Chapter Sixteen

Great is the Study of Torah

Most of His Brethren

[16b] “For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and
great among the Jews; and accepted of the multitude [rov] of his
brethren” (Esther 10:3).

Rav Joseph teaches¹ [in a baraita]:² “of the majority [rov] of his
brethren”³—and not of⁴ all of his brethren.⁵ This teaches that part of
the Sanhedrin⁶ withdrew from him.

The noun rov in biblical Hebrew carries the meanings
“multitude, abundance, greatness,”⁷ but not that of “majority” or “the
greater part.” It is precisely in these latter senses that the word is used
in the overwhelming majority of occurrences in rabbinic literature.⁸ As
frequently happens, the midrash read the biblical expression in the light
of its contemporary usage,⁹ leading to an ironic observation about the
price of Mordecai’s success. As long as Mordecai had existed as an
individual pursuing the life of a pious Jewish scholar, he could enjoy
the support and admiration of all his colleagues.¹⁰ Now that he has

¹ “Rav Joseph teaches”— ~ in MS P, Printings, Genizah fragment.
² See Melamed, Halachic Midrashim of the Tannaim in the Babylonian Talmud, 519.
³ “of...brethren”— ~ in MS P.
⁴ “of”— ~ in MSS P, L, HgT², Genizah fragment.
⁵ “and not...brethren”— ~ in MS B (and filled in in B*).
⁶ “Sanhedrin”—Genizah fragment: “Shekhinah.”
⁷ BDB, 913-4; Ben-Yehuda, 14:6348-50.
⁸ See Ben-Yehuda, 14:6350-2.
⁹ The phenomenon is described by I. Heinemann, Darkhei ha-aggadah, 112-7.
¹⁰ Interestingly and characteristically, the baraita is concerned only with the approval
of the members of the “Sanhedrin,” the rabbinic sages, and not with the general Jewish

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turned his energies to other directions, and come to occupy positions of leadership in the royal court and in the Jewish community, he has inevitably alienated some of the rabbis.

population, in spite of the verse's mention of "his brethren." See Maharsha, who takes the trouble to explain that Mordecai's spiritual "brothers" were the rabbis (according to the midrash, these were the "Men of the Great Assembly," by whose authority the Book of Esther was accepted into the biblical canon). The identification of Mordecai as a member of the Sanhedrin is by now a familiar motif in the midrashic retelling of Esther, which we have discussed on previous occasions.

Rashi attributes the hostility of the Sanhedrin to the fact that Mordecai's political appointment has led to a proportionate neglect of Torah study, an explanation which was accepted by all subsequent commentators. Although the connection to Mordecai's rise to power is indeed suggested by the context of the verse, I find no explicit indication in the biblical or talmudic texts that the issue at stake in the baraita was the diminishing of his scholarly achievement. Presumably Rashi arrived at this conclusion by equating the present baraita with Rav Joseph's dictum below, which defines the conflict as one between "study of Torah" and "saving of lives." Although such an understanding is perfectly reasonable, it is not necessarily true. A number of alternative interpretations are possible. For one thing, it is not obvious that Mordecai is actually being criticized. The baraita might merely be expressing its ironic resignation to the inevitable spiritual costs of communal power. On the other hand, the purpose of the midrash might be to castigate Mordecai for accepting an appointment in a non-Jewish administration. Rashi's allusion to this factor is ambiguous since he refers to Mordecai's entering the serarah, a Hebrew term which can apply equally to leadership within the Jewish community or an appointment at the royal court. That the objection is to collaboration with the government is suggested more strongly by R. Samuel Masnouth I. S. Lange and S. Schwartz, eds., Midraš Daniel et Midraš Ezra Auctore R. Samuel b. R. Nissim Masnouth (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1968), 148, who speaks of Mordecai becoming "close to the throne" (qarav lammalkhut). If we consider Rav Joseph's dictum (immediately below) to be integrally connected to his baraita, then the issue is spelled out clearly to be one of "saving of lives," and it is hardly likely that Mordecai is being taken to task for saving the Jews from Haman's plot!

In support of Rashi's reading, we may observe that the conflicting claims of academic religious scholarship and the duties of communal leadership were often characterized as an inescapable accompaniment of rabbinic leadership. The phenomenon is related to the separation of powers between the Patriarchate or Exilarchate and the beit hammidrash, and might have roots as far back as the Pharisaic avoidance of political involvement during the Hasmonean and Herodian eras. Rabbinic literature relates that the rabbis did nonetheless have to fulfill various administrative functions for the "secular" authorities. For an overview of the issues and an attempt to set it in a historical and social context see Urbach, The Sages, 604-12 (On 611-2 he discusses our pericope according to Rashi's understanding of it). See also his "Ma'amad

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Great is the Study of Torah

Greater Than the Saving of Lives

[16b] Says\(^\text{13}\) Rav Joseph:\(^\text{14}\) Great is the study of\(^\text{15}\) Torah\(^\text{16}\) more than the saving of lives.

Whence do we learn this? —From Mordecai.\(^\text{17}\) For\(^\text{18}\) initially it counts\(^\text{19}\) him\(^\text{20}\) after four, and in the end it counts him\(^\text{21}\) after five.

Initially it is written\(^\text{22}\) "Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai Bilshan, Mizpor, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The numbers of the men of the people of Israel" (Ezra 2:2).

\(^\text{12}\) See Esther 8:15; 9:4, etc.

\(^\text{13}\) "Says"—MSS G, B, L, M, Mf, Spanish family: "And says."

\(^\text{14}\) "Rav Joseph"—Genizah fragment: "R. Yose bar Rabbi Hanina."

\(^\text{15}\) "the study of"—~ in MS O.

\(^\text{16}\) "Torah"—~ in MS B (and filled in in B*).

\(^\text{17}\) "Whence...Mordecai"—thus only in MS Y; ~ in all other witnesses.

\(^\text{18}\) "For"—~ in MS W. Spanish family adds: "whereas."

\(^\text{19}\) "it counts"—Genizah fragment: "they count."

\(^\text{20}\) "him"—thus only in MS Y and Genizah fragment; in all other witnesses: "Mordecai."

\(^\text{21}\) "it counts him"—Genizah fragment: "they count him"; MS R: "it counts"; ~ in MS P, EY, Printings, YS.

\(^\text{22}\) "and in the end...written"—~ in AgE (homoioteleuton).
But in the end it is written "Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel" (Nehemiah 7:7).
Rav Joseph’s dictum appears to be based on the conclusions of the *baraita* which he brought above,24 which claimed that Mordecai had compromised his vocation as a Torah scholar when he involved himself in the “political” activities that were necessary for foiling Haman’s plans.25 Rav Joseph finds corroboration for his observation in the comparison of two verses outside the book of Esther in which Mordecai26 was mentioned. The former verse is part of a list of the Jewish exiles who went up to Jerusalem following Cyrus’ proclamation, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. An almost identical list appears in connection with the completion of the construction of the walls of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah.27 Both lists include the name Mordecai.28 The only major difference between the two lists, aside from some variations in orthography, is that in the second one an additional name is added just before Mordecai’s. Rav Joseph regards this fact as an intentional indication that the authors of the book of Ezra [-Nehemiah]29 wanted to show us that in the period intervening between

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24 But cf. Pinto who observes that if the *baraita* and the dictum were really making the same point then the dictum would be unacceptably redundant! He resolves this difficulty by arguing that in the *baraita* all that we are given is the human opinion of Mordecai’s colleagues on the Sanhedrin who could be expected to attach undue importance to the precept of *talmud torah*. Rav Joseph’s dictum, on the other hand, expresses the “objective” evaluation of the biblical author.

25 See my discussion in the notes to the previous section. However we may choose to understand the *baraita*, it is clear that the dictum relates to Mordecai’s activities prior to Haman’s defeat, not to whatever role he might have played afterwards.

26 According to the rabbinic belief which equated these two homonymous figures.

27 Maharsha notes that both lists must be recording the same event since it is inconceivable that all the exiles who are enumerated there should have gone back to Babylonia and then returned. Therefore the addition of the name to the second verse must have been done with a view to its midrashic exposition.

28 Presumably (though this fact does not affect the understanding of the current pericope) the author read “Mordecai Bilshan” as a single person in accordance with the midrashic traditions which viewed the latter as an epithet for the former [“master of (seventy) languages (lashon), a proverbial prerequisite for acceptance into the Great Sanhedrin].

29 According to *TB Bava batra* 15a the “Men of the Great Assembly” composed the Book of Esther, and Ezra himself authored the book bearing his name (including the

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the two events—the period during which the events of Esther, including Mordecai’s rise to worldly greatness, took place—Mordecai’s status had been reduced correspondingly. The reason for this, says Rav Joseph, must have been connected with his neglect of his scholarly activities in order to battle against the perils threatening his people.

