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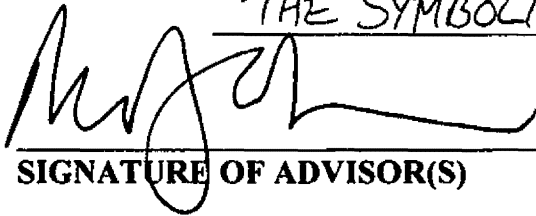
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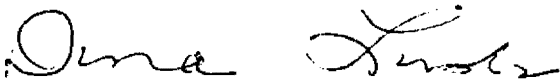
THE SYMBOLIC NATURE OF CAIN AND ABEL



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**Digging in the Dirt:
The Symbolic Nature
of Cain and Abel**

by Joshua Hillel Strom

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,
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INTRODUCTION

The tragic tale of the brothers Cain and Abel comprises just sixteen verses of the biblical book of Genesis. But those sixteen verses witness births, the taking on of occupations, sacrificial offerings, and the first experience of death. An interweaving of prose and poetry tells the story of the Torah's original siblings, how the rejection of one and the jealous anger that flowed from it resulted in the first murder. Before we can utter the words 'sibling rivalry,' the dynamic has risen to a pitch so feverish that it ends in fratricide. Stunned both by its suddenness and the absence of explanation, we read with bated breath to discover how the omniscient, omnipotent God reacts to the crime of murder, to see if the perpetrator confesses and repents, and to gauge his response to the punishment decreed against him.

Sixteen verses changed everything. But their striking brevity has left us with more questions than answers. Were Cain and Abel twins? If the human race developed from them, were there females born with them as well? What is the meaning, tone, and intention of Eve's cryptic explanation for Cain's name? Why is there an etymology for Cain's name and none for Abel's? What is the significance of their respective occupations? Why was the offering of one accepted while that of the other was rejected? What was Cain's reason or motive for killing his brother? What did Cain say to his brother before he killed him? Why did Cain answer God's question with a question of his own? What does it mean that the blood of Abel cried out to God and why is it written in the Hebrew in the plural form? What is the nature of the curse of the ground levied by God against Cain? Is Cain's response one of repentance? Complaint? A plea bargain? If no one else is in the world, of whom or what does Cain fear for his life? What is the mark

God places upon Cain, and what is its purpose? In sum, our challenge is to try to understand the core natures of Cain and Abel from the perspective of the rabbis of the Midrash.

Surely these questions have been asked by readers of the biblical text since its redaction. The intrigue and curiosity that has endured through modern scholarship led me to wonder how the rabbis of the Midrash answered those questions, and how, if at all, the socio-historical context in which they lived affected the suppositions they put forth. Thus, we will explore in the following essay the wide range of theories and interpretations suggested by the writers of Midrash in their attempts to answer the questions above.

The process I followed began with the biblical text itself, a complete immersion into those sixteen verses in order to know them inside and out, and to formulate our own questions— regarding what is found in the text as well as what is conspicuously absent. Once there was an established familiarity and comfort level with the original text, I studied modern scholarship on Cain and Abel. Chronologically the primary sources for modern biblical criticism I consulted were Umberto Cassuto, Gerhard von Rad, Robert Davidson, Claus Westerman, Gordon Wenham, and Nahum Sarna. It is fascinating that not only are the questions they raise inherently the same, but also that they draw us no closer to clear answers to these questions. In fact, with the impressive scope of modern scholarship providing yet greater possibilities, it would seem that we are actually farther from consensus than were the rabbis of the Midrash.

Then I began to turn to the midrashim themselves. In reviewing those questions articulated above, it became clear that we could attain an accurate understanding of the

rabbis' answers to them by choosing select key verses from the biblical narrative. As a result, I chose not to focus on Genesis 4:5b, where, according to the JPS translation, "Cain was much distressed and his face fell." In 4:6-7, God warns Cain in poetic form that, while sin waits at the door, the choice is entirely his whether he resists or succumbs to it. From the suddenly artistic rendering and bizarre grammatical formulation of the address, these two verses alone could be the subject of a lengthy essay. For our scope and purposes here, we have chosen not to examine midrashim connected to these verses.

For the remaining verses in the section, we examined the rabbinic verse anthology, *Ha-Torah ha-Ketuvah ve-ha-Mesurah*.¹ This source lists by verse where and in which compilations one can find midrashim that cite or deal with the particular verse. Having gathered all potentially relevant midrashic traditions, I then followed up with research in more than thirty midrashic sources ranging from the Intertestamental Period to the medieval anthologies to see how the rabbis over time answered the questions posed above, and found that most of their answers fall into one of six broad categories, which are the chapter headings for this essay.

In the first chapter, we will discuss the nature of the births of Cain and Abel. We shall see the differing opinions over whether the brothers are twins or not, as well as the notion that twin sisters were born with each. There are also varying ideas as to the inherent nature of each character which were noticeable from the moment of their birth. The end of the chapter deals with Eve's enigmatic phrase uttered upon the birth of Cain—what it means and how, if at all, it connects to the tale that follows.

¹ Aaron Hyman, *Ha-Torah ha-Ketuvah ve-ha-Mesurah* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1979).

The second chapter focuses on the occupations of the brothers—Cain a farmer, Abel a shepherd—to see what symbolism or significance the rabbis find in their respective professions. Also adding to this discussion is whether or not they chose their occupational paths or if they came to them by happenstance or some other route. Intimately connected with their jobs are the offerings they bring to God, and we will explore the reasons given for why Abel's was accepted and Cain's was rejected.

The murder of Abel itself is the topic of the third chapter. Before Cain rises up to kill his brother, the biblical text states that something was said by him to Abel, but the text never tells us exactly what. Here, the rabbis propose a myriad of theories about the conversation and subsequent quarrel between them which ends in fratricide, which then leads to the natural question of whether it was premeditated or an act of manslaughter. They also discuss to a limited degree what the murder weapon was.

In the fourth and longest chapter, we explore the aftermath of murder. God confronts Cain by first asking him where his brother is, and the rabbis take varying approaches as to the significance of God's question. We will see how they interpret the blood crying out to God, and what exactly the curse of the ground means. We then indulge in a lengthy discussion of Cain's words, "*Gadol avoni mineso*," translated in the JPS Torah as, "My punishment is too great to bear," the degree to which the utterance is considered a sign of repentance, and if the punishment decreed by God provides any insight into the debate over the meaning of the phrase. The end of the chapter focuses on the rabbis' perception of the final judgment of Cain, as a response to there being no report of his death within the biblical text.

The fifth chapter enters into the conversation among the rabbis as to the nature and purpose of the mark placed upon Cain by God. Cain expresses a profound fear of being killed in an act of revenge against him, but the text is unclear as to whom or what is the source of his fear. God's mark may be positive as a symbol of divine protection, negative as some sort of label for his crime, or perhaps a measure of both.

Our sixth and final chapter deals with the typological understanding of Cain and Abel throughout the midrashim. As the first born humans, perhaps their symbolism carries much deeper significance than might be discovered through a psychological investigation of the individual characters. We will see the rabbis posit overarching, highly generalized statements concerning the nature of their descendants and their responsibility for certain indelible human characteristics.

CHAPTER 1:
THE BIRTH OF CAIN AND ABEL

In analyzing the symbolic nature of Cain and Abel, it is natural to begin with an exploration of the circumstances surrounding their birth. The paucity of detailed information in the biblical text engenders several questions: Were Cain and Abel twins? Were there other siblings born with them, either simultaneously or afterwards? What are the meanings of the names 'Cain' and 'Abel'? What can we learn from the texts regarding the nature of each character? And just what is the intention of Eve in uttering the cryptic Hebrew phrase of Genesis 4:1, "*Qaniti ish et Adonai*," translated in the JPS edition as, "I have acquired a male child with the help of God"?

A. Twinning and Twin Sisters

The first of many major disagreements regarding Cain and Abel pertains to their actual physical birth. In the Book of Jubilees, a pseudepigraphic work dating back to the second century BCE and a seemingly proto-Rabbinic text, the brothers are not seen as twins. The book is based on the biblical text, but often departs significantly from it, written in the form of a first-person monologue of the angel of the 'Divine Presence.' It serves to retell and historically date the stories of the biblical text through a counting system where each jubilee consists of seven 'weeks' of years. Using this system, we read in Chapter 4:1,

*And in the third week in the second jubilee, [Eve] bore Cain.
And in the fourth she bore Abel. And in the fifth she bore 'Awan,
his daughter.*

Here, as opposed to the biblical text, it is abundantly clear that Cain and Abel are not

twins, and that there was a separate daughter.

We see similar interpretation in the works of Flavius Josephus, who lived in Roman Palestine in the first century CE and composed “perhaps the most significant extra-biblical writings of the first century.”² In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus informs us,

*Adam and Eve had two sons; the elder of them was named Cain...the younger was Abel...They had also daughters.*³

While his delineation of an elder and a younger does not necessarily preclude that they are twins, the fact that they are not explicitly presented as such illustrates Josephus’ conviction that they were not twins. If they had been and it had been important to the story, Josephus would have told us so.

Another important pseudepigraphic work is the *Life of Adam and Eve*, composed between the years of 100 BCE and 200 CE, with variations between in its Latin form as *Vita Adae et Evae* and its Greek form as *The Apocalypse of Moses*. In *Vita*, Cain is born in Chapter 21, and not until 23:1 do we read, “For Eve later conceived and bore a son, whose name was Abel.” Once again, the text describes the births of Cain and Abel as two separate incidents, rather than a birth of twins.

But this seems to be the minority opinion among the midrashim. Even the *Apocalypse of Moses*, the co-eval work to *Vita* itself, disagrees. We read in 1:3, “Eve conceived and bore two sons,” so that there is one conception and one birth, resulting in twin boys. The Babylonian Talmud dives fully into the conversation in BT Yevamot 62a,

² Whiston, William, trans, The Works of Josephus (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1987) ix.

³ Book 1, Chapter 2, 52.

where the Rabbis argue over the proper fulfillment of the commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” from Genesis 1:28. Beit Hillel argues that a man fulfills the commandment by producing a male and a female child, citing “male and female God created them” from Genesis 1:27.⁴ Beit Shammai refers to the birth of Cain and Abel, where the introduction of their names is preceded by the Hebrew word *et*. This proves that the commandment is fulfilled by producing two males and two females, based on the fact that the inclusive particle ‘*et*’ before each name implies that each was created with a twin sister. The rabbis argue:

Rav Huna said: What is the rationale [behind the view] that R. Nassan [stated] according to Beit Shammai? It is written, V’ha-adam yada et Hava ishto va-tahar va-teled et Kayin...Vatosef laledet et ahiv et Hevel. [Each occurrence of the Hebrew word et alludes to a twin sister. Thus, Adam and Eve’s children were two males and two females:] Abel and his [twin] sister, and Cain and his [twin] sister. And it is written, [later, after Abel’s death, that Eve gave birth to another son, Seth, and said:] “for God has provided me with another child in place of Abel, for Cain has killed him.” However, the Rabbis [say that Eve was not speaking in reference to the mitzvah of procreation. Rather,] she was [simply] expressing her gratitude [to God for providing her with another child after she had lost one].

The view presented here is that there were two males and two females born to Adam and Eve, the first people, so that this becomes the model for fulfilling the commandment. Beit Shammai attempts to bolster its proof with the words uttered by Eve following the birth of

⁴In the interest of gender neutrality concerning God, all references to God as masculine have either been edited or removed completely. This verse, for example, is translated in most sources as, “male and female He created them.” In places where the original text reads, “The Holy One, blessed be He,” the latter part has been omitted. Also, in editions in which the translation of the biblical text appears in Old English, we have rendered it here in modern idiomatic English.

Seth in Genesis 4:25, whom we are told is provided by God “in place of Abel, for Cain had killed him.” They interpret the verse to mean that Seth was a necessary replacement because fulfillment of the commandment required two children of each gender. But the Rabbis rule with Beit Hillel, who interpret the verse as Eve expressing gratitude to God, rather than indicative of *halakhah*. While the schools disagree in the end over the halakhic significance of the verse, the notion not only that Cain and Abel were twins, but that they were born each with twin sisters of their own, seems to be the consensus among both groups.

This notion is also assumed later in Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer, a Narrative Midrash composed in the land of Israel, dating back to the first half of the eighth century. In Chapter 21, the text reads, “Rabbi Miasha said: Cain was born and his twin sister with him.”⁵ It also appears in later sources, like Aggadat Bereshit, an aggadic homiletical midrash from the tenth century. The introductory chapter of MS Oxford 2340 reads, “Were not Cain and his sister and Abel and his sister born to him twenty-three years after the creation of the world?”⁶

Bereshit Rabbah, a watershed work of midrash compiled in the land of Israel and dated to approximately the 5th century CE, starts with the notion introduced by the

⁵Gerald Friedlander’s translation, (New York: Hermon Press, 1970, 152) takes into account variant editions of the Hebrew text. His translation is based on an edition that reads, ‘Cain was born, and his wife, his twin sister, with him’ but has a footnote that says, “‘his wife’ does not occur in the first editions.’ Our Hebrew text, based on the 1852 Warsaw edition does not have the corresponding words, so we have omitted them from the translation. Unless otherwise noted, we have quoted from the Friedlander translation.

⁶See also Midrash Lekah Tov to Genesis 4:1 and Yalkut Shim‘oni Part I, *Remez* 35.

Babylonian Talmud and takes it a step further. Whereas the Talmud infers that a twin sister is born with both Cain and Abel because the word *et* preceded their names, the writers of Bereshit Rabbah deduce that Abel was born with *two* twin sisters because the biblical text reads, “*Vatosef laledet et ahiv, et Hevel.*” If the occurrence of *et* implies a twin sister, there are two instances of the word before Abel’s name is first mentioned. In BR 22:2 we read,

*R. Eleazar b. 'Azariah said: Three wonders were performed on that day: on that very day they were created, on that very day they cohabited, and on that very day they produced offspring. R. Joshua b. Korhah said: Only two entered the bed, and seven left it: Cain and his twin sister, Abel and his two twin sisters.*⁷

The very next midrash in Bereshit Rabbah 22:3, explains how the Hebrew *vatosef* “implies an additional birth, but not an additional pregnancy.”⁸

BR 61:4 expands on this idea: ‘

Bar Kappara said: The addition granted by the Holy One exceeds the principal. Cain was the principal, yet since Abel is recorded as an addition (vatosef), he was born together with two twin sisters.

In this example, Bar Kappara supports his opinion with other examples where the addition exceeds the principal, like in the case of Joseph and Benjamin, the latter of whom had ten sons, and Er and Shelah, the latter of whom produced ten courts of law.

⁷ Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:2 changes Bereshit Rabbah 22:2 to fit the Talmudic explanation of one twin each: ‘R. Judah b. Petirah says that on that day each was born with one twin, two went into bed, six came out.’

⁸ See also Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 21 and Yalkut Shim’oni Part I, *remez* 35.

B. The Meaning of Their Names

Next we turn to the nature of Cain and Abel at their birth, as well as the meaning of each of their names. In *Vita Adae et Evae* 20-21, Eve experiences an extremely difficult and painful pregnancy as she carries Cain in her womb. Since Adam is described in the work as perfect in virtue and she is portrayed as “morally weak, but not wicked,”⁹ we read of her saying to Adam:

“And now implore God for me to hear you and to have regard for me and free me from my most awful pains.” And Adam prayed to God for Eve. And behold, twelve angels and two other divine beings came and stood to the right and to the left of Eve. And Michael stood to the right and touched her from her face to the breast and said to Eve, “Blessed are you, Eve, because of Adam. Since his prayers and utterances are many, I am sent to you that you might receive our help. Now rise and make ready to give birth.” And she bore a son, and he was lustrous. And at once the infant rose, ran, and brought in his hands a reed and gave it to his mother. And his name was Cain.

Thus we see that the explanation for Cain’s name (*Qayin*) is that he immediately runs off and brings a reed (Heb. *qaneh*) to his mother. When Abel is born, as in the biblical text, there is no explanation given for his name. In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, the two sons born to Eve are “Diaphotos called Cain, and Amilabes called Abel.” While the text itself provides no explanation for either name, the Charlesworth edition of the Old Testament

⁹ Jacob Licht, “Book of the Life of Adam and Eve,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 377-378.

Pseudepigrapha posits its own conjectures. One suggestion is that the name *Qayin* is linked to 'Kaiwan,' the Greek name for the planet Saturn, so named because of its shining, lustrous quality. Another suggestion is that Diaphotos is related to the Greek word for 'planter' and that Amilabes may be related to a word meaning "keeper of sheep."¹⁰

Then there are the works of Philo Judaeus, Jewish exegete and philosopher of tremendous significance for Jewish Hellenism and early Christianity who lived in Alexandria from 20-50 CE. In his essay entitled *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain*,¹¹ Philo explains how Cain means "'possession,' from his appearing [to himself] to possess all things." This links his name to the Hebrew root *kuf-nun-hei*, meaning 'to acquire' or 'possess,' and eventually 'buy' in modern Hebrew. He has no concept of or appreciation for a God who is the creator and owner of the whole world and everything in it; in his narrow view, he assumes that all he has acquired is a result of his own actions. He is in direct contrast to Abel, whose name means "referring to God," as in, he credits God and God alone for everything he has and everything he is. We will discuss this further in Chapters 2, 3, and 6 of this essay.

Josephus also explains the etymology of Cain through the connection to the Hebrew root for 'possession.' But here, rather than look backward at what he feels he has gained for himself in the past, Josephus explains that his name is reflective of a general attitude of Cain, because Cain is "wholly intent upon obtaining." Acquisition of as much

¹⁰ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Apocalypse of Moses*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985): 267.

¹¹ The titles of the works of Philo are suggested in the Yonge translation used for composition of this essay.

as possible is the core of who Cain is, and this is very much in line with what we shall see in discussing the murder of Abel as well as how the rabbis treat his character. On the other hand, for Josephus, Abel's name means 'sorrow,' as though his very moniker foreshadows his untimely and horrific end.

Sefer ha-Yashar, an aggadic collection of the late 11th century, also explains in 1:13 that Cain's name has to do with acquisition, but here it refers to Eve acquiring a son of her own. This is clearly an explanation of Eve's words, "*Qaniti ish et Adonai*," where the name Cain 'implies acquiring a son with God's help.' The name Abel (*Hevel* in Hebrew) is defined as "nothing," as if to say we came with nothing and we shall leave this earth with nothing.¹² While a foreshadowing of events to come, like in Josephus, can be deduced here, Sefer ha-Yashar seems to have a larger, perhaps grandiose message in mind. This is very much in the same vein as Ecclesiastes 1:2 and throughout the book, where the repetition of the same Hebrew word *hevel* emphasizes the ephemeral nature of life and the futility of amassing wealth and possessions as represented in the name of *Qayin*. Seen in this light, Abel's name is perhaps both a comment on the nature of Cain and a linguistic intimation to the fate of Abel.

Midrash Aggadah, a 12th century European midrashic collection, connects the name of Cain back to his mother, but more so than the notion of acquiring, it plays on another possible definition of the same Hebrew root (*qanah*) that means 'to create.' More on this as well in the following section regarding Eve's words of response. Like Sefer ha-

¹² The translation of Sefer ha-Yashar we use here calls the characters '*Kayin*' and '*Hevel*,' which we have changed to English names for the sake of uniformity of the essay.

Yashar, Midrash Aggadah defines Abel's name to mean 'nothing,' but here the reason is given, "because he was born for nothing, [meaning] that he had no descendants."¹³

The interpretation of Midrash ha-Gadol, a 14th century Yemenite compilation of rabbinic texts, continues the interpretive approach of Josephus, whereby the names given to the characters serve to foreshadow the irrespective fates. In response to Genesis 4:1, Cain is "named for his end, because in the end he was *q'ayin*, as nothingness." Abel is also named for his end, also nothingness, but there is an inherent difference in the Hebrew words chosen. '*Ayin* has more of a sense of purposelessness, of a void, like the rabbinic concept of *yesh me 'ayin*, that is to say, *creatio ex nihilo*, 'something from nothing.' In this vein, his existence was one of such negative implications that the world would have been a better place had Cain never existed. Abel's name, *Hevel*, carries with it a powerful image suggested by other translations—'breath' or 'mist—of something that was there, ephemerally in existence, yet is no more. The midrash continues, "The world was not built from either of them," meaning that between the murderer and the murdered, nothing positive in the world ever came of them.

C. Eve's Exclamation

Lastly, we turn to the enigmatic utterance of Eve, when she says, "*Qaniti ish et Adonai*," translated in the JPS edition as "I have gained a male child with the help of

¹³ Midrash Lekah Tov, Midrash Aggadah, Midrash ha-Gadol, Aggadat Shir haShirim, and Bereshit Rabbati were all unavailable in English translation, so that when these works are translated, they are my translations.

God.” We have already seen the challenges encountered in defining the root of the verb *qaniti*—whether having to do with ‘possess,’ ‘acquire,’ or ‘create.’ But each word in the phrase causes tremendous difficulty for the reader. The second word, *ish*, means ‘man,’ raising the question of why Eve’s exclamation would use this word when a word referring to a child; *yeled*, meaning ‘boy,’ would seem to be much more logical. In fact, most modern translations, unsure of the best way of translation, choose like JPS to render *ish* as a ‘male child.’

Targum Onkelos, a 2nd century CE translation of the Tanakh into Aramaic, translates this quotation from 4:1 as “*qaniti gavra*,” where *gavra* also represents the deliberate choice of another word signifying ‘man,’ rather than ‘boy,’ i.e., “I have gained a man.” Onkelos was likely a significant source for midrashim where this expression is interpreted to mean that Eve feels she has acquired or gained power over her husband with the birth of a child with him. Bereshit Rabbah 22:2 reads,

R. Isaac said: When a woman sees that she has children, she exclaims, “Behold, my husband is now my possession.”

This becomes for the rabbis a satisfactory explanation for the use of the confusing word *ish*, where a word signifying a child would be more palatable.¹⁴

Another perspective on this phrase is that Eve is crying out to God in exultation at the miracle of birth. This appears to be the case in Targum Neofiti, another Aramaic translation of the Tanakh, but dated by most contemporary scholars to approximately the 4th century CE. Rather than the active *qaniti*, Neofiti renders “*Yityahev li*” which means,

¹⁴ See also Yalkut Shim‘oni Part I, *remez* 35.

“I have been given.”¹⁵ The text also replaces the loaded word *ish* with *bar*, which is Aramaic for ‘son,’ a more logical choice considering the context.

Continuing in this vein, Midrash ha-Gadol, though unable to change the active verb *qaniti*, also represents the feeling of celebration and gratitude towards God for the gift of birth. It does so by providing a meaning of the literally untranslatable Hebrew word *et*, a task made almost impossibly more complicated by the fact that it is directly connected to the name of God. The explanation assumes the definition of the verb as ‘I have acquired,’ as others have, and addresses the challenge by suggesting that *et* means *m’eit*, as in ‘from,’ an emendation to the text proposed by many modern biblical scholars like Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westerman, and Gordon Wenham.¹⁶ A later part of Bereshit Rabbah 22:2 tells of the teaching of Nahum of Ginzo, that “every *akh* and *rak* is a limitation, while every *et* and *gam* is an extension.” Midrash Lekah Tov, a late 11th century work by Tobias ben Eliezer of the Balkans, expands on the *et* based on this teaching, explaining Eve’s words to mean, “In the past, man was created from earth, and Eve was created from man, but from this moment on, it is in our image and likeness.”¹⁷ At first satisfying, this explanation

¹⁵ Martin McNamara, trans., ed., Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 86. This translation, to which we refer throughout this essay, translates, ‘I acquired a man with God,’ as seen elsewhere in relation to other Hebrew or Aramaic texts. But here, we have chosen what seems to be a more appropriate rendering of this verb in its *hit’pa’el*, or reflexive sense, especially coupled with the prepositional phrase *li*, ‘to me.’

¹⁶ See Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972); Claus Westermann, Genesis, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984); Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis (Waco: Word Books, 1987).

¹⁷ See also Yalkut Shim‘oni Part I, *remez* 35.

upon second glance raises perhaps more questions than it answers. In one stream of interpretation, it could be read as an appreciation of partnership, that it was done “with the help of God” and thereby a greater number of participants than were involved in past creations. On the other hand, it could also be read as a statement of incredible hubris, either of equating herself with God because she and Adam can create as God does, or worse, that she *surpasses* God in her ability to create life; that God has somehow been rendered obsolete now that she and Adam have the creative power in their grasp.

Midrash Aggadah seems to understand the difficulty faced here, and goes further in its reading of the text to explain that, though God alone had created Adam and then Eve, now the creation of human life is a joint effort of God and humanity. The text reads,

The formation and limbs are from the coming together of me and my husband, and the soul is from God.

The physical body of a human may be the direct result of the incredible procreative powers of people, but the spark that makes them living, breathing beings comes only from God, calling to mind the image of Ezekiel 37:1-3 and the valley of the bones.

A final, remarkably different explanation of the utterance of Eve is from Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer. In Chapter 21, we are told that

(Sammael/Satan) riding on the serpent came to her, and she conceived.¹⁸ And she saw his [Cain’s] likeness that it was not

¹⁸ Sammael is the incarnation of evil. The difficulty in translating this phrase is posed by the presence of a verb meaning ‘riding on’ without explicit mention of someone or something performing the action. For Friedlander, the context of the story combined with this grammatical problem leads him to believe that Sammael or Satan is the implied subject of the sentence despite its lack of explicit mention. In other places where this story is adopted, like Yalkut Shim’oni Part I, *remez* 35 and Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:1, the Hebrew has been smoothed over so that the snake itself is the subject. But since the

of the earthly beings, but of the heavenly beings, and she prophesied: "I have gotten a man with God."

Here, Eve believes she had given birth to an angel of God. This is very much in line with the description presented in *Vita Adae et Evae* of a child born 'lustrous' and with extraordinary talents right away. It also may have lent its meaning to the interpretation of Midrash ha-Gadol, that the child Cain was 'from God.' More significantly, the text from Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer provides us with a pictorialization of Cain's core as the literal incarnation of evil and as well as an explanation for his killing of Abel.

serpent is the incarnation of Sammael , the effect of the story is the same.

CHAPTER 2:
THEIR OCCUPATIONS AND OFFERINGS

Now that we have explored the origins and names of Cain and Abel, we move into an exploration of midrashic treatment of their occupations and offerings before God.

Genesis 4:2b tells us that, “Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.” What is the significance of Abel being a shepherd? Why does it mean that Cain is a farmer? Why did they gravitate to these professions? What were the offerings brought to God by each, how were they brought, and what can they teach us about each character? Why was one offering accepted and the other not? How did they know that their offering was or was not accepted?

A. The Occupations

We begin with a discussion of the occupations of Cain and Abel, and first look at the writings of Philo. From his philosophical perspective, it is significant that Cain works with inanimate objects, the ground and its crops, because Cain displays no regard for living things, as we can infer from the opposite statements regarding Abel which we will mention later in this section. Representative of the type of person solely focused on the here-and-now, Cain assumes credit for everything he has and does, as we saw in Philo’s explanation in *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* that Cain’s name stems from “his appearing to possess all things.” As a result, he views the soil he works as his, rather than belonging to God. But Philo, unlike the writers of later midrashim which we will explore, has no fundamental issue with the occupation of farming. Philo’s understanding of the biblical text is that Cain does not become a ‘farmer,’ but a ‘cultivator of the earth.’ In his

Treatise, *The Worse Attacks the Better*, he explains the difference:

For every farmer is an artist, because farming is an art. But any of the common people are cultivators of the earth, giving their service to provide themselves with necessities, without any skill. These men, then, as they have no superintendent in all that they do, do much harm; and whatever they do well they do by chance, and not in accordance with reason. But the works of farmers, which are performed according to knowledge, are all of them, of necessity, useful.

