

The Hidden Bones Apocalypse

A Message Encoded in the Biblical Text

Charles R Lightner

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Author's Notes:

To my orthodox Jewish and conservative Christian friends - to all who understand the biblical text as literal, inerrant, and unchangeable -this book identifies an unusual element found in ten verses of the biblical text. The existence of that element, a Hebrew phrase, is not a controversial matter. It is an observable fact on which all can agree. My analysis of the phrase and of its meaning can be seen as having two parts. The first is the interpretation itself, on which I think it is possible to find common ground. The second, you will find difficult. I suggest that the phrase was inserted into the Hebrew text by a specific individual at a specific time for a specific purpose. You will not agree, and I certainly understand that. But my view of the history of the text can be severed from my identification of and analysis of the Hebrew phrase, which I hope you might find of interest even apart from my view of its provenance.

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All foreign language references in this book are transliterated. This book is not intended for a principally scholarly readership which might expect transliterations to follow the convention of the Style Book of the Society for Biblical Literature. For ease of use, all transliterations are intended to be as close to simply phonetic as possible.

Our study is specifically of elements of the Hebrew bible; that is, the twenty-four books that comprise the Masoretic Text. That is not the body of scripture that many refer to as 'The Old

Testament', which, for some traditions, includes additional books not a part of the Jewish canon. Unless otherwise noted, when I use the word 'bible' I mean the Hebrew bible.

The subject of this study principally concerns events and documents dating to periods before the common era. For simplicity, all dates cited will be BCE unless otherwise noted or clear from their context.

The subjects addressed and the documents referenced in this book span the entire period prior to the common era. References to place names, to peoples and to individuals changed over time and are found differently in different sources. So, for example, the transition was made over time from identifying the line of Abraham as Hebrews to Israelites to Jews. The land of Canaan became the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah but Judah – or the territory of which Jerusalem was the principal city - then was variously called Judah, Judea, Yehud and Israel. Judah Maccabee is often called Judas and the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus is known as Jesus Ben Sira or Joshua Ben Sira. In some cases, where confusion might otherwise be likely and context suggests, I have changed the language in quoted materials so that, for example, a reference to Judas Maccabee might be found here as Judah and Yehud might sometimes be found as Judea.

I am a student of the Hebrew bible, but I am not a scholar. I am a rabbi, not a professor. I have consulted the work of others to the extent required to have confidence in the analysis and conclusions presented. However, the scope of this study is such that I have not been able to review the complete scholarly literature on the issues discussed. I do not think that such a complete review is necessary and, given the scope of the study, it would not have been possible in any case. Where I knowingly present conclusions or analysis drawn from the work of others, I have credited the source. Where I have quoted others' work, I have cited those sources. I am confident, however, that I have reached conclusions myself that have been previously reached by others, and probably by many others. Lack of citation or

recognition in such cases reflects only the necessarily limited scope of research and I hope it will be pardoned in light of the serious but non-scholarly nature of this work.

My knowledge of the languages of the various texts discussed in this study is, charitably put, uneven. I have sought the assistance of others to confirm my interpretations of critical texts and issues, particularly in the Greek of the Septuagint and the Latin of the Vulgate. That assistance certainly prevented me from making some errors but, just as certainly, any that remain are my own.

PART ONE

Introduction

In the second century BCE, most likely in the second quarter of that century, a senior Jewish scribe working in Jerusalem, within the scribal community of the temple, encoded a message in the text of Hebrew bible.¹ He did so by inserting an unusual Hebrew phrase into the accounts of ten highly consequential biblical 'days'. That phrase appears nowhere else in the biblical text. It is a mark of his subtlety that, while the phrase is quite distinctive, it does not change the meaning of the accounts marked. It seems to add only a degree of emphasis, and in a way that could hardly seem objectionable. In fact, though, it does much more.

By reference to those ten days, the scribe created and conveys a many-layered message, parts of which would have been unacceptable to the temple establishment of the day. But the scribe's insertions were allowed to remain in the text. They remain there today; hidden, though, in English translations and obscured or ignored by biblical commentators; consciously suppressed, in all likelihood, by the early powers of rabbinic Judaism. The message of that scribe expresses the essential themes of the literary genre we now call apocalypse.

With the exception of the Book of Daniel, none of the major Jewish apocalyptic writings were made part of the final canon of the Hebrew bible. Daniel's apocalyptic message is couched in allegorical language and so it is veiled. It eventually became accepted, not because of its apocalyptic themes, but in spite of them. There was no guarantee, though, that the text of any of the Jewish apocalypses would survive. Embedding or encoding the message of apocalypse in works that were already firmly accepted

¹ I use the term 'bible' for convenience. At the time, 'the bible' as a final collection of accepted scripture did not really exist, but the texts that specifically concern us here had certainly attained a high degree of acceptance. There was some fluidity in their text but the books themselves, as books, were very well established. The final collection and canonization would occur over the next couple of centuries.

and essentially final, as were the five books of Moses and the books of Joshua and Ezekiel, was a way for our scribe to ensure the survival of that message. He could not have known that Daniel would be accepted and become a favorite of bible readers and biblical scholars, or that his carefully constructed and encoded version of apocalypse would remain hidden for so long.

It is rare that something new is found in the text of the bible. Most new information, insight and understanding in recent centuries has come from archeological finds and from new methods of linguistic, paleographic or materials analysis. The early cuneiform accounts of the Ark story and the later Assyrian version of the flood story; the documents from the Cairo genizah; the Nash Papyrus and, of course, the amazing finds in the Judean Desert, most notably at Qumran but also from Masada and Nahal Hever; have all come to light in the last century and a half, or so. The same is true for such important works as 1 Enoch and the book of Jubilees, which are important texts from before the common era but unknown in English until the nineteenth century. Important context has been gained from the El Amarna tablets, the Elephantine Letters and the documents from Wadi Daliyeh. And, the importance of the Samaritan Pentateuch as a major version of the biblical text has become more widely understood only in recent decades.

This study is not about new texts or even new ways of interpreting texts, though. It is about an element of the Hebrew text that has been fixed since at least the turn of the era.² The Masoretic Text, which was formed from that turn-of-the-era version, is the Hebrew bible that has long been accepted by scholars and religious leaders as standard. No alteration of that text would have gone unnoticed or undocumented for the last two millennia. It is probably the most closely scrutinized text in the history of western civilization.

² I refer here to the consonantal text of the Hebrew bible. The vocalization and punctuation of the text was not completed until some six to nine centuries later.

In early February 2017 I was asked to lead a Torah study group whose subject that week was Parashat Bo; Exodus 10:1 through 13:16. As I prepared for the class I was drawn to what seemed to me an interesting and unusual phrase in the Hebrew text of Exodus 12:17. I stopped and looked. I checked my dictionary. I glanced at the commentaries. And, having noted it as interesting, I went on. But then I found the same phrase again, twice more in the same chapter, at Exodus 12:41 and 51. Intrigued then, I looked for other occurrences of the phrase in the Torah and I found several, all associated with highly consequential events in the biblical account. I shared what I had found with the study group that Shabbat. I wrote up a brief paper the following week with initial thoughts and I determined to look further when I was able.

Over a year later, I decided to return to the subject to prepare a teaching for the evening of the festival of Shavuot in 2018. For that study I looked beyond the Torah, into the book of Joshua, where I found another occurrence of the phrase marking another highly consequential day. I presented the subject that evening as 'The Seven Bones of Torah' and was encouraged by the response to expand on my initial brief paper. In the course of that project I found three things: 1) the unusual phrase is found only in association with ten (not seven, as it turned out) highly consequential days or events in the Hebrew bible, 2) no English translation of the Hebrew passage that is or has been in common use reveals the unusual nature of the Hebrew phrase, and 3) the biblical commentators, both Jewish and Christian – but for different reasons - either ignore its unusual nature or offer inconsistent or incomplete interpretations of it. I decided to put aside another project that I had been working on and to pursue the study further.

I spent the next year studying those ten marked days. Each was so important to the biblical account and to the history of the Jewish people that it was easy to be drawn deeply into the study and into the idea of their association with that unusual phrase. The literature, especially the rabbinic and midrashic literature, was rich and deep and the study was satisfying. I had written over two hundred

pages of what I thought would be an interesting and unusual analysis when I found, while reading James Vanderkam's commentary on the Book of Jubilees, that I had completely missed the point. The message of those specially marked verses is not apparent at the level of the individual marked event. It is only apparent when each is understood as part of a larger communication, purposefully constructed, and etched with such a fine hand into the text as to be at the same time both obvious and invisible. I had been working on the wrong book. Rather than being near completion, I had to start over.

This book is not primarily about the ten events chosen by the scribe to convey his message, although we do need to look closely at each to understand the part it plays in his message. It is about the message itself. When I realized that the message was an apocalypse, that understanding became the organizing principle of the study: situating the message within the body of Jewish apocalyptic writings. I did not realize until later that I would be drawn by that study to an analysis of the time of our scribe's work. Nor did I expect that, having gained confidence in the timing of his work, I would then be pulled to the question of his identity. That is just where the trail led.

So this book identifies and locates the marker phrase in the Hebrew text, interprets the message created, situates that message within the literary genre, analyzes and proposes a specific likely timing of the scribe's work and, finally, identifies the scribe himself. The study necessarily involves discussion of some of the issues that drove the transformation of late second temple Judaism into early rabbinic Judaism, but I'll only discuss those issues to the extent required. How the work of our scribe was allowed to remain in the text by a temple establishment that would have found the message intolerable is a fascinating question and one that deserves a separate study that I expect to take up at another time.

The Marker Phrase and Its Hiddenness

What is this unusual phrase - the marker phrase, as I'll call it? It hardly draws attention to itself even though it is unusual and found infrequently. In transliterated Hebrew it is:

b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh

The word *yom* in Hebrew means 'day' and *ha'yom*, adding the definite article, is 'the day'

The word *zeh* in Hebrew means 'this' and *ha'zeh* makes it specific i.e. 'that'

The word '*etzem*' in Hebrew means 'bone'³

The preposition *b'* means *on* or *in*

So, this phrase is describing a day that is specific and that has a character that in some sense is bonelike. Propp, in his translation of Exodus 12:17, 41 and 51 understands it as 'on the bone of this day'.⁴ Werner, in her translation of Ezekiel 24:2 renders it 'this is Bone day'.⁵ Both are reasonable in that they acknowledge the plain sense of the word *etzem*. Others, such as Milgrom, retain the typical translation approach but point out the unusual nature of the phrase. Milgrom calls it 'a typical priestly phrase' and concludes that 'the expression is idiomatic, a stylistic flourish of H'.^{6 7} That misses the point and it does so for the same reason the point has been missed all along. It fails to recognize that all

³ *Etzem* can also mean substance or power but by far the most common meaning is 'bone'. The translation question becomes circular when the common English translation is read back onto the Hebrew, as when Brown-Driver-Briggs (p783) uses Ezek 24:2 to support the 'selfsame' translation.

⁴ Propp, W. H. Exodus 1-18: A New Translation and Commentary. Yale University Press. New Haven. 1999. pp 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'". p 40

⁵ Werner, A. Ancient Roots Translinear Bible: Reader Edition. ARTB Publishing. St. Louis. 2011 Kindle Edition Loc 22531.

⁶ Milgrom, J. Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary' Yale Anchor Bible. Volume 3B. Yale University Press. New Haven. p 2009, 2022, 2024

⁷ H refers to the Holiness stratum of the Priestly source or to the redactor(s) of that stratum.

instances of the phrase represent only constituent parts of a single larger and more complete communication.