Greater Than the Construction of the Temple

[16b] Says Rav; and if you should say: Says Rav Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta: Great is the study of Torah, more than the...Continued from previous page

section which we currently call “Nehemiah”), as well as the Book of Chronicles, insofar as they deal with events which took place before his death (They were subsequently completed by Nehemiah). However according to TB Sanhedrin 93b the whole of Ezra was composed by Nehemiah, but on account of his moral failings the authorship was not ascribed to him. See Ginzberg, Legends, 4:352; 6:439, n. 439.

30 See Ginzberg, Legends, 4:445: “Previously he had ranked sixth [!] among the eminent scholars of Israel, he now dropped to the seventh [!] place among them”; 6:480, n. 190. The Talmud does not state explicitly that the ranking in the verses was in order of scholarly erudition.

31 The dictum is undoubtedly an aggadic exaggeration, since it is unimaginable that Rav Joseph is suggesting that Mordecai ought to have kept to his studies in such circumstances. See the commentary of R. Josiah Pinto who tries unconvincingly to formulate a halakhic rationale that would give communal Torah study a higher priority than the saving of human life. Urbach, The Sages, 611-2, explains this passage in the light of Rav Joseph’s comment in TB Sotah 21a (ed. Liss, 1:296) that

A commandment protects and saves life at the time that a person is occupied in its performance; but when one is not occupied in its performance it protects but does not save life. However the Torah both protects and saves life whether or not the person is occupied in it.

32 “Says”— ~ in MS L.

33 “Rav”—MSS O, L: “Rava.”

34 “Says”—thus only in MSS Y, B; ~ in all other witnesses.

35 “Isaac bar”— ~ in Printings.

36 “Samuel bar”— ~ in MSS R, Mf.

37 “bar Marta”— ~ in MSS P, W. MS L adds: “in the name of Rav”; MS M adds: “in the name of Rav Gidal.”
construction of the Temple. For all the time that Baruch the son of Neriah was alive, Ezra did not abandon him and go up.

The tradition about Ezra’s alleged studies with Jeremiah’s protégé Baruch the son of Neriah is an attempt to grapple with a

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38 “construction of the Temple”—MS R: “offering of the daily sacrifices (temidim).”

39 “the son of”—HgT²: “and.”

40 “Neriah”—MS P: “Hilkiah.”

41 MS P adds: “and.”

42 “and”—AgE: “to.”

43 The biblical records do not speak of Baruch being exiled to Babylonia. On the contrary, Jeremiah 43:6-7 counts him among those who accompanied Jeremiah to Egypt in the wake of the assassination of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, and we hear nothing of him afterwards. However post-biblical Jewish sources know of several traditions that trace the fates of Baruch and Jeremiah, whether to Egypt, to Babylonia or to the Land of Israel. See the discussion in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4:311-2; 6:399-403, n. 42. Among the sources that should be mentioned in this connection are: The apocryphal Book of Baruch which claims (1:1) to have been composed in Babylonia. In the “Apocalypse of Baruch” 11:2, 3 and 33:2 [see “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” transl. A. F. J. Klijin, in: James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 623, 631] so too in “4 Baruch,” 4:6-7 [transl. S. E. Robinson, in: Charlesworth, 419] Baruch remained in the Holy Land while only Jeremiah went to Babylonia. *Seder ‘olam*, Ch. 26 (ed. Ratner, 120; ed. Milikowsky, 412, 533) relates:

“In the seven and twentieth year” (Ezekiel 29:17) of Nebuchadnezzar [God] gave Egypt into his hand. “He took her multitude, and took her spoil, and took her prey” (ibid., 29:19). And he exiled Jeremiah and Baruch to Babylonia in the twenty-fifth year of our captivity.

However Rashi in his commentary to Jeremiah 44:14 cites *Seder ‘olam* as speaking of a return to the Land of Israel (see the discussion in Ratner’s notes). No such text is recorded in Milikowsky’s critical apparatus. *Pesiqta rabbati* 26:6-7 (ed. Friedmann, 131a-132a; transl. Braude, 517-8) describes Jeremiah’s exile to Babylonia and (apparently) a subsequent return to Jerusalem (cf. Tosafot Bava batra 15a). Jerome, *Commentarius in Isaiae*, 30:6:7, cites a “Hebrew” tradition that both Jeremiah and Baruch ended their lives in Egypt [in: J. Martian ed., *S. Eusebii Hieronymi...Opera Omnia*, Patrologia Latina, P. L. Migne, ed. (Petit-Montrouge: [by editor], 1845), 4:341-2]. Josephus, *Antiquities* 10:9:7 (182-3; ed. Marcus, 6:258-9) relates that Nebuchadnezzar took all the Egyptian exiles to Babylonia, though he does not make specific mention of Jeremiah or Baruch. Ginzberg argues that the references in *TP Sanhedrin* 1:2 (19a and parallels) to Jeremiah and Baruch intercalating years abroad

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puzzle of Jewish historiography: Why did the righteous Ezra not seize the earliest possible opportunity and go up with the first group of returning exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel? Instead “he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king [Artaxerxes].”

There does not appear to be any positive reason why the rabbis should have chosen Baruch to be Ezra’s teacher rather than any other distinguished figure or prophet of the time. It is likely that the selection was arrived at by default, since of the figures who could have been active during that generation, Baruch is the only one who is not known to have returned to Zion at an earlier date [as did, e.g., Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (see Ezra 5:1)].

Rashi’s statement that the source for the connection between Baruch and Ezra is an “aggadic midrash” does not necessarily refer to a specific text; it might simply be an acknowledgment that the tradition is not found in the Bible. However he might be alluding to the passage from Song of Songs rabbah cited in the notes below. Cf. Sarah Kamin, Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization In Respect to the Distinction Between Peshat and Derash, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 139, n. 99.

The problem really arises only if we adhere to the traditional Jewish chronology according to which Ezra’s departure for Jerusalem was a mere seven years after Zerubbabel’s. Critical historians posit an interval of fifty-seven years between the completion of the Second Temple (in 515 B.C.E.) and Ezra’s migration (452 B.C.E.). If that is the case, then Ezra would have been an infant, or not yet born, at the time of the earlier wave. On the complex questions involved in the chronology of the era see: H. H. Rowley, “The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah,” in: Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume, eds. S. Löwinger and J. Somagyi (Budapest: by Editors, 1948), 117-49; N. H. Snaith, “The Date of Ezra’s Arrival in Jerusalem,” ZAW 63 (1951), 53-66; J. Liver, “The Return from Babylonia: Its Time and Scope,” Eretz Israel 5 (1958), 114-9; John Bright, “The Date of Ezra’s Mission to Jerusalem,” Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 70-87; J. Meyers, Ezra and Nehemiah (Anchor Bible), xxxvi-xxxvii; 59; Mordecai Zer-Kavod, ‘Ezra unehemia, Da’at miqra (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1980), 46, n. 1. The principal sources for the traditional Jewish reckoning of that era are: Seder ‘olam Ch. 29 (ed. Ratner, 133-4; ed. Milikowsky, 429-35, 541-4); TB ‘Arakhin 12b-13a.

See Rashi. Maharsha takes the problem a step further by asking why Baruch himself failed to go back to Palestine during that time. The ‘Eṣ yosef resolves this difficulty by citing Song of Songs rabbah, 5:4 (ed. Dunsky, 129-30):
It is probable that, in addition to these exegetical considerations, the dictum was also employed for homiletical purposes. It would have served as effective propaganda for the Babylonian talmudic academies in discourses designed to discourage students from immigrating to the Holy Land.46

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...Daniel and his following and his company went up at the same time... Ezra and his following and his company did not go up at that time.
And why did Ezra not go up at that time?
—Because he had to refine his learning before Baruch the son of Neriah.
And let Baruch the son of Neriah go up!
—Rather, they say: Baruch the son of Neriah was an old man advanced in years, and was incapable even of being carried in a litter.
Says Resh Laqish: It was in accordance with the will of the Holy One that Ezra did not go up at that time. For if Ezra had gone up at that time, then Satan might have spoken a denunciation saying: It would be preferable if Ezra served in the High Priesthood instead of Joshua son of Jehozadak...

46 Similar sentiments may be found in TB Ketubbot 111a (ed. Hershler, 2:536-9); Gitten 6a (which gives us a glimpse into the undesirable social consequences that could result when students forsook their families in order to fulfill their religious ideal of migration to the Holy Land—a concern which is clearly not the central concern of our present pericope); etc.; see S. W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982-), 2:207-8; 405, n. 40; Neusner, A History of the Jews in Babylonia, 3:220 (and n. 1). Urbach, The Sages, 612 writes that "The dictum...may possibly be regarded as an apologia for the continued residence of the Sages in Babylonia, but this certainly does not apply to the saying of the same Amora ‘Study of the Torah transcends honoring father and mother.’" See our discussion below. The issue is discussed in depth by Joshua Schwartz, "Aliya from Babylonia during the Amoraic Period," Cathedra 21 (1981), 23-30. Among the possible grounds for opposition to ‘aliyah on behalf of Babylonia rabbis, Schwartz (25) mentions the worry that the local yeshivot might be drained of talented students.