For Philo, what distinguishes between these categories of men is having a ‘superintendent’ of some sort, the acknowledgment of something larger than the self whose forces are at work, namely God. The fact that Cain has no regard for or recognition of God places him in the category of ‘cultivator of the earth’ and makes a concrete statement about the godless nature at the core of Cain. In section 112, Philo sums up, “Very clearly therefore is the good man thus shown to be a farmer, and the bad man to be only a cultivator of the land.”

Abel, on the other hand, works with living things, because working with and for the common good of all of God’s creatures is a more direct way to commune with God and show appreciation for everything God has bestowed. The value of the shepherd lies in his ability to effect change, both externally upon the world and internally upon himself. Externally, the shepherd brings comfort to creatures, both through his individual actions and by gathering them into flocks with others of its kind. Furthermore, Philo sees shepherding as a natural precursor to kingship, where the goal ideally is to control and channel the populace towards the greatest good. In his Treatise *Sacrifices* 46, Abel is linked with Jacob, another shepherd and another younger twin, when he writes,

Accordingly, Jacob, the practitioner of contemplation, conceiving this to be an employment most closely akin to virtue, endured 'to be the shepherd of the flocks of Laban' (Gen 30:36), a man wholly devoted to colors and to forms, and in sort, to lifeless substances.

Where Abel is connected to Jacob, Cain is connected to the wicked Laban, in that both were consumed by "lifeless substances."

But the merits of the shepherd are also based on his internal power, by which he controls his more base and animal instincts in efforts to attain the ultimate perfection of the soul. In *Sacrifices* 44-45, Philo speaks to the reader pedagogically:

...and we must always attend to the sovereign powers before those who are ruled over by them, and to the indigenous and native sciences before those which are strangers. The mind bearing this rejects pleasure, and attaches itself to virtue, perceiving its genuine, and unalloyed, and very divine beauty. Then it becomes a shepherd of sheep, being the charioteer and pilot of the irrational faculties which exist in the soul, 'not permitting them to be borne about at random and in an inconsistent manner, without any superintendent or guide' (Num 27:17); that they may not fall into a sort of orphan state, destitute of guardians and protectors, owing to their want of any allies, in which case they would perish without any saving hand to restrain them.

For Philo then, the shepherd is undoubtedly the highest level of occupation reachable by humanity.

In *Vita Adae et Evae*, the occupations undertaken by Cain and Abel are not so heavily imbued with philosophical or theological significance. In 23:2-4, we read:

And Eve said to Adam, "My lord, while I was sleeping I saw a vision—as if the blood of our son Abel was in the hand of Cain (who was) gulping it down in his mouth. That is why I am sad." And Adam said, "God forbid that Cain would kill Abel! But let us separate them from each other and make separate places for them." And they made Cain a farmer and Abel a shepherd, that in this way

*they might be separated from each other.*¹⁹

The story calls to mind the Greek story of Oedipus Rex who, in his desperate attempt to avoid a foretold disaster, acted in a manner which only ensured its occurrence. Here, the brothers are given separate occupations by their parents in the hopes that physical separation will prevent the horrible act from occurring. In the end, though we are never specifically informed as to why Cain murdered Abel, it occurs immediately following the above verses, so that the separation was wholly ineffective. But the fact that the assignment of occupations was a means of separation implies that the specific occupations were considered by the writers to be diametrically opposite. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of the separation perhaps speaks to Cain's inner character as one of wickedness, that Cain would have killed Abel irrespective of the parents' attempts at prevention.

The Targumim of Onkelos and Neofiti render Cain's work differently from the Hebrew, choosing the verb *palah* over *'oved*. *Palah* usually means the same as *'oved*, meaning 'work' or 'till.' But *palah* potentially carries a stronger connotation than *'oved*, because more than just working or tilling the soil, *palah* is also defined as 'subject,' which casts the relationship of Cain to the earth in an entirely different light as one of harsh

¹⁹ Interesting to note that in the Apocalypse 2-3:1, Eve has a similar dream, but rather than being an omen of future events, it illustrates what has already taken place: 'Eve said to her lord Adam, "My lord, I saw in a dream this night the blood of my son Amilabes, called Abel, being thrust into the mouth of Cain his brother, and he drank it mercilessly. He begged him to allow him a little of it, but he did not listen to him but swallowed all of it. And it did not stay in his stomach but came out of his mouth." And Adam said to Eve, "Let us rise and go to see what has happened to them. Perhaps the enemy is warring against them." And when they both had gone out they found Abel killed by the hand of Cain.'

inequality and exploitation. In addition, the verb choice places extra emphasis on just how physically demanding the work must have been. Furthermore, a tertiary translation of the verb has to do with division and distribution, which may have been a catalyst to *midrashim* we will discuss further, where the quarrel that leads to the murder of Abel results from Cain's attempts to divide the world in his favor.

In contrast to Philo, the writers of Bereshit Rabbah see no distinction between 'farmers' and 'cultivators of the land.' In Bereshit Rabbah 22:3, we read,

Three had a passion for agriculture and no good was found in them: 'Cain was a tiller of the ground,' 'Noah the husbandman' (Gen 9:20), and [of] Uzziah: 'For he loved husbandry' (II Chron 26:10).²⁰

Cain, of course, went on to commit murder, Noah became a drunkard, and Uzziah became a leper.²¹

Midrash Tanhuma, a work of approximately 7th century Palestine, expands upon this notion that the work of husbandry contains within it inherently wicked aspects. In Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Bereshit 13, we read,

Noah degraded himself when he began to till the soil. R. Judah, the son of R. Shalum, said: At first Noah was called a righteous and perfect man, but now he is described as a man of the earth... Three men toiled upon the earth and degraded themselves thereby. They were Cain, Noah, and Uzziah... Noah, as it is written:

²⁰ Uzziah was king of Judah at the age of sixteen, and at first "did what was pleasing to God" (v.4), but "when he was strong, he grew so arrogant he acted corruptly: he trespassed against his God by entering the Temple of the Lord to offer incense on the altar" (v.16). He defied the priests in his attempts to offer incorrectly and was struck with leprosy on his forehead. Uzziah was leprous until he died.

²¹ See also Bereshit Rabbah 36:3, Lekah Tov to Genesis 4:2, and Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, remez 35.

'And Noah, the husbandman, began, and planted a vineyard.' And soon thereafter he disgraced himself...Our sages held that on the very day he planted the vineyard, it bore its fruit, he harvested it, pressed it, drank the wine, became intoxicated, and exposed his private parts.

Whereas Philo considered Noah a 'farmer' and Cain a 'cultivator of the land,' all are equal and equally immersed in wickedness in Bereshit Rabbah and Midrash Tanhuma.

Another perspective is that the respective occupations of Cain and Abel came about from the conscious and deliberate choices of the characters, rather than resulting from the decisions of the parents or from natural, unwitting extensions of the types of people each represents. In Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 21, the text says, "Now Cain was a man who loved the ground in order to sow seed; and Abel was a man who loved to tend the sheep."²² This is noteworthy, because each specifically 'loves' what he does; they did not stumble upon these occupations by happenstance or because someone else directed them to it. This is both similar to and different from Philo: similar in the sense that the line of work of each is seen as an extension of who each is, but different in that conscious choices were made, as compared to the perspective of predetermination put forth by Philo.

Also stressing conscious choices is Midrash Aggadah, but here the choice of each character has less directly to do with the passions and interests of each and more to do with what God had decreed regarding the land in the prior story of Adam, their father. In the midrash to Genesis 4:2, we read how Abel

was fearful of the curse God had decreed on the earth [from the sin of Adam] and so busied himself with shepherding animals.

²² See also Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:2.

But Cain was not afraid of God and was stiff-necked. He said, "I will be a tiller of the soil," and toiled, not leaving it lie, in accordance with the decree, [thinking], "It is only a decree for Adam, who sinned."

This, too, connects back to Philo in terms of the theologies and philosophies of each directly determining which occupation they chose, though here it is obviously more conscious.

B. The Offerings

We now shift our focus from the occupations of Cain and Abel to the offerings each brought before God. Genesis 3-4a in the JPS translation of the biblical text reads: "In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to God from the fruit of the soil; and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of the flock." Philo writes in *Sacrifices* 52,

Here are two accusations against the self-loving man; one, that he showed his gratitude to God after some days, and not at once, the other, that he made his offering from the fruits, and not from the first fruits.

Cain's refusal to dedicate the first fruits and highest quality of his harvest to God is a sin of tremendous disrespect throughout the Tanakh, a fact certainly not lost on Philo. What strikes Philo as particularly galling behavior is that Cain was in no rush whatsoever to show gratitude to God, because it is clear that Cain feels no obligation to anyone else—and certainly not God—as the source of all that he has and does. In this way Cain represents what Philo calls later in section 42 of *The Posterity and Exile of Cain* the "impious and

atheistic opinion” Writing of Cain’s worldview throughout the works of Philo, scholar Hindy Najman wrote, “[For Cain,] humanity comes first and his sustenance is more important than the acknowledgment of God.”²³ And if Cain really does represent this atheistic opinion, is his offering then spurious and hypocritical, in addition to its being delayed? Furthermore, while the complaint against Cain that he waited a while before offering is a recurring theme throughout Midrash, it seems that this argument carries greater significance if the interpretation is that Cain and Abel were *not* twins. If Cain is older in years, then it makes more sense that he might be expected to present an offering at some point, and greater surprise can be taken at his delay in doing so. But if Cain and Abel are twins, then both are guilty of waiting the same period of time before bringing offerings to God.

Philo’s second accusation against Cain concerns the quality of his offering, that it was anything but the best of what he had, that which he should have offered to God.

Philo asks rhetorically in *Sacrifices* 72,

Why does he bring the fruits of the earth, but not of the first produce? May it not be for the same reason, that he may give the pre-eminence in honor to creation, and may requite God with what is the second best?

This notion resonates strongly with the writers of Bereshit Rabbah, as we see in 22:5, where Cain’s offering is described as being

of the inferior crops, he being like a bad tenant who eats the

²³ Hindy Najman, “Cain and Abel as Character Traits: A Study in Allegorical Typology of Philo of Alexandria,” (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 115.

*first ripe figs but honors the king with the late figs.*²⁴

This is also the concern of Sefer ha-Yashar, which first describes Cain's offering in 1:15 as "some of the fruit of the earth" and downgrades it a verse later to "only the worst of his fruit," in contradistinction to Abel's offering, which we are told is "from the best he had."

Whereas the offerings of Cain are described indiscriminately as "from the fruit of the soil," we are told explicitly that Abel's offering was of the oldest and therefore healthiest of his flock. The second clause of the phrase describing his offering, however, poses challenges for translation. In the biblical text it appears as *umehelvehien*, the central word meaning 'fat.' Translated one way yields, "of the fattest of them," meaning the strongest and healthiest from amongst the oldest, translated another way renders the text, "of their fats," meaning particularly an offering of fat from an animal. Or it could mean both statements together, as Philo read it. In *Sacrifices* 88, we read,

Abel did not bring the same offerings, nor did he bring his offerings in the same manner; but instead of inanimate things he brought living sacrifices, and instead of younger things, worthy only of the second place, he offered what was strong and fat.

Abel brings offerings which are "first in consideration and in power"²⁵ in accordance with the law of Moses regarding redemption of the first born.²⁶ The difficult Hebrew phrase as discussed here renders "of their fat," a point of great significance to Philo, as we read in *Sacrifices* 136,

²⁴ See also Midrash Lekah Tov to Genesis 4:3 and Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 35.

²⁵ Philo, *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 73.

²⁶ Exodus 13:11.

And he brings not only the first fruits from the firstborn, but also from the fat, 'showing by this that whatever there is in the soul that is cheerful, or fat, or preservative or pleasant, might all be surrendered to God.

For Josephus, the bringing of an offering was a mutual, agreed-upon decision of the brothers, as we read in 2:54, "They had resolved to sacrifice to God." But he reads *umehalveiher* rather than *umehelvehen*, where the difference of one vowel changes the root word from 'fat' to 'milk,' so that "Abel brought milk, and the first fruits of his flocks." As a result, God was

more delighted...when he was honored with what grew naturally of its own accord than he was with what was the invention of the covetous man, and gotten by forcing the ground.

This echoes both Philo's perception of Abel's offering as well as Onkelos' understanding of Cain's tilling.

Onkelos seems aware of the difficulty of the word choice of the biblical text, and offers *umishamineiher* in its place. His substitution might have been an attempt to favor one interpretation over another, but it presents the same difficulties as the biblical text in terms of translation. The debate becomes important to the rabbis of the Talmud, for whom the definition of the word determines whether the sacrifice offered by Abel was an '*olah* or a *shalem*. BT Zevahim 116a lays out the argument: If the word means "of the fattest of them," it means he offered the whole beast, fat and all, and it was an '*olah*. If the word means "of their fat," meaning just the fat was offered and not the entire beast, then the offering was a *shalem*.²⁷ The rabbis' concern for knowing the specific nature of

²⁷ See also JT Megillah 1:15a, BR 22:5, Bamidbar Rabbah 13:2, Pesiqta Rabbati 5:4, Midrash Lekah Tov to Genesis 4:4, and Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *r'mazim* 35-36.

the offering springs from their hopes of rebuilding the Temple and resurrecting the institution of bringing sacrifices.

Others have involved themselves in this debate, but towards the slightly different goal of discovering Abel's intention in making an offering. A note to 5:4 in the Braude translation of *Pesiqta Rabbati*, a 6th-7th century work, informs us that the *'olah* was more of a guilt offering, one presented for "sinful desire, for evil thoughts that come into one's mind."²⁸ The *shalem*, on the other hand, is a peace offering, which represents

a covenant of friendship...[and] nearness between God and God's own, a relationship between God and man which, according to R. Jose who disagrees with R. Eleazar, became possible only after the revelation at Sinai.

With all of the difficulties and implications that come with each way of translating the word, it is no wonder that later compilations like *Midrash ha-Gadol* wanted no part of this debate, as it contains no mention of either word in its exegesis.

For *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer*, the offerings are the very first ritual sacrifices, particularly those offerings made on the festival of Passover. In Chapter 21 we read,

*The evening of the festival of Passover arrived. Adam called his sons and said to them: In this [night] in the future Israel will bring paschal offerings, bring you also [offerings] before your Creator.*²⁹

Since the work was heavily influenced by earlier apocryphal and pseudepigraphical compilations, it is possible that the interpretation here is an expansion of Josephus' notion

²⁸ William Braude, trans, *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths, Volume 1*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 99-100.

²⁹ See also *Midrash Aggadah to Genesis 4:3-4* and *Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, remez 35*.

of agreed-upon sacrifices. The narrative continues, describing Cain's offering as "remnants of his meal of roasted grain and the seed of flax," while Abel's is "of the firstlings of his sheep, and of their fat, he-lambs, which had not been shorn of their wool," yet another testament to the quality of his offerings.³⁰ As a result, Cain's offering is abhorred, and this becomes the prooftext for the cryptic prohibition against mixing wool and linen:

R. Joshua ben Korhah said: The Holy One said: Heaven forbid! Never let the offerings of Cain and Abel be mixed up (with one another), even in the weaving of a garment, as it is said, 'You shall not wear mingled stuff (sha'amez), wool and linen together' (Deut 22:11).³¹

The Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas Bereshit 9 comes to the same conclusion, but with a more generalized justification:

The Holy One declared: It is not fitting that a sinner's offering and the sacrifice of a virtuous man should be coupled. Hence it is forbidden to combine them in a garment.³²

C. God's Approval and Disapproval

A final area of exploration regarding the sacrifices of Cain and Abel concerns God's approval or disapproval of them. The Hebrew of the biblical text utilizes the root *shin-ayin-hei* translated by JPS as 'paid heed,' though more literally having to do with

³⁰ Midrash ha-Gadol quotes Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, but adds in the description of Cain's offering a word meaning 'cast away' or 'contemptible.'

³¹ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 35.

³² See also Midrash Aggadah to Genesis 4:5.

'turning,' as in, "God turned towards Abel and his offering." The Targumim opt for terms containing the Aramaic *ra-a 'va*, meaning 'favor,' so that God's approval is still manifest while avoiding the problems of anthropomorphism regarding God hinted at in the biblical Hebrew. In addition to a stronger language choice, there is also perhaps a wordplay here linking the word for 'favor' with the root meaning 'shepherd,' so that there is a subtle message as to the superiority of shepherding over agriculture, not unlike what we have seen in Philo and in Bereshit Rabbah. Sifre to Deuteronomy, an early midrashic compiled probably in the 4th century, cites Cain in a discussion of the disloyalty in the desert in *Pisqa* 318. In Deuteronomy 32:17, rather than read *lo s'aroom avoteikhem*, the meaning of which is still unknown, the rabbis suggest reading *lo sha'um avoteikhem*. In the text, the rabbis suggest:

Do not read 'who stirred not your fathers' fears' but rather, 'whom your fathers did not look upon with respect,' for even though they sacrificed and burned incense to them, they did not fear them, in line with the meaning of the pertinent word in this verse: 'But to Cain and his offering he showed no respect.'

The wordplay here essentially suggests an emendation to a text whose meaning is unknown by changing the *sin* to a *shin* and removing the *resh*. The connection to the offering of Cain both serves the rabbis by clarifying a verse they may not have understood and provides insight on the meaning of *lo sha'ah* in Genesis 4:5. The fact that God did not give respect to Cain's offering is used as a proof-text for this alternate interpretation of the Deuteronomy verse. This same idea is presented in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 21, where we are told that Abel's offering was 'acceptable' and the biblical verse is translated,

“God had respect unto Abel and his offering.”³³

Pesiqta d’Rav Kahana, a 5th-6th century Palestinian text and one of the oldest homiletical *midrashim*, supports this reading by a wordplay connecting the word indicating God’s heeding Abel’s offering, *vayisha*, and God’s salvation, *y’shuah*. In *Pisqa* 28:5, we read,

R. Joshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi: The Holy One takes pleasure in the offerings of Israel. The words, ‘God adorns the humble with God’s heeding’ (Ps 149:4) mean that the Holy One regards God’s self as glorified by the sacrifice brought by a humble man. That ‘heeding’ refers only to the heeding of sacrifices is shown by the verse, ‘And God gave heed unto Abel and his offering.’³⁴

Bereshit Rabbah 22:6, on the other hand, defines the Hebrew text here according to its simplest meaning as “God was satisfied therewith.”³⁵ But ‘therewith,’ from the Hebrew *mimenu*, raises the question of just what God was satisfied with, whether with the actual sacrifices brought, or with the individuals who brought them, as a cumulative result of their thoughts, intentions, and quality of sacrifices. In Sefer ha-Yashar 1:15-16, Cain and Abel understood whose offering was accepted and whose was not by virtue of a fire sent down from heaven which consumed all of Abel’s offering, yet left Cain’s completely alone.³⁶ We see this concept elsewhere, including Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:5, where Cain knew his offering had been rejected because no fire descended to consume it,

³³ Friedlander, *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* 154.

³⁴ See also Pesiqta Rabbati 52:5.

³⁵ See also Yalkut Shim‘oni Part I, *remez* 36.

³⁶ See also Midrash Lekah Tov and Midrash Aggadah to Genesis 4:4-5.

implying that the opposite must have been true for the offering of Abel.

A final understanding of the meaning of God's approval appears in Midrash Lekah Tov, where a secondary opinion of the text is that Abel's "occupation was blessed," from which we may infer that shortly after the presentation of offerings, there was some noticeable boon in the shepherding of Abel, whereas the ground was no more fertile for Cain than it had been prior to the sacrifices. This notion has become very attractive to modern biblical scholars focused on the individual experiences of Cain and Abel, and divine rejection and approval, respectively.

CHAPTER 3:
THE MURDER: WHAT TRANSPIRED AND WHY

Now that the stage has been set with our characters' origins, occupations, and offerings, we turn to the murder of Abel. The biblical text reads, "And Cain said to his brother Abel," yet there are no words that follow, leading many editions to place an ellipsis before the next words, "and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him." The mysterious circumstances surrounding the first murder raise many questions: Was there a relationship between the brothers beforehand? What were the events that led immediately to the murder? Was it premeditated or was it manslaughter, and what was Cain's weapon of choice?

A. The Relationship of the Brothers

One of the topics rarely approached in the discussion of Cain and Abel is whether the two had a relationship with each other before the murder took place. In *Vita Adae et Evae* 23:1, the text tells us how "Cain and Abel used to stay together" until Eve had the dream of Cain killing Abel. Since it is only after her horrific vision that she and Adam decide to separate the two, it is natural to wonder if they had allowed them to "stay together," perhaps it might have prevented the murder from occurring. Or, is the intention of the author of the work that the murder of Abel was pre-ordained, so that any action or inaction would have inevitably led to the same result? In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, Eve has a similar dream but one which informs her of events which already transpired rather than those about to occur, a shift in perspective leading one to believe the latter argument,

that Cain's murder of Abel was pre-destined and thus entirely unavoidable.³⁷

In *Antiquities* 2:55, when God later asks Cain if he knows where his brother is, Josephus explains that this is done "because God had not seen him of many days, whereas God used to observe them conversing together at other times." The text portrays the relationship of Cain and Abel as one of collegiality if not deep friendship. But *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* goes further, expressing more of a mutual partnership in Chapter 21, where we read, "The one gave of his produce as food for the other, and the latter gave of his produce as food for his [brother]." For the writers of this source, it is in precisely the fact of their having seemingly opposite occupations that renders each one necessary to the survival of the other, irrespective of any emotional relationship between the two. This could be interpreted as an embracing of variety and harmony, of co-operation and co-existence, where the success or failure of humanity is determined by maximizing humanity's range of interests, skills, and passions. If this is indeed the intention of *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, it then comes into direct conflict with Philo and the writers of *Bereshit Rabbah*, for whom the occupational choice signifies the qualitative characteristics of each.

Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:2 begins with this same idea, where we read that "each one needed the other." But immediately thereafter, the rabbis tell us that "the master of the ground is victorious," a statement bolstered by Ecclesiastes 5:8, "Thus the greatest advantage in all the land is his: he controls a field that is cultivated." In addition to the assertion that, essentially, Cain holds all the cards because he tills the soil, the midrash here has also adopted the fatalistic perspective that the murder of Abel is a

³⁷ See ch. 2, p. 25, no. 19 of this essay.

foregone conclusion, much as we inferred from both *Vita Adae et Evae* and the *Apocalypse of Moses*.

Beyond the examples above, there is virtually no mention of any prior relationship between Cain and Abel.

B. What Cain Said to Abel and the Source of His Anger

We move now to what is perhaps the most famous lacuna in all of the biblical text, the gap following the words, “And Cain said to his brother Abel...” Though the text uses only words that mean ‘said’ (*vayomer*), rather than an idiom betraying any stronger emotion, it is fascinating that nearly every attempt at interpretation of this passage assumes that a quarrel took place between the brothers. The only notable exceptions are *Vita Adae et Evae*, where the murder simply occurs without explanation after the separation of the brothers into different occupations, and the *Apocalypse of Moses*, where Adam and Eve go out to discover “Abel killed by the hand of Cain” after Eve reveals her vision to Adam. Neither account, it should also be noted, contains any mention of sacrifices or offerings made to God on behalf of the characters. In *Shemot Rabbah* 30:17, a compilation of exegetical and homiletical midrashim dating to 10th-12th century, we read,

Nothing good or peaceful ever results from strife. It was only after a quarrel that Cain smote his brother.

But just what was the source of their strife and quarrel?

The first and most obvious response is that God’s reaction to the offerings set in

motion the chain of events leading to the murder. We see this in Jubilees 4:2, where the text reads,

And at the beginning of the third jubilee, Cain killed Abel because the sacrifice of Abel was accepted, but the offering of Cain was not accepted.

It is found as well in *Antiquities* 2:55, where Josephus writes, "Cain was very angry that Abel was preferred by God before him; and he slew his brother." Even more explicit is the manner in which this appears later in Midrash Lekah Tov to Genesis 4:8, where we learn how Cain "became enraged at the offering of Abel."

But what about the notion that Cain's murder of Abel was itself a sacrificial offering? Targum Onkelos to Genesis 4:10 portrays God asking Cain, "*mah 'avad'ta?*," connected to the Hebrew of the biblical text "*meh 'asita?*," meaning, "What have you done?" But the root at work here in the Aramaic of Onkelos (as well as in biblical and modern Hebrew) includes a secondary meaning having to do with worship, like the Hebrew word *'avodah*, which sometimes means 'work,' but often means 'worship.' The suggestion we present here is that perhaps Cain was attempting to offer Abel himself as a sacrifice to God. If Abel's offering was heeded because it was of animate, living creatures, it is plausible that Cain misunderstood the criteria by which God judged the offerings to be pleasing or displeasing, and in his desire to compensate, thought that no higher sacrifice could be made to God than that of a human, his brother. In addition to changing the entire dynamic of the story, this interpretation is consistent with a portrayal of Cain as one who would be oblivious to the reasons for Abel's acceptance and his own rejection, namely the quality of the offerings themselves and the manner in which they

were brought. This notion, though admittedly a minority opinion, is supported by Bereshit Rabbah 22:8:

R. 'Azariah and R. Jonathan in R. Isaac's name said: Cain had closely observed where his father slew the bullock [which he sacrificed, as it is written], 'And it shall please God better than a bullock' (Ps 69:32), and there he killed him: by the throat and its organs.

The text then continues, speaking of Cain's recitation of the two sacrificial blessings, one for ritual slaughter and one for the sprinkling of blood.³⁸ If the murder is really a sacrificial offering, then no dialogue between the brothers is necessary.

One stream of interpretation among the writers of the midrashim is that Cain and Abel entered into a dispute over a woman. Building off of their own interpretation that Cain was born with a twin sister and Abel with two, Bereshit Rabbah 22:7 posits that the brothers fought with each other over who would marry the extra twin. We read:

Then about what was their quarrel? Said R. Huna: An additional twin was born with Abel, and each claimed her. The one claimed: "I will have her, because I am the first born;" while the other maintained: "I must have her, because she was born with me."³⁹

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer also depicts a jealousy over a woman, though he assumes one twin sister was born with each, as we saw in the Babylonian Talmud text in Yevamot 62a. In Chapter 21, we read,

Rabbi Zadok said: A great hatred entered Cain's heart against his brother Abel, because his offering had been accepted. Not only (on this account), but also because Abel's twin-sister was the most beautiful of women, and he desired her in his heart.

³⁸ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38.

³⁹ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38.

*Moreover he said: I will slay Abel my brother, and I will take his twin-sister from him, as it is said, 'And it came to pass when they were in the field.'*⁴⁰

For the rabbis of Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, 'field,' like 'garden,' is a euphemism for woman, in that "whatever is sown therein, it produces and brings forth, so (with) this woman; what seed she receives, she conceives and bears through sexual intercourse." This could be a response to Philo, who wrote in sections 1-2 of his treatise *The Worse Attacks the Better*, that "the field to which he invites him to come, we may call a symbol of rivalry and contention, forming our conjecture of things that are uncertain from our perception of those which are manifest. For we see that most contests, both in peace and war, take place in the open fields." Philo's symbolism may also be a prime cause of the rabbis' assumption of a quarrel.

Another popular notion regarding the events leading up to Abel's murder is that the brothers were engaged in an intense theological argument following the episode with their sacrifices. Influenced by Philo, Targum Neofiti to Genesis 4:8 launches into a lengthy dialogue between the brothers:

And when the two of them had gone out into the open field, Cain answered and said to Abel: "I perceive that the world was not created by mercy and that it is not being conducted according to the fruits of good words, and that there is favoritism in judgment. Why was your offering received favorably and my offering was not received favorably from me?" Abel answered and said to Cain: "I perceive that the world was created by mercy and that it is being conducted according to the fruits of good works. And because my works were better than yours, my offering was received favorably and yours was not received favorably from you." Cain answered and said to Abel, "There is no judgment, and there is no judge and

⁴⁰ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38 and Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:8.

there is no other world. There is no giving of good reward to the just nor is vengeance exacted from the wicked." Abel answered and said to Cain: "There is judgment, and there is a judge, and there is another world. And there is giving of good reward to the just and vengeance is exacted of the wicked in the world to come." Concerning this matter the two of them were disputing in the open field. 'And Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.'