To suggest that a day has a bonelike character is to suggest that it is, at least, unusual. Most would interpret it as a day that was difficult, hard, brittle, and dry. A bone image is not light or joyful. Bone images evoke visceral and arresting reactions. But no English bible in general use, whether in Christian or Jewish communities, current or past, translates that phrase in a way that brings its bonelike character, or even its suggestion of an unusual nature, to the reader's attention. That has been true from the time of the very first English translations, whether from the Latin and Greek by Wycliff in the late fourteenth century or from the Hebrew by Tyndale in 1530. It is also true of editions, such as Young's Literal Translation of 1862, that actively seek to present the Hebrew and Greek in very literal English. It is true today.

How do English bibles translate the phrase? Depending on the requirements of syntax, they use phrases like: 'on that very day', 'on the very same day', 'that very day', 'this very day', 'this same day', 'during that entire day', 'in the midst of the day' or 'on the selfsame day'. Wycliffe, interestingly, departed from his 'same day' translation convention in two cases, using 'anon in that day' in Genesis 17:23 and 'in the tother day' in Joshua 5:11. These translation approaches signal some degree of emphasis but they neither change the sense of the verses marked nor convey anything as unusual as the idea of 'bone'. The same is true for the more recent English translations made from the accepted Hebrew text that specifically seek to express the plain Hebrew sense.

The New Revised Standard Version, for example, according to its translation notes, looked first to one of the oldest extant copies of the Hebrew text and sought to incorporate the most current scholarship, informed by the evidence of the Judean Desert texts. But it does not translate the marker literally. It does distinguish the instances in Leviticus relating to Yom Kippur, using there the

understanding ‘during that entire day’, which is certainly an understandable variation in that context, but it is still not an acknowledgment of the literal text. The New American Bible, Revised Edition, published in 2011, which describes itself as ‘translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources’, takes pains to reflect the new understandings gained from the Qumran and other Judean Desert materials. It specifically seeks to accurately present the texts as found in the best original language versions. It also holds to the ‘on that very day’ general understanding of the phrase. The most recent translations by the Jewish Publication Society and Koren Publishers are no different, nor is the new and beautiful translation by Robert Alter, nor is Everett Fox’s valuable work. The recent interlinear translations by Mesorah Publications interpret *b’etzem* as ‘in the midst of’ presumably following Rashi, which is actually less than helpful if the aim is a view of its meaning that fits all instances.

There have been two ‘firsts’ in bible translations in recent years. The first bible created specifically for the English speaking Orthodox Christian community was published in 2008. It did not seek to create a fully retranslated text but based its work on an authoritative edition of the Greek Septuagint. It consulted the Hebrew text but did not rely upon it. That version varies even more than usual from the literal Hebrew, in one instance⁸ the translation drops any reference at all to a ‘day’. As we’ll discuss in much more detail later, the first English translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch was published only in 2013. It also adopts the standard ‘very same day’ general approach.

It might be argued that there is a hint of the unusual in the common English translations in the sense that the words ‘very same’, ‘same’ or ‘selfsame’ could be seen as superfluous and therefore to add unusual force. But that argument fails when we see that the same English translations are found in some cases where the word *etzem* is not in the Hebrew text. That is, the Hebrew phrases *ba’yom ha’zeh*,

⁸ Exodus 12:41

ha'yom ha'hu, ca'yom hazeh or even just *ha'yom*, are sometimes translated in exactly the same way as our marker phrase.

There are hundreds of English translations of the Hebrew bible and I have certainly not consulted all of them. But I have reviewed all that I am aware of that have large audiences and I have not found any that come close to presenting a literal translation of the marker phrase. None go farther even than adding the modestly emphatic notes we've seen above. None suggest to the reader that there is something truly unusual about the 'days' that our scribe marked. That is why I think it is fair to say that the message marked by the phrase is hidden to readers of the bible in English. The same is true, as we will see, for those who read the bible in Greek, Latin or Aramaic.

We can understand how those who do not have access to the Hebrew text are limited by the interpretations of translators. How can it be, though, that those who read and study the text in the original language can also have overlooked the message created by these special markers? The straightforward explanation is that the text comes to us bearing the weight of two millennia of interpretation. When I first noticed the phrase and was puzzled by it, I looked to the commentary of the sage I mentioned earlier, the 12th century French commentator known as Rashi – Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzach. And that is exactly what most Jews would do. Rashi is the first source consulted when the plain meaning of the Hebrew is sought.

Rashi only comments on some of the instances of the phrase, though, and it becomes apparent when reviewing his commentary that his interpretation can only be reasonably applied in some instances. In three cases he argues that the actions portrayed needed to occur in public, in broad daylight – or as one Rashi translator puts it, 'at high noon'. In two other cases he interprets the phrase as conveying a sense of immediacy or precision, but he refrains from any comment on the remaining five instances. Rashi's view was not formed *de novo*. He would have certainly been aware of and

influenced by earlier works including an early midrashic text called *Sifre Deuteronomy*, which is thought to date to the first or second century CE. It is there (at 337.1) that we find the core of Rashi's argument i.e. that three specific marked 'days' or events occurred 'in the middle of the day'. Rashi clearly relied on *Sifre* in considering and preparing his own comments. That is perfectly reasonable and that is how the chain of tradition operates. But that chain can become heavy over time and the weight of tradition can work against clear understanding at times just as it can support it.

Centuries after Rashi, the nineteenth century German rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, wrote his own influential commentary on the Pentateuch. By then, for Hirsch, who would clearly look back at Rashi and at *Sifre*, the marker phrase means 'in the middle of the day' *wherever* it is found! *Sifre* does not say that the phrase has that meaning everywhere. Rashi does not really say that it has that meaning everywhere, although his words might be construed in that way. But Hirsch takes his place in the line of tradition, and it is an influential place. Rashi's interpretation subtly shifts *Sifre's* and Hirsch not as subtly bends Rashi's, and so on. There are other links in the chain, but the point is made. Century upon century of proffered opinion narrows the range of interpretive potential to the point that something as tangible, as jarringly unexpected as 'bone' just disappears. That is how a version like Mesorah's Interlinear Chumash⁹ comes to understand the phrase to mean 'in the midst of the day' wherever it is found, even where the context argues against that interpretation.

For those who do not find the line of interpretation that runs through Rashi to be satisfying, there is an alternative. The 13th century Spanish commentator known as Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, offers an approach that understands the word *etzem* differently. Jacob Milgrom traces the view that *etzem* means 'body or essence' through Ramban's commentary on Exodus 24:10 (not a marked phrase). He finds Ramban basing his view on an Aramaic translation/interpretation of text from

⁹ A very useful publication by a highly respected publisher.

the fifth century CE, called Targum Onkelos. And that view is then traced to a different early midrash called *Sifra*, which is only somewhat later than the pre-Mishnaic *Sifre*.¹⁰

Ramban's approach provides better support for the idea of the phrase as a non-specific emphatic expression. The idea of 'essence' certainly comes close to a phrase like 'the very same' or 'the selfsame'. But both approaches try very hard – too hard in my view – to avoid the plain sense of the Hebrew text. The unusual nature of the marker phrase becomes hidden. At the very least, it is obscured. The attention of even those who study the bible in Hebrew is diverted. Tradition provides the answer – or, at least, an answer - if the question should arise. And the message of our scribe sadly goes unseen.

¹⁰ Milgrom. Leviticus 23-23. p 2023

The Ten 'Days' Marked by Our Scribe

Now it is time to identify the 'days' that are marked as having some essentially bonelike qualities. It will be immediately apparent that they are all highly important; not all in the same way, but nevertheless crucial to the biblical account.

Day 1 – The Day Noah Enters the Ark

Gen 7:13 *On the very same day (b'etzem 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 2 – The Day of the Abrahamic Circumcision Event (the phrase is found twice here)

Gen 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'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, as God had said to him.

Gen 17:26 *That very day (b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh)* Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.

Day 3 – The Day of the Exodus from Egypt (the phrase is found twice here)

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

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

Day 4 – The Required Perpetual Observance of the Passover ¹¹

Ex 12:17 You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for *on this very day (b'etzem 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 5 – The Required Perpetual Observance of Shavuot

Lev 23:21 *On that same day (b'etzem 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.

Day 6 – The Required Perpetual Observance of Yom Kippur (the phrase is found three times here)

Lev 23:28-30 and you shall do no work *during that entire day (b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh)*; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. ²⁹ For anyone who does not practice self-denial *during that entire day (b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh)* shall be cut off from the people. ³⁰ And anyone who does any work *during that entire day (b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people.

Day 7 – The Day of Moses's Death

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

Day 8 – The First Day of Sustenance from the Promised Land; the Last Day of the Manna

¹¹ The required perpetual observance of Passover comes before the exodus event in the text. I reverse the order here for discussion purposes to group the three observance requirements together.

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

Day 9 – The Day of Ezekiel's Vision of the Siege of Jerusalem

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

Day 10 – The Day of Ezekiel's Vision of the Rebuilt Temple; Restoration and Reunification

Ezek 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'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh)*, the hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me there.

These are the only occurrences of the marker phrase in the Hebrew bible. There are obviously many other highly consequential 'days' in the biblical account that are not marked, which we'll discuss. But it is important to note that the phrase is not found associated with any event that is not of substantial consequence.

There are two variations of the phrase that are also in the text: *ad etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*, where *ad* means to or until, which can be prospective or retrospective, and *et etzem ha'yom ha zeh*, where *et* is the Hebrew indicator of a direct object. The first variant appears three times: in Leviticus 23:14, Joshua 10:27 and Ezekiel 2:3 and each is translated in the same general way as the marker phrase i.e. 'that very day' or 'this very day', with only the initial preposition changing. The second variant appears only once, in Ezekiel 24:2, where it is translated without a preposition as 'this very day'. Each occurrence of those variants points to and adds weight to one of the marked days. The Ezekiel 24 variant is actually in the marked verse, so the body of the phrase; *etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*: appears twice in one verse, which might be considered appropriate given the verse's subject.

It is possible that one or more of the markers or one or more of the variant instances was already in the text and was seen and adopted by our scribe, who recognized that it nicely fit his needs. It was unique but it was not disruptive of the basic meaning of the text. I'll discuss the variants as part of the discussion of the marked verses they support.

There are two additional interventions into the text that I think can be attributed to our scribe, one in Genesis and one in Ezekiel, which I'll discuss further on in the study. They are quite important to his message but required scribal action different from the nondisruptive marking of his ten central 'days'. They are further evidence of his skill and subtlety. They too have drawn the attention of scholars and commentators over time, but their nature and purpose have also been misunderstood.

The Message of the Ten Marked Days

When I began to prepare my presentation for that Shavuot discussion of ‘the bones’ I looked first at the Noah story as a logical point of entry. My focus was on the qualities of the event that might give it a bonelike quality. The entry into the ark after all of the preparation and anticipation, the din of the animals, the gathering storm clouds, the fear on the faces of his family – it must have been enough to stop even Noah, the *ish tzadik tamim*, the man who was both righteous and blameless, frozen in his tracks. Because it was left to God to actually shut the door behind Noah. That is unlike Noah’s counterpart in the Gilgamesh ark story, who himself gave the order to the have door shut. And it was the image of Noah as he heard the door shut, removing all hope of avoiding what lay ahead, that I tried to evoke that evening. But as intriguing an exegetical opportunity as that is, it is not the issue that draws the attention of our scribe. The essence of the Noah story of course or, more accurately, of the flood story, is not judgment and destruction but salvation and covenant. The issue is not Noah, as interesting as he might be, the issue is mankind. And it was that distinction – that missed distinction – that took me on an interesting and rewarding but ultimately errant path for a year.

