WHEN THE MEMORY OF DAVID IS NOT ENOUGH TO AUTHENTICATE THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

JOEL GERBOFF

The Temple in Jerusalem has served over the ages as a primary point of importance in Jewish thought and life. The Temple Mount as well bears significance in both Islamic and Christian traditions, though with quite different meanings than Jews ascribe to it. As is true for many groups, the origins of a sacred site, including reports about the efforts of founding figures, give rise to diverse and contested accounts that in turn connect to the concerns of their authors. The connection of King David to the actual building of the Temple in Jerusalem is described somewhat differently already in diverse biblical texts. Although traditions in the Deuteronomistic History (2 Sam 7, 1 Kgs 8) make clear that Solomon will be and was the person fully responsible for the construction of the Temple, several traditions in the Chronicler already give David credit for having procured some of the building materials, devised the plans for the Temple, and appointed its various officiants.

Rabbinic sources similarly assign in varying ways a greater role to David. One tradition appears with slightly different endings and most importantly with two different descriptions of how David played a role in the ceremony for dedicating the Temple. In one version, found in the Babylonian Talmud, Midrash on Psalms, and other late midrashim (Numbers Rabbah), when Solomon sought to bring the ark into the Temple, he was unable to do so as the gates of the Temple would not open. Citing and interpreting 2 Chronicles 6:42, this midrash relates that upon invoking chasdei david [God’s kindness for David or, alternatively translated, David’s good deeds], the gates immediately opened and the ark was successfully emplaced in the Temple. In some versions of this midrash, citing the next portion of the biblical text, 2 Chronicles 7:1, fire descended from heaven and consumed the offerings upon the altar. In several studies, Esther Menn explores how Midrash on Psalms includes this midrash along with a large number of
others that serve together to more closely connect the Temple in Jerusalem with David. In some instances, these midrashic comments serve to explain Psalm 30:1, a mizmor for the dedication of the House (the Temple) for/by/of David [mizmor shir chanukat habayit ledavid]. A different version of this midrash, appearing in three late midrashic texts (dated for their redaction from the late sixth to the ninth centuries)—Pesiqta Rabbai, Ecclesiastes Rabbah, Exodus Rabbah—asserts that the fire descended only when David was actually present in the Temple either by the bringing in of his coffin or his revival and attendance at the event. Thus the invoking of David’s memory is not seen as sufficient to authenticate the Temple of Solomon and allow for it to function.

This essay explores the background behind these midrashim. Although previous scholarship has offered explanations for the reason for critiquing Solomon and accentuating the positive impact of the invoking of the memory of David, no one has focused on the motif of David’s actual presence either in the form of his bones or his actual self. I correlate these traditions with developments in the Byzantine context of the dates of the documents in which these sources appear. My sense is that in part we can see here a development of ideas about relics, an idea attested in several other rabbinic sources that describe either the still-living corpses of rabbis or the coffin of Joseph as contributing to miraculous occurrences.

In addition, the increased if not initial practice of visiting graves of past individuals by Jews to seek their intervention—for example the tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron—is also first mentioned in sources dating from the period of the composition of these midrashic documents. This particular connection of David’s presence at the time of the dedication of the most important Jewish building, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, may have been formulated in relation to a number of Christian accounts from the fourth century onward that comment on the Temple of Solomon and connect Christian rituals and places to it. In this regard, authenticating the Temple by connecting it more directly with David emerges from both internal Jewish conflicts and those with emergent and ascendant Christianity of the post-Constantinian era.

**BIBLICAL TEXTS ON THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE**

First Kings and 2 Chronicles provide different accounts of the ceremonies related to the dedication of the Temple. The version in 1 Kings 8:1–66 consists of several sections and is a complex and composite text. It begins with a section (1 Kgs 8:1–9) reporting the assembly of the participants and the procession that ends with the placing of the ark under the wings of the Cherubim in the Temple itself. It (1 Kgs 8:10–13) proceeds to report that Solomon blesses the whole people, declaring that God has fulfilled all the promises made to his father, David, including that his son would
build the Temple. Solomon then offers a long prayer and supplication to God (1 Kgs 8:14–21). The narrative (1 Kgs 8:22–53) next relates Solomon’s blessing of the assembled group and concludes (1 Kgs 8:54–66) with comments that after eight days all returned to their homes “joyful and glad of heart over all the goodness [hatovab] that the Lord had shown to His servant David and His people Israel.” According to this narrative, the bringing of the ark into the Temple proceeded along smoothly without any impediments.