The three theological issues raised in the argument are whether or not the world was created with mercy, meaning with good intention on the part of the Creator; whether reward and punishment are based on good works and offerings or whether they are simply a product of favoritism; and the question of judgment, both in this world and the world-to-come which, for Cain, did not exist. What is also of interest is Abel's explanation that the superiority of his works is the reason why God accepted his offering and not Cain's.

These themes recur in other midrashic works. In Midrash Lekah Tov, for example, Cain says, "'There is no judgment and no judge and no world-to-come.'" From this, he killed him.' It is noteworthy that Abel is given no voice here, no opportunity to respond, and thus there is no quarrel or disagreement. But perhaps the intent of the text, assuming an argument, is to relate the central point of the argument and allow the reader to fill in the details, either from imagination or from knowledge of prior midrashim. In Midrash Aggadah, the three issues of judge, judgment, and world-to-come are again the focal points of the debate, but Abel's explanation is slightly different from what we found in Targum Neofiti:

Cain said to his brother, "There is no judgment, no judge, and no world-to-come." Abel said to him, "There is judgment, judge, and world-to-come, and you can figure this out from your sacrifice; since you did not offer it properly, it was not accepted."

Rather than emphasize his own works as alluded to in the Neofiti text, here the reason

Abel gives for the rejection of Cain's sacrifice has everything to do with the manner in which it was offered, though it is unclear if the meaning has more to do with character, intention, quality of sacrifice, or the specific act of offering.

In a discussion of Song of Songs 7:10, Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim, a 10th century midrashic work, translates a difficult Hebrew phrase into something resembling, "Old lips speak evil." For the writers of the text, this verse refers to Cain, as we read:

Cain was a man of evil speech toward Abel. Cain said to Abel: "Such is the way of the world: God gives to the one God loves. God never gives unconditionally, other than what was done for Adam our father, when God gave control over the creatures God had made in the beginning. This control was given him for nothing. But since then, God only gives to the one God loves."

In one way, Cain's notion that God's reward and punishment stem from arbitrary decisions and reactions rather than from a person's works is not a novel concept. But the problem raised by the text is that Cain acted in an evil manner and therefore professed an incorrect theology, echoes sentiments seen elsewhere in our tradition, as well as in the works of Philo, for whom the philosophies and theologies of the characters means everything. After all, in his *Sacrifices* 40, we read, "For the Ruler of the universe, of heaven, and of the world, both possesses and bestows on whomsoever God pleases, the good things, with all ease and abundance." The theological consequences of each perspective are not to be underestimated, for if God is truly omnipotent, God gives and takes away reward and punishment according to God's own desire, whether connected to one's works or not. But if there is a strict system in place of reward and punishment directly proportional to one's deeds, this renders a very different conception of God.

Lastly, Sefer ha-Yashar provides us with an example in 1:21-22 of a theological argument along the same lines as other works we have examined, but here the topic raised by Cain is of particular relevance to the deed he is plotting:

[Cain,] burning with hatred,⁴¹ said, "If I were to kill you now who would seek revenge from me?" Abel calmly replied, "The God who created us to live on this earth will avenge my blood. God is Judge and God will render to man evil for evil and God will do to the wicked according to his evil ways. Should you slay me, be assured that God will know your hiding place and will judge you for the evil which you plan."

In this depiction, Cain's question is of a practical and immediately relevant nature, rather than a general question of theological curiosity.

The last and largest school of thought regarding the quarrel of Cain and Abel is that they argued over possessions, over how to divide the world between them. The preponderance of midrashim consisting of quarrels over possession and inheritance is likely a result of a focus on their being seemingly alone in the world, combined with the linguistic suggestion of Cain's name that he is obsessed with acquisition. Bereshit Rabbah provides a template for future midrashim whose argument is based on their respective occupations. In 22:7, we read

"Come," said they, "let us divide the world." One (Cain) took the land and the other the movables. The former said, "The land you stand on is mine," while the latter retorted, "What you are wearing is mine." One said, "Strip," the other retorted, "Fly [off the ground]." Out of this quarrel, "Cain rose up..."⁴²

⁴¹ This follows an earlier argument over possessions, which we will discuss in the next section of the essay.

⁴² The same story appears in Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:8, except greatly abbreviated, 'This one said, "Strip," this one said, "Fly." From this, Cain rose up...' There seems to be

Sefer ha-Yashar elaborates in 1:18-20:

It happened that some sheep passed by the field where Cain was plowing. Cain became infuriated and turned to Abel and said in an angry voice, "Why have you brought your sheep to graze on my land?" Abel replied, "In that case, why do you eat the meat of my lambs and use their fleece for the wool of your clothing? Remove your woolen clothes and pay for all the meat you have eaten! If you do this, I shall leave your land, never to come back."

The text then continues with Cain's question of divine revenge mentioned earlier,⁴³ after which we read how Cain "flew into a rage" and killed his brother.

Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas also utilizes the template of Bereshit Rabbah, but expands upon it in a manner which renders Cain more manipulative in his plotting, and more aggressive in implementation and execution. In the section *Mishpatim* 13, the text reads:

Cain said to Abel: "Let us divide the world between us. You take the movable property, and I will take the fields." He thought that he would thereby be able to drive him out of the world. They divided everything between them. Abel took the movable property, and Cain the fields. Thereafter, wherever Abel went, Cain ran after him, shouting: "Get off my property." He fled to the mountains, and Cain pursued him, shouting: "This too belongs to me." Finally he turned upon him, and killed him, as it is said: 'And Cain rose against Abel his brother, and slew him.'

As compared to the versions of Bereshit Rabbah and Sefer ha-Yashar, where the arguments may have occurred somewhat more naturally, here we see the depth of Cain's deceitful manipulation. He completely manufactured an issue as an excuse for murder.

an assumption on the part of the writers that the reader is already familiar with this *midrash* and requires no further details.

⁴³ See previous page.

And while the role of Cain is cast as darker and more aggressive, it is interesting to note that Abel is absolutely silent. There is no response, no mutual agreement regarding division of the possessions, no plea or supplication to cease such hostilities. As Cain becomes more aggressive, Abel becomes proportionally more passive, to the point of absence, reacting and acted upon instead of acting.

But Bereshit Rabbah 22:7 continues its debate over the source of strife between the brothers. Dismissing the proposed division of the first part of the midrash as simplistic, R. Joshua of Sikhnin said:

Both took land and both took movables, but about what did they quarrel? One said, "The Temple must be built in my area, while the other claimed, "It must be built in mine." For thus it is written, "And it came to pass, when they were in the field:" now "field" refers to nought but the Temple, as you read, 'Zion shall be plowed as a field' (Micah 3:12)⁴⁴

It is natural for the rabbis to assume that both Cain and Abel would desire the Temple to be in whatever their allotted portion was, the way that the rabbis themselves would wish that the Temple were near to them. An earlier midrash from Tanhuma ha-Nidpas dovetails nicely with the above text in its concern for holy offerings and their locale. In *Bereshit* 9, we read

What did he say to him? He said: "Let us divide the world between us, but since I am the eldest, I shall take twice as much." Abel replied, "Perhaps." "If we do this," Cain continued, "I want my share to include the place at which your sacrifice was accepted." Abel replied, "That, you cannot have." Thereupon, they began to quarrel, as it is said: "And it came to pass while they were in the field that Cain arose," and it says elsewhere: 'Zion shall be

⁴⁴ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38.

plowed as a field' (Micah 3:12).⁴⁵

The midrash here assumes that the offerings of Cain and Abel were presented in geographically different places. This is significant because, from Cain's perspective, his brother's sacrifice was accepted because of the place in which the offering was made. From the fact that Abel is unwilling to part with that very spot, we may infer that this was at least part of Abel's perspective as well; that the place where the offering was made carries at least some measure of significance. It is also interesting to note the explicit reference to the custom of the elder brother inheriting twice as much as his siblings, a notion found in Deuteronomy 21:17 and perhaps the basis for Cain's claim over the extra twin sister in Bereshit Rabbah 22:7.

Finally, Midrash Aggadah creates a hybrid of the theological argument of Philo and Targum Neofiti and the tradition of division from Bereshit Rabbah. The midrash to Genesis 4:8 reads:

Cain said to Abel, "You say that there is another world, come let us divide. I will take this world in my portion, and you in your portion take the world-to-come. When Cain saw Abel shepherding his flock in the field, Cain said to him, "No! We already divided [the land] and this world fell to my lot. Why do you graze your flock on my plot? Abel said to him, "I did not accept [the division] because I would leave my flock without shepherding, and that's impossible. From these things, they fell into a quarrel, and Cain killed Abel.

The image presented here is of an even more cleverly wicked Cain, who has either painted Abel into a philosophical corner from the outset, or has shrewdly improvised to turn a losing argument in his favor. In addition to providing the theological argument, the

⁴⁵ See also Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:8.

midrash also seems to return to Philo's and perhaps the rabbis' preference of and admiration for the occupation of shepherding, as Abel's primary concern in the matter is remaining with his flock. In this piece, as well as in all of the midrashim where Cain's claim to the land somehow factors into the quarrel and murder, we understand more clearly what we saw at the beginning of the chapter in Midrash ha-Gadol, that "the master of the ground is victorious." Ownership and possession of land is a key issue for the rabbis, perhaps an extension of longing for the land of Israel and an end to the exile.

C. Premeditated Murder or Manslaughter

Intimately connected with the circumstances surrounding the murder are the opinions of the rabbis regarding whether the killing of Abel was premeditated or manslaughter. Most of the midrashim assume as we have in discussing the above renditions of the quarrel, that even the arguments were purposefully engendered and fabricated for the sake of seemingly a natural escalation. In Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 21, the sudden turn of Cain's attention towards Abel's twin sister might be seen as a symptom of the rejection he felt at the hands of God, and the envy of his brother. Consciously or unconsciously, Cain may have been trying to distract himself from his anger and hurt by focusing outward as a means to fill the space of that hurt. It differs significantly from the argument of Bereshit Rabbah 22:7, where the conflict is over the *extra* twin sister born with Abel, incorporating the element of human greed into the tension between the brothers. Here we find more envy than greed, because in Pirkei

d'Rabbi Eliezer, there is only one twin sister born to each, and thus, more blame is heaped onto Cain.

This notion of misplaced anger rings true in some of our other examples as well. In Midrash Aggadah, Cain is fully aware that his proposed division of this world and the world-to-come will only serve to escalate the tension between them. The same can be said for the midrash from Tanhuma ha-Nidpas where Cain demands from Abel the specific location where his sacrifice was accepted. The inference here, with an eye to the intention of the rabbis, is that Cain knew beforehand that his brother would never assent to such a proposition, precisely the reason why it was presented to begin with. This idea goes back to Philo, who indicts Cain with the argument that God's curse demonstrates

first of all that he is polluted and accursed, not now for the first time when he has committed the murder, but that he was so before, the moment that he conceived the idea of it, the intention being of equal importance with the perfected action; for as long as we only conceive wicked things in the bad imagination of our minds, still, during that time, we are guilty of thoughts only, for the mind is capable of being changed even against its will; but when performance is added to the intention that has been conceived, then our deliberate purpose becomes also guilty; for this is the chief distinction between voluntary and involuntary sin.⁴⁶

This notion of Cain's masterful manipulation, rendered tacit in some of the earlier *midrashim*, is made more explicit in Sefer ha-Yashar 1:16, where the text tells us how he "became jealous of his brother, and began to seek a means of destroying him."

Another argument for the view that the murder was premeditated goes back to the section from Bereshit Rabbah 22:8 and my own suggested reading of Targum Onkelos,

⁴⁶ Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 96-97.

whereby Cain kills Abel as a sacrificial offering to a God dissatisfied with his first attempt.

If Cain has resolved to offer Abel as a sacrifice, there can be no doubt as to its being premeditated. This idea can be supported by BT Sanhedrin 37b, where we find an explanation of the plural “bloods” from verse 10:

R. Yehudah the son of R. Chiya said: This teaches that Cain inflicted numerous bruises and slashes on his brother Abel [before he succeeded in killing him] because he did not know from where the soul departs; [he therefore struck him repeatedly,] until he reached his throat [and killed him].⁴⁷

That Cain caused multiple wounds by itself could support the case for premeditation. But the case becomes all the stronger when juxtaposed with the notion of Cain desiring to offer his brother as a sacrifice, as a wound across the throat might imply.

The other side of the argument is that the killing of Abel was manslaughter rather than an act of premeditated murder. There is the perspective one could take whereby some of the arguments between the brothers arose naturally rather than having been plotted by Cain, like the argument over the extra twin sister in Bereshit Rabbah 22:7. Where both feel they have a claim to the sister and each already has a wife of his own, an argument naturally born of their common greed could have arisen, rendering the killing of Abel a crime of passion and act of manslaughter rather than premeditated murder.

In Bereshit Rabbah 22:12, the case for manslaughter is made more explicitly, where we read,

⁴⁷ See also JT Sanhedrin 10:36b, Tanhuma ha-Nidpas *Bereshit* 9, Midrash Lekah Tov and Midrash Aggadah to Genesis 4:10, Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38, and Midrash ha-Gadol to Genesis 4:8.

*R. Nehemiah interpreted: Cain's judgment shall not be as the judgment of other murderers. Cain slew, but had none from whom to learn [the enormity of his crime], but henceforth, all who slay shall be slain.*⁴⁸

R. Nehemiah argues that, while Cain should have been put to death for his crime, he was let off the hook by God because murder had never occurred in human history and there was no way for Cain to have known that such an act could cause the death of his brother. A later midrash from Tanhuma ha-Nidpas essentially places the argument of R. Nehemiah into the mouth of Cain as though he were entering a plea bargain. In *Bereshit* 9, Cain says to God:

*"Master of the Universe, never before have I encountered death, nor have I beheld a dead person; how could I possibly know that if I pummeled him with a stone he would die?" The Holy One, answered immediately, 'Cursed art thou from the ground...'*⁴⁹

The difference here is that God's immediate answer likely indicates that Cain's plea was seen as disingenuous, which then weakens the position that the punishment was for the crime of manslaughter. But God may have answered quickly because God had foreseen Cain's response, or because God already saw it the same way, in which case the case for manslaughter holds up.

The argument for manslaughter is also bolstered by a text from *Devarim Rabbah*, a midrash likely dating back to the 8th-9th century. In the section written for *Parshat Va-ethanan*, the rabbis expound upon Deuteronomy 4:41-42, which reads:

⁴⁸ See also *Yalkut Shim'oni* Part I, *remez* 38.

⁴⁹ See also *Midrash ha-Gadol* to Genesis 4:11.

Then Moses set aside three cities on the east side of the Jordan to which a manslayer could escape, one who unwittingly slew a fellow man without having been hostile to him in the past; he could flee to one of these cities and live.

The rabbis provide an example of a man cutting branches from atop a tree who lets his tool fall to the ground, accidentally killing one standing below. But the biblical example used to prove their point is, surprisingly, Cain. The midrash reads, ‘From this you find that all who have killed unwittingly are punished with exile, as you find with Cain, who killed his brother Abel and was sentenced to exile, as it says [in verse 16a], “And Cain left the presence of God.”’⁵⁰ Yalkut Shim‘oni Part I, *remez* 34 also links Cain to this law of manslaughter, citing Cain’s departure from God “east of Eden” in verse 16b. The text presents the teaching of Rav, which is that, “In every place, the east collects.” Since Cain is sent away to the east as his punishment, as we see in the Deuteronomy text, the rabbis gather that the killing of Abel was not premeditated murder but manslaughter. Since we find in the text no indication of any history of hostility of Cain toward his brother, the rabbis here interpret the killing of Abel as a singular, isolated incident, thereby deeming it a crime of the heat of the moment.

D. The Murder Weapon

The final area of midrashic curiosity here pertains to the murder weapon. The biblical text merely says that Cain killed Abel; there is no mention whatsoever of *how* he

⁵⁰ See also Midrash Aggadah to Genesis 4:16.

killed him. The Book of Jubilees never delineates a weapon when the murder actually occurs in 4:3, but 28 verses and seven jubilees later we read,

And his house fell upon him, and he died in the midst of his house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and with a stone he was killed by righteous judgment.

Bereshit Rabbah 22:8 cites the lament offered by Lamekh in Genesis 4:23 as proof of the identification of the murder weapon, though its fragments lead to differing conclusions.

At first the text reads,

The Rabbis said: He killed him with a stone: 'For I have slain a man for wounding me' (Gen 4:23) indicates a weapon which inflicts wounds.⁵¹

This notion that the weapon was a stone also appears in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 21: "He took the stone and embedded it in the forehead of Abel and slew him." And we see it as well in Tanhuma ha-Nidpas *Bereshit* 9, where the text states, "He inflicted numerous bruises upon his body with a stone" along the same lines of the interpretation of the rabbis in BT Sanhedrin 37b regarding the multiple wounds.

But Bereshit Rabbah 22:8 continues with an alternate explanation citing the same verse for prooftext, as we read,

With what did he kill him? R. Simeon said: He killed him with a staff: 'And a young man for my bruising' (Gen 4:23) implies a weapon which inflicts a bruise.

There may be in this interpretation a linguistic connection to Cain's name which, translated one way, means 'reed.'

While it seems the majority of midrashim that weigh in on the subject assume a

⁵¹ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38.

stone to be Cain's weapon, the narrative of Sefer ha-Yashar serves as a singular, yet fascinating voice of minority report. After Cain's practical question of revenge for murder, we read in 1:25 that Cain "flew into a rage, and, flushed with anger, raised the plowing iron and killed his brother." Since their argument stems from their occupations, i.e., Abel's sheep grazing on Cain's land, it is tragically poetic then that Cain murders Abel with the instrument of his occupation.

CHAPTER 4:
CONFRONTATION, JUDGMENT, AND JUSTICE

What the writers of Midrash found surprisingly more intriguing than the description of the actual murder are the events immediately following it. Though not God's first interaction with humanity, nor even the first time condemning or punishing them, it is the first occurrence in the Torah of the death of a creature of God, and it is by no means of natural causes. For the sake of brevity, it will suffice for the moment to begin with the biblical text itself and say that the rabbis have much to say about every clause within it:

God said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Then God said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a fugitive and a wanderer⁵² on earth. Cain said to God, "My punishment is too great to bear! Since you have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a fugitive and a wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!" God said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him."

A. God's Confrontation With Cain

When God asks Cain where his brother Abel is, the natural response on the part of the reader is one of perplexity. If God is omniscient, as the writers of the Torah and the Midrash would concur, then it is of the utmost certainty that God knows what Cain has

⁵² We have here departed from the JPS translation, which renders, "a ceaseless wanderer," since a number of midrashim explored in this chapter are based on a reading of *na' v'nod* as two distinct forms of punishment.

done and what has happened to his brother. So what is the purpose in asking? As early as Philo, this predicament emerges. In *The Worse Attacks the Better* 57-58, we read:

For he who asks a question or puts an inquiry is asking or inquiring about something of which he is ignorant; seeking an answer through which he will know what he as yet does not know. But everything is known to God, not only all that is present, and all that is past, but also all that is to come. What need, then, has God of an answer which cannot give any any additional knowledge to the questioner?

Philo eventually answers his own question, albeit cryptically, when he says,

In order that the soul which is about to give the answer may prove by itself what it answers correctly or incorrectly, having no one else either as an accuser or an adversary.

It is, in essence, the moment of truth for Cain. Scholar Hindy Najman writes that, for Philo, this question demonstrates that “repentance is always possible, even for someone whose vicious character is inscribed in his very name”—a notion adopted and repeated by the rabbis, as we shall see in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:6 and *Midrash Aggadah* to *Genesis* 4:9-10—as well as highlighting what she calls the “endless responsibility” of each person for himself and his actions.⁵³

Josephus in 2:55-56 of his *Antiquities* addresses the issue differently:

...and [Cain] slew his brother, and hid his dead body, thinking to escape discovery. But God, knowing what had been done, came to Cain, and asked him what was become of his brother, because God had not seen him of many days, whereas God used to observe them conversing together at other times. But Cain was in doubt with himself, and knew not what answer to give to God. At first he said that he was himself at a loss about his brother's disappearing; but when he was provoked by God, who pressed him vehemently, as resolving to know what the matter was, he replied

⁵³ Najman, “Character Traits,” 116-117.

that he was not his brother's guardian or keeper, nor was he an observer of what he did.

It is noteworthy that Josephus breaks up Cain's response into two answers to at least two questions, depending on how one defines 'provoked' and 'pressing vehemently.' This technique is a favorite of the rabbis of the midrashim, like God's commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, where each detail given by God is a progressively narrower answer to Abraham's questions. Also of interest is how Josephus responds to the three most common definitions of the Hebrew *shomer*, 'guardian,' by including all of them in the paraphrase of Cain's response. By being neither a guardian, a keeper, nor an observer, Josephus covers his bases, and Cain's galling denial is rendered even more outrageous.

Bereshit Rabbah 22:9 offers a series overlapping parables to explain what the rabbis see happening in the initial dialogue between God and Cain, two of which we shall cite here in this section. The first reads:

This may be compared to a prefect who was walking in the middle of the road, and found a man slain and another man standing over him. "Who killed him?" he demanded. "I will ask you instead of you asking me," answered the other. "You have answered nothing," he retorted, ['seeing that it is you who are standing over him'].⁵⁴

The parable demonstrates not only the futility of responding to God's question with a question, but also the sheer stupidity of responding so brazenly, especially when the circumstances dictate that he is most likely to be the guilty party. The second parable:

It is like the case of a man who entered a garden and

⁵⁴ This last bracketed piece of speech is offered as a footnote to this text in the translation used for this essay: H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans. Midrash Rabbah Volumes 1 and 2: Genesis Rabbah. (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), 188.

gathered mulberries and ate them. The owner of the garden pursued him and said to him, "What are you holding?" He said to him, "There is nothing in my hands." "But yet your hands are stained [with juice]!" Similarly Cain said to God, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' and God said to him, "You wicked one, the voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."''⁵⁵

This parable illustrates that the blood of Abel is on his hands, if not in a literal sense (which is valid), then certainly in a figurative one. God knows what Cain has done, and avoiding responsibility is an absolute impossibility.

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer takes Cain's response and casts it in an occupational context, as we see in Chapter 21, where Cain says,

*Sovereign of the world! You have made me a keeper of field and vineyard. You have not made me a keeper of my brother.*⁵⁶

It is similar to the biblical text, yet it is not uttered in the form of a question, so that, on the surface, it does not seem quite so deceptive. However, a footnote in the Friedlander translation tells us, "Abel's flocks would not be in the fields or vineyards of Cain, and therefore, in the ordinary course of events, he would not have known the whereabouts of his brother."⁵⁷ With this explanation, Cain is viewed as equally deceptive, if not more so, not only for his smooth speech, but also for his attempt at turning the tables of responsibility back towards God. It is also interesting to note the mention in the midrash of a vineyard, not only as a specification of Cain's work, but also in light of the midrashim which frown upon husbandry, explicitly linking Cain with Noah, who is considered the

⁵⁵ Both parables above are also found in Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38.

⁵⁶ See also Yalkut Shim'oni Part I, *remez* 38.

⁵⁷ Friedlander, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, 155.

warrior who would fight against great odds to victoriously drive out foreign forces from the Jewish homeland and restore Jewish independence.

Chapter Three- The Book of Judith:

The book of Judith¹⁸³ is a narrative piece of literature dating from Second Temple times.¹⁸⁴ The story is as follows: Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Assyria, waged war against his neighbors and, despite their wealth, strength, and incredibly fortified cities.¹⁸⁵ Nebuchadnezzar utterly defeated them.¹⁸⁶ Before too long, Nebuchadnezzar sent his chief general, Holofernes, to continue his campaign of expansion¹⁸⁷ and Holofernes successfully conquered all the nations from the Persian boarder to Sidon and Tyre.

When Holofernes' army came to the narrow valley of Esdraelon, which leads into Judaea, the Assyrian forces found that Esdraelon's mountain passes¹⁸⁸ were defended by a small group of Jews living in the fortified mountain towns of Bethulia and Betomesthaim. These mountain Jews essentially served as gatekeepers tasked with keeping the Assyrians out of greater Judaea and specifically were seen as the only hope of keeping Jerusalem and the recently restored Temple safe.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Translation from Moore, Carey, *Judith*, Vol. 40 of *The Anchor Bible*, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985.

¹⁸⁴ Since Judith is generally considered fiction, scholars have difficulty assigning it an exact date. Generally scholars think it likely that Judith was comprised early in the first century B.C.E. during the late Hasmonean period either toward the end of John Hyrcanus I (135-104 B.C.E.) or at the beginning of the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-78 BCE). Craven, "Judith," 43; Moore, "Judith," 67; Nickelsburg, "Judith," 50.

¹⁸⁵ Judith 1:2-4.

¹⁸⁶ "In the seventeenth year he marshaled his forces against Arphaxed; and in battle he defeated him, routing Arphaxed's entire army and all his cavalry and chariots. He occupied his towns and then turned to Ecbatana, subduing its tower." (Judith 1:13-14).

¹⁸⁷ Judith 2:4.

¹⁸⁸ Carey Moore (Moore, "Judith," 45.) figuratively characterizes this narrow pass (Judith 4:7) as the 'Palestinian Thermopylae' which the Spartans famously defended with just 300 warriors against Xerxes and the Persian legions. However, Moore cedes that Amaldo Momigliano's (Biblical Archeologist 45, 1982, 227-228) assessment that the stories of Judith and the Spartan stand at Thermopylae have so much in common that it is plausible that the former story was actually based on the latter. (Moore, "Judith," 154.) This author would posit that based on the documented alliance and treaties between the Hasmonean Dynasty and the Spartans (Chapter #2); perhaps this connection, or influence, further hints towards perceived warrior-cultural commonalities. Specifically, the Hasmonean warriors admired, and sought to emulate, the Spartan reputation for military prowess, especially against stacked odds.

¹⁸⁹ "(The Jews were) alarmed for Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord their God. For they had returned from exile only a short time before; and all the people of Judaea had been reunited, and the sacred utensils, the altar, and the Temple had just recently been rededicated after they had been defiled." (Judith 4:2-3).

When Holofernes realized that sacking Bethulia and Betomesthaim was the key to gaining entrée into Judaea, he conferred with local Gentile chiefs who told Holofernes the Jews were fierce in battle and would not easily be defeated, especially since their towns used the mountain heights to their advantage and were well fortified. Nevertheless, Holofernes attacked¹⁹⁰ driving the Jews behind their city walls, and systematically laid siege.¹⁹¹ Thinking that the massive Assyrian force would be unable to survive off the sparse mountain land, the Jews hoped to wait-out Holofernes' siege; but Holofernes was able to cut off the Jews' water supply¹⁹² to the point where they literally were dying of thirst and on the verge of surrender.¹⁹³ However, at the proverbial 11th hour, a local young widow named Judith appeared to the town leaders and promised that she would defeat the invaders¹⁹⁴ and thus the Jews would avoid the dreaded fate of a conquered people.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ "The next day Holofernes ordered his entire army...to make war against the Israelites...every able-bodied man...a hundred and seventy thousand infantrymen and twelve thousand cavalry." (Judith 7:1-2.)

¹⁹¹ The Jews hoped to wait-out Holofernes' siege thinking that the massive Assyrian force would be unable to survive off the sparse mountain land. (Judith 7:4.)

¹⁹² "He (Holofernes) found their water sources, seized them, so thirst will destroy them, and they will surrender their town." (Judith 7:7, 13.)

¹⁹³ "The Assyrian army had blockaded them for thirty four days, and all the water reserves were depleted for all the inhabitants of Bethulia. The cisterns were going dry, and no one could quench his thirst for even a day because the water had to be rationed. The children were listless, and the women and young men fainted from thirst and were collapsing in the town's streets and gateways, for they no longer had any strength... (the people cried out to the leaders) 'Contact them (the Assyrians) at once and hand over the whole town to be sacked by Holofernes' people and all his army, for it is better for us to be sacked by them. For although we shall become slaves, our lives will be spared; and we shall not witness with our own eyes the death of our little ones or our wives and children breathing their last.'" (Judith 7:20-22, 26-27.)