There are multiple reasons why the Noah story is the first of our marked days but at the level of the scribe’s principal message – and this will be true of all of the marked days – the essence of the message is not to be understood at the level of the individual. Stories of individuals can be deeply meaningful and challenging, emotionally satisfying and instructive, but our scribe’s message is meant to be understood at a different level. God’s commitment to ‘never again destroy every living creature’ at Gen 8:21 begins the statements of covenant found in Genesis 9 that are the essence of the account from the scribe’s perspective. God establishes two covenants: one with all mankind and one specifically with the line of Noah. Covenantal terms are recited: parties are identified, duration is established, required behaviors are listed, a sign is identified. This is the result of Noah’s entry into the ark that begins the scribe’s message.

When we look at these ten 'days' from the point of view of their essence rather than their narrative content, which is very hard for one who has a strong emotional bond with the stories, the reason for their selection by the scribe begins to assert itself. We'll look briefly first at all of the marked 'days' and then extract from them a view of their essential message.

The second marked 'day' is enclosed in two instances of the phrase. It is in the Genesis 17 account of Abraham circumcising Ishmael and all of the men of his household and then himself, on a single day. The two instances of the marker phrase are at Exod 17:23 and 17:26. The images that section of text evokes are horrendous. If we accept the account literally, Abraham performed all of the circumcisions himself. Given the size of the household, which included 'all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner' (17:27) Abraham would likely have been at his task from dawn to dusk. His household was already substantial. The images of men writhing in pain on the bloodied ground, submitting to Abraham's knife whether willingly or unwillingly. And the women standing helplessly aside – probably horrified - or nursing their husbands, sons, and brothers. These are images certainly worthy of such an unusual, hard, brittle and difficult descriptor. But if we step back from those images and ask what the passage essentially conveys, I think the answer is that it conveys man's active acceptance of the covenant with God.

It is noteworthy that the next two marked days are in Exodus 12, in the foundational story of the liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. Noteworthy in one respect because of the stories that go unmarked. Our scribe skips forward through the entire narratives of Isaac and Jacob. What story is more iconic and 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 than the centuries the Hebrews spent in Egypt? And, of course, the longest single narrative in the Torah is that of Joseph. These are among the most read, most told, most

loved, most adapted, of all biblical stories. And yet none of them is marked. But most noteworthy is the precipitating condition.

The Book of Genesis ends with Joseph's death. Exodus begins with the account of the Hebrews in Egypt after Joseph died and a new Pharaoh came to power. The Hebrews, whose relationship with Joseph had ensured their survival and safety, then became an oppressed and enslaved people, despised by their Egyptian masters. The enigmatic but critical inflection point in the account is found in Exod 2:24-25 'God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites and took notice of them'. That apparently occurs after the Hebrews have been in Egypt for nearly four hundred years. The plain language of the account leads us to understand that there was something lacking in God's attention before that time, which draws much comment and midrash, but that is not the essential issue for us. The chain of events that includes the wonderful 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 'taking notice of them'.

The essential nature of the Exodus event, in the context of the scribe's message, is not the specific act of liberating the people. It is God's remembrance of and active expression of his covenant with the descendants of Abraham. The liberation occurs as a result of that expression. The first three of our scribe's marked 'days', then, are about the establishment of, the acceptance of and the expression of covenant.

There is an interesting mirroring of the covenantal language found in the Noah story versus that in the Abrahamic circumcision account. In the flood account, God's covenant commitment comes after Noah accepts and acts on God's direction. He builds the ark, gathers the people and animals, enters it, and rides out the flood. Then, in Genesis 9, we find God's expression of the terms of covenant. In the

case of the circumcision event, though, God's promise to Abraham is not only in advance of the action, it is insistent. The section of text preceding Gen 17:23-26 is the most densely covenantal in the Torah. It is as though God understands what a difficult thing it is that he has asked of Abraham. Again, and again we find the covenantal language, usually expressed in forms of the Hebrew word *b'rit*, meaning covenant, in the account leading up to the day. This portrays the relationship between God and Abraham in very human sense. Real empathy is shown for the anguished reluctance any human would naturally feel anticipating such a day.

It is the very human stories of the bible expressing universal emotions, experiences and situations that bring us back to the biblical accounts again and again. But it is importantly not the powerfully human messages, certainly not at the individual human level, that are the core of the three marked events we have looked at so far. The essential messages of those events, for our scribe, is found in the fact that they express covenantal promises and actions. Those covenants are between God and all mankind and between God and the Hebrew people. And those covenants are eternal. In this understanding we can begin to see the scribe's agenda emerge.

Another error I made early on in my study was in my interpretation of the marked days in Exodus. I did not see initially that two separate messages were marked: the Exodus event, which is marked in Exod 12:41 & 51, and the Passover observance, which is marked in Exod 12:17. I was having coffee one morning with my friend Rav Yishak Bilman, who is a kabbalist. I told him that I was working on this study of nine highly consequential days oddly marked in the biblical text. He smiled and said that if I were right 'there must be ten, not nine'. His response came from a very different point of view than the one that inspired our scribe, of course, but his comment led me back to the list of marked passages and to the understanding that he was correct. The event and its required observance are two separate matters. Each is separately marked and there are, in fact, ten marked days, not nine, which I only later understood was one the most important messages of all.

The next three marked days have a different character from the Noah, Abraham and Exodus events. They are the requirements that Passover, Shavuot and Yom Kippur be observed by the covenant people annually and perpetually. Passover is an active remembrance of and expression of gratitude for the redemption from bondage in Egypt. Shavuot is an active remembrance of and expression of gratitude for both the covenant and revelation. Yom Kippur provides an opportunity for active confession of and atonement for transgression. These requirements, found in the priestly book of Leviticus, arise from covenantal action and remembrance. The Passover and Shavuot instances are related to events in history, but the perpetual actions required establish them as distinct from single-occurrence events such as the Abrahamic circumcision story.

The memory of the Exodus event, a shared memory, a shared event vicariously experienced and acknowledged annually in the Passover seder and the seven-day holiday, is even today the most common shared 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 he were there personally. And in creating that idea of personal experience it is similar to Deut 29:15 in which Moses explains that the covenant is not only with those who stood before him that day 'but also those who are not here with us'. Shared experience, shared memory, the shared rituals of Passover, Shavuot and Yom Kippur are building blocks of peoplehood. They are instruments of continuity. They are obligations, to be sure, but they are also self-activating insurance policies, providing for the persistence of the people.

The annual observances of Shavuot and Yom Kippur require a different kind of attention than Passover. Each is more nuanced, or at least requires a more nuanced examination, than Passover. And each for different reasons.

The marking of Shavuot might be the most significant single clue to the message of our scribe, for reasons that are not obvious and that we'll look at it in much more detail later. For now, though, having identified its essential message as one of covenant and revelation, we have to acknowledge that the association with revelation came only much later to normative Judaism. That Shavuot is a remembrance of the theophany and revelation at Sinai has been a commonplace for Jews since Talmudic times. The assertion has been made for so long and in such a way that it has become fact – an article of faith - for the Jewish community. But there is nothing in the biblical text that associates the two. There was nothing in the first temple history, in the second temple accounts, even in early rabbinic literature, that associated Shavuot with revelation. Only through tortured rabbinic reinterpretation of the text, making one plus one equal three, did the rabbis ultimately find a way to argue that the Sinai event and the Shavuot observance coincide. We'll untangle the threads of that argument later.

The first instance of a variant of our phrase occurs in connection with Shavuot, at Lev 23:14a, which reads 'You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day (*ad etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*). The day referred to is Shavuot and the issue of the time interval between the first spring harvest and the festival is one of the constraints the rabbis must contend with in order to associate the two. We'll explain their solution as a part of unraveling the larger Shavuot puzzle. For now, I'll note that, first, the variant at the beginning of the countdown to Shavuot draws further explicit attention to it. Secondly, Shavuot had an important connection to revelation for the writers of early Jewish apocalyptic literature. Thirdly, the larger meaning of its marking by our scribe is a critical element in understanding the message of the hidden bones. And lastly, this understanding of the preposition *ad* is prospective; it is forward-looking; it points toward a day in the future. We'll see that it can also have a retrospective meaning, looking backward toward or over a time that has passed. In either case, it is distinguished from our marker phrase for which the timing is current i.e. 'on' as opposed to 'to' or 'until'.

That our scribe feels very strongly about Yom Kippur is signaled by his marking of three consecutive verses in the biblical account. No other day is accorded that level of emphasis and that emphasis is enough to fuel reams of exegesis about the hard and solemn and afflicted nature of that day. No day is more evocative of the dread of divine disfavor. If our scribe had not marked it, we would wonder why not. But Yom Kippur has another dimension as well. It is the one day of the year most strongly associated with priestly activity, and specifically with the duties of the high priest. The special emphasis our scribe gives it tells us something about his attitude towards priests and priestly matters, as well as about temple matters generally. He was positively disposed toward both. But Yom Kippur signals something else also. The essential presupposition of Yom Kippur is that outcomes, at least at the individual level – and that distinction is important - can be altered.

Atonement is meaningless if outcomes cannot be altered. Confession, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation – all of these presuppose the ability to right past wrongs, to regain lost favor, to restore prior position. Why is that such a critical matter for us? Because it is contrary to the notion of a type of determinism that we will find in other writings we will review later. It will help us to compare the message of our scribe to that of other important voices.

We'll come back to each of the three marked observances later. There is more to say about them and more to learn from them. But we'll move on to the other events with the final note that each of these observances requires continuing, active remembrance of, and affirmative attachment to, the crucial foundations of peoplehood: covenant, liberation, revelation and reconciliation.

It is an understandable clerical impulse to launch into emotional homily on the subject of the death of Moses. The image of the beloved leader, the instrument of the people's liberation, trudging slowly and alone up the mountain to die, as the entire people watches helpless from below, is irresistible. The poignancy of his death *al pi Adonai*, understood to mean with a kiss from God, is sure to

elicit anguished empathy. But that just as certainly misses the point. History has read back onto the relationship between Moses and the people a level of affection and an emotional bond that the text simply does not bear out. If we compare the reaction of the people to Moses' death at Deut 34:8 with the reaction to Aaron's death at Num 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 does not appear to warrant any special observance at the time, nor has later Judaism marked the day of his death in any special way. Unlike similar figures in other traditions, there is no place that has become a site of periodic pilgrimage and remembrance.

Later Judaism developed a far more emotional interpretation of the connection between the people and *Moshe Rabbenu* – Moses, our Teacher. The text of Deut 34:10 is for many the first that comes to mind when he is the subject i.e. 'Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face'. But 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 a portrayal of Moses that is either affectionate or anguished. 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 a sense of personal loss at his absence. Almost all references in Joshua fall into two categories. They either associate Moses with the law or the giving of the law. Or, they confer upon actions by Joshua the authority of prior instruction from Moses, particularly in support of the division of the land.

There are eighteen later books of the bible in which Moses is not mentioned at all (counting the 12 minor prophets individually). Where he is mentioned, most references are in phrases either identifying him as 'the servant of God' or in connection with the law, as in '*torat Moshe*', the law of Moses.¹² Among the major 'writing prophets' Moses is mentioned in Isaiah only once, in Jeremiah only once, and not even once in Ezekiel.

While later tradition has made much of Moses, the person, and a sense of him as affectionate and caring shepherd has become a part of the modern mindset, the message our scribe conveys by a reference to Moses' death is a message of the primacy of the law; particularly of the law as expressed in Deuteronomy. For our scribe he is not Moses the prophet, he is Moses the lawgiver, and that view of Moses will provide another means of distinguishing the message of our scribe from that of other voices.

It is difficult not to see the marked text in Joshua as the mirror of the marked text of Noah. In Joshua 5:11 the people, for the first time, eat and are sustained by, the produce of the promised land. In the Genesis account, Noah and his family enter the ark, which will sustain their lives. In Joshua 5:12, 'the manna ceased', removing the safety net it had provided during the desert years. That finds a clear parallel in God's shutting the door of the ark. There is no turning back, in either case. The land that has been promised has now been given. God has fulfilled a covenant promise that began with Abraham and was elaborated and expanded upon through the period of the patriarchs and at Sinai.