On the question of the order of priorities between family obligations and national or patriotic duties (see below) see TP Berakhot 3:1 (6a); and the rabbinic and classical sources adduced by E. E. Hallevy, Aggadot ha-‘amora’im, 40-1.
Greater than Honoring One's Father and Mother

[16b] Says Rava says Rav Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta in the name of Rav. Great is the study of Torah, more than honoring one’s father and mother; for during all those years that Jacob our father was in the house of Shem and Eber he was not punished on their account.

This comment, like the previous one, is intended to exalt and extol the importance of religious study. It is not unlikely that Rav had in mind specific cases where a potential student had to choose between conflicting claims of pursuing his education and supporting or obeying his parents.

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47 “Rava”—thus only in MSS Y, B; in all other witnesses: “Rabbah.”
48 “bar bar Hana”—~ in Printings.
49 “Samuel bar”—~ in HgT1.
50 “Rav Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta”—MS P: “Rav Isaac”; MS R: “R. Johanan.”
51 “in the name of Rav”—~ in MS Mf, Printings.
52 MS M adds: “Gidal.”
53 “our father”—~ in MSS N, B, M, Mf, YS, AgE.
54 “not”—~ in MS R (and filled in in R*).
55 “on their account”—~ in Printings.
56 MS N adds: “And whence do we know that he was not punished?”
57 See Ithamar Warhaftig, “Gadol talmud torah yoter mikkibbud av ve’em,” Sinai 100 (Jubilee Volume; 1987), 1:412-28, who observes that this is the only one of the three comments in our pericope in praise of Torah study which was treated by the medieval codifiers as a full-fledged legal ruling. The sort of real-life issue which Rav might have had in mind is astutely described by the author of the She’iltot, Toledot, 19 (ed. Mirsky, 1:128-9):

A person who has a father and mother, and is obligated to serve them, to provide them with food and drink, to bring them in and out, to clothe and cover them, as we have learned [TB Qiddushin 31b]... but he wishes to go to his master in order to study, or to a place of Torah so that he will not have to study in isolation, as we have learned [Mishnah Avot 4:4]...— Which of them takes precedence? ...Do we say that the study of Torah takes precedence as it does over all actions? Or perhaps honoring one’s father and mother takes precedence because their honor has been equated with honoring God...?

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Great is the Study of Torah

The computation that fourteen years of Jacob's life remained unaccounted for in the biblical story of his life is of course not stated explicitly in the Bible, and was deduced on the basis of the calculations set out below whose source, as we shall note, is in Seder 'olam, Chapter 2. Talmudic tradition deduced from this "fact" (as will be spelled out at the conclusion of the pericope) that Jacob had spent those years studying Torah at the yeshivah of Shem and Eber prior to departing

58 Other allusions to this period in Jacob's life are found in Genesis rabbah, 68:5 (773; a dictum of Hezekiah); 68:11 (784; R. Judah); 84:8 (1010; R. Nehemiah).

59 To the best of my awareness, the traditions about the existence of a "talmudic academy" during the Patriarchal age have not yet been subjected to extensive scholarly analysis. For the present see Urbach, The Sages, 335-6. He discusses the phenomenon in connection with the view, widespread among the talmudic rabbis, that the Patriarchs had observed the laws of the Torah even before its public revelation at Mount Sinai. Urbach contrasts the position expressed in our pericope and others like it, which claim that the contents of the Torah had been transmitted from primordial times from teacher to disciple, with a more prevalent view that the Patriarchs' observance of the commandments was the outcome of direct revelation. The discussion is incorporated into a broader treatment of the degree to which the Jewish sages posited an "autonomous" human role in the fulfillment of the laws of the Torah, an issue which was debated to a surprising extent in nineteenth-century Jewish theology and Wissenschaft, but which appears to have little bearing on the actual thought-patterns of the talmudic rabbis.

Prof. Chaim Milikowsky informs me (in a personal conversation) that in his view the origins of these traditions go back to the Second Temple era and derive from the characterization of Shem and Eber as prophetic figures, and the additional support supplied by the rabbinic exegeses (see below) was a secondary post facto development. The prophetic status of Shem is related to his identification with Melchizedek. [See references in Ginzberg, Legends, 1:233; 5:225-6, n. 102; 192, n. 63 (also concerning Eber, see below), 287, n. 118.] That Eber was a prophet is proven by Genesis 10:25 where he named his son Peleg on account of the division of the earth which would take place in his days [See Seder 'olam, 1 (Ratner, 2-3); Genesis rabbah, 37:7 (349); V. Aptowitzer, "Malkizedek. Zu den Sagen der Agada," MGWJ 70 (1926), 93-113; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Homilies of the Rabbis on the Prophets of the Nations and the Balaam Stories," Tarbiz 25 (1956), 274 [=World of the Sages, 538], n. 8.]

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Although the above reconstructions (as well as Urbach's suggestion that Shem and Eber might have served as a counterpart to the apocalyptic Enoch-traditions) might have validity, we should keep in mind that the traditions about an "academy of Shem and Eber" are easily explainable from within the conventional hermeneutical and conceptual worlds of the midrash. For example, the tendency of the rabbis to anachronistically paint the biblical world in the colors of their contemporary values and institutions is one of the most fundamental and familiar features of midrashic homiletics, and is an inevitable by-product of the desire to attach contemporary relevance to the study of the sacred scriptures. Assigning a "halakhic" status to Shem is also in keeping with the development of the concept of "Noachide commandments" which were incumbent upon humankind prior to the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai. [See also Ch. Albeck, "Das Buch der Jubiläen und die Halacha," Bericht der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, 47 (1930), 4-7, 38-40.]

The notion that it was Shem and Eber who, among all the possible representatives of the pre-Abrahamic generations, should have been the ones responsible for the transmission of the primordial "Torah" was undoubtedly inspired by the longevity of these two figures. Shem, if we presume that he was the oldest of Noah's sons, was born in year 1558 after creation (Genesis 5:32) and went on to live a total of six hundred years (Gen. 11:10-11), putting the year of his death in 2158. His great-grandson Eber was born in 1723 and lived 464 years until his death in 2187 (Gen. 11:15-7). This means that both of these personalities outlived Abraham (who died in 2123; see Gen. 11:26; 25:7; Seder 'olam, Ch. 1 [ed. Ratner, 7; ed. Milikowsky, 214, 451]: "Jacob 'served' Abraham fifteen years and Shem fifty years..."). Eber's life-span overlapped that of Isaac (who died in 2228; see Gen. 21:5; 35:28), and he did not die until Jacob was seventy-nine years old (Gen. 25:26; see below in our pericope). A useful chronological table is included in Moses Y. Weinstock, ed., Seder Olam Raba (Jerusalem: Mesivta "Torath Chesed," 1956), 1:7. Genesis 10:21 posits a special connection between Shem and Eber.

Unlike the situation in rabbinic sources, Shem and Eber do not figure prominently in Apocryphal and Apocalyptic writings. See however Testament of Simeon 6:5 [transl. C. H. Kee, "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," in Charlesworth, Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 1:87]. Shem appears as the transmitter of a book of healing in Jubilees 10:10-4 [transl. O. S. Wintermute, in Charlesworth, 2:76]. A similar role is ascribed to him with respect to magical lore by Sefer Ha-Razim [ed. Mordecai Margalioth (Jerusalem: Yediot Achronot, 1966), xiii, 18 (n. 3)]. Shem functions in the Bible as well as in rabbinic literature as a prototype for the nation of Israel. By contrast, the figure of Eber is barely mentioned in the Apocrypha or Pseudepigrapha.

The midrashic association between Shem and the talmudic yeshivah was probably suggested by the occurrence of the expression "tents of Shem" in Noah's blessing (Genesis 9:27), which was read in the light of the rabbinic association between "tents" and academies of Torah [as in Genesis 25:27 which supplies the ty-
for Haran. By tarrying Jacob was disobeying Isaac’s charge to proceed to Padan-aram to find a wife. As the talmudic passage will conclude, Jacob was punished for remaining too long with Laban, but not for the period of his studies. From this we will learn that the obligation to study the Torah takes precedence over filial duties.

The Years of Ishmael

[16b] For says R. Hiyya bar Abba: Says R. (Jonathan) (Joḥanan): [17a] Why were the years of Ishmael enumerated? —In order to trace the years of Jacob our father.

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pology of Jacob as a “plain man, dwelling in tents”; see also Genesis 25:22 where the verb darash (“inquire”) prompted the rabbis to expound that Rebecca had recourse to a “beit midrash”). The expression appeared initially as the “academy [or: court (beit din)] of Shem [sometimes: Shem the Great],” as it is found in some sources. The co-opting of Eber was a secondary step, needed to account for the continuity of the tradition in the years following Shem’s death (though the rabbis, in proper midrashic manner, were able to find an allusion to it in the plural “tents of Shem”). There is likely some significance to be attached to the fact that Abraham and his descendants were designated “Hebrews,” a term which can mean “children of Eber.” [See Genesis rabbah, 41:8 (414), etc.]

