Between the Prophet and his Prophecy: Ezekiel's Visionary Temple in its Historical Context

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We are accustomed to thinking of prophecies that address the future as timeless, and often do not ask ourselves to what extent these prophecies reflect the personal characteristics and style of the prophets or their time and place. In this article, I will examine one of many aspects of the transmission of prophecy from God to the people by means of God's prophets: the tension between the ahistorical sanctity that we customarily ascribe to prophecy, on the one hand, and the prophecy's connection to the prophet's own time, place, and personal outlook, on the other. To this end, I will examine Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the future temple (Ezek. 40–48). Despite the fact that this prophecy is God's revelation of future events, it is rooted in the conceptual world of the Neo-Babylonian period.¹

The prophecy of Ezekiel, uniquely among the later prophets, is organized chronologically. The time and place that the prophecy was received are known and mentioned explicitly in many chapters at the beginning of the book. We are therefore able to examine the relationship between the prophet and his context more clearly with regard to Ezekiel than with any other prophet.

Words with parallels in the language spoken in Babylon during this period appear frequently in Ezekiel's prophecy. Extant Mesopotamian sources enable us to identify many words and motifs that are analogous to contemporary Mesopotamian culture and reflect the richness of the language absorbed

by Ezekiel from his Babylonian surroundings. This shared semantic field is indicative of the influence of the surrounding Babylonian culture on the exiles from the Land of Israel, Ezekiel among them. This linguistic evidence is supplemented by the results of more recent research, such as archeological discoveries and Babylonian ritual texts. These texts include detailed descriptions of the structure and rituals of temples that were located in Ezekiel's Babylonian surroundings. Our discussion will focus primarily on Ezekiel chapters 40–48, which describe the prophet's vision of the future temple; for the reasons mentioned above, this subject is particularly pertinent to the examination of the interaction between the prophet and his surroundings.² For generations, Jews have yearned to build the future temple described in the closing chapters of Ezekiel, just as the first part of the book prophesies the First Temple's destruction. For example, the Malbim (Meir Leibush Wisser) concluded the introduction to his commentary to the book of Ezekiel by expressing his hope for the building of the prophesied temple:

I have built in the heavens, in my mind, to you my God in heaven, a Temple for you as the prophet envisaged it, it exists in my mind rebuilt. . . . I have measured the plans, as I have learned from your seer, with a wick of flax and a measuring rod, and I have solved the riddle. Hear the prayer of your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God! Let your eyes be upon this house night and day, to rebuild its destruction and raise up its ruins . . . and establish and build in high places your Temple, reveal it to us in your mercy, for our eyes are yearning and our souls are longing to establish it and build it, and to see it face to face.³

The longing throughout the ages for the building of the future temple, as described in Ezekiel's prophecy, lends an extra dimension to our search for answers to several questions: What is the nature of this temple? Is its prophetic description timeless or historically determined? Is it possible that our yearning for the building of a temple, in many ways, is reflective of the Neo-Babylonian period in which Ezekiel lived?⁴

In the following pages I will attempt to illustrate how the prophet Ezekiel's cultural context, including his familiarity with local Babylonian temples and the status of their priests, is reflected in the biblical text. The Neo-Babylonian temples offer us a meaningful context in which to situate some of the unique features of Ezekiel's description of the temple.

Ezekiel and his Babylonian Context

Ezekiel was not only familiar with the temples in his Babylonian context. He was also familiar, as he mentions, with the political events of his time. Ezekiel describes Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar's arrival in Jerusalem and the exile of Jehoiakim the king of Judah and his officers to Babylon (Ezek. 17:12–14), and records the breach of the treaty between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah (17:13).⁵ Ezekiel was also familiar with the methods of divination popular in his time (21:23–29). This can be inferred from his description of how the Babylonian king's decision whether to move the Babylonian army against Jerusalem or Amman was influenced by magical rites practiced in his day: "For the king of Babylon has stood at the fork of the road, where two roads branch off, to perform divination: He has shaken arrows,⁶ consulted teraphim,⁷ and inspected the liver"⁸ (21:26). The prophet points to these decisions as proof that God rules not only over the People of Israel, but also over all the rulers of the world. Recently, several scholars have pointed to additional connections between Ezekiel and his Babylonian surroundings.⁹ This scholarly trend continues to grow as additional findings illuminating Jewish life in Babylon are discovered.¹⁰

Ezekiel's Visionary Temple in its Babylonian Context

Archaeological discoveries of ancient structures and numerous documents, which reveal details of daily life in the temples of Babylon in the Neo-Babylonian period, illuminate, among other things, the period of the prophecy of Ezekiel. These findings even show that many aspects of the Neo-Babylonian temples from this period are reminiscent of Ezekiel's visionary temple.¹¹ A comparison of the temples in Babylon with Ezekiel's visionary temple reveals a common concern: the need to preserve the sanctity of the site.

Studies of the remains of the Ezida temple of Borsippa, among other sources, have provided considerable information on the rituals performed in the temples of Babylon.¹² This temple was in active use between the years 750–484 BCE, when it was the second most important temple in Babylon.¹³ The ruins of this temple were discovered in the nineteenth century at Birs Nimrud, a site located about one hundred kilometers south of modern Bagdad and twenty kilometers south of ancient Babylon. The temple was built at the end of the second millennium BCE and consecrated to the god Nabu, the servant-chronicler of Marduk, the head of the Babylonian pantheon. The temple was renovated

during the time of Nebuchadnezzar II, the king who destroyed the kingdom of Judah. Then at the height of its splendor, the temple continued to flourish at least until the beginning of the Persian period (the mid-sixth century BCE)—in other words, exactly the time of Ezekiel's prophecy: "In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, the fourteenth year after the city had fallen, at the beginning of the year, the tenth day of the month—on that very day" (Ezek. 40:1).

According to the dates specifically mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet lived at least twenty-five years in Babylon, from 597 BCE, when he was exiled to Babylon with Jehoiachin and thousands of other captives, until 573, the date mentioned in the opening verse of the prophetic section in chapters 40–48. It is reasonable to assume that Ezekiel was to a large extent aware of Babylonian temple practices in general, and the Ezida temple practices in particular, both because of his long sojourn in Babylon and because of the fact that temple activities spilled out onto the roads and the city centers, especially during the Babylonian holidays. In terms of the prophet's geographic proximity to the Ezida temple, it is not known exactly where Ezekiel saw the "vision of the future temple" in the final years of his prophetic career. His location is mentioned explicitly only at the beginning of his prophetic journey: "by the Chebar Canal" (Ezek. 1:1,3). Apparently, this was the Chebar Canal that bordered the city of Nippur on the Euphrates, southeast of Babylon, adjacent to the Ezida temple in Borsippa (the distance from Nippur to Borsippa is about one hundred fifty kilometers).

Many factors limit the validity of a comparison between the temples. Most significant is the disparity between, on the one hand, Ezekiel's presentation of a utopian vision, and, on the other, the picture of the actual historical reality of a functioning temple that emerges from the Babylonian documents. Nonetheless, we must not ignore the fact that Ezekiel's visionary temple differs in many ways from the Bible's descriptions of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon, as well as from the biblical descriptions of the Second Temple after the return to Zion. While neither contemporary Babylonian temples nor the Second Temple, then, can serve as direct models for the temple described in Ezekiel, the following examples do reveal an indirect connection between Ezekiel's prophecy and the physical context in which he prophesied, including surrounding Babylonian temples. The comparison of the biblical text with archaeological information about local temples in this period sharpens, highlights, and explains the unique characteristics of Ezekiel's visionary temple, as distinct from the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon, and clarifies how Ezekiel's prophecy was received by his local contemporaries.

Extant ancient descriptions of Babylonian temples provide details about their architectural structure and in several cases even provide their exact dimensions.¹⁴ It is possible that some were written, as in Ezekiel, as plans for future temples, rather than as descriptions of existing temples. These texts also include lists of priests and other functionaries who served in the Babylonian temples; it can safely be assumed that the Jews of Babylon were not familiar with the extensive lists that we have today. Nonetheless, these documents illuminate how contemporary temples worked, including detailed accounts of how priestly families divided their resources over the generations and the various ritual functions performed in the hundreds of different temple chambers.¹⁵ This information helps provide a context that brings to life the descriptions in Ezekiel's visionary temple.

The Temple Structure

Ezekiel's vision begins with the measurement of the wall surrounding the entire temple complex (Ezek. 40:5) and ends with a description of the same wall (42:20). This wall distinguishes the temple of Ezekiel from other temples described in the Bible. From this perspective, Ezekiel's temple is most similar to the Tabernacle, whose enclosure was surrounded by a wall with a simple gate (Exod. 27:9–16; 38:9–20). The wall in Ezekiel's vision, though, is wide and massive. Three gates lead to the area of the temple. The route through them is not completely clear, but it involves ascending flights of stairs and passing between recesses and a vestibule (40:6–38). The entrance area also included an additional space, unique to Ezekiel's temple, called the “vestibule of the gate” (40:39–40, 44:3, 46:2,8).¹⁶ In contrast, the detailed description of the Temple of Solomon includes but one verse (!) describing the inner enclosure (1 Kings: 6:36). This passage refers neither to a wall or gates, nor to a description of the means of entry and exit to and from the Temple. It thereby also lacks any reference to the chambers and pavement mentioned by Ezekiel (40:17–18), as well as additional details about the structures situated there (46:21–24).

Ezekiel is also unique in its depiction of the courts and their size. The circumference of the entire consecrated area is described in the following verses:

[A]nd he measured off the entire area. He measured the east side with the measuring rod, **500 [cubits]**—**in rods**, by the measuring rod. He turned [and] measured the north side: **500 [cubits]**—**in rods**, by the measuring rod. He turned [and] measured the south side: **500 [cubits]**—**in rods**, by

the measuring rod. Then he turned to the west side [and] measured it: **500 cubits—in rods**, by the measuring rod. Thus he measured it on the four sides; it had a wall completely surrounding it, **500 [cubits]** long on each side, to separate the consecrated from the unconsecrated. (42:15–20)

A unit of measure called rods (*kenim*) appears four times in these verses. This is a particularly large area, calculated, according to six cubits (*amot*) and one handbreadth (*tefah*) per rod (40:5), as 3000 by 3000 cubits (approximately 1500 by 1500 meters).¹⁷ In addition, Ezekiel's temple has two courts, an outer court (40:17), including large chambers intended for sacrifices, and a second, smaller inner (or lower) court (40:19) where the altar stands (40:47), reached by way of a network of gates and stairs (40:23–44). Structurally, the temple is divided into three parts: the portico (40:48–49), the great hall (41:1–2), and the Holy of Holies (41: 3–4).