But the Joshua event serves a larger purpose also. It ties back to and, in a sense completes, the accounts of other marked 'days' as well. It immediately follows the account of the celebration of the first Passover in the land, which follows the account of the circumcision of all the males among the people, which follows the account of the crossing of the Jordan. The ark containing the law, 'the

¹² There are several, more substantive references e.g. Josh 24:5, 1 Sam 12:6, 1 Sam 12:8, Psalm 77:21 and Psalm 99:6 that mention Moses' role in the people's redemption. Interestingly, those tend to dilute his legacy somewhat by consistently mentioning both Moses and Aaron.

covenant of the Lord', was carried across the Jordan by the priests as the waters of the river parted to allow it to cross 'on dry ground'. All of these echo prior marked events. If we think of the prior biblical accounts as building an ever-increasing energy and momentum toward the fulfillment of the covenant of the land, we can see all of that energy being, in a sense, received and resolved in the first chapters of Joshua.

The first day the people were sustained from the produce of the land; the last day they were provided the miraculous manna; is arguably as pivotal a historical transition as the Exodus, but its fundamental message is not historical. It is covenantal. It is another demonstration of God's faithfulness to the covenant. It is now for man to demonstrate his faithfulness, and that does not end well.

The text of Joshua contains another instance of the '*ad etzem*', variant of the marker phrase. It is found in Joshua 10:27 where it marks the end of the story of Joshua's defeat of the five Amorite kings and it looks back from the presumed time of authorship over the period that has passed since the bodies of the five kings were entombed in a cave. But the association of importance is not with the slain kings, it is with God's facilitation of the Israelite victory. Specifically, the day on which Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, the day that is described in 10:14 in these words: 'There has been no day like it, before or since, when the Lord heeded a human voice...' The text itself testifies to the uniqueness of the day, but have we not seen in prior accounts God responding to the voice of Moses? This account certainly reinforces the idea of God's willingness to act in furtherance of the covenantal promise, but it does not actually add a new element to the message. If our scribe found a phrase already in the text to adapt to his own needs, this might have been it, but we can only speculate on that point.

Six of the first eight days marked by our scribe occurred in a brief period of just over 40 years, from the Exodus to the Joshua event. After the time of Joshua 5:11, over six hundred years would pass before the word of the Lord came 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'. The siege, of course, ended in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and of the temple and in the exile of much of the population of Judea to Babylonia. The writing down of the day the siege began allowed the prophecy to be later verified by those arriving from the destroyed city.

During those long intervening centuries, the promised land was secured and apportioned (more or less). The era of the judges, who ruled in those early years, declined into a condition Alter describes as 'unbridled lust, implacable hostility and mutual mayhem'. The Book of Judges ends with the statement that 'In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes' (Judges 21:25) which is a repetition of the same statement found at Judges 17:6. The leadership model that relied on judges had failed. That leadership vacuum led to the selection of a king, allowed by Deuteronomy but with an apparent reluctance. The unified kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon survived only 120 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 king would not be seen again until the Hasmonean era.

During the six centuries prior to 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 according the law of Moses. During most of that long period they 'did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord' – the text's standard description of illicit behavior. There were some periods, notably under the reformer kings Hezekiah and Josiah, when they 'did what was pleasing to the Lord' but more often that was not the case. The account of Ezekiel leading up to his vision at 24:2 makes it clear that the reason for the fall of the city and the temple; the reason for the loss of the promised land and the exile; was the failure of the people to adhere to their responsibilities under the covenant. The Talmud in Tractate Yoma 9b quotes the Tosefta as attributing the fall of the first temple to three things: idol worship, illicit sexual relations, and bloodshed. There is no ambiguity about the message of this

marked event. And it is obvious that if one were to choose a set of the most consequential events in the biblical account and the history of the people, this one would have to be included.

The third instance of the 'ad etzem' variant of the phrase is found in Ezekiel 2:3 in which the prophet writes that God spoke to him saying 'Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me, they and their ancestors has transgressed against me to this very day (*ad etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*)'. As was the case in the Joshua variant, the preposition in this phrase is understood as retrospective. It is a part of the long accusation, judgement and justification narrative that culminates in the marked verse at 24:2. It does not add meaningfully to the message, although it reinforces it, and it might also have been a source, or the source, of the marker itself.

As I write this we are in the period of 'the three weeks' according to the Jewish ritual calendar. This period will end on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, on which Jews mark the destruction of Solomon's temple, the destruction of second temple, the expulsion of Jews from Spain and other horrific events in Jewish history. During this period, we read prophetic passages from the Book of Jeremiah reminding ourselves that warnings of disaster were given and unheeded. It is rabbinically tempting to resort to the poetry of pain and loss in discussion of the temple's destruction, and on Tisha B'Av the Jewish community does that, reciting the Book of Lamentations and engaging in mourning practices; weeping and reciting *kinnot*, - poetic elegies and dirges of loss. But in any clear-eyed view of the biblical account, the significance of the event that Ezekiel writes of in 24:2 is straightforwardly covenantal. God had fulfilled God's covenant promises. The people had not fulfilled 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 forfeit. But the covenant is perpetual and the last of the ten marked days makes that point.

The final variant of our marker phrase is actually in the marked phrase itself. That variant, the only one of its kind, does not include a preposition at all. Its initial element is the non-word, 'et', which is the direct object marker in Hebrew. It is not translated. The first part of the verse reads 'Mortal, write down the name of this day, this very day (*et etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*)'. Here the variant is emphatic, rather than temporal. Found in the same verse in which the marker phrase itself is found, it creates a hyper-emphatic reference, raising the volume of the scribe's voice, so to speak, in a way similar to his emphasis on the Yom Kippur observance. The justification of the vision of destruction and exile is unquestionable.

Twelve years after Ezekiel's vision in 24:2 was confirmed; that is, after word came that the city and the temple had fallen and that the siege had begun on the day of the Ezekiel's vision; the prophet has the experience he writes of in our last marked event at 40:1. This event is not only a vision. Ezekiel tells us '... 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 40:1b-2a) It is important, as we will see, that this event involves not only a divine communication but the movement of the prophet in an otherworldly plane, both of which are characteristic of apocalypse.

This marked passage is the beginning of the long account in Ezekiel 40-48 in which he receives very detailed information regarding the specifications of a new temple, a rebuilt Jerusalem and a reunited people returned to their promised and re-united land. The specifications are quite detailed and employ a highly symbolic mathematical and geometric vocabulary. The account treats not only the structures but also the staffing and management of the temple. The privileged position reserved for the Zadokite priests will be important for us in later discussion. As clear as it was that the city and the temple would fall, it is equally clear that God will once again 'remember' the people as he did at the end of the period of oppression in Egypt. There are indications throughout the Ezekiel text, many even before the vision in 24:2, that this will occur.

The first half of Ezekiel is almost completely accusatory and uncompromising, but in the midst of the harshly judgmental language there are some explicit statements that the period of desolation and punishment will be temporary. Ezek 16: 60-63, for example, has God telling the prophet that God will reaffirm the covenant, that the people will realize their error and be ashamed, and that God will ultimately forgive them. Again, in Chapter 20: 41-44 God's willingness to accept the people when they turn back to him is explicit. And between the markers of destruction in Chapter 24 and that 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'. And, immediately before the passage at 40:1 we find this in 39:25-29 '...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'. The last words of Ezekiel's prophecy are, speaking of the new Jerusalem of end times, 'And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There'. (48:35b)

The exile does end, of course, and some of the people do return. The temple is rebuilt but in no way does it conform to the vision. Jerusalem is restored but on a much smaller scale. It would be almost a century before the city wall was repaired under Nehemiah's leadership. The physical reality of these things, though, is not the point. Ezekiel's vision is of an eschatological end time. Its specifications are not constrained by the laws of physics. It is free of the bonds of time and space. It expresses heavenly mysteries in its mathematics and its imagery. Ezekiel 24:2 is a vision of a reality whereas 40:1 is a vision of an ideal, and in that it is a very appropriate final statement by our scribe and one that it is clearly expressive of the apocalyptic worldview. Collins, as a matter of fact, points specifically at Ezekiel 40-48 in

his analysis of Jewish apocalypse. In assessing Isaiah 66 he writes 'Much more typical is the tradition emanating from Ezekiel, which dreamed of a new Jerusalem, or a new temple, in terms that surpassed any historical reality'.¹³

The Essential Message

I interpret the essence of the scribe's message in this way:

God established a covenant with the line of Abraham.¹⁴ The covenant is perpetual. Each party has specific responsibilities. God performed God's covenantal obligations as demonstrated in the Exodus and Joshua events. Man's obligations following the Exodus are detailed in the laws of Moses, including the specific observances marked. Man will fail to follow those laws despite repeated warnings. Man will be harshly punished for his failure, but God stands always ready to accept man's repentance and return. Man will eventually turn back to God and God will accept and forgive man. The perpetual nature of the covenant will then again be demonstrated. A new age will ensue during which the law will be supreme, man will be faithful to it, and peace will reign forever.

Others might interpret the messages of the individual 'days' somewhat differently but, I think any differences, certainly at the level of the entirety of the message, would probably be only at the margin. The core theme of covenant seems inescapable to me. As do the markers of God's performance, man's failure, God's forgiveness, and the ultimate eschatological fulfillment.

¹³ Collins, J. *Apocalypse, Prophecy and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 2015. p163

¹⁴ The Noahide covenant is with all mankind, including the line of Abraham, but subsequent marked events are specific to the Abrahamic line.

It is a matter of observable fact that the marker phrase is in the Hebrew text and that it is only found in the locations I've indicated. Its hiddenness in the English translations is also objectively verifiable. We'll come back to the issue of hiddenness and consider other aspects of that question shortly. First, though, I need to make the initial argument that the core message is an apocalypse.

Initial Analysis - The Marked Passages as an Apocalypse

John J. Collins writes in his Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature that it 'has been recognized as a distinct class of writings since the work of Friedrich Lucke in the early nineteenth century'.¹⁵ He also notes there the complexity and diversity of the works that are considered to represent the genre. It was not until 1979 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. That committee acknowledged that none of the texts accepted by it as apocalypses exhibit all of the elements of the definition published and a subsequent expansion of that definition.

If not for the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Christian canon, apocalypse as a literary genre might not exist. Revelation is also known as The Apocalypse of John or simply The Apocalypse and it is from the perspective of that text that all others now included in the genre have been historically viewed. Its more common title indicates its most essential characteristic i.e. it is a revelation, which comes from the Greek word meaning an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known.

This is the formal 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*.¹⁶ 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*

¹⁵ Collins, J. Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids.1984. Kindle Edition. Loc 90

¹⁶ Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre. John J Collins, ed. Society of Biblical Literature. 1979. p9

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.'