The version of these events in 2 Chronicles differs in various ways from this account, but again Solomon is able to bring in the ark without any complications. As noted above, Chronicles assigns a far greater role to David in the planning of the Temple than does the Deuteronomistic version. Here I focus on the conclusion of the narrative. In this version of the events of the dedication, Solomon’s long prayer ends (2 Chr 6:40–42) with the following statements: “Now My God, may Your eyes be open and Your ears attentive to prayer from this place and now, Advance, O Lord God, to your resting place, You and Your mighty Ark. Your priests, O Lord God, are clothed in triumph; Your loyal ones will rejoice in [Your] goodness. O Lord God do not reject your anointed one, remember the good deeds of Your Servant David [zakhrab chasdei David avadekha].”

In this account Solomon prays that God bring his ark to its resting place, though previously (2 Chr 5:7–10) the narrative stated that the ark already had been brought into the Temple. This seeming contradiction forms a basis for the rabbinic midrashim related to the dedication of the Temple. In addition, here Solomon explicitly prays that God will remember chasdei David [David’s good deeds, or alternatively, God’s kindness to David]. By contrast, I Kings relates that the people returned home filled with joy because of the goodness [tovah] that God had shown to David. The Chronicler’s version also concludes in a different manner as it refers in 2 Chronicles 7:1 to the descent of the fire from heaven upon the altar. First Kings had made no mention of the fire. The midrashim, to which we now turn, combine in varying ways the emplacement of the ark and the descent of the fire and report that these events did not occur without difficulty at the ceremony of dedicating the Temple, difficulties that were overcome only through either invoking the merits of David or having him physically present at the dedication.3

RABBINIC TEXTS ON THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

We examine two different versions of the rabbinic description of the dedication of the Temple, each appearing in several different documents. In analyzing these texts, we face the challenge of dating rabbinic sources. In general, while attributions of sayings may indicate the date of the formulation of a comment, at present most scholarship dates
sources more conservatively according to the proposed time of redaction of a particular rabbinic midrashic “document.” Moreover, determining when a given document was redacted is also subject to dispute. In many cases these works developed over centuries with various types of revisions made over time, over centuries. Much contemporary analysis explores how the redactional context of a saying or narrative may have reshaped the tradition to align with the larger concerns of the redactional unit as a whole and at times of the document itself.

The texts we examine appear in sources generally dated somewhere between the sixth through the ninth centuries. I do not attempt to trace the development of these traditions, nor the relationships among them. For my purposes I will treat them as connected to these centuries and focus on how they involve David in the dedication. After briefly examining these midrashic accounts, I propose factors that may account for them and how these relate in part to efforts to underscore the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem, even in a period long after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

Similar versions of the midrashim appear in the Babylonian Talmud and in Midrash on Psalms, works coming from quite different contexts, Babylonia and Palestine, and slightly different time periods. Although the dates of redaction of these works are not settled, the sixth to seventh centuries are most likely for the Talmud and as late as the thirteenth century for the Midrash on Psalms, though most scholars propose a stage of redaction by the eighth century. In this version, only after invoking chasdei david—a phrase, as already noted, that may be translated as “the good deeds of David,” or as some commentators suggest “God’s good actions for David”—is Solomon able to conclude the dedication of the Temple. I first cite the version from the Babylonian Talmud.

**BABYLONIAN SHABBAT 30A**

A. Another interpretation of “Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living” (Eccl 4:2) is in accordance with what Rav Yehudah said that Rav said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, ‘Show me a sign of your favor, that my enemies may see it and be ashamed’ (Ps 86:17).

B. “David prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘Sovereign of the Universe, forgive me for that sin [with Bathsheba].’ He said to him, ‘It is forgiven.’ He said to him, ‘Show me a sign in my lifetime.’ He said to him, ‘In your lifetime I will not make it known; in the lifetime of Solomon your son I will make it known.’

C. “When Solomon built the Holy Temple, he sought to bring the [Holy] Ark (aron) into the Holy of Holies, the gates stuck one to the other.

D. “Solomon uttered twenty four songs (renanot), but he was not answered.

E. “He opened and said, ‘O gates, lift up your heads, and be lifted up you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall enter’ (Ps 2:4:7).
F. “They [the gates] rushed to swallow him [as they said], ‘Who is the King of Glory?’” (Ps 2:4:8).

G. “He said to them, ‘The Lord, strong and mighty’” (Ps 2:4:8).

H. “He said [again], ‘O gates, lift up your heads, and be lifted up you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall enter. Who is the King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah’” (Ps 2:4:9-10). But he was not answered.