Surprisingly, Ezekiel barely mentions the functions of these areas (in contrast to the descriptions of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon), instead describing in elaborate detail the measurements of the gates and passages. One possible understanding is that this detailed description, unique to Ezekiel, of the wall and the courts speaks to their importance: **sixty-three verses are devoted to the gates, courts, and the wall surrounding the temple, while only twenty-six verses are devoted to a description of the structure of the temple itself.**

It seems that the temple plan most similar to the one described in Ezekiel is, in fact, to be found in the Mesopotamian world and in the prophet's immediate context—namely, in the descriptions we have of the Ezida temple. In addition, the detailed descriptions of temple gates found in Babylonian architectural texts include many features in common with the descriptions of the gates in Ezekiel's visionary temple. The Ezida temple in Borsippa included large courts adjacent to inner and outer rooms and a terraced entrance leading from a less holy area to the most holy area, which was also the most carefully protected. A detailed description exists of how the priests entered the temple in Borsippa: via the main gate into the court, passing through several rooms, through another gate (the gate of Nabu), to the private area of Nabu, and only from there to the innermost, holiest place.¹⁸

It is impossible to precisely compare the size of Babylonian temples to the temple in Ezekiel because, among other reasons, the exact purpose of the gates is unknown. In addition, scholars have not succeeded in reconciling texts describing the Borsippa temple with archeological discoveries from the site. However, it is possible to point to a similarity between the basic plan of

Ezekiel's temple and the Borsippa texts: in both, outer rooms serve as entrances to the inner room. The archeological discoveries at the Borsippa site confirm the large size of the courts. The location and purpose of the "chambers" in the courts of the temple of Ezekiel are similar to those of the temple of Ezida. There are also significant similarities between the description of the wall surrounding the entire consecrated area in Ezekiel and walls found in many temples in Babylon in this period and mentioned explicitly in Babylonian temple texts. The texts likewise demonstrate the importance of the gates and courts.¹⁹ In Babylonian temples in general, and specifically in Ezida, the many gates and passages served to restrict access to the temple to authorized temple personnel, who are referred to extensively in the sources. It is to these individuals that we will now turn our attention.

Temple Personnel

It is well known that there are many discrepancies between the descriptions of priestly ritual in the Torah and in Ezekiel.²⁰ Leviticus, for instance, describes how the priests could enter the shrine and the High Priest was even commanded to enter the Holy of Holies, while the Levites and the rest of the people were only permitted as far as the court of the Tabernacle (Lev. 16). When an offering was sacrificed in the court, the animal was slaughtered by the Israelite bringing the sacrifice (with the exception of the bird offering, in which the priest severed the head), while the priests dashed the blood on the altar and placed the parts of the sacrifice there (Lev. 1–3).

Although we do not have a detailed account of priestly ritual from the time of the First Temple, which could provide the missing link between the Bible's description of sacrifice in the Tabernacle and what we find in Ezekiel, it is nonetheless clear that a significant change occurs in the latter text: all three social classes, priests, Levites, and Israelites, are described as being farther removed from the consecrated areas than in the Torah. The priests are not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and possibly not even allowed to enter the shrine; they perform their tasks primarily in the inner court. The Levites are permitted to be in the inner court, though they cannot approach the altar at its center. Israelites are not allowed to enter the inner court at all, but only the outer court. The Israelites do not slaughter the sacrifices themselves; this task is left to the Levites (Ezek. 44:11). The group furthest removed of all are the foreigners, whose presence defiles the temple (7:21–22); they are prohibited from even entering the temple compound (Ezek. 44:6–9).²¹

The changes in the structure of the temple and the tasks of the priests and Levites outlined above have two purposes. First of all, Ezekiel denies the common people access to the inner areas of the consecrated ground, thereby maintaining its sanctity. Secondly, these changes transform the courts into the center of activity in the temple because only a few, select priests are permitted to enter the consecrated areas. According to Ezekiel's vision, when the people come to the temple on festivals, they are forbidden from entering the inner court and can only stand at the entrance to the outer court (Ezek. 44:19). Only the Zadokite priests are allowed entry to the inner court (44:15–17).

Similarly, the Babylonian temple texts state that only the worthy were permitted entry to the temple court. These texts, too, mention explicitly who is not allowed entry. The gradation of areas permitted for priests in Babylon is also very similar to the situation described in Ezekiel, according to which a priest's rank determined his degree of access.²² The description of the personnel in the Ezida temple reveals a similar hierarchy of priests ranked according to their functions in the temple. The texts also describe how various steps were taken at Ezida to ensure that the god's place in the temple was separate and distinct.

At Ezida, the status of the priesthood in general was based on factors similar to those we find in Ezekiel and priestly literature: family origin, the priest's role in the temple, and his suitability to this role. The priests belonged to families whose priestly ancestry was traced back many generations and divided into different ranks. The members of the highest echelon held pivotal positions. By virtue of their stature, they were allowed to enter the central area of the temple where they were responsible for the performance of essential ritual functions. Those of secondary importance were only permitted to enter the court. Documents from the sixth century BCE reveal that the priests serving the idol had to meet the highest standards of lineage.²³ Babylonian priests' ancestry was scrupulously examined, with particular emphasis placed on determining that the candidate for priesthood was the legitimate biological offspring of a temple functionary. Likewise, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, the lineage of the priests of the line of Zadok distinguishes them from the other temple functionaries who are cast aside. Rules about priestly physical wholeness and marital prohibitions, however, are found already in Leviticus and are not Ezekiel's innovations.²⁴

The distinction between priestly ranks is very similar to the distinction between the priests and Levites familiar to us from Ezekiel 44:11–14: "They shall be servitors in My Sanctuary, appointed over the Temple gates, and performing the chores of My Temple; they shall slaughter the burnt

offerings and the sacrifices for the people. They shall attend on them and serve them. They shall not approach Me to serve Me as priests, to come near any of My sacred offerings, the most holy things. I will make them watchmen of the Temple, to perform all its chores, everything that needs to be done in it." Regarding the role of the priests, Ezekiel 44:15–16 states: "But the levitical priests descended from Zadok . . . they shall approach Me to minister to Me; they shall stand before Me to offer Me fat and blood. . . . They alone may enter My Sanctuary and they alone shall approach My table to minister to Me; and they shall keep My charge."

Overall, it is possible to enumerate other similarities as well as differences between Ezekiel's visionary temple and descriptions of the Temple in the Bible. It would appear that the purpose of all these changes is to more scrupulously safeguard the ritual sanctity of the future temple, and to ensure that the Divine Presence remains there for eternity. The principal changes in Ezekiel include the addition of a court, the enlargement of the courts surrounding the temple, the maintenance of strict surveillance over its gates, regulations concerning the suitability of priests for work in the temple, as well as restrictions on both the access of the prince (*nasi*) to specific areas of the temple compound, and on the level of involvement of the people in the sacrificial rite. All of the above were designed to prevent those considered ritually unclean from approaching the temple.

The various means employed to safeguard the sanctity of the temple can be more clearly understood through a comparison to the contemporary situation in Babylonian temples. The comparison to the Ezida temple helps us grasp how Ezekiel was understood in his day by his audience, who were living in a Babylonian context and surrounded by Babylonian temples.

Ezekiel's Visionary Temple in rabbinic Literature

The final question in our discussion is the degree of influence or correlation between Ezekiel's vision and the Second Temple, in its various stages, as well as with the description of the Temple found in the Mishnah in tractate *Middot*. The connections between Ezekiel's visionary temple, the Second Temple, and the tannaitic period, as well as the degree of Ezekiel's influence on the structure of the Second Temple, and subsequently on the description of the Temple in tractate *Middot* and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, are beyond the scope of our discussion. I will therefore confine this section to the principal aspects of the question.

From the description of the Second Temple in tractate *Middot*, especially the verses from Ezekiel quoted there, it would appear that the sages were aware of the connections between Ezekiel's visionary temple and the Temple they described in the Mishnah. Although the Mishnah does not discuss the structure of the Temple as a whole, it describes in detail the measurements of its buildings, gates, chambers, and recesses. Opinions vary as to whether the discussion in the Mishnah accurately describes Herod's Temple, or whether it serves primarily ideological objectives. This is a difficult question to answer. Even an examination of the verses from Ezekiel cited in the Mishnah does not help us to form a conclusion. It appears that the Mishnah quotes verses from Ezekiel's temple vision only when specific details mentioned in those verses are required to complete or to substantiate their description of a particular aspect of the Temple. It sometimes appears that the authors of the Mishnah believed that the temple plan described in Ezekiel had already been realized in the Second Temple. For example, the Mishnah quotes Ezekiel's descriptions of the doorways, wickets, and the altar (*Middot* 4:1–2, 3:1) as referring to the past tense.

