, and that Palestinian sages changed Ashmedai to an angelic figure, whereas we was preserved by later Babylonian sages.

In any case, the Pesikta deRav Kahana text and the Tanhuma Ahare texts, which both originate in Eretz Yisrael, copy the Yerushalmi text in describing God's angel displacing Solomon and taking on his likeness.

The final text, Midrash Al Yithollel, is a relatively short midrash that derives its name from Jeremiah 9:22: "the wise, the strong and the rich should not boast of their gifts." Fittingly, the text relates stories of the wise Solomon, the strong David, and the rich Korah.²⁰ However I was not able to find scholarly information about its origins. But this particular story from the midrash appears to combine material from the five other sources and fit their details together. The text starts out like the Eretz Yisrael texts, focusing on Solomon's transgression of commandments in Deuteronomy (Pesikta de Rav Kahana; Tanhuma Ahare), then *yod's* accusation to God (Yerushalmi), and then God's punishment. However, instead of sending an angel, God sends Ashmedai, king of the demons to displace Solomon and take on his likeness. From this point forward, the text resembles the Bavli Gittin text with Solomon's wandering, Ashmedai's mistakes, and Benayahu's confrontation. The midrash then differs from the Gittin text in its moralistic ending, which sees Solomon returned to his throne, aware of his mistakes and in God's role in his return. This contrasts with the Gittin text that

²⁰ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 339; A. Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim*, vol. 6 (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938), xxvi-xxvii.

ends inconclusively with the debate between Rav and Shmuel about whether they thought Solomon actually returned to power or not. Midrash Al Yithollel reads like a pastiche after seeing the five other traditions the address similar themes, which makes me think that it is a later text. If this text is a pastiche, then the provenance and possibility of syncretism no longer concerns me, given that the author/editor's primary concern was combining textual traditions, not justifying folk belief.

Below is a chart that will demonstrate the various story strains and themes for each of the six sources, which will demonstrate how different the Eretz Yisrael sources are from the Gittin source, and the extent to which Midrash Al Yithollel appears to be a pastiche of the other five.

Source:	Eretz Yisrael				Bavel	Late
	Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin	Pesikta deRav Kahana	Kohelet Rabbah	Tanhuma Ahare	Talmud Bavli Gittin	Midrash Al Yithollel
Demons have special knowledge					x	
Demons subject to divine commands/inscriptions					x	
Ashmedai demonstrates knowledge of Torah					x	
Ashmedai demonstrates supernatural knowledge and answers riddles					x	
Solomon demonstrates wisdom					x	
Solomon transgresses law(s) (Deuteronomy or Mishnah)	x	x		x		x
<i>Yod</i> complains to God	x					x
Deuteronomy complains to God on behalf of <i>yod</i>	x					
Citation of Ecc. 2:2 (לשחוק) (אמרתי מהולל ולשמחה מה זו עושה)	x	x		x		
God chooses to remove Solomon from throne	x	x		x		x
Angel takes Solomon's place, in his likeness	x	x		x		
Ashmedai takes Solomon's place in his likeness					x	x
Citation of Ecc. 1:12 (אני קהלת) (הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלם)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Solomon wanders in anonymity and is abused	x	x		x	x	x
Citation of Ecc. 2:10 (וזה היה) (חלקי מכל עמל)	x			x	x	
Citation of Ecc. 1:2 (הבל הבלים) (אמר קהלת)		x				
Ashmedai inadvertently reveals identity through mistakes (to women)					x	x
Benayahu tests Solomon						x
Ashmedai dethroned, Solomon returns					x	x
Debate about Solomon's return (מלך הדיוט ומלך vs מלך והדיוט)			x		x	

Major Themes

There are a few major threads, questions, and themes that occur in different permutations and combinations. As discussed in the previous section, Ashmedai is most likely a folk character indigenous to those particular Jewish communities, and he is used as a tool to uncover these same ideas in more nuanced ways than the Eretz Yisrael-based texts are able to accomplish. I contend that these texts combine these traditions and tales of Solomon, Ashmedai, angels, and others to ask and answer questions about the nature of divine justice and teshuvah.