For references to the Academy of Shem and/or Eber see: Targum pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 24:62 (trans. Maher, 87); 25:22 (90); 25:27 (90); Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, Fragments of Lost Targumim, Part Two, Bar-Ilan Institute for the History of Jewish Biblical Research Sources and Studies (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1989), 41; Genesis rabbah, 63:6 (684); 63:10 (693); 85:12 (1045); Song of Songs rabbah, 6:8 (ed. Dunsky, 142); Ecclesiastes rabbah, 5:18; 10:19; Midrash on Psalms, 72:2 (ed. Buber, 325; transl. Braude, 1:559); TB Makkot 23b; Midrash aggadah, Toledot (ed. Buber, 62); Aggadat bereshit, 73:1 (ed. Buber, 118).

See additional references in Ginzberg, Legends, 5:192, n. 63; 5:263-4, n. 303; 5:274, n. 29; Maher, ibid., 46, n. 23; A. Shinan, The Embroidered Targum, 188, n. 81.

60 Genesis 28:2.
61 See Rashi.
62 “Says”—MhG: “in the name of.”
63 “Jonathan”—thus only in MS Y; emended according to all other witnesses. R. Hiyya bar Abba was a disciple of R. Johanan. who frequently transmits sayings in his name. MhG adds: “says.”
64 All witnesses except MSS Y and R add: “through them.”
65 “our father”—thus only in MS Y; ~ in all other witnesses.
In general, the Torah provides only such historical and genealogical information as is necessary for tracing the development of the people of Israel. In light of this premise, it was inconceivable to the rabbinical mind that God should waste precious words on biographical data that does not further this purpose and relates only to the subsidiary branches of the Patriarchal line.  

R. Johanan’s observation is not crucial for demonstrating Jacob’s lost years, nor does it relate to Rav’s dictum about the priority of study over parental honor. Both these assertions are founded upon chronological calculations which had been formulated prior to R. Johanan. The redactor of our pericope seems to have had at hand a source in which the chronology of Jacob’s years was attached to R. Johanan’s dictum; i.e., as an exegetical comment to Genesis 25:17.

66 Rashi understands that the objection is based on the fact that Ishmael was wicked. Maharsha and the Turei even counter that a rabbinic tradition holds that Ishmael repented before his death (see references in Ginzberg, Legends, 5:267, n. 317). We might add that the Bible is meticulous in detailing the lives of the wicked monarchs of Judah and Israel. Rashi might have been basing his formulation on midrashic passages such as Genesis rabbah, 62:5 (676-7) which ask “Why did Scripture see fit to outline the genealogies of the descendants of the wicked one?” etc.

67 R. Johanan was concerned with the exegetical problem posed by the apparent redundancy of Genesis 25:17, as is stated explicitly in our pericope. An example of the sort of hermeneutical context in which R. Johanan’s interpretation might have been formulated can be seen in Genesis rabbah, 62:5 (676-7):

“Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son...” An anecdote: R. Hama bar ‘Uqba and the rabbis were sitting and raising an objection: Why did Scripture see fit here to detail the genealogy of a wicked man? R. Levi passed by. They said: Behold, here comes an erudite scholar, let us ask him. R. Levi came [citing] in the name of R. Hama bar Hanina: —In order to teach you at what age your ancestor was blessed.

68 They undoubtedly presuppose the chronology of Seder ‘olam; see below.

69 Note the analogous context of TB Yevamot 64a (ed. Liss, 2:434) where the full set of calculations is presupposed, though not detailed there (Rashi refers the student to Megillah). The Talmud there is dealing with events in the life of Isaac (Genesis 25:20, 26) which do not touch directly upon Ishmael at all.
[17a] As it is written: “And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years” (Genesis 25:17).

And it is written:71 “And Abram was fourscore and six years old when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram”72 (Genesis 16:16).

And it is written: “And Abraham was an hundred years old when his son was born unto him” (Genesis 25:5).

By comparing Abraham’s ages when Ishmael and Isaac were born we easily establish that the difference between the ages of his sons was fourteen years.73

[17a] And it is written: “Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them” (Genesis 25:26).

How old was Ishmael when Jacob was born?74 —Seventy-four years old.

How many remain from his years? —Sixty-three.

And it was taught [in a baraita]: How many years old was Jacob our father when he was blessed by his father?75 —Sixty-three years old.

At76 that same point in time Ishmael died, as it is written “When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob…” (Genesis 28:6);

70 MSS N, R, Printings add: “How much older was Ishmael than Isaac? Fourteen years.” MS N adds: “As it is written: ‘And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh etc.’ (Genesis 17:25), ‘And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old etc.,’ (Genesis 17:26).”

71 “And it is written”— ~ in MS B.

72 “And it is written... ‘...Abram’”— ~ in YS, MhG.

73 This calculation is found in Seder ‘olam, 1 (ed. Ratner, 6; ed. Milikowsky, 211-2, 450) with the conclusion “It thus works out...that Ishmael was older than Isaac by fourteen years.” According to Seder ‘olam’s chronology from the Creation, Ishmael was born in the year 2034 and Isaac in 2048.

74 “When Jacob was born” (in Hebrew)— ~ in MSS N, B, O, P, L, M, R, Mf, HgT1 (it is introduced there as an explanatory gloss), MhG; MSS G, R*, Printings: in Aramaic.

75 “How many...father?”—thus only in MS Y; in all other witnesses: “Jacob our father at the time that he was blessed by his father was.”

76 “At”—MSS G, N, M, EY, Printings: “And at.”
"And Jacob obeyed his father and his mother..." (7);

"And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not..." (8);

"Then went Esau unto Ishmael and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife" (9).

The Bible does not divulge how old Isaac, Jacob and Esau were at the time that Jacob received his father’s blessing, nor does it furnish us with explicit information that could enable us to deduce these ages. At this juncture the Talmud, citing Seder ‘olam, Chapter 2, resorts to more creative midrashic methods in order to determine the missing date. The exegesis bases itself on a number of hermeneutical assumptions:

• The wording of Genesis 28:6-9, when read literally ("When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob etc.") , is taken to mean that Esau’s marriage to Mahalath took place immediately following the blessing.

• Ishmael died at precisely the time that Esau was arranging to marry his daughter. The proof of this latter premise requires more imaginative midrashic exposition as we read presently:

  [17a] By inference from that which is written‘The daughter of Ishmael’ do I not know that she is “the sister of Nebaioth”!

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77 The content of Seder ‘olam (ed. Ratner, 9; ed. Milikowsky, 215-6; 451-2) is identical, though the order of the presentation is different. It begins with the declaration that “Our father Jacob was sixty-three years old when he was blessed. At that very time when he was blessed Ishmael died.” After this the text goes on to prove its claim by citing Genesis 28:6-9, and then asks “Why does Scripture say ‘the sister of Nebaiot’?—This teaches that Ishmael betrothed her etc.” The Esther-Midrash, possibly because it has elected to introduce the passage from the perspective of R. Johanan’s dictum, begins by citing the biblical proof-texts (as part of the Aramaic talmudic pericope, not from the baraita), and only afterwards brings the beginning of the Seder ‘olam baraita.

78 Cf. Skinner’s ICC commentary to Genesis, 375; Speiser, 215-6.

79 “that which is written”— ~ in MS N.
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—Rather,\(^{80}\) this teaches that Ishmael\(^{81}\) betrothed her and died, and Nebaioth\(^{82}\) gave her in marriage.

That Nebaioth was Ishmael’s son has already been related in Genesis 25:13. Therefore the rabbinic aversion to scriptural redundancy demands some justification for the repetition of that fact in 28:9.\(^{83}\) The baraita resolves this difficulty by assigning Nebaioth a role in the marriage arrangements: True, it was Ishmael whom Esau had approached at first seeking the hand of his daughter,\(^{84}\) but in the end it fell to Nebaioth to conclude the marriage. The most likely reason for such a development is that Ishmael had expired in the interval.\(^{85}\)

\(^{80}\) “Rather”— in Printings.

\(^{81}\) All witnesses except MSS Y, R, Printings and YS add: “her father.”

\(^{82}\) All witnesses except MS Y add: “her brother.”

\(^{83}\) Many biblical commentators propose reasons for the mention of Nebaioth here. Most of them ascribe the fact to his being the eldest of the brothers, or because he held some special importance or social standing; see e.g. Ibn Ezra [Asher Weiser, ed., Ibn ‚ezra perush lattorah (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1976), 1:86]; he also suggests that the intention might have been to distinguish Mahalath and Nebaioth from the offspring of Esau’s other wives; Hizquni (ed. Chavell, 109). Rashbam [A. I. Bromberg, Perush ha-torah la-rashba”m (Jerusalem: by Author, 1969), 32] and Qimhi [Moses Kamlehr, Perushei rabbi david qimhi (rada”q) ‘al ha-torah (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1982), 148] deal with the general phenomenon of identifying women by their brothers (as in Genesis 25:20; 36:22; Exodus 15:20; etc.).

