



The Hidden Bones Apocalypse: The Marker, Its Message, and their Hiddenness

Charles R. Lightner¹ 

¹ Independent Scholar/Researcher, Westfield, New Jersey, USA.

ABSTRACT

There is an unusual phrase that occurs only fourteen times in the Hebrew Bible. Those fourteen occurrences mark the accounts of ten highly consequential days. The essential messages of those ten accounts, when taken together, create and convey a unified and coherent communication. The presence of the phrase, its uniqueness to those days, and the message it creates, are hidden in translations. Readers of the biblical text in English, Greek, Latin, and German versions have no reason to associate the ten marked days. The phrase and its message are effectively hidden even from those who use the Hebrew text; having been obscured by the tradition of interpretation extending through rabbinic literature and commentary. The message created by reference to those ten marked days is representative of early Jewish apocalypse literature. This paper identifies and analyses the marker phrase, identifies the days that it marks, interprets the message created, demonstrates the hiddenness of that message, and argues its character as an apocalypse.

Keywords: *Hebrew Bible, Apocalypse, Bible Translation, Early Rabbinic Literature, Rabbinic Commentary*

Correspondence

Charles R. Lightner

Email: crlightner@yahoo.com

Publication History

Received 18th January, 2023 | Accepted 15th March, 2023 | Published online 24th March, 2023

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. Bible Versions

HB	Hebrew Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
V	Latin Vulgate
D-RB	The Douay-Rheims Bible
ESV	The English Standard Version
JPS	The “Old” Jewish Publication Society Translation
HCSB	The Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	The King James Version
NABR	The New American Bible Revised Edition
NASB	The New American Study Bible
NET	The New English Translation
NIV	The New International Version
NJPS	The “New” Jewish Publication Society Translation
NLT	The New Living Translation
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version
YLT	Young’s Literal Translation

2. Books of the Hebrew Bible

Genesis	Gen
Exodus	Exod
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Num
Deuteronomy	Deut
Joshua	Josh
Judges	Judg
Ezekiel	Ezek
Job	Job
Daniel	Dan
1 Chronicles	1 Chr

3. Deuterocanonical and Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

Sirach/Ben Sira	Sir
Jubilees	Jub.
1 Enoch	1 En.

4. Rabbinic Literature

Mishnah	M.
Babylonian Talmud	B.
Jerusalem Talmud	Y.
Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael	Mek.
Midrash Tanhuma	Tanh.
Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer	Pirke R. El.

Bereshit Rabbah
Shir HaShirim Rabbah

Ber. Rab.
Shir HaShir. R.

5. Other

Anchor Bible	AB
Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon	CAL
Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies	CATSS
Jewish Literary Aramaic	JLA
Jewish Palestinian Aramaic	JPA
Oxford English Dictionary	OED
Society of Biblical Literature	SBL
Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism	SJSJ
Supplements to Vetus Testamentum	VTSup

Part 1 – Introduction

There are many ways in which the Hebrew text of the Bible calls attention to itself. Some are visual signals: letters written larger or smaller than normal; inverted letters; text arranged in an unusual visual pattern; words and letters with unusual markings, and so forth. Some are textual, such as the emphatic doubling of verbs, poetic cadence, unusual word order, changes in spelling, apparent editing, or words that are found only once. Many textual issues will be obvious only to those quite familiar with the Hebrew text, but to those readers, they are as obvious as the oversized *bet* which is the first Hebrew letter of the first word of Genesis, *Bereshit*. This study concerns an unusual element of the Hebrew text that is not visually obvious. It calls for our attention because of an unusual combination of quite ordinary words. Its function is to draw our attention, not just to itself, but to the verses in which it is found, to the days to which the verses refer, to the essential importance of those days, and ultimately to the relationship among those days. The ten individual messages, when taken together, create a clear, coherent, and important communication; one that deserves our attention.

It is as if a person with a yellow highlighter had marked fourteen of the more than twenty-three thousand verses in the Hebrew text; fourteen verses whose subject is ten important days. Within each highlighted verse, an unusual combination of words is found. It would be natural to wonder what had drawn such specific attention, especially since this virtual highlighting has appeared in every copy of the Hebrew text that has ever been printed, and in copies created by hand before the advent of printing; as far back as the second-century BCE.¹ The unusual phrase was intended to draw the reader's attention, but it has not. We *should* wonder about both the phrase and the relationship among the ten important days. But we have not done so because the unusual nature of the phrase and the relationship among the ten marked days are not apparent in English translations of the text. Nor is it apparent in the standard Greek, Latin, or German versions. And the tradition of rabbinic analysis and commentary on the Hebrew text fails to point out the association even to those whose text is in the original language.

The existence of the Hebrew phrase and its uniqueness in the highlighted accounts is a matter of simple observation. The failure of nearly every translation to signal the association among them is also a matter of simple observation.² The failure to recognize the association in the rabbinic literature and commentaries on the Hebrew text can be demonstrated. Moving beyond observation and demonstration, to an interpretation of meaning and message, takes us into less certain territory. However, we can interpret the messages of the individual marked days without a great deal of controversy. Recognizing the ten individual messages as creating a single, coherent communication with a particular character, which is nevertheless effectively hidden, is the goal of this study.

The communication created by those messages meets the definition of the literary genre *apocalypse*. That conclusion can be successfully demonstrated based on evidence that can be presented in an analysis of this scope. A larger study will include and analyse all the texts of early Jewish apocalypse in some detail as well as a broad range of other texts of the same period. That analysis supports the conclusion presented here.

1.1 The Marker Phrase³

The Hebrew phrase that marks our fourteen verses and ten days is:

בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה *b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh*

The central term of the phrase, the Hebrew *yom*, means “day” and the definite article *ha* indicates specificity. The Hebrew *ha'zeh* is a demonstrative or attributive element denoting specificity; it is “this” specific day. The article ‘*b*’ means “on” or “in.” The element of the phrase that is unusual

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise noted.

² I am aware of two exceptions, one in English and one in Aramaic, which I will discuss.

³ I use “the marker phrase,” “the marker,” and “the *b'etsem* phrase” and “the hidden bones phrase” interchangeably.

and that creates its unique character is the word *etsem*, which means “bone.”⁴ The phrase *ha’yom ha’zeh* or “this (specific) day” is fairly common in the Hebrew Bible. There are over a hundred instances in addition to the ones that are part of our subject phrase, but our phrase identifies a day that has a quality that is described by the word *etsem*, or bone. And to describe a day as somehow *bonelike* is to suggest that it is, at least, unusual.

William Propp, in his Anchor Bible commentary on Exodus, specifically employed what he termed a “hyper-literal” translation approach. Three instances of the marker phrase are in the text of Exodus and Propp translates the phrase in each case as, “on the bone of this day.”⁵ Frances Werner, in her translation of Ezekiel 24:2, renders the phrase “This is Bone day.”⁶ While she specifically aims for literal translations used consistently throughout the text, she does not recognize the *etsem* element of the phrase in a literal sense in any of the other thirteen instances. The literal understandings of Propp and Werner are exceptional. No English translation that is or has been in wide use has recognized the most common meaning of *etsem* and only Young’s Literal Translation (YLT, 1862) has used a single, consistent translation for all fourteen instances of the phrase.⁷

First, we will review the verses marked by the phrase using the English translation of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).⁸ Then, with that as context, we will turn to the question of the hiddenness of the markings in English and then in the Greek, Latin, and German versions. Analysis of the effective hiddenness even in Hebrew will follow.

These, then, are the ten days marked by the *b’etsem* phrase.

1.2 The Ten Marked Days

Day One – The Day Noah Entered the Ark

Genesis 7:13 *On the very same day (b’etsem ha’yom ha’zeh)* Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark.

Day Two – The Day of the Abrahamic Circumcision Event (two verses are marked)

Genesis 17:23 Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins *that very day (b’etsem ha’yom ha’zeh)*, as God had said to him.

Genesis 17:26 *That very day (b’etsem ha’yom ha’zeh)* Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.

⁴ *Bone* is the common meaning of עצם s. or עצמות pl., in the Hebrew Bible. The root in other forms e.g., עצום, often gives a meaning of *might, power, or strength* or, in another variation, e.g., עצמו, it is understood to mean *numerous*. In a few cases, biblical usage suggests meanings of *substance* or *essence*, as in וכעצם השמים. Dictionaries also list *self* as an infrequent possibility, but that reflects post-biblical use. In biblical use עצם in its simple singular form means *bone*.

⁵ William H. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation and Commentary*, AB Vol 2. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 17, 357. In his Introductory note on translation Propp says, “An innovation of this edition is the literal rendering of such idioms as ... ‘the bone of this day,’ in order to exhume the dead metaphors buried in phrases like ... ‘this very day.’” 40.

⁶ Francis A. Werner, *Ancient Roots Translinear Bible: Reader Edition*, (St. Louis: ARTB Publishing, 2011) Kindle Edition. Loc 2253.

⁷ I have reviewed only the translations that are or have been in reasonably wide use, so it is possible that one or more versions not known to me have provided a unique and consistent version of the phrase.

⁸ All translations of scripture are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Day Three – The Day of the Exodus from Egypt (two verses are marked)

Exodus 12:41 At the end of four hundred thirty years, *on that very day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, all the companies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:51 *That very day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)* the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.

Day Four – The Perpetual Observance of Passover/the Festival of Unleavened Bread ⁹

Exodus 12:17 You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for *on this very day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)* I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance.

Day Five – The Perpetual Observance of Shavuot

Leviticus 23:21 *On that same day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)* you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations.

The beginning of the period of counting the *omer*, leading up to Shavuot, is also marked by a variant of the *b'etsem* phrase:¹⁰

Leviticus 23:14 You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears *until that very day (ad etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, until you have brought the offering to your God; it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.

Day Six – The Perpetual Observance of Yom Kippur (three verses are marked)

Leviticus 23:28-30 ...and you shall do no work *during that entire day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. For anyone who does not practice self-denial *during that entire day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)* shall be cut off from the people. And anyone who does any work *during that entire day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people.

Day Seven – The Day of Moses' Death

Deuteronomy 32:48 *On that very day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)* the Lord addressed Moses as follows ... Ascend this mountain ...

Day Eight – The First Day of Sustenance from the Promised Land/the Last Day of the Manna¹¹

Joshua 5:11 On the day after the Passover, *on that very day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain ... The manna ceased ...

Day Nine – The Day of Ezekiel's Vision of the Destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple

The significance of this day is conveyed not only by an instance of the marker phrase itself but also by the inclusion in the same verse of the unique variant **את עצם היום הזה**:

Ezekiel 24:2 Mortal, write down the name of this day, *this very day (et etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem *this very day (b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh)*.

⁹ The required observance of Passover comes before the Exodus event in the text. I reverse the order in this study simply to group the three observance requirements together for discussion purposes.

¹⁰ There are two variants of the marker phrase in the Hebrew text. One, **עד עצם היום הזה**, occurs three times. The other, **את עצם היום הזה**, occurs only once, in Ezekiel 24:2.

¹¹ Some versions truncate Joshua 5:11 causing the notice of the end of the manna to be found in Joshua 5:12. The first day of sustenance from the land and the ending of the manna mark essentially the same transition event.

Day Ten – The Day of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Rebuilt Temple/Reunified People/Reunified Land

Ezekiel 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, *on that very day (b’etsem ha’yom ha’zeh)*, the hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me there.

Some reading this paper might have hesitated on first encountering the marker phrase above, perhaps tempted to dismiss it and this subject without proceeding further. How can this seemingly innocuous phrase be important enough to justify either reading this paper or the writing of it? But none can deny the importance of the marked days to the biblical account or the uniqueness of the phrase, which appears only in the descriptions of the ten marked days. It is as meaningful a collection of ten days as can be created from the text, in my view. And yet, as we will see, both the collection and its importance are effectively hidden.

Part 2 – The Hiddenness of the Marker Phrase in English Translations

The NRSV verses quoted above offer seven different translations for the *b'etsem* phrase: *on the very same day*, *that very day*, *on that very day*, *on this very day*, *on that same day*, *during that entire day*, and *this very day*. The two common elements are the word “day” and an element of specificity: *very*, *same*, *very same*, or *entire*. The marker phrase includes both specificity and an unusual element of emphasis: *b'etsem*. In English, terms like *very* or *same*, even when compounded in *very same*, do not call the reader’s attention in the way the Hebrew **בְּעֵצֶם** does, or in the way it would if it were understood literally as *bone*. There is nothing in the phrase “this very day,” for example, that would cause a reader of the English text to stop and question the account. No search of the NRSV translation would suggest a unique connection among the ten marked days.

The NRSV is not unusual in the variety of its renderings of the phrase. None of the widely used English translations, from John Tyndale’s in the sixteenth century¹² to the present, has given the reader any reason to associate the ten days that are uniquely marked in the Hebrew text. The translations in twelve widely used English versions can be found in Appendix 1. In all cases, except in that of Young’s Literal Translation (YLT), the pattern is similar to that of the NRSV. In the case of YLT, which does use the same translation for each instance of the phrase, the association could be made. Its version compresses the elements of emphasis and specificity into the word *self-same* which it uses uniquely for the *b'etsem* phrase. Young seems to have chosen *self-same* from among the translations found in the King James Version which seems to have inherited it from its initial use by John Tyndale. Tyndale was the first to confront the problem of translating unusual Hebrew phrases into English¹³ and so it is to him that we owe the selection of *selfsame* to render the Hebrew *etsem*. He, in turn, might have found it in the work of Chaucer, who used *selfsame* in several of his Canterbury Tales to mean something like *exact*.¹⁴ While the association among the marked verses *could be* made in the YLT, I have seen no evidence that it actually *has been* made.

The twelve translation approaches shown in Appendix 1 owe much to their predecessors. The English translations that preceded the KJV are shown in Appendix 2. Wycliffe’s was from the Latin Vulgate and shows as diverse a range of English renderings as we find in the Latin source. The influence of Tyndale’s work is evident in the versions that followed his through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most use six or seven different translations of the phrase. We might expect Jewish translators to be more sensitive to the unusual Hebrew word choice, but they have not been. Appendix 3 shows the earliest English translations of the Hebrew text made by Jewish translators. None presents an approach to the phrase that has differed from the earliest versions by Christian scholars.

There is nothing in the English translations that are or have been in wide use that alerts a reader to the association of the unique Hebrew phrase with the ten days that it marks. That association and whatever it might signify or convey, are hidden from those whose biblical text is English.¹⁵

¹² Tyndale’s was not the first English translation, but it was the first to be made from the Hebrew. John Wycliffe’s 1382 translation was from the Latin Vulgate.

¹³ David Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament. Being the Pentateuch of 1530, Joshua to 2 Chronicles of 1537, and Jonah*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), ix.

¹⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary cites lines 1037–1040 of the 1386 work, *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Some editions of Chaucer lack the word “self-same” in that passage but include it in others. In some it is found in *The Knight’s Tale*, *The Nun’s Tale*, or *The Man of Law’s Tale*. It does seem clear that Chaucer knew and used the word. Whether he coined it or not is uncertain, but the OED credits him with the earliest recorded use.

¹⁵ I do not suggest that translators have been unaware of the plain meaning of *etsem* as “bone.” The translators of the NRSV, for example, include in their translation notes to some verses, a literal rendering of the phrase. But unless the systematic use of the phrase is recognized, its character and importance are not.

Part 3 – The Hiddenness of the Marker Phrase in Greek, Latin, and German Translations

The translations of the marker phrase found in the Greek Septuagint (LXX), the Latin Vulgate (V), Luther's German version, and later influential German versions are shown in Appendix 4. The Greek, Latin, and German translations represent a period from the LXX Pentateuch in the mid-third century BCE to Luther's version in the mid-sixteenth century CE, to the twentieth-century German version of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

It is understood that the LXX translators worked from Hebrew texts that were older than the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew.¹⁶ Both Jerome for his Latin version and Luther for his German translation had the MT to work from. Mendelssohn, Zunz, Buber, and Rosenzweig had the MT and all of the early rabbinic literature and commentary to guide their work. The following observations can be made of all of these versions:

- 1) none provides a uniform translation of the *b'etsem* phrase, although the latest German works move toward uniformity;
- 2) none provides a translation that is unique to the fourteen instances of the *b'etsem* phrase;
- 3) none includes in any translation a word that is the literal equivalent of *bone*;
- 4) all include in each translation a representation of the word "day," and
- 5) all include in each translation some indication of specificity.

In each of those respects, the Greek, Latin, and German translations exhibit the same pattern as the English translations. None of the non-English translations reviewed here gives a reader, even a scholarly one, any reason to believe there is an association of any kind, much less an important and unique one, among the ten days marked with the *b'etsem* phrase in the Hebrew text. The relationship among them is as hidden in the Greek, Latin, and German versions as it is in English versions.

Demonstrating that the phrase and its message are effectively hidden even to those who use the Hebrew text requires a more lengthy and complex analysis which will occupy a large part of the balance of this study. Before we turn to that analysis, we should look more closely at the character of the marked days and the message they create.

¹⁶ See, for example, the discussion in: Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. 3rd Edition*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 127–140.

Part 4 – The Message of the Ten Marked Days

4.1 The First Marked Day: Noah's Entry into the Ark

The Noah story begins with God's observation of the descent of the earth into corruption and violence and God's consequent determination "to make an end of all flesh" (Gen 6:13). Noah, however, "found favor in the sight of the Lord," (Gen 6:8) and God established a covenant with Noah to provide for a continuation of life and a repopulation of the earth after the cleansing flood. Noah's obligations were to build an ark, to gather his family and representatives of all species, and to take them into the ark.

The essential message of the Noah story is not one of God's judgement and destruction. It is tempting to linger on the account of the moment when Noah enters the ark after "All the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened" (Gen 7:11). The cries of frightened animals must have been deafening and the anxiety of Noah's family gathered around him palpable. Noah enters the ark and stands seemingly paralyzed. He had gone in "as God had commanded him" but then stood, immobile perhaps from fear, until "The Lord shut him in" (Gen 7:16). This is in contrast to the action of Atrahasis, the hero of the parallel flood story found in the Babylonian Ark Tablet who, himself, gives the order to close and seal the door of the ark after he enters it.¹⁷ But it is not that moment of Noah's seeming hesitation that conveys the essential message of the day.

Noah's entry into the ark was the final physical act of his acceptance and performance of God's initial covenantal requirements. God reveals the broader terms of the covenant only after the flood recedes in Genesis 8:21 through Genesis 9:17. Noah is the individual focus of the story, but its essential message is not individual. God made a general covenant with all humankind and a more specific one with the line of Noah and his sons. Noah's active acceptance of and performance of his covenantal obligation, culminating in and evidenced by his entry into the ark, is surely the message of Genesis 7:13, the first day highlighted as somehow *bonelike* in the Hebrew text.

4.2 The Second Marked Day: The Abrahamic Circumcision Event

The account of the second marked day is enclosed in two instances of the *b'etsem* phrase: Genesis 17:23 & 26. It is the account of Abraham circumcising his son Ishmael, all the other men of his household, and perhaps himself, on a single day. Many read the account as indicating that Abraham performed all the circumcisions, including his own, although the passive Hebrew verb form raises the possibility that someone else might have circumcised Abraham. Given the size of the household, Abraham would certainly have been at his task from dawn to dusk. The images evoked are difficult. We can imagine a scene of men writhing in pain on the bloodied ground, submitting to Abraham's knife either willingly or unwillingly, with mothers, wives, and sisters standing by helpless and probably horrified. *Midrash Tanchuma* to Genesis 17:26–27 describes the process as continuing "until Abraham piled up a hill of foreskins, and a river of blood poured forth from his home."

But, again, we need to step back from the scene of human suffering and ask what message the text essentially conveys. Once more, it is clear that the message is not about the individual, Abraham, or the anguish of those specific people on that day. Abraham acts not only for himself, but on behalf of his family, his household and, critically, his descendants. He acts on behalf of what becomes a covenant people, committing to an agreement with God. And the marked account testifies to his active acceptance of and compliance with that covenant.

There is an interesting mirroring of the covenantal passages found in the Noah story when compared to those in the Abrahamic circumcision account. In the flood story, God provides the expanded details of the covenant commitment *after* Noah acts on God's direction. In the case of the circumcision event, though, God's promise to Abraham is *in advance* of Abraham's action, and it is repeated and insistent. The section of text preceding Genesis 17:23–26 is the most densely covenantal

¹⁷ Irving Finkel, *The Ark Before Noah*, (New York: Doubleday; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014), Kindle Edition. 515.

in the entire Torah. The repeated assurances by God that the covenant promises are both real and eternal demonstrate an empathy for and an understanding of the hesitation Abraham would naturally have felt anticipating such a difficult day. But in this event, as in the Noah event, the significance is not at the level of the individual. The significance of Abraham's performing his covenantal obligation is certainly found at the level of the covenant people.

4.3 The Third Marked Day: The Exodus from Egypt

The Exodus event, like the Abrahamic circumcision event, is marked in two verses: Exodus 12:41 & 51. It is noteworthy that the next marked verses are found well forward in the text, past the long and important narratives of Isaac and Jacob. What story is more iconic, which is more *bonelike* than that of the *Akeidah*, the binding of Isaac? How many moments are there like Jacob's dream of the ladder or Moses' turning aside at the burning bush? What condition is more fundamental to the story of the line of Abraham than the one of the centuries spent in Egypt? And, of course, the longest single narrative in the Torah is that of Joseph with its many iconic scenes. Those are among the most read, most told, most loved, and most adapted of all biblical stories, yet none of them is marked with the *b'etsem* phrase. None stands among the ten marked days.