The story of Solomon in the book of Kings contains an essential contradiction. In Chapter 3, Solomon received the gift of divine wisdom and he was the king fated to complete the Jerusalem Temple when his own father, the archetypal King David was deemed unworthy.²¹ Solomon achieved riches and fame,²² and he expanded the border of the kingdom to a greater extent than any who would come after. Thus, Solomon receives an outsized, mythic status as a Jewish leader who raised Israel, and by extension God, to glory. However, Solomon was unable to sustain his legacy to his kingly heirs. The kingdom groaned under his tax burden, and split after his son raised taxes to even higher levels.²³ If we are to judge Solomon by fragile state in which he left the realm after he died, and by the foolhardy actions of his son and heir, then we might rethink Solomon's legacy of greatness. And although Jeroboam, the first Israelite king after the splintering of the Unified Monarchy, infamously

²¹ 1 Kings 3:12; 1 Kings 5:17-19

²² 1 Kings 5:1-6

²³ 1 Kings 5:27, 12:1-19

introduced foreign sacrifices into the cultic practice,²⁴ Solomon - builder of the Jerusalem Temple - was in fact the first monarch after David to approve and establish shrines to foreign gods.²⁵ Our paragon of wisdom was a flawed king, amassing wives, wealth, and armies, in excess of prudence and Torah laws' dictates. As he amassed wealth and reputation, perhaps he grew proud. And most of the sources share in common the idea that Solomon made a mistake prior to being displaced. Either he erred by violating laws of Deuteronomy 17 or their repetition in Mishnah Sanhedrin 2, or he erred through hubris - albeit the hubris of keeping Ashmedai captive for longer than he needed to be kept, and taunting him such that he let his guard slip.

The text of Ecclesiastes also complicates Solomon's life story for the rabbis. The only element that all six midrashim had in common was the verse from Ecclesiastes 1:12: "I Kohelet was king over Israel in Jerusalem." This past tense formulation of a sentence spoken by Solomon (understood to be the same "Kohelet, son of David" in Ecclesiastes 1:1) meant that Solomon reached a point in his life when he was no longer king. This particular detail was not reflected in Solomon's life in 1 Kings, so one way to harmonize these two contradictory pieces of information is to suggest that perhaps, no one at the time knew that the person sitting on the throne was, in fact, only a likeness of the real Solomon. And for what reason might Solomon no longer be king? Might it be punishment for the transgressions mentioned above: hubris or sin?

As discussed above, God sent an angel as the agent of punishment in the Eretz Yisrael sources when Solomon violated mitzvot. In the Bavli Gittin source, Ashmedai punished

²⁴ 1 Kings 12:28-33

²⁵ 1 Kings 11:4-8

Solomon directly when Solomon's pride led him to lead his guard down. And in the amalgamated source, Midrash Al Yithollel, Solomon became prideful in the course of his reign, which led him to transgress, after which God punished him by sending Ashmedai to displace him on the throne.

The essential question that these texts interact with comes after mistake and punishment, and concerns the question of Solomon's return. The dispute between Rav and Shmuel (Gittin) and between Rabbi Yudan and Rabbi Oniyah (Kohélet Rabbah) best encapsulate the question about teshuvah that these texts raise. Rav and Rabbi Oniyah both contend that Solomon ended his life as a commoner, whereas Shmuel and Rabbi Yudan both argue that Solomon returned to the throne after his period of lower status.²⁶

The narrative tellings of the Eretz Yisrael texts do not mention any return to the throne. Of the Eretz Yisrael texts, only Kohélet Rabbah makes mention of this essential question. Gittin 68a-b and Midrash Al Yithollel, by comparison, both mention Ashmedai, and both mention Solomon's return to the throne. However, the Gittin text does undermine its narrative arc returning Solomon to power when the dispute between Rav and Shmuel mentions the "king then commoner" possibility. Midrash Al Yithollel is unambiguous in describing Solomon's return to the throne after three years of punishment.

This possibility of return, of teshuvah for mistakes, lies at the heart of these texts. Solomon, for all his faults, remains a symbol of God's blessing upon humanity because of his wisdom, his accomplishments, and the family heritage he upheld. His story serves as an

²⁶ There are slight differences to the opposing arguments: Rav argues for "king then commoner" (מלך והדייט) and Rabbi Oniyah argues for "commoner, then king, then commoner" (הדייט ומלך והדייט); whereas both Shmuel and Rabbi Yudan argue for "king, then commoner, then king" (מלך והדייט ומלך). For more detail about the differences between the opinions, see the analysis comparing the Gittin and Kohélet Rabbah texts in the in-line commentary to Kohélet Rabbah.

example that if mighty, anointed figures can fall from their heights so can any person. And the texts that raise the possibility of Solomon's return from such a depth also demonstrate that others too can obtain forgiveness for transgressions and return to a place of status having been brought low by pride or sin.

The last phenomenon to consider around the issue of teshuvah is the fact that the same texts that depict Solomon's return to the throne are the same texts that include Ashmedai as a character. The Eretz Yisrael texts, which do not depict any return, also are ones that do not include Ashmedai. What connection does Ashmedai have to the possibility of teshuvah? Perhaps Ashmedai represents an external influence that is the sole cause for Solomon's fall, and that his removal is the only requirement for Solomon's return. Or, the demon Ashmedai might embody the corruption of sin and pride when he displaced Solomon's from his throne. After Solomon's wandering with no possessions and being degraded, then the sins of over-acquisition and the pride would be atoned for, and Ashmedai could be purged from the throne just as Solomon's sins were purged through his trials.

