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Yale University, correspondence and journal article, 1983.

BABYLONIAN COLLECTION
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Curator
WILLIAM W. HALLO
Professor of Assyriology

September 30, 1983

Dear Dan,

I find myself with many offices but few secretaries so rather than keep you waiting longer I want (at least) to confirm in writing what we talked about on the telephone not too long ago: we would like to invite you, on behalf of the major in Judaic Studies, to address the Yale community on the subject of "Torah as Library" (or another topic of your choice) on Tuesday, November 29. We hope to schedule your lecture at a time and place where some of the New Haven community will also have an opportunity to hear you, i.e. presumably about 8 P.M.

In view of the fact that you will be in the area for other business, we would like to offer you a combination of travel expenses and honorarium in the total amount of \$300. - . I personally look forward to having you as our house guest at Morse College for the duration of your stay.

David Ruderman, who directs our

Jewish Studies Program, will be in
touch with you for further details
including, possibly, the sponsoring of
your visit under one of our newly
endowed lectureships. He will also
be able to answer any questions you
may have. He can be reached
at the Department of Religious
Studies, 320 Temple Street, New
Haven 06520, Tel. 203-436-2536.

Looking forward to your
visit, and with renewed good
wishes for the new year,

Cordially yours,

Bar

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

The Temple

University Circle at Silver Park

Cleveland, Ohio 44106

cc: D. Ruderman

Yale University

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

320 Temple Street
P.O. Box 2160 Yale Station
New Haven, Connecticut 06520

(203) 436-3536

Oct. 4.

Dear Dan

Just a note to tell you How happy I am about you coming to Yale on November 29. I will miss the Nov. 28 (Car Meeting) because of classes but I look forward to chatting with you again + listening to your lecture the next day.

Given the stature of our speaker, we thought it might be a good idea to invite one of the donors of our 4 endowed lecture series to attend your lecture + to have dinner with us at a small informal meal before your presentation. I trust you will not mind if we exploit your being with us to mark the beginning of a new lecture series.

My life at Yale has been hectic + I can't

Say I'm enjoying it yet BUT it clearly
holds great promise for the future for
Both me + Jewish studies.

- My warmest regards to Adele. -

Bill demands the honor of housing + feeding
you. I assume you WILL let him know when
you will arrive. We will probably plan
the lecture for the evening in order to invite
community people as well. Perhaps you might
plan on arriving some time in the afternoon.

In the meantime, A recent C.V. OR BIO
PLUS your Social Security Number would
be helpful in making preparations for your
visit. Please let me know if you require
anything else.

Sincerely,

David

P.S. Thanks for your recent New Year Note

October 21, 1983

Dr. David Ruderman
Yale University
Department of Religious Studies
320 Temple St.
New Haven, Connecticut 06520

Dear David,

I am looking forward to being with you on November 29. I will be delighted to see Morris Levenson with whom I have worked on National Foundation business. He can be quite generous.

We are just back from an October vacation. I brought in two new assistants this year and had a short busy summer, so with the early holidays we took off after Simhat Torah and spent two and a half weeks in Turkey. This is my first morning at the desk so if this letter is not quite coherent blame it on the jet lag.

I will come up to Yale sometime Tuesday morning. You can set the schedule from then on. An evening lecture sounds fine. Enclosed you will find a c.v. My Social Security number is [REDACTED].

With all good wishes from house to house, I remain

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

October 21, 1983

Dr. William W. Hallo
Babylonian Collection
Sterling Memorial Library
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut 06520

Dear Bill,

I am just back this morning from two weeks in Turkey. We got as far as Bogazkoy and in Istanbul saw the Four Thousand Years of Anatolian History. We had a good break.

I found your letter of September 30 on my desk and look forward to being your guest at Morse on Tuesday evening, November 29. I have written to David and sent him the bio etc. he requested.

As always,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

William Lee Frost
60 East 42nd Street-Suite 2910
New York, New York 10165

11/4/83.

Sam David,

Thank you for your note of
October 24th. I would enjoy
seeing you on Monday, November 28th
for dinner, lunch or whatever. Do
let me know what time is
best for you.