On the other hand, the Mishnah also quotes Ezekiel in reference to the visionary temple. Written at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, these passages may reflect a yearning for the building of the temple of Ezekiel. For example, the following statement is found regarding the uncovered courts of the temple: "The court of the women **was . . . and so they will be**, as it is said, 'Then he led me into the outer court' (Ezek. 46:21)" (*Middot* 2:5). In addition, in the case of the water gate, it appears that the Mishnah is describing a feature that could exist as described in Ezekiel only in the future temple because it was not included in the Second Temple. In reference to the name of this gate, the Mishnah comments: "The water gate, why was it called the 'water gate'? . . . Rabbi Ekiezer ben Yaakov says, 'In it the gurgling water will in the future gush out from under the threshold of the temple'" (*Middot* 2:6; based on Ezek. 47:1). This point has been addressed by Ben-Zion Rosenfeld:

The sage Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob, possibly of the generation of the destruction of the Temple . . . bases himself on the words of the prophet Ezekiel that are quoted, in which he says, close to the end of his prophecy, that there will be a miracle in the future temple and living waters will gush out from under the threshold of the temple and will flow past part of the temple and will rise up until they become a mighty stream and will

flow down to the Dead Sea whose waters will be sweetened and whose surroundings will bloom again. The sage identifies the threshold with the water gate, and, in his opinion, the gate is so named on the basis of future events, because the miracle will occur beneath it and water will gush out and flow under part of the temple (Ezek. 47:1–12). Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob's identification of the water gate with the threshold mentioned in Ezekiel adds weight to the architectonic connection between the two structures as well as to the belief that there will be a future temple as described in Ezekiel and the Second Temple, which was destroyed, was built according to its plans.²⁵

One possible understanding is that the descriptions in the Mishnah in tractate *Middot* refer not only to the structure built by Herod but also to the future temple.

From the reference to Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob, who lived at the end of the Second Temple period and saw the Temple in both its glory and in its destruction (*Middot* 1:2), it can be inferred that these *mishnayot* also reflect the Temple as it appeared at the end of the Second Temple period.²⁶ It is possible that the references to Ezekiel in this tractate, written in the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, reflect a yearning for the building of Ezekiel's long-awaited temple. Perhaps the references to Ezekiel in tractate *Middot* should be understood as a longing to see the future Temple, which did not yet exist at the time of the sages, in all its glory.

The sages' difficulty with certain contents in the book of Ezekiel, especially the chapters describing the details and rituals of the temple, is also reflected in rabbinic literature. The Babylonian Talmud in tractate *Shabbat* (13b) quotes a statement in the name of Rav that credits Hananiah ben Hezekiah, to whom the text also attributes the authorship of *Megillat Taanit* (The Scroll of the Fasts), with rescuing the book of Ezekiel from suppression. Given the book's many contradictions, its rehabilitation necessitated a lengthy and strenuous exegetical feat by Hananiah ben Hezekiah.

Maimonides, too, at the beginning of *Hilkhot Beit ha-Behirah* (The Laws of the Temple) on the laws regarding the building of the future temple, assumes that it will be built according to the plan found in Ezekiel. However, he acknowledges difficulty in realizing this plan: "The Temple building erected by Solomon is clearly described in the Book of Kings. Furthermore, **the Temple that will be built, even though it is discussed in the Book of Ezekiel, is not fully described and defined therein.** Therefore, those who built the

Second Temple in the days of Ezra followed the pattern of Solomon's Temple and **adapted some of the particulars described in Ezekiel**" (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Behirah* 1:4).²⁷

In other words, according to Maimonides, the builders of the Second Temple were unable to follow Ezekiel's model exactly, and built "in approximation" those features that are clearly described.²⁸ Although Maimonides does not elaborate on the details of the actual construction, it is possible to see an illustration of this idea in his description of the shapes of the altar and gates.²⁹ Maimonides writes that the dimensions of the altar were preserved in the tradition until it was built in the days of the Second Temple by returning exiles under the guidance of the prophet who returned to the Land of Israel with them: "They made it according to the plan for bulding altar **of the future**. It was therefore forbidden to add to, or subtract from, its prescribed dimensions." (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Behirah* 2:3).³⁰ One of the gates is also identified with the gate described in Ezekiel: "this gate is to be kept shut and is not to be opened" (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Behirah* 4:6, citing Ezek. 44:2).³¹

In conclusion, the difficulty in correlating Ezekiel's visionary temple with the Second Temple, as well as with the Tabernacle and the First Temple, is apparent in early rabbinic literature. It is also worth asking whether the Second Temple had features that pointed to direct or indirect Persian influence, transmitted by way of Ezekiel.³² It is also possible that after the Second Temple was not built according to Ezekiel's vision, an alternative approach was adopted in which the temple of Ezekiel came to be considered the temple that would be built in the future.

The challenging question remains how to understand the connection between the ritual practices in the temples of Babylon and the prophecies of Ezekiel, in particular the vision of the future temple. To put the matter another way, what role should new research on the ancient Near East play in understanding this prophecy? This is but one facet of a larger question concerning the originality and uniqueness of biblical laws and beliefs; many generations of scholars have struggled with this question, most prominently Yehezkel Kaufman in *The Religion of Israel*. In the case before us it seems we can assume that Ezekiel's visionary temple is, to some extent, similar to the temples that he saw around him. Perhaps Maimonides referred to this point in the following passage from *The Guide of the Perplexed*:

And as at that time the way of life generally accepted and customary in the whole world and the universal service upon which we were brought

up consisted in offering various species of living beings in the temples in which images were set up, in worshipping the latter, and in burning incense before them—the pious ones and the ascetics being at that time, as we have explained, the people who were devoted to the service of the temples consecrated to the stars—: His wisdom, may he be exalted, and his gracious ruse, which is manifest in regard to all His creatures, did not require that he give us a Law prescribing the rejection, abandonment, and abolition of all these kinds of worship. For one could not then conceive the acceptance of [such a Law], considering the nature of man, which always likes to that to which it is accustomed. At that time this would have been similar to the appearance of a prophet in these times who, calling upon the people to worship God, would say: “God has given you a Law forbidding you to pray to Him, to fast, to call upon Him for help in misfortune. Your worship should consist solely in meditation without any works at all.”

Therefore, He, may he be exalted, suffered the above-mentioned kinds of worship to remain, but transferred them from created or imaginary and unreal things to His own name, may He be exalted, commanding us to practice them with regard to Him, may He be exalted. Thus he commanded us to build a temple for Him . . . to have an altar for His name . . . to have the sacrifice offered up to Him . . . to bow down in worship before Him; and to burn incense before Him. And He forbade the performance of any of these actions with a view to someone else And he singled out *Priests* for the service of the *Sanctuary*. . . . And because of their employment in the temple and the sacrifices in it, it was necessary to fix for them dues that would be sufficient for them; namely the dues of the *Levites* and the *Priests*.

Through this divine ruse it came about that the memory of idolatry was effaced and that the grandest and true foundation of our belief—namely, the existence and oneness of the deity—was firmly established, while at the same time the souls had no feeling of repugnance and were not repelled because of the abolition of modes of worship to which they were accustomed and than which no other mode of worship was known at that time.³³

Maimonides believed that all temple ritual and sacrifices were nothing but a response to the need to imitate foreign practices. If so, it is no wonder that both the design of the temples and their rituals were influenced by the surrounding foreign culture.

Ezekiel is not unique in this respect. He is not the only prophet whose human characteristics, personal views, and immediate surroundings are reflected in his prophecies. The premise that prophecy was influenced by the time, place, and personality of the prophets—that the prophets of Israel did not operate in a vacuum—has been discussed by generations of traditional commentators. We can cite, to begin with, the well-known words of the sages: “The same type of communication is received by many prophets, yet no two prophets express themselves in the same manner.”³⁴ Similarly, commentators in different eras, including Joseph Albo, Isaac Abravanel, and Malbim, discussed the question of the human dimension of divine prophecy.³⁵ It would seem that their words contain principles from which we can deduce that the language of prophecy is conditioned by the personal circumstances and abilities of the prophet: his history, his life experience, the surrounding intellectual climate, and his education.³⁶

I cannot determine with any certainty when we are encountering the prophet as a private person, expressing his personal qualities, thoughts, and pain, and when we are encountering him as a messenger revealing the words of God. These questions are beyond the scope of the examples that I have examined here and touch on the entire book of Ezekiel. With regard to the chapters in which Ezekiel prophesies about the destruction of the Temple, we can ask whether the absence of love, compassion, and pain in these prophecies of admonition reflects Ezekiel’s human qualities, or whether they demonstrate another aspect of the relationship between God and his people, substantially different from that expressed in the contemporary prophecy of Jeremiah.³⁷

Ezekiel received the content of his prophetic revelations in a vision from God. His prophecy, which spans the period before and after the destruction of the Temple, describes a different temple, one suited to the circumstances of the people around him. The contents of his prophecies reveal that Ezekiel was concerned with the causes that led to the desecration of God’s name, the removal of God’s glory from the Temple, and its destruction—and the lessons to be learnt from them. However, his style, and how he phrased the divine messages he received, was influenced by a combination of factors, including not only associations and images familiar to him from the Temple of Solomon, but also the surrounding culture and its images, including its temples. These various facets of his experience coalesced and impacted the content of his prophecy as we know it today. If so, this prophecy is not only an expression of the sublime, the remote, and the divine. It is also an expression of an encounter

between God and humankind. That is why it was expressed in forms, contents, and concepts that could be clearly understood in that time and place.

