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# THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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## History

# Torah & Archaeology

RABBI DR. DOVID GOTTLIEB

I

The Torah contains a vast amount of historical material. Evidence that the Torah is true must also apply to this material. Since questions have been raised about the factual accuracy of the Bible as an account of ancient history, we ought to discuss that for a bit. The Bible talks about the lives of the  
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# the TEMPLE

A RESPONSE TO THE GOLDEN CALF

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Credits: "The Tabernacle" by Moshe Levine

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Weekly Parsha

# TERUMA

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"The poles should be in the rings of the Ark. They should not be removed." (Shemot 25:15)

A ring was attached to each corner of the Ark. Poles were passed through these rings. These poles were used to carry the Aron – the

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Exodus, 25:8, G-d instructs man, "Make Me a Temple and I will dwell among you." Sforno comments on the purpose of the Temple in 25:9 as follows: "In order that I may dwell in your midst, to speak to you and to accept your prayers and the (Temple) service of Israel, not as the matter was prior to the Golden Calf, as was stated, (Exod. 20:21) "In every place that you mention My name, I will come to you and bless you." Sforno says that prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the statement in Yisro, "In every place that you mention My name..." teaches that G-d's relationship to man was

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# the TEMPLE

## A RESPONSE TO THE GOLDEN CALF

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

anyone, anywhere, would have his prayers recognized by G-d. But subsequent to the Golden Calf, a new system was demanded, "In order that I may dwell in your midst, to speak to you and to accept your prayers and the (Temple) service of Israel..."

Sforno teaches a startling concept; the Temple may have had no objective need, but was a concession in response to the Golden Calf. If the Jews hadn't sinned with that Calf, the structure of Temple, the ark, the menorah and all the vessels might not have been commanded, according to Sforno. "Make Me a Temple and I will dwell among you" teaches that after the Calf, without the Temple, G-d will not dwell with us. One might suggest this is an impossible theory, as the Temple appears in the Torah before the sin of the Calf. But Rashi addresses this in Exodus 31:18, "There is no chronology in the Torah; the Golden Calf preceded the command of the work of the Temple by many days..." Rashi again makes mention (Deut. 10:1) that it was only on Moses' descent from Mount Sinai did G-d first command him on the work of the Tabernacle. It was at the time of his descent that the Jews had already sinned with the Golden Calf.

What was the precise sin of the Golden Calf, and how does the institution of the Tabernacle and Temple rectify the problem? Sforno also teaches that prior to the Calf, one's prayer was readily noticed by G-d, afterwards it was not. This needs an explanation.

A few other relationships are seen between the sin of the Calf and the Temple/Tabernacle which supports Sforno's explanation. Those who sinned with the Calf were not allowed to serve in the Temple. For this reason, the entire tribe of the Levites who abstained from the sin of the calf merited Temple service. One might suggest a simple explanation; idolaters are prohibited to officiate in G-d's service. But perhaps there is more to this command. Additionally, no gold was used in the service of the Holy of Holies, due to the reason that "the accused cannot be come the defender". That is, the accused - the gold (representative of the Gold Calf) cannot be part of man's service seeking atonement. One does not mention his gravest sins when seeking pardon for his offenses. Similarly, the Torah teaches that the High Priest's garb including gold must not be worn when entering the Holy of Holies. Prior to entering, he must change into his white garments. Again we see a tie between Temple law and the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Torah teaches that the Jews gave their jewelry for the creation of the Calf, (Exod., 32:3) "And they removed, all the people, the rings of gold, that were in their ears, and they brought it to Aaron." We also learn that the Tabernacle was created from the peoples' donation of Terumah, "...from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take my Terumah". Is there any parallel between these two acts of giving, that the

Torah wished to record both?

Another verse in response to the sin of the Calf reads "And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the 'Tent of Meeting', and it would be that anyone seeking G-d would, go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp." (Exodus 33:7) This verse teaches that prior to the sin, G-d communicated with Moses within the camp. But after the sin, this close relationship could no longer be. Moses therefore demonstrated this by his removal of his tent to outside the camp of the nation. What may we learn from this act of moving the tent? Isn't it clearly stated that whoever sought G-d would exit the camp? So G-d was still found. What purpose is there in distancing the Tent of Meeting from the people?

To clarify, Sforno is not suggesting that without the sin of the Golden Calf, there would be no institution of sacrifice. Sacrifice dates back to the first men. Adam's children brought sacrifices. Noah, Abraham and so many other figures sacrificed long before the Golden Calf. To clarify, Sforno is suggesting that the institution of Temple alone is due to the sin of the Calf, but he agrees that sacrifice always existed. So our main question is how the Temple addresses the problem of the Golden Calf sin.

How do we begin to answer this main question? The first step would be to understand the sin. We should look for an expression of the sin exhibited by the sinners. This would make for accurate analysis. G-d's own words describing the Jews' precise flaw would provide an even better clue. Fortunately in this case, we have both.(1) The mixed multitude said about the Calf, (Exod. 32:4) "These are your G-ds Israel, who took you up from Egypt." Later, after the giving of the tablets to Moses, G-d says to him concerning the Jews' worship of the Calf, (Exod. 32:8)"They have turned quickly from the path which I have commanded them, they made for themselves a molten calf, and they prostrated to it and sacrificed to it and they said, 'These are your G-ds Israel, who took you up from Egypt.'" G-d purposefully repeated this statement in His Torah, "These are your G-ds Israel, who took you up from Egypt." I believe this is to point us to the Jews' precise error.