The enigmatic but critical inflexion point in the account leading up to the Exodus event is found in Exodus 2:24–25, “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites and God took notice of them.” The plain language of the account suggests that something was lacking in God's attention to the Hebrews before that time. In whatever way we might understand the account, the text tells us that something changed at that time. The chain of events that includes the stories of Moses' early life, his fleeing Egypt, his encounter with God and return to free the people, the scenes pitting Moses against Pharaoh and his magicians, the plagues, and Pharaoh's ultimate agreement allowing the people to leave are all precipitated by God's “remembering” and “taking notice” of them. The essential nature of the Exodus event, then, in the context of God's relationship with the covenant people, is not only the specific act of liberating them. It is God's remembrance of and active expression of the covenant made originally with the descendants of Noah and then extended to and expanded in the covenant of the land made with Abraham and his line. That liberation was an active expression of the covenant that followed God's taking notice.

It is the human stories of the Bible, those that express universal emotions, experiences, and situations, that bring us back to biblical accounts again and again. But it is not the powerfully human messages; not at the individual level, at least; that are at the core of the first three marked days. The essential message of the first three marked events is found in the fact that they express covenantal promises and actions that bind God to the covenant people.

The next three days marked by the *b'etsem* phrase are not single days or events. They are perpetual observances required by the expansion of the obligations of the covenant. They are binding on the entire people and each, in its own way, is responsive to covenantal action by God.

4.4 The Fourth Marked Day: The Perpetual Observance of Passover/The Feast of Unleavened Bread¹⁸

The Passover observance is an active remembrance of and expression of gratitude for the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. It arises as a result of God's action toward fulfillment of the promise made in the covenant of the land and communicated to Abraham in Genesis 15:13–14, “Then the Lord said to Abram, ‘Know this for certain that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions.’”

¹⁸ I interpret the marking of Exodus 12:17, although directly referencing the Feast of Unleavened Bread, to effectively include both Passover itself, the day of the *pesach* sacrifice, as well as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The memory of the Exodus event is a shared memory, recreated and renewed in each generation and in each year through the rituals of the Passover *seder* and the holiday of unleavened bread. The Passover *seder* is the single most widely observed Jewish ritual experience. Its power to bind the community in all places, times, and circumstances has been remarkably powerful. The annual retelling of the story is the central ritual requirement, creating a line of transmission from generation to generation. It asks each Jew to experience the liberation as if she were there personally. And, in creating that idea of personal experience, it reflects a condition of unity similar to that expressed in Deuteronomy 29:15 in which Moses explains that the covenant is not only with those who stood before him that day “but also (with) those who are not here with us,” which is understood to refer to all succeeding generations.

Shared experience, shared memory, and shared rituals are building blocks of peoplehood. The three required observances are instruments of continuity. They are obligations, to be sure, but they are also self-activating insurance policies, providing for the persistence of the covenant people.

4.5 The Fifth Marked Day: The Perpetual Observance of Shavuot

The marking of the required observance of Shavuot at Leviticus 23:21 presents an interpretive challenge much different from that of the Passover observance. The association of Shavuot with the Sinai revelation and its covenant expansion, which has become accepted as fundamental in Judaism, is not to be found in the biblical account. In the text itself, the observance is an agricultural holiday celebrating the wheat harvest. As such, it hardly seems to merit standing with Passover and Yom Kippur as one of three marked perpetual observances. When compared to the holiday of Sukkot, for example, it is of clearly lesser importance in the biblical account. Why then might it be among the ten uniquely marked days? Here I have to briefly allude to matters that are beyond the scope of this paper, in which our purpose is only to introduce the marker, its message, and their hiddenness.

Only if Shavuot is understood as having a “dual nature,” both agricultural and covenantal, does it seem appropriate that it stands as one of only ten uniquely marked days in the biblical account. Rabbinic Judaism did not recognise that dual nature until after the time of the *Mishnah*, which was redacted in about 200 CE. But the idea is first encountered much earlier, in the book of *Jubilees*, which dates from about 150 BCE. There, at Jub. 6:17, we find this statement, “For this reason it has been ordained and written on the heavenly tablets that they should celebrate the Festival of Weeks during this month—once a year—to renew the covenant each and every year.”¹⁹ And in Jub. 6:19 we find that the Israelites had forgotten at least that aspect of the obligation until it was “renewed for them at this mountain.” The mountain, of course, was Sinai, and so the connection between Shavuot, the Sinai event, the revelation there, and the covenantal expansion, is made.

For the *Jubilees* author, it was a given that both the Sinai event and the Festival of Weeks occurred on the 15th day of the third month. The association was obvious. Not so for the rabbis. *Jubilees* held to a calendar of 364 days: fifty-two weeks of seven days each. But the rabbis were committed to a different calendar having only 354 days, and in that calendar, the Sinai and Shavuot dates did not appear to coincide. Ultimately, the rabbis of the post-Mishnaic period found a way to make the association between Shavuot and the Sinai event. Their solution required several unusual interpretive leaps and the date they established for the dual events is not the 15th day of the third month. It is the 6th day of the third month, the Hebrew month of Sivan. A full elaboration of the rabbinic solution is beyond our scope, but the marking of Shavuot does raise important questions.

The *b’etsem* phrase was clearly in the Hebrew text before the time the rabbis made the formal association between Shavuot and the Sinai event. For present purposes, it seems clear that Shavuot can have the level of importance that puts it among the ten marked days only if it is understood in the way *Jubilees* understands it, and in the way rabbinic Judaism later came to acknowledge. It is a perpetual

¹⁹ Translations from: James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 2 Vols. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).

remembrance of and thanksgiving for the theophany and revelation at Sinai. And its observance is a part of the expanded covenantal obligations that arose from that event and revelation.

A variant of the marker phrase, *עד עצם היום הזה*, *ad etsem ha 'yom ha 'zeh*, is found in Leviticus 23:14. The Hebrew *עד*, *ad* means “until” and the verse provides that grain from the newly harvested barley crop cannot be eaten until a ritual offering has been made. The day on which that offering is made begins the counting of seven weeks, the 49-day period of the counting of the *omer*, leading to the holiday of Shavuot, which is on the fiftieth day. Determining the specific day on which that offering from the barley crop is to be made was a problem for the later rabbis, but the fact that the text is open to a variety of interpretations ultimately allowed the rabbis to find their solution. The point to be made here is that the variant phrase in Leviticus 23:14 is associated with the holiday that *follows* it; that is, with Shavuot, not with Passover. We know that because Leviticus 23:14 and 23:21 are clearly part of a discrete unit of text (Lev 23:9–22) separated from the preceding Passover account by the introductory formula, “The Lord spoke to Moses. Speak to the Israelite people and say to them” (Lev 23:9–10a) Because Shavuot is observed at a fixed time after the Leviticus 23:14 offering, fixing the date of one effectively fixes the date of the other, and that again brings the issue of the calendar into play. The variant phrase in Leviticus 23:14 “points to” the marked holiday of Shavuot and, therefore, reinforces its importance.

4.6 The Sixth Marked Day: The Perpetual Observance of Yom Kippur

The Abrahamic circumcision event and the Exodus event are both marked in two verses, but the requirement to observe Yom Kippur is marked in three verses, and those are consecutive: Leviticus 23:28–30. It seems an insistent demand for attention. We understand the requirement to periodically atone as being a part of the covenantal expansion at Sinai, but the text does not provide an explicit predicate. The command to observe the day also appears, in an unmarked version, in Leviticus 16:29–34, “This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourself ... for on this day atonement shall be made for you ... this shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the people Israel once in the year for all their sins.” That version of the requirement is associated by textual proximity with the death of the two sons of Aaron who “offered unholy fire before the Lord” (Lev 10:1) through the reference at Leviticus 16:1, “The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron” It is associated in rabbinic commentary with the sin of the golden calf because the tenth day of the seventh month is understood to be the day Moses brought the second set of tablets down from the mountain.²⁰ Both provide a rationale for a specific requirement to atone. But there are two aspects of Yom Kippur that I think help to make its triple-marking understandable.

First, Yom Kippur is the day of quintessentially priestly concern. The requirements to afflict oneself and to abstain from work apply to all, but it is “the priest who is anointed and consecrated as a priest” who “shall make atonement for the sanctuary” and “for the tent of meeting and for the altar” and “for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.” (Lev 16:32–33) The later requirement that the high priest, and only the high priest, enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur makes that point. Only he could speak the four-letter name of God and only in that place and on that day. And elaborate rituals were instituted to protect the high priest and to ensure that his words and actions on the day of Yom Kippur were correct.

Second, a process of correction and forgiveness is essential for the persistence of a covenantal relationship. Humans will violate the requirements of the covenant both as individuals and as a people. The biblical account makes that clear. Without a process for atonement and forgiveness, the covenantal enterprise would be short-lived. The essential presupposition of Yom Kippur is that outcomes can be altered. Confession, restitution, forgiveness, and reconciliation all presuppose the ability to right past

²⁰ See Rashi to Exodus 33:11, *Seder Olam* 6, and *Tanchuma* 31.

wrongs, regain lost favour, and restore prior position. Clarity on that point is also important because it is contrary to notions of determinism and predestination found in other cultures and writings.

While Yom Kippur might be the *most* priestly of days, all the verses marked with the *b'etsem* phrase are of priestly origin.²¹ We should expect that a message created solely from priestly texts will have a priestly perspective and sympathy.

4.7 The Seventh Marked Day: The Day of Moses' Death

Almost thirty-nine years of the desert experience are recorded in the text without a marked day. The chastisement of Miriam, the episode of the spies, the rebellion of Korach, and the frustrated threat of Balak all go unmarked, as do Moses' long and moving orations in Deuteronomy. It is not until we reach Deuteronomy 32:48 that we encounter the next marked day which, according to Von Rad, "belongs neither to the tradition of Deuteronomy nor to that of the Deuteronomic history, but to that of the Priestly Writings."²² It is the day on which Moses is told to "ascend this mountain ... and ... die there ... and ... be gathered to your kin." (Deut 32:49–50) But, before Moses goes up the mountain, he delivers a final blessing to the people in Deuteronomy 33:2–29. In it, he describes his contribution to the history of the people. Speaking of himself in the third person he says, "Moses charged us with the law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob" (Deut 33:4).²³ In that statement he makes clear the essence of the role that he has played. He was Moses, the lawgiver.

It is an understandable impulse to approach the subject of Moses' death as an emotional as well as a historical matter. The image of the beloved leader, the instrument of the people's liberation, the longsuffering protector of fractious and difficult former slaves, walking deliberately and alone up the mountain to die as the people watch helpless from below, is irresistible. The poignancy of his death *al pi Adonai* is sure to elicit an empathetic response. But that misses the point that is important for us.

History has read back onto the relationship between Moses and the people a level of affection and an emotional bond that the text itself does not convey. If we compare the reaction of the people to Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34:8 with the reaction to Aaron's death in Numbers 20:29 we find a clear distinction, "The Israelites wept for Moses thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended," versus, "When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel mourned Aaron thirty days." The commentator, Ibn Ezra, interprets the difference as indicating that the people's grief at the loss of Aaron was greater than at the loss of Moses since "all the house of Israel" mourned versus only "the Israelites." Rashi interprets the difference between the accounts to mean that only the males of the community mourned Moses, but because Aaron "pursued peace and made peace between friends and between husbands and wives," the entire population mourned his death. Moses' death did not warrant any unusual observance at the time, nor has later Judaism marked the day of his death in any special way. However, later Judaism developed a far more expansive and emotional interpretation of the connection between the people and *Moshe Rabbenu*, Moses our Teacher.

If we look at the references to Moses that follow his death, from the time Joshua assumed leadership through the end of the biblical period, we do not find Moses portrayed in either an affectionate or an anguished way. In fact, even in the book of Joshua, in which there are many references to Moses, none concerns his personal relationship with the people. None indicates that his absence is felt as a personal loss. Almost all references in Joshua fall into two categories: they either

²¹ See, among others: Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, AB Vol 3B. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) See his list on p 209 discussing Leviticus 23:21. See also his interesting comment on p 204, "... the expression (i.e., the marker phrase) is idiomatic, a stylistic flourish of H." Milgrom himself uses a conventional translation of the phrase, however.

²² Gerhard Von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), Kindle Edition. Loc 3783. See also, for example: Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School*, (Winona Lake, IL: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 106.

²³ Other interpretations of this verse have the reference to Moses as lawgiver being voiced by the people. In either case the identification of Moses with the law is made.

a) associate Moses with the law or the giving of the law, in a phrase such as *torat Moshe*, the law of Moses, or b) they confer upon the actions of Joshua the authority of prior instruction from Moses, particularly in support of the division of the land. While later tradition and rabbinic lore have made much of the personal qualities of Moses, the biblical text portrays Moses as a crucial figure, first, because of his association with the Exodus event, and then as the conduit for and communicator of the law.

During the entire desert experience between the Exodus event and the end of the Pentateuch, there are only three marked days: Shavuot, Yom Kippur, and the death of Moses. All are associated with the expansion of the covenant requirements; with laws given, observances required, and in the case of Moses, the conduit for lawgiving. God acted in furtherance of God's covenantal promise by freeing the Israelites from bondage. God then expanded the covenantal obligations of the liberated people.

4.8 The Eighth Marked Day: The First Day the People Are Sustained from the Land / the Manna Stops

The early chapters in the book of Joshua record events that directly mirror several earlier marked days. In Joshua 3:16–17, the people cross the Jordan, passing through it on dry land as those leaving Egypt had crossed the Sea of Reeds. In Joshua 5:7 Joshua circumcises all the males born in the desert, mirroring the Abrahamic circumcision event. In Joshua 5:10, Passover is celebrated. Then in Joshua 5:11, we find a mirror of the Noah story. In the Joshua verse, the people are sustained by the produce of the land for the first time. In the Genesis account, Noah and his family enter the ark, which will sustain their lives. Both the produce of the land and the ark act to preserve life. In Joshua 5:12 (5:11 in some texts) “the manna ceased,” removing the safety net provided during the desert years. That finds a parallel in God's shutting the door of the ark. There is no turning back in either case.

The day marked in Joshua 5:11 is a pivotal historical transition, forming a *coda* of sorts to the account of the desert years which are framed by it and the Exodus event, but its fundamental message is, again, not only historical but also one of covenant fulfilled. It is another demonstration of God's faithfulness to the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:7, “Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring, I will give this land.’” The Exodus event was a required precondition for the fulfilment of the covenant of the land. The desert experiences were necessary to prepare the people to enter and possess the land. Having entered it with new leadership and new laws, the people are given a fresh start, an opportunity to build their own society in their own territory, which God had promised them. As God had been faithful to God's covenant promise, the people now needed to be faithful to theirs. That, of course, did not end well.

4.9 The Ninth Marked Day: Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Fall of Jerusalem and the First Temple

After the time of Joshua 5:11, over six hundred years would pass before the word of the Lord would come to the prophet Ezekiel in Babylonia, telling him to “write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem, this very day.” (Ezek 24:2) The siege ended in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and of the First Temple in 586. Ezekiel and many others from the educated and leadership ranks of Judea had already been exiled to Babylonia in 597. The rest of the leadership class was exiled in 586, leaving in Judea mostly those who were needed to work the land. Ezekiel's writing down of the day the siege began allowed the prophecy to be later verified by those arriving from the destroyed city.

The text of the book of Judges makes it appear that the work of conquering and inhabiting the land was complete during the lifetime of Joshua. There we read, “When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites all went to their own inheritances to take possession of the land. The people worshipped the Lord all the days of Joshua.” (Judg 2:6–7) In fact, though, the conquest of the land was a long and difficult process, and it was probably never really completed. There is ample evidence of Israelites

mixing with peoples of the land rather than conquering them, and the fidelity of the people to the Lord was short-lived. In Judges 2:11–12, just after the account quoted above, we read, “Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and worshipped the Baals; and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.” The era of the judges who ruled in those early years declined into a condition that Robert Alter describes as “unbridled lust, implacable hostility and mutual mayhem.”²⁴ The book of Judges ends with the statement, “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” (Judg 21:25) The leadership model that relied on judges had failed. That leadership vacuum led to the selection of a king, allowed in Deuteronomy with apparent reluctance. The unified kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon survived for only one hundred and twenty years before political miscalculation and hubris on the part of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, led to the division of the kingdom. A unified land under a single Jewish king would not be seen again until the Hasmonean era over seven hundred years later.

During the six centuries between the time of Joshua 5:11 and the fall of Jerusalem, there were only a few periods when it can be said that the people and their leaders actively pursued the covenant agenda; when they attempted to live and govern themselves according to the law of Moses. During most of that long period they “did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord,” which is the text’s standard description of illicit behaviour. There were some periods when they “did what was pleasing to the Lord,” but more often that was not the case. The book of *Ben Sira*,²⁵ which was written in about 180, makes the point bluntly, “Except for David and Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them [referring to the other kings] were great sinners, for they abandoned the law of the Most High; the kings of Judah came to an end.” (Sir 49:4) The account of Ezekiel leading up to his vision at Ezekiel 24:2 makes it clear that the reason for the fall of the city and of the First Temple; the reason for the loss of the promised land and the reason for the exile; was the failure of the people to adhere to their covenant responsibilities. And if one were to choose a set of the most consequential events in the biblical account and the history of the Jewish people, Ezekiel’s vision would likely be included as an efficient reference to both the destruction of the First Temple and the reasons for it. As if to reinforce the weightiness of this occurrence of the marker phrase, and the importance of the day it marks, the same verse includes the unique variant of the phrase, *את עצם היום הזה*, *et etsem ha’yom ha’zeh*.

The significance of the event that Ezekiel writes of in Ezekiel 24:2 is straightforwardly covenantal. God had fulfilled God’s covenant promises. The people had failed clearly and persistently to fulfil theirs. As a direct result, and only after having ample opportunity to mend their ways and prevent their loss; their land, their temple, and their freedom were forfeited.

4.10 The Tenth Marked Day: Ezekiel’s Vision of the Rebuilt Temple and City and Reunited Land

Twelve years after Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 24:2 was confirmed; that is, after word came that the city and the First Temple had fallen and that the siege had begun on the day of Ezekiel’s vision, the prophet had the experience that he writes of beginning in our last marked verse at Ezekiel 40:1. This event is not only a vision. Ezekiel tells us that “the hand of the Lord was upon me and he brought me there. He brought me, in visions of God, to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain.” (Ezek 40:1–2) It is important that this event involves not only a divine communication but also the movement of the prophet in an “otherworldly plane,” both of which, as we will see, are characteristic of the literary genre, apocalypse.

This marked passage is the beginning of the long account comprising Ezekiel 40–48 in which the prophet receives detailed information regarding the specifications for a new temple, a rebuilt Jerusalem, and a reunited people returned to their reunited land. The specifications employ a symbolic mathematical and geometric vocabulary and treat not only the structures but also the implements, the

²⁴ Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings*, (New York: Norton, 2013), Kindle Edition, Loc 2269.

²⁵ Also known as *Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus*.

staffing, and the management of the temple. As clear as it was that the city and the First Temple would fall, it is equally clear in this prophecy that God will once again “remember” the people as God did during the period of oppression in Egypt. There are indications throughout the Ezekiel text, many even before the vision of destruction in Ezekiel 24:2, that this will occur, as there were even in the last chapters of Deuteronomy.²⁶

The first half of the book of Ezekiel is almost completely accusatory and uncompromising, but even in that harshly judgmental language, there are some explicit statements that the period of desolation and punishment will be temporary. In Ezekiel 16:60–63, for example, God promises to “remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth,” which parallels the remembering in Exodus 2:24. The people will then also remember the covenant. They will realize their error and be ashamed and God will ultimately forgive them. Again, in Ezekiel 20:41–44, God’s willingness to accept the people when they turn back to God is explicit. Between the markers of destruction in Chapter 24 and of restoration in Chapter 40, the willingness of God to accept repentance and to respond without reservation is made clear. The famous account of the dry bones in Chapter 37 specifically foresees the reunification of the people in the reunified land. The land that had been given to Jacob would once more be under the kingship of David, “never again to be two nations.” (Ezek 37:22) And, immediately before the marked passage at Ezekiel 40:1 we find this declaration, “Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel ... when I have brought them back from the peoples, and gathered them from their enemies’ lands ... then they shall know that I am the Lord their God ... I will leave none of them behind and I will never again hide my face from them....” (Ezek 39:25–29) Just as the reasons for the destruction and exile are unambiguous, so is the promise of ultimate redemption and restoration. Ezekiel’s prophecy ends in a confident assertion of the inevitable, eternal condition promised by God, “And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There.” (Ezek 48:35b)

Ezekiel 24:2 is a vision of a difficult and destructive reality. Ezekiel 40:1 begins the vision of an ideal, salvific future. It is a future for the covenant people made possible because both the covenant itself and God’s promise are eternal.

4.11 A Summary of the Message

A summary of the messages of the ten marked days as interpreted above would have these elements:

Day 1: God established a perpetual covenant with the descendants of Noah. Noah performed his covenant obligation as attested in the Genesis 7:13 account.