Endnotes

1. Babylon was the name of a longstanding ancient city-state. In the middle of the seventh century BCE, Babylon began to rule over extensive territories that eventually formed an empire. The period of Babylon's imperial rule, from 626 to 539 BCE (the date of the rise of the Achaemenid Persian empire) is known as the Neo-Babylonian era.
2. On the study of the Bible in light of discoveries from the Near East, see Barry L. Eichler, "Study of Bible in Light of Our Knowledge of the Ancient Near East," in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1996), 81–100.
3. Meir Loeb ben Jehiel Michael Wisser (Malbim), *Nevi'im u Ketuvim: Im Perush Rashi u ferush nifla, nikra be-shem Mikra'e Kodesh* (Warsaw: Yitzhak Goldman, 1867), vol. 6, introduction.
4. It should be noted, however, that it is difficult to derive a blueprint of the future temple from the verses in Ezekiel, and even the classic commentators recognized this point. See, e.g., Rashi's comment on "deliberation" (42:3–4), in *Mikra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter, Yehezkel* [Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer: a revised and augmented scientific edition based on the Aleppo Codex and early medieval MSS], ed. Menachem Cohen (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2013), 321. This is in addition to the differences between the descriptions of the temple plans outlined in the commentaries of Rashi and Rabbi Eliezer Beaugency. *Ibid.*, 322–328.
5. Agreements of this kind were common throughout the Assyrian empire (less so in the Neo-Babylonian period). See S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, eds., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988).
6. This refers to the practice of filling a quiver with arrows, on each of which was written a different solution to the problem. The diviner would shake the arrows, and the first arrow to fall out of the quiver was believed to contain the answer of the gods. Walter Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1983), 1895–1910.
7. The reference is to divination by means of statues (similar to Gen. 31:34; 2 Kings 23:24; and Zech. 10:2).
8. This is reminiscent of the archeological and textual evidence that refers to the ancient practice of "looking at the liver," in other words, divining one's fate and the future according to the state of a liver taken from an animal sacrificed as an offering (*haruspicy*). In order to teach priests the art of liver divination, the shapes of livers were copied onto clay models; sometimes handwritten explanations were etched onto them. Such clay models have been discovered in many archeological sites throughout the Near East. This practice is also mentioned in *Kohelet Rabbah* 12:8: "Rabbi Levy said 'Like those Arabs who slaughter a sheep and examine its liver.'" Realistic descriptions of haruspicy can be found in Shadal's comment on this verse, where he explains that it was an Arab practice. See Shmuel David Luzzatto (Shadal), *Pirush Shadal al Yirmiyahu, Yihezkel, Mishle, va-Iyov* (Lemberg: A. Isaak Menkes, 1876).
9. See A. Winitzer, "Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel Among the Babylonian Literati," in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon; Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians, and Babylonians in Antiquity*, ed. Uri Gabbay and Shai Secunda (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). These connections are not unique to Ezekiel. For an example of the connection

- between the Assyrian environment and Isaiah chapter 6, see S. Z. Aster, "Images of the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Calah in the Throne-Room Vision of Isaiah 6," in *Marbeh Hokmah: Studies Bible and the Ancient Near East in Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Yonah Shamir, Meyer Gruber, Shalom Paul et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 13–42.
10. See S. Z. Aster, *The Unbeatable Light: Melammu and Its Biblical Parallels* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 301–315.
 11. See further Tova Ganzel and Shalom E. Holtz, "Ezekiel's Temple in Babylonian Context," *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 211–226.
 12. The sages were familiar with a "Borsif" in Babylon. In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Shabbat*, Rav Ashi comments that Babylon is now called Borsif and Borsif is called Babylon (36a). In tractate *Sanhedrin*, Babylon and Borsif are described as two neighboring towns (109a). In *Bereshit Rabbah*, the student of Rabbi Yoḥanan comments that he was exiled to the Land of Israel from Borsif. (58:38,11). It would appear that all of these references concern the Babylonian town under discussion, and it is possible that its ruins were known to the sages, who believed that the Tower of Babel was built there.
 13. Caroline Waerzeggers, *The Ezida Temple of Borsippa: Priesthood, Cult, Archives* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2010). In her comprehensive research in the last decade, Waerzeggers has delineated the status and position of officials in the temples of Babylon in the first millennium BCE. See also M. Jursa, *Neo-Babylonian Legal and Administrative Documents: Typology, Contents and Archives* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005).
 14. On plans of temples, see A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1992).
 15. In addition to these texts, hundreds of documents written on clay tablets in cuneiform script reveal the daily life in the temple. On Mesopotamian temples, see Michael Roaf, "Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 423–441; and John F. Robertson, "The Social and Economic Organization of Ancient Mesopotamian Temples," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 443–454.
 16. The temple described in Ezekiel also differs in many respects from the Temple of Solomon. It is incorrect, therefore, to ascribe these differences to the fact that the structure described in Ezekiel is permanent whereas the Tabernacle is temporary.
 17. The area of the entire temple, including its courts, was much greater than the area of the First or Second Temples. Indeed, the Mishnah (*Middot* 2:1) describes the area of the Second Temple in this way: "The Temple Mount was five hundred by five hundred cubits." Some have argued that the Mishnah's measurement was influenced by the measurement of five hundred cubits in Ezek. 42:20, which summarizes the preceding verses that described the area of the Temple Mount without giving precise measurements. This opinion is first found in Radak's [David Kimḥi] comment on this verse, which adds that these measurements are in cubits even though the word "rods" is repeated four times in the preceding verses. It would appear more natural to assume that verse twenty also refers to rods (see Rashi and Eliezer Beaugency). However, modern commentators have pointed out that assuming the entire consecrated area measured five hundred rods raises significant difficulties. Among other difficulties, the absence of the word "rods" in the Septuagint in verses 15–20 led them to conclude that Ezekiel referred to cubits. They also compared the circumference of the temple in Ezekiel to the description of the future temple in tractate *Middot*, which includes these same measurements. I will address these points in a future article.
 18. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida Temple of Borsippa*, 13.

19. A detailed description of these findings can be found in Ganzel and Holtz, "Ezekiel's Temple in Babylonian Context."
20. The sages pointed out the severity of these discrepancies when they related that earlier sages had wanted to suppress the book of Ezekiel, "because there were in it things that contradict the words of the Torah" (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Shabbat* 13b and parallel sources). A sage by the name of Hananiah ben Hezekiah ben Garon is remembered with honor because he "sat and interpreted"—in other words, resolved the contradictions by means of interpretation (midrash). See below.
21. A similar gradation can be found in the Mishnah (tractate *Kelim* 1:8), which only permits non-Jews to enter the *hayil*, the outermost and least sacred area of the Temple Mount.
22. See Tova Ganzel, "Ma'amadam shel Ba'alei ha-Tafkidim ba-Mikdash ha-Atidi be-Yehézekel [The status of functionaries in the future temple in Ezekiel]," *Shnaton le-Heker ha-Mikra ve-ha-Mizrah ha-Kadum* 19 (2009): 21–23.
23. These tests based on ancestry were accompanied by punctilious examinations of physical wholeness and moral integrity, meaning the abstention from serious sins.
24. It should be noted that although distinctions of status within the priestly caste are also found later in classical rabbinic literature (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Isurei Bi'ah*, 20), this concept does not exist in the Torah where strict attention was paid only to the preservation of the sanctity of the priestly families. (Lev. 21).
25. Ben-Zion Rosenfeld, "Yahas Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi ba-Mishnato le-Mikdash u-le-Yerushalayim," [The approach of Rabbi Judah the Prince to the Temple and to Jerusalem], *Hidushim le-Heker Yerushalayim* 18 (2013): 267.
26. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Yoma* 2:2, and the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Yoma* 16a, Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob was the tanna who taught tractate *Middot*.
27. This translation is adapted from book 8, "The Book of Temple Service," in Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*, trans. Mendell Lewittes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 5–6.
28. It is believed that the Third Temple will be built by human hands. Maimonides in his *Hakdama le-Pirush ha-Mishnah*, *Maseket Midot* points out that tractate *Middot* was included in the Mishnah so that the builders of the Third Temple will know how to construct it, in accordance with the commandment in Ezekiel 43:10–11. Maimonides, *Hakdama le-Pirush ha-Mishnah*, *Maseket Midot* [Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishnah, tractate *Middot*], in *Mishnah im Perush Rabenu Moshe ben Maimon* [The Mishnah with the commentary of Maimonides], ed. Yosef Kafah (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1967), 17; see Rashi's comment there. See also the commentary of the *Lehem Mishneh*, *Hilkhot Ma'aseh ha-Korbanot*, 2:14, who has difficulty understanding why Maimonides thought that the prophecy of Ezekiel was about the Third Temple.
29. Maimonides refers indirectly to the difficulty of reconciling the details of the sacrifices as they appear in Ezekiel with those that appear in the Torah, and determines that the verses in Ezekiel all refer to a onetime ritual marking the dedication of the Third Temple. (*Hilkhot Ma'aseh ha-Korbanot*, 2:14)
30. Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides*, 10.
31. Ibid., 19. Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (known as "Tosafot Yom Tov") wrote: "Even though the future building has changes and is not comparable to the Second Temple, as anyone who examines the Mishnah and the book of Ezekiel will see . . . the building of the Second Temple was only 'an approximation of some features clearly described in Ezekiel' and does not conform to everything that is written in that book." In essence he writes that one must rely upon the description of the Second Temple and adds: "When we merit to build the

future temple the Holy One Blessed be He will open our eyes and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the lord so that we may understand the hidden meaning of the words of Ezekiel.” Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, *Tzurat Beit ha-Mikdash he-Atid ha-Nirah le-Yehezkel* (Prague: Avraham ben Moshe, 1602). Malbim made corrections and addenda to this book in his work *Tavnit ha-Bayit*. Both works were published together at the end of Malbim, *Nevi'im u Ketuvim: im Perush Rashi u-ferush nifla, nikra be-shem Mikra'ei Kodesh*.

32. The existence of new architectural elements in the Second Temple, connected to the return of exiles from Babylon, can be inferred indirectly from the words of Maimonides in his commentary to the Mishnah: “When they returned from Susa to build the temple, as is described in Ezra, the king commanded them to draw the design of the city of Susa in the Temple so that the fear of the king would be upon them and they would remember the days when they lived there and would not rebel against the king. They therefore drew it on the most eastern gate of the Temple.” This subject also warrants further study. See *Mishneh im Perush Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon*, 5:284.
33. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:32.
34. Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Sanhedrin* 89a.
35. A collection of examples can be found in: Moshe Greenberg, “Tefisot Yehudiot shel ha-Gorem ha-Enoshi be-Nevua ha-Mikrait” [Jewish perceptions of the human factor in biblical prophecy], *Sefer ha-Yovel le-Rav Mordechai Breuer* [Mordechai Breuer Jubilee Volume], ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992), 1:63–76.
36. Greenberg, “Tefisot Yehudiot,” 76. For an example referring to Ezekiel, see Isaac Abravanel, *Perush al Nevi'im Ahronim* [Commentary on the Later Prophets] (Jaffa: Torah ve-Da'at, 1956), 434.
37. See the dictum of the sages: “Raba said, ‘Everything that Ezekiel saw, Isaiah also saw. To whom can we compare Ezekiel? To a man from the country who saw the king. To whom can we compare Isaiah? To a man from the city who saw the king.’” (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Haggigah* 13b).