I. “When he said, ‘O Lord God, do not reject the face of your anointed one; remember the good deeds of David your servant’ [alternatively: your kindness to David your servant] (2 Chr 6:42), he was immediately answered [and the gates opened].

J. “At that very hour the faces of all of David’s enemies turned [black in humiliation] like the bottom of a pot, and all Israel knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven him that sin.

K. “And [thus] did not Solomon speak well when he said, ‘Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living’” (Eccl 4:2).

The Babylonian Talmud places the narrative in the context of a discussion of David’s seeking a sign from God that he has been forgiven for his sin with Bathsheba. God indicates that he would do this only after David’s passing. In addition, the midrash uses this sequence of events to comment on Ecclesiastes 4:2 that the dead are more fortunate than the living. In Babylonian Shabbat 30a the story of the bringing of the ark appears in letters C–I. The gates initially stuck together, so Solomon then uttered numerous prayers. This proved ineffective, so Solomon next is described as reciting portions of what is Psalm 24. But the gates not only did not open but, in what may be a later addition to this account, also sought to swallow him. The midrash interprets Solomon’s action as if he was describing himself arrogantly as the “King of glory.” But even after Solomon makes clear that God is the king of glory, the gates still do not open. It is only when Solomon invokes the good deeds of his father, David—the words found in 2 Chronicles 6:42—that he is successful. The midrash concludes by indicating that these events evidenced God’s forgiveness of David (J) and confirmed (K) the truth of Ecclesiastes 4:2 that the dead are better off than the living.

The similar version of the midrash in Midrash Psalm 2:10 focuses directly on Psalm 2:4.5

**Midrash Psalm 2:4:10**

A. “O gates, life up your heads” (Ps 2:4:7)

B. You find that when Solomon built the holy temple, he sought to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holy, but the gate was too narrow. This gate was five cubits in height and two and a half cubits in width, and the Ark was only a cubit and a half in height. But cannot something that measures a cubit and a half enter into a space of two and a half cubits? Rather, at that time the gates stuck one to the other.
C. Solomon uttered twenty four songs (renanot), but he was not answered.
D. He said, “O gates, lift up your heads,” (Ps 24:7) but he was not answered.
E. He said again, “O gates, lift up your heads, and be lifted up you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall enter. Who is the King of glory?” (Ps 24:9–10). But he was not answered.
F. When he said, “O Lord God, do not reject the face of your anointed one; remember the good deeds of David your servant” [alternatively: your kindness to David your servant] (2 Chr 6:42), immediately the gates opened and the ark entered and fire came down from heaven (2 Chr 7:1).
G. Why did Solomon have so much trouble? Because he was arrogant having said, “I have surely built you a house of habitation” (1 Kgs 8:13).
H. When all of Israel saw what had happened, they immediately said, “Surely, the Holy One, blessed be He, has forgiven David of that sin,” and immediately their faces turned [black] like the bottom of a pot, for they felt ashamed. As it is written, “Show me a sign of your favor, that my enemies may see it and be ashamed because you, Lord, have given me aid and comfort” (Ps 86:17). You have given me aid in this world and comforted me in the world to come.

Solomon again succeeds at F only when he invokes the good deeds of David. This version also notes, citing the continuation of the narrative at 2 Chronicles 7:1, the fire descended upon the altar at that time. It also explains explicitly at G that Solomon’s arrogance occasioned the difficulties.

In contrast to this version of the events, midrashim found in Ecclesiastes Rabbah 4:2⁶ and Pesiqta Rabbati 2:9⁷ contain sayings in the name of various sages that describe the invoking of the memory of David as inadequate to overcome the obstacles Solomon faced. These versions discuss the descent of the fire, not the challenge of bringing in the ark.

ECCLESIASTES RABBAH 4:2
A. R. Samuel b. Nahman interpreted the verse [“Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living” (Eccl 4:2)] in connection with David.
B. When Solomon built the Temple, he sought for fire to descend from heaven, but it did not descend. He offered one thousand sacrifices, but it did not descend. He prayed twenty four prayers, but it did not descend until he recited, "Remember the good deeds of David your servant” (2 Chr 6:42), and immediately [fire] descended, as it is stated, "And when Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven” (2 Chr 7:1).
C. R. Yehudah b. Ilai and the rabbis [differ in their interpretation of what occasioned this outcome].