G-d is teaching us that the Jews' sin was due to their wish to relate to G-d in some tangible form. Ramban and Or Hachaim dismiss the notion that the Jews thought the Calf to be G-d. Ramban said, "no fool would say the gold that was in their ears is what brought them up out of Egypt." (Exod. 32:4) Ramban explains that the Jews did not say the Calf was G-d, but that this Calf was some force of G-d.(2) Or Hachaim says on "they turned aside", that they violated "you shall not make intermediaries." Both Ramban and Or Hachaim agree that the Jews admitted to G-d's existence, and that this Calf was not viewed by the Jews as G-d. The Jews' error was their belief that the Golden Calf had forces which effect reality.

Consider the Jews words when they felt Moses was no longer returning, "...Moses the man who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has happened to him." Why did they mention Moses "the man"? This statement too points to the Jews' inability to relate to G-d as he is, above the physical, "metaphysical". They became attached to the "man" of Moses. When they miscalculated Moses' stay on Mt. Sinai, they were confronted with a false belief that Moses was gone. They feared not having some tangible leader, so they created the Golden Calf and said this was responsible some how for their exodus. They desired something physical to relate to. This is not tolerated in Judaism, and many have been killed (Samuel I, 6:19(3))because of their projection of physical qualities onto G-d. Judaism demands above all else that we do not project any physical nature onto G-d, (Deut. 4:15) "And guard yourselves exceedingly for your lives, for you did not see any form on the day G-d spoke to you on Horeb (Sinai) from amidst flames." The

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# the TEMPLE

A RESPONSE TO THE GOLDEN CALF

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Torah stresses how fundamental it is to know that G-d is not physical. We saw no physical objects when we heard G-d speak to us on Sinai.

Maimonides third principle of his 13 Principles reads:

*"Principle III. The Denial of Corporeality in Connection with G-d. This is to accept that this Oneness that we have mentioned above (2) is not a body and has no strength in the body, and has no shape or image or relationship to a body or parts thereof. This is why the Sages of blessed memory said with regards to heaven there is no sitting, nor standing, no awakens, nor tiredness. This is all to say that He does not partake of any physical actions or qualities. And if He were to be a body then He would be like any other body and would not be G-d. And all that is written in the holy books regarding descriptions of G-d, they are all anthropomorphic. Thus said our great Rabbis of blessed memory The Torah spoke in man's language (i.e. using human terms so that man would have some understanding). And the Rabbis have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third pillar and is attested to by the verse "For you saw no image" meaning that you did not see an image or any form when you stood at Sinai because as we have just said He has no body nor power of the body."*

Perhaps now we may answer how the Temple addresses the sin of the Golden Calf. The Temple had many unique qualities and vessels. But most central was the fact that it was constructed of two rooms; a Holies, and a Holy of Holies. In this second room, no man was allowed to enter, save the high priest on Yom Kippur, and even then, only with smoking incense, a vail. Sinai too was accompanied by smoke and darkness. G-d created His "appearance" as cloud. In all cases, we are taught that there is an impenetrable vail - cloud - between G-d and man. "For man cannot know me when alive." (Exod. 33:20) Man must accept his mind's shortcomings, his inability to know G-d. We have but five senses of perception. All that cannot be perceived through these senses is completely out of our range of

knowledge. In a dark room, vision does not function, as vision requires light. G-d is not physical, similarly, He cannot be perceived by human sensation which requires physical stimulation.

The sin of the Golden Calf was man's futile attempt to grasp what man cannot grasp. When man assumes there is a sensory connection between G-d and the physical, man forfeits his purpose. His existence is worthless, as all he knows or learned in his life, to him, stems from an imagined physical G-d, not the true metaphysical G-d. His knowledge is completely inaccurate. His life is wasted due to his incorrect notions of G-d. He deserves death. Therefore, those who worshiped the Calf were killed, just as those who looked into the Ark when it was returned by the Philistines. (Samuel I, 6:19) In both cases, man assumed something physical in connection with G-d. In truth, the underlying flaw is man's overestimation in his own knowledge. In both cases the sinners felt all must be within their grasp, including G-d. They could not accept human inability.

We mentioned that the Temple has two rooms, one of which is off limits. The Temple attempts to teach man through man's distance from a certain room, that man must admit complete ignorance about the nature of G-d's existence. Even more, man must not even try to approach any understanding of G-d's existence - it is impossible for our minds to apprehend, and is "off limits". We cannot know Him. A location, the Holy of Holies, coupled with the command never to enter, opposes man's assumption that G-d is approachable, and teaches that in fact, we cannot fathom G-d's existence. What we do know concerning G-d, is as Maimonides explains, is what He is not. We can only have negative knowledge of G-d. That is, we know He is not physical, He has no emotions, He occupies no place, He is not "in" this world, etc. The Rabbis say, "He is the 'place' of the world, and the world is not His place." This means that G-d is the "place" or source of the world, but He occupies no place. He is not physical.

Prior to the sin, the people had not demonstrated a false notion of G-d. Therefore, as Sforno states, in any place they called to G-d, He responded. This is because they were calling on the true G-d. However, subsequent to their sin, they corrupted their view of G-d, and He therefore could not answer. They did not call to "Him", but to an imagined idea of G-d. An imagination cannot answer someone's call. Moses' removal of his Tent of Meeting was a demonstration that there was a separation between G-d and the people after the sin of the Golden Calf.

Perhaps we can also answer why the Temple was constructed from free donations. Such an act demonstrates that the donor is not attached to the precious metals, gems, and materials, but he gives freely. In fact, his focus on physical property is replaced by an act of following a Divine command, to build a Temple to G-d. Such a donation enables man to remove his grip on the physical, which the sinners could not accomplish. Man is also perfected by this display of following G-d's commands, not man's own fantasies. □

#### Footnotes:

(1) But even the Jews' sin is recorded by G-d's divine words, so in fact, both are G-d's clues for our study.