\(^{84}\) As the verse states explicitly: “Then went Esau to Ishmael.” See Maharsha.

\(^{85}\) Our talmudic pericope, like the Seder ‚olam passage upon which it is based, is satisfied with merely establishing the fact of Ishmael’s death, which is sufficient for its chronological calculations. Neither do the classical talmudic and midrashic compendia try to utilize Ishmael’s death for more elaborate aggadic or homiletical purposes. However in several medieval Yemenite anthologies and biblical commentaries we do encounter a tradition which traces a homiletical link between the rivalry of Esau and Jacob and the death of Ishmael. According to this account Esau had proposed to Ishmael that each of them should do away with their respective brothers, after which Esau would pretend to “avenge” his uncle’s blood and claim the complete inheritance. God put Ishmael to death in order to protect Isaac and Jacob. See Mordecai Margulies, ed., Midrash Haggadol on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1975), 490-1; Joseph Kafih, ed., Sefer ma’or ha’afelah [nur al-zalam] lerabbenu netan’el ben yesha’yah (Jerusalem: Ha-aguddah Lehatzalat Ginzei Teiman, 1957), 133; M. Havatzelet, ed., Midrash hahefes ‚al hamish-shah ‏humshei torah hibbero rabbi zekhariah ben shelomoh harofeh: bereshit–shemot (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1985), 148 et al. Continued on next page...
Thanks to Genesis 16:16 and 25:17, which inform us respectively when Ishmael was born and how long he lived, we are now able to attach a date to the episode of Jacob’s receiving Isaac’s blessing, a date which would otherwise have remained unknown. This, then, was the

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1990), 187-8; Ginzberg, Legends, 1:344-5; 5:287, nn. 118-9; Kasher, Torah shelemah, 4(5):1116-7, #27.

As R. Johanan suggests, the assertion that Jacob was sixty-three years old when he left Beersheba is not supported by the unexpounded scriptural verses, and requires that we accept the midrashic assumption that Ishmael died at that time, a claim which demands in turn that we add fourteen undocumented years before his arrival at Laban’s house. Without the midrashic embellishment, we would have to assume that Jacob was seventy-seven years old when he fled [i.e., we count fourteen years until Joseph’s birth, and thirty-nine years (30+7+2) from then until Jacob tells Pharaoh that he is 130 years of age; see in detail below]. It is therefore most remarkable to observe that the fixing of Jacob’s age at sixty-three is attested in early Jewish writings which do not stem from the rabbinic corpus. See e.g. Jubilees 25:4 [R. H. Charles, The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis (reprint, Jerusalem: Makor, 1972), 157; transl. Wintermute, in Charlesworth, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2:105]: “And thus spake Jacob to Rebecca, his mother, and said unto her: Behold, Mother, I am nine weeks of years old, and I neither know nor have touched any woman...” I do not know on what basis Ratner writes that the same tradition is recorded by the early Hellenistic author Demetrius the Chronogapher. In Demetrius’ discussion of the chronology of Jacob’s life, preserved in Eusebius’ Praeparatio Evangelica, 9:19:4 [Eusebii Pamphili...Opera Omnia Quae Exstant, J.-P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca Vol. 21 (Petit-Mountrouge: 1857), 3:713-22] we read: “Demetrius says that Jacob was (75) [77] years old when he fled to Haran.” [The translation, including the emendation, are taken from J. Hansen, “Demetrius the Chronograph,” in Charlesworth, 2:843-54 (the present passage is on 848)]. As we shall have occasion to observe below, there are other more substantial instances of agreement between the Alexandrian historian and the rabbinic reckonings. On Demetrius and his oeuvre see J. Freudenthal, “Hellenistische Studien. 1,” Jahresbericht des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars “Fraenkel’sche Stiftung,” 2:39-40 (including a discussion of our passage); M. Gaster, “Demetrius und Seder Olam: Ein Problem der hellenistischen Literatur,” Festskrift in auldadun...David Simonsens, 243-52 (especially 249-50); Yehoshua Gutman, The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958), 132-9; E. J. Bickerman, “The Jewish Historian Demetrius,” in: Jacob Neusner, ed., Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3:72-84; B. Z. Wacholder, Eupolemus: A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1974), 98-104; Carl R. Holladay, Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, SBL Texts and Translations, Pseudepigrapha Series Continued on next page...
point of R. Johanan’s remark that the biographical statistics about Ishmael, while of no intrinsic interest for the purposes of the scriptural narration, provide valuable information concerning the life of Jacob.

The Fourteen Lost Years

[17a] And\(^{87}\) the fourteen\(^{88}\) that he was in\(^{89}\) the house of Laban,\(^{90}\) until Joseph was\(^{91}\) born—That makes seventy-seven.\(^{92}\)

According to Genesis 29:18-20 Jacob served Laban for seven years prior to his marriages to Leah (22-5), and then Rachel (28). He then had to serve an additional seven years for Rachel’s sake (30). Genesis 30:25 relates that “…it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country…” The Talmud therefore concludes that if Jacob had gone to Aram-naharaim immediately after leaving his parents’ house, then he should have been seventy-seven (63 + 14) years old at the time of Joseph’s birth and their return to Canaan.

[17a] And it is written:\(^{93}\) “And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Genesis 41:46).\(^{94}\)

We calculated above that Jacob ought to have been seventy-seven years of age when Joseph was born. According to Genesis 41:46 Joseph was thirty years old when he was summoned to interpret Pharaoh’s

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\(^{87}\) “And”—MS N and Printings: “Sixty-three, and.”

\(^{88}\) MS O adds: “years.”

\(^{89}\) “that he was in”—MSS N, P: “of.”

\(^{90}\) “that he was in the house of Laban”— ~ in MSS B (and filled in in B*), M, Printings, YS.

\(^{91}\) “was”—MSS G, L, M, Printings: “is.”

\(^{92}\) MS B adds: “And from when Joseph was born until he stood before Pharaoh thirty;” MS P adds: “And thirty of Joseph.”

\(^{93}\) “And it is written”—MS P: “as it says.”

\(^{94}\) MSS G, N, Mf, Spanish family, Ashkenazic family, Printings, YS add: “That makes one hundred.”
dreams foretelling the succession of the years of plenty and of famine. Therefore, if no interval followed Jacob’s departure from his father’s house, he should have been $(77 + 30 =) 107$ years old at that time.

[17a] And the seven\(^{95}\) of plenty and two of famine—That makes one hundred and sixteen.\(^{96}\)

Genesis 41:32 tells us that the cycle of plenty and famine was to commence immediately after its revelation to Pharaoh. The seven years of plenty passed (Genesis 42:47-53), following which the period of famine began. At the time that Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers he remarked (Genesis 45:6) that “For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet these are five years, in the which there shall neither be eearing nor harvest.” In keeping with our computations thus far, Jacob should now have been $(107 + 7+2 =) 116$ years old.\(^{97}\)

[17a] And it is written: “And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob\(^{98}\) said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years.”\(^{99}\)

It may be assumed that Jacob was conveyed to Egypt immediately following Joseph’s revelation.\(^{100}\)

\(^{95}\) MSS N, M add: “years.” MS M adds: “and seven years” (?).

\(^{96}\) Phrases from this passage are used in TB Berakhot 55b in order to provide support for R. Levi’s dictum that “a person should wait twenty-two years for the fulfillment of a favorable dream.”

\(^{97}\) Although the pericope is clearly Amoraic, couched in the Aramaic dialect of the Talmud, it is evident that its authors were alluding to the cognate material contained in the Tannaitic Seder ‘olam, Ch. 2 (ed. Ratner, 11-2; ed. Milikowsky, 219-20, 453). There we read as follows, all in Hebrew:

...In his thirtieth year he went out from prison— “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh”.

...Seven years of plenty and two years of famine.

It turns out that Joseph was thirty-nine years old and Levi forty-four when Israel went down to Egypt...

\(^{98}\) “And it is written... And Jacob”—MS P: “And he said”; YS: “And Jacob said.”

\(^{99}\) MS G adds: “One hundred and thirty?!”

\(^{100}\) See Genesis 45:13: “and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.”
Great is the Study of Torah

[17a] But behold, they are one hundred and sixteen!

Rather, learn from this that the fourteen that he served in the house of Shem and Eber, and it does not count them.

The verb "serve" in MSS G, B: "was serving"; in all other witnesses: "was."