Although Solomon might have returned to his throne, he was certainly changed and humbled by his experience. Both Gittin 68a-b and Midrash Al Yithollel describe the ways that teshuvah fundamentally changed him. At the end of the Gittin text, the text says that "despite this [expulsion of Ashmedai], Solomon was fearful of him (or: of his experience)," and goes on to cite a proof-text from Song of Songs 3:7-8 describing the sixty warriors Solomon had guarding him from "terror by night."²⁷ Where this text describes residual trauma, Midrash Al Yithollel describes remorse. Having described his pride at the beginning

²⁷ Song 3:8 [NJPS] "מִפְּקֶד בַּלַּיְלוֹת" - the rabbis want this to be a reference to Ashmedai.

of the selection, the text places a statement of faith in Solomon's mouth, followed by a pasuk from Psalms, that "true sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit." Both texts show a Solomon returned to his throne, but he was not the same Solomon who was expelled, having grown and changed from his experience.

Ultimately, these texts show Solomon as an exemplar for us, that we too can fall, we too can endure punishment and return, and we too can make the changes necessary to ensure we do not make the same mistakes in the future.

Conclusion

I began this project as an exercise in process, to take one basic midrashic story that occurred in different permutations and combination, and analyze it for changes and learn something about the rabbinic process through those changes. The story this paper analyzed concerned a basic problem: the Kings account of Solomon's life has him reigning until death, and Kohelet 1:12 introduces the possibility that Solomon was not king during his adult life. The stories that arose through this basic contradiction suggested fault on Solomon's part, either through sin or pride. The Eretz Yisrael tellings generally saw Solomon punished by God through angels, without a return to kingly status, whereas the Gittin text (and the amalgamated Midrash Al Yithollel) include the demon king Ashmedai as either an independent agent, or God's agent in punishment. But the presence of Ashmedai also correlates to the potential for teshuvah, and he serves as a means through which to return. Ashmedai, especially in the Gittin text, is Solomon's counterpart in the demon world. Both are wise, God-fearing, masters of their realms, and both subservient to God. The power dynamic between the two suggests that Solomon could return to his position. But the power imbalance between Solomon and God suggests the finality in God's punishment that did not allow for Solomon's return.

The generations of rabbis who included these stories in our tradition found themselves as "commoners" - wandering through streets that should be safe and familiar, but unrecognized beggars, debased by those around them. The diasporic experience of wandering, yearning, and fearing outsiders may found voice in Solomon's exile after his fall

from power in Jerusalem. Like Rav and Shmuel, who argued over Solomon's end, the rabbis had no way of knowing whether or not that exile would end, and if the People Israel's teshuvah might be accepted, as signified by the messianic hopes surrounding a return to Zion. But certainly that messianic return would be accompanied by a scion of *Bet David*, through the line of his son Solomon. Would Israel's punishment be final, as with Solomon's punishment at God's hand, or might Israel have an adversary against whom to fight, as Solomon had with Ashmedai, and find its way back to glory? Just as that question was live for the rabbis, that essential question about Israel remains open for us today.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 20c.

Talmud Yerushalmi: Masekhet Sanhedrin. Edited by Daniel Bomberg. Venice, 1523.
Accessed from the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD-ROM.

Pesikta deRav Kahana 27 (168b-169a):

Pesikta De Rav Kahana: According to an Oxford Ms.; with Variants from All Known Mss. and Genizoth Fragm. and Parallel Passages. Edited by Bernard Mandelbaum. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962. Accessed from the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD-ROM.

Talmud Bavli Gittin 68a-b

Koren Talmud Bavli. Edited by Tzvi Hersh Weinreb. 1st Hebrew/English ed. Vol. 21, *Gittin*. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2015.

Kohelet Rabbah 1.12

Kohelet Rabbah. Jerusalem, repr. Vilna, 1878. Accessed from the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD-ROM.

Tanhuma Ahare 1:2

Midrash Tanhuma. Jerusalem, 1958, repr. Warsaw, 1875. Accessed from the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project CD-ROM.

Midrash Al Yithollel:

A. Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim*, vol. 6. Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938.

References

Braude, William G. and Israel J. Kapstein, eds. *Pesikta De-Rab Kahana: R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festival Days*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2002.

Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews*. Translated by Henrietta Szold. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1954.

Guggenheimer, Heinrich W. ed., *The Jerusalem Talmud: Fourth Order: Neziqin*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000.

Pope, Marvin H. *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977.

Steinsaltz, Adin, ed. *Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 21. *Tractate Gittin*. Jerusalem, Israel: The Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1993.