The SBL committee, according to Collins, also identified two main types of apocalypses: those with and without 'an otherworldly journey'. It also found that that 'All the Jewish apocalypses, which have no otherworldly journey have a review of history in some form, and so they may be conveniently labeled Historical Apocalypses.'¹⁷

Let's start with those formal specifications and observations to begin our discussion of the character of the message. We can, without real controversy I think, make these points:

- 1) Our scribe's message is unique in that it is conveyed by reference to existing texts. If we accept the biblical text itself as revealed, then excerpts from it must be accepted as revealed.
- 2) In the case of the marked passages in the Five Books of Moses, the source of the revelation is God. These instances of the message are not 'mediated'; they are direct revelations from God to man, in some cases through Moses. Or, so they are understood. In the case of the marked passages in Ezekiel, the source again was God and the revelation was directly to the prophet Ezekiel and through him to man.
- 3) The marked passage in Ezekiel 40:1 clearly relates a transcendent reality, an otherworldly journey, and begins a message of an eschatological and salvific or idyllic final age.
- 4) The scribe's message is more fully expressive of the genre than some other Jewish apocalypses. It has both an otherworldly journey and a review of history. The references to Noah, Abraham, the Exodus, the death of Moses, the entry into the land and the destruction of the temple represent a more complete review of history than most historical apocalypses.
- 5) There is no question that the message provides an interpretation of the present, as experienced at the time of the scribe, by reference to history, and that it is intended to influence understanding and behavior.
- 6) It is true that the message of the scribe is not in narrative form, but my argument is that that was the point. The scribe did not want to create a separate narrative. The unusual means of delivery does not disqualify the message as an apocalypse. It points to the brilliance and subtlety of the messenger.

¹⁷ Collins. Daniel. Loc 132.

The scholars of the SBL committee created a classification system based on core characteristics of works generally accepted as apocalypses. Those characteristics are not rigid, though. They serve both as descriptive of works that are consensus members of the genre and benchmarks against which others can be analyzed for possible inclusion. Given the divergences in both form and content of even the consensus members of the genre, the classifications must be interpreted in fairly broad terms. But the approach taken by the committee, based on analysis of existing, recognized works, could not provide for or anticipate unique and previously unrecognized characteristics. The issues of narrative form and of the specific mechanisms of revelation that the committee considered could not have anticipated the message of our scribe. Collins does, though, indicate the degree of potential flexibility in the definition of apocalypse in a later work, where 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”’.¹⁸

The analysis of our scribe’s message against the elements of the SBL definition produces a strong argument for its interpretation as an apocalypse. But it is its message rather than its form that makes the argument. Because of the uniqueness of its form I decided that I needed to compare the message of the hidden bones against that of the other, generally accepted apocalypses and so I turned to that task, but in my study of the Ezekiel passages I had found that the Hebrew text of Ezekiel is meaningfully longer than that of its Greek version. That led me to look at the Greek versions of the verses that are marked in the Hebrew, and that opened a new, completely unanticipated and very exciting new understanding of hiddenness.

¹⁸ Collins. *Apocalypse, Prophecy and Pseudepigraphy*. p2

The markers are not in the Greek version of the biblical text! There are no 'bones' there. So, before we move onto our analysis of the other Jewish apocalypses, we need to look at the other versions of the biblical text that scholars term its 'witnesses'.

PART TWO

A Different View of Hiddenness – The Textual Witnesses

In the earlier discussion of hiddenness, I noted that the first English translation of the bible was made from Greek and Latin texts. The Greek version of the text, created in Alexandria, Egypt in the third century BCE,¹⁹ became the accepted bible of the Greek-speaking Jewish community and, later, of the early Christian communities. It is an extremely important version of the text and it varies from the standard Hebrew in meaningful respects. The Samaritan Pentateuch is another particularly important textual ‘witness’. Its importance is becoming better understood as the study of the texts found in the Judean desert focuses more closely on it. Its importance is well known among scholars, but it is hardly known at all among non-scholarly students of the bible, possibly because the first English translation is less than a decade old. The text of the Samaritan bible is very close to that of the Masoretic Text, but it also differs in meaningful ways, reflecting the different self-understanding of the Samaritan community.

We will first look at the three principal versions of the text: the Masoretic (MT), the Septuagint (LXX) and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). Then we’ll also look to other texts, including the Latin Vulgate and the Aramaic Targumim, and then at some of the rabbinic writings. Commonalities and differences among those texts and between them and the message of the scribe will help us better situate the marker phrase in the history of the text.

Our more detailed look at the question of when the phrase made its way into the MT will take us back to some of these other witnesses later. For now I’ll just note that more background is given on

¹⁹ That first translation effort was of the Pentateuch only.

the Samaritan Pentateuch because it is less well known than other texts and, therefore, requires more context.

The Masoretic Text – The Accepted Hebrew Text

The Masoretic Text (MT) is the version of the Hebrew Bible that has long been accepted as definitive. It is the Hebrew text found in all Hebrew Bibles in general use today and it has been the accepted version for two thousand years. Emanuel Tov tells us that the base text of the MT was accepted as 'authoritative by all Jewish communities...probably in the first century CE'.²⁰ That first-century text did not look like the one we see when we open a printed Hebrew Bible today. At that time the text was still 'consonantal'; that is, it did not include vowels, punctuation or marks that indicate how the text is to be interpreted and chanted. Those additions, along with detailed notes about the text, comprising the *Masorah*, or tradition, were not added to the text until hundreds of years later, although much of the tradition would have been known orally well before that time.

Expert scribes working in the area of Tiberias on the shore of the Galilee during the period from the sixth to the tenth centuries CE added the punctuation, vocalization and explanatory notes to the text. They were known as Masoretes and it is for them that the MT is named. The oldest complete text of the Hebrew Bible that we have today is known as the Leningrad Codex, which was produced in 1009 CE. It is the work of the scribal school of Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, who died in 960 CE. Ben Asher's views became accepted as the most authoritative of the Masoretic schools.²¹ An earlier text, known as the Aleppo Codex, produced in about 930 CE, was the oldest complete Hebrew Bible until it was partially

²⁰ Tov, E. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Third Edition. Fortress Press. Minneapolis. 2012. p 25

²¹ Even within the Masoretic community and tradition there were competing views on some matters regarding vocalization, punctuation, and textual transmission. It is said, for instance, that the scribal school of ben Naftali differed with the school of ben Asher on as many as 860 issues. Most were matters of minor punctuation, but the point remains that as late as the ninth century CE expert opinion was to some degree divided on these issues.

destroyed in 1947. It was also the work of the ben Asher school and possibly of Aaron ben Asher himself.

It is the MT that contains our scribe's marker phrase in the fourteen locations we've detailed, marking the ten special days. It also contains the variants discussed. It is to the MT that we refer when we speak of 'the Hebrew bible'. It is the text that became the MT that our scribe 'marked' and the distinction is one that needs to be stressed. As we'll see, there came a time when a choice was made: which text would be accepted? Which text would become the MT? Which pre-MT or proto-MT text would the rabbinic authorities of the late Hasmonean or early Roman period embrace?

If the consonantal text of the bible was fixed by about the first century CE - and that is the accepted view, although some believe it was fixed two to three centuries earlier - the text that the Masoretes worked from to create it had been accurately maintained for hundreds of years. The meticulous rules and practices of the scribes responsible for that accuracy were collected in a book called *Masseket Soferim*. The absolute devotion to accuracy is clear in the provisions of that book. If the consonantal text of the MT is an accurate transmission of the first century text, we can conclude that the marker phrase was in the text at least by that time.

But the text that became the MT had undergone a significant process of editing for centuries prior to being finalized. The textual tradition from which the MT grew was, as the scholars put it, 'pluriform'. That is, there were differing versions of the text in use even among the Jews in the area of Palestine in the centuries just before the common era. And there were other versions in use to the east, in the area of Babylonia, and to the west in Egypt. Jan Joosten finds that 'The western diaspora (Egypt) appears to have had beliefs and traditions that diverged from those of Jews in the homeland (Judea) or

in the eastern diaspora (Babylonia)'.²² Robert Boling, in his Anchor Bible analysis of Joshua is more specific: 'It is now clear' he writes 'that the text of the Hebrew Bible was being developed by scholars in each of the three great centers of Jewish population (Egypt, Palestine, Babylonia), not in total isolation but with a high degree of independence.'²³ And Emanuel Tov in a recent paper writes 'For the Torah alone, I count some ten different textual branches from the third century BCE onwards while for other books we witness only one, two or sometimes three textual branches'.²⁴

The discovery of the texts of the Judean desert, principally the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the mid-twentieth century has added greatly to our understanding of the history of the biblical texts. The discoveries at Qumran have gained the most popular attention, but there were other locations in the desert from which important finds have also been recovered. While no full text of the bible was found in the desert, two virtually complete copies of the book of Isaiah were found at Qumran. The text of those copies of Isaiah is virtually identical to the Isaiah of the MT, which suggests that little or no editing occurred on that specific text, from the time of Essenes at Qumran to the work of the Masoretes hundreds of years later. It also confirms the level of care taken in copying the texts from which the Masoretes worked.

On the other hand, when portions of the Pentateuchal texts found in Qumran are compared with those found in other, non-Qumran desert locations, there are differences. The non-Qumran texts more closely correspond to the MT than do those found in Qumran. In fact: 'All the 25 texts that were found in the Judean Desert at sites other than Qumran display almost complete identity with codex L',

²² Joosten, Jan. 'Divergent Cultic Practices in the Septuagint'. *Journal of Septuagint and Cognate Studies* (48) Eisenbrauns. 2015. pp 27-38

²³ Boling, R. G. 'Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary' *The Anchor Bible*. Doubleday. Garden City. 1982. p109

²⁴ Tov, E. *From Popular Jewish LXX-SP Texts to Separate Sectarian Texts: Insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scroll*. Michael Langlois, ed. CBET 94. Peeters. Leuven. 2019. p19

finds Tov.²⁵ That tells us that there was some level of ongoing editing of the Pentateuchal texts in Qumran which is not evident in the texts found in the other desert locations. The biblical texts found in the non-Qumran locations such as Masada have been found to be uniformly 'proto-Masoretic' i.e. direct precursors of the Masoretic Text, which Tov also identifies as 'proto-rabbinic'. Tov has found that 'the relation between (the Leningrad codex) and the ancient Judean Desert texts is one of almost complete identity'.²⁶ The distinction between the proto-rabbinic lineage versus the Qumran lineage is very important to us, as we'll see as our study progresses. It helps us understand the mindset of our scribe.

Unfortunately, no full text of any verse that contains the marker phrase has been recovered from any of the desert locations. Texts that include portions of some of the verses have been found but none of those recovered portions is complete enough to show whether or not the phrase was a part of the text discovered. So, while the Judean Desert texts have been of tremendous value to biblical scholars in many respects, and will be of real help to us for other purposes, they do not provide direct physical evidence that the marker phrase either was or was not in the biblical text of that era.

But the marker phrase is clearly in the MT and there is strong evidence of the essential identity of the proto-Masoretic and proto-rabbinic text with the MT.

The Septuagint – The Greek Version of the Text

The Greek version of the biblical text is commonly referred to as the Septuagint and commonly abbreviated as LXX. The name comes from the tradition that seventy Hebrew scholars were responsible for the translation of the Hebrew text into Greek²⁷ and the abbreviation is the Roman numeral for the number seventy. Because the LXX is a translation, the question of its Hebrew source text, known to

²⁵ Tov, TCHB, 29. Note: Codex L is the Leningrad Codex.

²⁶ Tov, E. The essence and History of the Masoretic Text. Hebrew University. 2017. Pp7-26 [need publisher ref.]

²⁷ It is now believed that as few as five translators were actually involved but the older tradition persists. See Kim, H., "Multiple Authorship of the Septuagint Pentateuch" (PhD diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2007)

scholars as its *Vorlage*, is a critical one. The translation was done in Alexandria by Jewish scholars who had been invited by the Egyptian king, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who reigned from 283 to 246 BCE. It is reported that they brought the scrolls of the five books of Moses with them from Jerusalem. That first translation project would have occurred during the reign of Ptolemy and the years 275 or 250 are often cited for that work. Translation of the prophetic and wisdom books of the bible followed, but it was apparently well over a century before the entire project was completed. In fact, work on some of the books might have continued into the first century of the common era.