D. R. Yehudah b. Ilai said, “David came to life at that very hour.”

E. And the rabbis said, “He [Solomon] brought in the coffin (arono) of David.”

F. They do not [really disagree]. The one who said that David came to life at that time [is supported by] what David says with his [own] mouth, “O Lord, you brought me up from Sheol” (Ps 30:4), and another verse says, “Do not reject the face of your anointed one” (2 Chr 6:42), [that is] he who is living before you [now]. And the one who says that he brought in his coffin, this is in accord with that which is written, “Remember the good deeds of David your servant” (2 Chr 6:42).

G. And concerning this very occasion it is said, “Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living” (Eccl 4:2), such as myself [Solomon] and my associates.

**PESIQTA RABBATI 2:8–9**

A. Another interpretation of “A song of dedication of the house of David” (shir chanukhat habayit ledavid) (Ps 30:1).

B. “You [David] will not build a house for me” (1 Chr 17:4) means you will not build it. “Will you build a house for me” (2 Sam 7:5). [The verse is reinterpreted as a statement, not as a question, rendering it to mean “You will build me a house.”] For were it not for you, fire would not descend from heaven. How so, when the Temple was built, how many prayers did he [Solomon] arrange, and the fire did not descend.

C. Another interpretation: “Will you will build me a house” (2 Sam 7:5), you will lay the foundation. “You will not build me a house” (1 Chr 17:4) [means] you will not finish it.


E. “He said, ‘Master of the universe. If I do not have sufficient [good] deeds, do it for the good deeds of my father David.’ Immediately fire descended from heaven, as it is written, ‘O Lord God, do not reject the face of your anointed one; remember the good deeds of David your servant’ (2 Chr 6:42).

F. “And what is written after it? ‘And when Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven’ (2 Chr 7:1).”

G. And if you cannot learn from here [these verses] that Solomon brought the coffin of David his father from the grave, [then learn it from the following interpretation].

H. Said R. Berakhiah in the name of R. Helbo in the name of the school of R. Shila, “There is an explicit verse, ‘I extol you, O Lord, for you have lifted me up, O Lord, you brought me up from Sheol’ (Ps 30:2, 4).”
I. “Therefore said Solomon, ‘Since it is because of the merit of David my father the Holy One, blessed be He, did this, I shall recite a song of dedication of the house in his name—A song of dedication of the house of David’” (Ps 30:1).

According to B of Ecclesiastes Rabbah, invoking the memory of David was adequate. But C–F relate a dispute between R. Yehudah b. Ilai, an Ushn tanna, and the rabbis on what actually overcame the difficulty. The rabbis hold at E that David's coffin was brought into the Temple, while R. Yehudah b. Ilai at D indicates a revived David was present. F provides different exegetical bases for these positions, including a citation from Psalms 30:4. The version of this midrash in Pesiqta Rabbati also assigns a similar, and in fact a more prominent, role to David. This account serves as a comment on Psalms 30:1, a mizmor shir chanukat habayit ledavid—a song of dedication of the house of David. The midrash interprets this biblical text to refer to a song sung at “the dedication of the house, the Temple of David,” treating the lamed in ledavid to associate the Temple with David. In this version, the comment about bringing in the coffin of David is reported at D by the fourth generation Palestinian amora R Helbo, who lived in the second half of the fourth century.

What factors might account for the critique of Solomon and the greater significance assigned to David in these accounts? In addition, what may explain the very atypical rabbinic comments that the physical presence of a person from the past, either in the form of his corpse or of the actual revived person, was effective in securing the completion of the dedication of the Temple? As already noted, previous scholarship has commented on the first of these questions. One explanation is that primarily exegetical concerns stand behind these accounts—efforts to explain verses in 2 Chronicles 6, Psalms 24 and 30, and Ecclesiastes 4:2. For example, why did Solomon offer such a long prayer; what explains the sequence of questions about the king of glory in Psalm 24?8

A second and commonly cited explanation of the critique of Solomon is that these accounts are an indirect way of critiquing the patriarchate, especially Judah Nesiah, a third century descendent of Judah the Patriarch. David, parallel to the earlier patriarch, Judah the Patriarch, is fine, but his descendent, just like Solomon, is deficient.9 A third explanation of the prominence assigned to David, offered by scholars such as Hananel Mack and Avigdor Shinan, is that these texts align with other rabbinic efforts to “clean up and enlarge the image of David.”10 Esther Menn in her previously mentioned articles provides an explanation of the version of the midrash in Midrash on Psalms. She analyzes a number of texts in this document that elevate King David for the purposes of treating the Temple as a House of Prayer. The editors of Midrash on Psalms saw David as the author of the book of Psalms and sought to highlight the importance of prayer in a period long after the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. These explanations clearly assign to David a far greater importance in
connection with the Temple and are also part of an effort, found in many rabbinic texts, that like the much earlier efforts of the Chronicler sought to “clean up” the image of King David. But none of these explanations says anything about the odd imagery of the actual presence of David.