¹⁹⁴ "Judith said to them, 'Listen to me. I am going to do something which will go down among the children of our people for endless generations. As for you, stand at the gate tonight, and I will leave with my maid...the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand. But you must not inquire into the affair; for I will not tell you what I am going to do until it is accomplished.'" (Judith 8:32-34.)

¹⁹⁵ Nebuchadnezzar swore that he would "come upon them, and I will cover every square inch of land with the feet of my army, and I will let them be looted by my troops. Their wounded will fill their ravines and gullies! I will send them away as captives to the ends of the whole world...on the rebellious show no mercy. Let them be slaughtered and looted..." (Judith 2:7-11.) Later, Holofernes specifically threatens the obstinate Jews who refused to surrender when he promises that "We, Nebuchadnezzar's servants, will strike them down as if they were one man. Their hills will be drunk with their blood, and their plains filled with their corpses. Not even their footsteps will survive! They will be completely wiped out!" (Judith 6:3-5.)

Judith, who is described as being “shapely and beautiful,”¹⁹⁶ wealthy¹⁹⁷ and righteous,¹⁹⁸ used clothing and make-up to make herself irresistibly attractive. She then gained entrée into the enemy camp by making two types of overtures to Holofernes. The first overture was to tantalize Holofernes with information on how to penetrate the Jewish defenses; the second was of a sexual nature. Holofernes in turn, confident of an imminent victory against the mountain Jews, was eager to engage the shapely Judith and to enjoy the fruits of his spoils. Smitten by her very presence, Holofernes exclaimed to his officers that “in terms of beauty and brains, there is not another woman like this from one end of the earth to the other!”¹⁹⁹ Before too long, over a feast, Judith helped Holofernes get incredibly drunk²⁰⁰ and tempted him with sexual *ententes*.²⁰¹ Fully intending to have sex with this beautiful Jewess,²⁰² they entered his tent and while Holofernes “sprawled on his bed, dead drunk,”²⁰³ Judith ironically used Holofernes’ own sword to chop off his head savagely.²⁰⁴ Judith immediately put his bloody head in a sack, and with her maid escaped from out of the Assyrian camp into the night.

Once back behind the town walls, Judith quickly assumed command of the Jewish forces. She commanded a daring battle strategy which bluffed the Assyrians into thinking that the

¹⁹⁶ Judith 8:7.

¹⁹⁷ “Her husband Manassch had left her gold and silver, male and female servants, livestock, and fields.” (Judith 8:14.)

¹⁹⁸ “(...despite her wealth, age and beauty) “there was no one who spoke ill of her, so devoutly did she fear God.” (Judith 8:9.)

¹⁹⁹ Judith 11:21.

²⁰⁰ “Holofernes was so delighted with her that he drank a great deal of wine, much more than he had ever drunk on a single day since he was born.” (Judith 12:20.)

²⁰¹ “Who am I that I should refuse my lord? I will do whatever he desires right away, and it will be something to boast of until my dying day.” (Judith 12:14.)

²⁰² “Holofernes was beside himself with desire, and his brain was reeling, and he was very eager to have relations with her.” (Judith 12:16.)

²⁰³ Judith 13:2.

²⁰⁴ “She went to the bedpost by Holofernes’ head, and took down from it his sword, and approaching the bed, she grabbed the hair of his head and...struck at his neck twice with all of her might, and chopped off his head.” (Judith 13:6-8.)

Jews still had sufficient strength to fight, and she gambled on a certain chaos that might ensue once the Assyrians realized that their leader had been slain. Her tactics were successful and when the Assyrian soldiers fled, they were pursued and cut-down by Jews not only from those mountain towns, but from across the entire land.

The book of Judith employs descriptions of the Jews, of Judith, and of their actions which may inform the reader of the author's perception of Jew-as-warrior. Although the question of verifiable history is interesting, the finished work serves to inform regardless of its factual truth. To begin, the lengthy accounts of King Nebuchadnezzar's military might, as well as the strength of the Gentile enemies whom he defeated, clearly relays the certainty that the Assyrian army was beyond defeat via conventional military methods. Quintessential to this point is the description of one of these defeated kings, King Arphaxed of Medes, who despite the impressive fortification of his city, fell beneath the tidal wave of the Assyrian might:

King Arphaxed ruled over Medes and Ecbatana and had thought his capital to be un-impregnable. Arphaxad had surrounded Ecbatana with walls of hewn stones four and a half feet thick. He had designed its gates, which were one hundred and five feet high and sixty feet wide, to allow his army of mighty men to parade forth, with his infantry in full formation.²⁰⁵

The message is clear: if the Assyrians could defeat a tremendous power like King Arphaxed, then the small towns of mountain Jews, despite their reputation as fierce fighters, could not possibly stand a chance.

After more than thirty days of withstanding the Assyrian siege, the Jews were dying of thirst. Rather than die in this slow and painful manner, they decided (almost) that it would be better to suffer the consequences of slavery rather than see their children waste away. They

²⁰⁵ Judith 1:13-14.

were desperate, and thus it made sense to embrace Judith's highly unorthodox strategy for salvation.

Judith herself embodies the familiar warrior ideal found in both the Bible and in I Maccabees in that she is willing to risk her life against the enemy to save her people, she has tremendous courage against great odds, she effectively uses unorthodox tactics against a numerically superior enemy: she arms herself with the best weapons (intelligence, beauty, sexuality, enemy's overconfidence) available to her, and she employs daring battle tactics to overcome superior forces. Judith models the Jew who takes action against the enemy, and ruthlessly fights to win despite the risks and the odds.

Like the Maccabees, the heroine Judith was decisive in her decisions and quick in her implementation. Once Judith realized the dire situation, she began to act. Furthermore, Judith risked her reputation, her chastity, her freedom and her life to kill Holofernes, and thus to give her people a small chance of escaping the horrible fate of a conquered people. Judith's choice is even more impressive once one realizes that Judith likely had options not available to her Jewish neighbors or male parallels. One must assume that any woman who could so enchant Holofernes with her beauty and intelligence could easily have switched her loyalties and avoided risking her personal safety. Likely, if she had so desired, Judith could have found her way into the arms of a powerful Assyrian man and lived out her life in comfort and safety. But she did the opposite and with tremendous courage Judith faced the enemy and risked everything for her people.

Reminiscent of the Maccabees, Judith used aggressive and unorthodox tactics to overcome her huge disadvantages: those being that she was alone, a woman, and had to enter into the enemy camp both unassuming and unarmed. The fact that her goal from the outset

seemed to have been to kill the enemy general, not on the battle field where she would not have stood a chance, but rather in his own tent, shows a focused discipline which would be the envy of any soldier. Judith proved herself practical as a “clever and resourceful assassin,”²⁰⁶ with both her meticulous preparations and her ability to mask her murderous intent. Judith unabashedly deceives Holofernes, and in doing so, was able to implement a complex and fragile plan.

What is more, like any good strategist, Judith masterfully used the enemy’s weakness against him. Specifically, she first used Holofernes’ ‘lack of mastery for his own desires against him,’²⁰⁷ those being his desires for power, food, alcohol and sex. Even more impressive is that Judith correctly ascertained that the Assyrian army would be rudderless without their leader, and thus with but one precise cut of a sword that indestructible force could be made vulnerable.

After returning with Holofernes’ severed head, it is Judith who commanded the innovative battle strategy. Judith’s daring tactics effectively maximized the drama and made her gamble possible by showing the Assyrian army that their leader, Holofernes, had been killed under their very noses by the people whom they thought were on the verge of surrender.²⁰⁸

(Judith said to the village leaders) ‘Please hear me out, my brothers, Take this head and hang it from the battlements of our wall. And as soon as day breaks and the sun comes out over the land, each of you take up your weapons, and let every able-bodied man leave the town. Appoint a commander for them as if you were about to descend upon the plain against the Assyrian outpost. Only you must not descend! Then the Assyrian outpost will grab their weapons and make for camp. They will rouse the officers of the Assyrian army and then rush

²⁰⁶ Nickelsburg, “Judith,” 47 referring to Judith 10:1-5.

²⁰⁷ deSilva, *Introducing*, 85.

²⁰⁸ Judith 14:1-5.

into Holofernes' tent, and not find him! Then they will panic and retreat at your advance, and you and all who live within Israel's borders will pursue them and cut them down in their tracks.

It is vital to note that it is Judith who dictated the strategy, and the male village leaders listened. But more amazing, is that Judith's entire strategy was based on a bluff! She knew first hand the dire situation that the thirsty Jews were in, but counted on scaring the Assyrians into a retreat. It was a desperate plan, but one that brilliantly capitalized on the enemy's only weakness, that being their shocked perception of reality and the chaos of being leaderless. It worked:

So Bagoas went into (Holofernes' tent)...and found him on top of the bed stool - a discarded corpse, with his head missing! He let out a yell...then, quivering with fear, no man stood firm with his comrade, but with common impulse they tried to escape along every path in the plain and the hill country. Those who were encamped in the hills around Bethulia were fleeing too. Then the Israelites, every fighting man among them, sallied out after them.²⁰⁹

Judith's personal actions, her active pursuit of blood and victory, speak of a warrior. 'There is no doubt that her beauty is a weapon by which Judith saves Israel...she uses her sexual attraction as a weapon...she girds herself in the armor of womanhood: she has her hair done, puts on makeup, attires herself glamorously, and goes out in her beauty to confront the enemy general.'²¹⁰ To this author, it speaks volumes that Judith chose to kill Holofernes via decapitation rather than some method more subtle, like poison. Although Judith's strategy necessitated the general's head to route the Assyrian army, one can not help but to be struck by the cold brutality of the act. Nonetheless, the heroine is credited with saving her people from defeat, death, rape and enslavement through her ruthless actions. When her people's lives were at risk, Judith, like other idealized Jewish warriors, goes for the proverbial jugular

²⁰⁹ Judith 14:14-16, 15: 2-3.

²¹⁰ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 340.

vein. Her example of action against the superior enemy, using any means necessary, is lauded to inspire emulation.

In terms of the book of Judith's authenticity, meaning historical accuracy, many scholars firmly hold that the narrative is "didactic fiction and not factual history."²¹¹ That being said, many of those same scholars think that this fiction was meant by Judith's anonymous writer²¹² both to entertain and to instruct as a "model for proper and improper actions."²¹³ This author agrees with Alonso-Schokel who thinks that Judith is "the homiletic model of man who preaches or advocates active resistance and not passive surrender."²¹⁴

Along the same lines, other scholars²¹⁵ think that Judith served to inspire as Resistance Literature in that "the faithful are those who fight the good fight."²¹⁶ This author would posit that the historical accuracy of the Book of Judith is far less important, in the context of this thesis, than the fact that the book existed and presumably was read by the Jewish masses. Even if she was entirely fictional, Judith was an exemplar. Although it is impossible to know it for a fact, it certainly is possible that her example informed the psyche of the masses in much the same way that popular media does today. In hearing of Judith's refusal to submit to the forces of superior armies, and to resist with everything that she had, Judith becomes a role model for those who wish to champion active, violent resistance.

²¹¹ This view is held by: Craven, "Judith," 43; Nickelsburg, "Judith," 48; and deSilva, *Introducing*, 92. A notable exception to this line of thinking is Moore, "Judith," 45: "With the exception of a few statements (Judith 3:8, 4:7.), the rest of the narrative remains well within the bounds of realism and could be essentially true, i.e., just slightly exaggerated."

²¹² Due to the fact the Judith's author appears to be familiar with the Jewish religious customs, history and geography of second century Palestine, there is a consensus that the anonymous author likely was a Palestinian Jew. (Moore, "Judith," 70; deSilva, *Introducing*, 90; Craven, "Judith," 43.) Additionally, although no Hebrew Urtext survives, "the Book of Judith gives every indication of being a translation of Hebrew text." (Moore, "Judith," 66.)

²¹³ Nickelsburg, "Judith," 48.

²¹⁴ Alonso-Schokel, "Ruth, Tobias," 66.

²¹⁵ Winter, TIDotB, 1025; Craven, "Judith," 46.

²¹⁶ Craven, "Judith," 46.

Chapter Four- The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons of Darkness:²¹⁷

The general historical context in Judaea around the millennial transition was one of uncertainty, violence, and unrest.²¹⁸ Eventually, due to civil war between two rival brothers contending for control over Judaea, John Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, the Hasmonean Dynasty fatally splintered. Desperate for power, each brother appealed to the neighboring Roman Empire for aid in hopes of gaining control despite the potential dangers of extensive military dependence and economic debt at the hands of the ambitious Caesars. Although the Hasmoneans had been ruling under the Roman shadow for decades, once aware of the depth of Judaeans vulnerability, Rome decided in 63 B.C.E. that Judaea was weak enough to commandeer with minimal effort: which they did without shedding one drop of blood.²¹⁹

The following century under Roman rule was not one of peace and tranquility in Judaea as "these years were constantly characterized by civil and political unrest."²²⁰ It is unclear how much of the unrest was due to lingering hopes of reclaiming Jewish nationalistic aspirations versus desperate reactions to perceived deprivations of accustomed religious independence and freedom. However, regardless of the specific causes, many Jewish insurrections took place as Jews took up arms in a desperate protest against Roman policy

²¹⁷ The late professor E.L. Sukenik named the scroll 'The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness' on account of its contents and by way of summarizing the first line of col. i: 'The first engagement of the Sons of Light shall be to attack the lot of the Sons of Darkness.' (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 1.)

²¹⁸ Although an extensive rendering of this era's fascinating history would be interesting and worthwhile in and of itself, the confines of this thesis dictate that only a very general history be conferred as it is the context for the War Text.

²¹⁹ "In general terms, Roman rule in late Second Temple Palestine may be divided into three major stages: 1. vassal state under Hyrcanus II, 63-40 B.C.E.; 2. Herodian rule, 37 B.C.E.-6 C.E.; 3. Direct Roman rule, 6-66 C.E. (save for the brief reign of Agrippa I, 41-44 C.E.)" (Altridge, "I Maccabees," in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Stone, 18.)

²²⁰ Altridge, "I Maccabees," in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Stone, 18.

and persons, particularly those of Caligula (37-41 C.E.) and Nero (54-68 C.E.). "By the end of the last Roman governors, total anarchy seems to have prevailed in Judaea."²²¹ A culmination of these Jewish armed revolts was a full scale war which ended with the destruction of the Temple (70 C.E.).

The end of Jewish religious sovereignty, made blatant with the destruction of the Temple, was a time of great uncertainty, social upheaval, and apocalyptic expectation for many. Even without the overt violence, various political-religious sects vied for influence and power amongst the common people and both authorities, Judaeans and Roman. Some of the Jewish literature of this era reflects the Jewish uncertainty and reaction to this paradigmatic shift, specifically that of increasing Roman control and the subsequent correlating Jewish powerlessness. "The Roman conquest in general, and in particular the turbulent days in Judaea following Herod's death, were an ideal setting for the propagation of beliefs regarding an imminent deliverance from the yoke of foreign conquest,"²²² and the reclaiming of Jewish sovereignty.

Amid this uncertainty, sometime in the second century B.C.E.,²²³ a group of Jews living in Judaea with sectarian sentiments against the ruling Jerusalem priesthood "defined themselves as a discerning group struggling against an unsympathetic Jewish majority."²²⁴ They established a community outside of Jerusalem by the Dead Sea in a place known as Qumran. It is likely that this community was one of a group called the Essenes.²²⁵ The

²²¹ Altridge, "I Maccabees," in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Stone 22.

²²² Altridge, "I Maccabees," in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Stone 25.

²²³ "we must be content to date the founding of the sect sometime in the second century BCE after the Hasmoneans had taken over the high priesthood, about 152 BCE" (Schiffman, "Origin," 46).

²²⁴ Schiffman, "Origin," 42.

²²⁵ "The Essenes, a sect noted for its piety and distinctive theology, were known in Greek as *Essenoi* or *Essaioi*. Although numerous suggestions have been made about the etymology of the name, none has achieved scholarly consensus. The most recent theory, and also the most probable, holds that the name was borrowed from a group of devotees of the cult of Artemis in Asia Minor, whose demeanor and dress somewhat resembled those of the

question of exactly the origins of this Qumran community, specifically their social standing among the known Hasmonean era parties, is debated still amongst leading scholars;²²⁶ however, their origin is not overly important to this thesis. What is important to this thesis is how the historian might interpret the literature found in the Dead Sea Caves²²⁷ *vis-a-vis* how that Qumran community might have viewed themselves as warriors. To this end, it is essential to note that the Qumran community believed that they were currently living on the verge of the End of Days²²⁸ and typical of apocalyptic groups, they believed that their age would soon be followed by the dawn of a new and better one.²²⁹ Specifically, the era which they hoped would end was their era of Roman rule, and the concomitant Jewish powerlessness.

Although there are hints, instances and references to military aspirations, or plans, throughout many of the Dead Sea Scrolls,²³⁰ the scroll known as the War Text is singularly devoted to battle plans for a specific eschatological war to be waged in the future. The War Text reveals that the world will be divided into two diametrically opposite forces of 'good' and 'evil': specifically the 'Sons of Light,' those being the warriors of the Qumran community, will battle against the 'Sons of Darkness,' those being basically everyone else in

group in Judaea. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, most scholars have identified the Qumran sect with the Essenes...although the term 'Essene' does not appear in any of the Qumran scrolls...The Roman author Pliny identifies an Essene settlement between Jericho and Ein Gedi on the western shore of the Dead Sea." (Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 78.)

²²⁶ "Scholars differ widely in their attempts to identify the sect of the scrolls with one of the sects known to us from other sources. In fact, the sect has been identified by various scholars with every single one of the numerous sects which existed toward the end and after the period of the Second Temple... Many scholars now accept the view, first suggested by E.L. Sukenik and developed by Dupont-Sommer, Brownlee, Grinz, De Vauz and others that the sect of the scrolls was Essenes. (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 246.)

²²⁷ Known as 'The Dead Sea Scrolls.'

²²⁸ Schiffman, "Origin," 42.

²²⁹ Sollamo, "War and Violence," 348.

²³⁰ To this point, scholars include the scrolls of 'The Community Rule' (Schiffman, *Personal Interview*, 24 August, 2007; Sollamo, "War and Violence," 349.), and the various *pesharim* (Sollamo, "War and Violence," 349; Bolotnikov, "The Theme," 262.)

the world, but quintessentially led by a people referred to as the *'kittim'*.²³¹ This war between good and evil on earth will be paralleled by superhuman dualistic forces in heaven. After six taxing battles in which the *'Sons of Light'* will alternately defeat and then fall to the *'Sons of Darkness'*, the *'Sons of Light'* ultimately will be victorious in the seventh and final battle through the grace of God's intervention. Although the War Text does not specify it, in the Jewish tradition of partnership and covenant, it seems as though the contest can only be decided by God if the loyal warriors of *'light'* first wage, and win, against the vast and powerful forces of *'darkness'*. Thus both the very real human efforts and battles of the *'Sons of Light'* along with the divine effort of God are needed in tandem in order to reign victorious and usher in the new age.

Most striking to this author about the War Text is not its assurance of ultimate victory, its polemic against the enemy, or its reliance on God for ultimate salvation: these traits are common²³² to the other genres of literature covered in this thesis. What is most striking is the incredible attention to detail in which the author of the War Text²³³ describes everything having to do with the warrior, weapons, mounts, formations, and tactics. Unlike other pieces of Jewish literature in which the future revelations are attributed to a biblical prophet, "the author mentions neither himself nor the circumstances in which were revealed to him the things which he tells his readers: nor does he attribute the revelation to righteous men of the past, as we so often find in the apocalyptic works. His style is matter-of-fact and terse.

²³¹ "*Kittim*" is a code word for Romans...and the defeat of the "kittim" seems to be the major concern of the author of the War Scroll throughout the whole book. Since the scroll was written during the Roman rule, the author wanted to hide his intentions from Roman censorship and make the content of the scroll understandable only to the group...therefore he was using a code word. (Bolotnikov, "The Theme," 264.) Additionally, the *'war of kittos'* is mentioned in Jewish sources (*Seder Olam Rabbah* 30, *M. Sor.* 9.14.) It is dated fifty-two years after Vespasian's war and sixteen before Bar Kochba." (Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 100.)

²³² But certainly not limited to the works of literature covered in this thesis.

²³³ Yadin, *The Scroll*, ix.

describing the occurrences as facts, self-evident and known to his readers."²³⁴ In short, much of the War Text seems to be a practical manual for properly conducting war against specific, but cryptically named enemies,²³⁵ with almost every possible imaginable variable anticipated and provisioned against.

The goals of this thesis chapter are two-fold: Firstly, to examine and analyze the image of the Qumran army and warrior described by the author in the War Text.²³⁶ These descriptions provide possible insight into how the Qumran man saw himself, or ideally wanted to see himself, as a soldier. Secondly, this author hopes to theorize about the motivations of the War Text author against the questions of the actual existence of a viable Qumran fighting force. In other words, were the details of this war-manual the actual plans of a militant group actively planning to implement attacks; or rather was the War Text the delusional fantasy of a powerless and passive bunch who never actually thought to do anything more than talk about what would happen with the manifestation of Divine guidance and the impossibility of perfect conditions?

Unlike the descriptions of the warrior found in the Bible, Maccabees and Judith, the War Text does not have much specific description about the individual warrior except as each is a part of the whole army. The army is fully comprised of the 'Sons of Light,' and each and every warrior in that army is of the absolute highest quality in every imaginable respect. The army is incredibly organized and coordinated: while the warriors are disciplined and well trained. The army is complete and comprised of foot-soldiers, cavalry and war towers on the

²³⁴ Yadin, *The Scroll* 7 in reference to chapters #2 and #9 of the War Text.

²³⁵ i.e. - "In the first year they shall fight against Aram Naharaim, in the second against the sons of Lud, in the third against the remainder of the sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Togar and Masha...in the fourth and the fifth they shall fight against the sons of Arpachshad... etc." (Yadin, *The Scroll* 2:10-11.)

²³⁶ All War Text English translations are taken from Yadin, Yigael. *The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons Of Darkness*. Translated by Batya and Chaim Rabin. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1962. Each translation is demarcated with X: Y representing column: line, respectively.

field; while the soldiers are well armed and uniformly immaculate. The army is not a defensive army, but rather is an aggressive army that plans to attack the enemy first and pursue them across the lands until they are crushed;²³⁷ while each individual warrior will gladly step forward to initiate attacks with war-darts dubbed with such epithets as 'sparks of blood to fell the slain by the anger of God.'

Guided by Torah, the holy army is girded in ritual purity, commanded by battle- priests and paralleled by angelic beings who simultaneously carry this war into the heavens; so too each individual soldier is ritually pure and of intractable faith to God and of their destined ultimate victory. The army is comprised of remnants from the twelve tribes who gather outside of Jerusalem eager to be God's army; while each warrior is a brave volunteer eager to annihilate the enemy. The army is steadfast despite the assured and pre-ordained defeats prior to their ultimate victory; while the warrior is honored to die in battle as the ultimate sacrifice for his army's ultimate victory.

The War Text's description of how the army of the 'Sons of Light' was to employ banners and trumpets confers that the ideal army was super-organized and that the ideal warrior was hyper-disciplined. The contemporary reader must remember that in the days before modern technology, battles were decided based on field communication, or lack thereof. An army that could fluidly communicate and quickly react to commands while the arrows were flying had a tremendous advantage over one that could not. All the more so for a force like the 'Sons of Light' which planned on being numerically inferior to their enemy in

²³⁷ The war is to be waged in three phases of extending concentric circles starting with Judaea and ending with an expansionist push North to battle the Kittim who have settled in distant lands. As Yadin summarizes, "In the first it will be conducted against the alliance of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia, led by the Kittim of Asshur. Joined to these will be a group of 'offenders against the Covenant' from amongst the Jews. In the second phase they will fight the 'Kittim who dwell in Egypt'. In the third and last phase the war will be waged against the kings of the north' in general." (7). It is interesting to note that by the end of the first campaign, all Jews who are not considered 'Sons of Light' will be defeated and dead, thus leaving a united Jewry to engage in subsequent battles.

each and every engagement. The ability to react quickly and decisively as a fighting unit would make them sharply dangerous and much more effective at war.

In the army²³⁸ of the 'Sons of Light,' each military division from the largest to its smallest subdivision of ten men had its individual banner with the troop's name, its commander, and all of that commander's direct reports. For instance, one of the myriad units (one-thousand men) carried a banner with their name 'retribution of God'²³⁹ and underneath it was inscribed the name of that myriad's commander with ten names of each of his sub-commanders who each led one of the myriad's hundred-man battalions. Another fighting troop, this one of only ten men, was named 'Rejoicings of God upon the ten-stringed lyre' and beneath that inscription the banner held the name of that troop's commander of the ten, along with the names of the nine men in his charge.²⁴⁰ In this way, each man was identified by name to at least one fighting unit, and often more than one. In terms of organization, with this banner system each soldier would know exactly his place in the army, and thus his place and role in each different type of battle formation. Through these descriptions, without having any description of the army's strength or individual's fighting prowess, the War Text's author conveys the warrior ideals of organization and discipline above all else.

The War Text also describes in excruciating detail the exact trumpet calls with which to maneuver each unit into, and out of, different battle scenarios:

The use of the trumpets for summoning them when the battle intervals are opened for the advance of the skirmishers, the trumpets for the fanfare of the slain, the trumpets of the ambush, the trumpets of

²³⁸ The structure for the whole army of the 'Sons of Light' was modeled after biblical Israel's organization (Exodus 18) while encamped and while wandering in the wilderness. "Thus the men are organized by tribes, families, thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens." (Dimant, D. "The War Scroll." In *Jewish Writing* (ed. Stone), 516.)

²³⁹ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 43.

²⁴⁰ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 4:5.

pursuit when the enemy is smitten, and the trumpets of withdrawal when the battle returns.²⁴¹

In this way, the army of the 'Sons of Light' would be able to communicate and react to real-time battle situations with pre-arranged trumpet signals. However the War Text does not just detail that there would be signals for each type of general battle engagement, but rather amazingly it details the exact length and tone of the trumpet signal for each variation on these engagements! For instance:

The trumpets shall keep blowing to direct the sling-men until they have finished throwing seven times. Then the priests shall blow on the trumpets of withdrawal, and they shall come to take up position by the side of the first formation to fall in at their appointed position. The priests shall blow on the trumpets of summoning, and three skirmishing battalions shall go forth from the intervals and take up position between the lines, with cavalry on their flanks on the right and on the left. The priests shall blow on their trumpets a level note, signals to array for battle, and the columns shall deploy into their proper arrays, each man to his place. When they are drawn up in three arrays, the priests shall blow for them a second fanfare, a low legato note, signals for advance, until they approach the enemy lines and stretch their hands to their weapons; then the priests shall blow on the six trumpets of assault a high pitched intermittent note to direct the fighting, and the Levites and all the band of the horn-blowers shall blow in unison a great battle fanfare to melt the heart of the enemy. At the sound of the fanfare, the battle darts shall go forth to fell the slain. The sound of the horns shall cease, while on the trumpets the priests shall keep on blowing a high-pitched intermittent note so as to direct, signals for fighting, until the skirmishers have hurled into the line seven times. Then the priests shall blow for them the trumpets of withdrawal, a low note alternately level and legato...²⁴²

The War Text goes on to list the exact composition and size of the army. "The whole army, seven formations, twenty eight thousand warriors, and the horsemen, six thousand in

²⁴¹ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 3:1-2.