(2) Either notion is a corruption in our view of G-d, and is prohibited.

(3) The Jews looked into the ark upon its return from the Philistines. This demonstrated their belief that there is something to be seen in relationship to G-d. They harbored a notion that G-d is connected with the physical. A large amount of Jews were punished there with death by G-d's hand.

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# Torah & Archaeology

RABBI DR. DOVID GOTTLIEB

Patriarchs, wars, migrations, famines, marriages, and all kinds of other events in ancient history. How reliable is that record? Here is a popular way to investigate the reliability of the Bible. The Bible is what is in question and therefore we should not assume that it is true. Now, if we can find other ancient records, for example, ancient hieroglyphics, Syrian records, or Babylonian records, then we could check the Bible against them. If the Bible agrees with them that is indication and evidence that the Bible is correct. If the Bible disagrees with them, then that shows that the Bible is incorrect. That is an objective, neutral way of assessing whether the Bible's account of history is correct or incorrect.

Does that strike you as fair? I should hope not because it isn't fair. The mere fact that the Bible would contradict other ancient records doesn't prove that the Bible is wrong. Maybe the other records are wrong! A mere contradiction only shows that somebody is wrong. Why assume that the Bible is wrong? That would just be a hidden prejudice against the Bible. When there is a contradiction between the Bible and other ancient sources, then the question has to be raised: How can we best understand the nature of the contradiction, and which source do we rely upon?

Now, in making that evaluation you must know one fact - all ancient histories were written as propaganda. This is something upon which historians and archaeologists agree. The function of ancient histories was to glorify contemporary powers, and therefore they would not record their own defeats. After all, the scribes were their employees. You see this, for example, in the following type of historical chain of events. You read in the hieroglyphs that Pharaoh X raised a great army and conquered a number of provinces, and his son Pharaoh X Jr. raised even a larger army and conquered more provinces. Then, there is a hundred year gap in the history. What happened during that 100 years? For that you have to go to the Babylonian records. That is when the Babylonians were kicking the stuffing out of the Egyptians. The Egyptians don't record that because that doesn't glorify their empire. They just leave it out.

An example is the question of the Exodus. Why is it that no ancient Egyptian records mention the Exodus? The answer is that the Egyptians never recorded their defeats. Therefore, since the Exodus was a massive defeat, you would not

expect them to record it. So, its absence from their records is not evidence against the Exodus.

## II

Now if we are talking about the accuracy of ancient history, the key question is archaeology. Archaeology is supposed to uncover the actual evidence that these events did or did not occur. I am going to give you a brief review of the situation in archaeology with respect to the Biblical narrative. Most of this is referred to in a book called *Biblical Personalities in Archaeology* by Leah Bronner.

One hundred years ago it was assumed that Biblical history going back roughly to the time of King David and Solomon is more or less accurate. Bertrand Russell wrote in his *History of Western Civilization* that we can presume that David and Solomon were real kings. But, beyond David and Solomon, there was no evidence for anything whatsoever, and the prevailing view was that it was myth. It was simply stories invented to glorify mythical, that is to say non-existent, ancestors so as to create a great history for the nation. Many nations did that, such as the Greeks, and it was assumed that the Jews did it as well.

One of the ways that you can tell if this myth-making goes on is that the people writing the myth project into the past their own conditions of existence. They didn't know that 500-1000 years before life was very different. They assumed that life was more or less the same as their conditions of life and projected backwards. Then, what we find from archaeology is that the conditions were quite different from what was described in the myth, and we know therefore that it was a myth. For example, they may have projected back weapons that they didn't have, domesticated animals that they didn't have, trade routes that they didn't have, settlements that they didn't have and so on. That is how you determine if it was myth. So there was the same assumption about the Biblical account of history before David and Solomon.

But in the case of the Bible, archaeology has revealed the exact opposite. Archaeology has uncovered a myriad of details, details that the Bible records about the quality of life and the conditions of life of the Patriarchs which turn out to be accurate to the last detail. These details are accurate in ways that are utterly inexplicable if

you think that this is a normal process of myth formation.

So, for example, Abraham in all his wanderings is never associated with the Northern part of Israel, only the Southern part of Israel. Now in the period to which Abraham is assigned by the Bible, the Northern part of Israel wasn't settled. Later, when supposedly the myth was being made up, it was settled. If someone were writing it later, and projecting his conditions of existence on the past, there would be no reason for him to discriminate against the Northern part of Israel.

Another example: the names Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lavan, and Joseph were in common usage in the Patriarchal period and dropped out of usage thereafter. These names appear in archaeological inscriptions from that period and no later period. In the Bible those names are used only in the book of Genesis. Now, somebody five hundred years later is supposed to be making up this myth. How is it that he just happened to get right names for that period of time?

It was custom in that period of time that if a couple was childless, the husband would take a handmaid of the wife as a concubine and have children with her. If the original wife were then to have a child, law against being disinherited protected the child of the handmaid. This legal protection did not exist in later centuries. In the Bible, we have Abraham and Sarah doing this. If a handmaid had a child in the manner just described, the law of the time forbade expelling of the child of the handmaid. This explains why, when Sarah told Abraham to throw Ishmael out of the house, the Torah says that it was "Very evil in Abraham's eyes." It was very evil because it went against the local prevailing law. It wasn't forbidden in later centuries, but in that century it was forbidden. If this had been made up five hundred years later and projected onto the past, it would be inexplicable how they could have gotten this right.

An argument that they used that the account depicted in the Bible was a myth was the idea of camels being domesticated. The Patriarchs are described as having used camels for transportation. It was assumed that this was an anachronism. Camels were domesticated later, but of course the later people didn't know that their ancestors didn't have camels, and if they had camels they would of course have pictured their ancestors as having camels. Their great ancestors

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# Torah & Archaeology

RABBI DR. DOVID GOTTLIEB



couldn't be less than they were.