Day 2: God later expanded the terms of the covenant to include, among other things, the specific promise of the land. Abraham performed his obligation under the expanded covenant, as attested in the Genesis 17 circumcision account.

Days 3 & 8: God performed God’s covenantal obligations, as demonstrated in the Exodus event and the Joshua 5:11 account.

Days: 4, 5, 6 & 7: The people’s obligations following the Exodus event were further expanded. They included the required perpetual observances of Passover, Shavuot, and Yom Kippur as well as the other laws received at Sinai and communicated through Moses.

Day 9: The people failed to follow the law despite repeated warnings. Ultimately, they were harshly punished for that failure. Their land was conquered, their temple was destroyed, and they were driven into exile.

²⁶ For example: Deuteronomy 30:1–5.

Day 10: God always stood/stands ready to accept their return. The people did/will eventually turn back to God, and God did/will accept and forgive them. A new age will ensue during which the law will be supreme, the people will be faithful, the land will be reunited, a new temple will be built, and peace will reign forever in the presence of God.

Others might interpret the message somewhat differently, but its essential elements do seem uncontroversial. There is a covenant. Its terms are known. One party complies; the other does not. The noncompliant party is punished. There is provision for return and repair, after which past transgressions will be forgiven, and a new day will dawn. Those basic elements seem to me to be beyond serious debate. The question now is whether that message is an apocalypse.

The issue of the effective concealment of the marker phrase from the user of the Hebrew text will be treated after the question of genre is addressed; only because of the length of the analysis required.

Part 5 – The Message of the Hidden Bones as an Apocalypse

I began to consider the possibility that the message of the marked days is an apocalypse when I noted the similarity of its subjects and themes to those found in the first chapter of the book of *Jubilees*. Not all scholars understand *Jubilees* to be an apocalypse, but it was *Jubilees* that led me to study the early Jewish apocalypses more broadly. My purpose in that study was to determine the extent to which the messages of the other acknowledged apocalypses were also congruent with that of the Hidden Bones. I decided to focus my study on the texts of Jewish apocalypse that are understood to date to times before about 100 BCE. I concluded that the marker phrase must have become part of the Hebrew text before that time and that its message, therefore, must be reflective of a time before that date. That conclusion was based on several factors.

First, I concluded that the marker phrase was not part of the Hebrew source text from which the Septuagint was translated. That analysis is beyond our present scope, but I have detailed it in a paper entitled *The Missing Bones of the Septuagint*.²⁷ That suggests that the phrase became a part of the Hebrew text sometime after the middle of the third century BCE. On the other hand, the *b'etsem* phrases *are* in the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) in exactly the same form and locations as they appear in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible. I have also documented that issue in a separate paper.²⁸

The Hasmonean king and high priest, John Hyrcanus, destroyed the Samaritan temple at Mt. Gerizim in about 110 BCE, which effectively severed the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans.²⁹ It seems inconceivable that the Samaritans would have harmonized their text of the Pentateuch with any changes made to the MT after that event. So, the use of the latest likely date of about 100 BCE for their insertion into the Hebrew text seems justified. While the text of some books of the MT was still fluid after 100 BCE, the texts of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ezekiel were probably fixed by that time. They were at least fixed to the extent that an effort of systematic editing to add a distinctive phrase to fourteen verses in six books would not have been possible. Had such an editing project occurred there would surely be some notice, trace, or other indication of it. I could find none. Third, the marker phrase is found in the Temple Scroll (11Q19; Col 25, line 12) in the text that parallels Lev 23:29.³⁰ The *ad etsem* variant of the marker phrase in Leviticus 23:14 is also found in the parallel Temple Scroll text at 11Q19, Col 18, line 3.³¹ The Temple Scroll is a composite text and some elements of it might be later than 100 BCE. But the author/redactor used earlier, existing sources that “most certainly included the sacrificial festival calendar (13:9–29:1)” according to Schiffman.³² In all of the biblical texts; as opposed to those that are not biblical; found in the Judean Desert in the twentieth century, there is only one small fragment of text in which an indication of the marker phrase is preserved and that is not the marker itself but of the unique variant found in Ezekiel 24:2.³³ In the small fragment known as 4QEzek^c, which contains only a few words, the phrase **את עצם** clearly appears. The range of dates estimated for the Ezekiel texts found in Qumran Cave 4 is from 50 BCE to 50 CE which

²⁷ Charles R. Lightner, *The Missing Bones of the Septuagint*. DOI:10.31124/advance.20301882.

²⁸ Charles R. Lightner, *The Hidden Bones Phrase in the Samaritan Pentateuch*.
https://www.academia.edu/90761444/The_Hidden_Bones_Phrase_in_the_Samaritan_Pentateuch

²⁹ See for instance: J. D. Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1968), 118.

³⁰ Lawrence H. Schiffman and Andrew Gross, *The Temple Scroll*, (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 76.

³¹ Schiffman and Gross, *The Temple Scroll*, 56–57.

³² Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Temple Scroll,” in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, eds. Feldman, Kugel, and Schiffman, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), Vol 3, 3038.

³³ Eugene Charles Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls Transcriptions and Textual Variants*, VTSup 134, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 606.

is later than our proposed cut-off, but the presence of the partial variant phrase in that text, which is very nearly old enough to satisfy our criteria, is supportive of the early character of the phrase.³⁴

My review of early Jewish apocalypses included the four discrete apocalypses recognized within the book of *1 Enoch*: a) the book of *Luminaries* (1 En. 72–82), b) the book of *Watchers* (1 En. 1–36), c) the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (1 En. 93:1–10; 93:11–17), and d) the *Animal Apocalypse* (1 En. 85–90). It also included the book of *Daniel*, which is the only book of the Hebrew Bible considered to be an apocalypse, and the Book of *Jubilees*. Other works of the period that have some characteristics of apocalypse including the *Third Sibylline Oracle*, *The Visions of Amram*, and *The Assumption of Moses* provide helpful elements of comparison and contrast. Space does not permit a review of each of those in detail here. I will present a detailed review of each of the early Jewish apocalypses as well as reviews of a range of relevant non-apocalypse texts from the same period in a later study. That broader review of literature will help to situate the message of the Hidden Bones within the complex of voices of that period, which will then help refine the likely time and source of the Hidden Bones editing. Here I will limit the analysis to, a) the characteristics of *Jubilees* that first led me to the subject, and b) an analysis of the message against the formal definition of the genre arrived at in 1979 and subsequently expanded. I will make a general comment or two, though, on the extent to which the message of our ten days compares to the other early Jewish apocalypses.

First, there is a clear distinction between the texts of Jewish apocalypse that have priestly and covenantal perspectives and those that do not. The priestly sympathies and covenantal emphasis of the Hidden Bones message are clearly found in the texts of *Daniel* and *Jubilees* but, just as clearly, they are not found in the Enoch literature. Our message has a distinct Mosaic affinity as do *Daniel* and *Jubilees* while the earliest Enoch literature does not. The *Animal Apocalypse*, which is the latest Enoch text reviewed; roughly contemporaneous with *Daniel* and only somewhat earlier than *Jubilees*; shifts the Enoch perspective of Moses to some extent. Like its predecessors, it is neither priestly nor covenantal, but Moses does play an important role in it as does Noah. The Hidden Bones message is rooted in the Noah story, as is the *Third Sibylline Oracle*. The Sibyl herself is a daughter of Noah. Using the Noah narrative as a foundation rather than the earlier Enoch story is important because using Enoch requires confronting the brand of cosmic dualism found in that story. The Hidden Bones message does not project a dualistic perspective.

All of the Jewish apocalypses share with our message some element of hiddenness. The earliest hide only the identity of the actual authors, speaking through the voice of the biblical Enoch. The later texts, especially *Daniel* and the *Animal Apocalypse*, completed during a time of oppression and danger, use allegory to disguise their actual subjects. The danger that those authors faced had apparently passed by the time of *Jubilees*, whose author seemed free to express his message openly. It is interesting to note that the timing of the mid-second-century allegorical texts roughly coincided with the rise of the practice of writing texts in code. Some of the texts found in Qumran—texts that are not apocalypses—were written in “esoteric” or “cryptic” scripts, which were replacement codes, requiring a key to decipher. It is interesting, too, that eight of those coded documents deal with matters of the calendar. The subject of the earliest Jewish apocalypse, the book of *Luminaries*, is the calendar, specifically the calendar of 364 days, which, as we have seen, is also the calendar of the book of *Jubilees*.³⁵

The full analysis of the early literature that I will present in a larger study will show that the message of the Hidden Bones is substantially congruent with that of early Jewish apocalypse literature. It does exhibit a far greater affinity with the messages of *Daniel* and *Jubilees* than it does with the Enoch literature. But there are many elements of important agreement even with the Enoch texts.

³⁴ Herrie Van Rooy, “The Ezekiel Manuscripts from the Dead Sea, the Ancient Versions, and the Textual History of Ezekiel,” in *Scribal Practice, Text and Canon in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Essays in memory of Peter Flint*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah. Vol 130. eds. John J. Collins and Ananda Geyser-Fouché, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 75–89, 85.

³⁵ The calendars of Enoch and Jubilees are not identical, but they do both hold to the 364-day duration of a year.

5.1 The Hidden Bones Message and the Book of Jubilees

Jubilees begins with a brief Prologue that opens with the equivalent of the Hebrew phrase *eileh ha'davarim*,³⁶ which means, "These are the words" That is also the phrase that opens the Hebrew book of Deuteronomy and, as James C. VanderKam puts it, "The writer in this way situates *Jubilees* in a tradition of Mosaic discourse."³⁷ In the Prologue, we learn that the book contains laws and commandments given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai. Therefore the importance of the Sinai event, which is associated with the Shavuot observance, is central. Moses' connection with the laws and commandments and the allusion to the book of Deuteronomy suggests a viewpoint similar to that expressed by the marking of the day of Moses' death.

After the Prologue, in Chapter 1, God calls to Moses, "During the first year of the Israelite's exodus from Egypt." (v. 1)³⁸ The Exodus is the precipitating event that, in *Jubilees*, sets the stage for God's call to Moses, which is specified as occurring "in the third month, on the sixteenth day of this month." (v. 1) God's revelation to the entire people would, then, have occurred on the previous day, the fifteenth day of the third month. That is the date of the Sinai event associated with the Shavuot observance according to the calendar of *Jubilees*. With the same economy of expression found in the Prologue, *Jubilees* 1:1 asserts the importance of Moses, the Exodus, the Sinai event, and the law.

In the verses that follow, the theme of covenant is central. The notice of the covenant in Chapter 1 begins with Abraham, and through him, it runs to Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. The covenant of the land is explicit, "the land that I promised by oath to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To your posterity I will give the land." (v. 7) That is God's commitment. The Sinai event expands the covenant provisions and the people's obligations. After the people enter the land, they "eat and are full" (v. 7), which parallels Joshua 5:11 and signifies the fulfilment of God's promise. But they will "turn after other gods" (v. 8) and "will forget all my commandments." (v. 9) God says, "I will send witnesses to them so that I may testify to them, but they will not listen and will kill the witnesses." (v. 12) This is the behaviour that the biblical record from Joshua through the period of kings relates. Then, God says, "I will hide my face from them, I will deliver them into the control of nations for captivity, for devastation, and for devouring," (v. 13) clearly corresponding to the Ezekiel 24:2 message. However, just as clearly, God stands ready to accept a sincere and penitent return. "They will not listen until they acknowledge their sins and the sins of their ancestors. After this they will return to me in a fully upright manner and with all their minds and all their souls." (vv. 22–23) This is the condition required for Ezekiel's prophecy beginning at Ezekiel 40:1, but it is also suggestive of the Yom Kippur dynamic in which repentance has the power to alter outcomes. That is consistent with the rabbinic idea that Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 40:1 occurred on Yom Kippur.³⁹ Others argue that the date should be understood to be not the tenth of *Tishrei*, the date of Yom Kippur, but rather the tenth of *Nisan*. In that case, there would be an association with the Passover sacrifice, which was first commanded to be made on that date.⁴⁰ Once the people do repent, however, "Their souls will adhere to me and all my commandments. They will perform my commandments. I will be their father and they will be my children." (v. 24) Then there will be a "time of the new creation ... Then Zion and Jerusalem will be holy ... The temple of the Lord will be created in Jerusalem ... (and) it may remain this way from that time throughout all the days of the earth." (v. 29) The prophecy begun in Ezek 40:1 of the return of the people to God, God's acceptance of them, the restoration of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple, and an eternal condition of peace, is directly paralleled here in *Jubilees*.

These are direct correspondences between the message of our marked passages and the opening section of *Jubilees*:

³⁶ אלה הדברים is the Hebrew equivalent of the Ethiopic text that survives.

³⁷ VanderKam, *Jubilees* Vol. 1, 125.

³⁸ Translations are from VanderKam, *Jubilees* Vol. 1.

³⁹ B. *Arakhin* 12a.

⁴⁰ Exodus 12:3.

- a) An emphasis on the importance of and the requirements of covenant,
- b) An emphasis on the importance of and the requirements of the law,
- c) An emphasis on the importance of the role of Moses as a lawgiver,
- d) The specification of the covenant line through Abraham and his descendants,
- e) The centrality of the Sinai event and its expansion of covenant requirements,
- f) God's fulfilment of the covenant of the land, which includes the Exodus event,
- g) The people's failure to fulfil their covenant obligations,
- h) The people's consequent loss of favour; their conquest, dispersal, and exile,
- i) The people's ultimate repentance and return to covenant obligations,
- j) God's acceptance of that return,
- k) The restoration of the people to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple, and the dawning of a new and perpetual age of peace and blessing.

That so much can be conveyed in only thirty verses of the *Jubilees* text is testimony to the skill of the author. It also makes clear how VanderKam can write, "The fifty-chapter book is divided formally into two unequal parts, chapter 1 and chapters 2–50."⁴¹ Specific treatments of several of the marked days are found later in the *Jubilees* text. The Noah event and covenant, the Abrahamic circumcision event, and the observances of Passover, Shavuot, and Yom Kippur are all found, and importantly so, later in the book. The postponement of that specific detail does not damage our ability to see that the essential themes and message of the ten marked days are expressed clearly and directly in the Prologue and opening chapter of *Jubilees*.⁴²

Some believe that *Jubilees* is not, at least as a whole, an apocalypse. John Collins, in *Semeia* 14, identifies only *Jubilees* Chapter 23 as a discrete apocalypse within the larger work.⁴³ He notes there that, "the manner of revelation in Chapters 1 and 2 is similar to the apocalypses" but that "the content of the angelic revelation has little apocalyptic or eschatological material." He also finds, though, that, "The apocalyptic eschatology and worldview are presupposed throughout *Jubilees*."⁴⁴ In subsequent writing Collins allows that "In the end, *Jubilees* is a hybrid work" and "there is, then, much to be gained from viewing *Jubilees* in the context of both rewritten narratives and of apocalypses"⁴⁵ VanderKam, measuring *Jubilees* against the formal definition of apocalypse that we will now turn to, concludes that, "*Jubilees* scores well by this definition."⁴⁶

Our subject here is not *Jubilees* as an apocalypse. It is the question of whether the message created by the unique marking of ten biblical days should be understood as an apocalypse. We can certainly compare it to all the other early Jewish apocalypses, including the "hybrid" text of *Jubilees*, which will be done in the larger study that has been already mentioned. However, since 1979 there has been a formally accepted definition of the literary genre "apocalypse." Collins writes that apocalypse "has been recognized as a distinct class of writings since the work of Friedrich Lucke in the early nineteenth century."⁴⁷ It was not until 1979, though, that a committee of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), chaired by Collins, published a definition of the genre based on an analysis of the most common elements found in the works considered representative of it. The committee

⁴¹ James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees: The Hermeneia Translation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), Kindle Edition. 1.

⁴² The Sabbath is a critical concern of the author of *Jubilees*, but Shabbat is not among our marked days. I will explore the reason for that apparent divergence in an analysis of the origin of the Hidden Bones message in a future study.

⁴³ John J. Collins, "The Jewish Apocalypses," in *Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*. ed. John J. Collins, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), 21-59.

⁴⁴ Collins, *The Jewish Apocalypses*, 33.

⁴⁵ John J. Collins, "The Genre of the Book of *Jubilees*," in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*. eds. Mason, Bautch, Harkins, and Machiela. SJSJ Vol 153. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 737–755.

⁴⁶ VanderKam, *Jubilees* Vol. 1, 20.

⁴⁷ John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), Kindle Edition, Loc 90.

acknowledged that none of the texts accepted by it as apocalypses exhibit all the elements of the definition, however.

5.2 The Hidden Bones Message and the Formal Definition of Apocalypse

This is the definition adopted by the SBL committee:

*Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.*⁴⁸

A subsequent study by the SBL Seminar on Early Christian Apocalypticism suggested the following addition which was accepted by the original committee: an apocalypse is ...

*... intended to interpret the present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future and to influence both the understanding and behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.*⁴⁹

The SBL committee identified two main types of apocalypse: those with “an otherworldly journey” and those without “an otherworldly journey.” The committee also distinguished between apocalypses that have a review of history in some form and those that do not. It found, for instance, that, “All the Jewish apocalypses, which have no otherworldly journey, have a review of history in some form, and so they may be conveniently labelled Historical Apocalypses.”⁵⁰

Those specifications and observations provide benchmarks against which to analyse the message created by our marked days. I think we can make the following observations without much fear of disagreement.

5.2.1 Revelation

The Hidden Bones message is created and conveyed by reference to existing texts of the Hebrew Bible. To those who accept that text itself as revealed, excerpts from it will also be accepted as revealed. Those who do not accept the text as revealed will acknowledge that the text knows itself, at least in part, as revealed. The accounts of the first three marked days: Noah’s entry into the ark, the Abrahamic circumcision event, and the Exodus event; are from the voice of an anonymous narrator. Each, however, is associated with prior direct communication from God. The command to observe Passover/The Feast of Unleavened Bread is communicated by God to Moses and Aaron.

The commands to observe Shavuot and Yom Kippur are communicated by God to Moses for transmission to the covenant people. God directly instructs Moses to go up the mountain to die. It is the narrator who relates the events of Joshua 5:11 but God had just spoken directly to Joshua in Joshua 5:2 and 5:9. Ezekiel’s first marked vision is directly from God to the prophet for transmission to the people. The content of Ezekiel’s vision beginning in Ezekiel 40:1 is initially from God to Ezekiel and then to the prophet from a “man whose appearance shone like bronze.” (Ezek 40:3) Communication from God to man, in some form, is an essential element of all ten marked days. In the case of Ezekiel 40:1 the communication channel shifts to the “man” introduced in Ezekiel 40:3. Both God and the “man” certainly qualify as “otherworldly” and the criterion of revelation to a human recipient, which is the first essential of apocalypse, is clearly satisfied.

⁴⁸ John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), 1–20, 9.

⁴⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism,” in *Semeia 36* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1986), 1–11.

⁵⁰ Daniel: With an Introduction, Loc 132.

5.2.2 Review of History

The progression from the foundational stories of Noah and Abraham, through the Exodus event, the Sinai event, the death of Moses, the sustenance from the land, the fall of the First Temple, and the exile is quite a full and efficient review of history, and so qualify the message as “historical.” I do not think more needs to be said on that point.

5.2.3 Otherworldly Journey

Ezekiel 40:1–2 introduces the long account of the eschatological temple, city, and land: “The hand of the Lord was upon me and He brought me there. He brought me in visions of God, to the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain.” Arriving there the prophet finds “the man whose appearance shone like bronze” (Ezek 40:3) who then leads him from the mountain and in stages into and around the new temple and its surroundings. The visions experienced by the prophet are not of the actual physical world. He knew the real Jerusalem and its now-destroyed temple. The journey he took was through a visionary representation of a world that did not exist. It was an otherworldly journey to an otherworldly destination.

5.2.4 Transcendent Reality

The message introduced by Ezekiel 40:1 presents a transcendent reality in both spatial and temporal terms. The “master paradigm” of the characteristics of the apocalypse, the literary genre, in the *Semeia 14* study⁵¹ has two sections, or axes, of transcendent reality: Spatial and Temporal. The Spatial Axis has two elements: otherworldly regions and otherworldly beings. In the Ezekiel account, the prophet is transported by God to what the NRSV notes as a “mythic, cosmic mountain” where he meets the otherworldly “man,” who addresses him as *ben adam*, “Mortal,” distinguishing the prophet’s human nature from his own. Stephen Cook calls the man “a supernatural guide,” whose bronze appearance “signals his transcendent nature.”⁵² In spatial terms, the visions of both the city and the temple are transcendent. The geography of the city and its surroundings are transformed. The site of the temple becomes the source of a miraculous river that creates an idyllic, Edenic paradise on the land to the east and south, flowing to the Jordan and the Dead Sea. The temple itself is transcendent in size, setting, and design. Cook writes that Ezekiel does not provide “a blueprint for an actual, realistic temple,” and that it “emphasizes many fantastic elements,” and he agrees with Carvalho that Ezekiel’s utopian temple “could not be built, not at any level of the text.”⁵³ Walther Eichrodt calls it “a heavenly reality created by Yahweh himself and transplanted to stand on the earth. Its appearance is inseparable from the complete transformation of geographical conditions.”⁵⁴ Spatial transcendence is undoubtedly an element of the Ezekiel message.