The Septuagint was the bible for Greek-speaking Jews. It later became the accepted text of the bible for the early Christian community and it remained so until Jerome translated the text into Latin between 390 and 405 CE. The LXX continues to be an important 'witness' to the early form of the biblical text and scholarly study of it has gained momentum in recent years because of similarities between the LXX and some of the important Qumran finds. The oldest surviving complete manuscript of the Septuagint is the *Codex Vaticanus*, which dates from the early fourth century CE. Fragments of the LXX text from as early as the first and second centuries BCE have been found, though. *Codex Vaticanus* is older than the Leningrad Codex by some 600 years. And although it is not in Hebrew, it was translated from Hebrew by Jewish scholars and so provides crucial insight into the Hebrew text available to those scholars in third century Alexandria.

It is important to stress that the lineage of the LXX traces to the *version* of the Hebrew text that the LXX translators worked from. The distinction is critical because scholars have concluded that the Hebrew text from which the LXX was translated was different from the Hebrew basis of the Masoretic Text. Note again Joosten's comment above regarding differences between the Jewish communities in Egypt and Palestine and Tov's finding of ten textual branches of the Torah. In some cases, we know that the base Hebrew text of the LXX is an earlier version than that of the MT. In others, though, it is almost certainly later.

That the Hebrew basis of the LXX is different from that of the MT can be shown through analysis of text and language, by comparison to external sources and by evidence of translation and scribal practices. The details of those technical and scientific analyses are not required for our argument. How can scholars determine that some elements of LXX are earlier than MT? Fortunately, there are some fairly straightforward indications. The MT version of the Book of Jeremiah, for example, is about 15% longer than the LXX version, the MT version of Ezekiel is about 5% longer and the MT of Joshua is about 5% longer. When one version of a text is longer than another it is more reasonable to conclude that material was added to the longer text after the shorter one was finalized, than to propose that the longer text was later truncated. But the differences between LXX and MT also point in the other direction in some cases. The LXX of the Book of Daniel contains several lengthy elements that are not in the MT version of the book, for example, which suggests that the LXX text of Daniel was stabilized at a date later than that of the MT. That is not unexpected since, as we will see, the MT of Daniel was one of the last texts in the Hebrew bible to be finalized. The conclusion that the LXX and MT come from different source texts and that elements of each developed differently over time is enough for present purposes.

If the base texts of MT and LXX were different, and LXX is a key textual lineage, we are bound to ask whether it, like the MT, contains our scribe's special marker phrase. More accurately, we must ask whether the Hebrew from which it was translated contained the phrase. Since we do not have the Hebrew we can only look to the translation as a guide. Doing that, we can say:

- 1) the Greek translation of the marked verses do not contain a Greek word that is the equivalent of the Hebrew *etzem*,
- 2) the Greek translation of the marked verses contain no common phrase that is uniquely or even systematically associated with those ten days, and

3) the Greek translation does not include any element that otherwise conveys the hyper-specific or hyper-emphatic structure of the Hebrew phrase. Five of the LXX instances do suggest a moderate level of specificity using *kairos* (Gen 17:23 & 26) *ekeinos* (Ex 12:51 and Ezek 40:1) or *apo* (Ezek 24:2).²⁸ But there is neither the consistency nor the emphasis of the markers in the MT.

The Greek translation supports the assumption of an underlying Hebrew text that is the equivalent of *ba'yom ha'zeh* or *ha'yom ha'zeh* or *ba'yom ha'hu*, for example; each of which could be translated 'on that day' or 'on that same day' or 'on that very day'. And that is how the English translation of the LXX is commonly given.

There is nothing in the LXX that, in any literal way, duplicates or is even suggestive of the presence in the Hebrew source of a phrase like *b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*. That realization, that the Hebrew foundation of the LXX was earlier than the MT and showed no indication that the marker phrase was present in it, took this study in an unexpected but unavoidable direction.

We cannot know with certainty how a Jewish scholar in the third century might have translated the marker phrase into Greek. But we do know that the phrase is unusual; it would draw the eye of any scholar looking closely. And, if there were multiple translators working on the text, whether seventy or just five, it is hardly likely that none would feel the need to make some kind of literal rendering of the phrase or, at minimum, otherwise indicate some sort of hyper-specificity. In fact, Albright, in a 1975 paper on the early evidence from Qumran notes that the fidelity of the LXX to the 'Hebrew prototype is much greater than has often been assumed. We now know that... the Greek translators were almost slavish in their literalism'.²⁹

²⁸ We will find a similar pattern in the Latin Vulgate, which we will discuss.

²⁹ Albright, W. F. *Early Recensions of the Hebrew Bible. Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*. Cross and Talmon, eds. Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 1975 p142

The most likely conclusion is that the Hebrew sources³⁰ from which the LXX was translated did not include the marker phrase.

Emanuel Tov's analysis clearly leaves the door open to that possibility. 'The special character of the *Vorlage* of the LXX seems to be related to two factors or a combination of them: (1) the idiosyncratic Hebrew manuscripts used for the Greek translation were *not* embraced by the circles that fostered MT; and (2) the relatively early date of the translation enterprise (275–150 BCE), involving still earlier Hebrew manuscripts, could reflect vestiges of earlier editorial stages of the biblical books.'³¹

Absent physical proof that the phrase was not in the LXX *Vorlage*, there is some, probably small, chance that the LXX translators, like Milgrom, considered the phrase simply a 'stylistic' element of the text not requiring literal translation. It is hard to credit the idea, though, that no indication of its unusual nature would be found in any of the locations where we find it in MT.

If not for the understanding that the marker phrase found its way into the text at some point later than the middle of the third century, I would probably have never looked closely at the Samaritan Pentateuch. I don't recall its ever coming up in my rabbinic studies. But it provides key evidence of timing as well as important overall context for the second temple period.

The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP)

³⁰ The LXX source would have been a collection of individual scrolls, some of which might have been the same as those that formed the basis of the MT, others would have been different. Not all would have even been completed at the time of the LXX translation of the Pentateuch.

³¹ Tov, E. 'The Nature of Large-scale Differences Between the LXX and MT S T V, Compared with Similar Evidence in Other Sources.' In 'Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible, and Qumran: Collected Essays' Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2008 pp 155-170

Only in the past several decades has the importance of the Samaritan Pentateuch as a textual witness on a par with the MT and the LXX been recognized. The texts discovered in the Judean desert include materials similar to the SP in a concentration that is second only to MT texts. Those discoveries and their implications are still making their way into mainstream biblical understanding. The SP is still not well known outside scholarly circles. That might be attributed to the fact that the first English translation is less than a decade old.³²

The Samaritan community is tiny; currently fewer than one thousand individuals. Most of them reside in the west bank city of Nablus, near Mt. Gerizim, and in the Israeli city of Holon and there is a significant diaspora community of Samaritan descendants. Some are aware of and acknowledge their heritage and some are not. The roots of the Samaritan population are a subject of dispute. Their own view is quite different from that of many scholars, but the details of that dispute are not critical to us. It is beyond dispute that the geographical and spiritual center of the community is and has been Mt. Gerizim. And it has probably been so since at least the early post-exilic period – the middle of the fifth century BCE, or so.

The original Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim was probably constructed in the fifth century and then significantly expanded in the late third or early second century, probably during the reign of the Seleucid Greek, Antiochus III. There are few sources that document the early history of the Samaritan community and those sources conflict in important ways. While it seems that the community was large, probably larger than that of Judea during the early period after the return from Babylon, archeological efforts have not recovered any substantial Samaritan literature. Inscriptions on papyrus fragments,

³² Tsedaka, B. and Sullivan, S. eds 'The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah: The First English Translation Compared to the Masoretic Text' Eerdmans. 2013

ceramics, building stones, coins, etc. confirm that the Samaritans³³ and Judeans 'wrote and spoke the same language'³⁴ during the late Persian and Hellenistic periods.

The Samaritan and Jewish communities coexisted, occupying adjacent territories and interacting more or less closely for a long period after the return of the exiles. Both were Yahwist religiously, worshipping the God of the Pentateuch and sharing 'a basic set of common sacred writings'.³⁵ There is evidence of cooperation between the priestly elites of the two groups. Knoppers has concluded that 'The textual and literary evidence from within the Pentateuch shared by the Judeans and Samaritans indicates that the Pentateuch was ultimately a compromise document, a work that could...function as scripture for both communities'.³⁶ The Samaritans accept only the Pentateuch, however. They do not recognize the prophetic and wisdom books of the Hebrew bible.

Some suggest that the Samaritan refusal to recognize the prophetic and wisdom books was a stance taken by that community to distinguish itself from the Judeans at the time the two communities severed discretionary ties. The separation of the two communities and events surrounding or stemming from it, give us important means to pursue our study.

The Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim was destroyed by the Hasmonean king, John Hyrcanus, in the late second century. The consensus date for that event has long been 128 BCE, however, recent archeological evidence suggests that a somewhat later date of 111 or 110 BCE is more likely. At the same time, Hyrcanus destroyed the community around the temple and, shortly thereafter, the

³³ The term Samaritans is used to generally refer to the inhabitants of the territory known as Samaria. The Samaritans, in contrast, are a religiously identified group within the Samaritan population.

³⁴ Knoppers, G. 'Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations.' Oxford University Press. Oxford 2013, p110.

³⁵ Knoppers. Jews and Samaritans. p173.

³⁶ Knoppers. Jews and Samaritans. p212

Samaritan capital city of Shechem. The destruction of their temple was the defining event in the Samaritan history during the era of the second Jerusalem temple.

Some believe the sharp divide between the Samaritan and Judean communities resulted from the destruction of the Mt. Gerizim temple; others believe the two roughly coincided, but without suggesting cause and effect; still others believe the separation of the communities happened gradually over time. But the two communities were apparently seen by others as one nation even at the time the second book of Maccabees was written in 124 BCE.³⁷ To the Persian, Ptolemaic, Seleucid and Roman rulers of the area, the territory of Judea included that occupied by both the Jews and the Samaritans. Since the two communities also spoke the same language, worshipped the same god in much the same way and held many other customs in common, they seemed to be a single people to the eyes of an outsider. Certainly, there was not enough difference to warrant a third-party power treating them as separate peoples. They certainly saw themselves as different in meaningful ways, though, but that did not prevent the close association suggested by Knoppers. The two communities also had in common the fact of governance by those outside parties, which would have made some cooperation helpful.

There is no question that there was tension between the communities, however. We know from the Jewish scribe and teacher, Joshua ben Sira, writing in early second century BCE Jerusalem, that the educated elite of Judea apparently looked down on the Samaritans. Ben Sira writes 'With two nations my soul is vexed, and the third is no nation. Those who live on Mount Seir, and the Philistines, and the foolish people that dwell in Shechem,' (Ben Sira 50:25-26) The 'foolish people' who constitute 'no nation' living in Shechem are, of course, the Samaritans. But it is now understood that some level of cooperation, at least on practical matters that would necessarily arise between communities occupying adjacent lands and answering to the same rulers, continued well into the common era.

³⁷ Pummer, Reinhard. 'The Samaritans: A Profile' Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 1987. p 48-49

An irrevocable divergence of interests, though, certainly did occur, and that divergence was apparently triggered by the destruction wrought by John Hyrcanus. It is also in the late second century, or early in the first, that scholars believe the SP, as we now have it, was finally redacted. The process of SP creation was probably a long one, though. Anderson and Giles suggest that a large number of the expansions in the SP must have been made after the mid-third century LXX translation, but that some significant expansions, including the important expansion of the tenth commandment, do not yet appear in some Qumran scrolls.³⁸

The expansions referenced above are additions to the text, relative to the other textual witnesses, that convey information or ideas central to the Samaritan self-understanding and distinguishing them from the Jews. Most notably that understanding identifies Mt. Gerizim as the place chosen by God ‘to make his name to dwell’, in the familiar formula of Deuteronomy, as opposed to the Jewish understanding of that place as Jerusalem. In fact, the text of the SP uses a verb in the past tense in passages regarding the choice of place as opposed to the MT, which uses the future tense.³⁹ For the Samaritans, God’s choice was made before the people even entered the land. The choice of tense intends to leave no room for argument.