²⁴² Yadin, *The Scroll*, 8:1-14.

number...²⁴³ This army is described as exceedingly well armed. In addition to infantry and cavalry, they would have the advantages of 'war towers' armed with men and machines to help neutralize enemy archers, break enemy flanking attempts, and lay siege to fortified cities. In one description, The War Text instructs on one particular use for these towers, that being 'to disorganize the enemy:'

Disposition for changing the array of the battle battalions, so as to form up in the shape of a rectangle with towers, enveloping arms with towers, an arc with towers, a flat arc with protruding columns, and wings issuing forth from both sides of the line, to disorganize the enemy...there shall be all round the tower in the three frontal positions three hundred shields.²⁴⁴

The War Text, in manual-like fashion, lists the weapons that each type of soldier would have depending on his battalion and the anticipated battle formations. No warrior was armed with just one type of weapon, but rather each warrior carried a virtual arsenal on his person. In various specified combinations, soldiers were instructed to carry: shield, greave, helmet, cuirass, sword, darts, staff, lance, spear, sling, and bow. As if that were not impressive enough detail, each of these weapons was to be crafted according to specifically indicated requirements of uniform length, material, and adornment. For instance:

All of them shall carry shields of burnished copper, like a face mirror. The shield shall be bordered with a rim of cable work and a pattern of running spiral, work of an artificer, in gold, silver, and copper welded together and precious stones in *ajour* work, work of a smith, cunningly wrought. The length of the shield shall be two cubits and half, and its breadth one cubit and half.²⁴⁵

With each weapon manufactured as an exact replica, this army is portrayed as not only an organized one comprised of disciplined soldiers, but a handsomely sharp one as well.

²⁴³ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9: 4.

²⁴⁴ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9:10-11, 13.

²⁴⁵ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 8:4-7.

Although each weapon's appearance and use is described in a manner that is worthwhile to examine, it is the war-darts that are particularly interesting. Like all of the weapons, the war-darts were to be of the highest quality of make and aesthetic, but additionally, each war-dart was to be inscribed with a battle-cry connoting either God's bellicose intentions toward the enemy, or the fierceness of the 'Sons of Light' in battle. For instance, each soldier's second dart²⁴⁶ would be inscribed with the name 'sparks of blood to fell the slain by the anger of God;' and his third dart would bear the epithet 'Glitter of a sword devouring the sinful slain by the judgment of God.'²⁴⁷

To buttress the infantry and war-towers, the army of the 'Sons of Light' employed superior cavalry. The cavalry, like the infantry, had different instructions for various types of battles and were described in such a way as to connote perfection. In addition to being men of the finest character with the finest training fully armed with the finest weapons, they were to ride only stallions of superior breeding, training, conditioning, experience and temperament. The War Text is not remiss in any detail. For example, when the cavalry enters initial battles that the War Text calls 'skirmishes':

...seven hundred horsemen being on one side and seven hundred on the other...all the cavalry that go forth to battle with the skirmishers shall be on male horses fleet of foot, tender of mouth, long of wind, full in the measure of their years, trained for battle and accustomed to hearing the noises and to the sight of all spectacles. Their riders shall be men of valour for battle, trained in horsemanship, the measure of their age being from thirty to forty-five years...they and their mounts shall be garbed in cuirasses, helmets and greaves, armed with round shields and spear eight cubits long, a bow and arrows and battle darts, all of them ready in their arrays for the day of vengeance, volunteers

²⁴⁶ Every soldier had seven darts which he would hurl at the enemy at the start of each battle.

²⁴⁷ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 6:3

for battle,²⁴⁸ to destroy the enemy in the battle of God and to shed the blood of their guilty slain.²⁴⁹

The War Text's description of the army of the 'Sons of Light' goes beyond their succinct organization and iron discipline, beyond their tactical adroitness and superior ability to wage war because of their innately superior training and weaponry. The army and every soldier in it has the attitude and character of a warrior, that being appropriately aggressive in their desire to attack the enemy, and rightfully ruthless in their eagerness to continue fighting until the enemy is not just subdued, but is dead. The very first line of the War Text sets the overall tone for the tone and the mission of the army: "the first engagement of the Sons of Light shall be *to attack* the lot of the Sons of Darkness..."²⁵⁰

248 "Volunteers of battle": Throughout the War Text, the author stresses that the soldiers must be volunteers and at one point (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 10:5), he quotes Deuteronomy regarding 'turning back the faint-hearted'. However, as Yadin points out (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 304, n. 5), the War Text omits the first three of the four Deuteronomic war exemptions listed in Deuteronomy 20:5-8:

"Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home; lest he die in battle and another marry her...Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades' flag like his." (*Tanach*, Jewish Publication Society, Deut 20:5-8.)

The first three of these causes, the social causes for dismissal, are not listed at all in the War Text. Perhaps just as the Rabbis later (circa 225 C.E. when the Mishnah was codified) would hyper-extend these war-exemptions (war exemptions are expanded upon in Mishnah Sotah 8 and are further extensively discussed in Bavli Sotah 30's-40's) to the point that it would be virtually impossible for anyone not to be exempt, the War Text of Qumran seems to have taken the opposite approach so that the most people possible could be conscripted. It is interesting that the fourth Deuteronomic cause for war-exemption, that being he who is too 'faint-hearted,' which is given the least attention by the Rabbis, is the only cause for dismissal for the Qumran warriors. Perhaps this shows that the author of the War Text was virulently opposed to having cowards in their army because each man was supposed to be 'eager' to fight God's war against the rest of the world. Assuming that Qumran had the same Deuteronomic text as the rabbis, it is interesting that both the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the author of the War Text instituted change in order to fit their agendas, and those changes, reflecting the polarity of each party's agenda, were on opposite polarities. The Rabbis of the Mishnah wanted to demilitarize Judaism and so they expanded the war exemptions so that with their interpretation nobody would have been biblically required to fight; however the author of Qumran was fomenting a military resurgence by describing a time (albeit perhaps one purely fantastical), when everyone of their community would be required to fight...except for cowards. That being said, The War Text does restrict who could fight by excluding women and children from battle. Even men under twenty-five years of age could not fight, although they could participate in a support role.

²⁴⁹ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 6:7-16.

²⁵⁰ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 1:1. Emphasis my own.

The War Text is very clear throughout its length that the army of the 'Sons of Light' is not a defensive army protecting land or lives, but, to the contrary, is an aggressive army that is charged to surge forth into the territory of the enemy²⁵¹ with the sole purpose of eliminating any military force that falls under the auspices of the 'Sons of Darkness':

The whole army, seven formations, twenty eight thousand warriors, and the horsemen, six thousand in number, all these shall take up the pursuit so as to destroy the enemy in the battle of god for an eternal annihilation. The priests shall blow for them the trumpets of pursuit, and the warriors shall spread out against the whole enemy force for a pursuit of annihilation, while the cavalry roll back the enemy at the sides of the field of battle until their extermination.²⁵²

Most telling about the nature of Qumran's War Text is the religious nature of the army and its warriors. They are called the 'Sons of Light' because they are the faithful remnant of the twelve tribes who hold with the proper state of mind, ritual observance and ritual purity. Their army was to be perfectly holy because battle-Priests were to be in command, and each warrior would be ritually pure before entering the battles where, under God-invoking banners, they would use weapons with God's name to battle God's enemies. The War Text specifies that the army would engage in prayer before and after each battle, and defeats on the battlefield should be interpreted as nothing other than God's divine plan towards ultimate victory, and not indicative of any long-term status. For the warriors of the War Text, the exact fulfillment of the Law was an essential condition for success since not only was the outcome of the war on earth to be balanced on a precipice, but the parallel angelic battles being waged in the heavens were likewise tenderly balanced. Only by waging God's war properly, especially in accordance to Torah precepts, would God ultimately tip the balance of

²⁵¹ "In the first year they shall fight against Aram Naharaim, in the second against the sons of Lud, in the third against the remainder of the sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Togar and Masha...in the fourth and the fifth they shall fight against the sons of Arpachshad... in the remaining ten years the war shall spread out against all sons of Japheth in their dwelling places. (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 2:10-11.)

²⁵² Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9:4-7.

alternating victories and defeats by entering the fray in the eleventh hour and in doing so secure victory for God's faithful warriors.

Guided by the Torah's rules of engagement, the War Text is clear that this war would have to be fought not only in accordance with all the laws and statutes of warfare specified in the Law of Moses, but according to all the general rules of war practiced by the nations against whom they would fight. For instance, the 'Sons of Light' would absolutely adhere to the biblical prohibition against fighting on Shabbat²⁵³ or in sabbatical years.²⁵⁴ The War Text does not explain how the army of the 'Sons of Light' would reconcile the proclivity of other armies to continue to wage war on Shabbat, irrespective of what the Torah might decree or that Qumran might wish. This of course begs the question of how 'real' these battle plans were if a condition to enter into the war was that both sides, including the 'Sons of Dark,' would respect the Sabbath as holy and in accordance to the biblical text, refrain from war on Shabbat.

This author is tempted to summarize that the author of the War Text created impossibly high standards as mandatory preconditions for waging war, and in doing so ensured that the 'Sons of Light' could never actually fight. The organization and discipline described, although not impossible, would have been the envy of every army in the world. The unwavering commitment, training, aggressiveness and ruthlessness of each warrior gives this fighting force mythical prowess; and the quality, quantity and uniformity of the arsenal, including towers and horse, point towards not only a superior field presence but an

²⁵³ It is interesting to note that in this case of forbidding war on Shabbat the Qumran community (as it is reflected in the War Text) did not support (in fact Qumran theoretically reversed) the decision of the Maccabean army to ignore the biblical decree out of necessity. This observation is, of course, conditional on whether we can accept that the report in I Maccabees was reflective of the reality that Jews would thereafter fight on Shabbat. As presented earlier in this thesis, the Maccabees decreed that the reality of war outweighed the biblical prohibitions against fighting on Shabbat because the enemy did not similarly 'take Shabbat off' from the field of battle.

²⁵⁴ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 2.9.

unshakable support infrastructure. All of these factors: the twenty-eight thousand warriors and six thousand horses,²⁵⁵ the trumpets and the discipline, the weapons and the attitude: are set against the fact that “the community lacked the wherewithal to wage war” at all.²⁵⁶ Far from a dedicated military force of 34,000 men supported by an intractable infrastructure, likely Qumran was a community of a few hundred.²⁵⁷ Although it is difficult to ascertain the degree, if any, of militarism²⁵⁸ in Qumran, certainly militarism was not the prime concern, or endeavor, of the community. Thus, it is akin to fantasy to think that a small community could swell their ranks with the quantity and quality of men that the War Text mandates as a pre-condition for war.

Numerical and qualitative fantasies aside, although the parallel war to be fought in heaven might be dismissed as theological belief, the practical implications of not reconciling the Torah laws with the realities of war cannot be ignored. That the author of the War Text does not even attempt to reconcile these biblical restrictions with the harsh realities of war indicates that the conditions necessary for the ‘Sons of Light’ to wage war was, in reality, impossible. In other words, the example of fighting on Shabbat is a ‘loophole’ that forbids Qumran to actually engage in fighting since that precondition could never have been met for the simple reason that an enemy would not ‘rest’ on Shabbat, even if Qumran insisted on it.

²⁵⁵ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9: 4.

²⁵⁶ Sollamo, “War and Violence,” 345.

²⁵⁷ According to the testimony of Philo and Josephus, there were about four thousand Essenes-scattered in communities throughout Palestine... (Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 79.) but Dr. Schiffman personally estimates that the Qumran male membership was limited to a few hundred. (Schiffman, *email correspondence*, 23 October, 2007.)

²⁵⁸ However, Lawrence Schiffman (Schiffman, *Personal Interview*, 24 August, 2007.) thinks that likely there was a some sort of real military component to the community, if for no other reason than that ‘they expected the Romans to attack them...and they needed to be ready.’ Opponents to his theory point to the lack of archeological evidence at Qumran that would suggest militarism, such as a cache of weapons. However, aside from the familiar mantra that ‘a lack of evidence is not evidence of absence,’ Professor Schiffman counters this assertion by pointing out that “in 66 C.E. the war starts with the Romans. It is plausible that three out of four of the Qumran guys left to fight, and those were the messianists. It might have been that they took the weapons with them...and this would have left about one of four of the Qumran community in Qumran without a weapons cache...”

Assuming that the impossible conditions precluded Qumran from fighting an actual war, the historian must wonder if the War Text author set the standards impossibly high deliberately in order to avoid military action. If this were the case, then perhaps this fantastical literature was an attempt to theologically and psychologically explain Jewish powerlessness (and perhaps suffering) in a new post-Hasmonean world where the Roman polytheists were the dominant military force; and the Jews, no matter how pious, were at best pawns and puppets to Roman power. If setting the conditions for war at an unobtainable level was a conscious decision by the author of the War Text, then perhaps his intent is reflective of, or a predecessor for, the similar strategy employed by the mishnaic rabbis to demilitarize Judaism and Messianism by making Jewish redemption only available through Torah study and *mitzvot*, Divine initiation and intervention. What is certain is that the plans, numbers and details set forth in the War Text do not seem to reflect any sort of reality in terms of what the Qumran community feasibly might have been capable of implementing.

That being said, although this author is *tempted* to dismiss the War Text as delusional fantasy, regardless of the War Text author's deliberate intention: in his final analysis he can not because of that scroll's propensity for detail. If the War Text were meant to function in some sort of hyperbolic or prophetic way, then why not just do what other such writings do and prophesize with grand, but general, declarations. The War Text does not do make general grand declarations, but rather instructs in painstaking detail. In contrast to a narrative or poetry, the manual-type form and the extensive details take away from any 'enjoyment' that an audience might receive from a genre that flowed. The War Manual seems very much a working document meant to instruct.

Even more to the point, this author would opine that such a working document, meant to instruct (even if fantastic), is a vital first step to any practical action. In other words, the first step to real action is real planning. Even if that detail was only 'real' on a hypothetical level, it is a vital component that reflects at least the possibility of action. This reading of the War Text would suggest that the extensive war described in the War Text is indicative of real intentions "for the planned offensive against the occupying Romans...although perhaps not to reach independence for Judaea, but to bring eternal redemption and victory over the forces of evil."²⁵⁹

It should also be noted that the depth and degree of details attached to the military was not something that came from the author's imagination, but rather seems congruent with practical war manuals thought to exist at the time:

The laws of war and of military organizations as set out in the Torah, tactics of the armies of the world, and the prayers: these obliged him to base himself²⁶⁰ on different sources. For the first subject, he of course relies mainly on Numbers and Deuteronomy...On the other hand, when he came to write on the second subject- the tactics of war, arms, the trumpet signals, etc. - he had to turn to different sources. The number of accounts of battles in the Bible is not large and they could not serve him as a source for a detailed description such as he wished to present to his readers. Also the descriptions of wars in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are very general and could not supply him with the material needed. An analysis of the chapters in question (cps 5-7) and of the terminology employed proves that he used contemporary military sources.²⁶¹ Unfortunately the only sentence in which he mentions the sources from which he drew his knowledge has mostly been eaten away...this sentence gave the name of the source on which he relied: "In that very place, he"²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Bolotnikov, "The Theme," 265-8.

²⁶⁰ Meaning the writer of The War Text.

²⁶¹ Professor Lawrence Schiffman agrees with Yadin's assessment that the Qumran community had practical war manuals. He comments that "the war text was futuristic...although there is evidence that there also were practical war manuals written by the Qumran community that have been lost...but we can assume that they did exist." (Schiffman, *Personal Interview*, 24 August, 2007.)

²⁶² The Priest leading the 'Sons of Light' into battle against the 'Sons of Darkness'.

shall array all the formations, as written *in the Book (?) of War*.²⁶³... This would be a reference to a book of general military rules²⁶⁴ or perhaps to a kind of handbook on military matters for the use of priests.²⁶⁵

It would also seem plausible, if not probable, that an author who could write in such exhaustive tactical and practical detail might likely have direct military experience himself. Whether there were many men with similar experience in Qumran is unknown, but one thing is for sure. In contrast to the later Mishnaic rabbis who demilitarize Judaism by teaching that Messianism would come about not through violence but through prayer and *mitzvo*t, the community of Qumran was quite positive that even if their army was nothing but fantasy, the idealized course of action toward a new world order was one which centered on war and violence in which they were to have an active part. The inclusion of such precise military details indicate that Qumran took themselves seriously as warriors, and wanted to have others (potential recruits) take them seriously as well.

Unfortunately, even in Qumran's final moments the historian can infer little as to just how serious the men of Qumran took themselves as warriors, regardless of the intent or effect of the War Text. "We know little about the final battle and circumstances at Qumran when the Roman legions approached Qumran on their way to Massada. That the Romans destroyed the main building of the community points to at least some skirmishes at Qumran;²⁶⁶ but there is no indication of any of the specifics, or even if the Qumran

²⁶³ Yadin's footnote on 'the book (?) of war': "It is impossible to say whether the missing word was *sefer*, in which case a military handbook of some kind may have been meant- or *serekh*. In the latter case, the reference may actually be to the first part of our scroll. (Yadin, *The Scroll*, n.6.

²⁶⁴ Yadin posits the possibility that perhaps this 'Book of War' is the same one mentioned in *b. Moed Qatan* 25b: "A certain youngster opened the eulogy over Rav Hanuna as follows: A disciple of sages has ascended from Babylonia and with him a Book of Wars."

²⁶⁵ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 16-17.

²⁶⁶ Sollamo, (Sollamo, "War and Violence," 350.) cites Magness' *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, 61, *cf.* 184.

community's 'Sons of Light', successfully engaged the Romans at all.²⁶⁷ Unlike the War Text, the men of Qumran did not alternate defeats with victories over the '*kittim*' and 'Sons of Darkness.' Their first and only battle ended their lives and their community...but perhaps not the spirit of their aspirations. Those would be carried on over the next half century with Jewish revolts and rebellions until they climaxed in the Akiva-backed Bar Kochba revolt.

In conclusion, the War Text is different from other writings of that era for many reasons, but the extensive militaristic detail and practical tactical planning give the War Text a feeling of 'seriousness' that is absent in the biblical narrative accounts and prophetic writings. Writings like the Book of Judith and I Maccabees are narratives, but the War Text is an instruction manual reminiscent of halakhah. As posed in the introduction to this thesis, an interpretation for a halakhah of 'war' seems conspicuously absent from Jewish literature.²⁶⁸ Perhaps the War Text could have been set to function as such: in essence, perhaps it is the 'missing link'.

²⁶⁷ Sollamo (Sollamo, "War and Violence," 350.) does point out that in his Jewish War II, Josephus reports that the Essenes were terribly tortured by the Romans...and he made the Essenes martyrs and heroes of their faith in the Maccabean spirit.

²⁶⁸ Although the rules of Deuteronomy 20 are about war, the subject lacks an extensive interpretation similar to that of how to celebrate Torah holidays, deal with land acquisition, or laws of marital purity.

Chapter Five- Josephus' Account of Massada:

This thesis will briefly examine the Massada story because it generally fits in with the theme of examining a piece of Jewish literature that reflects and refracts certain Jewish self-images as 'warrior' from the era in which it was written and initially read. To partake in this exercise, one must utilize Flavius Josephus'²⁶⁹ account of the Massada event as he reports it in his book, 'The Jewish War.'²⁷⁰ due to the fact that aside from Josephus' account, the story of Massada as we know it is unknown and not mentioned in Jewish literature.²⁷¹

Like all of the pieces of literature presented in this thesis, the historical veracity of Josephus' account is somewhat questionable. Although this chapter will briefly delve into the issue of Josephus' accuracy and embellishment, as well as partake in admitted conjecture as to Josephus' possible motives; this author holds that Josephus' account is consistent with the overall sentiment of this thesis: that being that Josephus' Massada account as literature, regardless of historical veracity, is in itself useful for determining how Jews of an age might have thought of themselves, or wanted to think of themselves, as warrior. In other words, regardless of whether or not the literature accurately recounts historical fact, it is a fact that the literature did exist; and therefore the literature can be mined for what it might tell us about the age in which it was created.

Like all the literature presented in this thesis, Josephus' Massada account demands to be read in its historical context. The Hasmonean Jewish state, weak and overly dependent on

²⁶⁹ Josephus, son of Matthias, was born in 37 C.E., served as a commander for the Jewish forces in the Galilee against the Romans, and eventually became a Roman citizen and notable historian chronicling, amongst other things, the factors and events of Rome's war with the Jews. Once in Rome, his patrons were often the Emperors themselves, and Josephus was given a house, a pension for life and Roman citizenship.

²⁷⁰ A.k.a.: *Bellum Judaeum*.

²⁷¹ Dr. Martin Cohen (Cohen, *Personal Interview*, October 3, 2007) confirms this fact and further explains that the Massada story does not appear in Jewish literature specifically because its narrative of militant Jews defying Rome was counter to the rabbi's effort and desire to acquiesce to Rome and demilitarize Judaism.

their ambitious Roman allies, was annexed as a Roman province to be governed by Roman officials in 6 C.E. One of the Roman puppets who ruled Judaea was King Herod.²⁷² who rightly perceived that he was vulnerable at the hands of his Jewish subjects and so built a desert fortress outside of Jerusalem in case he was forced to flee his capital. This fortress, called Massada, was built to wait out trouble. Herod spared no expense or effort to make sure that a small group of soldiers might defend Massada's walls against a much larger force, and that there would be enough food, water and weapons to last for years.

Although Herod's preparations might allow him to wait out trouble, it was the desert landscape in which Massada was situated that could enable it to actually break a siege. Massada was situated in the middle of a desert above the waves of the Dead Sea; and the local environment, harsh and spartan, would not provide enough food or potable water for an army at siege to survive without a steady infrastructure to transport vast quantities of both over long distances. However, Massada's extensive system of cisterns was designed to catch the rain and thus to enable the fortress enough water to survive a siege that might last years.

Massada's origin and development is described by Josephus:²⁷³

When Herod came to the throne he decided that no place would better repay attention and the strongest fortification, especially in view of the proximity of Arabia; for its situation was most opportune, commanding as it did a view of Arab territory. So he surrounded a large area with walls and towers and founded a city there, from which an ascent led up to the ridge itself. Not content with that he built a wall round the very summit and erected towers at the corners, each

²⁷² In 70 B.C.E. Herod was born in Ashkelon, which at the time was in the region of Idumea. Appointed governor of the Galilee by his father Antipater in 47 B.C.E. Herod crushed a Jewish revolt led by Hezekiah and had the rebels put to death without a trial. Arraigned before the *Sanhedrin*, he fled before they could pass sentence. In 43 B.C.E. Herod was appointed governor of *Coele Syria* by the Roman Senate and three years later Herod was similarly crowned King of Judaea, a land which at the time had recently fallen into the hands of the Parthians. Soon after, in 37 B.C.E., Herod returned to Judaea with Roman military backing and after five months of siege, captured Jerusalem. (Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon, *Historical Atlas*, 50.)

²⁷³ All Josephus quotes are taken from the translation done by G.A. Williamson, *The Jewish War*, Penguin Books, 1970.

ninety feet high. In the middle of this enclosure he built a palace...and he constructed a number of tanks to receive rain-water and maintain a constant supply. He might well have been competing with nature in the hope that the impregnability the place had received from her might be outdone by his own artificial defenses. He further provided an ample store of weapons and engines, and managed to think of everything that could enable the occupants to snap their fingers at the longest siege.²⁷⁴

As the years progressed, Roman relations with certain sizable segments of the Jewish population steadily deteriorated until they exploded into open revolt and war in 66 C.E.²⁷⁵ The Jewish forces were not a cohesively unified force but were rather more along the lines of a loose confederation of warring sects. After being soundly defeated in open battles, the Jewish fighting forces mostly barred themselves inside the besieged Jerusalem walls where they spent as much time fighting each other as they did keeping the Romans out.

According to Josephus, one of the militant Jewish sects at the time was the Sicarii,²⁷⁶ who were extreme not only in their bellicose tactics but also in their theology. At the outbreak of the war with Rome in 66 C.E., the Sicarii captured Massada, but not before they first had slaughtered the Jewish inhabitants of Ein Geddi,²⁷⁷ who were, in their eyes, wicked and doomed to perdition.²⁷⁸ The historian can assume that while the Roman army defeated the organized Jewish forces centered around Jerusalem, these Sicarii waited out the fighting in their Massada fortress. Finally, in late 74 C.E., the campaign commander, Flavius Silva,

²⁷⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, II:264:68.

²⁷⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, II:425:7

²⁷⁶ Aside from Josephus, it is not at all clear that the Sicarii was a true sect, as opposed to a small group loosely, if at all, affiliated.

²⁷⁷ Shaye Cohen reports (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 400.) that it was not only the men of Ein Geddi who the Sicarii slaughtered, but over 700 women and children as well.

²⁷⁸ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 401.

approached Massada with his troops²⁷⁹ and set to work 'mopping up' the tiny remains of Jewish armed resistance.²⁸⁰

Josephus' account claims that the charismatic leader of the Sicarii militants was a certain Eleazar.²⁸¹ Josephus relays that before taking over Massada, Eleazar had experience, and success, in fighting the Romans both in the open field, and under siege. Although the following description of Eleazar precedes Eleazar's command of Massada, it is important for two reasons.

The first is that Josephus seems to hold Eleazar, and his warrior attributes, in high esteem. Eleazar and the other Jewish troops are portrayed as courageous, not afraid to strike first at the enemy, and exceedingly dangerous in battle. Further, Eleazar specifically is portrayed as a charismatic leader who could rally his peers to battle, as bold in his strategy, unafraid to risk, and fierce in his fighting. Caring for his men, Eleazar also was confident enough in his battle prowess that he not only led attacks on fortified positions, but guarded the retreat of his troops with his own sword.

Secondly, and somewhat surprisingly, Josephus does not describe any actual fighting between Jews and Romans in the final Massada showdown; and so this description of Eleazar

²⁷⁹ Mainly the 10th legion.

²⁸⁰ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 401.

²⁸¹ It is interesting to note that Josephus himself claims that while he was fighting the Romans, one of his best fighters was a man named Eleazar, son of Samias, from Saba in the Galilee. Josephus speaks at length and with admiration of Eleazar and his strength in battle: "In this struggle one of the Jews distinguished himself in a way that calls for very special mention. His father's name was Samias, his own Eleazar, and his birthplace Saba in Galilee. This man raised a huge stone and flung it from the wall at the battering-ram with such tremendous force that he broke off its head. Then he leapt down and seizing the head under the noses of the enemy carried it back to the wall without turning a hair. A target now for all his foes and with no armor to protect his body from the rain of missiles, he was pierced by five shafts; but paying not the slightest regard to them he climbed the wall and stood there for all to admire his daring...he charged the ranks of the Tenth Legion, falling upon the Romans with such dash and fury that they broke through their lines and routed all who stood in their path." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, III:232.2) It remains to be seen if this Eleazar is the same one who Josephus later says led the militants at Massada (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:202:6), but if this is in fact the case, then Josephus is claiming to not only know the leader of the Massada Jews, but to have fought alongside of him against the Romans.

as a warrior fighting is that much more emphasized. It is interesting and relevant to Josephus' narrative that despite Eleazar's prowess, ultimately the Roman siege was successful and Eleazar narrowly escaped with his life. In this light, it makes sense that in the future Eleazar, faced with the doom of certain Roman success, despite the best efforts of his accomplished and adroit warriors, might champion other options:

They (Jews under siege by Roman troops) wanted to test their prospects of escaping a siege; so they made vigorous sorties every day and grappled with all whom they encountered; at heavy costs to both sides...Among the besieged was a young man, bold in enterprise and energetic in action, named Eleazar. He had been prominent in the sorties, inciting the majority of defenders to issue forth and interrupt the building of the platforms, and in the encounters doing a great deal of damage to the Romans; for those who dared to sally out with him he smoothed the way to the attack, and made retreat safe by being the last to withdraw.²⁸²

Josephus goes on to recount, with an abundance of specific detail, the final confrontation on Massada between the determined Roman war-machine and Eleazar's warriors. Realizing Massada's strengths, Flavius Silva set his engineers in standard siege-breaking endeavors, mainly cutting off avenues of escape and building ramparts to neutralize Massada's advantage of height and fortified walls. Meanwhile, inside the mountain-top fortress, although the Jews wanted for nothing, they could only wait and watch as the Roman ramps began to take form. Josephus describes that the Jews would banter and taunt the Roman troops while they worked, sometimes with volleys of arrows and stones, sometimes with words, and sometimes 'thumbing their noses' at the Romans by standing on Massada's walls, in full view of the Roman troops, and pouring out valuable water into the sand as if to say, 'we are not in a hurry, and we are very comfortable.'