I suggest that this notion relates to emerging notions of relics and the importance for Jews of the physical presence of the remains of significant figures from the past, evidenced in a number of rabbinic texts and in traditions about pilgrimage to such location as the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. These practices developed in the Byzantine era after the consecration of what is known now as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on September 13, 335. Several scholars, including Jeffrey Rubenstein and Ra’anan Boustan, have examined a variety of rabbinic texts, including stories about R. Eleazar b. Simeon, appearing in both the Babylonian Talmud and *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana*, that describe villagers battling over his body, a body that had not decayed and was able to benefit the living. Similarly, a tradition in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Sotah 34b) ascribes to the mid-fourth century Babylonian amora Rava a comment that Caleb during his scouting of the land went and prayed for help from the Patriarchs at their grave in Hebron. This burial site is a location not simply to honor and remember the dead but also to seek their intervention and assistance. Although pilgrimage to graves became prominent among Jews in the Islamic period, as demonstrated by Elchanan Reiner, this tradition attests to the idea that praying in the proximity of a “holy person” is efficacious.

I propose, in line with the views of scholars such as Joshua Schwartz, Joshua Levinson, and Eyal Ben Eliyahu, that the tradition about the physical presence of David at the dedication of the Temple may be a rabbinic response to the growing Christian notion of “the Holy Land” and to their ways of speaking of the Temple. Robert Wilken, John Wilkinson, and others have traced the emerging Christian notion of the Holy Land. A key figure in this development is the Church Father Eusebius, who praises Constantine for his efforts. In his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius says the following about the building of the church complex at the newly discovered site of Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection: “New Jerusalem was built at the very Testimony to the Savior, facing the famous Jerusalem of old, which after the bloody murder of the Lord had been overthrown in utter devastation, and paid the penalty of its wicked inhabitants. Opposite this then the Emperor erected the victory of the Savior over death with rich and abundant munificence, this being perhaps that fresh new Jerusalem proclaimed in prophetic oracles, about which long speeches recite innumerable praises as they utter words of divine inspiration.”

In his *Church History*, Eusebius had previously in 317 CE addressed Paulinus the Bishop of Tyre upon the dedication of its basilica by remarking, “Shall I call you a new Bezalel, the master builder of a divine tabernacle, or a Solomon, king of a new and far
nobler Jerusalem, or a new Zerubbabel, who adored the temple of God with the glory that was far greater than gold?" Here a builder of a church is compared to Solomon the builder of the Temple, thereby appropriating the biblical imagery to praise him. Finally, the connection between the Temple and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher appears quite explicitly in the Travels of Egeria to the Holy Land in the early 380s. She relays her observations of the Encaenia, the day celebrating the consecration of that church (called the Anastasia here). The date in September was chosen “to coincide with the very day when the cross had been found. You will find in the Bible that the day of the Encaenia was when the house of God was consecrated, and Solomon stood in prayer before God’s altar as we read in the Book of Chronicles [2 Chr 6–7]. At the time of the Encaenia they keep the festival for eight days, and for many days beforehand the crowds begin to assemble.” Here the consecration of the church is seen as a direct parallel and a replacement for the previous eight-day celebration that took place when Solomon dedicated the Temple.

Egeria also comments on how the Holy Cross was treated by Christians, how it was seen as a relic with amazing powers. She notes that this potent object was kept in a golden and silver box, a coffin, to protect it and was taken out only with much care. Perhaps these traditions that connect key Christian symbols, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Holy Cross with the Temple of Solomon, may provide some of the background for the rabbinic stories that connect the successful dedication of the Temple either with the corpse of David in his coffin or a revivified David. Although it was in ruins, the rabbis in many ways continue to underscore in many midrashim the unique power and importance of the Temple, its “founder” David, and the Temple Mount.