But, it turns out that this was just archaeological ignorance. We have the eighteenth century B.C.E. Canophorin tablets in Northern Syria which list the domesticated animals and in which the camel is specifically mentioned. Another archaeological discovery depicts a camel in a kneeling position. A seal dating back to this period depicts a rider sitting on a camel. So, it turns out to be an accurate report of the details, not a later anachronistic projection into the past.

There are many examples dealing with Joseph. Take for example the price of a slave. Joseph is sold for twenty pieces of silver. That was the accurate price of a slave in Joseph's time, and at no other time. Slaves were cheaper beforehand, and they got increasingly more and more expensive later. Imagine someone five hundred years later putting in that detail. How would he know what the price of slaves were five hundred years earlier? He certainly wouldn't get it right by accident.

You have the same thing regarding sleeping in Egypt on beds. In Palestine at that time they slept on the ground, and in Egypt they slept on beds, and so therefore the Torah mentions explicitly that when Jacob was in Egypt, he died on a bed.

The investiture of Joseph as viceroy in Egypt follows the pattern from that period. He stood before Pharaoh and had to be shaved because

the Pharaohs in that period were shaved. He had a collar put around his neck and a ring put on his finger. There are hieroglyphs of that specific procedure, and of riding in a chariot second to the king. All of these details are accurate.

Now, that means that at least the details of life are corroborated by archaeology. So, the normal

assumption that this was written later and projected on the past simply doesn't hold up. It is simply not correct.

### III

Now, I will not say that there are no problems. There are some problems. Some of the problems have to be looked at very carefully to understand what kinds of problems they are, for example, the Exodus. This is a textbook case. If the Exodus took place, what kind of archaeological evidence would you expect to find? You are talking about a large number of people leaving Egypt. You would expect to find implements, clothing, vessels, weapons, and these sorts of things scattered all over the desert. What about bones? People die, especially if they were in a desert for forty years. The truth is though we don't find anything. Nothing as of yet has been found as archaeological evidence of the Exodus.

Is this then evidence against the Torah's account? It depends on what is being tested. Are you testing the Biblical story? If you are testing the Biblical story, you have to test it in its own terms. You have to accept all of it. It will do no good to take one element of the Biblical story, and then graft onto it other non-Biblical hypotheses and then test the conglomerate, because that is a conglomerate that no one believes in.

Now in the case of the Exodus the Torah says

explicitly that during the forty-year period their clothing didn't wear out (Deut. 8:4). Now, if you are going to look through the desert for scattered clothing, then you are not testing the Bible. The Bible would say you will not find a thing! The Bible says that they are not there. If you are looking for clothes, you are testing the assumption that there was an Exodus as the Bible says together with your naturalistic account of the evidence, which the Bible denies. Nobody believes that! To test the Biblical story you have to take it in all its own details.

Similarly is the case with the bones. The Bible gives no details of how the people died. But Jewish tradition (Midrash) records the following. Each year on the ninth of Av they dug a mass grave, everybody laid-down in the grave, and in the morning those who survived got up, and the rest that were dead were covered up and that was their grave. They didn't die from time to time, everyday more or less scattered all over the desert.

Furthermore, the Sinai desert is a big place and sands shift over time. We are talking about sands shifting over a period of three thousand years. Where exactly would you dig? How deep should you dig? How many holes should you put down to have a chance of finding anything? It is not even thirty-nine burial places because in certain places they stayed for many years. There are maybe twenty burial places in the entire Sinai desert. How many holes do you need to put down to have a reasonable probability of finding twenty burial places, each burial place being something like three, square blocks? So, the fact that they haven't found the kind of evidence they are looking for is no proof whatsoever. It is not even evidence against the idea of an Exodus.

### IV

Kathleen Kenyan excavated Jericho. She says the best date we have for the entry of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is 1400 B.C.E. She says that there is a hundred and fifty year gap between the destruction of Jericho and the entry of the Jewish people into the land. Therefore she concludes that the Jews couldn't have been the ones responsible for destroying Jericho. They just attributed it their ancestors in order to glorify them.

Now how does she arrive at her conclusion that

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# Torah & Archaeology

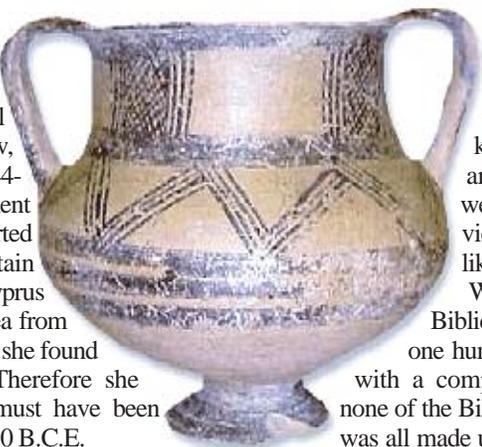
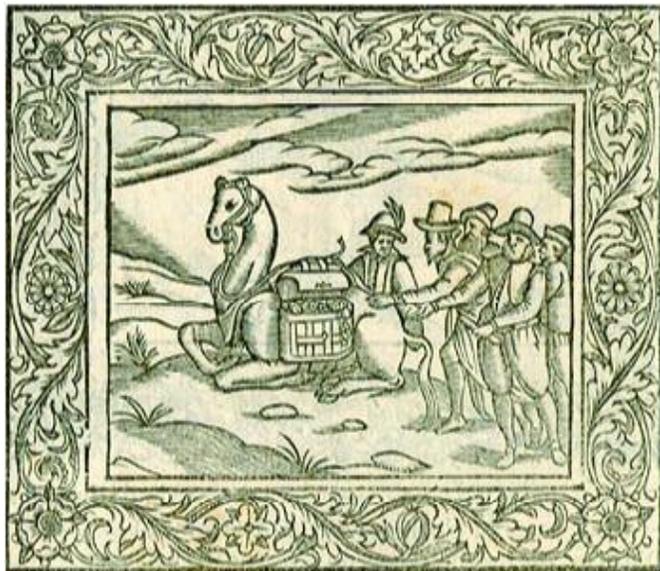
RABBI DR. DOVID GOTTLIEB