The temporal axis of the “master paradigm” has thirteen elements, recognizing a substantial diversity in the representation of temporal transcendence in the apocalypse texts. The dual references in Ezekiel 24 and 40 explicitly convey several elements of that paradigm: recollection of the past, present salvation, persecution, eschatological upheavals, judgment/destruction of the wicked and of the world, and cosmic transformation. Two elements of the paradigm: cosmogony and primordial events are not represented in the Hidden Bones; but they are not found in most of the recognized Jewish apocalypses that are dated to the period before 100 BCE. The exception is the Enochian book of *Luminaries*. I think the case for temporal transcendence can be made given the number of criteria

⁵¹ Collins, *Jewish Apocalypses*, 28; Adela Yarbro Collins, “*The Early Christian Apocalypses*,” in *Semeia 14 Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), 61–121, 104–5.

⁵² Stephen L. Cook, “*Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*,” AB 22B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), Kindle Edition, 112.

⁵³ Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48*, 6, with a quote from: Corrine Carvalho, *The Book of Ezekiel*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 188.

⁵⁴ Walther Eichrodt, “*Ezekiel: A Commentary*,” The Old Testament Library, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), Kindle Edition, Loc 12022.

satisfied by the message of the ten marked days. There is however another issue under the heading of temporal transcendence that should be addressed.

Most of the texts, both Jewish and Christian, understood by the SBL scholars as being apocalypses, have either implicit or explicit messages of personal resurrection and/or afterlife. Among the early Jewish texts, only the *Animal Apocalypse* is seen as having both, and in that case, the resurrection message is not explicit.⁵⁵ We should not expect the Hidden Bones to convey an explicit message of either resurrection or an afterlife and certainly not at the personal level. As we have discussed, none of the ten days marked with the *b'etsem* phrase carries a message that is appropriately understood at the level of the individual. The temporal transcendence in our message is not personal, it is corporate, specific to the covenant people as a people. It represents a kind of “political eschatology” which John Collins mentions in connection with both the *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Animal Apocalypse*⁵⁶, and in that respect, it does differ from many of the (especially later) apocalypse writings, which have either explicit or implicit messages of personal resurrection or an afterlife. *Daniel* 12:1–3 is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that contains an unambiguous message of individual resurrection. But the condition described in that message is limited, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake...” (emphasis added; Dan 12:2) Some, according to this text, will not, and so Daniel’s message is more limited than that of Ezekiel. Jan Sigvartsen writes that “The Hebrew Scriptures reflect little regarding the destiny of the individual after their death...death was not considered the start of a new life, but the end of the present one.”⁵⁷ Therefore, a message created by reference to verses from the Hebrew Bible could not be expected to communicate an idea of personal resurrection or an afterlife. But the absence of a reference to personal resurrection or afterlife does not disqualify our message from inclusion in the apocalypse library. James H. Charlesworth uses Ezekiel 40–48 to illustrate his finding that both the Old Testament and the New Testament “contain important apocalyptic sections” in addition to the texts of *Daniel* and *Revelation*, which are the only texts of apocalypse in the canonical scriptures.⁵⁸

5.2.5 Intention

The 1986 expansion of the original definition of apocalypse as a literary genre addresses the issue of the author/creator’s intention. To address intention, I must venture beyond the limits of the subject of this paper, but I will do so only briefly. The expanded definition references “present earthly circumstances,” and suggests that a text should be viewed from that perspective. In this case, the definition of “present” must be some time after the latest of the elements of the message, after the vision of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 40:1, which is dated in the twenty-fifth year of the Babylonian exile. I would suggest that the “understanding and behaviour” of any audience, from that time to this, might be influenced by the message created by our marker phrase and that such an influence would reflect, to some degree, its acceptance as arising from “divine authority.”

The more fundamental question, of course, is whether the message was intentionally created for a specific purpose. I am convinced that it was, and I will address the issues of how, why, and when the message was created in subsequent parts of this study.

⁵⁵ Sigvartsen finds three passages in the *Animal Apocalypse* “which may allude to a future resurrection.” In his discussion he quotes Nicklesburg as pointing to Ezekiel 34 and 37 as examples of similar allusion. See: Jan A. Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*, (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 119.

⁵⁶ Collins, *Jewish Apocalypses*, 26.

⁵⁷ Jan A. Sigvartsen, “*Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha*,” (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 1.

⁵⁸ James H. Charlesworth, “*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Vol 1, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*,” Eighth Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2021), Introduction.

5.3 The Message as an Apocalypse: Conclusion

The message created by reference to the ten marked days does meet the formal requirements of the definition of apocalypse except for the criterion of “narrative framework.” Collins expressed the idea of narrative framework more fully in his Introduction to *Semeia 14*, writing, “Apocalypse should refer to a single coherent and recognizable type of writing.”⁵⁹ The committee could not have anticipated the creation of an apocalypse by reference to another text. There was no precedent in its library of possibilities for such a thing. That is also true of a mechanism of revelation-by-reference. However, Collins in a later work does indicate a substantial degree of flexibility in recognizing a revelation. There, he writes “A revelation might be introduced as a vision, or a dream of the night, or a ‘word,’ or just by a verb, such as ‘I saw.’ For our purposes, all of these counted as ‘revelations’.”⁶⁰

The crisp and compact language of the SBL definition unavoidably masks the obvious diversity of the texts it describes. *Luminaries* looks nothing like *Watchers*. *Weeks* looks nothing like *Daniel*. The *Animal Apocalypse* looks nothing like the *Sibylline Oracle*. Yet all have some elements in common. Some have only minimal commonality, but others have many points of direct congruence. I presented a brief analysis of the congruence between the message of our verses and the initial section of *Jubilees* because that is what led me to study the Hidden Bones message in the context of the early Jewish apocalypses. I do believe that *Jubilees* should be considered both re-written scripture and apocalypse, but agreement on that point is not necessary to see the message of the marked days as an apocalypse.

In 2011, Adela Yarbro Collins commented on the approach to the definition of apocalypse taken by the SBL committee. She wrote, “The approach taken in *Semeia 14* addressed neither the ‘life situation’ out of which the genre ‘apocalypse’ grows nor its *raison d’être*. These limitations may be due to the preliminary nature of the project. A deeper reason, however, was probably the judgment that the functions of the various apocalypses are too diverse to be summarized in a definition.”⁶¹ I think her points are certainly applicable to this case. It is its message rather than its form that makes the argument for the Hidden Bones as an apocalypse. I think the unusual form was critical to its intended function and was responsive to a specific “life situation.”

It is only with respect to form that a question might be raised about the character of the Hidden Bones message as an apocalypse, and I believe that question can be answered.

⁵⁹ Collins, Introduction: Morphology, 2–3

⁶⁰ Collins, Apocalypse, Prophecy and Pseudepigraphy, 2

⁶¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Apocalypse Now: The State of Apocalyptic Studies Near the End of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century,” in *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 104/4, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) 447–57

Part 6 – Hiddenness in the Hebrew Text

I will now turn to the question of the *effective* hiddenness of the marker phrase and its message even to those who use the Hebrew text. Addressing that issue requires a review of rabbinic literature and commentary that, even in an abbreviated form, is fairly lengthy and detailed. I include that detail in Part 7, below, and I will draw on that material in the analysis presented here. Most readers will find the level of detail included in this analysis sufficient. The additional detail in Part 7 will be of greater interest to the professional or scholarly reader, or as a reference resource.

Three fundamental forces have acted against the recognition and understanding of the message created by the marker phrase even for those who use the Hebrew text:

- a) The scarcity and narrowness of notice of the marker phrase in early rabbinic literature, especially in the *Mishnah* and the two Talmuds,
- b) The deference specifically accorded earlier rabbinic views versus later, and
- c) The constraints on understanding created by the sanctioned systems of textual interpretation.

6.1 Scarcity and Narrowness of References in Early Rabbinic Literature

The *Mishnah* was the first great literary product of the rabbinic period. Redacted in about 200 CE, it is a systematic presentation of the tenets of the Oral Law, an expansion and explanation of the laws found in the written Torah. The Oral Law is understood to have been transmitted to Moses on Sinai and then from Moses to Joshua, from Joshua to the Elders, from the Elders to the Prophets, and so on, down to the time of its redaction by Rabbi Judah HaNasi.⁶² There is, quite surprisingly, no notice of the marker phrase in the *Mishnah*.⁶³ Because it is concerned mainly with matters of law, we might not be surprised to find that the *Mishnah* does not comment on the day of Noah's entering the ark, or the day of Moses' death, for example. However, we would surely expect that the phrase would catch the attention of the early rabbis and the redactor on issues such as the three perpetual observances or the requirement of circumcision, especially since, as we will see below, earlier midrashic literature had already discussed the phrase and its meaning. But nowhere does the *Mishnah* address, or even quote, the marker phrase.

There is another specific and important failure of notice in the *Mishnah*. Seder Moed is the order or division of the *Mishnah* in which special days are discussed. In it we find tractates discussing the laws of Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Passover, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, for example. But there is no tractate in Seder Moed for the laws of Shavuot. Not only does the *Mishnah* take no notice of the marker phrase, but it also lacks the separate tractate on the holiday of Shavuot that we would expect to find. Why might that be? Recall the point made earlier regarding the marking of the Shavuot observance. The connection between Shavuot and the Sinai theophany and covenant was not formally made by the rabbis until after the redaction of the *Mishnah*. To acknowledge the connection required an approach to the timing of the events that did not rely on the calendar of *Jubilees*. That solution had apparently not been found, or not agreed upon, or perhaps the rabbis were not yet willing to make it public, at the time of the redaction of the *Mishnah*.

The *Tosefta* was redacted about a century after the *Mishnah* and is a supplement to it. It is about four times the size of the *Mishnah* and its redactors had time and opportunity to address any deficiencies they might have perceived in the *Mishnah*. No references to the marker phrase are found in the *Tosefta*, either. However, the *ad etsem* variant is quoted once (*Menachot* 10:6) in a discussion about the timing of the first barley offering, and the *et etsem* variant is quoted once (*Sotah* 6:10) in a discussion of the fast of the tenth of Tevet. But the *Tosefta* offers no new information about the marker itself.

⁶² M. *Pirke Avot* 1:1–12.

⁶³ There is a reference to the *ad etsem* variant of the phrase at Leviticus 23:14 in M. *Menachot* 10:5.

There are two Talmuds, the Jerusalem Talmud, or the *Yerushalmi*, which dates to about 400 CE, and the Babylonian Talmud, also known as the *Bavli*, which is about a century later, or about 500 CE.⁶⁴ The *Mishnah* is the core document around which the Talmuds are structured. With the *Mishnah* as touchstone, the Talmuds record the arguments, explanations, expansions, and (sometimes) conclusions of the rabbis. The *Yerushalmi* is the product of the rabbis of Jerusalem while the *Bavli* records the work of those in the major centres of study in Babylonia. The *Bavli* was the crowning literary achievement of the rabbinic period: it is a massive document, with 2,711 double-sided pages of argumentation and explication.

Both Talmuds do reference and comment on the marker phrase, but only just. The only references to the phrase in the *Bavli* are to the three Yom Kippur verses in Leviticus 23. The Yom Kippur issue discussed in the *Bavli's Tractate Yoma* (81a:11–13) is one of limitation or specificity; that is, distinguishing the day of Yom Kippur itself from an extension of time before it. The *Yerushalmi* comments on the phrase only in its discussions of Passover and Yom Kippur. Two points are made in those discussions. One is an issue of specificity or limitation of time, as in the *Bavli*. The other concludes that the phrase indicates that the Exodus event occurred in the middle of the day, which we will see reflects the views of earlier midrash. The rabbis of the two Talmuds did not record an interest in what the marker phrase might mean more broadly.

The targums are translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic by the rabbis of the early centuries CE. *Targum Onkelos* is the most commonly used Aramaic version of the Pentateuch and *Targum Jonathan* is the most commonly used translation of the prophetic books. Those are printed in many editions of the Hebrew Bible even today as aids to understanding the text. *Targum Neofiti* also translates the Hebrew Pentateuch but in a different, Palestinian, dialect of Aramaic. It might be the earliest of the major targums.

Onkelos and *Jonathan* translate the Hebrew *b'etsem* phrase using a single, unique Aramaic expression: בבֵּרַן יוֹמָא הַדִּין, *bic'ran yoma ha'den*. Their use of the same translation in each instance of the phrase makes the connection among the marked phrases and the days they describe discoverable. Yet, as we saw in the case of the unique and consistent version in the English of Young's Literal Translation, there is no indication that the connection was discovered. The Aramaic word used as equivalent to the Hebrew עֵצֶם, *etsem*, is בֵּרַן, *c'ran*. That word is found nowhere else in the text except in two locations where it appears as a proper name.⁶⁵ Its meaning, then, cannot be understood from other uses in the text and can only be approximated from other evidence. The clear and common Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew עֵצֶם is גְּרָמָא, *gar'ma*, meaning *bone*, but the Aramaic translators chose not to use that word. It appears that the Aramaic בֵּרַן was created specifically to translate the marked verses. See Part 7 for more detail on that subject.

Targum Neofiti takes a very different approach from that of *Onkelos* and *Jonathan*. It uses several very similar but still different translations for the *b'etsem* phrase, all of which are built on the Aramaic זְמַן, *z'man*, meaning *time*, to translate *etsem*, and the scribe who created the sole surviving copy of *Neofiti* inserted two translation notes into the Aramaic text making it clear that he was using *z'man* to translate the *etsem* phrases. Therefore, rather than obscure the meaning by using a word not found in other contexts, *Neofiti* takes a stand, using the clear and common word for *time*, which also obscures the phrase but in a different way, by being so unremarkable.

The earliest rabbinic literature predates the redaction of the *Mishnah*.⁶⁶ It is the earliest of the halachic⁶⁷ midrash literature, including the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael*, *Sifra* on Leviticus, and *Sifre* on

⁶⁴ Some believe that editing of the *Bavli* continued even into the eighth century. See, for example: David Weiss Halivni, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud*. trans. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.

⁶⁵ Genesis 36:26 and 1 Chronicles 1:41.

⁶⁶ See, for example: David Weiss Halivni, *Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁶⁷ Having generally to do with legal matters.

Numbers and Deuteronomy. Later than those halachic midrashim but still earlier than, or at least contemporary with, the Babylonian Talmud, are the earliest of the homiletical⁶⁸ midrashim: *Genesis, Leviticus, and Lamentations Rabbah*.⁶⁹ After the time of the Talmud, but before the era of the commentators, we find references to the marker phrase in the midrashim known as *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Midrash Tanchuma, and Shir HaShirim Rabbah*. There is debate about the dates of all the older sources and some will disagree about the dates assigned to the early midrashim. For our purposes, approximate and relative timing is all that is required.

The early halachic midrashim were known to the redactor of the *Mishnah*, to the rabbis of both Talmuds, and to the translators of the targums; and those early texts of midrash do confirm the presence of the marker phrase in their sources. Halivni makes the point of the importance of the early midrashim in this way, “The very starting point of the Babylonian Talmud, at the beginning of the tractate Berakhot, highlights the dependence of the Mishnaic text on previous midrashic efforts”⁷⁰ The *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* references the marker phrase three times. The comment at Mek.12:6:5 explains that the phrase in Exodus 12:41 regarding the day of the Exodus means that the children of Israel left Egypt *during the day*; that is, during the daylight hours as opposed to at night. At Mek.12:17:2, the same point is made in a discussion of the marker at Exodus 12:17. At Mek.12:40:1 the Exodus reference at Exodus 12:41 is brought to support the idea of *immediacy*, “when the time arrived the Lord did not delay them for one moment.”

Sifra on Leviticus references the marker phrase four times. At Emor 13:11 *Sifra* quotes the Shavuot marker in Leviticus 23:21 and emphasizes the *specificity* of that day. In Emor 14:3, it references both Leviticus 23:29 & 30 emphasizing the specificity of Yom Kippur. In Emor 14:7 & 8 it makes the same point again referencing the Yom Kippur verses in Leviticus 23:29 & 30.

Sifrei to Deuteronomy in 337:1 uses the marked verse at Deuteronomy 32:48 to make the point that the marker is found “in three places”: that is, in Deuteronomy 32:48, in Genesis 7:13, and in Exodus 12:17. In each of the three cases, the midrash explains that God used the events described *to demonstrate God's power*. They tell us that making Noah's entry into the ark, the Israelites' departure from Egypt, and Moses' journey up the mountain all occur “in the middle of the day” was intended to demonstrate that no human opposition to those events could thwart God's desire.

So, the earliest halachic midrashim certainly know the marker phrase. All of the comments in those texts explain the phrase as an expression of time and, in that sense, they might have influenced the translator of *Targum Neofiti*. The reference in *Sifre* is the most interesting since it comments on instances of the marker in three of the five books of the Pentateuch. Given the breadth of the author's view, it is fair to ask whether the use of only three of the eleven Pentateuchal instances to make his point is valid. The same “middle of the day” argument could hardly be advanced for the perpetual holiday requirements, for example. That is a point the medieval commentator, Ramban, would later make, but we will see that the views of these early midrashim are echoed by many commentators through the centuries that followed.

Bereshit Rabbah is one of the earliest compilations of homiletical midrash. It references the marker phrase in three of its midrashim. In Ber. Rab. 32:8, which discusses the entry of Noah into the ark, an explanation is given that Noah did not enter the ark at night because the surrounding peoples might not have believed that he did enter it unless they had seen him do so. In Ber. Rab. 46:2 and 47:9 the midrash quotes the marker phrase in the passages dealing with the Abrahamic circumcision event and it explains those instances in essentially the same way; that is, unless the circumcision activity was visible to all, the account might not have been believed. Interestingly, the issue in these somewhat later midrash texts is one of *evidence*, while the earlier midrashim were concerned that God's *power* was

⁶⁸ These generally attempt to clarify or expand upon non-legal matters.

⁶⁹ There are other midrashic texts from the early rabbinic period, but I cite only those that contain some mention of the marker phrase.

⁷⁰ David Weiss Halivni, “From Midrash to Mishnah: Theological Repercussions and Further clarifications of ‘Chate’u Yisrael’,” in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. Michael A. Fishbane, (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1993), 23–44, 23.

asserted and recognized. In *Lamentations Rabbah* the marker in Lev 23:21 is quoted (Petichta 11), but it is brought in support of an argument on another topic. The meaning of the marker phrase itself is not addressed.

Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer cites the marker in two locations. It agrees that the circumcision and Exodus events occurred at mid-day (*Pirke R. El* 29:2 & 48:20). However, in *Pirke R. El* 29:2, it also finds that since both the circumcision event and Yom Kippur are marked with our phrase, we should learn that the circumcision event occurred on Yom Kippur. The fact that other days which could not coincide with either of those two, are marked with the same phrase, is not addressed.

Midrash Tanchuma in Lech Lecha 17:2 notes that the language of Genesis 17:26 indicates that Abraham “was circumcised,” not that he circumcised himself. *Vayera* 2:5 looks back to the circumcision verse in Genesis 17:23 and finds that God strengthened Abraham to such an extent that he was able to circumcise himself first and then carry on to circumcise Ishmael and all of the other males of his household.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah discusses the circumcision verse in Genesis 17:26 and brings a new idea. It explains that the passive language “Abraham was circumcised” teaches that God joined Abraham in the act of circumcision, which is an evolution of the thinking about that event.

Neither the earlier halachic midrashim nor the early homiletical midrashim explain the marker phrase in any way other than as a matter of evidence of the specific referenced event, the specificity of its timing, or as a demonstration of God’s power. The post-Talmudic midrashim do show some evolution of the understanding, but that evolution still falls far short of a search for a common thread among all of the marked days.

6.2 The Influence of and Deference to Earlier Rabbinic Opinion

The concept of *yeridat ha’dorot*, or “the decline of the generations,” is rooted in the idea that those temporally closer to the Sinai revelation were better equipped both spiritually and intellectually to understand it. Menachem Kellner writes that in “the pre-modern Jewish world ... the superiority of the ancients over the moderns was taken as being so clear and so basic that it was rarely even clearly asserted.”⁷¹ That view was denied, at least in part by some authorities, including Maimonides, who believed in the inherent equality of ancient and modern abilities.⁷² But even Maimonides accepted the authority of the earlier generations in matters of halachic interpretation. Some later authorities, including many Hasidic masters, acknowledged a progressive decline of capacity in *halachic* matters but believed that *spiritual* capacity increased over time. They argued that the closer the generation to the age of the messiah, the greater the spiritual potential. Nevertheless they, too, acknowledged a progressive decline in the capacity to understand and interpret the contents of revelation, including both the written and oral Torahs and the interpretations of early rabbinic literature. The later rabbinic commentators could and did disagree with one another, but as we will see, they did not deny the authority of the earlier generations. They might add to or attempt to clarify opinions found in the early rabbinic literature, but they did not contradict them. The belief in and influence of the concept of *yeridat ha’dorot* persisted in traditional communities during the period of rabbinic commentary, and it remains important in orthodox Jewish communities today.

Many early sources express the idea. The *Bavli* in *Sanhedrin* 94b is often brought into this conversation as an early benchmark. It portrays an idealized populace during the time of the reformer king Hezekiah, “they searched from Dan to Beersheba and did not find (anyone) ... who was not expert (even) in the (complex) laws of ritual purity and impurity.” That ideal was brought to contrast the level of those living in earlier times with those in the time of the Talmud quoted. The understanding that prophecy ceased after the time of Malachi is another frequently cited benchmark for the decline of the

⁷¹ Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides on the “Decline of the Generations” and the Nature of Rabbinic Authority*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), ix.