The Torah of Moses and the Laws of the Nations: A Study in the Teachings of Rabbi Tzadok ha-Kohen of Lublin

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Introduction

The foundation of Jewish belief is that the holy Torah, the Five Books of Moses given by God to the Jewish people, is the word of God. But what is the Torah? The traditional belief that the Torah, as the word of God, is independent of both time and space is expressed in the well-known midrash: “As it is written, ‘I was with Him as a confidant’ (Prov. 8:30)—What is a ‘confidant’? Rabbi Judah bar Ilai said, ‘Confidant in the Torah—God would look in the Torah and create the world, as it says, ‘I was with Him as a confidant.’”¹

This midrash seems to give clear expression to the belief that the Torah, which preceded the creation of the world, is not only independent of time and space, but also eternal, beyond time and space. Maimonides, in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, forged a new path when he argued that many commandments were given in response to laws that already existed in the time of Moses. For example, the laws concerning sacrifices and the commandment to build a temple were given as a concession to contemporary forms of worship.² According to Maimonides, the Torah, rather than opposing accepted practices, recognized and even adopted them, while at the same time “converting” them from idolatrous purposes to the service of the God of Israel. It is clear, therefore, that Maimonides does indeed place the Torah in a temporal and spatial framework. His approach was not the dominant one in Judaism, and it may even be said that in the following

centuries neither the rabbinic nor the kabbalistic schools of thought followed Maimonides' approach.

This question came to the foreground again at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries with the discovery of writings from the ancient Near East. In 1872, the eleventh tablet of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which recounts the story of the Babylonian flood, was discovered. The similarity between the Babylonian story and the narrative in Genesis leaves no doubt about the connection between the two accounts. In 1901, the stone stele of Hammurabi was discovered. The law code engraved upon it bears an undeniable resemblance to the laws of the Torah, notwithstanding the dissimilarities between them.³

The discovery of these writings shook the Christian world—and the Jewish world as well—and was discussed far beyond academic circles. In 1902, the German Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, in a series of published lectures, declared that at long last humanity had succeeded in uncovering the sources of the Bible; what had once been considered an ancient spiritual wonder was revealed to be none other than a product of plagiarism, the result of literary theft.⁴ With the exception of a few scattered comments, leading rabbis completely ignored the subject. One well-known example is the passage in Rav Kook's *Eder ha-Yakar*, which contains a positive, albeit brief, reference to the discovery of the texts.⁵ The general response, however, was silence, and this silence requires an explanation. The question still hanging in the air is: How is it possible that the word of God was influenced by contemporary writings?

Many academic studies have been written on the relationship between the laws of the Torah and the legal codes of the Near East. The purpose of this article is not to survey the literature on this subject, but rather to shift the focus of the discussion to the theoretical plane, as reflected in Rabbi Tzadok ha-Kohen of Lublin's sermon on the Torah portion Yitro in his book *Pri Zadik*.⁶ The sermon addresses the relationship between the Torah of Moses and the external sources used by Moses to write the Torah. Written in a homiletic style, the sermon can be read as a religious response to the discovery of the writings from the Near East. It is not surprising that this tension is only latent in the sermon, because in other matters as well Rabbi Tzadok adopted an allusive rather than explicit style. For example, his ongoing argument with the claims of academic scholars of Judaism affiliated with the nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement regarding the development of the Oral Law was not polemical and did not refer directly to specific scholars or

their works.⁷ It is reasonable to assume that Rabbi Tzadok was aware of the discovery of writings that had received so much attention in the Jewish world in his time. Even if our assumption is incorrect, and Rabbi Tzadok was entirely unaware of their discovery, his teachings nonetheless address the questions these Near Eastern texts raise; in that case, the coincidence of the discoveries and this faith-based response to the challenges they posed is truly remarkable!

Rabbi Tzadok ha-Kohen (1823–1900) was born in Lithuania to a family of *Mitnagdim* (opponents of Hasidism), and in his youth he was considered a prodigy in the study of the Talmud. He was drawn to Hasidism and became a disciple of the Izbica Rebbe, Mordekhai Joseph Leiner, the author of the work *Mei Shiloach*. At the end of his life he assumed the position of Rebbe Leibele Eiger as the Grand Rabbi of Lublin. Rabbi Tzadok was an influential scholar of Jewish law, proficient in all areas of Torah study, whose sermons reveal a pervasive tension with the intellectual world of Jewish academic scholarship.

The Sermon on Yitro

The sermon on the weekly Torah portion Yitro⁸ opens with the question of why the story of Jethro immediately precedes the giving of the Torah.⁹ Rabbi Tzadok's answer is that the study of gentile wisdom is a necessary condition for receiving the Torah. That is why Jethro, the priest of Midian, came before the giving of the Torah, to impart his wisdom and insights to the People of Israel. Rabbi Tzadok at this point launches into a lengthy discourse on the study of the wisdom of other nations, with specific reference to what was learned from Pharaoh, Jethro, Job, and Balaam.

Rabbi Tzadok bases his arguments on various sources, but a comparison between his own words and his sources reveals the extent of his originality: "It says in the holy Zohar that it was necessary to conquer the king and priest of the *kelipah* ("husk" or "impurity") and afterwards the Torah was given." The source of these words is the Zohar: "When this king and this priest were subdued and broken, all of the other members of the *sitra aħra* (the forces of evil) bowed down to God and acknowledged him. Then God ruled alone in heaven and on earth as it is said, 'None but the Lord shall be exalted in that day' (Isa. 2:11)."¹⁰ The king and priest referred to in the Zohar are Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and Jethro, the priest of Midian. The meaning of the passage from the Zohar is that God can rule exclusively only after the forces of evil have acknowledged God and accepted divine authority. Rabbi Tzadok, on the other

hand, argues that it was first necessary to encounter the forces of evil, Pharaoh and Jethro, in order to learn the truth contained within them and within their religions.

Rabbi Tzadok quotes a homily of Rabbi Isaac Luria (Ari), cited several times in *Pri Tzadik*¹¹: “The essential purpose of the exile in Egypt was that they would leave with great wealth, in order to bring out the holy sparks and their souls, as it is said ‘thus they stripped the Egyptians’ (Exod.12:36). They made Egypt resemble a fortress without grain, the deep waters without fish,¹² which is the root of life and survival. Because of this the People of Israel merited the revelation of the Torah.” The idea of the elevation of the sparks is a basic tenant of both Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism, but Rabbi Tzadok adds an original insight. The words of the Ari indicate that the gathering of the sparks of holiness either refers to the souls of converts who joined the Jewish people,¹³ or can be understood as an abstract concept. The Ari’s words have been cited often, and, in these later sources as well the verse “thus they stripped the Egyptians” (Exod. 12:36), understood as referring to the gathering of the souls that are worthy to join the Jewish people. For example, the *Orech Hayyim*¹⁴ and the *Ohev Yisrael*¹⁵ quote the Ari in the context of discussions of conversion. Rabbi Tzadok, however, changes the emphasis of the citation. He does not refer to the individual souls of converts, but rather to the concept that the Torah was composed following the study of foreign teachings and their adaptation and purification.

Rabbi Tzadok then quotes from the Zohar: “It would appear that the Torah is called the Torah of Moses because he wrote down the words of vulgar people, the words of Laban, Esau, Hagar, and so forth, and through him these became the words of the Torah,¹⁶ and it is called his book, the ‘Torah of Moses.’” The source of this idea is the Zohar:

Even if a simple story is written in the Torah, which is the highest principle, its purpose is certainly not merely to tell that story, but to teach lofty matters and sublime secrets; not to tell about itself but to instruct about general matters. . . . For example, it is written “in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat” (Gen. 8:4). This verse is part of the narration of a simple story. Why do we care if the ark rested on this mountain or in another place? Its purpose is to teach us a general principle . . . and anyone who says that the purpose of a story in the Torah is to teach us only the contextual narrative of the story itself deserves to die. . . . The truth of the supreme, holy Torah

is undeniable . . . for is it conceivable that he did not have sacred words with which to make a Torah?! Yet he gathered material about vulgar people, such as the words of Esau, of Hagar, the conversations of Laban and Jacob, the words of the ass and of Balaam and Balak, and the words of Zimri. He collected them all, as well as the rest of the stories that are written, and made them into the Torah. If so, why is the Torah called “the law of truth” (Mal. 2:6)? . . . And why is it called “more desirable than gold, than much fine gold” (Ps. 19:11)? . . . It is truly a sublime holy Scripture, the Torah of truth; “the teaching of the Lord is perfect” (19:8), and each and every word is intended to teach lofty ideas. The purpose of each story is not merely to relate its own particular details but to teach a general principle, as we have said. . . . (Zohar 3,149).

The Zohar declares in this passage that the meaning of the stories of the Torah does not lie in their exoteric narrative, but in their esoteric content, which is related to the mystic lore of the Torah. The author of the Torah gathered stories and turned them into Torah by virtue of the inner layer embedded within them. While Rabbi Tzadok emphasizes that Moses wrote the words, the Zohar does not refer to Moses, but to God: “for is it conceivable that the supreme and holy King, may he be blessed, did not have holy words to write down make into a Torah?! Yet he gathered the words of vulgar people.” We will examine this point in greater depth below.

Rabbi Tzadok paints a comprehensive and lucid picture: The Torah was not, in a manner of speaking, written by one hand. Rather, Moses, the author of the Torah, gathered preexisting documents and, in rewriting them, made them into the Torah: “He wrote the words of vulgar people, the words of Laban, Esau, Hagar, and so forth, and through him these became the words of the Torah.” There is a difference between the meaning of the phrase “the words of vulgar people” in the Zohar and the meaning given to it by Rabbi Tzadok. In the Zohar it refers to words about vulgar people that, when written in the Torah, acquired a secret and esoteric dimension. Rabbi Tzadok, however, understands the phrase to mean the words or teachings of vulgar people that Moses gathered, compiled, and wrote down in the Torah in his own words.