Jericho was destroyed no later than 1550 B.C.E.? [For the details of what follows, see Biblical Archeological Review, March/April 1990 pp. 44-56.] She based her argument on the absence of imported Cypriot pottery. A certain style of pottery from Cyprus was imported into the area from 1550 to 1400 B.C.E., and she found none of it at Jericho. Therefore she concluded that Jericho must have been destroyed earlier than 1550 B.C.E.

But this conclusion is very weak. It can be attacked in at least four different ways:

- (1) Method: conclusions based on what you don't find are always weak (see below).
- (2) She herself says that Jericho was not on any of the major trade routes - is that where you expect to find imported pottery?
- (3) She sank two shafts into what she herself describes as the poor section of the city. Is that where you expect to find imported pottery?
- (4) She totally ignored the dating of local pottery, which had been found in earlier excavations, which do come from dates later than 1550 B.C.E.

Now bear in mind that the British government



knighted her for her contributions to archeology! I won't speculate what leads to this kind of sloppy argumentation. But surely we don't have to give up our views in the face of criticism like this!

What has happened in Biblical archaeology in the last one hundred years is that it started with a completely negative mind-set: none of the Biblical narrative happened, it was all made up. Little by little, piece-by-piece, that mind set has been refuted in a myriad of details. That doesn't mean they are giving up entirely, they are still holding on to some of the things which they feel haven't yet been established. But this should give us two consequences. One: the trend is gradual verification. There is gradual archaeological corroboration of the Torah's account of history. Two: it should give us some insight into their mental set. They started off with a complete negative, and they are grudgingly admitting piece by piece that some parts have been verified. That means to say that they are imposing an unreasonable standard of proof for the Bible.

Archaeology can sometimes establish a positive. If you find something such as a city that was burnt, pillaged, or destroyed, you could assume that there was some sort of military action. It is very difficult for archaeology to establish a negative - for archaeology to establish that something didn't happen. In order for that, you need to know that if it happened I ought to find it here in such and such a place. That is a very tricky judgment. Even if it happened, how do you know you ought to have found it here? Maybe you will find it someplace else. Maybe this isn't the place that you thought it was. There are some cities that have gone through three or four identifications. Remember: they assumed that there were no domesticated camels because

they didn't happen to find that cylindrical seal, or that particular hieroglyph. Then they found it and discovered that there were domesticated animals.

So beware of archaeology when it claims to find a negative. To establish that a war didn't take place or that a settlement wasn't there, or that so and so wasn't the king is very difficult. When archaeology claims to establish a positive, then it is more credible. Of course, even then it requires interpretation of what was found, and that is not completely reliable. In any event, I think we are in a position to say that archaeology is no longer the great problem it once was. Archaeology is still in progress. New insights and new deductions are still being drawn and there is a lot yet to be learned from it. New evidence in archaeology is providing gradual (though at present incomplete) verification of the Torah's description of history.



I will end this chapter with one little insight that is due to William Albright, which I think is fascinating for a general picture of ancient history. Albright has a proof that there was an influence of the Jews on the Greeks. The names of the Hebrew letters are words in Hebrew. Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Dalet and so on all have meanings in the Hebrew. The names of the letters in Greek are obviously related to the names of the letters in Hebrew: alpha, beta, gamma, delta and so on. But, those sounds in Greek have no meaning in Greek. Alpha and Beta are not Greek words. Where did they get those names for their letters? Albright says the historical archaeological community has accepted this - they received them from the Jews. Perhaps indirectly the Philistines took them to Greece and gave the letters to them, but it ultimately comes from the Jews.

Now if the very names of the letters of the Greek alphabet came from us, what else came? We know that there was some influence and that they took something from us. The names of the letters in your alphabet are pretty fundamental. Who knows whatever else they could have taken? Instead of thinking that the Greeks may have influenced Judaism, there a new sector of research investigating ways in which the Jews influenced the Greeks! ▣

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# Weekly Parsha

# TERUMA

RABBI BERNARD FOX

Ark. The Torah commands us that the poles must remain in the rings at all times. Even when the Mishcan is erected and the Aron is at rest the poles are to remain attached.

The poles were designed for the transport of the Ark. When the Aron was moved the poles were needed. But when the Ark was at rest the poles did not have any apparent function. Why should they not be removed at such times?

Gershonides discusses this issue. He explains that the Ark represented the Torah. The Torah is perfect. Therefore, the Ark must always be perfect. With the removal of the poles, the Ark would no longer be complete. An incomplete Aron is unfit to represent the Torah.[1]

Gershonides explanation seems difficult to understand. In order for an object to be perfect it must be complete. However, perfection also requires that the object have no extra or meaningless components. Imagine the perfect machine. Every part would serve a purpose. No needed component would be absent. No component would lack purpose.

When the Ark was at rest the poles had no purpose. They were extra. It seems the Aron would have better represented the perfection of the Torah without this superfluous component!