MS G's omission of the sentence "And it does not count them" is in accordance with Rashi's directive: "And we do not read 'and it does not count them' here until later on. [A similar emendation is contained in Tosfoth Hachmei Anglia; according to the editor's emendation, 55, n. 184.] Rashi was apparently disturbed by the fact that it is still premature for the Talmud to insert its conclusion at this point since it has not yet demonstrated that Jacob was not punished for his actions—a premise which must be established before the story can serve as a precedent for R. Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta's dictum about the superiority of study over parental honor. The statement about the fourteen years not being counted is found again below, where it is not merely expressing the fact of the omission of the time-period from the biblical narrative, but it also attests to the moral propriety of Jacob's separating himself from his parents during the course of his studies. Rashi concludes with some justification that the identical expression, if used in our current sentence, must carry the same

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The only way to resolve this apparent contradiction between our calculation of Jacob’s age and Jacob’s words to Pharaoh is to assume that our previous calculations were incomplete, and that we must supply information that is not stated explicitly in Scripture. The Talmud therefore inserts a period of fourteen years in the only available slot, between Jacob’s departure from his parent’s home and his arrival at Laban’s household. The biblical story does not really supply us with meaningful clues about where Jacob was and what he was doing during this period, but the Talmud relates that he was occupied throughout in the study of Torah. During the patriarchal era, according to the premises of the aggadah, the proper venue for such studies would have been in the “Yeshivah of Shem,” which was conducted after its founder’s death by his successor, Eber.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Within the framework of our pericope this exegesis is of course necessary in order to prove its point about the priority of Torah study over filial obligations. However even outside that context (as in the Seder ‘olam baraita discussed below) the
After the Talmud has reached its chronological conclusions on the basis of the biblical and midrashic evidence which has been adduced so far, it quotes a *baraita* which presents an identical chronological framework. Unlike the talmudic pericope in which the statement about Jacob’s “service” in the academy of Eber was proposed as a solution to the discrepancy between its calculations of the patriarch’s age and Jacob’s own statement on the matter, the *baraita* only teaches that such a fourteen-year period preceded Jacob’s arrival in Aram-naharaim, but does not take the trouble to demonstrate on what basis the claim was derived. What the Talmud has done here, of course, is to show us the unstated exegetical considerations and computations which underlie the *baraita*’s chronology and to prove that they follow logically from its hermeneutical premises.

[17a] It was taught also {in a *baraita*} thus:111 112 Jacob our father113

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conclusion is an inevitable one for the midrashic mind, for whom the study of Torah usually embodies the supreme religious value. Hence this would be the most natural destination for any young Jewish man leaving home for the first time, and all the more so when we are dealing with Jacob who is commonly depicted by the midrash as an archetypal scholar. The homilist may well have been guided by a verbal association between the references to “the tents of Shem” in Genesis 9:27 and Jacob’s “dwelling in tents” in 25:27. *Genesis rabbah*, 63:9 (693) expounds the latter verse as: “…Two tents—i.e., the *bet midrash* of Shem and the *bet midrash* of Eber.”


111 “also thus”— ~ in HgT2, Printings.

112 HgT2 adds: “Fourteen years.”

113 “our father”— ~ in Printings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS Y</th>
<th>MS G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(with variants from MS O, EY, HgT¹, Printings)</td>
<td>(with variants from remaining witnesses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was¹¹⁴ serving Eber¹¹⁵ for fourteen years.</td>
<td>¹¹⁶ for fourteen years¹¹⁷ was concealed¹¹⁸ and serving¹¹⁹ Eber.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹⁴ MS O, HgT¹ add: “concealed and”; EY adds: “concealed in the house of Eber and”; Printings add: “in the house of Eber.”

¹¹⁵ “Eber”— ~ in EY.

¹¹⁶ MS N adds: “in the Land of Israel.”

¹¹⁷ “for fourteen years”— HgT²: “in the house of Eber.”

¹¹⁸ MS B adds: “in the house of Eber;” MS L adds: “in the land (or: “earth”) and standing.”

Jacob’s main reason for leaving home was to escape Esau’s vengeance. Now that he chose to remain in the Land of Israel, it was necessary to do so in secrecy. The Hebrew root TMN in rabbinic parlance can have a broad spectrum of meanings. Though it often refers to the actual physical interring of an object under the ground etc. (e.g., Mishnah Shabbat 2:7), it can also denote the simple maintaining of secrecy or avoiding other people (see Exodus rabbah, 21:13). It seems quite clear that the original allusion in Seder ‘olam (see below) was to concealment. Nevertheless Genesis rabbah, 68:5 (733) and 68:11 (784) evidently took the expression to mean “buried in the earth” (though the passages can with some awkwardness be rendered “concealed in the land [i.e., of Israel]”). The reading in MS L is undoubtedly a paraphrase of the latter passage in Genesis rabbah which teaches as follows:

“And he lay down in that place to sleep” (Genesis 28:11)— R. Judah says: Here he lay down. During the fourteen years when he was buried in the earth (see above) and serving Shem and Eber he did not lie down.

A similar reading was also contained in the text of Tosfoth Hachmei Anglia which explains “‘hidden in the earth’—i.e., because of Esau.” See the editor’s remarks in n. 195. An almost identical phraseology is employed in Seder ‘olam, Ch. 29 (ed. Ratner, 132; ed. Milikowsky 431-2, 542-3) where it is related that Esther was concealed (חדשה) for four years in Shushan until the day that she was taken before the king. Ratner (n. 13) claims that the interpretation there was derived from the exegesis of the word omen (“brought up”) in Esther 2:7 (see references cited there).

¹¹⁹ “and serving”—MS M: “in the house of.”
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120 Eber died121 two122 years after Jacob our father123 went to125 Aram-naharaim.126

It is likely that the *baraita* chose to mention this fact here not merely for its intrinsic historical interest, but principally on account of its relevance to the development of the midrashic expansions to Jacob’s biography.127 It furnishes an indirect explanation of why Eber was singled out by the rabbis as the ideal candidate to head a *yeshivah* during the patriarchal period,128 as well as showing that Eber was alive during (but not long after) the fourteen years that have been assigned to Jacob’s studies.129

120 MS N adds: “And.”
121 “Eber died”—EY: “And.”
122 “two”—~ in MS R (and filled in in R*).
123 “Jacob our father’s”—EY: Jacob’s.”
124 “after...father”—MS M: “He.”
125 “father went to”—thus only in MS Y; Printings: “father went down”; in all other witnesses: “father’s descent to”
126 EY adds: “What did he do?”
127 A different explanation of the phenomenon is proposed by R. Josiah Pinto.
128 See our previous discussion on the origins of the rabbinic Shem and Eber traditions.
129 Eber lived a total of 464 years, 430 of them after the birth of Peleg (Genesis 11:16-7). These years subdivide as follows: From the birth of Peleg until the birth of Reu—30 years (Gen. 11:18); from the birth of Reu until the birth of Serug—32 years (11:20); until the birth of Nahor—30 years (11:22); until the birth of Terah—29 years (11:24); until the birth of Abraham—70 years (11:26); until the birth of Isaac—100 years (21:5); from the birth of Isaac until the birth of Jacob—60 years (25:26). These add up to a total of 351. When subtracted from Eber’s 430 that leaves seventy-nine years during which Eber’s life overlapped that of Jacob.

As was observed by Maharsha, the interposing of a sojourn with Eber at this point in Jacob’s life raises an additional exegetical complication: Genesis 28:10 implies that Jacob’s journey to Haran set out directly from Beersheba (the difficulty is intrinsic to the story and does not presuppose the aggadic expansion in *TB Hullin* 91b). We are forced then to assume that Eber’s academy was also situated in Beersheba and that Jacob had spent the full fourteen years in dangerous proximity to his family. This assumption would at any rate account effectively for the emphasis on his being “concealed” (or buried!) throughout the period (see above).
[17a] {He went out from there and came to Aram-naharaim\textsuperscript{130}.\textsuperscript{131}

Thus it turns out that when he\textsuperscript{132} stood\textsuperscript{133} at the well he was seventy seven years\textsuperscript{134} old.

The \textit{baraita} that was brought by the Talmud is without question from \textit{Seder ‘olam}, Chapter 2, where the passage appears in almost identical formulation.\textsuperscript{135}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130}“naharaim”—~ in MS B (and filled in in B*).
\item \textsuperscript{131} Bracketed section missing only in MS Y, presumably on account of a homoioateleuton; filled in (according to wording in MS G) on the basis of all the other witnesses.
\item \textsuperscript{132} “he”—MS G: “Jacob.”
\item \textsuperscript{133} “when he stood”—\textbf{Pesaro printing}: “he is standing”; \textbf{Venice printing}: “when he is standing.”
\item \textsuperscript{134} “years”—~ in MS B.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Ed. Ratner, 9; ed. Milikowsky, 216-7, 451-2).
\end{itemize}
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<th>From Isaac’s Birth</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Source (in Genesis)</th>
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<td>Birth of Ishmael</td>
<td>16:16</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Birth of Isaac</td>
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<td>Famine begins</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jacob tells his age to Pharaoh</td>
<td>45:6; 47:9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jacob Was Not Punished

There were two stages in the process of the Talmud's validation of its claim that Torah study overrides the obligations of parental honor. First it had to be proved that Jacob remained apart from his parents in order to pursue his studies. This has been satisfactorily established. It now remains to be demonstrated that the patriarch was not punished for his absence. This the Talmud sets out to do now.