The continuation of the passage clearly shows that this is the correct reading. Rabbi Tzadok again emphasizes that the writing of the Torah was the result of the study and collection of earlier teachings: “Pharaoh was the oldest *kelipah*, the secret of the great crocodile, as it is written in the Zohar [2,34], and they removed from him the souls and all the words of Torah that were in

exile with him. Three of the advisors and wise men of Pharaoh¹⁷ contained within them other words of Torah and these also needed to be removed from them.” In this passage from the Zohar, Pharaoh is called the great crocodile, and although the idea that the crocodile is the source of sanctity and study is not expressed here, Rabbi Tzadok emphasizes that the People of Israel learned words of Torah from Pharaoh.

To the best of my knowledge and understanding, the ideas expressed in this passage are almost entirely original.¹⁸ Even Maimonides, who in *The Guide of the Perplexed* raised the possibility of a connection between the Torah and the beliefs of the time, did not describe the writing of the Torah as a mosaic of passages that had been edited and adapted. In explaining the reasons for the commandments, Maimonides argued that many laws were intended to uproot idolatrous practices and eradicate them from the world. Rabbi Tzadok, in contrast, describes a complex and radical process. He explains that even before the giving of the Torah the world was neither lawless nor void. The Torah was written by borrowing ideas from the world that predated it and purifying them. This by no means implies that the Torah is just another human legal code, a product of its time and place. The process of writing the Torah was an act of revelation and a manifestation of holiness. Moses collected material from which, and by means of which, he wrote the Torah. The process of writing the Torah involved not only translating from one language to another, but also infusing the material with new meaning, sanctifying it, and transforming it into “the Torah.”

Rabbi Tzadok clearly implies that the Torah, though divine, was given in a specific time and place, and that its temporal and spatial context influenced its content. This description of the Torah differs from the traditional, simple, faith-based understanding of the Torah as a book written before the creation of the world, in black fire upon white fire, disconnected from time and space.

Rabbi Tzadok then proceeds to discuss the difference between the prophecy of Moses and that of Balaam:

However, as it says in the commentary on the Torah portion Balaam in the holy Zohar (3:210b), “When you open your mouth, your tongue will not be under your control and the words will not be determined by your lips; rather, ‘speak thus’ (Num. 23:5, 16).” . . . His words were literally the words of God. Concerning this it is said, “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses” (Deut. 34:10). The sages clarified: “In Israel no one arose, but among the nations of the world one did arise and that was Balaam” (*Ba-midbar Rabbah* 14:19), as it

is written in the holy Zohar (3:193; and so, too, in *Sifrei*, the end of the section *Ve-zo't ha-berakhah*, 16). And the meaning is that Moses' power was that when he spoke, he articulated the words of God literally. The Divine Presence spoke from within his throat, as we have seen, when it was said that "Moses exceeded them when he prophesied in this matter" (*Sifrei*, Mattot, 1). The meaning is that when he spoke, he said the actual words, rather than relating what God said to him. The latter would have been expressed by the words "thus said the Lord," as is the level of the other prophets, who did not merit that the actual words of God would be spoken by the Divine Presence from their throats. In the case of Balaam however, the Divine Presence did speak from within his mouth . . . but Balaam had no connection whatsoever to the word of God that was uttered from his mouth or even knowledge of it. . . .

For this reason, it is specifically stated that Moses wrote the section about Balaam.¹⁹ It is not included in the statement "Moses wrote his book," because in these chapters Moses our teacher, may he rest in peace, did not have to turn the words of vulgar people into the words of Torah because this section already was the word of God, as is explained in the holy Zohar [regarding the phrases] "speak thus" and "as it is said."

According to Rabbi Tzadok, Balaam was a medium who transmitted to the world the word of God without adaptation or editing, whereas Moses did not merely hear the word of God and relate what the Divine Presence told him, but said the words themselves as the Divine Presence spoke from within his throat. This explanation is not sufficiently clear. How could it be that Moses spoke the words, yet, at the same time, the Divine Presence spoke from within his throat? Rabbi Tzadok asked this very question countless times regarding the Oral Torah. On the one hand, Rabbi Tzadok describes the Oral Torah as the creation of the sages, and, on the other, as the words of the living God. This is a riddle, the solution to which is to be found in emphasizing, rather than obscuring, the role of both human and divine agency in the creation of Torah.²⁰

Rabbi Tzadok's description of the prophecy of Moses, and its distinction from other prophecies, is antithetical to some traditional beliefs. The traditional explanation is that Moses prophesied through a "clear glass" or an "illuminated vision"; in other words, Moses' prophecy conveyed the pure and pristine word of God, whereas the other prophets, who did not receive an illuminated vision, interjected into their prophecies human elements that obscured their vision.²¹ Rabbi Tzadok explains that as the prophet's role in the

prophetic process increases, the quality of the prophecy improves, whereas the closer the prophecy is to the actual word of God, and as the influence of the prophet on its content decreases, the quality of the prophecy also declines. This approach, which grants Moses a role in the writing of the Torah, is certainly not the dominant voice within Judaism and, in fact, is very rarely heard.²²

The tendency to blur the boundaries between written and oral law, by introducing the human voice associated with the Oral Torah into discussions about the Written Torah, recurs in many of Rabbi Tzadok's sermons.²³ This raises the question of the difference between the Written and the Oral Torah. Although Rabbi Tzadok does not answer this question, or even address it, the distinction between the expression of the divine voice in the Written Torah and the human voice in the Oral Torah is often repeated in Rabbi Tzadok's sermons. Therefore, it cannot be said that Rabbi Tzadok does not distinguish between the Oral Torah and Written Torah; his position on the issue is best described as complex.

Rabbi Tzadok places the Torah in a specific time and place, and ties it to Moses, who wrote it by adapting materials and turning them into the Torah. The concept that the Torah was given in a specific time and place, gleaned from the writings of the period and influenced by them, and the idea that Moses had an active role in writing the Torah are interconnected. Both ideas add a certain human dimension to the Torah.

What influenced Rabbi Tzadok in the formation of these ideas? Just as Rabbi Tzadok placed the Torah in a historical timeframe, he was himself a product of his own time and place. I assume that the news of the discoveries of texts from the ancient Near East, which shook the world in those years, also reached the ears of Rabbi Tzadok. I do not know the extent of his knowledge of the subject. While it is possible that Rabbi Tzadok heard of the Babylonian version of the flood story, he certainly was not aware of *The Code of Hammurabi*, which was published only after his death. It is possible that, though he was only vaguely aware of the discoveries, Rabbi Tzadok's keen insight enabled him to grasp their deeper meaning. Rather than embarking upon a pointless and hypocritical campaign of polemics and apologetics, he built a true foundation of faith. Rabbi Tzadok understood, purely and simply, that if the Torah is connected to a specific time period, an almost inevitable conclusion given its similarity to the discoveries, it must possess a certain human dimension.

The concept of the Oral Torah plays a pivotal role in Rabbi Tzadok's thought. He understood it to mean that the Torah is being developed over time by great Torah scholars in response to the spiritual needs of each generation.²⁴

This conception does not begin with an analysis of the Second Temple period, but with the understanding that the Torah was revealed in a specific place and time. The idea is grounded in the belief that the Torah is not perfect but self-perfecting; its purpose is to make the world a better place. The road is long. It began with the Torah, was carried on by the sages, and continues, in different forms, in every generation.

The concept that the Torah is not perfect but self-perfecting is the basis for many sermons in *Pri Tzadik*. For example, Korah's fight for the democratization of holiness and the abolition of the priesthood was justified, but the world is not yet ready for this approach. Only in the days of the Messiah will we be worthy of observing Korah's Torah.²⁵ This means that the Torah does not present an ideal legal code, but one that is appropriate for the lived world. Similarly, the commandment to build a temple, according to Rabbi Tzadok, was given only after the sin of the Golden Calf; the ideal is not a physical temple, but a temple in the heart of every person, in every time and place.²⁶ Again, the Torah accommodated itself to the reality in which it was created—not to make peace with the current reality, but to cause the world to progress to an ideal state.

I have assumed that the discovery of the writings from the Near East prompted Rabbi Tzadok to make these statements. Nonetheless, even if he was not aware of the discoveries, his words (which would thus fall into the category of prophecy and divine inspiration) nonetheless contain a systematic philosophical methodology for addressing this issue. In contrast to Rabbi Tzadok, most of the religious world completely ignored the discoveries and continued on its way as if nothing had happened. It would seem that many chose to ignore the discoveries because they feared that confronting them would have unwelcome consequences. This period saw the breakdown of Jewish communal life, during which many people abandoned the world of Torah and faith. The Reform movement, in its various guises, claimed that the Torah and the Talmud were given in specific situations, and that, with the changing times, the old laws had lost their validity. The Reform movement and secularization prompted most of Orthodox Jewry to adopt a position of self-defense and isolation. Rabbi Tzadok, while alert to the danger to traditional Judaism posed by the Reform movement, did not refrain from broaching difficult subjects; he was by no means a secret reformer masquerading as a Hasidic rebbe. The fundamental difference between the academic scholars of Judaism of his generation and Rabbi Tzadok was his belief in the holiness of each letter in both the written and the oral Torah.

The Homilies of Rabbi Tzadok and the Contextual Meaning of the Verses

Hasidic homilies usually do not discuss the contextual (*peshat*) meaning of the biblical text. Nonetheless, despite its profoundly homiletic nature, Rabbi Tzadok's sermon on Torah portion Yitro that we have discussed in this article does, in fact, relate to the straightforward meaning of the biblical text. The question at issue, first discussed in classical rabbinic literature, is historical in nature: When did Jethro arrive? If we assume that the narrative of the Torah reflects a linear chronology, he arrived before the giving of the Torah. If we can assume however that the narrative of the Torah does not reflect a strictly linear chronology, he may have appeared after the giving of the Torah. The empirical, historical question is less relevant to our discussion than the question of the meaning of the events as they are described in the verses themselves. Why does the story of Jethro appear in the book of Exodus immediately before the story of the giving of the Torah? Rabbi Tzadok defined the question in this way: "Why does this story, which everyone agrees took place after Yom Kippur, as Rashi wrote, appear in the narrative before the giving of the Torah?" It would appear that the meaning ascribed by Rabbi Tzadok to the placement of the story of Jethro emerges from both layers of the biblical text—from the narrative itself and from the narrative in its context.