The Samaritans also adopted a distinctive script for use in writing that is quite different from that used by Jewish scribes. That development is also dated to a time – roughly 100 BCE – that would be consistent with the idea that the destruction of the Samaritan temple, the separation of the communities and the final redaction of the SP all occurred within a span of only a few decades. Further textual distance is created between the two communities by the Samaritans’ adoption of spelling, pronunciation and grammar conventions that differ from the typical Judean Hebrew. All that said, there are still far more commonalities than differences between the MT and the SP. Some scholars point to

³⁸ Anderson, R and Giles, T. *The Samaritan Pentateuch*. Society of Biblical Literature. Atlanta. 2012. p 64

³⁹ The SP uses the Hebrew perfect tense. The MT uses the Hebrew imperfect.

'thousands' of variances but the majority of those reflect incidental differences in spelling and other scribal conventions. They do not affect meaning. When the elements of the text that are specific to Samaritan self-understanding are removed and the remaining text is compared to the MT, the two are found to be nearly identical.

James Montgomery, an early twentieth-century scholar of Samaritans and the SP wrote: 'Indeed it is not the disagreement that is remarkable so much as the great similarity of the two texts.'⁴⁰ And as Knoppers puts it: 'Book by book, chapter by chapter, sentence by sentence, and clause by clause, the two works are very close.'⁴¹ In another view, 'the Pentateuch has to be regarded as a common patrimony from the time before relations between the Judeans and the Samaritans became seriously aggravated in the last two centuries BCE'.⁴² So, to say that the Samaritans 'created their own Torah', which some do, is certainly to overstate the case. It is likely more accurate to say that the Samaritans edited a version of the text from among the versions that existed at that time and that they shared with the Judeans. The text of the Pentateuch was still in development during the post-exilic period and both the Judeans and the Samaritans probably influenced that development. It is likely that the priests and scribes of the two communities worked together at least on some matters. But when the two communities severed ties, the Samaritans moved to protect and promote their own separate identity. Creating a sacred scripture that reflected that identity, and as a vehicle for expressing their separate character and relationship with God, was an important element of that protection. The version of the text used by the Samaritans, then, might not have been identical with the version that became the MT, but it was certainly quite close.

⁴⁰ Montgomery, J. A. 'The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect: their history, theology and literature' Winston, Philadelphia, 1907 p299

⁴¹Knoppers, G. "Parallel Torahs and Inner-Scriptural Interpretation'. The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research. Dozeman, Schmid and Schwartz, eds. Mohr Siebeck..2011 p 513

⁴² Knoppers, Jews and Samaritans, p 188 [complete reference]

Before we address more specific matters, we should look at the state of the SP witness. The oldest extant copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch is the Abisha Scroll, which dates to 1065 CE,⁴³ making it roughly equal in age to the Leningrad Codex of the MT.⁴⁴ Because we lack physical copies from earlier times we have to look, as we did with the MT, to references to it in external sources. Timothy Lim⁴⁵ examines those external sources and finds clear references from the second century BCE to distinctions between the Samaritan and Jewish beliefs regarding the primacy of Mt. Gerizim versus Jerusalem. He notes passages in the writings of the historian Josephus that appear to identify the Samaritans and relate their distinctive beliefs and texts as early as that time. He acknowledges the consensus that the Samaritan text can be dated to the second century but concludes that we can know ‘nothing definitive’ about its timing because of a lack of sufficient evidence.

Knoppers, on the other hand, looking to the findings from Qumran, finds that ‘the SamP represents a new recension⁴⁶ of a particular text form that was available in the second-first centuries B.C.E.’⁴⁷ Tov, also examining the material from the desert discoveries, finds that ‘the earliest pre-Samaritan text is ... dated to the mid-third century BCE’.⁴⁸ He writes: “It is now assumed that the (SP-group) reflects a popular textual tradition of the Torah that circulated in ancient Israel in the last centuries BCE, in addition to the (MT-Group) and other texts.”⁴⁹

⁴³ Some date this later, to the thirteenth or fourteenth century CE. The Samaritans themselves believe it to be far older; the work of Abisha, the great-grandson of Aaron, the brother of Moses. That would date the scroll thousands of years earlier than either science or scholarship can attest.

⁴⁴ While the Samaritans are very confident of the completeness, accuracy and antiquity of the Abisha Scroll, a copy of the SP dating to 1204 CE, known as the *MS 6 (C)* scroll from the synagogue in Shechem, has been considered the central critical text by scholars.

⁴⁵ Lim, Timothy. ‘The Emergence of the Samaritan Pentateuch’. *Reading the Bible in Ancient Traditions and Modern Editions*. Society of Biblical Literature. 2017

⁴⁶ A recension is essentially a revision or version.

⁴⁷ Knoppers, G. *Parallel Torahs*.p523

⁴⁸ Tov, TCHB, 91

⁴⁹ Tov, TCHB, 79

The SP text that was of most value to scholars until recently was the 1918 edition by von Gall.⁵⁰ In 1994 a new critical edition of the text was published by Abraham Tal based on a manuscript from the synagogue in Shechem that dates to 1204 CE.⁵¹ An improved edition of that Shechem text was published by Tal and Moshe Florentine in 2010.

Three full-text comparisons of the SP and MT have been made in recent years. In 1965 Abraham Tsedaka and Ratzon Tsedaka wrote 'Jewish and Samaritan Versions of the Pentateuch - with particular stress on the differences between both texts'.⁵² In 2008 Mark Shoulson published 'The Torah: Jewish and Samaritan versions compared'.⁵³ And in 2013 Binyamin Tsedaka published the first English translation of the SP which also emphasizes the variances between the SP and the MT.⁵⁴

For our purposes, the key points of a review of those editions of the SP, and of previous ones, and of other sources that analyze the SP versus the MT, are these:

1. The text of the Samaritan Pentateuch contains the marker phrase in every location in which it occurs in the MT,
2. There are no occurrences of the marker phrase in the Samaritan Pentateuch except those that are also in the MT,⁵⁵ and
3. The variant of the marker phrase found in the MT at Lev 23:14 is also found in that location in the Samaritan Pentateuch.

There is a version of the Book of Joshua in the Samaritan tradition, but it was created much later than the period of interest to us; perhaps as late as the 14th century CE. Scholars believe it was created by weaving together the LXX of portions of Joshua with traditions from the Samaritan community. The material addressed reaches back into the Pentateuchal narrative as far as the account of Balaam and

⁵⁰ Von Gall, A.F. 'Der Hebraische Pentateuch der Samaritaner' Giessen: Topelmann, 1914-1918.

⁵¹ Tal, Abraham. 'The Samaritan Pentateuch: Edited according to the MS 6 (c) of the Shekhem Synagogue. Tel Aviv University, 1994.

⁵² Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Reuven Mas. 1961 – 1965.

⁵³ Shoulson, M. The Torah: Jewish and Samaritan Versions Compared. Evertime. 2008.

⁵⁴ Tsedaka interestingly adopts the typical English translations of the marker phrase e.g. 'that very day'

⁵⁵ Shoulson's comparison of the MT to the Shechem synagogue text was used here.

Balak, found in Numbers 22 – 24 in the MT; and forward through the times of Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander and Hadrian. Some of the source material appears to have been originally in Arabic and there are clear signs of Arabic influence in the text.

Oliver Turnbull Crane translated and published the text of the Samaritan Joshua in 1890. The verse that corresponds to the marked verse in the MT of Joshua is found in Chapter 17 of Crane's translation. It reads: 'And they kept the Passover at this time and ate unleavened bread from the new crop. And the manna ceased with their entrance into the land, and their eating of its crops and the fruit of its trees.'⁵⁶ The thrust of the text, as Crane has translated it, is certainly consistent with that of the MT but the lack of any hyper-emphatic or hyper-specific language is consistent with the LXX.

The SP can't provide a verification of the Joshua and Ezekiel verses, of course, but it is a critical witness as to the Pentateuch. It allows us to conclude that the base texts from which both the MT and SP were created must have included the marker phrase. They might not have been identical in all respects – but they might have been, in fact, the same base text. That is the view of the scholar Reinhard Pummer, for example.⁵⁷ Clearly, though, the marker phrase must have been there in each. The fact that there are no other instances of the marker text in either MT or SP, and that both include the instance of the variant at Lev 23:14 provide additional support for that conclusion.

The facts that the two communities diverged irrevocably after having been associated more or less closely for a very long time; that the Samaritans apparently adapted a version of a previously shared text to reflect their own self-understanding⁵⁸; and that they adopted methods of writing and conventions of spelling that further distinguished their texts from those of their neighbors; make it impossible to

⁵⁶ Crane, O.T. *The Samaritan Chronicle or The Book of Joshua Son of Nun*. Alden. NY. 1890 p50

⁵⁷ Pummer, R. *The Samaritans: A Profile*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 2016. p207

⁵⁸ The Samaritans might have created and maintained texts that reflected the critical differences between their views and the Judeans on the Samaritan-specific matters well before the project that melded those texts into the full SP.

believe that they would then make subsequent changes in their text to harmonize with any changes that the Judeans might have made later. Likewise, no changes to the text made later by the Samaritans would conceivably have been adopted by the Judeans.

Consider the level of animosity suggested by Josephus' report that in the first decade of the common era, "as the Jews were celebrating the feast of unleavened bread, which we call the Passover, it was customary for the priests to open the temple gates just after midnight. When, therefore, those gates were first opened, some of the Samaritans came privately into Jerusalem, and threw about dead mens' bodies,⁵⁹ in the cloisters...' (Antiquities 18:2) There could hardly be a more antagonistic act than to ritually defile the temple at the time of a major pilgrimage festival. Not only would the temple itself be made impure but so would any of the priests who might come into contact with the human remains. And this was more than a century after the destruction of the Samaritan temple.

If both the MT and the SP contain the marker phrase, it must have been in the text(s) from which both the MT and the SP developed – and it must have been there prior to the divergence of the two communities. That allows us to say that the phrase, which was apparently not in the texts used by the translators in Alexandria in the third century BCE, apparently was in texts in use in the Samaritan and Judean communities in the second century, prior to the time John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple.

That allows us to focus our attention on a relatively manageable and relatively well-documented period as we try to learn more about the time, the message and the identity of our scribe.

The Latin Vulgate

⁵⁹ Probably best understood as bones rather than bodies, though.

The earliest Latin versions of the bible were translations from the Greek, and they date to the second century CE. The first of those were made in North Africa and were not considered to be of high quality linguistically. They are generally known as the 'Old Latin' versions. Jerome, a priest, theologian and saint of the church (347-420 CE) made the first Latin translation that was directly from the Hebrew. That translation, completed over the period 390 CE – 405 CE, became known as the Vulgate, and was the accepted 'bible' in Christian Europe for nearly 1000 years. The oldest surviving manuscript dates to about 700 CE and is known as the *Codex Amiatinus*.

Jerome had previously translated much of the bible into Latin from the Greek Septuagint text. He sought to improve on that translation by working directly from the Hebrew. And, interestingly, for our purposes, he had at least two copies of a Hebrew text before him as he worked. One, which was his principal source and the second that was a Hebrew text included in a work by the church father, Origen, which was called the Hexapla. The Hexapla, completed in the first decades of the third century CE, was a six-part comparative text of the bible arranged in parallel columns. The first column contained a version of the Hebrew text, the second was a transliteration of the Hebrew text in Greek characters, and the remaining four columns contained four versions of the text in Greek, one of them being the Septuagint.