²⁸² Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:202:6.

Eventually the Roman ramparts reached Massada's outer defenses and the Roman troops attacked the outer walls. In anticipation of this, the men of Massada built an inner wall of wood and pliable material in order to withstand battering rams. However, by the time the Romans were ready to attack it was near dark, and so the Romans burned down the new inner wall, but then retreated with the intent to return with the dawn to defeat the Massada warriors.

It was at this point Eleazar gathered all of the Massada men and with an impassioned speech, advocated for the collective suicide of everyone present, as well as their wives and children. Josephus has Eleazar's speech as long and addressing different subjects, including his belief that the soul lives pleasantly after death, and that despite herculean efforts, Rome was invincible to defeat. Despite being a bit lengthy, a section of Eleazar's speech is worth quoting at length because in it Josephus *vis-a-vi* Eleazar relayed not only his reasoning for mass suicide, but also hinted at how he viewed the 'warrior-qualities' of these Jewish men:

...and now all hope has fled, abandoning us to our fate, let us at once choose death with honor and do the kindest thing we can for ourselves, our wives and children, while it is still possible to show ourselves any kindness. After all, we were born to die, we and those we brought into the world: this even the luckiest must face. But outrage, slavery, and the sight of our wives led away to shame with our children-these are not evils to which man is subject by the laws of nature: men undergo them through their own cowardice, if they have a chance to forestall them by death and will not take it. We were very proud of our courage, so we revolted from Rome: now in the final stages they have offered to spare our lives and we have turned the offer down. Is anyone too blind to see how furious they will be if they take us alive? Pity the young whose bodies are strong enough to survive prolonged torture; pity the not-so-young whose old frames would break under such ill-usage. A man will see his wife violently carried off; he will hear the voice of his child crying, 'father!' when his own hands are fettered. Come! While our hands are free and can hold a sword, let them do a noble service! Let us die unenslaved by our enemies, and leave this world as free men in the company with our

wives and children...let us deny the enemy their hoped for pleasure at our expense, and without more ado leave them to be dumbfounded by our death and awed by our courage.²⁸³

From this passage it is clear that above all else Eleazar (and Josephus) valued a warrior's courage, and the ability to die a free man (rather than as a prisoner or a slave). Since even the Romans would "be awed" by this act of "courage," it would seem that courage to do something radical and drastically adverse to self-preservation, such as mass suicide, was an indication of the true 'mettle' of a superior warrior. Perhaps this was admired because it indicated a certain ruthlessness, or dedication, or willingness to die unfettered despite the highest cost.²⁸⁴

However, this passage, and indeed the entire Massada story, has to be viewed not only by the choice that the men of Massada made, but also by the options that did not choose. Most obvious is that they chose mass suicide over torture and enslavement, as well as over being helpless to protect their wives and children from the horrible fates that surely awaited them. If the Massada tale is any indication of Josephus' view of Jewish warriors, then the reader can conclude that for the Jewish warrior, there were some things that were worse than death.

²⁸³ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:390:45.

²⁸⁴ In his comprehensive comparative study, Shaye Cohen shows that in the Second Temple Period mass suicide as an alternative to enslavement was not rare, or limited to any particular culture. "Massada was not unique. Ancient history provides many examples of a besieged city or fortress whose inhabitants (men, women, and children) preferred death to surrender or capture." (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 386.) Cohen lists 16 such historical narratives that resemble Josephus' Massada tale. Further, Cohen states that: "collective suicide was the action of last resort...for Greeks, Romans and the townspeople of Asia Minor whose object was to avoid capture not only by the Romans but also by Persians, Greeks, and Carthaginians." (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 390.) Cohen also demonstrates that many of Josephus' contemporary historian-peers similarly lionized a group's choice for mass suicide thus reflecting a general Roman admiration for such men who could make, and implement, such a hard decision: "Our corpus shows that ancient historians generally approved of collective suicide...for instance, Polybius and his followers clearly admire the desperate resolution of the Phocians, while Appian has the Roman consul admire the 'virtue' or 'prowess' of the Astapaeans...who as 'lovers of liberty, could not tolerate slavery.'" (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 392.) This author would posit that Cohen's demonstration of the commonality of mass suicide adds probability to the veracity of Josephus' account.

What is harder to understand is why the men of Massada did not choose to fight to their deaths,²⁸⁵ even if death was certain. Whether by suicide or battle, both avenues have identical results. One would think that at least by fighting the Romans, the Jewish warrior could die a warrior's death. However, by Josephus' account, since these warriors chose suicide over battle it would seem that by their standards, the more 'manly' thing to do was to have the resolve to kill one's comrades, family and finally self in order to die freely, on their own terms. This act is one of ultimate defiance. Perhaps then this is the ultimate warrior quality, for Josephus at least, that a warrior could determine the time and manner of his own death.

Keeping in mind that the Josephus account is the only written account available of the Massada event, at this point it might be appropriate to address how accurately Josephus' account reflects what really happened on Massada, or if the Massada event ever happened at all. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the veracity of Josephus' account, although important in other contexts, has no bearing on this thesis' assumption that the factual presence of a piece of literature is grounds enough to utilize it as an avenue for determining perceived Jewish self-identity. However, determining a degree of veracity might allow the historian insight into the Josephus' motivations to expand his narrative with any creative exaggerations.

When judging the veracity of Josephus' account, one must remember a few things. First, Josephus admits that he was not at Massada, and so the reader must assume that some of his account is permitted through creative license. For instance, it is unreasonable to condemn Josephus' conception of Eleazar's speech because it is obviously not a rendition verbatim. Second, like all the historians of his day, Josephus was permitted to insert creative rhetoric in

²⁸⁵ Perhaps after killing their families first to humanely save them from their fates.

the absence of fact; and even to exaggerate in order to enhance the narrative's effectiveness to entertain.²⁸⁶

In light of that caveat, based on external collaborating evidence, (mostly archeological discovery from the Massada site in Israel and data from existent external Roman imperial commentaries),²⁸⁷ scholars²⁸⁸ agree that in matters of facts, figures, distances, measurements and formations, Josephus accounted with accuracy.²⁸⁹ It is unclear whether this accuracy can be attributed to first hand knowledge, second hand accounts, or the use of the Roman imperial records (which because of his patrons would have been at his disposal). This is not to say that Josephus' accuracy was always total. To the contrary, even those scholars who hold by Josephus' general veracity admit that (in areas that do not describe facts, figures, distances, measurements and formation) his "inaccuracies range from vagueness to blatant exaggeration."²⁹⁰ However, on the other extreme of the spectrum, even those critics who charge Josephus' Massada account as being a "farrago of fiction, conjecture, and error"²⁹¹ must be clearly qualified in their academic context: for this type of criticism is shouted not to challenge the veracity of the general narrated event, but merely the absoluteness of the details. For instance, even Shaye Cohen who calls Josephus's account a "farrago of fiction, conjecture, and error" admits that:

²⁸⁶ "Josephus needs no apology for these inventions and embellishments since practically all the historians of antiquity did such things." (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 397.)

²⁸⁷ "Undoubtedly, the source of much of Josephus' accurate data was the Roman imperial commentaries, the *hypomnemata*, specifically mentioned by him three times in his works. (Broshi, "The Credibility," 381.) Josephus relied on commentaries dating not only from the period of the Great War but also on later commentaries found by him in the imperial archives." (Broshi, "The Credibility," 383.)

²⁸⁸ This author reaches this conclusion by comparing scholars on opposite sides of the spectrum regarding their opinion of Josephus' veracity. For instance, both Magen Broshi and Shaye Cohen, who seem to agree on little else, both concur that at least in these areas, Josephus is credible.

²⁸⁹ For instance, Josephus accurately provided the correct distances between geographical points, the measurements of the Massada fortifications and even, upon renewed scholarship, the relative accuracy of this population estimates. (Broshi, *The Credibility*, 380-381.)

²⁹⁰ Broshi, "The Credibility," 383.

²⁹¹ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 399.

We may readily believe that the Josephan story has a basis in fact. First, it is plausible. Many Jews committed suicide during the crucial moments of the war in 66-70, and, as we have seen above, many non-Jews also committed suicide rather than face their enemies.²⁹²

To paraphrase Cohen's analysis of how the Massada event 'really happened' *vis-a-vis* Josephus' account, Cohen thinks that Josephus exaggerated in that *not all* of the Massada residents committed suicide, or burned their buildings, *exactly* as Josephus says. Rather, Cohen's admitted conjecture of the events has some of the Jews slaying their families and setting the public buildings on fire: while others of the Sicarii fought to the death or attempted to hide or escape. He concludes that upon breaching Massada's defenses, the Romans were in no mood to take prisoners and massacred all whom they found.²⁹³ The point being that despite condemning words, even Josephus' most harsh critics admit that the bulk of what he says is certainly plausible, they just take issue with some of the details.

Another way to look at the plausibility of Josephus' account is to consider why Josephus would make up something that was not true if his account, and credibility, could be invalidated by the myriad of Roman soldiers involved, including his patron himself, Flavius Silva. The answer is that Josephus would not and could not. Josephus, albeit permitted with some creative license, had to write within the confines of what were considered the basic facts and conjectures of the Roman victors at Massada. It is precisely because his account had to be within the realm of 'truth' that Josephus could not (and did not) have the Sicarii engaging in some desperate fight...because everyone who was at Massada knew that such a battle never occurred.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Cohen, "Massada Literary," 399.

²⁹³ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 403.

²⁹⁴ Since Josephus is the only source for what happened at Massada, and was the official Roman historian on the subject as empowered by the Roman Emperors, his account is 'the' official Roman account of all that occurred.

Additionally, Josephus' motivations for recording the Massada event in the way that he does must be understood in the context of his personal situation as well as his intended audience. Although Josephus claimed to be from a priestly family which could proudly trace its pedigree to the early Hasmoneans, and he claimed to have led Jewish forces against the Romans in the Galilee, Josephus clearly was perceived by some Jews in his own day as a traitor. Although after the war Titus gave Josephus an estate outside of Jerusalem, Josephus thought it prudent to decamp for good to Rome.²⁹⁵ Likely he feared for his very life by the Jews of Judaea who were bitter at his changed allegiance, and who sought to make an example of Josephus by broadcasting what would happen to traitorous Jews. In addition to the accusations by his fellow Jews, the fact that Josephus never returned to Judaea likely indicates that he feared for his life.²⁹⁶

Josephus wrote about the Jews not necessarily because he loved the Jews but because 'the Jews' were the only thing on which he was an expert and was considered worthwhile to the Romans. Remember, in 'The Jewish War,' Josephus is not just writing about the Jews, but of their war with Rome and specifically, the Jewish defeat at the hands of the very men who later become his patrons. 'The Jewish War' was published because it made the Roman Emperors look good. And the stronger the Jewish warriors were made to look, the better their Roman victors would appear. That being said, Jewish warrior prowess and making the Romans look good are not necessarily mutually exclusive endeavors. However, despite attractive political theories, it is very difficult to be certain of Josephus' motivation for portraying the Jewish warrior as positively as he did.

²⁹⁵ Once in Rome, Josephus was given the very house in which Vespasian had lived as a private citizen, a pension for life, and Roman citizenship. Later, Vespasian gave him a second large estate in Judaea, and Domitian exempted his property from the land-tax payable by all provincials, a highly coveted honor. (Smallwood, "Introduction," 13.)

²⁹⁶ Smallwood, "Introduction," 13.

The one clue that might give some hint as to Josephus' reasons for his portrayal of the Jewish warrior is his intended readership. Aside from the commission to be part of the official Roman annals, it seems that Josephus' initial intended audience was other Jews! In his introduction to *The Jewish War*, Josephus informed his readers that he originally wrote his account in Aramaic "for circulation among the Jews of the eastern Diaspora-those living beyond the Euphrates, under Parthian rule."²⁹⁷ Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the region, but would have prevented most of the Roman Empire from reading what he wrote.

What then, was Josephus hoping to accomplish? Certainly there seems to be an element of self-affirmation and self-congratulation in showing the mettle of the Jewish 'race' of which he was a member. Indeed, Josephus makes the Jews out to be worthy adversaries who 'fought the good fight' but eventually lost to the superior Romans. In other words, the military prowess of the Jew did not matter because the Romans were, and always would be, better.²⁹⁸ If anything, Josephus seems to write as a cautionary tale for Jews to know that when they are outclassed and beaten by their betters, they need to accommodate and acquiesce to the Romans. In doing so, like Josephus himself, Jews would receive the benefits of Roman largess and would be better off with Rome as their proverbial patrons. Through the Massada account, Josephus alludes to the fact that the futile alternatives of fighting to the bitter end or nobly committing suicide still results in death rather than the security of self governance and prosperity: all of which were to be had under Roman authority.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ "and later translated it into Greek in order to make it accessible to the peoples of the Roman Empire." Smallwood, "Introduction," 14.)

²⁹⁸ In the seven years of war, from 66 C.E. to the fall of Massada in 73 C.E., from the beginning the Romans had far greater forces: three legions reinforced with auxiliaries, approximately sixty thousand well-trained professional soldiers. (Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon, *A Historical Atlas*, 52)

²⁹⁹ Although Massada was the final stronghold of the Jews and is thus is the climax of *The Jewish War*, this tension between suicide and dying in battle is one that is a consistent theme throughout the book. Although this author has not done extensive research to prove this point, certainly Josephus himself cogently argues against

To some readers, Josephus' suggestions might seem pusillanimous; but to others they might seem starkly practical and even parallel to what some of the rabbis in fact would adhere to, starting with Yochanan ben Zakai and evolving into a demilitarized Judaism. Interestingly, and perhaps deliberately, both Josephus³⁰⁰ and Yochanan ben Zakai³⁰¹ claim to have escaped Roman siege³⁰² only to be given an audience with Vespasian whom they prophesize would become Emperor. Soon after, when this prediction became reality,³⁰³ both were given privileges worthy of his prophesy. For Josephus, it was access to the highest echelons of Roman society, a powerful patron, and entrée into the publishing world. For Yochanan ben Zakai, it was permission to relocate to Yavneh in order to ensure Judaism's survival. In both cases, each man submitted to the physical military superiority of Rome in order to survive and succeed.

Whether taken as a metaphor or merely as an example reflective of the reality, each man sacrificed his pride as 'warrior' in order to obtain what he perceived as a higher goal. But as we will see in the next chapter, despite the Roman victories in the war of 66 C.E., the submissive attitude of Josephus and the rabbis of Yavneh were not uniformly adhered to, nor was it a forgone conclusion. The spirit of the biblical warriors, the Maccabees, Judith and the 'Sons of Light' was a part of the collective Jewish psyche³⁰⁴ and could not easily be subverted. Jews were a people who had succeeded in war, and despite Roman defeats, that

suicide (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, III:382:17) when the remnants of his Galilean troops were trapped in the cave and considering suicide as a viable option.

³⁰⁰ Josephus claims to have been brought out of a cave in the Galilee where his men had committed suicide, and marched by Nicanor to Vespasian. (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, III:383:19.)

³⁰¹ Yochanan ben Zakai's account is recorded in *b. Gittin* 55b-57b

³⁰² Josephus from a cave in Jotapata and Yochanan ben Zakai from Jerusalem in a coffin.

³⁰³ "In July of 69 C.E. by which time Nero had been dethroned and his two short-lived successors had met equally inglorious ends." (Smallwood, "Introduction," 11.)

³⁰⁴ Although it is difficult to establish that because Jewish warrior-identity exists within a text that this reflects a warrior psyche within the society, minimally it is evidence that the warrior psyche existed at least within one particular segment of the Jewish society.

warrior self-identity would not be bleached out easily for any reason, whether convenience, luxury, or even the necessity of survival.

Chapter Six- The Diaspora and Bar Kochba Revolts:

In the 60 years after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), the warrior self-identity of the Jewish people was not only alive, but boiling over. Starting with a series of armed-revolts in the Diaspora, and ending with the harsh finality of Bar Kochba's revolt in Judaea, the Jewish warrior 'spirit' brought open war against Rome and in certain cases, their Gentile neighbors. The brutal Roman defeat of the Jews in Judaea can not be emphasized enough, as it is the pivotal historical event that led to, or forced, a major paradigm shift within the national Jewish psyche. With Bar Kochba's defeat at Betar (135 C.E.),³⁰⁵ Jews' self-identity as warrior was drastically shifted to one that was war-averse and assimilationist.

Up until this point, previous chapters of this thesis have centered on Jewish literature from the Second Temple Period:³⁰⁶ however, this chapter will stray from this formula in that it will center around the historical events of Jewish armed revolt rather than focus exclusively on any one piece of contemporary Jewish literature³⁰⁷ because, for various reasons which will be discussed in this chapter, such a singular work is not known to exist. In this way, this chapter is less formal coverage of specific literature than an 'interlude.' However, as this chapter will explain, the Jewish armed revolts that followed the destruction of the Second Temple, and the ultimate consequences at the hands of the Roman military machine were absolutely vital in the way that they affected the Jewish psyche, Judaism, and the Jewish people from that point forward. Thus, chapter six of this thesis might be regarded as a 'vital

³⁰⁵ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 122.

³⁰⁶ By definition, the events of this chapter happen after the Second Temple was destroyed, and thus fall outside of the scope of what is 'Second Temple.' Nonetheless, a contemporary Jewish source or piece of literature is lacking.

³⁰⁷ However, for lack of better options, this chapter will utilize later Jewish and non-Jewish sources to a certain degree.

interlude' which explains "the tensions between Jewish perceptions or ideologies of power and the political realities of Jewish life."³⁰⁸

However, Chapter Six: 'the Bar Kochba revolt,' is like the previous chapters in that it is less important for the purposes of this thesis to unravel what is 'true' and historically 'factual,' than it is to focus on how the events as they were recorded and understood by the Jewish people might have reflected and refracted Jewish self-identity as warrior. This chapter will look at the historical context, possible causes, initial success and ultimate defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt. Additionally, it will delve into Bar Kochba as a historic and literary figure. All of this helps 'shed light' on how Jews were viewed and viewed themselves as warrior at the time.

Finally, this chapter will examine how Rabbi Akiva's alleged allegiance with Bar Kochba's forces occurred, and how it was described by the Talmudic tradents after their stunning defeat. This section will show how the tradents were initially split in their support for Bar Kochba, but that after the revolt was quashed the rabbinic authority railed against him, his militarism, and any sort of messianic aspirations to be achieved through violence. In contrast to previous centuries, from this point on Jewish nationalism and Messianism was to be pursued non-violently through prayer and *mitzvot*, and specifically not through the lens of armed struggle.

Barely forty years after The Great Revolt, Jews throughout the Roman Empire rose up in armed rebellion. These revolts occurred in prominent Jewish communities in Libya,³⁰⁹ Egypt,³¹⁰ Cyprus,³¹¹ and Syria (Mesopotamia)³¹² at roughly the same time (115-117 C.E.)³¹³

³⁰⁸ Biale, *Power and Powerlessness*, ix.

³⁰⁹ Cyrene or 'Cyrnaica.'

³¹⁰ Alexandria.

³¹¹ Salamis.

and so these revolts together have been dubbed ‘The Diaspora Revolt.’ Although it is likely that each local conflict had specific local causes,³¹⁴ there is significant evidence to suggest that the Jewish warriors from each of these communities coordinated and cooperated with one another³¹⁵ toward a common goal and against a common enemy

The Diaspora Revolt erupted during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan³¹⁶ in 115 C.E. while Trajan was occupied in Syria with war against Parthia.³¹⁷ “This spasmodic revolt started in AD 115 in Cyrenaica (Libya), where the Jews...fought against the local population so fiercely that eventually the Romans were compelled to intervene. At the same time, or shortly thereafter, the Jews of Egypt rose too; Cyprus followed as a battle scene, and so did Mesopotamia with a general revolt in 116.”³¹⁸ The causes for the various Diaspora Jewish uprisings are unknown, but the speculative consensus amongst various historians seems to be that likely the causes were an amalgamation of Jewish national “messianic yearnings”³¹⁹ and the “local factors of social, economical, political, and ideological competition...between Jews and Greeks.”³²⁰ Additionally, these four Jewish communities provided fertile ground for the surviving Judean veterans of the Great Revolt, and it stands to reason that they brought with them to these Diaspora communities not only their battle-field experience, but their philosophy³²¹ and leadership, which took root and spread.³²²

³¹² Antioch

³¹³ Schiffman, *From Text*, 172.

³¹⁴ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 17; Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 93.

³¹⁵ Sper, *The Future*, 56; Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 94.

³¹⁶ 98-117 C.E.

³¹⁷ Sper, *The Future*, 55.

³¹⁸ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 17.

³¹⁹ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 17.

³²⁰ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 93.

³²¹ Perhaps what Josephus refers to as the ‘fourth philosophy’ lionized by the Zealots.

³²² Sper, *The Future*, 56.

The Libyan uprising had its roots back in 73 C.E., when mass armed resistance ended with the deaths and confiscation of property of a large number of wealthy Jews.³²³ Now, two generations later, once again the Jews of Libya rose up against their Greek and Roman neighbors, but this time under the leadership of a certain Jewish 'King Andreas'.³²⁴ According to Dio's account,³²⁵ the Jews successfully attacked and destroyed local Cyrenean pagan temples, statues of gods, and centers of Greek civic life with shockingly violent and cruel behavior. After initial victory over local garrisons, the Jews tried to destroy the road between Cyrene and its port, Apollonia; in order to disrupt the anticipated Roman reinforcements set to arrive by sea

Within a few months, in October of 115 C.E., the Jews of Egypt also rose up against their non-Jewish neighbors in a widespread armed revolt that spread through large sections of the country. Like their Jewish brethren in Libya, they too targeted pagan temples and civic centers.³²⁶ This antagonism between the Egyptian Jews and their gentile neighbors went back at least to the third century B.C.E., but in recent generations violent exchanges along ethnic lines had grown both in frequency and intensity. Under the Emperor Claudius (41-54 CE) this longstanding feud between the Jews and Greeks in Alexandria had erupted into open

³²³ Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 94.

³²⁴ According to Ben Zeev, (Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 94), the Roman historian Dio Cassius, (*Ziphilinus* 68:32.1) reports that this king's name was "Andreas", but according to the ancient historian Eusebius, his name was "Lukas." Ben Zeev explains this as "either two different persons or one person with two names, a common practice at the time." This author thinks it likely the latter.

³²⁵ "The most important and extensive of the classical sources for the Second Revolt are the writings of *Dio Cassius*, the third-century historian, in his *Roman History*, although his passage dealing with our subject actually comes to us only in an abbreviated form through the hands of *Ziphilinus*, an eleventh-century monk...but Dio does not mention the leader of the Jews nor the fact that he had been successful; nor does he mention the duration of the war. In fact, even the cause of the revolt as described by Dio is contradicted by other historians. (Dio says that Jews could not tolerate foreign races settling in their city and foreign religious rights being planted there)" (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 19.) As a source, although certainly imperfect, Peter Schafer in his summation of Bar-Kochba scholars' work from the 2001 Princeton University conference titled, 'Bar Kochba Reconsidered' says: "Dio Cassius' report has become the major trustworthy literary source of the uprising." (Schafer, "Preface," XX).

³²⁶ Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 96.

fighting.³²⁷ and in October of the year 115 “armed attacks had been perpetrated by Greeks against Jews, the last of which may definitely be considered a direct cause of the Jewish uprising.”³²⁸ As the Jewish revolt in Egypt continued on, the lines were clearly drawn with the Egyptian Greeks reinforced by both the Roman military and the Egyptian peasants,³²⁹ while the Jews of Alexandria were reinforced by Jews from Syria³³⁰ and Libya. Specifically, “Eusebius states that the Jews of Libya acted in co-operation with the Jews of Egypt and specifically mentions a military alliance adding that at a certain stage the Jews of Libya passed into Egypt.”³³¹ Dio Cassius also reports³³² that having annihilated their pagan adversaries in Libya, the Libyan Jews marched east to support the Jews of Egypt in late 115 or early 116 C.E.³³³

At roughly the same time, the Jews of Cyprus, led by a man named Artemion, rose up against their pagan neighbors and destroyed the city of Salamis. The full extent of the loss of life is unclear, although from the records it is clear that the local gentile inhabitants of Cyprus were unable to contend with the armed Jewish forces that remained victorious until the Roman military legions under Marcus Turbo arrived to defeat them. “Dio states that in Cyprus ‘two hundred and forty thousand (gentiles) perished’ whereas Orosius writes that ‘all the Greek inhabitants of Salamis were killed’”³³⁴

In the Jewish uprisings of the Diaspora revolt, the last to begin was in Syria towards the end of 116 C.E. The details of the causes of this revolt and the resulting damages are unclear, but according to the sixth century chronicler Malalas, “thirty thousand Jews rushed

³²⁷ Sper, *The Future*, 56: quoting the 6th century chronicler Malalas.

³²⁸ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

³²⁹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

³³⁰ Sper, *The Future*, 56.

³³¹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 94.

³³² Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Book LXVIII: 32:2.

³³³ Sper, *The Future*, 57.

³³⁴ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

up from Tiberius to support their brethren in Antioch.”³³⁵ What is clear from Roman records is that the Jewish Revolt in Syria was effective enough so that Trajan was forced to call up one of his best generals, Lusius Quietus, to quell the Jewish revolt.

The Roman reaction to the Diaspora Revolt was forceful and thorough. It is clear that they took the Jewish uprisings very seriously as they named the revolt a *‘tumultus’* indicating they viewed it as an emergency graver than war.³³⁶ In response, Trajan sent in legions of land and sea forces,³³⁷ including cavalry,³³⁸ led by top generals on the side of the Greeks. Marco Turbo, one of Trajan’s best, was in command of the Libyan, Egyptian and Cypriot fronts. He arrived in Libya and crushed the Jewish uprising before the autumn of 117.³³⁹

The harsh and thorough character of Turbo’s campaign against these Jewish revolts is described by Appian,³⁴⁰ who states that in his day, Trajan ‘exterminated’ the Jewish race in Egypt.”³⁴¹ Additionally, the Jerusalem Talmud describes the destruction of the great synagogue of Alexandrian, and the subsequent despair of the Egyptian Jewry:³⁴²

תני אמר רבי יודה כל שלא ראה דיפלי איסטב' של אכסנדריאה לא ראה כבוד ישר'
מימיו כמין בסילקי גדולה היה ואסטיו לפנים מסטיו היתה פעמים היו בה כפלים
כיוצאי מצרים ושבעים קתידראות של זהב היו שם מקובעות אבנים טובות
ומרגליות כנגד שבעים זקנים וכל אחת ואחת היתה עומדת בעשרים וחמש ריבוא
דינרי...ומי החריבה טרוגיינוס הרשע.

It was taught that R. Judah said, ‘Whoever has never seen the double-colonnade (the basilica-synagogue) of Alexandria has never seen

³³⁵ Alon, *The Jews* (trans. G. Levi), 363.

³³⁶ Sper, *The Future*, 56.

³³⁷ “The forces that accompanied Marcus Turbo likely were the *legio XXII Deiotariana* and the *legio III Cyrenaica*, the *cohes I Ulpia Afrorum equitus* and the *cohes I Augusta praetorian Luistanorum equitata*, the latter of which suffered heavy losses in Egypt” during the early summer of 117. (Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.)

³³⁸ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.

³³⁹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.

³⁴⁰ c. 95-165 CE.

³⁴¹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.

³⁴² *j. Sukkah*, 5:1,55b.