⁷² Kellner, *Decline of the Generations*, ix.

ability of humans to receive and understand divine communication. Some attribute the cessation of prophecy to sin, others to the longer-term effects of the destruction of the First Temple, and others to a transition during Hellenistic times from an essentially spiritual grounding of the people to an essentially rational one. Malachi himself points to a deterioration in the priesthood, increased intermarriage, and failure to properly bring offerings. And that message probably refers to a time only a few generations after that of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A version of the *yeridat ha'dorot* idea is found in a statement in the *Mishnah*: “Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: From the day the [Second] Temple was destroyed, the generations have deteriorated; the sages have become like scribes, scribes like synagogue attendants, synagogue attendants like common people, and the common people became more and more debased. None ask and none seek.” (M. *Sotah* 9:15) The *Bavli* makes the same point in *Shabbat* 112b, “If the early generations are [like the] sons of angels, we are [like the] sons of men. And if they are [like the] sons of men, we are [like the] sons of donkeys.” The fall of the First Temple, the end of prophecy, the deterioration of the institutions of religion during the Hellenistic period, the fall of the Second Temple; all of these could be seen as benchmarks of diminished spiritual and intellectual capacity.

As we look at the early rabbinic literature and the later commentary, it is important to be mindful that the earlier views will greatly influence the later. The idea is made very plainly by the modern scholar, Adin Steinsaltz, who writes: “Statements by the *tanna'im* that appear in the *Mishna* ... are binding on the [later] *amora'im*. An *amora* may not, except in rare instances, dispute tannaitic statements ... if already stated by a previous authority, it becomes an established, axiomatic truth.”⁷³ Kellner expands that analysis in his finding that it is a “fact of halachic history that Amoraim do not dispute Tannaim, Gaonim do not dispute Amoraim, Rishonim do not dispute Gaonim, and Aharonim do not dispute Rishonim.”⁷⁴ Ephraim Urbach quotes Yitzhak Baer assessing the period from the time of Alexander the Great to the close of the *Mishnah*; a period of over 500 years. Baer wrote that, “in the closing of the *Mishna* there was implicit a conscious feeling of the continuous decline of creative power.”⁷⁵ The writing preserved what might have otherwise been lost or corrupted by the anticipated continued decline. We can now illustrate the point with an example.

6.2.1 An Example: The “Middle of the Day” Explanation

We saw above that the early halachic midrash, *Sifrei* to Deuteronomy in 337:1, uses the marked verse at Deuteronomy 32:48 to make the point that the marker is found “in three places”: that is, in Deuteronomy 32:48, in Genesis 7:13, and in Exodus 12:17. In each of the three cases, *Sifrei* interprets the phrase as meaning “in the middle of the day.” The same “middle of the day” explanation is made in the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* (12:6:5). That same understanding is then found in the *Yerushalmi* in *Pesachim* 10:5:3.

Moving beyond the period of early rabbinic literature, into the stream of major Jewish commentary, we first encounter the 11th-century Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak, better known as Rashi. Rashi writes in his comment to Deuteronomy 32:48 that the marker phrase is used in “three places in the scripture”: in the Noah instance, the Exodus event, and the day of Moses’ death. In each case Rashi writes that the event took place *בְּחֶצֶי הַיּוֹם*, *b'chatzi ha'yom*, meaning “in the middle of the day,” repeating the position found in *Sifre*, in the *Mekhilta*, and in the *Yerushalmi*. Rashi accepts and repeats

⁷³Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, *Reference Guide to the Talmud*, 2nd Edition, ed. Joshua Schreier (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2014), 126-27 See also, for example: David Weiss Halivni, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud*, trans. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195.

The *tannaim* are the authorities of the pre-Mishnaic period, before 200 CE, whose opinions are cited in the *Mishnah*. The *amoraim* are authorities of the period from the close of the *Mishnah* through the close of the Babylonian Talmud.

⁷⁴ Kellner, *Decline of the Generations*, 8.

The *gaonim*, *rishonim*, and *acharonim* are successively later eras of the rabbinic authorities from roughly the 11th century through the periods of the commentary we have reviewed and extending into the current day.

⁷⁵Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1975), 12.

the position of the early literature, elaborating only on the reason that the events occurred at mid-day, not on the conclusion itself.

The 13th-century commentator, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, also known as the Ramban, provides explanations for several additional instances of the phrase. He attaches his principal analysis to the phrase in Leviticus 23:28. He begins by acknowledging that the phrase used in the verses concerning Yom Kippur requires a different kind of interpretation from that in the Noah event or the Exodus event. A “middle of the day” explanation is not appropriate for Yom Kippur, he notes. The same is true for the Shavuot reference. He proposes that the Noah event, the circumcision event, the Exodus event, and Moses’ last words and death, were each begun and completed on *a single day*. The *etsem* in each of these cases acts to *limit*, in his view, as well as to specify. At the end of his commentary, lest he seem to be contradicting Rashi or, more importantly, *Sifre*, he acknowledges the position that the earlier sources take on the “middle of the day” character of the instances cited in their comments on Deuteronomy 32:48. His view does not contradict the earlier authorities; he adds a dimension of specificity to those earlier views. His is the most complete comment on the marker phrase but he does not appear to seek a meaning that connects *all* of the marked days.

Before leaving the 13th century, it is instructive to consider an important comment on the decline of the generations from the modern scholar, David Weiss Halivni. He writes, “After the thirteenth century the number of creative biblical commentators who followed peshat⁷⁶ declined. The decline was due ... to the impact of the contributions of the giants of peshat who flourished between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, leaving later scholars little to add. To this one may add a decline in exegetical talent of the caliber of the early masters.”⁷⁷ Halivni’s view of the decline in the powers of understanding after the 13th century reads very much like the comments in the *Mishnah* at *Sotah* 9:15 and the *Bavli* at *Shabbat* 112b. We will now see that little was added to the rabbinic conversation on this point after the thirteenth century.

The 17th-century super-commentary on Rashi called *Sifte Chakhamim* repeats and clarifies Rashi’s comment on the instance at Deuteronomy 32:48 noting that, because the Abrahamic circumcision event is marked in two verses, there are actually *four* instances of the phrase rather than three in the accounts Rashi cites. That is an accurate observation but adds nothing meaningful to the conversation.

The 18th-century commentator whose work is called the *Or Ha’chayyim* addresses the instance in Deuteronomy 32:48 and notes the source in *Sifre* that Rashi cited. He then associates the event of Moses’ death with the idea of the expression of God’s power. In that case, he says, the people had threatened to physically prevent Moses from ascending the mountain to die. The phrase, then, tells us that it was God’s *power* that prevailed. And God’s power was evident because the event occurred without hindrance in the full light of day.

In the 19th century, the influential German rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary on the marker phrase in Genesis 17:23 writes that the marker phrase means, “on that very day, without delay or deliberation ... According to our Sages (*Bereshit Rabbah* 47:9) *b’etsem ha’yom ha’zeh* always means ‘in the full power of the day’—i.e., in broad daylight.” In reality, neither *Bereshit Rabbah*, which he cites, nor the midrashim in *Sifre*, nor the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael* says that the phrase *always* has a certain meaning. Nor can Hirsch’s interpretation reasonably be applied to all instances of the marker phrase, as the Ramban made clear five centuries earlier. Hirsch’s comment stands, nevertheless, and we can find a current Hebrew-English edition of the Pentateuch by a major Jewish publishing company that translates the marker phrase as “in the midst of this day” in every place it occurs.

We could similarly trace a line of commentary that interprets the phrase as an indication of specificity or immediacy, which we found in the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael* (20:40–1) to the marked

⁷⁶ The straightforward, literal meaning of the text.

⁷⁷ David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat & Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34.

verse at Exodus 12:41, and in the *Yerushalmi* at *Pesachim* 1:1:2. Ibn Ezra in the 12th century, R. David Kimchi in the 13th century, R. Abarbanel in the 15th century, R. Ovadia Seforno in the 16th century, and the Malbim in the 19th century, all embrace the same general ideas of specificity or immediacy found in the *Mekhilta*. See Part 7 for detail.

The power of earlier rabbinic literature to shape and limit the positions of later literature and commentary is clear. While the attribution of near inerrancy that Steinsaltz articulated above is not as strong a force in homiletical interpretation as in halachic, it still acts to limit later interpretive scope even in homiletical matters, and that scope is already limited by the third force acting to obscure the message of our marker phrase, to which we now turn.

6.3 The Influence of Prescribed Systems of Interpretation

The discussion of the marker phrase in the Babylonian Talmud is limited, but it provides a useful introduction to the third major limiting force listed above. First, it includes an important concept that helps us understand the rabbinic view of the role of the marker phrase. The discussion referencing the markers in *Yoma* 81a:11–13 concerns *specificity* or *limitation*, making the point that punishment for violations of required restrictions applies only to behaviour on the day of Yom Kippur itself. Nonetheless, the fact that three verses are marked with the same unusual phrase does draw attention and in the continuation of the conversation, in *Yoma* 81a:19–21, the rabbis question whether the understanding earlier on that page is valid. In exploring that question, the point is made that the marker phrase is “available,”⁷⁸ meaning that ... the phrase ‘בעצם היום הזה’ is unnecessary within its own context”⁷⁹ and appears only for another purpose. The idea of “availability” and its implication that the phrase is superfluous to the verse itself, is important beyond its specific context. It tells us that, in the minds of the rabbis of the *Bavli*, the phrase could be removed without harming the plain sense of the verses where it appears. Conversely, we can conclude that the addition of the phrase would not change the plain sense of those verses. And, secondly, it opens the subject of the power of systems of biblical interpretation to shape and influence the understanding of the text. Rabbinic interpretation of the biblical text, and even of prior rabbinic literature, especially of texts dealing with matters of law, is guided by systems of formal rules. Those rules influence the range of possible understandings.

Rabbi Hillel the Elder, who lived in the first century BCE, is credited with developing a system of seven principles of biblical interpretation. They create a rational discipline to be applied in analyzing the text of the scriptures. They include the provision, for instance, for arguing from a minor premise to a major one, teaching based on analogy, teaching based on inference, and teaching based on comparison. In the first part of the second century CE, still in pre-Mishnaic times, two major rabbinic figures, Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph and Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, proposed alternate interpretive systems. Rabbi Ishmael created a set of thirteen principles, expanding on Hillel’s seven primarily by extracting more detailed rules from those already in general form in Hillel’s version. Rabbi Ishmael’s system became a part of the Introduction to the halachic midrash *Sifra* to Leviticus and it can be found in the prayerbooks of traditional Jewish communities even today. In roughly the same period, Rabbi Akiva advanced an approach that was founded on the belief that the Torah is unique in form, language and essence, and that its text must be analysed at the most elemental level. For Akiva, nothing in the Torah was superfluous. Every word, syllable, particle, and letter had a higher significance. Only somewhat later than those two, Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha Gelili, proposed a system of thirty-two principles intended for use primarily in the interpretation of homiletical, or aggadic, materials in the biblical text. His system is found in the Introduction to *Midrash HaGadol*. Rabbi Eliezer adds several ways in which the interpretation of a passage can be influenced by other passages, either before, after,

⁷⁸ The idea of “availability” or, מופנה, is associated with the idea of יתורא, or “superfluity.” See Part 7 for definitions of those concepts.

⁷⁹ *Koren Talmud Bavli*. Noé Edition. With Commentary by Adin Steinsaltz (Jerusalem: Koren, 2021), B. *Yoma* 81a.

or parallel to the one being studied. He also provides for understanding a passage as parable, as well as analysis based on the system of numerical analysis known as gematria, and for analysis by separating words into two or more parts.

We can see the influence and operation of those interpretive approaches throughout the rabbinic literature reviewed in Part 7, but in the specific case of interest to us, we most often find the influence of Rabbi Akiva's approach. His focus on the text was at the most granular level and it is his approach that is reflected in the analysis of the marker phrase in B. *Yoma* 81a, above. An interpretive approach based on the notion that every word in the text has a specific purpose and once employed for that purpose is no longer available to teach something different, effectively prevents the pursuit of a message such as that of the Hidden Bones.

To illustrate that issue, several texts and commentaries reviewed in Part 7 found multiple markings of single events to cause problems of interpretation. For example, if Genesis 17:23 marks the Abrahamic circumcision event, why do we have the phrase also in Genesis 17:26? There are varying explanations offered, as there are for the double marking of the Exodus event. If the Exodus is marked at Exodus 12:41, the instance at Exodus 12:51 must, in that way of thinking, come to teach something different. Similarly, if our phrase appears in all three Yom Kippur verses, i.e., Lev 23:28–30, each instance must there for a different reason. That approach values finding *differences* more than exploring *commonalities* or *connections*. Rabbi Akiva would not look to the entire biblical text, identify the ten marked days, and ask what each of the ten might have in common. That is not the way he approached the text.

We have seen that the understanding of one marked event can influence the understanding of another. *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* teaches that, since both the circumcision event and the observance of Yom Kippur are marked with our phrase, the circumcision event must have occurred on Yom Kippur. But, having established that relationship, it seems the teaching opportunity is exhausted. The same relationship cannot hold for other events. We have seen that multiple events can be understood to have a specific element in common, usually having to do with some attribute of time. None of the specific characteristics identified, though, can be applied to *all* the events marked with the *b'etsem* phrase. Also, importantly, we have seen that once an explanation has been accepted, as in the case of the *Sifre* to Deuteronomy 32:48, it clearly restricts future interpretation. Ramban came closer than any to investigating all the instances of the phrase, but even as he disagreed with some earlier explanations, he was influenced by them, and his disagreement was more technical than fundamental.

We can understand and appreciate the early hermeneutic systems and we can see how they shaped the literature and commentary that came after them. We can acknowledge that they reflected immense respect for the text and the tradition. Interpretation by humans of the revealed word of the divine required both humility and caution. As praiseworthy as those motives might be, they can also prove to be impediments to understanding, certainly in a case such as ours.

We can understand that the later rabbinic commentators were strongly influenced by both the early rabbinic texts and the rules that had been created for their interpretation. I do not think it is difficult to see that reliance on the teaching of those commentators obscures the relationship among the marked verses. The more difficult question is why the earlier rabbinic writings were so nearly silent in their treatment of the marked verses. I will address that question in a later phase of this study. The fact remains that while the *markers* are obvious to any reader of the Hebrew text, the *message* they convey has been just as hidden from the student of the Hebrew text as it has been from those whose Bible is in English, Greek, Latin, or German.

Part 7 of this study, which follows, contains a full and more detailed review of the rabbinic literature and commentary on the marker phrase. It includes both the specific sources drawn on in the analysis above and others that have not been referenced above. Some readers might want to turn directly to the Conclusion in Part 8 and use the more detailed information in Part 7 as needed for reference.

Part 7 – Marker Phrase References in Rabbinic Literature and Commentary

This review will be in two major parts. In “early rabbinic literature” we will review material from the early halachic midrashim, the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, the Talmuds, the targums, and the midrashim in the post-Talmudic period; before the tenth century or so. The “rabbinic commentary” period will encompass the period from Rashi in the eleventh century through the nineteenth century.

7.1 Early Rabbinic Literature

This review will be ordered chronologically. The dates of some of the works included are generally agreed upon. In other cases, we can say with some confidence that a certain work is earlier or later than another. For our purposes, that level of accuracy is sufficient. The works included will be those in which references to the marker phrase or its variants are found, so, if there is no such reference in a particular collection of midrashim, for example, that collection will not be among those reviewed.

The order of review will be:

- a) The earliest halachic midrashim that reference the marker phrase: the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael*, *Sifra* on Leviticus, and *Sifre* on Numbers and Deuteronomy,
- b) The *Mishnah*,
- c) The *Tosefta*,
- d) the earliest of the homiletical midrashim that reference the marker phrase: *Genesis*, *Leviticus*, and *Lamentations Rabbah*.
- e) The Jerusalem Talmud (the *Yerushalmi*)
- f) The Babylonian Talmud (the *Bavli*)
- g) The targums representing Jewish Literary Aramaic, *Onkelos* and *Jonathan*⁸⁰
- h) *Targum Neofiti*, representing Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and
- i) The post-Talmudic midrashim that reference the marker phrase: *Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer*, *Midrash Tanchuma*, and *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*.

7.1.1 The Early Halachic Midrashim

The *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael* references the marker phrase three times.

- Mek 12:6:5 explains that the phrase in Exodus 12:41 regarding the day of the Exodus event means that the children of Israel left Egypt *in the middle of the day*.
- Mek 12:17:2, the same middle-of-the-day point is made in a discussion of the Passover marker at Exodus 12:17.
- Mek 12:40:1 the reference at Exodus 12:41 is brought to support the idea of *immediacy*, “when the time arrived the Lord did not delay them for one moment.”

For *Sifra* to Leviticus, the issue is *specificity*. It references the marked verses four times.

- Emor 13:11 quotes the marker in Leviticus 23:21 and emphasizes the specificity of the day of the Shavuot observance.
- Emor 14:3 references both Leviticus 23:29 and 23:30 emphasizing the specificity of Yom Kippur.
- Emor 14:7 makes the same specificity point again referencing Leviticus 23:29.
- Emor 14:8 repeats the specificity point with respect to Leviticus 23:30.

Sifra also references the *ad etsem* variant of the marker phrase three times.

- Vayikra Dibbura d’Nedavah 13:4 references Leviticus 23:14 and interprets the variant phrase as indicating the specificity of the time, in this case by reference to the barley crop that is harvested in the spring.

⁸⁰ I use the categories of Flesher and Chilton. See: Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

- Emor 10:9 again references Leviticus 23:14 and again the issue is specificity, here it is the question of which grains are not to be eaten *until* the specified time.
- Emor 10:10 also references Leviticus 23:14 and here the issue is the specificity of the time of day *after which* eating the new grain was permitted.

Sifrei to Deuteronomy in 337:1 uses the marked verse at Deuteronomy 32:48 to make the point that the marker is found “in three places”: that is, in Deuteronomy 32:48, Genesis 7:13, and Exodus 12:17. In each of the three cases, *Sifrei* interprets the phrase as meaning *in the middle of the day* as we saw in the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael*, and explains that God used the events described to *demonstrate God’s power*. They tell us that describing Noah’s entry into the ark, the Israelites’ departure from Egypt and Moses’ journey up the mountain as all occurring in the middle of the day was intended to demonstrate that no human opposition to those events could thwart God’s desire.

Sifrei to Deuteronomy in 31:4 also references the *et etsem* variant of the marker phrase in Ezekiel 24:2. There the reference is brought as part of a discussion of the proper time for the fast of the tenth of Tevet.

The earliest halachic midrashim, then, certainly know the marker phrase. All of the comments in those midrashim explain the phrase as an expression of time; either specifying a time or characterizing a time. The reference in *Sifre* 337:1 is the most interesting since it comments on instances of the marker phrase in three of the five books of the Pentateuch. It does not suggest a broader application of the “middle of the day” explanation given for those instances, though.

7.1.2 The Mishnah

The *Mishnah* was the first great product of rabbinic Judaism. It is a systematic presentation of the tenets of what the rabbis viewed as the Oral Law, an expansion and explanation of the laws found in the written Torah. The Oral Law had—and has for traditional Jews—the status of revelation, originally given orally to Moses on Sinai. In about the year 200 CE Rabbi Judah HaNasi created the written record of that oral revelation in the text we know as the *Mishnah*. But, nowhere in the *Mishnah* is there a reference to the marker phrase, which is more than surprising. Equally surprising, and important for our study, is the absence in the *Mishnah* of a tractate dealing with the holiday of Shavuot. We would expect to find a tractate dealing with Shavuot in the section of *Mishnah* called Seder Moed, which deals with holidays. Seder Moed includes tractates on Passover, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, among others, but there is no *Tractate Shavuot*.

We do find a reference in the *Mishnah* (*Menachot* 10:5) to the *ad etsem* variant of the phrase that appears in Lev 23:14. That verse is cited in a discussion about when it is permitted to eat from the newly harvested barley crop. The issue is one of timing. No connections to any other instances of the marker phrase or its variants are suggested.

7.1.3 The Tosefta

The Tosefta is a “supplement to the Mishnah, four times larger than the document it amplifies.”⁸¹ It was redacted about a century after the *Mishnah* and about a century before the Jerusalem Talmud. In it, at *Menachot* 10:6, the *ad etsem* variant of the marker is brought into a further discussion of the timing of the first barley offering, which provides no additional information about the phrase itself. It simply extends the discussion in the *Mishnah* at *Menachot* 10:5. One version of the *Tosefta* on *Sotah* 6:10 quotes the *et etsem* variant of the marker in Ezekiel 24:2 in a discussion of the requirement to fast on the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tevet. So, the *Tosefta* adds nothing to the *Mishnah’s* silence on the marker phrase itself.

⁸¹ Jacob Neusner, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*, (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 129.

7.1.4 Early Homiletical Midrashim

Bereshit Rabbah (Ber R.) is one of the earliest compilations of homiletical midrash. It is later than the *Mishnah* and it references the marker phrase in three of its midrashim.