Gershonides is providing us with an important insight into the nature of the Aron. The Ark constructed in the wilderness was transported as the nation traveled. Therefore, the Aron was constructed so that it could be carried. However, this design was not merely a practical necessity. The portability of the Ark was essential to its very definition. In other words, the Ark was defined as a portable item. The Aron could only be considered perfect when it expressed this definition. Even at rest the Ark was required to conform to this definition. It must remain completely portable. For this reason the Aron of the permanent Bait HaMikdash remained unchanged in design. The poles were part of the design and could not be removed.

Perhaps, this provides a message regarding the perfection of the Torah. This perfection, in part, lies in the portability of Torah. Torah is a way of life that applies to all times and places. Even when Bnai Yisrael are dispersed throughout the world, Torah is still to be the guide.

**“And the cherubs shall spread their wings upward, their wings covering the Ark-cover. And they shall face one another. They should face the center of the Ark cover.”** (Shemot 25:20)

The Aron – Ark – in the Mishcan held the tablets of the Decalogue. The opening of the Ark was sealed by the Kaporet – the Ark cover. Mounted on this golden cover were two cherubs. The golden cherubs were positioned at the ends of the cover. The cherubs faced one another. Their wings were spread forward and upward.

There are various opinions regarding the meaning of these cherubim. Don Yitzchak Abravanel explains that the cherubim symbolize two relationships. Their up-stretched wings represent the relationship between the individual and the Almighty. The cherubim faced one another. This represents the relationship between the individual and his or her friend. The cherubim were placed upon the Ark that contained the tablets. This communicates the message that both of these relationships must be based upon the commandments of the Torah.[2]

The importance of the Torah in regulating relations between individuals is reflected in a well-known teaching of the Sages. “Torah scholars increase peace in the world.”[3] This concise dictum communicates the lesson that the Torah is a guide for the treatment one’s neighbor. Through following the principles of the Torah, a healthy community is formed.

It is interesting that our Sages taught that Torah scholars increase peace. Why did the Sages not say that the scholars create peace?

Rav Zalman Soroskin ztl offers an insightful response to this question. He explains that two issues must be addressed in order for peace to be achieved. First, there must exist, among the members of the society, a desire to establish peace. Second, wisdom is required to translate this goodwill into concrete rules for relationships. The scholar, through the Torah, can provide the framework in which peace can develop and flourish. However, in order for these efforts to be successful, there must exist a sincere desire to pursue peace.

Based in this insight, the meaning of the Sages emerges. The Torah scholar cannot create peace. First, the desire must exist. However, given this desire, the scholar can help society achieve its goal.

**“And they should create for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.”** (Shemot 25:8)

In this pasuk Hashem instructs Moshe to command Bnai Yisrael to construct the Mishcan. Hashem tells Bnai Yisrael that through this Mishcan, He will dwell among the people.

This passage cannot be understood literally. In order to understand the difficulty presented by a literal interpretation of the pasuk, an introduction is needed. Maimonides, in his commentary on the Mishne enumerates the basic foundations of the Torah. The third of these basic principles is that the Almighty is not, in any sense, material.[4] Maimonides discusses this principle in further detail in his Mishne Torah. He again explains that the Almighty is not material. He adds that it is also inappropriate to attribute to Hashem any of the characteristics associated with physical bodies. For example, Hashem does not have a front or back. One cannot ascribe physical actions to the Almighty. Also, one cannot ascribe a place to Hashem.[5]

This principle, identified by Maimonides, is a logical extension of the proposition that Hashem is a unity. The Torah clearly states that “Hashem is one”.[6] This statement tells us that there is only one G-d. However, our Sages understand the passage to also mean that the Almighty is a perfect unity. This means that He has no parts or aspects. He is not subject to division. He is an absolute representation of “oneness”.[7] The principle of Hashem’s unity precludes attribution of a material existence to Him. Any material entity is has parts or aspects. It has a front and back or dimensions. These characteristics contradict the concept of absolute unity.

Furthermore the Torah clearly states that Hashem is not material. This principle is communicated in Moshe’s review of the event of Revelation. He reminds the nation that they had experienced Revelation at Sinai. In this experience the Almighty was not represented by any material image.[8]

We can now understand the difficulty presented by our passage. If our passage is interpreted literally, it contradicts this principle. Literally understood, our passage attributes location to the Almighty. The passage states that Hashem will dwell among Bnai Yisrael! This is impossible. Hashem is not material. Therefore, it is not correct to say He dwells in any place.

Unkelus is sensitive to this anthropomorphism. In his translation of our passage, he alters the problematic phrase. In his rendering the phrase reads, “and I will cause the Divine presence to dwell among them”. Unkelus’ intention is to remove any attribution of place to the Almighty. According to Unkelus, the passage’s refers to Hashem’s Divine presence or influence. In other words, the passage describes a providential relationship. The Almighty will exercise His

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# Weekly Parsha

# TERUMA

RABBI BERNARD FOX

Credits: "The Tabernacle" by Moshe Levine



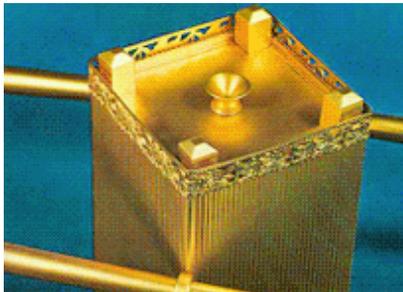
The Menora



The Table, housing the Showbread



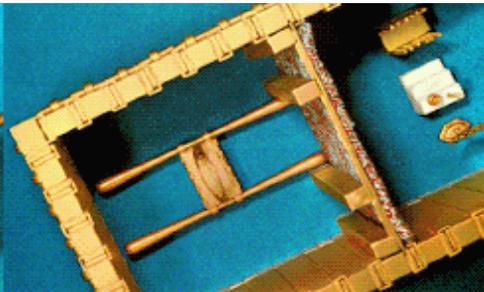
The Ark, housing the Ten Commandments



The Inner Altar (incense)



The Outer Altar (animals)



The Tabernacle, housing the vessels (overhead view)

providence over the Mishkan and the people.