[17a] And whence do we know that he was not punished?

Because it was taught {in a baraita}: It turns out that Joseph, (when he) separated from his father, that he did not see him for twenty-two years, just as Jacob our father was separated from Isaac his father for twenty-two years.

The baraita that is being cited here by the Talmud also originates in Seder 'olam, Chapter 2. In Seder 'olam it comes at the conclusion of a detailed enumeration of the events of Joseph's life:

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136 "And"—~ in MS N.
137 "he"—Spanish family (except HgT2): "Jacob our father."
138 "It turns out that"—~ in EY.
139 "(when he)"—deleted in MS Y; found in MS M; ~ in all other witnesses.
140 "that he did not see him"—~ in Printings.
141 "It turns out...twenty-two years"—MS R: "[It turns out that Joseph from his father twenty-two years that he did not see Jacob (!)]."
142 "our father"—~ in MSS G, N, B, O, M, R.
143 "Isaac"—thus only in MS Y; ~ in all other witnesses.
144 "It turns out...twenty-two years"—MS L: "Just as Jacob was separated from his father for twenty-two years that he did not see him, thus was Joseph concealed from his father for twenty-two years"; YS: "Just as Jacob was separated from Isaac for twenty-two years, thus was Joseph separated from Jacob for twenty-two years."
146 For purposes of our current calculations it is sufficient to know that Joseph was seventeen at the time that he was sold to Egypt and thirty-nine when he was reunited with his father [i.e., thirty when called before Pharaoh, plus the seven years of plenty and the two of famine].
“These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph being seventeen years old etc.” (Genesis 37:2). At that point Leah died.

He descended to Egypt and spent twelve months at the house of Potiphar. “...And the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field” (Genesis 39:5).

“In the house”—because of the sun.

“And in the field”—because of the cold.

He spent twelve years in prison...

In his thirtieth year he went out of prison—“Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh” (Genesis 41:46).

At this point Isaac died. Seven years of plenty and two years of famine.

It turns out that Joseph was thirty-nine years old and Levi forty-four when Israel went down to Egypt.

It turns out that Joseph separated from his father for twenty-two years just as Jacob had separated from his father for twenty-two years.147

Seder ‘olam does not spell out that Joseph’s separation from Jacob was a punishment for Jacob’s analogous treatment of his own father, but it is difficult to imagine what other reason the author could have had for pointing out the parallel.148

147 We have noted above in connection with the tradition about Haman’s alleged term as a barber in Kefar Qurianos (to Megillah 16a) that twenty-two appears frequently in rabbinic works as a prototypical number. Here of course the usage is specific, not merely as a round number. Cf. the twenty-two years which are assigned to Rabbi Akivah’s apprenticeship (meshammesh) of Nahum of Gimzu in Genesis rabbah, 1:14 (12) and parallels. See also Jubilees 25:8 (Charles, 157-8; Wintermute, 2:105): “...these two and twenty years my brother [Esau] has striven with me” (see Charles’ note).

148 It is significant that MS Antonin which was chosen by Milikowsky as his principal text lacks most of the expressions [e.g., “that he did not serve him” (or: “see him”); “in return for (keneged) the twenty-two years”; etc.] that are used in other manuscripts in order to point unambiguously to Joseph’s absence as a measure-for-measure punishment for Jacob’s neglect of filial duties. This situation serves as a further indication that the Antonin manuscript has not absorbed the exegetical traditions of the

Continued on next page...
Jacob in Succoth and Beth-el

[17a] Those of Jacob are thirty-six!149 150

—The fourteen151 of the152 house of Eber it does not count.

We at last approach the real proof that Jacob was not punished for the time that he spent studying with Eber. From Seder ‘olam’s juxtaposition of the respective absences of Jacob and Joseph the Talmud deduces that the latter was Jacob’s punishment for the former—i.e., that in accordance with the midrashic theological principle of “measure for measure” Jacob was being made to suffer the same pain that he had inflicted upon his own father. However the numbers do not quite fit. By Seder ‘olam’s own reckoning, Jacob’s absence extended over thirty-six years, since we should include among them the fourteen years spent...
with Eber! Does this not prove that when God chose to penalize Jacob for being remiss in honoring Isaac, he did not hold him accountable for the years spent at the *yeshivah* studying the Torah? Similarly, we may draw the homiletical conclusion that students in subsequent generations should not feel constrained in such cases by the conflicting demands of familial and religious obligations, since the Bible has shown us that Torah study takes precedence.

[17a] Those\textsuperscript{153} of the house of Laban are twenty years!\textsuperscript{154}  \textsuperscript{155}  \textsuperscript{156}

For two years he tarried on the way;\textsuperscript{157}

as it was taught (in a *baraita*): He went out of Aram-naharaim and came to Succoth, and\textsuperscript{158} there he spent\textsuperscript{159} eighteen\textsuperscript{160} months; as it says:\textsuperscript{161} "And Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle" (Genesis 33:17).\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{153} “Those”—Printings: “After all, those”; MS Mf: “If so, there are too few. Those.”

\textsuperscript{154} HgT adds: “As it is written: ‘This twenty years have I been with thee’ (Genesis 32:38).”

\textsuperscript{155} See the reading in HgT above. Demetrius the Chronographer also writes that “when Jacob wanted to return to his father in Canaan, at Laban’s request he stayed six more years, so that in all he stayed for twenty years with Laban in Haran” (transl. Hanson, in Charlesworth, 2:849). See literature on Demetrius cited above.

\textsuperscript{156} MS N adds: “Rather”; Printings add: “Rather, because.”

\textsuperscript{157} “For two years he tarried on the way”—MSS G,N, EY, HgT: “He tarried for two years on the way”; MSS B, Mf, Ashkenazic family, Printings, AgE: “He tarried on the way for two years”; MS O: “He was found (אֶתְוַיָּבֹא, צֶלֶת הָאֵין לֶא) for two years on the road.”

\textsuperscript{158} “and”—~ in MS M.

\textsuperscript{159} “spent”—MSS G, R: “tarried.”

\textsuperscript{160} “eighteen”—HgT\textsuperscript{2}: “twelve.”

\textsuperscript{161} “says”—Ashkenazic family, MS Mf: “is written.”

\textsuperscript{162} EY, HgT add: “in the days of winter.”

\textsuperscript{163} EY, HgT add: “summer.”
This *baraita*, which is also being cited from *Seder 'olam*,\(^{164}\) does not explain how it arrived at the time-span of eighteen months which is not mentioned explicitly in the verse. The most likely explanation is that of Rashi who states that the plural form *succoth* ("booths") indicates two summer periods in which it is common to dwell in the fields in such temporary shelters,\(^{165}\) whereas the (singular) "house" denotes the permanent quarters that would have to be constructed for the (one) winter. Two summers and the intervening winter add up to eighteen months.\(^{166}\)

\(^{164}\) Chapter 2; ed. Ratner, 10; ed. Milikowsky, 217, 452. The text is almost identical. Note that in Milikowsky's text there is no introductory formula ("as it says is written") before the verse. This seems to be typical of *Seder 'olam*'s distinctive style.

\(^{165}\) On the uses and construction of the *sukkah* see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, 1:4-7; *Qadmoniyot ha-talmud*, 1:2:224-35.

\(^{166}\) Rashi's interpretation was interpolated into the Talmud texts of the Spanish aggadic compendia. In his commentary to Genesis 33:17 Rashi offers a slightly different version of the explanation, basing it on the two mentions of the word *succoth*\(^{[ah]}\) in the verse. The version in the talmudic commentary seems more convincing (thus also according to Maharsha, Ratner and others), with the first instance of *succoth*\(^{ah}\) being read, according to its plain sense, as a place name. The explanation in the Pentateuch commentary appears to be supported by *Genesis rabbah*, 78:16 (936): "How many years did our father spend in Beth-el? ... R. Abba bar Kahana says: Eighteen months: *Succoth*, and "house," and "succoth." See *Leqah* 10v (ed. Buber, 1:173), *Tosafot hashalem* to Genesis 33:17 (ed. Gliss, 3:241), and commentators. On *Genesis rabbah*’s apparent confusion between Succoth and Beth-el see Albeck’s notes; Kasher, *Torah shelemah*, 5:1312, #54; and my discussion below.