–Ber R. 32:8 discusses the entry of Noah into the ark at Genesis 7:13. It explains that Noah did not enter the ark at night because the surrounding peoples might not have believed he did enter it unless they had seen him do so.

–Ber R. 46:2 quotes the marker phrase in Genesis 17:26 dealing with the Abrahamic circumcision event and questions the timing of Abraham's action. The phrase is used again in a specificity argument: that is, Abraham circumcised himself at the specific time he was commanded to do so.

–Ber R. 47:9 also quotes Genesis 17:26 and explains that the circumcisions were performed during daylight hours because unless the event was visible to all peoples the account might not have been believed. Interestingly, the issue here is one of “evidence,” while the earlier halachic midrashim were concerned that God's power is asserted and recognised.

Lamentations Rabbah in Petichta 11 quotes Leviticus 23:21, which includes the marker phrase, but the discussion does not concern the marker phrase. The inclusion of the marker is incidental.

Therefore, neither the earlier halachic midrashim nor these (relatively) later homiletical midrashim explain the marker phrase in any way other than as a clarification of the specificity or immediacy of timing or as providing some explanation or interpretation of the timing.

7.1.5 The Talmuds

The *Babylonian Talmud* was the crowning achievement of rabbinic Judaism. It was the work of the rabbis in the major Babylonian centres of study. Another Talmud, the *Jerusalem Talmud*, or the *Yerushalmi*, represents the work of the rabbis in Jerusalem and surrounding areas. It was completed about a hundred years earlier than the Babylonian version. It is shorter than its Babylonian counterpart and while important, is less influential. While the *Mishnah* is spare and terse, the two Talmuds are expansive, comprising thousands of pages of material on every conceivable topic relating to Jewish text, teaching, law, and lore. Especially in matters relating to law and religious practice, the omission of comment on or reference to a biblical verse is exceptional in the Talmuds.

In the *Yerushalmi*, the marker phrase is cited in only three discussions. The *ad etsem* variant is also cited twice and the *et etsem* variant once.

–*Pesachim* 1:1:2 quotes the Exodus 12:17 Passover verse and discusses the specific timing of the requirement to eat unleavened bread.

–*Pesachim* 10:5:3 quotes the first of the marked Exodus event verses at Exodus 12:41 and makes the point about the event occurring at mid-day that we found earlier in midrashic sources.

–*Yoma* (8:3:12) uses the marker phrase as it appears in Leviticus 23:28–30 to argue a timing issue. The question is whether the requirements of Yom Kippur apply only to the daytime hours of Yom Kippur or to both day and night. Again, the specificity of timing is the issue.

–*Challah* 1:1:19 quotes the *ad etsem* variant of the marker at Leviticus 23:14 in an argument that the day itself allows the eating of the new grain even without a sacrifice. This is an interesting instance of an understanding of *etsem* in a reflexive sense.

–*Challah* 1:1:22 also references the *ad etsem* variant at Leviticus 23:14 in much the same way we have seen it referenced in the midrashim; in a discussion of the specific time when new grain may be eaten.

–*Ta'anit* 4:5:6 cites the *et etsem* variant in Ezekiel 24:2 in a discussion of fast days, questioning whether the tenth of Tevet is the appropriate day to fast for the event related in Ezek 24:2. This is essentially the same question raised in *Sifre* 31:4 and the *Tosefta* at *Sotah* 6:10.

The *Bavli* is a century or more later than the *Yerushalmi* and several times larger. In it we find the marker phrase itself referenced only three times, all of which are in Tractate *Yoma*, whose subject is Yom Kippur. These are the references in *Yoma*:

–*Yoma* 81a:11 The marker phrase at Leviticus 23:30 is brought here to support an argument that punishment for prohibited labour is limited to the labour done during Yom Kippur itself and does not apply to the labour done during an extension of time before Yom Kippur begins. This is an issue of both specificity and limitation.

–*Yoma* 81a:12 The marker phrase at Leviticus 23:29 is brought here to make the point that punishment for a violation of the requirement to afflict oneself would only apply to behaviour on the day itself and not to behaviour during the extension of time before the day formally begins.

–*Yoma* 81a:13 The marker phrase at Leviticus 23:28 is brought here to teach that the warnings that are required before liability for punishment are not required in the case of prohibited labour during the extension of time before the day itself.

The issue in the *Yoma* references is specificity and limitation, which we have seen elsewhere. So, those references to the phrase do not further clarify its meaning, but in a continuation of the conversation on that same page (*Yoma* 81a:19–21), there is an interesting argument. The marker phrase, it is suggested, is not necessary for the context of the Yom Kippur verses and so it is מופנה *muphneh*, or “available.”

In Talmudic vocabulary, the concept of מופנה means “free (for interpretation); available (for the deduction because it is not needed for the plain sense of the passage).”⁸² It implies that the available text is יתירא *yatirah*, which means “extra, superfluous, redundant.”⁸³ That is important to us because it tells us the rabbis of the Talmud understood that the marker phrase could be removed from the verses where it is found without doing damage to their plain meaning. And that suggests, conversely, that the phrase could have been added without doing damage.

In addition to the references to the marker phrase itself, there are eight references in the *Bavli* to the *ad etsem* variant of the phrase:

–*Pesachim* 23a:7 The *ad etsem* variant at Leviticus 23:14 is referenced here in an argument that grain from the new barley harvest may be fed to animals even before the *omer* offering. This is another case of limitation and specificity.

–*Rosh Hashanah* 30b:1 Here the *ad etsem* variant is referenced in an argument that eating the new grain would not be allowed at dawn but only after the *omer* offering was sacrificed.

–*Rosh Hashanah* 30b:2 This reference to Leviticus 23:14 is brought in an argument about the source of an opinion that the new grain is prohibited during the entire day of the *omer* offering.

–*Sukkah* 41b:1 & 2 The conversation here continues to be the definition of the specific time when eating the new grain is allowed.

–*Menachot* 68a:12 & 14 The *ad etsem* references in these locations are brought in a discussion of differences in practice while the Temple was standing versus practices followed after its destruction, and where the case involves those living at a distance from the Temple versus at the Temple itself.

–*Menachot* 68b: 3 & 5 Here there are two positions given holding that eating the new grain on the day of the *omer* offering is not allowed.

The *et etsem* variant of the marker appears in the *Bavli* in one location:

–*Rosh Hashanah* 18b:6 This reference to Ezekiel 24:2 is brought in a discussion of the reason the fast on the marked day is called the fast of the tenth.

⁸² Yitzhak Frank, *The Practical Talmudic Dictionary*, 3rd Edition (New Milford, CT: Koren Publishers; Jerusalem: Ariel United Institutes, 2016), 162.

⁸³ Frank, *The Practical Talmudic Dictionary*, 117.

The ten references in the *Bavli* to the variants of the marker; nine to the *ad etsem* variant and one to the *et etsem* variant; are all brought in what are essentially technical discussions. The subjects are limited and specific to the immediate context. We do find in the discussions of the *ad etsem* variant a clear understanding that forms of עצם can have the meaning of *self* or *essence*, which represents an evolution from the earlier biblical usage.

7.1.6 The Aramaic Targums

The word *targum* means translation. The targums of interest to us are “Aramaic translations of the books of the Hebrew Bible done by Jews during the rabbinic period.”⁸⁴ Because many Jews did not understand the Hebrew text, the Aramaic version was effectively their Bible, the one they understood, just as the Septuagint was the Bible for many in the Greek-speaking Jewish communities. The targums that are of specific interest to us are those whose aim was the literal reproduction of the texts of the Pentateuch and Prophetic books. For the Pentateuch, *Targum Onkelos* is the most common, and for the Prophetic books, *Targum Jonathan* is the standard text. *Targum Yerushalmi*, also known as *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, also treats the Pentateuch but it uses the translation in *Targum Onkelos* as its basis. It does not vary from *Onkelos* in any of the specific verses of interest to us. Those texts represent a version of Aramaic that Flesher and Chilton term Jewish Literary Aramaic (JLA) and they were the versions accepted by the great medieval Jewish commentators.⁸⁵ Another dialect of Aramaic, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (JPA), is represented in *Targum Neofiti*, which translates the entire Pentateuch. Consequently, we have in *Onkelos* and *Neofiti* two Aramaic versions of the same Hebrew text of the Pentateuch, giving us two different rabbinic views of its meaning from the period of early rabbinic literature.

The dates of *Onkelos*, *Jonathan*, and *Neofiti* are all within the first few centuries CE and all were in their final form by the close of the Talmudic period. According to Emanuel Tov⁸⁶ all of the targums reflect the medieval form of the MT. The rabbinic translators, therefore, had to cope with the presence of the marker phrase and its variants in the Hebrew text. The way they do that gives us an important view of early rabbinic Judaism’s approach to explaining the phrase.

We will analyse *Onkelos* and *Jonathan* separately from *Neofiti* for reasons that will become apparent. Nonetheless, all of them share two important characteristics. First, as might be expected given Tov’s conclusion that all were based on the MT, they all reflect the presence of the marker phrase and its variants in the source text. That is, the texts of the targums include phrases that are clearly parallel to the marker in the MT. The same number of words occurs in the same places in the targums and convey information about specific antecedent “days.” And, secondly, none of the parallel phrases in the targums translates the Hebrew *etsem* literally as “bone.”

There is a clear and common Aramaic word for “bone” just as there is in Greek, Latin, and German. The Aramaic word is גרמא *gar’ma*, and its meaning is quite clear in familiar uses such as “bone of my bones” in Genesis 2:23; references to the bones of the Passover sacrifice in Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12; and, in the account of the prophet’s vision of the “dry bones” in Ezekiel 37. But that is not the word the authors of the targums use in the locations where the MT has the marker phrase. In both *Onkelos* and *Jonathan*, the same Aramaic phrase is used to render the Hebrew *b’etsem ha’yom ha’zeh*. The Aramaic is בברך יומא הדין, *bic’ran yoma ha’den*. That phrase is used consistently in every location in which we find the marker phrase in the MT.

In the MT, the marker phrase is exclusive. That is, it is found nowhere *except* in association with the ten marked days. The same can be said for the Aramaic versions of the marker phrase in

⁸⁴ Flesher and Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*, 8.

⁸⁵ Flesher and Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*, 9.

⁸⁶ Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 149.

Onkelos and *Jonathan*.⁸⁷ Their translations meet the tests of consistency and exclusivity and so, like Young's Literal Translation in English, they could have been used to identify and communicate the message of the ten marked days. But, in this case also, the translations fail the test of literalness. The Aramaic כִּרְאֵן, *c'ran* is not the equivalent of the Hebrew *etsem*.

Alexander Sperber undertook a complete comparison of *Onkelos* manuscripts against MT manuscripts in the 1930s. In 1934, he published an article that included a table of variances between the two.⁸⁸ He did not identify any variance between *Onkelos* and the MT in any of the instances of the marker phrase that occur in the Pentateuch. Sperber was himself, of course, acting as a translator in deciding which Aramaic expressions were at variance from their Hebrew counterparts. That means that he saw the Aramaic *c'ran* as equivalent to the Hebrew *etsem*.

The standard dictionary of the Aramaic of the targums is that of Marcus Jastrow.⁸⁹ The entry in Jastrow for *c'ran* gives the meanings, "roundness, fullness, essence." Jastrow also includes an expansion, *c'ran yoma*, which he defines as "the very day." And he notes parenthetically that the equivalent Hebrew is *etsem ha'yom*. So Jastrow equates *c'ran* and *etsem* and associates *etsem*, then, with not only "roundness, fullness, essence" but also "very."

A project to produce a new *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* has been underway at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati since the mid-1980s. Its work is made available on the CAL website.⁹⁰ The entry for *c'ran* on the CAL website is interesting. The definition is given as "the very essence (??), the selfsame." The double question mark is a part of the definition given in the CAL and it brings up a fascinating issue. It is one addressed in our discussion of the KJV translation lineage. That is, where do the definitions in our dictionaries come from? In the case of the CAL definition of the key Aramaic term of our marker phrase, it seems that the current makers of an Aramaic dictionary have looked back to, and been influenced by, the history of the English translation of the Hebrew. Where else would "selfsame" have come from?

In 2008 Edward M. Cook published *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos*.⁹¹ In this specific case, his work is even more closely aligned with the English translation history than CAL. His entry for *c'ran* gives a primary definition of "self, self-same (?)" where, again, the question mark is a part of the definition. He then provides, as an example, the *Onkelos* version of the marker phrase, *bic'ran yoma ha'den*, with the meaning "in the same day."

Jastrow's third meaning of *c'ran* as "essence" is carried forward into the CAL definition but is not recognised by Cook. In fact, Cook's understanding of the Aramaic *c'ran*, which includes *self-same*, is essentially Tyndale's understanding of the Hebrew *etsem*. We have just seen, above, that the ideas of *self* or *essence*, as interpretations of the Hebrew עצם are known by the time of the *Bavli*. But the words that elicit those understandings are of *forms* of the root, not the simple singular.

Before we draw any conclusions about the Aramaic of the targums we should look at all uses of *c'ran* other than those in the marker phrase (and its variants) to find out what *c'ran* seems to mean to the translators when it is *not* used to translate *etsem*. A search of *Onkelos* and *Jonathan* for all instances of the three-letter *c'ran* produces interesting results. The only place other than in the marker phrase and its variants that we find *c'ran* is in reference to the proper name of a descendant of Seir the Horite in Genesis 36:26 and 1 Chronicles 1:41. In the case of the Hebrew *etsem*, there are many instances of the word found throughout the Hebrew Bible in contexts other than the marker phrase and its variants. We know from those instances and contexts what the word *etsem* means, independently

⁸⁷ Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan* on Deuteronomy 16:2 does have a truncated version of the phrase, בכרן יומא, describing the Passover observance, but that is the only other instance of a phrase so nearly identical to the marker.

⁸⁸ Alexander Sperber, "The Targum Onkelos in Its Relation to the Masoretic Hebrew Text," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 6, (1934); 309–351.

⁸⁹ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1903).

⁹⁰ See: <http://cal.huc.edu/>.

⁹¹ Edward M. Cook, *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

of the uses in the marker phrase, but that is not the case for the Aramaic *c'ran*. Other than its use as a proper name, we do not find it anywhere except in the Aramaic versions of the marker and its variants.

Jastrow, in his entry for *c'ran*, notes that Nachmanides quotes a targum version in which the word is spelled with a *kuf*, rather than a *caf*. That is, the word would be קרן, or *keren*. In Hebrew *keren* most often means “horn” or “to emit rays,” but Jastrow also shows it to mean “strength,” and Klein gives “might, dignity, and power” which, except for the dignity alternate, is one of the common meanings of words formed from עצם. Jastrow also allows the same “roundness” or “fullness” definitions for *keren* that he gives for *c'ran*. With a different vowel pattern Jastrow shows it as *c'ren*, with a definition of “essence,” but he gives no examples of texts in which the idea of “essence” is demonstrated. For *keren*, the CAL and Cook also give the expected “horn,” which suggests a roundness, but CAL and Jastrow also point to instances where it refers to a capital sum or a principal amount, which is suggestive of a fullness. Roundness is also suggested by a secondary meaning given as “coin.”

To my knowledge, the Aramaic version of the marker phrase is found in no other rabbinic literature outside the targums. It is not in the Talmud or the *Mishnah* or the early midrashim. Where then did the idea come from that the Aramaic *c'ran* was an appropriate or accurate representation of the Hebrew *etsem*? An 11th-century word study called the *Sefer HeArukh* seems to think the Aramaic phrase originated from Greek.⁹² The reference might be to the Greek of the LXX, which also struggled with *etsem*. But even if that were the case, we would still be left with the fact that a word that is, at best, difficult to understand, was chosen by the creators of *Onkelos* and *Jonathan* when they had available to them a word that would have been a clear and precise translation of *etsem*.

Targum Neofiti presents a very different idea of the meaning of the marker phrase. *Neofiti* is known only from a single manuscript held in the Vatican library. It might be the earliest of the targums. Its initial editor suggested a date of the first or second century CE, or perhaps earlier.⁹³ Like *Onkelos*, it is a translation of the Pentateuch only and, like *Onkelos*, it includes clear parallels to each of the marker phrases in the MT, but unlike *Onkelos*, *Neofiti*'s translation is not consistent. Its *approach* is consistent, but its language does vary. Where *Onkelos* and *Jonathan* use *bic'ran* as their parallel to *b'etsem*, *Neofiti* uses *biz'man*. The Aramaic זמן, *z'man*, has the same meaning as it does in the Hebrew, that is, “time” or “a specific time.” The phrase as it appears in *Neofiti*'s Genesis 7:13, for example, is בזמן יומא הדין *biz'man yoma ha'den*. There are several variations of that phrase in *Neofiti*.⁹⁴ All are built on the idea of time and on the word זמן. So, where *Onkelos* and *Jonathan* are understood to be conveying an idea of fullness or roundness or possibly strength, *Neofiti* understands the marker as being concerned with a specific time. And, lest there be any doubt about the Hebrew source, in two instances; Genesis 7:13 and Genesis 17:26; the manuscript of *Neofiti* provides an actual translation note, in the scribe's text itself, informing the reader that *biz'man yoma* is the translator's rendering of *b'etsem ha'yom*. The Hebrew phrase is given as a note in the body of the Aramaic text!⁹⁵

In some cases, the difference in *Neofiti*'s translation does not materially affect the meaning. In the case of Leviticus 23:29, though, the “day” referenced is not described by *ha'den* as it is elsewhere, but by צומא, *tzoma*, specifically identifying the day as a fast day. The key distinction for our purposes between the targums written in Jewish Literary Aramaic and *Targum Neofiti*, though, is that *Neofiti* constructs its translation of the marker phrase around an Aramaic word that is both common and clear. The issue for *Neofiti* is one of time, not of form, shape, or substance.

Jastrow does not seem to have been aware of *Neofiti*. He does not include it among the targums in his list of sources and there is no reference to it in any specific definitions. He would have certainly

⁹² *Sefer HeArukh*. Letter Caf 361.

⁹³ Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 150.

⁹⁴ בזמן יום צומא, בזמן יומא הדין, זמן יומא הדין, בזמן יומא הדין, בזמן יומא דין

⁹⁵ The is only one copy of the text. It is a hand-lettered scroll held in the Vatican library.

included some reference to it in his treatment of *c'ran* if he did know it. But Cook, who surely knew *Neofiti*, does not recognise the *z'man* parallel to *c'ran*, either. Nor does the CAL. It is quite clear that *Neofiti* and the JAL targums were translating the same MT phrase. The JAL targums seem to have created a word to use in parallel to *etsem*, then, since *c'ran* is not used in that form elsewhere. They leave it to the reader to either determine its meaning, or not to determine its meaning. *Neofiti*, on the other hand, uses a very common word to add emphasis to the “time” quality of the marker rather than addressing the plain meaning of *etsem*.

It is worth stressing again that the targums are the work of early rabbinic scholars, all of whom had the MT before them as their source text, and all of whom would have been well aware of the plain meaning of the *etsem* element of the marker phrase. The fact that the targums that came to have (at least nearly) the force of scripture—that is, the JAL versions, *Onkelos* and *Jonathan*—seem to have created an Aramaic term to translate the Hebrew *etsem* rather than use the one that would directly translate it, is important. It was a decision, not an accident. The same is true of *Neofiti*. There is no sense in which *biz'man* is a direct translation of *b'etsem*. The rabbinic authorities responsible for creating the targums decided to avoid addressing the meaning of the marker phrase and, in doing that, they helped to obscure it.

We will now review the midrashic sources that date to the period after the completion of the *Bavli* but before the age of the great medieval commentators.

7.1.7 Later Midrashic References

The midrash known as *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* cites the marker phrase in two locations:

- Pirke R. El. 29:2 This midrash makes two points with reference to the marker phrase at Genesis 17:26. First, the author interprets the marker as indicating that the Abrahamic circumcision event occurred “in the might of the sun, at midday,” confirming the position taken by the earliest midrashim. Second, this author draws an inference from the relationship between two marked days. The fact that both the circumcision event and the Yom Kippur observance are marked with the same unusual phrase leads the author to conclude that the circumcision event occurred on Yom Kippur.
- Pirke R. El. 48:20 Here the author also confirms the position taken in earlier midrashim that the exodus event occurred at midday.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* references the marker phrase twice and the *et etsem* variant once:

- Tanh. Lech Lecha 17:2 The midrash here notes that the verb in Genesis 17:26 indicates that Abraham “was circumcised,” not that he circumcised himself.
- Tanh. Vayera 2:5 The issue here is also the Abrahamic circumcision event. The verse cited is Genesis 17:23 and the point made is that the Lord strengthened Abraham to the extent that he could circumcise himself first and then was still able to circumcise Ishmael and all the males of his already large household.
- Tanh. Tazria 9:1 Here the *et etsem* variant at Ezekiel 24:2 is cited in an argument that God was kind to Israel in not sending them into exile in the cold of winter but rather waiting to send them during the summer month of Tevet.

The last of our midrashic references to the marker phrase is found in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*:

- Shir HaShir. R. 4.6.1 The discussion here is also on the topic of the Abrahamic circumcision event. The marked verse in Genesis 17:26 is cited. The issue of the passive language of the verse is debated. The conclusion is that God joined with Abraham in the act of Abraham’s circumcision, which allows both understandings to be true; that is, Abraham circumcised himself and he was circumcised. That does represent an evolution of the view of this event.