Rav Yosef Albo, in his *Sefer HaIkkrim*, uses the same approach to explain various anthropomorphic expressions found in the Torah. A few examples will illustrate this approach. Hashem tells us, in reference to the Temple, "Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually".[9] Hashem does not have eyes or a heart. The intent of the passage is to communicate that a special providential influence exists over the Mikdash.[10] The Torah states that at Revelation, "the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain".[11] This passage does not intend to communicate that Hashem was present at Revelation. This would attribute a place to the Almighty. Instead, the passage is stating that the influence of the Almighty was evidenced through a physical manifestation. In this case, the manifestation was the conflagration that appeared at the top of Sinai.[12] It should be noted that the pasuk refers to the "glory" of the Almighty. This supports this interpretation. The Almighty was not present. However, His "glory" or influence was indicated by the fire.

One anthropomorphic expression has occasioned considerable discussion among the Sages. One of the names used for the Almighty is HaMakom – the Place.[13] This is popularly understood to mean that the Divine presence extends everywhere. However, our Sages provide a different explanation of the term. They explain that the term means that Hashem is the makom – the place – of the universe.[14]

This explanation is very difficult to understand. How can the Sages refer to Hashem as the place of the universe? Hashem is not material. He is not a place! Rav Yitzchak Arama offers a novel interpretation of the Sages' comments. He explains that the term place can be understood as the base upon which something rests or is supported. As an example, he cites the second mishne of Tractate Avot. The mishne explains that the world stand on three pillars – Torah study, Divine service and acts of kindness. The intent of the mishne is that these three activities are essential to the existence of the world. The mishne expresses this idea by representing the world as standing on these activities. In other

words, standing in a place – upon the pillars of Torah study, Divine service and acts of kindness – represents dependency. Rav Arama explains that the name HaMakom communicates the universe's dependency upon the Almighty. He is the "place" upon which the universe stands. This means the universe only exists as a result of His continuing will. His will supports the universe's existence. Without His will, the universe would cease to exist.[15] □

[1] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), *Commentary on Sefer Shemot*, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 342.  
[2] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, *Commentary on Sefer*

*Shemot*, p 252.

[3] *Mesechet Berachot* 64a.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) *Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin* 10:1.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) *Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah*, 1:11.

[6] *Sefer Devarim* 6:4.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) *Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah*, 1:7.

[8] *Sefer Devarim* 4:15. See Rabbaynu

Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) *Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin* 10:1.

[9] *Melachim* I 9:3.

[10] Rav Yosef Albo, *Sefer HaIkkarim*, volume2, chapter 14.

[11] *Sefer Shemot* 24:17.

[12] Rav Yosef Albo, *Sefer HaIkkarim*, volume2, chapter 17.

[13] See, for example, *Mesechet Avot* 2:9.

[14] *Midrash Rabba, Sefer Beresheit* 68:9.

[15] Rav Yitzchak Arama, *Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer Shemot, Parshat Terumah*.

# the ARK'S POLES

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the purpose of haftoras Pekuday teaching that the Cherubim not only covered the Ark with their wings, but they also covered the poles of the Ark? What is derived from this? Additionally, what may be derived from the command (Exod. 25:15) that the Ark's poles are never to be removed? Lastly, what may be derived from the order of the Ark's assembly, (Exod. 40:20) "he (Moses) placed the Tablets into the Ark, he placed the poles on the Ark and he placed the Kapores (Ark cover) on the Ark"? Shouldn't the poles be last, as the Kapores should most certainly be prior, as it is more essential than the poles?

I believe the answer to all these questions is one concept, that is, that the Ark has no "destination" i.e., the Temple. The Ark outweighs the Temple in importance, as the Ark houses the Law - man's main pursuit in life. Suggesting that the Ark has found a resting place, i.e., a 'purpose' in something else, attributes greater import to something other than the Ark itself. This is as if to say that a higher purpose in the Ark has been realized by the Ark's arrival in the Temple. This is not so. Torah study must always claim top priority for man. To demonstrate that the Ark has not 'come to finally rest' in the Temple, the poles are never to be removed. This informs us that the Ark which houses the law must be the central focus of the Temple - counter intuitive to what we would expect of such a marvelous structure.

This is why Moses inserted the poles prior to covering the Ark, to demonstrate that the poles of all other objects are merely for transport. But the Ark's poles are integrally tied to the Ark's purpose and designation. Moses therefore displayed the pole's essential character, giving them prominence by inserting them even prior to covering the Ark with the Kapores. This also explains the passage in the haftora that the Cherubim not only covered the Ark with their wings, but they also covered the poles. ■

# the CHOSEN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**READER:** I AM TRYING TO EXPAND MY KNOWLEDGE IN RELIGIONS. COULD YOU GIVE ME AN EXPLANATION OF THE PHRASE "THE CHOSEN ONES"? WHO ARE THEY? WHY ARE THEY THE CHOSEN ONES? ARE THEY SUPERIOR, IN WAYS, TO OTHER PEOPLE IN THE WORLD?

**Mesora:** Let me clarify your last statement; man is man. When compared with all other nations, Jews have no additional human features.

You question the term "chosen people". I ask, "what does 'chosen' imply"? I would say that one who has merited distinction based on his own acts, and is ascribed credit by another, may be termed "chosen" by the other.