Israel's glory in his entire life. It was a kind of large basilica, with one colonnade inside another. Sometimes there were twice as many people there as those who went forth from Egypt. Now there were seventy-one golden thrones set up there, one for each of the seventy-one elders, each one worth twenty-five talents of gold ...and who destroyed it all? It was the evil Trajan.³⁴³

What is certain is that after Turbo's sublimation of the Jewish revolts in Egypt and Libya in 117 C.E., these two communities "almost disappear from the sources. In Egypt, the land that had belonged to the Jews was confiscated by the Roman government, and a consequence of the revolt may have been the abolition of the Jewish court in Alexandria."³⁴⁴

Similarly in Cyprus, after Turbo's Roman military machine subdued the Jewish rebellion, scholars have found no evidence of a Jewish presence on the island until the fourth century, which may give serious credence to Dio's assertion³⁴⁵ that after the revolt "no Jew may set foot on that island, and even if one of them is driven upon the shores by a storm he is put to death."³⁴⁶

To deal with the Jewish uprising in Syria,³⁴⁷ Trajan sent his general Lucius Quietus, who was ferocious in putting down the Mesopotamian revolt.³⁴⁸ As a reward for his leadership, Trajan rewarded Quietus with the governorship of Palestine. However, it seems as though quashing the Jewish revolt of Syria was not as quick or clean as they would have liked, for when Hadrian³⁴⁹ became emperor in 117 C.E. he had to spend his first year mopping up the last of the Syrian Jewish rebels.³⁵⁰

³⁴³ Neusner, tr. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Sukkah*, 117.

³⁴⁴ Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 97.

³⁴⁵ Dio, *Roman History*, book 68.32.3.

³⁴⁶ Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 97.

³⁴⁷ Syria is sometimes referred to as 'Mesopotamia.'

³⁴⁸ Thus, the Diaspora Revolt is often referred to as 'the war of Quietus' in Rabbinic texts.

³⁴⁹ 76-138 C.E.

³⁵⁰ Schiffman, *From Text*, 172.

It is a fact that four Jewish communities (Libya, Egypt, Cyprus, Syria) engage in armed revolt at roughly the same time (115-117). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of contemporary sources so we may never know what really happened. However, minimally, this fact would indicate that they were mutually influenced and encouraged by one another. This author would posit that from the timing and reports of Jewish troops aiding other Jewish communities, it is reasonable to assert that it is likely that there was a degree of military coordination. This would indicate that common bonds, causes, enemies and goals were shared amongst the Diaspora Jewish communities. Even more so, the fact that four Jewish communities rose in armed revolt against their gentile neighbors and further engaged in war, regardless of success, against the Roman military strongly points to a very real Jewish self-identity as warrior. These Jews not only thought of themselves as warriors, but were confident enough in that identity to engage in coordinated violence against their gentile neighbor. Surely the community leaders understood that armed revolt against the local governments would result in eventual confrontation with the Roman military.

This author would suggest that these Diaspora Jewish communities were very aware of the eventuality, and were prepared for it. Perhaps they thought that their example would empower other revolts, Jewish and non-Jewish, throughout the Roman empire which in turn would help their cause and ultimate success. After all, in some ways this was the case with the original Libyan Jewish revolt's initial success empowering similar action in Egypt, Cyprus and Syria. This 'domino effect' would explain the Roman reaction of dubbing the Diaspora Revolt as '*tumultus*' and sending seasoned veterans like Turbo and Quietus with crack Roman troops.

These Jews were more than 'ready' to engage, they engaged! To emphasize the point, think about the Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora since 117 C.E., and even the Diaspora communities throughout the world today. Can we even imagine the Jews of France, or Argentina, or America ever having the 'readiness,' much less the 'resolve,' to rise up in a coordinated armed revolt no matter what their grievances? Even if we can imagine such a situation, history provides us with the resounding answer of 'no:' and the primary reason is that unlike the Jews of 115 C.E., Diaspora Jews ever after have not thought of themselves as warriors. Of course, the eras hold tremendous differences in social realities, but those Jews of 115 C.E. were closer to the warrior mentality of the Great Revolt, the pride of the Hasmonean dynasty, the Maccabean victories, and the surfeit of Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period which reflected and reinforced the Jewish self-identity as warrior. But even as the Diaspora Revolt showed Jews the highs of initial military success and the lows of military defeat, both in terms of Jewish life and punitive consequences, the Diaspora Revolt was perhaps merely a warm-up for the incredible Jewish uprising, and then ultimate stunning defeat of Bar Kochba at the hands of the Romans only 15 years later.

The Bar Kochba Revolt, named for its leader, began in the summer of 132 C.E. and ended in the summer of 135 C.E.³⁵¹ This Jewish revolt against the Romans in Judaea was the apex and final Jewish uprising against Roman rule in Palestine,³⁵² after which the Jews would not engage in armed struggle for an independent homeland for almost two millennia.³⁵³ For various reasons that will be detailed later in this chapter, the Jews under Bar Kochba were initially very successful defeating first the local Judaeans garrisons and then the Syrian legions. Ultimately, Hadrian was forced to deal with Judaea by sending in multiple legions

³⁵¹ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 112, 122.

³⁵² Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 105.

³⁵³ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 94.

and his top general, Julius Severus, all the way from Britain. Even against these overwhelming forces, the Judaeans still managed to inflict huge losses upon the Romans. The Bar Kochba revolt ended in a dramatic fashion with the Jews taking their last stand at the Judaeans fortress of Betar. Using similar techniques as they had in breaching Massada, the Romans sacked Betar and crushed the Jewish rebellion with a ferocity that echoed still in Jewish literature for hundreds of years. Once the Jewish fighting forces were destroyed, the emperor Hadrian³⁵⁴ enacted vicious anti-Jewish legislation designed both to punish the Jews, and to keep the Roman Empire from having to spend money or send troops against the warrior Jews ever again.

One of the most interesting and surprising things about the Bar Kochba war was the tremendously high stakes for both the Jews and the Romans. Readings of the Bar Kochba revolt range from minimalist to maximalist. The minimalist view is that since Rome was spread thin over a large empire, and the Parthians posturing on the eastern borders were poised to invade at the first sign of Roman weakness, the Jewish revolt had to be crushed quickly and harshly.³⁵⁵ In terms of geography, although Judaea was small, it cut the Roman Empire in two: thus losing it would seriously impair Roman contiguity. Hadrian therefore had no choice but to keep Judaea from revolution at all costs.³⁵⁶ Additionally, Rome feared the 'domino effect' that a successful revolt (revolution) might have on the rest of the subjugated peoples within the Roman Empire. In other words, failure to quell the Jewish revolt in Judaea would mean more than losing one province, but rather would likely mean that Rome would have to fight on multiple fronts throughout their empire. Thus, the overwhelming force employed by Hadrian, plus the punitive measures against the Judaeans

³⁵⁴ Hadrian reigned 117-138 C.E.

³⁵⁵ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 96.

³⁵⁶ Sper, *The Future*, 94.

Jews following their defeat were designed not to only deal with the "Jewish problem," but also to serve as an example for any other would-be revolutionists throughout the Roman empire.

The maximalist view is that the Romans dealt with the Jews of Judaea not as a common uprising, but as a potential rival for world power:

To better understand the causes of this great struggle it is necessary to know that Rome was especially harsh with nations viewed as potential rivals for world power specifically: Greece, Carthage and Judaea. Only these nations had, in Roman eyes, the demographic weight, technical sophistication, military history, and culture capable of rivaling that of Rome in the ancient western world.

For over a century Rome fought a series of wars against Carthage, known as the Punic wars, before she was finally able to establish mastery over the western Mediterranean. Rome did not merely subjugate Carthage as she would a smaller state. In 146 B.C.E Rome destroyed Carthage, mother city of her rival, leaving not one stone standing, and then spread salt on the ground where the city had stood, turning it into a desert. At this point, Carthage disappears from history.³⁵⁷ (Thus) the Roman treatment ...of Judaea clearly demonstrates that this policy did not reflect any particular Roman antipathy towards Judaism as has often been assumed, nor was it a response to any particular behavior on the part of the Jews. Rather, this was standard Roman imperial policy for dealing with a potential rival for world power, a policy different from that applied to smaller states with less potential.³⁵⁸

Whether the revolt is closer to the maximalist or minimalist view in terms of its importance to the Roman Empire, part of what makes the Bar Kochba revolt so hard to analyze and to understand is the conspicuous dearth of primary sources. The Bar Kochba Revolt lacked a Josephus Flavius to describe the events of the war, and thus, despite its tremendous importance, very little is known of it.³⁵⁹ Case in point is that so little is known

³⁵⁷ Sper, *The Future*, 64-65.

³⁵⁸ Sper, *The Future*, 66.

³⁵⁹ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 18.

about the war that even the very name of the leader of the revolt, Bar Kochba, could not be ascertained until the Yadin discoveries in the 1950's:

Its details remain shrouded in mystery. With no historical treatise to provide a systematic account of the revolt and no lost work (Roman or Jewish) describing it, any scholarly attempt to reconstruct its course inevitably confronts the stumbling block of reliance on sources representing varying objectives, reliability and dates, leaving many seminal issues unresolved. Continuing to be debated are the revolt's direct causes, the geographical extent of Bar Kochba's regime and whether it included Jerusalem, and the magnitude of the Roman reaction.³⁶⁰

More importantly, as it relates to this thesis, is the theory that the conspicuous dearth of primary sources, or even secondary literature (Jewish or Roman) can only be explained as deliberate:

Both sides in the conflict were not particularly interested in recording the details of the war for posterity. The Romans did not like to harp on defeat. Even though they ultimately achieved domination over the Jewish rebels through sheer force of numbers, the cost was almost debilitatingly high. The Jewish sages, on the other hand, did not want to encourage further suicidal attacks against the military might of Rome, fearing that the results might prove catastrophic for the very survival of Judaism.³⁶¹

Amazingly, in large part due to a lack of sources, scholars today still have a very hard time coming to consensus with any degree of confidence the causes of the Bar Kochba rebellion. In his summary of the 2003 Princeton University conclave titled, 'Bar Kochba Reconsidered,' which was attended by most of the leading world historians on the subject of the Bar Kochba revolt, chairman Peter Schafer writes:

We are still far from a scholarly consensus regarding most of the questions related to the Bar Kochba Revolt³⁶²...(although) the revolt appears now as the result of a long-lasting anti-Jewish policy on the

³⁶⁰ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 105.

³⁶¹ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 100.

³⁶² Schafer, "Preface," VIII.

Roman side, and of prolonged and well-planned preparations on the Jewish side.³⁶³

This author would opine that practically the only thing that scholars do agree on is that the Bar Kochba revolt occurred. The list of possible contributing factors briefly described includes:

...administrative changes in Judaea following the First Revolt of 66-70; the unrest caused by the sizable Roman military presence in Judaea; a possible economic decline- a shift from landowning to sharecropping; the nationalistic agitation provoked by Jewish uprisings in Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Libya during the Trajanic Revolt (115-117) and Trajan's war ("the War of Quietus") against the Jews of Mesopotamia (116-117). For proximate causes, the sparse historical evidence focuses inconclusively on the foundation of the pagan city of Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem (Cassius Dio 69.12,1-2) or on Hadrian's ban on circumcision³⁶⁴ (Historia Augusta, Vita Hadriani 14.2). Although scholars are divided about these factors weight and historicity, the prevailing consensus ascribes a role to both. One must also note the part played by the construction of a temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount.³⁶⁵ Reminiscent of the introduction of a statue of Zeus to the Temple in 167 BCE that had sparked the Hasmonean revolt, the Jews evidently believed they could once again successfully rid the Temple Mount of this unwanted idolatrous presence.³⁶⁶

"As soon as Hadrian, who had resided in the area of Judaea for a few years, left, the Jews broke out into open revolt with remarkable initial successes."³⁶⁷ The leader of the Judean

³⁶³ Schafer, "Preface," XX.

³⁶⁴ In addition to his survey of Greek and Latin sources as well as through Talmudic literature (Mishna Shabbat 19:1, Tosefta Shabbat 15:9, and Mishna Avot 3:11), Aharon Oppenheimer ((Oppenheimer "The ban," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 69.) concludes that "our reconsideration thus leads us to the conclusion that there is no source either in Greek and Latin, or in the Talmudic literature, from which it is possible to conclude that the ban on circumcision preceded the Bar Kochba revolt," and thus circumcision has no definitive causal connection with the causes of the revolt.

³⁶⁵ "After Trajan came Hadrian (117 CE) whose hyper-tolerant philosophy for dealing with other religions was initially almost contrary to his predecessor's. Perhaps Hadrian was reacting to a changing religio-political landscape, as it is estimated that up to 10% of the Roman Empire was Jewish, mostly via high conversion rates, by the end of the first century CE. Since such a sizable percentage of his Empire was Jewish, Hadrian sought to gain favor with them by rebuilding The Temple in Jerusalem; however, for some reason, at some point, Hadrian changed his mind. When the Jews heard that the Temple was not to be rebuilt, they once again began to prepare for revolt." (Schiffman, *From Text*, 171.)

³⁶⁶ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 106.

³⁶⁷ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 95.

revolt we know now to be a man named Simeon bar Kosiba,³⁶⁸ who was dubbed Bar Kochba in his own day by his followers who believed in his Messianic nature. Like the rest of the revolt, little is known about Bar Kochba except through legend and secondary sources written hundreds of years after his death. But from conservative speculation about his vital leadership in the revolt, Talmudic and Midrashic writing, and 20th century archeological discovery, the contemporary historian does have some indication about Bar Kochba's role and character.

An amalgamation of a four factors separated the Bar Kochba revolt from the earlier revolts of the Great Revolt and the Diaspora revolt: leadership, Jewish numbers, veteran warriors, and the Land. The earlier revolts had some, but not all of these factors. Unlike the Great Revolt where Jewish factional infighting wreaked havoc amongst the ranks of Jewish warriors to the benefit of the Roman enemy, Bar Kochba united the Jewish populace³⁶⁹ and unified the Jewish fighting forces of Judaea, as can be inferred by his title 'Nasi,' and in turn acted as a beacon to Jewish warriors throughout the Roman Empire. An important constituency of those attracted to Bar Kochba's proverbial rising star was the surviving

³⁶⁸ "The name Bar-Kochba, which in Hebrew and Aramaic literally means 'son of a star' obviously referring to his Messianic nature- was preserved only in the sources of the early Church Fathers...Scores of scholars have argued and debated this point for many years. One school of thought believed that his real name had indeed been Bar-Kochba (perhaps after his birthplace) but was later, when his mission failed, altered, 'pun-fashion,' to mean 'the deceiver.' Others argue just the reverse; that his real name had been bar-Koziba- again after his birthplace or perhaps his father's name- later to be changed by his followers and ardent believers in his Messianic mission into Bar-Kochba: 'son of a star.' " (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 18.) "In January 1952, de Vaux and Harding brought from Kando and from the Bedouins of the Ta'amireh tribe some more documents, including another that began similarly: 'From Shimeon ben Kosiba to Yeshua ben Galgoula and the people of the fort, Shalom.' It was obvious that they belonged to the Bar-Kochba period; indeed, they revealed for the first time his true name: Shimeon ben (or bar) Kosiba. We could now understand the riddle of his name." (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 127.)

³⁶⁹ Scholars debate the extent of Bar Kochba's unification of the Judaeian populace. The Consensus seems to be that certainly the unification was less than total, but in many areas the percentage was likely quite large. Although we must figure that a percentage of the population ideologically endorsed the revolt, it is certain that at least some percentage of those who were 'on board' with Bar Kochba were forced to 'support' him by threat of force and fear of repercussion. (Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.)

veterans of the Diaspora revolt: those men who were accustomed to war and with an ideology of revolution swelled the military ranks. To this effect, rabbinic literature cites figures between 150,000 and 250,000 school children in Betar during its siege.³⁷⁰ Although the numbers might be exaggerated, the idea that there were many, many children of Jewish warriors is effectively conveyed.³⁷¹ Bavli Gittin 58a describes:

ארבע מאות בתי כנסיות היו בכרך ביתר, ובכל אחת ואחת היו בה ארבע מאות מלמדי תינוקות, וכל אחד ואחד היו לפניו ארבע מאות תינוקות של בית רבן, וכשהיה אייב נכנס לשם היו דוקרין אותן בחוטרין, וכשגבר אייב ולכדום, כרכום בספריהם והציתום באש.

There were four hundred synagogues in the city of Bethar, and in every one were four hundred teachers of children, and each one had under him four hundred pupils, and when the enemy entered there they pierced them with their staves, and when the enemy prevailed and captured them, they wrapped them in their scrolls and burnt them with fire.

The last factor in the amalgamated mix is that Bar Kochba's revolt, unlike the Diaspora revolt, was fought to expel the Romans from Judaea: the land which the Jews believed was theirs as bequeathed by God since biblical times. This was the same land from which the Maccabees, the ideological forefathers of Bar Kochba's revolt, had expelled their Greek occupiers in 164 B.C.E – a land in which they knew how to wage guerilla warfare, and where the population would likely ideologically be sympathetic to the nationalistic and messianistic goals. This was the land which had held both sacrificial Temples, and the land which the biblical prophets promised the Jews would reclaim when they were once again worthy. Reclaiming Judaea³⁷² was a beacon, a rallying cry, and a real symbol to call on Jews to fight.

³⁷⁰ b. Gittin 58a with parallels in j. Taanit IV:69a; Lamentations Rabbah 2:4-5.

³⁷¹ Sper, *The Future*, 99.

³⁷² "Some likelihood also exists that Ben Kosiba gained hegemony over a small part of Transjordan." (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 113.)

Together, the four factors of leadership, Jewish numbers, veteran warriors, and the Land – provided the Jewish warriors advantages that they previously had lacked.

Like the Maccabees, Bar Kochba's warriors used guerilla tactics in the Judaeen hills which granted them military advantages over the Roman army:

It is possible that in this stage of the revolt the local Roman command did not take the Jewish rebels seriously. Likewise, the garrison of Judaea and the forces that joined to support it continued to fight according to their traditional techniques without adjusting to the terrain, or to the tactics used by the rebels. At this time the Romans suffered heavy losses, and some of the senior commanders like the governor of Judaea, Tineius Refus, and the governors of the neighboring provinces, Publicius Marcellus and Haterius Nepos, probably participated in the fighting in Judaea.³⁷³

In response, Hadrian sent two of the legions stationed in Syria to subdue the revolt, but they too were decimated and repulsed by Bar Kochba. Hadrian then ordered legions from Egypt's, including the province's best, Legion XXII Deiotariniana (the 22nd Legion) containing 15,000 soldiers, but the Jewish rebels were ready for them and literally annihilated them. This was the first time in Roman history that an entire legion was destroyed to such an extent that it literally disappeared from the Roman military records.³⁷⁴

In the first phase the rebels fought a guerilla war in limited areas in the Judaeen Mountains, but these were familiar territories, which granted them military advantages over the Roman army. It is possible that in this stage of the revolt the local Roman command did not take the Jewish rebels seriously. Likewise, the garrison of Judaea and the forces that joined to support it continued to fight according to their traditional techniques without adjusting to the terrain, or to the tactics used by the rebels. At this time the Romans suffered heavy losses, and some of the senior commanders like the governor of Judaea, Tineius Refus, and the governors of the neighboring provinces, Publicius Marcellus and Haterius Nepos, probably participated in the fighting in Judaea.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

³⁷⁴ Book (Book, "Jewish Journeys," 95.) summarizes the findings of L.J.F. Keppie, "The History and Disappearance of the Legion XXII Deiotariana," *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel*, Ed. A. Kasher, U. Rappaport and G. Fuks, (Tad ben Tzvi: Jerusalem, 1990.)

³⁷⁵ Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

In these early battles the Romans suffered huge losses. So much so that when Hadrian wrote to the Senate during the revolt he deliberately omitted using the customary opening phrase traditionally invoked by an emperor while on campaign: "If you and you children are in health, it is well; I and the legions are in good health," because the Roman troops had sustained such devastating losses against the Jewish rebels.³⁷⁶ His troops were far from 'being in good health,' and the campaign to suppress the Jews of Judaea was not at all going well.

Bar Kochba's guerilla warfare was buttressed with iron military discipline which was vital to keep order within the ranks and rebellion, both for internal cohesion as well as against superior Roman forces in battle. An example that has been preserved through the Jerusalem Talmud and Midrash Lamentations,³⁷⁷ was Bar Kochba's practice to mark his soldiers as a means of identification to his army from which there could be no return, and to test their commitment to the cause, by demanding the price of a finger.³⁷⁸

Like the zealous Maccabees, Bar Kochba and his troops strictly observed Jewish law.

³⁷⁶ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69:12-14: "Many Romans, moreover, perished in this war. Therefore, Hadrian, in writing to the Senate, did not employ the opening phrase commonly affected by the emperors: 'If you and you children are in health, it is well: The legions and I are in good health.'"

³⁷⁷ "As a source Midrash Lamentations is problematic. Most of it was likely written in the 4th century C.E., but additions were added into the 8th century C.E.. It is also very likely that there are oral traditions reflective of events and material that pre-date the 4th century C.E. by centuries contained within its corpus. The problem is that it is very difficult to accurately discern what specific material is earlier or later within Lamentations Rabbah." (Norman Cohen, *Interview*, 1/17/08) The Encyclopaedia Judaica adds: "Except for some later additions, the entire Midrash, including the proems, is a compilation redacted by a single redactor. No sage later than the fourth century C.E. is mentioned in it. The list of kingdoms that subjected the Jewish people concludes with "Edom Seir," i.e., Rome and Byzantium (1:14)....Lamentations Rabbah is the earliest source that gives a list of the Ten Martyrs of the Hadrianic persecutions (2:2)" (Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. *Lamentations Rabbah*.)

³⁷⁸ *J. ta'anit* 4:8; also paralleled in Midrash Lamentations, "There sages used to tell him: 'how long will you continue to make the men of Israel blemished? When he retorted: 'How else shall they be tested? They replied, 'let anyone who cannot uproot a cedar from Lebanon'¹⁷⁸ be refused enrolment in your army."

³⁷⁹Although Bar Kochba presents...as someone who is concerned about religious precepts, it is not the Rabbinic Halakhah that motivates him but rather the law as preserved in the earlier, pre-70 traditions. As the Nasi ("Prince") he is much closer to the Maccabees, the Qumran community, and the Zealots than to the Rabbis. This image of Bar Kochba, as a hero reviving the Maccabean ideals, fits well the priestly connotations of his movement.³⁸⁰

Part of Bar Kochba's success was that the Jews were not alone in the fight, but in accordance with Rome's nightmare scenario of a domino effect, were joined by regional gentile allies. One of those allies was the Nabataeans of Arabia, about whom one historian posits:

The participation of the Nabataeans in the revolt must be viewed in the light of Cassius Dio's statement that 'many outside nations, too, were joining them (the Jews) through eagerness for gain.'...(Cotton) accepts the possibility that the 'eagerness for gain' could refer to Nabataean mercenaries who joined Bar Kochba in their greed for gain.³⁸¹

Like the Maccabean leaders (Chapter 2), Bar Kochba presents historically and through Jewish literature as a quintessential hero, albeit tempered with a reality that is absent from the Maccabees. It seems as though he was charismatic enough to have unified disparate Jewish factions into a unified fighting force; to have been a savvy military general who utilized intimate knowledge of the land to decimate superior enemy forces through guerilla tactics; to have forged foreign alliances against a common enemy; to have demanded unwavering commitment from his troops; to have used both ideology and force to recruit reinforcements and maintain discipline; to have been zealous in his religious observance; and to have led his people in a battle to purge the Jewish land from foreign powers. The early Jewish victories

³⁷⁹ As seen in the two letters from Bar Kochba to a regional commander that Yadin discovered regarding the Four Species necessary to observe Sukkot (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 128.), this has been documented through the discovery of many letters, economic documents, and other discoveries from the Judaean desert caves (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 121.)

³⁸⁰ Shafer, "Preface," VIII.

³⁸¹ Shafer, "Preface," XIII referring Cotton, *The Bar Kochba Revolt* (ed. Schafer), 143-147, 152.

empowered his revolt, and the promise of a victory similar to that of the Maccabees must have been virtually tangible... until Rome, the most powerful army in the entire world, finally rallied and turned its full military might towards Judaea.

The Roman reaction to the Jewish revolt in Judaea was brutal and thorough. After the Roman troops from Syria and Egypt were stymied or destroyed, the Emperor Hadrian ordered in his best general, Sextus Julius Severus,³⁸² from Britannia to quell Bar Kochba's revolt. Severus brought with him overwhelming force, Rome's strongest six legions plus various auxiliary troops from another five.³⁸³ All told, Severus' army numbered almost a quarter of a million seasoned troops ordered to quell the Jewish forces which are estimated to be no more than 20,000.³⁸⁴

Upon Julius Severus' arrival in Judaea, he adjusted the Roman tactics to meet those of the Jewish rebels. Using the vast numbers of his soldiers, he adopted guerilla tactics, divided his soldiers into small units and defeated the rebels using a 'scorched earth' policy,³⁸⁵ forcing part of them to fortify and take refuge in Bethar while others found shelter in the caves of the region.³⁸⁶

The last of the Jewish rebels retreated to the fortress of Betar, which fell in the summer of 135 C.E.

Betar was Bar Kochba's greatest stronghold and last line of defense, and so it was buttressed against siege by high walls, an ample supply of food and arms, and a fresh spring supplying water. Not only was Betar Bar Kochba's military base from which all war

³⁸² Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

³⁸³ "The available evidence indicates that six legions (II, III, VI, X, XII, XXII) participated in their entirety and another four or five were partially represented." (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 123.)

³⁸⁴ Book, *The Bar Kochba Revolt*, 96.

³⁸⁵ "Although Dio's figure of 985 as the number of villages destroyed during the war seems hyperbolic, all Judaeac villages, without exception, excavated thus far were razed following the Bar Kochba Revolt. This evidence supports the total regional destruction following the war." (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 125.)

³⁸⁶ Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

operations emanated, but also where the families of Bar Kochba's Jewish warriors resided.³⁸⁷

Like Massada, the fortress of Betar stood elevated atop a steep mountain rising 150 meters above its valley, its height and easily defended walls effectively neutralizing far superior enemy numbers.³⁸⁸

As at Massada, the Romans employed almost exactly the same siege complex as the Tenth Legion did in 74 C.E. (Chapter Five). Using the same engineering approach, the Romans built a 4-km-long dike, which soon eliminated Betar's advantage of altitude.³⁸⁹ Rabbinic literature tells that many Jewish soldiers were killed trying to defend against, and pull down, the Roman dike. After all, it is very likely that they knew of Massada and that when the ramp was finally complete, their fate and that of their families would be sealed.³⁹⁰

שוב מעשה בששים בני אדם שירדו לכרקום ביתר ולא עלה אחד מהם

Sixty men went down to the dike at Betar and not a single one of them came back...

However, the Jewish efforts to disrupt the siege ramp ultimately was for naught, as its completion allowed for the Roman troops to storm Betar's walls en mass, overwhelm the Jewish warriors, and enslave the women and children to the last person.

With the fall of Betar, signaling the end of Bar Kochba's revolt, the Romans celebrated in a manner, and to a degree, rarely seen in Roman history. "Not only in Rome was victory celebrated. Three commanders were awarded the ornamenta triumphalia for their part in putting down the Bar Kochba revolt: Sex. Iulius Severus, governor of Judaea, C. Quinctius Certus Publicius Marcellus, governor of Syria, and T. Haterius Nepos, governor of Arabia. It must not be overlooked that in no other war waged by Rome, since the Augustan principate, were so many

³⁸⁷ Talmud, *Gittin* 58a, Lamentations Rabbah 2:4-5.

³⁸⁸ Chaim Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 241.

³⁸⁹ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 122.

³⁹⁰ *Tos. Yev.* 14.8.

senators awarded the highest marks of honour available to those belonging to their class.³⁹¹

In addition to high honors awarded to key military leadership in putting down the Jewish revolt, the Romans erected a grandiose triumphal arch to immortalize the Roman victory, and to recognize the tremendous amount of Roman blood spilled towards this goal:

The triumphal arch with its remaining inscription was built in the context of the Bar Kochba Revolt, and not during Hadrian's visit to the province around 130 CE; it was erected by order of the Roman Senate, and not by one of the two legions serving in Judaea at the time of the visit; and it commemorates a decisive victory towards the conclusion of the revolt.³⁹²

The tremendous measures that the Romans took to quell the revolt, including the vast number of soldiers they utilized and the superior generals they resourced: their celebration of the final victory by awarding the ultimate military awards and building a triumphal arch strongly suggests that the Romans perceived the Judaeian revolt as a genuine threat to their empire.³⁹³ However, although Roman victory over the Jewish revolt in Judaea was itself an achievement in the short-term, Hadrian realized that suppressing yet another Jewish rebellion was 'treating the symptom', but not at all addressing the problem itself. Hadrian realized that Bar Kochba's efforts were just the latest attempt by a warrior-people who, as recent history had shown them, could not be placated by normal Roman policy. A people who had the viewed themselves as warriors, and likely would rise again thus costing Rome money, time and lives; not to speak of the risk that such a tenaciously bellicose people might cause to the empire itself if their next attempt was more successful. For Hadrian, long-term measures were needed to insure that the Jews never again would rise up in armed struggle against Rome.