Cf. Targum "Jonathan" to the verse (ed. Ridder, 1:7 and n. 14; ed. Ginsburger, 63 and n. 1; transl. Maher, 116 and nn. 14-5): "Jacob journeyed to Succoth and tarried there for a period of twelve months. He built himself a *bet midrash* and for his livestock he made booths..." Note that the reading "twelve" also appears in *HgT*\(^2\) (though it cannot be justified in the context of our pericope). Most scholars lean towards emending the text of the Targum to make it conform with the *Seder 'olam* chronology. See Menachem Brayer, "Aggadic Literature and Esoteric Explanations in the Aramaic Translation of the Torah Ascribed to Jonathan ben Uziel," in: M. Carmilly and Hayim Lear, eds., *Samuel Belkin Memorial Volume* (New York: Erna Michael College of Hebraic Studies, Yeshiva University, 1981), 77 (Note particularly his reference to *TB Pesahim* 88a); Shinan, *The Embroidered Targum*, 189 and n. 82; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:394; 5:312-3, n. 277.
Great is the Study of Torah

[17a] In\(^{167}\) Beth-el he spent\(^{168}\) six months offering\(^{169}\) sacrifices;\(^{170}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS Y</th>
<th>All other witnesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as it says: &quot;And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, etc.&quot; (Genesis 35:3)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The duration of Jacob’s sojourn in Beth-el is not specified in the Bible, and it is most probable that the author of the *baraita* was merely filling in the interval required to reach the desired total of twenty-two.\(^{171}\)

\(^{167}\) "In"—thus only in MS Y; in all other witnesses: “And in.”

\(^{168}\) "spent”—MS G: “tarried for.”

\(^{169}\) “offering”—MS G: “and offered upon it”; MSS N, B, R, Spanish family, Printings: “and he offered”; MS Mf: “and he made.”

\(^{170}\) MS L adds: “and burnt offerings”; MS M adds: “and peace-offerings. The fourteen of the house of Eber it does not count”; MS B* adds: “to the God of Beth-el (his father)”; MS O adds: “to the God of Beth-el”; EY adds: “to the God of his father Isaac.”

\(^{171}\) See the Vilna Ga’on’s gloss to *Seder olam*. The pericope pays no attention to Jacob’s encampment in Shechem, the scene of the incident of Dinah and Hamor which occupies all of Genesis 34, or to his sojourn at the tower of Eder (35:21) until his final reuniting with Isaac in Hebron (35:27). Although the extent of his sojourns there are not specified, there is no obvious reason to suppose that they would have been shorter than the time he spent in Beth-el, and the six months must necessarily have included these periods as well. It is possible that *Seder olam* gave priority to the Beth-el period because it is described as “dwelling” (יהשת) in Genesis 35:1, as distinct from Shechem and the tower of Eder where Jacob merely “pitched his tent” (34:19; 35:21). This explanation was apparently intended by the author of *Leqah tov* who wrote (ed. Buber, 1:177) that “dwelling” denotes nothing other than delaying; since he tarried there for six months offering sacrifices.” Maharsha, who discusses the omission of Jacob’s other stations, proposes that the Talmud might be emphasizing a homiletical point; namely, that even though Jacob spent his time at Beth-el in fulfillment of his religious obligations, it was still held against him that he thereby delayed his reunion with his father.

Continued on next page...
Concluding Remarks

The material discussed in the current chapter consists primarily of a series of sources on a related topic,\textsuperscript{172} the religious primacy of Torah study.\textsuperscript{173} The sources were assembled here because the first of them connects to verses in Esther. After making allowance for the confusion that attaches to several of the attributions, we may summarize the passage as follows:\textsuperscript{174}

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According to Jubilees 31:3 ff. (Charles, 185-96; Wintermute, 1:114) Jacob originally invited his parents to join him in sacrificing at Beth-el, but instead had to visit Isaac’s deathbed. This tradition is alluded to in the Testament of Levi, 9:1 [M. De Jonge, ed., \textit{The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text}, Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece, ed. A. M. Denis and M. De Jonge (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 35; see Hollander, H. W., and De Jonge, M., \textit{The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary}, Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece, ed. A. M. Denis and M. De Jonge (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 155-7]. According to Jubilees the period of Jacob’s sacrificing at Beth-el lasted from the first day of the seventh month (31:3) until the twenty-third (32:27), thereby observing what would later become the Hebrew New Year, Tabernacles and the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly. The association with Tabernacles was undoubtedly inspired by the juxtaposition with Succoth (see Ginzberg, \textit{Legends}, 1:412-3; 5:317, n. 299). Similar exegesis might underlie the passage in \textit{Genesis rabbah}, 78:15 (936) discussed above, which appears to equate Succoth and Beth-el (see Rainer to \textit{Seder olam}, 10, n. 17).

\textsuperscript{172} The very first item in the series, Rav Joseph’s \textit{baraita}, may not have originally been alluding to \textit{talmud torah}; though Rav Joseph himself might have understood it as such (as reflected in his subsequent dictum); see our discussion above. At any rate, the redactor treated the \textit{baraita} and the dictum as a single literary unit.

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Talmud torah} has a strong claim to the status of the most important rabbinic value-concept. See e.g. Mishnah \textit{Pe’ah} 1:1. Several dicta in rabbinic literature are formulated according to the type “great is the study of Torah” or “Great is Torah”; e.g., the \textit{baraita} on the “Acquisition of the Torah” appended to Mishnah \textit{Avot} 6:5; 6:7; \textit{Kallah}, 8:6-7 [Michael Higger, ed., \textit{Masekhitot kallah} (New York: Deve rabbanan, 1936), 292-6]; \textit{Seder eliahu zuta}, 17 (ed. Friedmann, 18); \textit{TB ‘Eruvin} 63b (=\textit{Megillah} 3b, \textit{Sanhedrin} 44b), \textit{Qiddushin} 40b, \textit{Nedarim} 32a (ed. Hershler, 1:272-3); \textit{Midrash on Psalms}, 17:8 (ed. Buber, 132; transl. Braude, 1:214); etc. For overviews of the subject see George F. Moore, \textit{Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1906), 2:239-47; Solomon Schechter, \textit{Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology} (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1909), 116-69; Max Kadushin, \textit{The Rabbinic Mind} (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952), by index; Urbach, \textit{The Sages}, 606-16.

\textsuperscript{174} See also Abraham Weiss, \textit{Studies in the Literature of the Amoraim}, 290.
1) Rav Joseph's *baraita*, based on Esther 10:3.

2) Rav Joseph’s dictum: Study is greater than the saving of lives, derived from Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7.

3) Rav, or Rav Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta: Study is greater than the building of the Temple.

4) Rabbah bar Hana in the name of R. Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta: Study is greater than the honoring of parents, as derived from the life of Jacob.

It was with reference to the last source that the Talmud compiled a detailed pericope devoted to a meticulous analysis of the traditional (*Seder ‘olam*) chronology of the events in the life of the patriarch Jacob. In its current form it is unimaginable that such a pericope, with its reliance on complex mathematical calculations and the bringing together of events from the whole book of Genesis, could have been preached to a lay congregation as part of a normal sabbath sermon. It is however conceivable that the main ideas might have been originally conveyed in a more simplified form, accepting as a received tradition the fact of Jacob’s fourteen years at Eber’s academy.178

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175 He was a second-generation Babylonian *Amora* who appears principally as a transmitter of the teachings of his teacher, Rav. He frequently cites traditions in the name of R. Isaac bar Samuel bar Marta. See Albeck, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 202-3.

176 Originally a Palestinian, he is known chiefly as a transmitter of traditions by R. Johanan and his circle. See Albeck, *op. cit.*, 305.

177 In this respect our pericope differs significantly from the long passage above (11b-12a) which dealt with the assorted ways of calculating the seventy years of desolation prophesied by Jeremiah. In that case, the mathematics were so crucial to the argument that their deletion would have rendered the passage meaningless.

The use of the dating of biblical events as the basis for aggadic homilies is not unique to the Babylonian Talmud. Many such interpretations are found in *Seder ‘olam*. Moreover, several passages in *Genesis rabbah* make homiletical use of the chronological framework for Jacob’s life that is established by *Seder ‘olam*, in particular the tradition about Jacob’s studies in the *bet midrash* of Shem and Eber. None of these passages however presents a detailed mathematical demonstration of the kind that we encounter in the Babylonian Esther-Midrash. Thus, in *Genesis rabbah*, 68:5 (773-4) Hezekiah calculates that Jacob did not marry until the age of eighty-four, as

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distinct from Esau who found a wife at forty. He concludes from this that “the Holy One advances the wicked and delays the righteous.” In 65:9 (731) a comparison is drawn between the respective ages when Isaac and Jacob were blessed by their fathers; on 68:11 (784), which relates how Jacob denied himself sleep throughout his apprenticeship with Eber, see above. 84:8 (1010) speaks of Jacob transmitting to Joseph the halakhot he had received from Shem and Eber. See also Pirqe derabbi eli’ezar, 35 (transl. Friedlander, 263).

178 The other calculations required for the proof are of the respective twenty-two-year periods of Joseph’s separation from Jacob and Jacob’s from Isaac. Both of these numbers can be derived through relatively straightforward computations which should not exceed the intelligence or attention-span that can be expected from an average congregation.