The narrative itself teaches us that we learnt how to establish a judicial system from a non-Jew, a priest of Midian. This means that it is permissible, and even advisable, to borrow beneficial laws and statutes from the outside world.

The story of Jethro appears in a certain context. The positioning of the story of Jethro and the establishment of the judicial system before the giving of the Torah is meant to teach us that *derekh eretz kadma le-torah* (the way of the world precedes the Torah). The purpose of the Torah is to improve upon the good already found in the world, not to destroy the world as it exists and build a new one.

The account of the war with the Amalekites immediately precedes the story of Jethro. Umberto Cassuto has pointed out parallels between the two narratives.²⁷ The Amalekites and the Midianites-Kenites appear in the Bible as tribes who wander the desert together.²⁸ When the People of Israel escaped from slavery and entered the terrifying desert, they were attacked by the Amalekites, who thereby incurred perpetual divine wrath ("The Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages" [Exod. 17:16].) In contrast, Jethro and the Midianite and Kenite tribes received the People of Israel in

friendship and the People of Israel accepted them in friendship in turn, and adopted from them laws pertaining to the judicial system. This teaches us that it is not important if a person is from Jewish or gentile ancestry, but who he is and how he behaves. Does he follow the path of Jethro or that of Amalek?

The story of Jethro is one of a series of stories preceding the giving of the Torah. These stories appear in the course of the narrative between the parting of the Red Sea and the revelation on Mount Sinai. They are similar in style to the stories in the book of Numbers, and this similarity inspired Rabbi Joseph Bekhor-Shor to argue that these are different descriptions of the same events.²⁹ I do not share this opinion and, in any case, the text as it appears, not the empirical-historical reality, is the focus of our discussion. A straightforward reading reveals that the Torah contains two series of desert stories, one in Exodus

following the parting of the Red Sea and the second in Numbers. The similarity between the two series compels the reader to examine the differences between them. There is much to be said on this topic, but I will limit myself to a discussion of those aspects relevant to our subject.

In the story of Marah in the book of Exodus, the people complain about the water and in addition to water receive commandments:

So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test. He said, "If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Lord am your healer" (Exod. 15:25–26).

The story of the manna and the quail in Exodus also mentions the commandments: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not. But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they have brought in, it shall prove to be double the amount they gather each day'" (Exod. 16:4–5).

In contrast, in the story of *kibroth-hattaavah* in Numbers 11, the people are given quail but there is no reference to commandments. Both stories in Exodus, Marah and the provision of manna and quail, are preparation for receiving the commandments and the Torah at Sinai. This preparation continues with the story of Jethro and the establishment of the courts of law.³⁰

The story of Jethro is also partially repeated in Numbers (Num. 10:29–31), but the subject there is not *halakhah*, but rather desert navigation. This comparison indicates that the series of narratives in Exodus constitute a preparation for receiving the Torah.³¹

Moses and his father-in-law Jethro meet twice in Exodus. The first meeting takes place at the beginning of the book (Exod. 2:15–22) and is followed by the incident of the burning bush at Horeb (Exod. 3–4). The second meeting, found in Torah portion Yitro (Exod. 18), is followed by the revelation on Mount Sinai. In both cases, the meeting with Jethro was preparation for the encounter with God on Horeb. Rabbi Tzadok's *derash* (homiletic interpretation) that the preparation for the receiving of the Torah consisted of instruction from a gentile corresponds to the *peshat* (simple, contextual meaning of the text). Rabbi Tzadok's words, which scale the heights of Hasidic thought and Kabbalah, are, at the same time, grounded in the contextual meaning of the biblical verses.

Maimonides and Rabbi Tzadok

I have already mentioned that Maimonides, in the third section of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, in his explanation of the reasons for the commandments, argues that the purpose of many laws was to contradict beliefs and opinions that were current in Moses' time. In some cases, this was accomplished by the abolition of practices associated with idol worship,³² while in other cases the opposite approach was taken—the practices were accepted, but the Torah used them to teach faith in the one God rather than to serve idols. Maimonides explained that because in those times temples and sacrifices were the accepted forms of worship, the Torah adopted these practices but directed them to the worship of God.³³ Maimonides based his discussion of the practice of idolatry in the time of Moses on the book *The Nabatean Agriculture*, which purports to describe the Sabian cult.³⁴ The problem is that Maimonides mistakenly believed the book to be ancient, whereas the accepted opinion today is that it was written close to Maimonides' time and certainly does not reflect customs in the time of Moses.³⁵ Despite Maimonides' crucial error, his intuition was brilliant. All of the new discoveries from the Near East support the theory that the Torah engages confrontationally with the laws and customs of its time.

Maimonides' position poses challenges to the belief in the eternal validity of the commandments. Since these idolatrous practices have been abandoned and forgotten, why observe commandments that were only intended to uproot

them? Our purpose here is not to examine all aspects of Maimonides' discussion, but rather to better understand the teaching of Rabbi Tzadok. Rabbi Tzadok outlines a process of gathering sparks from the ashes and the revelation of holiness. The crux of the matter is that even if the Torah was given in a specific time and place, the revelation of holiness has eternal significance.

Rabbi Tzadok, Rav Kook, and the Hasidic World

The overall similarities between the teachings of Rabbi Tzadok and the teachings of Rav Kook have been discussed elsewhere.³⁶ It would appear that in this matter as well there are similarities both in their responses to the specific question of the connection between the Bible and the Near Eastern legal codes and in their general approach to the subject.

In his book *Eder ha-Yakar*, Rav Kook mentions the commotion following the discovery of the writings from the ancient Near East: "When Assyriology made known its findings, our hearts were troubled because of some dubious similarities between the teachings of the Torah and some cuneiform texts."³⁷ Rav Kook raises several possible ways of understanding the relationship between the Torah and these cultures and concludes: "In a more enlightened outlook, this is the sure foundation for the acknowledgment of a good cultural element deep in the nature of man. This is conveyed in the statement that the most all-inclusive teaching of the Torah is the verse: 'This is the book of Adam's descendants. When God created man, He created him in God's image' (Gen. 5:1,2), and that this is even greater than the verse: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Lev. 19:18), which was cited by Rabbi Akiva." Rav Kook refers here to the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai: "'Love your fellow as yourself' (Lev. 19:18)—Rabbi Akiva says, 'This is an important principle in the Torah.' Ben Azzai says, 'This is the record of Adam's line' (Gen. 5:1) is a more important principle."³⁸

Rabbi Kook understood that Rabbi Akiva interpreted the word "fellow" to mean a fellow Jew, whereas Ben Azzai interpreted "Adam" to mean any human being, which teaches us that it is proper to learn laws and customs from all our fellow human beings. It follows, then, that the explanation for the parallels between the Torah and other ancient texts is that the Torah borrowed material from contemporary judicial codes. Both Rabbi Tzadok and Rav Kook accept the possibility that the Torah was influenced by neighboring cultures. It must be emphasized that most of the references to this subject in religious sources stress the originality of the Torah in relation to these cultures, whereas both of

these holy men raise the simple possibility that in certain ways the Torah was influenced by contemporary culture.

Hasidism is usually focused on the inner world of the individual. This is of course a generalization, but it nonetheless contains an element of truth. A great rebbe, for example, can look into a sinner's soul and find a spark of goodness, and use it to rehabilitate him. In contrast to other Hasidic thinkers, Rabbi Tzadok and Rav Kook devoted attention not only to the private world of the individual, but also to general phenomena. Rav Kook addressed the issue of the rampant secularization in his generation and attempted to elevate sparks from the ashes. Like Rav Kook (and those before him), Rabbi Tzadok looked at his generation and found within it sparks of holiness. Rabbi Tzadok's approach to the composition of the Torah reflects his confrontation with the beliefs and opinions of his generation; his approach to the Torah itself reflects his perspective of his generation.

* * *

In closing, I would like to share my personal opinion and a prayer. Viewing the Torah in the context of its time and place often leads to regarding it from a secular perspective. I can hear the Torah crying out over its treatment in the hands of prosaic academic scholars who see in it only what is mundane and dreary. The Torah asks them, "Do you not see how beautiful and wonderful I am?!" They hear neither her question nor her sobs, nor do they see her beauty. I pray to God that the students of Torah will not be deluded by superficial charms and will respond to the Torah in joy, and that she, in turn, will delight in them, and that the sounds of rejoicing will be heard throughout the Torah world. May we also follow in the path of the great teachers and pray to God that we be worthy to graze our flocks "by the tents of the shepherds" (Song of Sol. 1:8).