Does this compliment apply to each individual Jew? Let us consider:

Abraham lived in a society permeated by idolatrous practices - he too worshiped idols. Upon later analysis of what is real and true as he observed the world, Abraham arrived at the conclusion that there can be only one God. He beholds infinite wisdom. His wisdom reflects in all He created. He is just, kind, merciful, and He is not of the material of this world - He is not physical. Noting man's clear distinction as the only rational being on Earth, Abraham further understood that God desires man to use his mind above all else. Abraham arrived at proofs for his reasoning, such valid proofs that God desired His

words be carried out in the world through Abraham and his descendants, to whom Abraham would teach the ways of God. This is expressly stated in Genesis, 18:19, "For I know (him) that he will command his children and his household after him and they will keep the way of God to do charity and justice...."

For the singular reason that Abraham approached this life - and ultimately his relationship with God - using rationale, intelligence, and proofs, God therefore chose Abraham - and thereafter his descendants - to be the guardians and teachers of His Torah. It is most crucial that one realize this distinction between Abraham and all others of his era, which is the same distinction between Judaism and all other religions: Judaism is based on rationale and proofs, just as all other areas of study, such as math and natural science. Conversely, all other religions base themselves on belief and claims, not subject to proof. God does not desire this approach, demonstrated by His gift to man of intelligence.

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## Letters

# the CHOSEN

Abraham discovered God and Judaism with the same methods used to prove scientific fact. God created both religion and science. Therefore, by design, both require the identical, intelligent approach in order to discover the layers of God's wisdom enveloped in each. This approach of reason - the only approach - is what Abraham engaged to demonstrate to others the fallacy of idolatry and polytheism. He taught God's existence via proofs, and that following the Creator of the universe is what is reasonable and true. Man cannot deny logic, and Abraham soon attracted thousands of adherents. God's revelation to, and selection of Abraham is the undeniable, Divine endorsement that Abraham discovered what is real and true about the universe. We learn that God waited for someone like and Abraham to find God, and not vice versa. God revealing Himself to man without man exerting his intelligence will never happen. God does not desire that man be forced into worshipping Him. This is why the Torah states in connection with revelation at Sinai, (Deut. 5:19) "A loud voice, and no more." Meaning, although one historically proven event was required to prove God's existence and the veracity of the Torah, it also coerced the Jews into the acceptance of God, as the proof was undeniable. This is not God's desired method for man's approach to Him.

God wishes that man use intelligence, not his fear, nor faith, nor belief. This applies to

all areas of life, starting with the most important area, man's knowledge of, and adherence to God. Selecting Abraham and his descendants to teach the world, God teaches just that.

Jews are bound to study God's system of Torah, both for our own edification, and to teach other nations, demonstrated by Abraham's life's work of reaching out to others. Thus, we are referred to as the "chosen people"(1), Deuteronomy, 10:15, "Only in your fathers did God desire and did He love them, and He chose their seed after them from all other peoples, as this day."

Based on God's words noted herein, a Jew must not feel arrogant towards a Gentile. Certainly, if such a Jew is non-observant, he does not fulfill in himself God's desire for man, nor does he lay claim on the term chosen. And even when one does fulfill God's plan and adheres to the Torah, the term "chosen" is not complimentary to him, but actually to Abraham. We read in Deuteronomy 7:8, "Because from God's love for you and His guard of His swear that He swore to your forefathers..."

God secured the blessings of Abraham upon his son Isaac, with the qualification that Abraham adhere to God's ideals, as stated in Genesis, 26:5, "I will increase your seed as the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your seed all these lands, and all nations will bless you. On account of Abraham's hearkening to My voice, and he guarded my guarding (laws), my

commands, statutes and torahs."(2)

Where do we see our goal of "a light unto nations" realized? In Deuteronomy 4:6-8 we read, "And you shall watch them and keep them as they (the commands) are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and declare 'what a wise and understanding people is this great nation. Because what great nation has God close to them like God, whenever (they) call to Him? And what great nation has statutes and laws as righteous as this entire Torah!'"

**The Rabbis stated in line with this quote, that we are chosen for no other reason than to imbue the world with God's wisdom.**

God did not create "Jews" and "Gentiles". God created "man". Later on, man deviated through idol worship. But from God's initial plan it is quite clear, He desires ALL mankind follow him. That He chose a people most suitable to receive, study and teach His ideas to others, follows God's initial plan. Deuteronomy 9:5 and 9:6 state emphatically, "Not due to your righteousness or upright hearts do you come to inherit the land..."

The very fact that God selected David and Solomon as His kings, the descendants of

converts, demonstrates that God judges one based on his own merit, not on his lineage. Although these great men were not descendants of the "chosen" people, this is immaterial.

Maimonides - responding to a convert's query whether he could accurately state in his prayers "God of our fathers" - instructed him that Abraham was indeed his father, as "father" is measured not in biological terms, but in ideological terms. Maimonides taught that converts are truly descendants of Abraham.

Jews can become corrupt - we are not exempt from emotions and erroneous opinions which lead to sinning against God. Equally true, being a member of the "chosen people" does not brand us as good - our free will determines our own merit. We must think clearly, and appreciate that the term chosen did not devolve upon us today - it is Abraham's appellation - who was not even a Jew. We do share that reference, provided we study, understand, teach, and follow God's instructions to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

God desires all mankind know Him. It is only due to our forefathers' adherence to God's ideals, that God selected them. They demonstrated intelligence in all areas of life starting with religion, and they embodied moral perfection essential to act as God's emissaries - transferring God's will to man - every man. ▣

(1) "Chosen" is not a universal accolade applying to all roles of a Jew. Chosen means, chosen for a specific task.

(2) Once chosen, Abraham remained at risk of losing the chosen status unless he remained faithful to the true path. Unlike academic degrees, one's status as God's chosen is reversible; in proportion to his perfection is God's desire of him.