CHAPTER TWO

RABBINIC LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel 28:11–19 is found in rabbinic literature exclusively in haggadic contexts: the Palestinian Talmud, which contains far fewer haggadic traditions, for example, never cites the text, whereas the Babylonian Talmud records in several places traditions that use Ezekiel 28:11–19. Among those texts citing the lament over the King of Tyre, two strong traditions emerge. Each is developed by identifying the prince of Tyre, against whom the lament is addressed, with another biblical character: either Adam, the first man, or Hiram, the king of Tyre allied to David and Solomon. Those traditions that concern Hiram focus on hubris, false claims of divinity, and subsequent punishment for which Hiram (somewhat surprisingly) serves as an example. The Adam traditions, by contrast, are concerned to use the Ezekiel text to demonstrate Adam’s glory and wisdom prior to his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. We also find in this latter tradition a well attested tradition concerning Adam’s wedding to Eve.

The interdependence of the works of rabbinic literature means that we find common haggadic traditions concerning Ezekiel 28:11–19 throughout the corpus. In none of our rabbinic sources is the lament the text under discussion. Rather, it is always adduced to demonstrate a particular point of haggadah or to provide an example for the ongoing argument.

ADAM TRADITIONS

Those traditions that associate Adam with the figure of Ezekiel 28 cluster around two principal themes: first is the notion, widespread in rabbinic lore, that Adam possessed a superabundance of wisdom prior to his consumption of the fruit and expulsion from the garden—for which the phrase “You were one who seals a measure, full of wisdom” (Ezek 28:12) is

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1 Suspicion of the book of Ezekiel as a whole may be one reason why it was avoided in halakhah (the Palestinian Talmud cites Ezekiel only a handful of times). Secondly, the content of the lament does not lend itself easily to legal discussion.
repeatedly adduced in support. The second concerns a series of debates over the number of ‘canopies’ (ח contar) that God created for Adam in Eden, for which the list of precious stones (Ezek 28:13) is the nub of the discussion.

The most obvious way in which the lament over the king of Tyre of Ezekiel 28:11–19 is connected to the narrative of Adam in Genesis is through the liturgy. Ezek 28:13–19, 25 served as the reading (haftarah) that accompanied a reading taken from the Pentateuch (the seder), namely the account of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden (Gen 3:22 to 4:26), in the liturgical cycle employed in the synagogues of ancient Palestine (commonly referred to as the ‘triennial cycle’, though this is inaccurate). The place of the Ezekiel text (28:13–19, 25) within this liturgical cycle is established based on the appearance of the text in a collection of haftarot texts from the Cairo Genizah. The Ezekiel text appears under the heading ביחזקאל העם, ‘Behold the Man [Adam] in Ezekiel!’ so there was no mistaking in the mind of the compiler of this collection that the Ezekiel text spoke of Adam.

The connection between the portions read from the Torah and those read from the Prophets did not come about by happenstance. Rather, they were selected because some resemblance was perceived to exist between the two texts (b.Meg 29b); the correlation could be either verbal or thematic. In bringing these texts into a liturgical relationship, the haftarah could provide a springboard from which the homily could be developed. Many of the midrashim that we will encounter in what follows are structured around or presuppose the Palestinian liturgical cycle (e.g. Mekhilta de R.Ishmael, Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu, etc.).

Though the Palestinian cycle was known to the Babylonian Talmud (b.Meg 29b) and continued to be widely practised well into the middle ages, how far back the choice and arrangement of haftarot in the cycle goes cannot be known with certainty. There was a great deal of variation in the haftarot over time and between regions—even between one

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* Ezek 28:11–19 is not read in the Annual (i.e. Babylonian) Cycle.