Best regards,
Sincerely,
Ben

The Temple

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER - RABBI

UNIVERSITY CIRCLE AT SILVER PARK • CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106 • 791-7755
BRANCH: 26000 SHAKER BLVD. • BEACHWOOD, OHIO 44122 • 831-3233

November 14, 1983

Mr. William Lee Frost
60 East 42nd St., Suite 2910
New York, N.Y. 10165

Dear Bill:

As my plans firm up for the 28th, I wonder if you could meet me for a drink around five o'clock. I have to be through with the day's business by then and we would have a chance for an hour or so together. If so, do you have any preference as to where we should meet? Looking forward to being with you, I remain



Sincerely,

[Signature]
Daniel Jeremy Silver

11/18/83

DJS:mp

Dear Daniel,

How About meeting
At THE HARVARD Club (27 W 44th)
At 5PM on Monday, Nov 28. IF
I do not hear from the company,
I will be waiting for you in
The lobby of the Club.
(Brooklyn)

November 30, 1983

Dear Rabbi Silver,

I feel terrible that I won't be able to make it to your lecture tonight, but unfortunately Tuesday classes happen to extend into the wee hours of the evening for me. I have a seminar, tonight, from 7:30 to 9:30, and with finals two weeks away my absence would be quite conspicuous, if not foolish.

The best I can offer is the hopes that you enjoy your stay in New Haven. If you get a chance after your lecture, I would really appreciate a quick phone call to say hello. My number is 432-1738, and I should be in my room after the seminar. Once again I regret missing your presentation and I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Mark

December 1, 1983

Dr. and Mrs. William Hallo
Babylonian Collection
Yale University
New Haven, Conn.

Dear Edith and Bill:

I want to thank you again for your warm and thoughtful hospitality. I not only enjoyed the evening but I enjoyed myself.

I caught a train almost immediately into New York and got everything done there that was on the agenda.

We are looking forward to having you here in March.

As always,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

vincing novels have been written about the patriarchs and David. None has been written on Moses, though writers of the stature of Sholem Asch, Louis Untermeyer, and Howard Fast have tried; and the reason, I believe, is that the Torah provides the novelist with little, if any, insight into Moses' personality. The Moses narratives are set out in prose, but that fact should not mask from us their fundamental dissimilarity in presentation and purpose from other biblical narratives. This is so, I believe, because the specific events which involve Moses represent the key moments in which God had intervened in the nation's history (redemption, election, covenant, land)—events the nation would wish to rehearse at their worship so as to induce God to renew and repeat His earlier displays of redemptive power and concern.

One of the reasons I have never been able to convince myself that some priest or pious storyteller invented Moses is that so few of the prerogatives and perquisites of power are ascribed to him. Moses is never described as wearing royal robes or seated on a throne. Had Moses been invented by the scribes of any of the successive rulers of Israel—tribal chiefs, kings, or theocrats—they would likely have taken pains to attach their patron's life and authority to the noblest figure of their nation's early history. No Israelite or Judean king claimed descent from Moses. If the priests had had the opportunity to invent Moses they would surely have claimed direct descent from him rather than from his brother Aaron, who was Moses' subordinate in rank and authority. Moses never straps on a sword, rides out in a war chariot to do battle, or devises a battle plan. A king's palace guards swiftly dispatch any who rebel. Moses has no private bodyguard and, when challenged by Dathan and Abiram, can only ask God for help against his rivals (Num. 15:12–15). Emperors dictate to ever present secretaries their nation's laws. Moses is the scribe who copies the laws as God dictates them to him. Great leaders build massive mausoleums to guarantee their immortality. Moses disappears into the wilderness, his burial place deliberately anonymous.

Kings establish dynasties and plan carefully for the transfer of their power. Moses had no voice in the choice of his successor: "Let the Lord . . . appoint someone over the community . . . so that the Lord's community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd" (Num. 27:15–17). His sons did not share in their father's authority, and Moses apparently did not seek power for them. They were not even considered for the group of spies selected to

assay the Promised Land, who would, it was clearly understood, be the future leaders of the people (Num. 13). The Torah reports only the names of Moses' sons, Gershon and Eleazar, and the fact that Moses delayed the youngest's circumcision, for reasons not given. Beyond this they are not in view, except for a single mention in an archaic fragment embedded in the book of Judges, which seems to indicate that descendants of Gershon, "son of Moses," were officiating as minor priests at a local shrine in the territory of Dan (Judg. 18:30). None of Moses' descendants make capital of his name, and there is no indication that Moses sought to make any political arrangements which would have benefited them. The narrative constantly underscores the point that power and authority belong to God and that Moses is simply God's agent.