We do not know what Hebrew text Jerome worked from and we do not know what Hebrew text Origen included in the Hexapla. Unfortunately, the Hexapla itself was largely destroyed in the mid-seventh century CE. Surviving scraps do not include any of the Hebrew. The fact that Jerome had at least two Hebrew texts to work from at a time when the rabbinic period was well underway makes a review of the Vulgate necessary for us. According to Alexander Sperber, Jerome also had a copy of the SP to further aid his translation and, if that was the case, it makes Jerome's work even more important.

Jerome was a gifted and experienced translator. He had multiple sources to draw from. He had been charged by Pope Damasus to take a conservative translation approach, seeking accuracy and

clarity in reproducing the words and the sense of the text. By all accounts he was faithful to that charge. What does the Vulgate tell us about the text that is marked with our special Hebrew phrase? The Vulgate falls even shorter than the Septuagint in providing any confirmation of the presence of the marker phrase in the Hebrew texts from which it derived. In the Septuagint, we found Greek expressions that we might term at least emphatic: e.g. that would translate as ‘that very day’ or ‘that very same day’. But we didn’t find any ‘bones’ or anything that would add a descriptive element to the identification of the ‘day’ or ‘event’. In the Vulgate we do find some Latin expressions that are specific or modestly emphatic, but only in *some* of the instances where the marker phrase is found in MT. In five of the ten instances the Vulgate reflects no added emphasis or information at all.

For example: In Lev 23:21 Shavuot is merely ‘*hunc diem*’ or ‘this day’. In Lev 23:29 Yom Kippur is ‘*die hac*’, also a simple reference to ‘this day’. Moses’ death is at the command of God ‘*in eadem die*’ which is a specific but non-emphatic ‘*on the same day*’ reference. And so forth. In the Latin verses, as in the Greek, there is no systematic usage of any phrase that would suggest that the ten instances marked in Hebrew share something in common. Given Jerome’s specific charge of accuracy, the Vulgate’s lack of emphasis suggests that the marker phrase did not appear in Jerome’s primary Hebrew text or in Origen’s version. But the consonantal text of the MT had been stable for at least two or three centuries and it’s nearly impossible to believe that Jerome would have had two Hebrew texts to work from, neither of which had the markers as they appeared in the MT. It seems more likely that Jerome’s translation in these instances was influenced more by the Greek versions before him than the Hebrew. That is, he simply did not understand the phrase in Hebrew to mean what it literally says. The Greek versions of the marked verses, which did not reflect the markers, would make for a much smoother transition to Latin than would the Hebrew, which would require a translator to confront and solve the problem of the markers’ meaning. It is intriguing, that there is some overlap – not perfect, but

noticeable – between the verses that have some emphatic nature in the Greek and those that have some emphasis in Jerome’s Latin.

We saw in the tradition of Jewish bible commentary that the views of earlier authorities affect the limitations within which later commentators work. The same principle is sometimes found in translation history. The four Greek versions available to Jerome didn’t require the problem of ‘bones’ to be solved. The absence of any literal acknowledgement of the phrase in the Vulgate does not prove that it was not in the Hebrew, though. It does raise an interesting question about a third layer of potential hiddenness. We’ve seen that hiddenness can result from the phrase actually not appearing in a version of the text. We’ve also seen that a tradition of interpretation can act to obscure the presence of the phrase. Now we must consider that a tradition of translation might also be a source of hiddenness.

We saw that medieval Jewish commentators could understand the Hebrew *etzem* in a literal sense as ‘bone’ or in a metaphorical sense as ‘essence’. It is at least possible that Jerome’s Hebrew text did contain the marker phrases but that his understanding of the phrase was primarily informed by the earlier Greek versions he had before him and that he had used in his earlier Latin translation.

It is possible that the weight of translation history might have overridden the plain meaning of the Hebrew. But that is speculation.

The Aramaic Targumim

The word ‘targum’ means translation. The various targumim (the plural form) are translations from the Hebrew to Aramaic. In the case of the text known as the Peshitta, the translation is into the Syriac dialect of Aramaic. Because Aramaic was the language commonly spoken in many parts of the Middle East for centuries, it was the language with which many were most comfortable. The practice for centuries was for the Aramaic translation of a public reading from the Hebrew bible to be recited after

the Hebrew, so that those hearing the reading would more easily understand it. The Babylonian Talmud (Berachot 8b) provides that individuals should read the weekly Torah portion twice in Hebrew and once from the Targum before the Sabbath. The Targumim are not primary sources but they do help us understand how their authors understood the underlying text and in many cases the translations depart from the literal in an effort to make the material more easily understood by the intended audience. They are interpretive translations; free rather than literal.

The most commonly known of the Targumim is that of Onkelos. It is still printed alongside the Hebrew in many bibles used in traditional Jewish communities. While there is evidence of early versions of Targumim from Qumran, final redaction of Onkelos is estimated to date to the fourth and fifth centuries CE, which would make that text roughly contemporaneous with the redaction of the two Talmudim. According to Tov⁶⁰ all of the Targumim reflect the medieval form of the MT. That suggests that they would have been created from a text that included the marker phrase. But none of them translates the verses in which the marker phrase is found in a way that reflects the *b'etzem* element literally. None of them understands the verses differently from the Septuagint or the Vulgate.

Alexander Sperber undertook a complete comparison of Targum Onkelos manuscripts against MT manuscripts in the 1930s. In 1934 he published an article that included a table of variances between the two.⁶¹ He did not identify any variance between the Targum Onkelos and the MT in any of the instances of the marker phrase that occur in the Pentateuch. But Sperber was, himself, acting as translator in deciding which Aramaic expressions were at variance from their Hebrew counterparts.

⁶⁰ Tov, TCHB, 149

⁶¹ Sperber, Alexander. "The Targum Onkelos in Its Relation to the Masoretic Hebrew Text." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 6, 1934, pp. 309–351. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3622282.

Sperber's interest went beyond the comparison of MT and Targum Onkelos, though, and in the same paper he reported on his analysis of varying texts of the Genesis passage regarding the age of Methusaleh. He found that Jerome, in his translation of the Vulgate, had more than one version of the Septuagint plus the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch before him. And there were significant differences among those sources. A translator in such circumstances must choose among the conflicting sources. Following along with Jerome's decision process Sperber concluded that it suggested: 'The agreement in the reading of a certain biblical passage between the Masoretic Text and any of the non-Masoretic texts is, therefore, no proof whatsoever, that this passage always read in this way.'⁴¹ - an interesting observation for us also in light of our discussion of the Vulgate.

While the Targumim were produced to make the biblical text more accessible to and understandable for those whose primary language was not Hebrew, it is not by accident that they are also known as 'the paraphrases'. The Targumim do not aim for hyper-literal reproduction of the Hebrew text. They aim for broad understanding and they engage in interpretation as a matter of course. In such circumstances a translation that includes an unusually placed expression might well have been rendered in more typical vernacular language. The absence of an *etzem-like* expression in the Aramaic cannot be seen as proving the absence of the phrase in the Hebrew. It proves only that the translator believed it was more appropriate to his task to use a different expression.

It is interesting that Nachmanides, the Ramban, specifically drew his interpretation of the marker phrase, which is not literal, via a line of tradition that passes through Targum Onkelos, a paraphrase.

Rabbinic Sources

We've previously referenced the early halachic midrash, *Sifre Deuteronomy* that specifically references the marker phrase in three locations in the Pentateuch. That confirms the presence of the phrase in at least one non-biblical Hebrew source from the first century, or so, CE. Two other early midrashim also specifically reference and reproduce the phrase. The *Sifra*, which is a midrash on Leviticus, discusses two of the marker instances found in the passage regarding Yom Kippur.⁶² And the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael* contains the marker phrase in three locations that reference the Exodus event.⁶³

Sifre and the *Mekhilta* are thought to date to the first or second centuries CE; earlier than or roughly contemporaneous with the redaction of the Mishnah. *Sifra* is thought to be a third-century work; roughly contemporaneous with the Mishnah but earlier than the Talmudim. These three early halachic sources, referencing multiple instances of the marker phrase, confirm the view that the phrase was in the Hebrew early in the Common Era. But nowhere in the Mishnah, which is a much more important and comprehensive rabbinic work, do we find the marker phrase itself quoted.

The two Talmudim are later than the Mishnah; the Jerusalem Talmud by about 200 years and the Babylonian Talmud by about 300 years. So, neither will give us an earlier reference than the halachic midrashim cited above. It is still interesting to note, though, that there are very few specific references to the marker phrase in either Talmud. In both the phrase is found only in discussions of Passover and Yom Kippur, and not elsewhere.

In a fascinating discussion in Tractate Rosh Hashanah (18b) the Babylonian Talmud relates a discussion in which the first two verses of Ezekiel 24 are quoted. Here we would certainly expect to find our phrase – it is a part of the quoted passage. The two verses contain thirty Hebrew words, the last

⁶² Sifra on Parashat Emor 13.11; 14.3; 14.7; 14.8

⁶³ Mekhilta 12.40.1; 12.6.5; 12.17.2

three of which are *b'etzem ha'yom ha'zeh*. But the quote in the text of the Talmud contains only twenty-seven words. The marker phrase is omitted, and the omission seems deliberate.

At the time of the Babylonian Talmud's redaction the MT had been stable for several hundred years. The text of Ezekiel that the Talmudic discussion in Rosh Hashanah addressed undoubtedly included the marker phrase. An affirmative decision by the rabbinic redactors of the Talmud to truncate the Ezekiel quote must have been made. We cannot know whether the redactor felt it simply unnecessary, or if it was considered objectionable in some way. But it is also interesting to note that English translations of that Talmudic passage tend to present the verse as if the Hebrew were complete. That is, the additional emphasis we usually find in the English of Ezekiel is also in English translations of the Talmud, even though it is not in the quoted Hebrew. Those who translate the Talmud for English readers ignore the fact that the Talmud ignores the marker phrase! Such an obvious omission would typically draw at least a comment or question.

The relationship between the rabbinic sources and the marker phrase is complex. But the early midrashim know the phrase and for purposes of dating its presence in the text the later sources are interesting but not critical.

What is most interesting is that evidence from rabbinic sources suggests that recognition of the presence of the markers might not have been just passively ignored by the early rabbis – it is possible that it was actively resisted. And the reasons for that resistance are important.

Initial Indications of Timing

I began to look at the history of the other biblical and the rabbinic texts because the Greek version of the Ezekiel 24 verse did not seem to recognize the marker phrase. That took me first to the

other locations in the Greek text, which led me to the other texts and sources. To this point in our study, these are the things I think we can say with a high degree of confidence:

1. The marker phrase is in the MT, which has been stable since roughly the turn of the era. Rabbinic literature confirms its existence in some locations but does not allow us to propose an earlier date.
2. The Hebrew text from which the Greek Septuagint was translated in about 250 BCE does not appear to have contained the markers.
3. The Samaritan Pentateuch does contain the marker phrases in all Pentateuchal locations, just as it is found in the MT. The SP also contains the variant of the marker in the Leviticus 23 location just as in the MT.
4. The marker phrase must have been in the SP before the destruction of the Samaritan temple by the Hasmonean, John Hyrcanus in about 110 BCE. It must, therefore, have also been in the MT before that time. It is inconceivable that the Samaritans would have adopted such an editorial element from the MT after their temple was destroyed by Hyrcanus. It is equally inconceivable that the Judeans would have adopted a Samaritan editorial adjustment after that date.

Therefore, we can say with some confidence that the marker phrase made its way into the pre-MT text after 250 BCE but before 110 BCE. And, as it happens, that is the period during which early Jewish apocalyptic literature flourished.

We'll now turn to the early Jewish apocalypses to see how the message of our scribe compares.