Endnotes

1. Midrash Tanhuma, ed. Shlomo Buber, Bereshit, chap. 5.
2. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:45.
3. Abraham Lebanon published a Hebrew translation of the legal codes from the ancient Near East. Abraham Lebanon, *Kivtzei Hukkim shel ha-Amim be-Mizrakh ha-Kadum* [Collections of laws from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor] (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1967). The poet S. Shifra has published a modern Hebrew translation of the non-legal writings. Shin Shifra and Yaakov Klein, *Ba-Yamim ha-Rehokim ha-Hem* [In those bygone days] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996). Rabbi Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto remains the accepted authority on these matters, especially his commentary to Genesis and to Torah portion Mishpatim in Exodus. See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams

- (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), and *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997).
4. See Y. Shavit and M. Eran's study of the widespread controversy generated by Delitzsch's lectures, *Milhemet ha-Luhot: ha-Hagana al ha-Mikra be-Me'a ha-Tsha-Esreh u-Pulmus Bavel veha-Tanakh* [The war of the tablets: The defense of the Bible in the nineteenth century] (Tel Aviv, Am Oved: 2003).
 5. See Rabbi Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook, *Eder ha-Yakar* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1967), 42, and further below.
 6. Tzadok Ha-Kohen, *Pri Tzadik* (Lublin: Schneidmesser and Hirschenhorn, 1901).
 7. On Rabbi Zadok's understanding of the Oral Law and his attitude to the *Wissenschaft* movement, see my article Avia Hacohen, "Rabbi Tzadok Ha-Kohen ve-Hitpathut Torah She-be-al Peh" [Rabbi Tzadok and the development of the Oral Law], *Mishlav* 35 (2000): 15–25. See also Y. Elman, "R. Zadok Hacohen on the History of *Halakhah*," *Tradition* 21 (1985): 1–27.
 8. *Pri Tzadik* contains Rabbi Tzadok's sermons on the weekly and holiday Torah portions. The sermon under discussion appears as sermon 4 in the portion Yitro. Tzadok Ha-Kohen, *Pri Tzadik*, 86–87.
 9. On this subject see *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Masekhta de-amalek, dvar ha-mathil "ve-yihi memaharat"*; Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Zevahim* 116a: "My sons, Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Joshua ben Levi—one says Jethro comes before the giving of the Torah. . . ."; See also the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Nachmanides, and others on Exodus 18.
 10. Zohar, Exod. 67b (Yitro).
 11. See *Pri Tzadik*, Genesis, Hayyei Sarah, 6, "*ve-hineh*"; Genesis, Hanukah, 2, "*akhen pri*"; Genesis, Va-yiggash, 12, "*u-mispar esreh*"; Exodus, Yitro, 3, "*ve-amar be-Zohar ha-Kadosh*"; Exodus, Yitro, 4, "*ve-yihi memaharat*"; Exodus, Shekalim, 1, "*u-Moshe Rabenu*"; Leviticus, Passover, 5, "*ve-shalosh matzot*"; *ibid.*, 39, "*torei zahav*"; Leviticus, Metzora, 6, "*u-mikol makom*"; Leviticus, Kedoshim, "*akhen yesh*"; and many more places.
 12. See Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Berakhot*, 9b, *inter alia*: "thus they stripped the Egyptians' (Exod.12:36)—Rabbi Ammi said, 'This teaches us that they made it resemble a fortress without grain.' Reish Lakish said, 'They made it resemble the deep waters without fish.'"
 13. See Rabbi Hayyim Vital in *Sha'ar ha-Pesukim* at the beginning of the book of Exodus: "We need to clarify the matter of the exile in Egypt. . . the reason for the exile of the People of Israel among the nations. We have said that Adam contained all the souls and all the worlds, and when he sinned all the souls fell from him into the *kelipot*, that are divided into seventy nations, and the People of Israel have to find them there, in each and every nation, and gather together the blossoms of the holy souls scattered among the thorns." In *Sha'ar ha-Mitzvot*, Rabbi Hayyim Vital writes about the commandment to remember the Exodus from Egypt in the weekly Torah portion Re'eh: "The reason for remembering the exodus from Egypt more than the other exiles . . . the Divine Presence of his power (*skhinat uzo*) goes with the People of Israel into exile among the *kelipot* . . . and gathers the souls from there . . . and they were not redeemed [from Egypt] until all of the souls were selected and removed from there, as it is said 'thus they stripped the Egyptians' (Exod.12:36). They made it resemble the deep waters without fish."
 14. See the commentary of the *Orach Hayyim* to Gen. 28:5.
 15. "God did a righteous thing for the People of Israel when he dispersed them among the nations so that converts would join them. The fundamental purpose of the exile . . . is for our good, because God had mercy on the souls of Israel and the sparks of holiness scattered in the four corners of the earth. . . . All of the sparks of holiness in all the places where they lived should have been drawn to the People of Israel of their own accord, and the latter should not have needed to

make an effort to run after them, just as the branch follows the root. However, because of our many sins, they became corrupted in their behavior and no longer have that power. Nonetheless, God had mercy on them and decided not to cut any of them off, God forbid, and so it was necessary to scatter the People of Israel among the nations in order to gather all of the holy sparks which are scattered, as they were in Egypt; as our sages commented (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Berakhot* 9b) on the verse ‘thus they stripped the Egyptians’ (Exod. 12:36), that they made them resemble the deep waters without fish. In other words, they collected all of the sparks of holiness that were swallowed up within [the Egyptians] and removed what they had swallowed from their mouths. That is the meaning of the verse ‘for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again’ (Exod. 14:13), as is understood by those familiar with esoteric lore. Their holy work, that is the exile, was completed because they did not leave behind a single spark of holiness. In other words, the root, the core, must leave its place and wander in exile to collect the branches, that is all its holy sparks, and gather them to the root.”

16. See Zohar 3, 149b.
17. The three advisors of Pharaoh are Jethro, Balaam, and Job.
18. The only source I know of that is similar to Rabbi Tzadok’s ideas is a homily in the book *Meor Einayim* by Rabbi Naḥum of Chernobyl on the weekly portion Va-yetse’: “Jacob left Beer-sheba’—Before Jacob set out for the house of Laban, there had not been a revelation of knowledge and Torah except in secret, and several roots of the Torah were scattered in the low levels because there had not been a revelation of knowledge in the world. And in the house of Laban there were several cloaked roots of Torah and this is the Torah that is written in the book of the Torah, taken from the stories of the deeds of Jacob in the house of Laban in Haran. The roots that Jacob removed were cloaked, and he selected and collected them from the depths of the kelipot of Laban, the size of which are well known.” See further there.
19. Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Bava Batra* 14b.
20. Rabbi Tzadok frequently discusses the relationship between the divine and human dimensions in the Oral Torah. In his opening homily on the book of Deuteronomy, after a long discussion on the human dimension of the Oral Torah, he writes: “The verse ‘He has made me dwell in darkness’ (Lam. 3:6) refers to the Babylonian Talmud (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Sanhedrin* 24a), because the Oral Torah is like the ancient dew—‘My speech distill as the dew’ (Deut. 32:2). Darkness symbolizes the position of man without divine assistance, and in a wondrous manner this creation is related to the word *atika* (ancient), a word that indicates the highest *sefirah*, *keter*. The connection to the *sefirah* of *keter* is through *tal* (dew). . . . Rainfall is clear and visible, whereas falling dew is not clearly apparent. Just as the dew appears wondrously, so God is revealed in the Oral Law in hidden ways.”
21. “As it is taught: all the prophets saw through an unilluminated vision. Moses our teacher saw through an illuminated vision” (Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Yevamot* 49b). Maimonides in his introduction to *perek Helek* distinguishes between the prophecy of Moses and the prophecy of all the other prophets, which included imagination and human impediments: “The Seventh Fundamental Principle is the prophecy of Moses our teacher. We are to believe that he was the chief of all other prophets before and after him, all of whom were his inferiors. . . . There remained . . . no deficiency, great or small, to confuse him. All his powers of sense and fantasy were repressed.” Maimonides, “Commentary on the Mishnah: Introduction to *Perek Helek*,” in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 419. Rabbi Joseph Albo wrote in *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*: “God Himself made clear the difference between Moses’ prophecy and that of the others. . . . From this we infer that the other prophets spoke in dark speeches which were not clear, and saw visions which were not real. . . . Moses, on the other hand, in whose prophetic inspiration the imagination

- played no part at all, but reason only, as separate from all corporal powers.” Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, ed. and trans. Isaac Husik (Philadelphia: JPS, 1946), 3:17.
22. Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), in his introduction to the story of creation in the book of Genesis, expresses a similar idea and emphasizes Moses’ role in writing the Torah: “Also this entire passage about the six days of creation was added by Moses our teacher to explain what God said at the time of the revelation of the Torah, ‘Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day’ (Exod. 20:8,11), and ‘And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day’ (Gen. 1:31). At the revelation of the Torah, God spoke of the same sixth day that is the end of the six days of creation. Therefore, Moses spoke of it to Israel, to show them that God speaks the truth.”
 23. See, e.g., the opening sermon of *Pri Tzadik* to the book of Deuteronomy, where he defines the book as the Oral Torah and the Torah of Moses.
 24. On Rabbi Tzadok’s understanding of the Oral Torah and his opinion of the academic study of Judaism, see above, note 5.
 25. See the homilies of Rabbi Tzadok on the Torah portion Korah in *Pri Tzadik*.
 26. See Rabbi Tzadok’s opening homily on the Torah portion ‘Emor in *Pri Tzadik*.
 27. One example is that in the narrative about Amalek it is written “But Moses’ hands grew heavy” (Exod. 17:12), and in the story of Jethro it is written “For the task is too heavy for you” (Exod. 18:18). See Umberto Cassuto’s discussion of the narrative of Amalek in his commentary to Exodus (see above, note 3).
 28. This can be seen in Saul’s speech to the Kenites before his war with Amalek: “Saul said to the Kenites, ‘Come, withdraw at once from among the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they left Egypt.’ So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites” (1 Sam. 15:6).
 29. See Rabbi Joseph Bekhor-Shor’s commentary to Numbers 11, where he states that the story of the manna and the quail is an alternate version of the narrative in Exodus 16, while the story of the events at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20) is an alternate version of the narrative of the events at Massah and Meribah in Exodus 17.
 30. See Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Sanhedrin* 56b on the commandments given at Marah.
 31. Though, in fact, both the stories in Exodus 17, Massah and Meribah and Amalek, do not refer to the commandments.
 32. See, e.g., *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:37, where Maimonides explains that the commandment of *sha’atnez* was instituted to counter the customs of idolatrous priests.
 33. *Ibid.*, 3:45.
 34. *Ibid.*, 3:29.
 35. See the words of Rabbi Yosef Kafah in his notes to his translation of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Jerusalem; Mosad Harav Kook, 1977), 3:29, 342n59.
 36. See Hayyim Yishayahu Hadari, “Shnei Kohanim Gedolim” [Two great Kohanim], in *Me’at Le-Zadik: Kovetz Ma’amarim al Rabi Tzadok ha-Kohen u-Mishnato* [Essays on Rabbi Tzadok Ha-Kohen and his thought], ed. Gershon Kitsis (Jerusalem, 2000), 77–95.
 37. Rabbi Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook, *Eder ha-Yakar* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1967), 42. Translated in Ben Zion Bokser, ed. and trans., *The Essential Writings of Abraham Isaac Kook* (Amity NY: Amity House, 1988), 4.
 38. *Sifra Kedoshim*, 2.