These later midrashic references are similar to the earlier midrashim in that their interests in the phrase and its variants are essentially technical in nature and limited in scope.

7.1.8 Conclusion: Early Rabbinic Literature

Given the importance of the ten marked days to the overall biblical account, the scarcity of references to the marker phrase in the early rabbinic literature is more than surprising. The complete absence of any reference in the *Mishnah* and the very limited scope of the references in both Talmuds are remarkable. The earliest midrashim exhibit broader but still limited interest in relationships among the marked days, while later midrashic references are generally narrow and technical. In almost all cases where we find the phrase referenced in the early literature, it is understood to have a temporal significance, aligning with the understanding of *Targum Neofiti* as against *Onkelos* and *Jonathan*. Where *Neofiti* chose to translate the Hebrew עֶצֶם using the clear and common Aramaic זָמַן, for which there is nevertheless no apparent justification, *Onkelos* and *Jonathan* both chose to use an unclear and uncommon Aramaic word for which justification is even less available.

The authors of early rabbinic literature were fully absorbed in the text of the Bible. No verse, phrase, or word escaped their notice, analysis, and elucidation. And yet the texts that they passed on to the centuries of Jews who would come after them paid scant attention to the odd phrase that is our subject and did nothing to suggest that all the instances of it might be viewed together.

7.2 Later Rabbinic Commentary

We now want to see how a representative sample of the major Jewish commentators have understood and explained the marker phrase through the centuries since the close of the rabbinic period. Jews study the Bible along with the commentaries on it. They look to the tradition of analysis by recognised historical authorities. Many use texts that provide both a targum, usually *Onkelos* to the Pentateuch and *Jonathan* to the Prophets, and at least several commentaries alongside the biblical text itself. When a question about the meaning of a word, phrase, or passage arises, they look to the commentaries for guidance. We cannot review the work of every commentator here, nor do we need to. Our concern is how those whose principal text is Hebrew have come to understand the marker phrase. And, for that purpose, it is sufficient that we look to the group of major commentators whose work is typically consulted.

The earliest major commentary typically included in Jewish biblical texts is that of Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak, usually known as Rashi, who lived in France in the 11th century. We will first look at Rashi's writings on the marked verses and then we will progress century-by-century through the works of other major figures of rabbinic commentary.

7.2.1 11th Century

The influence of tradition becomes clear as soon as we begin to read Rashi's comments. He references the midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 32:8 in his comment on Genesis 7:13, making the point that Noah entered the ark "before the eyes of everyone" to demonstrate God's power. Genesis R. 47:9 on the Abrahamic circumcision event is his source for concluding that the event occurred immediately, "by day and not by night," as an additional show that God had no fear of onlookers. The *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* gives him the answers to the phrase's meaning in Exodus: the immediacy of action and action in full view.⁹⁶ Rashi, interestingly, has no comment on the Leviticus markings of Shavuot or Yom Kippur. His comment on Deuteronomy 32:48; the day of Moses' death; is his most expansive. He writes that the marker phrase *b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh* is used in "three places in the scripture": in the Noah instance, the Exodus event, and the day of Moses' death. In each case, he writes that the event took place in the middle of the day. Here Rashi essentially repeats the position we found in *Sifre*, above. On the use of the phrase in Ezekiel 24:2 Rashi says it is to specify that the siege of Jerusalem began on the same day as Ezekiel's vision.

⁹⁶ *Mekhilta* 12:17:1 to Exodus 12:17, and *Mekhilta* 12:42 to Exodus 12:41.

Rashi is generally given pride of place in rabbinic commentaries; the first one typically cited and often the one considered the most important. It is interesting that, in the case of his comments on the marker phrase, he essentially repeats and references earlier midrashic sources with little or no elaboration. His aim was always to clarify the plain meaning of the biblical text. Apparently, he found those earlier explanations adequate. It is also interesting that he would write that the phrase is found in “three places in Scripture,” when he was obviously aware that it appears more often. But that is how it is stated in his source, and that is how he states it. And Rashi sets the tone for the conversation that comes after him.

7.2.2 12th Century

Abraham Ibn Ezra of Spain and Shmuel ben Meir of France, also known as the Rashbam, who was Rashi’s grandson, were contemporaries and major scholars writing in the 12th century.

Ibn Ezra comments on several instances of the phrase. His view is that it signifies either the specificity of the day or the immediacy of an act. Regarding the circumcision verse in Genesis 17:26, he interprets the phrase to mean that Abraham acted without delay. Regarding the marker in Exodus 12:51, he raises a question that others will also raise; one that illustrates a typical rabbinic response to the text. Since the day of the Exodus event was marked in Exodus 12:41, he argues, the marker in Exodus 12:51 should properly be attached to the next verse, Exodus 13:1, which requires the consecration of the firstborn. That reflects the judgment that since the Exodus event was already marked in Exodus 12:41, the instance in Exodus 12:51 must have a different purpose. The consecration requirement in Exodus 13:1 arises from the protection of the Israelite firstborn from the tenth plague. So, the connection in Ibn Ezra’s view is shifted to another incident in the Exodus story. Ibn Ezra interprets the phrase in Deuteronomy 32:48 as clarifying that the day of Moses’ death was the same day that he recited the blessing/poem in Deuteronomy 33. So, the issue again is specificity.

Rashbam associates the Passover phrase in Exodus 12:17 with the haste required in the preparations for the Exodus. His comment on the Exodus event itself in Exodus 12:51 raises the same issue that drew Ibn Ezra’s attention. Like Ibn Ezra, he suggests that the second instance of the phrase in the account of the Exodus event should be understood as relating to the commandment to consecrate the firstborn, which follows in Exodus 13:1. The understanding of both Ibn Ezra and Rashbam is typical of the interpretive approach of Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef; that is, since the Exodus event has already been associated with one instance of the phrase, in Exodus 12:41, the instance in Exodus 12:51 must intend to teach something else.

Neither of those commentators directly references the earlier texts that Rashi relied upon. And neither directly quotes Rashi. But both propose the immediacy and specificity explanations found in Rashi and his sources.

7.2.3 13th Century

A Franco-German group of scholars known as the Tosafot, which included other grandchildren of Rashi, compiled a commentary in the 13th century that is called the *Daat Zkenim*. They comment in that work on the phrase in the two verses marking the Abrahamic circumcision event. They cite the discussion in *Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer* (29:8) which we saw above, in which Rabbi Gamliel associated the marker phrase in Genesis 17:23 with the Yom Kippur instance in Leviticus 23:29 and derived the conclusion that the circumcision event must have occurred on Yom Kippur. The issue they address is not the phrase itself but the association that can be drawn from its use elsewhere. Once used in such a way, a phrase is no longer “available” for further elaboration. That approach would prevent any broader relationship among marked verses from being recognised.

Rabbi David Kimchi, also known as the Radak, wrote in France in the 13th century. His view of the marker in Genesis 7:13 was that the phrase indicated that the day described was the day on which Noah *last* entered the ark, reasoning that he had entered it previously as it was prepared for the deluge. Radak too had a view on the meaning of the circumcision event being marked twice. He agreed

with the idea that the marker phrase itself is an indication of specificity. But he found that each of the two circumcision instances taught something different. In Genesis 17:23, he makes it clear that Ishmael and all the males in the household of Abraham were circumcised on that same day. The second circumcision marker, at Genesis 17:26, he proposes, tells us that Abraham himself was also circumcised on that day. Again, the idea is that once the phrase is used to teach one thing, the second use of it must have a different purpose.

Kimchi wrote a book called *Sefer Ha'shorashim*, or The Book of Roots, which was an early form of the Hebrew dictionary.⁹⁷ In it, he explains the word **עצם** by reference to the phrases **עצם מעצמי**, “bone of my bones” at Genesis 2:23; **ועצמי חרה**, “my bones are charred” at Job 30:30; and **ותקרבו עצמות עצם אל עצמו**, “and the bones came together, bone to its bone,” from Ezekiel 37:7. He brought only instances in which the word **עצם** has its common meaning as *bone*.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, also known as the Ramban or Nachmanides, gives us the most extensive discussion of the marker phrase to be found in the line of major rabbinic commentary. He agrees that the marker of the Exodus event should be interpreted as meaning that the event occurred in the full light of day, but he attaches his more expansive analysis to the Yom Kippur phrase in Leviticus 23:28. He begins by acknowledging a point we have already brought up, that the phrase used in the verses concerning Yom Kippur requires a different kind of interpretation from that in either the Noah event or the Exodus event. A mid-day or full-view sort of explanation is not appropriate for Yom Kippur. The same is true for the Shavuot reference. He refines the idea that we have seen from others that the phrase teaches immediacy and specificity. He proposes that the Noah event, the circumcision event, the Exodus event, and Moses' last words and death, were each begun and completed *on a single day*. The *etsem* in each of these cases acts to limit, in his view, as well as to specify. He explains that under normal circumstances, for example, the entire population that left Egypt could not have been gathered and led out in a single day.

Ramban also proposes that the *etsem* of anything means its power and strength, which he derives from the use of forms of the simple **עצם** in such instances as are found in Deuteronomy 8:17, Psalm 68:36, or Exodus 21:10, for example, where the context requires understanding the term as meaning power or strength. He views that meaning as arising from an extension of the function of the bones in the body, which recognises the literal meaning of *etsem* without using it. And, in other instances, he clarifies that the day itself is the essential matter, as opposed to the sacrifices to be offered on it.

In a fascinating discussion, he analyses the phrase as it appears in *Onkelos*. We saw in the discussion of *Onkelos* that Jastrow's dictionary cites Ramban's point here, that the Aramaic of *etsem* in the marker phrase is **קרן** (*keren*) rather than **כרן** (*c'ran*). Ramban apparently knows versions of *Onkelos* in which both translations are found, and he argues that the two have the same meaning. But *keren* has an unambiguous primary meaning; that is, “horn,” from which ideas of strength and substance can easily be understood, as can the idea of roundness that Jastrow proposes. *Keren* is also used in descriptions of the principal sum in calculations of amounts owed, which accords with Jastrow's fullness idea. Ramban cites several instances that he believes support the idea that *keren* should be understood to be the same as *c'ran*. Whatever his reasons might have been, Ramban's teaching on this point allows him to avoid the problem created by the unusual *c'ran*. It is a line of interpretation that substitutes a clear and common Aramaic word for an unusual one that seems to have been created to translate the unusual instances of *etsem*.

Lest he seem to be contradicting Rashi or, more importantly, *Sifre*, he ends his comment by acknowledging the position those two sources take on the “mid-day” character of the instances cited in their comments on Deuteronomy 32:48.

⁹⁷ Accessed at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hnk9ct&view=1up&seq=11&skin=2021>

Ramban attempts to provide answers to many of the instances of the marker phrase as well as to the *ad etsem* variant in Leviticus 23:14. To do that, he creates groups of instances that he suggests have common elements and so should be understood in similar ways. He does not propose a single element, issue, or explanation that is common to all the instances, but he does provide a point of departure for Abarbanel's discussion (below) of the lack of a *b'etsem* element in the Leviticus 23 discussion of Shabbat, Sukkot, and Rosh Hashanah. While his analysis is the most comprehensive of the classic commentators, the question of whether there is a unifying purpose associating all instances does not arise.

7.2.4 14th Century

Rabbi Jacob ben Asher is sometimes known as the Ba'al HaTurim, after his major work, a code of Jewish law. One of his works, the *Tur Ha'Aroch*, is a commentary on the Hebrew Bible. In it, he addresses three instances of the marker phrase. In each case, he references earlier commentary or material and adds his own clarifying analysis. On the instance at Genesis 17:26, the second of the markers of the circumcision event, ben Asher reviews the positions of Rashi and Ramban. He then observes that tradition (midrash) tells us that Abraham was aware of and observed all the commandments of the Torah, even those that had not yet been given to Moses. The question then arises, why did Abraham not circumcise the males of his household and himself long before the time of the Genesis 17 event? Ben Asher proposes that the apparent delay recognises the rule that it is preferable to perform a commandment at the time it is commanded. While Abraham had been aware of the commandment, he had not yet actually been commanded to perform it and, since circumcision is a singular event; that is, its performance cannot be repeated; waiting until the command was received was appropriate.

On the second marking of the Exodus event at Exodus 12:51, ben Asher notes Ibn Ezra's view that the verse must be read together with Exodus 13:1. He also references a point made by the Ramban regarding the specific timing of the Exodus. His aim in the analysis is to prevent a potential faulty conclusion that the Israelites left Egypt on the same night that Pharaoh agreed that they could leave. He says the marker serves to emphasise that the Exodus event took place on the morning of the 15th of Nisan. In his comment on Leviticus 23:28, ben Asher reviews in some detail the analysis of Ramban. He restates and clarifies but does not contradict Ramban's principal points.

Bachya ben Asher, also known as Rabbenu Bachya, is another voice from early 14th-century Spain. He offers a novel analysis of the Yom Kippur marker phrase in Leviticus 23:28. Without the phrase, he suggests, in the absence of a temple and the ability to offer sacrifices, we might think that forgiveness, which is essential to Yom Kippur, might be unavailable. The phrase is added in the Torah, he proposes, to reassure us that forgiveness is still available. That view is obviously specific to a single marked day. It supports the rabbinic view that, in the absence of the sacrificial cult, the Day of Atonement, itself, atones for the sins of man against God.

7.2.5 15th Century

Isaac Abarbanel was a 15th-century Portuguese scholar, philosopher, kabbalist and, for a time, financial adviser to the king of Portugal. His Torah commentary is unusual in that it is structured in a Socratic format, raising questions on each section of the text and then proposing answers. In the case of the double marking of the circumcision event, for example, he specifically asks why the phrase *b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh* is found in two verses. He answers that Genesis 17:23 mentions Ishmael and all the males in Abraham's household, but in Genesis 17:26 both Ishmael and Abraham are mentioned. There he essentially agrees with Radak. He agrees with Ramban that all the circumcisions were completed on the same day, and he makes the point that all were done on the same day the command was given. He asks the same question regarding the double marking of the Exodus event and finds there that the counting of time, which had previously been reckoned from the birth of Adam, would now begin with the date of the Exodus. In his comment on the marked Passover verse in Exodus 12:17, he agrees with

Ramban again that the entire people left Egypt, miraculously, on the same day. For the most part, Abarbanel's comments align closely with those of prior major voices, but his comment regarding Passover leads to a broader and an important line of questions.

Abarbanel asks not only "why," but also "why not" and in doing so he seeks relationship as well as discrimination. In his commentary on Leviticus 23, he notices as Ramban did, that Shavuot and Yom Kippur are both described using the marker phrase, but that Passover is not. He does not look back from the Leviticus text to the marked Passover verse in Exodus 12:17, but his question does raise the interesting point that the marking of Passover only occurs once. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread could have been marked in the Leviticus calendar that Abarbanel questions, but it could also have been marked in Exodus 23, Exodus 34, Numbers 28, or Deuteronomy 16. He does not ask why it is marked only once, but that would be a logical extension of his approach.

In the same way, Abarbanel notes that Shabbat, Sukkot, and Rosh Hashanah are *not* described using the marker phrase. That leads him to look for differences between them and the marked days of Shavuot and Yom Kippur. The details of his analysis are not as important to us as the fact that he raises the question. He sees that the text recognises the importance of Sukkot and Rosh Hashanah and that they share certain characteristics with Shavuot and Yom Kippur. Why, then, are they not described with the same unusual phrase? Again, a logical expansion of his approach would be to ask what might connect all of the days that are marked, but he does not do that. His approach is still fundamentally one of considering and questioning a single text or section of text at a time.

7.2.6 16th century

Rabbi Ovadia ben Yaacov Seforno was a 16th-century Italian commentator. He explains the marker phrase in the circumcision event verse in Genesis 17:23 to mean simply "without any delay," which is a reiteration of positions taken by earlier literature and commentary. He is more expansive in his comment on the phrase used in the Passover verse in Exodus 12:17. There he restates earlier positions that all of those who left Egypt left on the same day and that the day itself was no later than had been planned; that is, he says it was the last day of the 430 years. The idea of the "last day" is similar to the notion we found in Radak's interpretation of the marker in Genesis 7:13. He adds an admonishment that great care must be taken in calendar calculations to assure that Passover is not observed on the wrong day of the month. In that comment, he adds to the point made in the 14th century by ben Asher.

7.2.7 17th century

The commentary of Rabbi Shlomo Lunschitz of Prague is known as the *Kli Yakar*. His comment on Deuteronomy 32:48 is specific to the issue of Moses' death. He understands the *etsem* term of the phrase in that instance to mean that on the day of Moses' death he was as fresh in appearance and vigorous in the body as if he were in mid-life. That position was not new, it is found in earlier midrashic sources also. The *Kli Yakar* adds a contrasting note, though, that the day of death is often called a person's sunset, but here Moses' "sun," that is, his condition and appearance, was as if at mid-day. Where Rashi and his sources interpreted the mid-day idea literally, *Kli Yakar* proposes it metaphorically.

Shabbtai ben Joseph Bass was a Polish printer, publisher, and scholar who wrote an influential super-commentary on Rashi's work called the *Sifte Chakhamim*. He notes in his comments to Rashi's explanation of the marker phrase in both Genesis 7:13 and Genesis 17:23 that if the phrase did not mean to teach that the circumcision was to be "by day and not by night," as Rashi proposed, the verse would have read simply *ba'yom ha'zeh* as it does elsewhere. In that position, he agrees with the view that the word *etsem* is not required by the context of the verse itself. If it is not needed, it must be there for a different reason. That approach to the text is also evident in his comment on the verse in Genesis 17:26. Since the marker in Genesis 17:23 taught the matter of "by day and not by night," the marker in Genesis 17:26 must teach something different. The conclusion proposed is that the marker in Genesis 17:26 teaches that the circumcision event occurred on the specific date on which Abraham

turned ninety-nine years old and Ishmael turned thirteen. That is a refinement of the specificity position we have seen in earlier sources.

Siftei Chakhamim also addresses Rashi's comment on the instance in Deuteronomy 32:48. Rashi said there that the phrase is found in three places. Here, the super-commentary explains that there are four instances of the phrase in the accounts of those three events. That is more an editorial note than a comment on the substance.

7.2.8 18th century

Rabbi Chayim ibn Attar's Torah commentary is known as the *Or Ha'chayyim*. He was a kabbalist as well as a legal authority and his commentary has more of a midrashic flavour than many we have reviewed. He comments on both verses that mark the Exodus event. In the instance at Exodus 12:41 he suggests that the phrase might tell us that, even though the Israelites left Egypt on that day, the troubles of the Egyptians did not end with their departure. That implies an association between *etsem* and hardness or difficulty. In Exodus 12:51 he tells us that the reason the Torah records the Exodus event immediately after the Passover ceremonies is to remind us that it was the fulfilment of that commandment—to observe the Passover—that triggered the redemption from Egypt. In the instance, at Deuteronomy 32:48, he notes the source in *Sifre* that Rashi cited, and he associates the event of Moses' death with the idea of the expression of God's power. In that case, he says, the people had threatened to physically prevent Moses from ascending the mountain to die. The phrase, then, tells us that it was God's power that prevailed.

We have seen little comment on the instances of the phrase in Joshua and Ezekiel. Rabbi David Altschuler of Prague comments on the Prophetic and Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible. His commentary is divided into two parts, one of which, called the *Metsudat Zion*, seeks to explain unusual words or phrases. There he comments on both the Joshua and Ezekiel instances. On the instance at Joshua 5:11 he notes that *b'etsem ha'yom* refers to the day itself as opposed to a longer duration that includes the day, and specifically that it refers to the daytime hours as opposed to the night. He explains the word *etsem* in Ezek 24:2 as indicating that the “body” of a thing is its *etsem*. He cites there the form of the word found in the phrase *עצמי ממש*, *atz'mi mi'mecha*, in Psalm 139:15, which is understood as “frame” or “skeleton.” And, in his comment to the word *b'etsem* in Ezek 40:1, he equates the “bones” of a thing and its “body” or essence.

7.2.9 19th century

I will end this review of rabbinic commentary with the work of two major figures from the 19th century: Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rabbi Meir Loeb ben Jehiel Michael Weiss, who is known as the Malbim. The two contemporaries present quite different approaches.

Hirsch was the most prominent figure in 19th-century German modern orthodoxy. His commentary on the Bible has had a continuing influence on students of the Hebrew text and it was his aim, like that of Altschuler, to ascertain and explain the exact meaning of the Hebrew. In light of that aim his comment on the marker phrase in Genesis 17:23 is surprising. He writes that it means, “on that very day, without delay or deliberation ... According to our Sages (*Bereshit Rabbah* 47:9) *b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh* always means ‘in the full power of the day’—i.e., in broad daylight.”⁹⁸ In fact, the midrash cited does not extend that interpretation to all instances of the phrase. His comment is not accurate, but it stands in the line of respected commentary.

Malbim was born in what is now Poland and his career was primarily in Eastern Europe. He was very much a traditionalist and strongly opposed the reformers of his day. He was an authority in both halacha and homiletics and published influential works in both fields. His comments on the marked verses reflect his traditionalist views and situate him squarely in the stream of interpretations

⁹⁸ S. R. Hirsch, *The Hirsch Chumash*. 5 vols. trans. Daniel Haberman (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2002), Vol 1, 403.

we have seen before him. He references other texts and prior commentary to a greater extent than we have seen previously. He brings in other biblical texts, midrashim, and references to both Talmuds. He cites and quotes Ramban's comment on Leviticus 23:28, which we have seen above, and he brings in the halachic writing of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, the 12th-century philosopher, halakhist, and commentator known as the Rambam. He aimed to add clarity to and emphasize comments made by others in the line of tradition.