³⁹¹ Eck, "Hadrian," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 166.

³⁹² Schafer, "Preface," XIII, referring to Eck, "Hadrian," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 161-162.

³⁹³ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 123.

The practical realities of 60 years of Jewish revolt against Roman rule, both in the Diaspora and in Judaea, were staggering. The year 135 C.E. was the culmination of three generations of Jewish men indoctrinated to war, with many thousands of them killed in battle. It is a wonder that there were any fighting age Jewish men left to repopulate any of the Jewish communities that had risen up, and failed, against Roman military might. Severus' strategy of destroying all Jewish villages and outposts where they stood meant that Jewish civilization in Judaea had been razed to the ground. Once the war was over, Hadrian decreed that Jews were forbidden to live in Jerusalem at all.³⁹⁴ Upon pain of death, they were also forbidden from even visiting, except on the 9th of Av, a date which tradition attaches to the date of Betar's fall, as well as to other major historical events that commemorate Jewish military defeat at the hands of foreign forces. In allowing Jews to visit their celebrated homeland only on the annual date when they had been absolutely defeated minimally served as a reminder to those who might think about again taking on Rome: and maximally was Hadrian's way of 'thumbing his nose,' or 'salting the wounds,' of those who had caused so much trouble and bloodshed again and again against Roman dominance. Additionally, as a practical consequence of Jewish defeat in Bar Kochba's war, many thousands of Jews were carried out of Judaea in shackles, likely removed from Jewish history never to be heard from again.³⁹⁵

In order to 'salt the soil' of Jewish military aspiration, and in an effort to attack the very existence of Jewish identity, Hadrian decreed 19 anti-Jewish edicts. "the rationale behind these repressive decrees was to forbid the public gathering of Jews and the observance of

³⁹⁴ Schafer, "Preface," XII.

³⁹⁵ Littman, *A Concise History of the Jewish People*, 97.

religious practices integral to Judaism. The punishment for anyone caught in violation of these decrees was severe.³⁹⁶

An additional more lasting punitive measure taken by the Romans involved expunging Judaea from the provincial name, changing it from Provincia Judaea to Provincia Syria Palestina. Although such name changes occurred elsewhere, never before or after was a nation's name expunged as the result of rebellion. Following the appalling failure of the Bar Kochba Revolt, the Jews made no further attempts to achieve national independence.³⁹⁷

This exceptional form of punishment had never been inflicted on any other people in the entire history of the Roman empire.³⁹⁸ However, after Hadrian's death³⁹⁹ and with the accession of the emperor Antoninus Pius,⁴⁰⁰ perhaps in an effort to assuage the Jewish population elsewhere in the Roman empire, virtually all of Hadrian's decrees were rescinded.⁴⁰¹

Whatever Antoninus' motives, the effect of three generations of Jewish revolt and brutal defeat took its toll and resulted in a marked change in Jewish leadership, and the populace's acceptance of accommodationism in place of military action. Perhaps this trend was the only practical response to 60 years of Jewish military failure and perhaps it was easier to push this new agenda since it is fair to assume that most of the militants were dead. What is clear is that Jews, who had a long history of identifying as a military people comfortable waging war, did not do so again for almost two millennia.

The question of the existence, or degree, of Tannaitic support for Bar Kochba and his revolt is an interesting one, and worth pursuing despite an absence of reliable sources on the

³⁹⁶ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 98.

³⁹⁷ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 126.

³⁹⁸ Eck, "Hadrian," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 168.

³⁹⁹ 138 C.E.

⁴⁰⁰ b.86 C.E.-d.161C.E. Pius ruled from 138 to 161C.E.

⁴⁰¹ Schiffman, *From Text*, 17.

subject. According to Jewish sources, Bar Kochba himself was present, and fell, at Betar. Even as the ramp was being built, Midrash Lamentations recounts how Bar Kochba brutally dealt with dissension in the ranks, and with plots to fraternize with the Roman soldiers. For example, the Midrash explains that Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'in was with Bar Kochba at Betar during the last siege of the revolt, but Bar Kochba suspected him of betraying the secrets of Bethar to the Romans. Upon hearing that Rabbi Eleazar was betraying the Jewish warriors, he 'kicked him with his foot and killed him'.⁴⁰² This account from Midrash Lamentations is interesting because it professes three important things. First, that Tannaim were involved in the revolt to such a degree that at least one, R' Eleazar of Modi'in, was in the fort as the Romans were building their ramp. Second, that there was a possibility of this Tanna having betrayed, or planned on betraying, the Betar defenses. It is important to emphasize that Bar Kochba is portrayed as directly killing a Tanna by kicking him to death. If nothing else, this hints at the complex relationship between Bar Kochba and the early Talmudic sages:

The Tannaim were divided, some supporting his rebellion, others not. Those who supported him saw him as a messianic figure.⁴⁰³ The most famous of the authorities⁴⁰⁴ who supported Bar Kochba, according to Jewish and Roman sources,⁴⁰⁵ was none other than Rabbi Akiva, to whom tradition has assigned the role of being the spiritual leader of Bar Kochba's revolt.⁴⁰⁶ In the opinion of most authors,⁴⁰⁷ Akiva was one of the keenest supporters of the rebellion. He journeyed throughout the Jewish Diaspora looking for

⁴⁰² Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 26.

⁴⁰³ Schiffman, *From Text*, 173.

⁴⁰⁴ Finkelstein (Finkelstein, "Rabbi Akiva," 3.) posits that Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Simeon were also clearly in the Bar Kochba camp.

⁴⁰⁵ "So impressive a leader was bar Kochba that Rabbi Akiva declared him the Messiah and became his 'greatest supporter.' (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, L.XIX:12:3) (Sper, *The Future*, 99.)

⁴⁰⁶ Sper, *The Future*, 61.

⁴⁰⁷ Not just authors, but this is how the religious tradition understands Akiva's role (see Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 171)...thus, once again, the facts are less important than the perception.

resources and sympathizers for his revolt against Rome: he proclaimed Bar Kosiva to be the Messiah: he was imprisoned as a result of his active support of the rebellion: and finally he died a cruel martyr's death because of his convictions.⁴⁰⁸

Some modern scholars, like Peter Schafer, opine that the literature connecting the subject of the relationship between Rabbi Akiba and Bar Kochba is "for the most part fanciful and not critically sound"⁴⁰⁹ and therefore, details within it are not worth discussing. This author would point out that Dio Cassius, the most reliable source on the Bar Kochba rebellion as stated by Schafer,⁴¹⁰ collaborates with the sentiment of later Jewish literature: as can be seen in Dio Cassius statement, "So impressive a leader was Bar Kochba that Rabbi Akiva declared him the Messiah and became his 'greatest supporter.'"⁴¹¹ This is not to say that the sources about the relationship are perfect, far from it, but they are the only sources available and so must be utilized as such, even if with a healthy 'grain of salt.'

There is a speculative theory that certain stories within the Talmuds and Midrash contain cryptic references to Tannaitic support, and participation, in Bar Kochba's revolt. For instance: "Both the content and the wording of a *baraita* in *Yevamot* provide us with information regarding Rabbi Akiva's pupils:"⁴¹² Specifically, *Yevamot* 62b says:

אמרו: שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא, מגבת עד אנטיפרס,
וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, והיה העולם שמים, עד שבא
ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום, ושנאה להם ר"מ ור' יהודה ור' יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי
אלעזר בן שמוע, והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה. תנא: כולם מתו מפסח ועד
עצרת. אמר רב חמא בר אבא, ואיתימא ר' חייא בר אבין: כולם מתו מיתה רעה.
מאי היא? א"ר נחמן: אסכרה

⁴⁰⁸ Schafer, "Rabbi Aqiva," 113.

⁴⁰⁹ Schafer, "Rabbi Aqiva," 113.

⁴¹⁰ "Dio Cassius' report has become the major trustworthy literary source of the uprising" (summation of Bar-Kochba scholars in 2001 Princeton University conference) (Schafer, "Preface," XX.)

⁴¹¹ Sper, (Sper, *The Future*, 99) cites Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXIX:12:3.

⁴¹² Kolitz, *Rabbi Akivah*, 218; similar sentiment is expressed by Sper, *The Future*, 99.

They said: Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of pupils, from Gabbath to Antipatris, and all of them died during one period, because they did not act respectfully to each other. The entire world was desolate until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught them: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Simeon, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Shammua. They are the ones who revived the Torah at that time. It has been taught that all of them died between Pesah and Shevuot. Rabbi Hama bar Abba, or, as some say, Rabbi Hiyya bar Avin, said, They all died a bad death. What was it? Rav Nahman said, Croup.⁴¹³

The theory details that the expression "pair of pupils" (זוגים תלמידים) is some sort of code for 'student-fighters' engaged in revolt military service. The term "pair of pupils" is rare⁴¹⁴ in the Talmud and it could possibly refer to religious disciples who were in some sort of para-military commitment.⁴¹⁵

More convincing are the two locations cited in Yevamot 62b:

'Gabbath'" and 'Antipatris,' which are not to be found on any maps of Jewish settlement at the end of the Second Temple period and later, for they were not settlements. They were, in fact, Roman garrisons or fortresses.⁴¹⁶

In one of the Roman turning points against the Jews in Bar Kochba's revolt, "the front between Chezib-Acco-Gabbath and Antipatris-Kotzrim was breached during the period between Pesah and Shavuot."⁴¹⁷ At that time, Bar Kochba's troops were routed by the Roman forces, and huge numbers of Jews fell in battle."⁴¹⁸ This is the 'bad death' to which

⁴¹³ As Kolitz (Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 225.) notes, "note should be taken of the linguistic and phonetic connection between the word *askara* אסכרה (croup) mentioned here and *askaria*, which means 'army' or 'troop' in Turkish and Arabic. Although we have not found any sources which testify to the connection between them, this similarity cannot be ignored.

⁴¹⁴ This is the only instance found in the Bavli.

⁴¹⁵ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 219.

⁴¹⁶ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 220.

⁴¹⁷ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 222.

⁴¹⁸ Kolitz (Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 222) goes on to relay that in the course of that Roman rout, the Jewish warriors "were successful only on one day, when they waged a counterattack with their remaining forces and repulsed the enemy. This occurred on the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer (Lag ba-Omer), which was established as a holiday for all time." Yadin (Yadin, *Bar Kokhba*, 27) also talks about Lag Ba'omer in a similar way when he says, "It was centuries of persecution of the Jews and their yearning for national rehabilitation that turned Bar-Kochba into a people's hero- an elusive figure they clung to because he had demonstrated, and was the last to

Yevamot 62b is referring. Unfortunately, mining the Talmud and Midrash for other such examples which may, or may not, be cryptic fossils describing Akiva's role in Bar Kochba's revolt is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worthwhile to reiterate that what is 'fact' is often less important than what is perceived within the literature.

However, of primary importance to this thesis is the literature that shows that during the revolt Akiba proclaimed Bar Kochba the Messiah, while other authorities were not convinced or even were opposed to this statement of support. Equally as important is how other rabbis in the same literature, written or curtailed after the revolt's failure, derided and mocked Bar Kochba as nothing but a liar. "Those who, like Rabbi Aqiba, believed in his Messianic nature called him, playing a small pun on his name by changing the S into K, Kochba; while those who opposed him, particularly after his failure, played a different pun by changing the S into Z, thus distorting the meanings completely to read 'liar' or 'son of a liar.'⁴¹⁹

Akiva's proclamation of Bar Kochba as the Messiah appears in three sources⁴²⁰ that pretty much say the same thing with very little variation, and "these are the only sources in rabbinic literature in which Aqiva and Bar Kokba are brought into direct contact with one another."⁴²¹ The basic formula can be seen in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anit* 4:5:

עקיבה רבי היה דורש דרך כוכב מיעקב דרך כוזבא מיעקב רבי עקיבה כד היה חמי
בר כוזבה היה אמר דין הוא מלכא משיחא אמר ליה רבי יוחנן בן תורתא עקיבה
יעלו עשבים בלחייך ועדיין בן דוד לא יבא

Akiva used to expound, '*there shall step forth a star out of Jacob*.'⁴²² thus Koziva steps forth out of Jacob! When R. Aqiva beheld Bar Koziva, he exclaimed, 'This is the king Messiah.' R. Yohanan b. Torta retorted,

demonstrate, that the Jews could fight to win spiritual and political independence. To commemorate his revolt it became tradition for the children of Jewish communities in eastern Europe to go into the fields at the festival of Lag Ba'omer and play 'Bar-Kochba and the Romans' with makeshift bows and arrows..."

⁴¹⁹ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 127.

⁴²⁰ y. *Ta'anit* 4:5, b. *Gittin* 57-8, Lamentations Rabbah 2:2.4.

⁴²¹ Schafer, "*Rabbi Aqiva*," 119.

⁴²² Quoting Numbers 24:17.

'Aqiva, grass will grow between your checks and he still will not have come.'

All of these texts display Akiva's proclamation that Bar Kochba is the messiah: and they all⁴²³ refer to the leader of the Jewish revolt as Bar Koziva/ בר כוזבה (with a ז). Since Bar Kochba, as Yadin's discovery shows, was originally called by his name, Shimon ben or Bar Kosiva/ כוסבה (with a ס), "all the versions of the text reflect the rabbinic change of meaning of Bar Kosiva's name to Bar Koziva (in other words to 'son of a liar.'...) and therefore the situation after the Bar Kochba rebellion."⁴²⁴

The devastating failure of the Kochba revolt "cannot be overestimated."⁴²⁵ The Judaeen Jewish community never recovered from the Bar Kochba war. In its wake, Jews no longer formed the majority in Palestine, and the Jewish center moved to the Galilee.⁴²⁶ Since the Bar Kochba revolt is barely even referred to in rabbinic sources, it is difficult to ascertain with any certainty the mind-set of the rabbis in the wake of the Roman destruction. The men mostly dead, families torn apart by war and slavery, the promise of a new Temple in Jerusalem farther away than ever, economic crisis, and the remnants of Judaeans in Diaspora once again. It is in this context that the Rabbis must have uniformly agreed that armed resistance was no longer a viable option. To continue on that path would certainly mean more dead Jews and perhaps even the death of Judaism itself. "To this end they downplayed the revolt, "demilitarized" the Talmud and emphasized that Messianic Redemption would be achieved by merit of Torah study and not by military might."⁴²⁷

⁴²³ With the exceptions being direct Akiva quotes.

⁴²⁴ Schafer, "Rabbi Aqiva", 118-119.

⁴²⁵ Hammer, "A Rabbinic Response," 40.

⁴²⁶ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 126.

⁴²⁷ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 102.

By demilitarizing Judaism, and kowtowing to Rome, the Rabbis were actually achieving three things. They were keeping Jews alive; they were changing the psyche of Judaism from bellicose to war-averse; and they were empowering themselves as the new Jewish leaders as recognized by the dominant culture and military authority, that being Rome.

This changed the basic reality of the Patriarchate. From a head of an academy deriving his authority because of his implicit recognition by the people, the Patriarch became the channel whereby the average citizen had contact with the coercive power, i.e., the Romans. Both judicial power and fiscal power were now in the hands of the Patriarch.⁴²⁸

In a sense the institution of the Patriarch had achieved its final victorious realization: complete internal and external recognition.⁴²⁹ It was this apolitical, demilitarized and accomodationist Judaism that became Rabbinic Judaism, but the memory of the age when the Jewish warrior held political power was preserved in national memory, Messianism and extra-canonical literature.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Elazar, *Authority*, 100.

⁴²⁹ Elazar, *Authority*, 108.

⁴³⁰ Biale, *Power*, 11.

Chapter Seven- *Megillat Ta'anit*:

Megillat Ta'anit, the 'scroll of fasting' is a bit of a misnomer, as the scroll is really a list of dates from antiquity when one was forbidden to fast⁴³¹ because the dates commemorated auspicious Jewish historical events.⁴³² It is an annual calendar⁴³³ in which the vast majority of the 35 dates listed clearly refer to Jewish military or political achievements.⁴³⁴ The compilers of *Megillat Ta'anit* thought these dates worthy of special mention and treatment apart from other days in the calendar year; in other words, a holiday of sorts. The day and month of each event is listed without a year, and thus the document is confusing; however, "it is obvious that the text of the Megillah is arranged according to the sequence of the months and not in chronological order. To establish the historical meaning of the events commemorated in the Megillah, and to interpret these, it is necessary to rearrange the various dates in a chronological setting."⁴³⁵ This task, however, is much easier said than done.

Megillat Ta'anit is relevant to this thesis for three reasons. The first is the fact that most of *Megillat Ta'anit* is a list of Jewish military achievements. What does this say about the Jewish culture that would have such a list, and set it apart to be observed in commemoration? The second reason has to do with the date to which *Megillat Ta'anit* extends. Modern scholarship is split as to whether the military commemorations listed extended past The Great Revolt into the Bar Kochba era or not. That modern scholarship is in consensus that the dates minimally coincide with the Great Revolt is almost entirely due to the fact that they

⁴³¹ Fasting is prohibited on them all, and in 14 cases it was additionally forbidden to give a eulogy.

⁴³² Strack, *Introduction*, 15.

⁴³³ Starting with the month of Nisan.

⁴³⁴ Of the 36 listed commemorations, a large percentage 23 clearly refer to some sort of military-political event; eight appear to be religious commemoration, and five are too brief and cryptic to categorize, i.e., 'on the 7th (of Kislev) is a holiday.'

⁴³⁵ Zeitlin, "Megillat Taanit," 70.

can cross-check them with Josephus' account. Tragically, since Bar Kochba lacked a Josephus, there is no source to collaborate for potential Bar Kochba military achievements.

There are scholars, including modern ones of the highest esteem, that posit the possibility that the end-date of *Megillat Ta'anit* extends beyond the Great Revolt... and one only has to extend six decades beyond the Great Revolt to get to Bar Kochba. As it is, dates listed in *Megillat Ta'anit* that can not be accounted for through collaboration are safely labeled by scholars as 'miscellaneous',⁴³⁶ 'obscure',⁴³⁷ 'unidentifiable',⁴³⁸ or some sort of cryptic reference to the Pharisaic-Sadducean conflict.⁴³⁹ What is important about the end-point is that it informs the historian about the 'mindset' of the proto-rabbinic authors who compiled and disseminated *Megillat Ta'anit*, as well as the populace who agreed not to fast on these semi-holidays celebrating military victory. The exact end-date helps inform the historian know when the Jewish leaders and populace employed this mindset of lionizing military victory.

Regardless of *Megillat Ta'anit's terminus ad quem* commemorations, the third reason why *Megillat Ta'anit* is relevant to this thesis is because 3rd century authorities annulled it.⁴⁴⁰ This fact buttresses the theory that there was a concerted rabbinic effort to demilitarize Judaism and the Jewish people in efforts to appease Rome by obscuring the Jews' history of armed rebellion from even the Jews themselves.

Like attempts to study the Bar Kochba revolt, the problem that the modern historian has in studying *Megillat Ta'anit* is a lack of reliable contemporary sources. A huge amount of what even the best modern expert does is pure speculation, attempting to piece together

⁴³⁶ Zeitlin, "Megillat Taanit," 116.

⁴³⁷ Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 10.

⁴³⁸ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴³⁹ Glatzer, s.v. "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.

⁴⁴⁰ Stern, review of Noam, 184; Glatzer, s.v. "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.

damaged manuscripts, dealing with huge differences in content (up to 50% in the two best preserved manuscripts⁴⁴¹) between various manuscripts,⁴⁴² discerning the extent of reliability of *Megillat Ta'anit*'s included commentary; and desperately searching for possible collaboration with external sources. It is no wonder that there has been a dearth of scholarly work on *Megillat Ta'anit*,⁴⁴³ since the material available to work with is as narrow as the speculation is wide. All of the questions listed above that make *Megillat Ta'anit* interesting to this thesis are only able to be guessed at by the experts, including Vered Noam in her 2003 critical edition.⁴⁴⁴ In short, we just don't know much; yet, we know that *Megillat Ta'anit* existed, that it was hailed as 'halakhic' by the Tannaim, and that it was cancelled sometime in the post-Amoraic era. Thus, *Megillat Ta'anit* is very interesting and for the purposes of this thesis it is well worth analyzing what is known, what is likely, what is possible, and what can only be guessed at.

There are additional difficulties in deciphering *Megillat Ta'anit*: it is very short. It really is little more than a list.⁴⁴⁵ For instance:

"On the 7th of Elul was the day of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, on which it is forbidden to mourn. On the 17th thereof the Romans evacuated Judah and Jerusalem; on the 22nd thereof we began to slay the wicked; on the 23rd of Tishri were removed the 'mentions'

⁴⁴¹ The Oxford and Parma manuscripts.

⁴⁴² "Noam (Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 319-322.) shows that the scholion is attested in the manuscripts in two very different recensions that differ in about half their contents. The main two manuscripts that she uses are the Oxford and Parma manuscripts. Although some common sources are used, the recensions do not seem to have originated from a single Urtext. (Stern, review of Noam, 185.)

⁴⁴³ There is a serious dearth in contemporary scholarship in *Megillat Ta'anit*, with the notable exception of Vered Noam's 2003 critical edition. Before that, the serious attempts at analysis were limited to H. Lichtenstein's (German) '*Die Fastenrolle-Eine Untersuchung zur jüdisch-hellenistischen geschichte*', HUCA, 8-9 (1931-2), 257-351; S. Zeitlin's doctoral thesis, '*Megillat ta'anit as a source for Jewish Chronology and History in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*' (1922); and an article by Gesch Graetz in 1906.

⁴⁴⁴ "As Noam demonstrates, half of these events remain obscure and unidentifiable, whilst the other half belongs mostly to the Hasmonean period., most famously, the Maccabean victory, commemorated on the days of Hanukah, although some events are earlier and some later." (Stern, review of Noam, 184.)

⁴⁴⁵ Especially without the included commentary, sometimes referred to as 'scholion.'

on documents; On the 23rd of Heshvan the Sorega was torn away from the Azarah; On the 25th thereof the wall of Samaria was captured.”⁴⁴⁶

Megillat Ta'anit uses language to explain each date's importance which is not only terse, but, as described by University College of London's professor Sacha Stern, the language is “cryptic.”⁴⁴⁷ Minimally, this ‘cryptic’ language makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe with any confidence a particular historical event to some of the listed dates. Maximally, it is possible that this terseness was deliberate so as to hide the exact reason for the semi-holiday from those who could find offense and punish, specifically the Romans. Admittedly, the author has absolutely no evidence to suggest this, except that Jews have many times in their history censured offensive parts of their literature in order to avoid repercussions from enemy eyes. Either way, the brevity and terseness of some of the dates listed suggests that at one point the people reading the date automatically knew the corresponding commemorative event. Even more assured is that beyond a certain point, those who were assumed to know, forgot. This is evidenced by the different explanations that various *Megillat Ta'anit* manuscripts give for the same date, and that today many of those especially terse dates are truly a mystery.

The main text of *Megillat Ta'anit* was written in middle Aramaic, while the included “scholion” explaining the historical events referred to in each of the entries is in Hebrew. Recent scholarship disagrees on when the scholion were added. The origins and history of the scholion are “unclear because it remained a fluid composition.”⁴⁴⁸ Vered Noam posits that it was added quite early, well before the codification of the Bavli:⁴⁴⁹ whereas Nahum

⁴⁴⁶ translation: Zeitlin, “Megillat Taanit,” 69.

⁴⁴⁷ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴⁴⁸ Stern, review of Noam, 185.

⁴⁴⁹ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

Glatzer holds that it was appended after the Bavli was codified.⁴⁵⁰ “Some of the scholia provide detailed, informed aggadic accounts, others are vacuous and clearly improvised⁴⁵¹ In Noam’s estimation, half of the scholion is unique and unattested in rabbinic literature, but parallels can be found in earlier Jewish works such as the books of Maccabees, others parts of the Septuagint, and especially Josephus.⁴⁵² “Other parts of the scholion are attested in the Babylonian Talmud (13 entries in all);⁴⁵³ but surprisingly, no scholion is found in the Palestinian Talmud of any other Palestinian rabbinic sources. Noam does not attempt to explain why this is the trend.⁴⁵⁴ In terms of using the scholion to explain *Megillat Ta’anit*’s listed dates, the fact that the existing manuscripts differ so greatly in their explanations only further confuses modern historical attempts at understanding.

When it comes to actually naming a date for *Megillat Ta’anit*, scholars agree that *Megillat Ta’anit* “certainly existed, already in written form, at the time of the redaction of the Mishnah, since it is cited in the Mishnah.”⁴⁵⁵ However, when asked to be more specific, there is little agreement. Noam posits a 1st century C.E. dating, probably prior to 70 C.E.⁴⁵⁶ She claims that *Megillat Ta’anit* was composed by a 1st century C.E. Pharisaic, Shammaitic figure that can be identified as R’ Hananiah b. Hezeqiah or his son Eleazar.⁴⁵⁷ Noam’s view is supported, and influenced by, the appendix of *Megillat Ta’anit* which gives the author as Eliezar, the son of Hananiah

⁴⁵⁰ Glatzer, s.v. “Megillat Taanit,” 769.

⁴⁵¹ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴⁵² Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 22-24.

⁴⁵³ Stern (Stern, review of Noam, 185) cites Noam (Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 133-158, 361-375.)

⁴⁵⁴ Stern, review of Noam, 185.

⁴⁵⁵ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴⁵⁶ Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 19-21.

⁴⁵⁷ Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 333-336.

b. Hezekiah⁴⁵⁸ as well as the Tannaitic source in the Bavli which purports that

Megillat Ta'anit was compiled by "Hananiah b. Hezekiah and his company:"⁴⁵⁹

מי כתב מגילת תענית? אמרו: חנניה בן הזקיה וסיעתו

Who wrote *Megillath Ta'anit*? Said they, Hananiah b. Hezekiah and his companions, who cherished their troubles.

Sacha Stern respectfully rejects Noam's dependence on Rabbinic sources as reliable, as well as her conclusions. He says:

Noam appears to assume the historical reliability of early rabbinic sources and traditions; a position that historians, today, can no longer adopt without considerable reservations and qualifications...On the question of the origins of *Megillat Ta'anit* and its early history, I beg to differ with the author... (based on the acceptable known evidence) *Megillat Ta'anit* is clearly pre-Mishnaic, Judaeen, and related to rabbinic or proto-rabbinic circles, but more than that, we do not know.⁴⁶⁰

In other words, although Stern does not come out and say it in his review, it seems as though he would date it later than 1st century, but before the codification of the Mishnah. This would put his estimate within the era of Bar Kochba.⁴⁶¹

Nahum Glatzer also posits the possibility that at least the scholion dates from the Bar Kochba era, even if the Hebrew dates that can be identified date no later than the Great Revolt. "The work received its present form close to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple or at the latest during the Bar Kokhba era."⁴⁶² Glatzer's assertion coincides with

⁴⁵⁸ According to Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2:409- this man was one of the leading rebels against the Romans.

⁴⁵⁹ *b. Shabbat* 13b.

⁴⁶⁰ Stern, review of Noam, 186.

⁴⁶¹ Sacha Stern directly agrees that this is possible. "It seems to me that materials from the Trajanic or Bar-Kokhba period do not contradict my general assumption that MT is "clearly pre-Mishnaic, Judaeen, and related to rabbinic or proto-rabbinic circles" (Sacha Stern, *personal email correspondence*, 1/22/08)

⁴⁶² Glatzer, "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.