Later Christian traditions emerging from the period of the emperor Heraclius in the early 600s also ascribe much significance to his successful return of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem in 630 after retrieving it from the Persians, who had conquered Jerusalem and taken it in 614. They compare the Cross to the Ark of the Covenant, and in later versions of Heraclius’s activities they describe his initial lack of success in bringing in the cross through the gate through which Jesus had entered Jerusalem. Heraclius managed to bring in the cross in its box only after he humbled himself, stripped off his royal garb, and then approached the gates. Events associated with Heraclius appear to have led to making connections with David by both Jews and Christians. Scholars connect the capture of Jerusalem in 614 by the Persians with the rise of an intense Jewish apocalyptic set of writings, including Sefer Zerubbabel and Sefer Eliyahu, accounts that describe the success of a Davidic messiah. Heraclius also draws upon the tradition of David, especially evident in a set of golden plates found in Cyprus that appear to appropriate events from the life of David to symbolize the emperor’s own achievements. Heraclius also names one of his children David.
Jews familiar with the midrashim cited above and with these accounts of Heraclius’ endeavors may well have seen a parallel between the emperor’s efforts at returning the Holy Cross in its box and the box containing the corpse of David. David was a living presence for Jews, and the building now even more closely associated with him, the Temple in Jerusalem, the House of David, and the Mount on which it stood remained potent symbols and a presence for Jews for many centuries. They do so as well even until this day. In the hearts and minds of many Jews, as the song based on a comment in the Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah 25a says, “David King of Israel, chai vekayam—is alive and endures.”

NOTES


2. David Rothstein’s comments on 1 Chronicles 22:2–29:25, a unit that describes David’s various preparations for building the Temple, capture the overall thrust of the revisions of the Chronicler. “This entire section has no parallel in other biblical sources. The Chronicler composed it to bolster David’s image by suggesting that he did everything allowable for building the Temple short of constructing the structure itself. The Chronicler thus presents the construction of the Temple as a two-part venture, begun by David and completed by Solomon. Chronicles repeatedly makes the point that, although David was denied the honor of building the Temple, he did everything in his power to lay its groundwork. Accordingly David prepares the labor force, and raw materials” (David Rothstein, “First Chronicles,” in The Jewish Study Bible [2nd ed.; ed. Adele Berlin, et al.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 1749).


4. For overviews of the scholarship relating to early rabbinic documents and their dates, I draw upon the discussions in H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (2nd ed.; trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). In some instances I also note additional discussions of dating. Several scholars have discussed the midrash in the Babylonian Talmud, commenting on its textual features, its literary structure, the redactional impact upon its formulation and meaning. The variations in the manuscripts do not have any significant

5. I use the translation of Esther Menn, “Praying King and Sanctuary of Prayer, Part II,” 300–301, which I checked against the Hebrew text.


8. Frenkel (*Midrash and Agdadah*), Heinemann (“On Life and Death”), and Sasson (*A
King and Layman) stress these factors and note how redactors refocus the message of the core story.


11. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “A Rabbinic Translation of Relics,” in Crossing the Boundaries in Early Judaism and Christianity: Ambiguities, Complexities and Half-Forgotten Adversaries: Essays in Honor of Alan F. Segal (ed. Kimberly B. Starrton, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 314–32; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “Hero, Saint, and Sage: The Life of R. Elazar b. Shimon in Pesiqta de Rab Kahana II,” in The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade (ed. Michal Bar-Asher, et al.; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017), 509–28; Ra’anan Boustan, “Jewish Veneration of the ‘Special Dead’ in Late Antiquity and Beyond,” in Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond (ed. Cynthia Hahn, et al.; Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015), 61–81. Another rabbinic tradition, appearing in a range of documents including the tannaitic midrash Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Va‘ehi Beshalach 4, and also in Gen Rabbah 87:8 and in Midrash on Psalms 114:9, also describes the impact of the physical remains of an ancestor. These sources assert that the bones of Joseph occasioned the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. This tradition differs in one crucial detail from the midrashim about David’s coffin. In this case, the biblical text itself describes how the Israelites took the bones of Joseph with them when they departed Egypt. Thus the presence of the bones of Joseph on their journey through the desert is not introduced into the biblical text, though ascribing miraculous powers to them is a novel point made in rabbinic texts. It is worth noting as well that while the versions in the earlier documents, Mekhilta and Gen Rabbah, claim it is the bones of Joseph that had the miraculous impact, in the version in the late Midrash on Psalms the coffin [aron], the same word found in the traditions about David’s presence at the dedication of the Temple, causes the splitting of the Sea. Simcha Raphael, Images of Joseph’s Bones in Torah and Midrash (Philadelphia: Da’at Institute, 2013), analyzes these traditions in depth.