Though the texts are certainly familiar, the reader is urged to re-examine the narratives which deal with Moses with the perspective I have suggested in mind. Particular attention should be paid to those chapters which describe Moses after he assumes his public role. The reader may begin, for example, with the third chapter of the book of Exodus (the commissioning scene at the Burning Bush) and read through to the end of the first telling of these events in the last chapters of the book of Numbers. He may then ask himself if he can point to a text which states, or even suggests, that Moses led the Israelites from Egypt. There is none. Instead, the reader will find himself remembering texts such as "That very day the Lord led the Israelites from the land of Egypt troop by troop" (Ex. 12:15). What about any statement that Moses' diplomacy was decisive with Pharaoh? What is written is that "The Lord struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:20). Similarly, the text does not indicate that Moses led his people in the wilderness; rather, it states, "The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night . . ." (Ex. 13:20). The Torah does not claim that Moses introduced Israel to the God whom they afterward worshipped; instead we read: "The Lord called to him [Moses] from the mountain saying, 'Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob . . . if you obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant You shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples'" (Ex. 19:35). There is no report that Moses led the tribes during the forty years of the wilderness trek; the text states rather, "The Lord continued: 'I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians, and bring them out of the land

to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of the Canaanites . . . ' (Ex. 3:8).

The narrative consistently affirms that God, not Moses, made the Exodus possible, established the terms of the covenant, and enabled the tribes to make a successful passage through the wilderness. Moses is depicted not as a self-reliant leader but as a faithful courtier whose virtue consists in faithfully and humbly carrying out the royal will. Moses makes no move to return to Egypt until God orders him to go. Once he returns, Moses does not develop a strategy for the slaves' escape. He simply awaits God's instructions and follows them to the letter (Ex. 6:13). Moses' activity in Egypt is to relay God's messages to the Hebrews and to announce God's miracles to Pharaoh. He does not act on his own. It is not, after all, Moses' skill as a diplomat, his nimble or his slow tongue, but the irrefutable logic of the plagues that finally persuades Pharaoh. Indeed, so consistent is the image of Moses as a man without independent authority that it extends to his costume as well as to his characterization; from the time he enters public life Moses keeps by him the staff which signaled his role as God's ambassador. It is a magical staff, but the power is not Moses' to control. When God wishes to display His might, He orders Moses to lift the rod and the skies darken or the Nile runs red. When, on God's command, Moses holds the rod above the rock, water gushes forth. Moses cannot summon the rod's power at will. The man who carries the staff is *ish-elohim*, God's man, and not his own master (Deut. 31:5).

To see the difference of thrust and form between these narratives and those which fit Alter's thesis, it may be useful to compare this presentation of Moses with the David narratives. Moses is married before his public career begins, and once he accepts God's commission there are no indications that he has any further sexual interests or even a private life. David's love affairs are unceasing and amply described, and his family problems would provide the story line for a soap opera. Moses is depicted as unwilling or unable to act, except when God gives him specific instructions. David rules by fiat; his every whim becomes law. When faced with a difficult decision, Moses has no alternative but to wait in the Tent of Meeting to receive God's instructions. David takes advice from a variety of counselors and makes his own decision. Moses plays no part in developing battle plans, and never enters the battlefield as a combatant. David is a master strategist and trained soldier who leads his troops with

skill and courage. When Korah rebels, Moses prostrates himself before God to ask for help, and is saved only when God orders the earth to swallow up his adversaries. When Absalom rebels against David, the king dispatches mercenaries to put down his son's uprising. Moses' sin is a purely formal one: he fails to follow with absolute fidelity God's instructions for a specific ritual. When David sins, his are the sins of ambition, cruelty, lust, and power—in short, the sins of a heroic figure.

The Moses narratives are about God (myth). The David narratives are about David (history, or, if you will, sacred history). That most of us have heretofore come away from the Torah text without this impression of Moses' contingent role testifies to our habit of rationalizing saga, to the force of pious tradition, and to our familiarity with the few stories of Moses' life before his commission where the narrative allows him some measure of independence. The conviction we bring to the text that a leader is a particular kind of man—a strong, vigorous, and decisive man—influences our reading and defines what we take away from it. But what is really in the text is a depiction of Moses as *ish-elo him*, God's ever-obedient servant. At times, indeed, one could almost describe Moses as a puppet manipulated from above.