In the Exodus 12 verses, he makes the points we have seen previously; that the redemption occurred at night but the Exodus itself was during the day. On Exod 12:41 he struggles, as others have, with the issue of the redemption occurring at the end of precisely 430 years. He reviews a full complement of earlier rabbinic views and concludes that the marker phrase helps to make the case that the time in Egypt was half the 430 years stated in the verse. The Exodus event, he concludes, occurred after 215 years in Egypt. The substance of his argument is not particularly important to us, but two elements of his process are. He is focused completely on the account under study. He takes note of the marker only in the context of that specific issue, and he clearly wants to harmonize the various strands of the prior rabbinic record. That record informs his analysis, but it also importantly constrains it.

In the Leviticus 23:28 verse, Malbim restates Ramban's views discussed above, and he specifically cites the interpretive principles of Rabbi Akiva used by Ramban in his analysis. Malbim addresses the marker in Joshua 5:11 to clarify the language of that verse and to specifically distinguish the day on which manna was last eaten from the day on which the people were sustained from the produce of the land. In Ezekiel 24:2, his primary concern regards the specific dates: the date of the writing that is commanded and the date of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. However, he also shows that he looks beyond the plain meaning of both the words and the dates and acknowledges hints and hidden meanings found in both, indicating the influence of the kabbalistic tradition to which Ramban was also very much attached.

7.2.10 Conclusion: Later Rabbinic Commentary

Much of the later rabbinic commentary on the marker phrase and its variants amounts to restatement and refinement of material and positions found in the earlier rabbinic literature. The narrowness of the notice in earlier literature is maintained in the later commentary. I argue in Part 6 that it was largely inevitable that that would be the case because of the tradition of deference shown to earlier opinions and the constraints on interpretation imposed by accepted systems of analysis. In fact, a millennium of rabbinic commentary did not meaningfully expand the analysis that we found in the early literature.

Only the (inaccurate) comment by Hirsch ascribes a consistent meaning to every instance of the phrase. Neither the early literature nor the major commentaries propose a unifying theme across all instances. I have found no source in either the early literature or the later commentary that has connected and interpreted the ten days marked by the *b'etsem* phrase as a coherent communication embedded in and conveyed through the biblical text.

Part 8 —Conclusion

That the marker phrase exists and that it is unique to the accounts of the ten marked days is beyond debate.

No English version of the Hebrew Bible that is now or has been widely used translates the Hebrew *etsem* literally as *bone* and only one, the YLT of 1862, offers a consistent translation for all instances of the marker phrase. The Septuagint Greek, the Vulgate Latin, Luther's German, and the later German translations, follow the same pattern; that is, none uses a literal translation of *etsem*, and none uses the same translation of the phrase uniquely in all instances. There is nothing in the translations of the phrase into English, Greek, Latin, or German that draws attention to the association among the ten days that is created in the Hebrew text. That commonality and its implications are hidden in those translations.

The hiddenness to the student of the Hebrew text is of a different variety. The marker phrase itself is clearly not hidden, but the association among the marked days and the meaning of that association are effectively hidden by, a) the surprisingly limited notice of the marker phrase in the texts of early rabbinic literature; b) the influence of earlier interpretation on later rabbinic understanding; c) the decisions made by the translators of the Aramaic targums, and d) the limitations created by the rabbinically established systems of biblical interpretation.

My interpretations of the messages of the marked days are certainly open to disagreement or criticism, but I would not expect too much debate on the basic elements. The establishment by God of the covenant first with Noah, then with Abraham and his descendants, and then with the covenant people, is straightforward. The performance of covenantal obligations by Noah and Abraham is clear. God's liberation of the Israelites in the Exodus event is a necessary precondition to their possession of the land, which is reflected clearly in Joshua 5:11, signalling that God's obligation under the covenant of the land was met. The terms of the people's covenant obligations are expanded at Sinai. The centrality of the newly detailed law is emphasized in the three perpetual observances and by the marking of the event of Moses' death. The failure of the people to thereafter adhere to the covenant and the difficult consequences of that failure are well marked in Ezekiel 24:2. Ezekiel 40:1 points forward to the eschatological age in which the reunified people will return to a reunified land. A new temple of cosmic proportions will be built in Jerusalem as the locus of God's attachment to the people and the land. The people will dwell there in an idyllic age of peace in the presence of God.

My interpretation of the message as an apocalypse might be challenged. It obviously does not meet one of the principal criteria of the formal definition of the genre; it is not in narrative form. In substance, however, the message does meet the definition in all other respects:

- a) It is revelatory in multiple respects,
- b) It provides a thorough review of history,
- c) The text introduced by Ezekiel 40:1 includes an account of an "otherworldly journey" in which "otherworldly beings" communicate to the human prophet,
- d) Ezekiel 40–48 expresses a transcendent reality in both spatial and temporal terms, and
- e) While I have not argued the issue here, I believe the message of the Hidden Bones Apocalypse was created with a specific intention that can be identified and understood.

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APPENDIX 1 - Marker Phrase Translations in a Selection of English Language Bibles

Among the more widely used English language Bibles, most give five or six different translations for the Hebrew phrase *b'etsem ha'yom ha'zeh*. Without consistency in the translation, the consistency of the unique source text is lost.

NRSV

On the very same day
That very day
This very day
That same day
During that entire day
On that very day
On this very day

KJV

the selfsame day
this selfsame day
that same day
that selfsame day
this same day

NIV

that very day
this very day
the very day
that same day
that day

ESV

The very same day
That very day
This very day
The same day

NABR

the very same day
that same day
this very date
this same day
this day
that very day

HCSB

that same day
that very day
this very day
this particular day
this same day

D-RB

The selfsame day
The very same day
This same day
The same day
That same day
This day
That very day

NLT

that very day
that same day
this very day
the last day
that entire day
that day

NJPS

that same day
that very day
this very day
the very day
the same day
throughout that day

NASB

The very same day
This very day
The very day
That same day
This same day
That very day

NET

that very day
that very same day
the very same day
this very day
the very day
this particular day
that same day

YLT

this self-same day (1)

(1) Only YLT (1862) provides a consistent, unique translation.

Selected Versions Abbreviations

NRSV	–	The New Revised Standard Version
KJV	–	The King James Version
NIV	–	The New International Version
ESV	–	The English Standard Version
NABR	–	New American Bible Revised Edition
HCSB	–	Holman Christian Standard Bible
D-RB	–	The Douay-Rheims Bible
NLT	–	New Living Translation
NJPS	–	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation
NASB	–	New American Standard Bible
NET	–	New English Translation
YLT	–	Young's Literal Translation

APPENDIX 2 - Earliest English Translations of the Marker Phrase

The first English translation of the Bible was made by John Wycliffe from the Latin Vulgate. The Latin versions of the marker phrase are quite diverse as we see in Appendix 3, and we find the same pattern in Wycliffe's English. It shows no consistency of translation and uses no English expression that might suggest the presence of the *etsem* element of the Hebrew.

Tyndale's translation of 1530 was the first made from the Hebrew text. His decision that the Hebrew *etsem* should be rendered as *self same*, which Tyndale apparently found in Chaucer, has importantly influenced subsequent translators.

Wycliffe (1395)⁹⁹

In the end of that day
Anon in that day
On the same day
That same day
In the same day
This day
In the time of this day
In this day
In that day
In the tother day
In this same day

Tyndale (1530)¹⁰⁰

in the self same day
even the self same day
the self same day
upon that same day
the same day
that day

Coverdale (1535)¹⁰¹

(same as Tyndale) +
the present day

Tyndale was an accomplished scholar and knew the Latin and Greek versions of the Bible well. His knowledge of Hebrew, though, was unusual for his time. Of particular interest to us is that Tyndale also had access to some Aramaic versions and to the commentary of Rashi.¹⁰² Tyndale's translation of Joshua through Chronicles was not published during his lifetime. It appeared in the 1537 edition called the Matthew Bible. The use of *self same* in the Joshua instance shows a consistency of approach with Tyndale's earlier work.

The Great Bible was the first to be officially sanctioned, having been authorized by Henry VIII. It follows Tyndale in its approach to the marker phrase.

Matthew Bible (1537)

The self same day
Even the self same day
Upon that same day
That same day
The same day
That day
This present day

The Great Bible (1539)¹⁰³

in the self same day
even the self same day
the self same day
this same day
the same day
that day
this present day

Geneva Bible (1560)¹⁰⁴

in the self same day
in that self same day
the self same day
the same day
that same day
this same day

The Geneva Bible translators used the Great Bible as their base text and its influence is clear.

The Bishops Bible of 1568 (see below) was the second authorized or official text of the English Church and the translators of the King James Version were directed to use the third, 1602 edition, of

⁹⁹ Wycliffe's translation is from the Latin.

¹⁰⁰ Tyndale's is the first translation from Hebrew.

¹⁰¹ Completed the Old Testament translation begun by Tyndale. Coverdale includes one added version.

¹⁰² David Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament: Being the Pentateuch of 1530, Joshua to 2 Chronicles of 1537, and Jonah* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), xvi

¹⁰³ Also known as Cranmer's Bible for the Archbishop who wrote an introduction to it.

¹⁰⁴ The first full Old Testament translation from Hebrew. It relied heavily on Tyndale.

the Bishops Bible as their base text. The use of the term *self same* to translate the *b'etsem* term of our phrase can be traced from the KJV back through The Bishops Bible, the Geneva Bible and the Matthew Bible to the initial translation decision of John Tyndale.

The Bishops Bible (1568)

In the self same day

Even the self same day

The self same day

This same day

The same day

That day

APPENDIX 3 - Early English Translations of the Marker Phrase by Jewish Translators

Leeser (1845-53)	Benisch (1851-61)	JPS (1917)
On that self-same day	In the self-same day	In the selfsame day
On this selfsame day	In this selfsame day	In this selfsame day
On the selfsame day	Even the selfsame day	Even the selfsame day
On this same day	The selfsame day	The selfsame day
	On the selfsame day	On the selfsame day
	In that same day	In that same day
	That self-same day (1)	That selfsame day
	This same day (2)	This selfsame day

(1) A footnote to this translation, which is found twice, reads “bone, substance.”

(2) A footnote to the one instance of this translation reads “bone, essence.”

Isaac Leeser was the first Jewish translator to complete an English version of the Hebrew Bible. He cited the work of the Germans, Moses Mendelssohn and Leopold Zunz, as significant influences on his translation. He specifically noted consulting the three Aramaic targums to assist in understanding the Hebrew text, as well as the works of the commentators Rashi, Kimchi, Ibn Ezra, and others. His use of those sources did not move him to view the marker phrase differently from the approach taken to it by the KJV and its predecessors, however. He offers neither a new translation approach nor the consistency of the Hebrew text.

Abraham Benisch was an English author and editor of the mid-nineteenth century. The title of his translation, “The Jewish School and Family Bible,” says much about his aim and his audience. Benisch, like Leeser, looked to the work of Mendelssohn and Zunz as influential precedents. Benisch specifically sought “fidelity” in his translation. By that, he meant that he wanted the English to be as literally correct as possible and—importantly, for our purposes—he wanted to use a consistent English translation for each Hebrew word. From the table above, however, we can see that he offers no approach to our phrase that differs from those of his predecessors. But he did provide footnotes in three cases that acknowledged the literal “bone” meaning of the key Hebrew word.

The Jewish Publication Society of Philadelphia (JPS) has produced two of the most widely used English translations created by Jewish scholars. The 1985 edition, known as the “New JPS” translation, is included among the versions in Appendix 1. The first edition published by JPS, included here above, was published in 1917. It is known as the “Old JPS” version. The Old JPS was the first English translation by a diverse committee of highly respected Jewish scholars. The Preface to their translation clarifies the perspective of its editors, “The dominant feature of this sentiment ... is and was that the Jew cannot afford to have his Bible translation prepared for him by others.” That is an understandable motive, and yet it is clear that the Old JPS translation was still strongly influenced by prior versions, both by Christian and Jewish translators. In the instances of concern to us, its translations do not differ from either those of Leeser and Benisch or from those in the line of Christian translations back to and through the KJV.

The rabbinic authorities and tradition that the Jewish translators looked to in their efforts to improve prior translations gave them no reason to see all the instances of the marker phrase as having anything in common. As a consequence, the uniqueness of the marker phrase is as obscured in the work of the early Jewish translators as it is in the efforts of Christian scholars.

APPENDIX 4 - Greek, Latin, and German Translations

Septuagint (Greek)	Vulgate (Latin)	Luther (German)
εν τη ημερα ταυτη	in articulo diei	eben am selben Tage
εν τω καιρω της ημερας εκεινης	in ipso die	eben desselben Tages
εν γαρ τη ημερα ταυτη	eadem die	eben auf einen Tag
εν τη ημερα εκεινη	in eadem enim ipsa die	eben an demselben Tage
τατην την ημεραν	hunc diem	auf einen Tag
τη ημερα ταυτη	in tempore diei	diesen Tag
εν ταυτη τη ημερα	die hac	an diesem Tage
απο της ημερας της σημερον	in eadem die	desselben Tages
	diei hujus	eben an diesem Tag
	in ipsa hac die	

The Septuagint Greek (LXX) version of the Pentateuch dates to the mid-third century BCE. The Joshua and Ezekiel translations were probably completed by about 200 BCE. All are understood to represent Hebrew texts that are older than the corresponding Masoretic Text (MT) versions. The pattern of LXX translations is not different from the newest English versions we have seen. There are two common elements present in the translations: there is a representation of the word for “day” that is, *ημερα*, and there is an indicator of specificity or emphasis. There are three elements absent, however: there is no literal translation of the Hebrew *etsem*, which we would expect to find in forms of *οστεων*; the translation provided is not uniform; and the translation provided is not unique to the fourteen locations marked in the MT. There are instances in the LXX text in which the same translation is given for the Hebrew *היום הזה*, *ha’yom ha’zeh*, or *היום ההוא* *ha’yom ha’hu*, and even for the simple *היום* *ha’yom*¹⁰⁵, as is given for the more complex *b’etsem* phrase.

Emanuel Tov and Robert Kraft co-directed a project for the creation of a database designed to allow the study of the Septuagint with the aid of computer technology. The project was known as “Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies”, or CATSS.¹⁰⁶ The database contains “the major types of data needed for the study of the Septuagint (LXX) and its relation to the Masoretic Text (MT) ... in particular ... translation techniques, variant readings, grammar, and vocabulary of the LXX.”¹⁰⁷ Polak and Marquis in 2002 used the CATSS database to produce a comprehensive analysis of the “minuses” exhibited by the LXX of the Pentateuch when that text is compared to the MT. A “minus” in formal terms is found “if a given element is present in the MT, but is lacking ...” in another text form.¹⁰⁸ What does the CATSS database tell us when it is subjected to the analysis of minuses by Polak and Marquis?

First, CATSS finds the entire *היום הזה בעצם* phrase to be lacking in the LXX of Exodus 12:41. In five other instances, the CATSS analysis identifies the *עצם* element of our phrase as a minus; that is, it finds that the word *עצם* was not in the text from which the LXX was translated. Those five instances are Genesis 7:13, Exodus 12:17, Exodus 12:51, Leviticus 23:21, and Deuteronomy 32:48.¹⁰⁹ In each of those instances, the study finds the LXX translation to reflect a Hebrew text of *ha’yom*

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Deut 5:1, in which the LXX translation of *ha’yom* is the same as that for Deut 32:48.

¹⁰⁶ Emanuel Tov and Robert Kraft, *Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies (CATSS): A computerized data base for Septuagint studies: the parallel aligned text of the Greek and Hebrew bible*, (United States: Scholars Press, 1986)

¹⁰⁷ Frank Polak and Galen Marquis, *A Classified Index of the Minuses of the Septuagint: Part 1: Introduction*, ed. Emanuel Tov (Cape Town: Stellenbosch, 2002), Preface.

¹⁰⁸ Polak and Marquis, *A Classified Index of the Minuses of the Septuagint: Part 1*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Frank Polak and Galen Marquis, *A Classified Index of the Minuses of the Septuagint: Part II: The Pentateuch*, ed. Emanuel Tov (Cape Town: Stellenbosch. Cape Town, 2002), 9, 160, 192, 338.

ha'zeh. This issue is discussed in much greater depth in “The Hidden Bones of the Septuagint,” referenced earlier, which concludes that the *b'etsem* phrase; or at least the *b'etsem* term of the full phrase; was not in the Hebrew text from which the LXX was translated.

The Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome in the late fourth century CE, supplanted the Septuagint as the official Bible of the Roman Catholic church. Jerome's translation was from the Hebrew; he had two Hebrew texts including the version in Origen's Hexapla; but it was strongly influenced by the Septuagint. The Vulgate does not recognise the *b'etsem* phrase in two of its instances: Leviticus 23:30 and Joshua 5:11. Like the LXX, the instances in the Vulgate include a representation of the Latin word meaning day; that is, *die*; and an element of specificity or emphasis. Like the LXX, there is neither consistency in the Vulgate's Latin nor is there a Latin phrase unique to the marked verses. Jerome consistently used forms of the Latin *os* to translate the Hebrew *etsem* and its other forms in other locations. He does not use that word in any of the instances of the marker phrase.

A Latin translation from the Hebrew by Pagninus, published in 1528,¹¹⁰ was considered more faithful to the original Hebrew than Jerome's Vulgate. It is somewhat more consistent in its rendering of the Hebrew. Its version of Genesis Chapter 17 does not include Genesis 17:26 as that appears in the MT, so it lacks an instance of the phrase there. Pagninus was said to have made “extensive use of rabbinic sources.”¹¹¹ He does offer some different Latin readings. *In corpore die*, (lit. in the body of the day), which he uses for five instances of the phrase, for example, is like that of Rashi's comment to Deuteronomy 32:48. There Rashi suggests that the *b'etsem* element of the phrase indicates that the events referenced occurred at mid-day in order to be in full view. Pagninus was used by the translators of The Bishops Bible, which was the direct predecessor (in its 1602 version) of the KJV. Another Latin translation by Sebastian Castellonis, published in 1551, was among the sources used by the KJV translators. It does not vary materially from the Vulgate.

Martin Luther's German translation was completed in 1534 but he continued to refine it until 1545. It was from the Hebrew, but some suggest he relied primarily on the Latin, since his command of that language was superior to his comfort in Hebrew. The number of his German renderings of the *b'etsem* phrase is similar to that of Jerome's Vulgate. Like the LXX and the Vulgate, it lacks the uniformity and uniqueness of the Hebrew, and it lacks Luther's typical German translation of the Hebrew *etsem* as *Bein*, which he uses in Genesis 2:23, Genesis 29:14, Exodus 12:46, and Numbers 9:12. Other forms of *etsem* are rendered by Luther in other forms of *Bein*. It would not suggest to a reader that there is anything unique about the days marked with the Hebrew phrase. Nor would it suggest that the days are related.

As noted in Appendix 3, the early Jewish translators of the Bible into English looked importantly to the German translations of Mendelssohn (1783) and Zunz (1838), whose renderings of the marker phrase are shown below. Mendelssohn's translation was of the Pentateuch and only those portions of the prophetic books that are read as a part of the Jewish liturgical cycle. Zunz did translate the entire Hebrew text. Mendelssohn's renderings are nearly as varied as Luther's considering his more limited scope, but by 1838 Zunz did approach uniformity. It is clear that neither Mendelssohn nor Zunz took a more literal approach to the phrase than Luther had done. Their influence on the early Jewish translations to English did not materially affect their approaches in the specific case of the marker phrase.

¹¹⁰ Pagninus's translation was accessed online at:

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=CxJTAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA4>

¹¹¹ David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5

Mendelssohn (1783)

an eben demselben Tage
an dem selben Tage
an demselben Tage
an eben diesem Tage
an ebendiesem Tag
an diesem Tage

Zunz (1838)

an eben demselben Tage
an eben diesem Tage
an eben deselben Tage

Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig produced a translation into German that was begun in the mid-1920s but not completed until 1961 (long after Rosenzweig died in 1929). They specifically sought to reproduce in German the sound, the rhythm, and the impact of the original Hebrew. They also wanted to reflect in their translation the specifically Jewish exegetical traditions. Like Zunz, they use only three different German phrases in rendering the *b'etsem* marker: *an ebendem Tag*, *an eben diesem Tag*, and *an eben dem Tag*. While both Zunz and Buber-Rosenzweig approach uniformity, neither achieves it and neither uses phrases that would strike a reader as worthy of unusual attention. And, of course, none uses a literal rendering for the Hebrew *etsem*.

None of the non-English translations reviewed here gives a reader any reason to believe there is any association, much less an important and unique one, among the ten marked days.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Charles R. Lightner

After a career in various finance-related positions, the author began rabbinic studies at the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York in 2001. He received rabbinic ordination from AJR in 2008. He currently studies, writes, teaches, and acts as rabbi in Westfield, New Jersey, where he lives with his wife, Sharon. They have three children and seven grandchildren.