The Moses narratives breathe the same spirit as the patriarchal narratives until the moment of his commissioning. Moses' birth story is a conventional miracle story. Moses' youth is passed over in silence. The narrative which details the crises leading to his exile uses active verbs to describe the incident: "When Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and witnessed their toil. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that, and seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (Ex. 2:11–12). Moses acts on his own when he kills the overseer and again the next day when he interferes in a quarrel between two Hebrew slaves (Ex. 2:13–14). He makes the decision to flee Egypt. He acts on his own when he protects Jethro's daughters from local bullies bothering them at the village well (Ex. 2:16–21), when he marries one of Jethro's daughters, and when he agrees to work for his father-in-law (Ex. 3:1). These domestic scenes probably were omitted in the shrine recitals, just as they do not appear in our later day version of these recitals—the Passover Hagada—and so were not shaped by the needs of the liturgy.

But once Moses is commissioned at the Burning Bush, once he exchanges private life for public life, the text routinely and

As was the familiar custom of holy men, Moses lived apart. His tent was set up "at some distance from the camp" (Ex. 33:7-8). His tent was taboo. When God visited the holy man there, the tribal leaders would prostrate themselves wherever they happened to be in the encampment (Ex. 33:10). After he had been with God, Moses veiled his face as was the custom among shamans and holy men (Ex. 34:29).

A word should be said about the courage required of holy men and prophets. Popular understanding linked, in a cause and effect relationship, the messenger with his message. When the holy man spoke an oracle, he activated the event and so was, in a sense, responsible for it. If a holy man prophesied defeat or national disaster, he was seen as responsible for any tragedy that might follow his speech; had he not spoken, the disaster would not have happened. Holy men and prophets often acted in ways contrary to the king's or the community's perception of the national interest. One *ish-elohim* announced the end of Eli's priestly dynasty (I Sam. 27:36); another denounced King Jeroboam for setting up an altar at Bethel (I Kings 13); and a third warned King Amaziah against a military campaign he was contemplating (II Chron. 25:7). The holy man was protected by the credulities of his society. He carried neither weapons nor shield, but as Jeremiah's fate makes clear, these protective taboos could break down. Moses, of course, never brought words which threatened national extinction, but the oracles he delivered were not always cheerfully received. After the apostasy of the Golden Calf, Moses delivered God's death sentence against many of the most powerful men in the camp. When the camp vetoed God's command to move out immediately and begin the conquest of Canaan, Moses spoke the words which condemned the Exodus generation to die in the wilderness.

The holy man in West Asian society proved the power of his god and the authenticity of his closeness to his god by living without the familiar protection of bodyguards. Moses, therefore, has no bodyguard. Moses' lack of formal protection, despite his vulnerability and the repeated threats to his life, allowed the editors to display dramatically and repeatedly God's saving power. Moses' frequent escapes from danger proved that God protected His servants.

In West Asia during the second millenium B.C.E., historical writing tended to be limited to formal texts: brief reports of imperial victories, lists of tribute paid by vassals, king lists, and

documents which supported a shrine's claim as the home of a national god. The biblical narratives, as Alter makes clear, present artfully constructed stories which represent a new order of history. The dry lists become lively incidents which are shaped to fit into a covenantal scheme which proves God's dependability and beneficent control of history, and detail the response of individual men and nations to the duties and freedom which God has given them.

The Moses narratives are closer to liturgy than to chronicle—shrine talk, not sermon talk or story talk. The covenant, of course, came to be embedded in these narratives and in Deuteronomy (particularly some of the implications of covenant theology are exposed); but these narratives were not designed as sacred history or proof of God's *chesed*, but as myth, i.e., literature which would hasten *ge-ula*, redemption. Their purpose was mythic, not sermonic.

Our Passover faithfully continues this original mythic-redemptive purpose. The Hagada is not history but liturgy: specifically, a liturgy designed to evoke the redemptive power of God and so to hasten redemption. Passover is not an historic commemoration but an anticipation of the messianic deliverance. *Seder* night is the long-awaited "night of watching" when, according to tradition, the Messiah or his forerunner, Elijah, will appear. It is appropriate and consistent that Moses was not mentioned in any of the early versions of the Hagada. What had Moses to do with Eschaton?

How it came about that these narratives were set in prose rather than in the poetic style of most liturgies cannot now be explained. We know too little about the actual practice at places like Beth-El and Shechem. The idea suggests itself that the oral narrative was already phrased in this way while the tribes were semi-nomadic and not yet aware of the shrine practices of the Canaanite city states. Whatever the reason, the Moses narratives are unique in Scripture and represent recitations which describe God's power so as to encourage God to use these powers. They center on the promise of redemption and were designed as a mechanism to hasten redemption.