

## A Hidden Name Midrash in 2 Chr 28:24?\*

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While the Book of Kings stresses that Ahaz's visit to Damascus led to the construction of a new altar and not to a form of foreign worship (2 Kgs 16:12-15), in Chronicles the visit and consequent building of the altar are replaced by a report, relating to Ahaz's worship of the gods of Damascus, i.e. an Aramean ritual act (2 Chr 28:23).<sup>1</sup>

The same difference can also be observed in those activities, which involve the temple. These includes the dismantling of the temple's holy vessels in order to pay bribes to the Assyrians (2 Kgs 16:17-18), that becomes the sealing of the temple doors (2 Chr 28:24). Curtis and Madsen recognize correctly the distortion of the facts made by the Chronicler. They claim that there is absolutely no evidence to support the Chronicler's assertion that Ahaz shut the temple doors. Such an action, they believe, would have contradicted the ritual innovations, which Ahaz was said to have introduced into the temple and encouraged their practice.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this is a part of the striking shift in the Chronicler's aim to impute Ahaz with total heresy, to the same extent that he credits Hezekiah, his son, with absolute orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup>

Now, the verb **אָחַז** (to grasp, to seize) has also the rare meaning of shut, to lock.<sup>4</sup> Is it possible then that the mention of the verb **סָגַר** (to shut, to close) in 2 Chr 28:24 is a hidden Midrash related to the name of Ahaz (**אָחַז**)?<sup>5</sup> In his book on biblical names, under the chapter that deals with name derivations without sound effects, Garsiel refers to a Midrash on the name of Ahaziah – of which Ahaz is the obvious abridgement. In 2 Kgs 14:13 we find: "King Jehoash of Israel captured (**תָּפַס**) King Amaziah of Judah son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah". Garsiel claims that Ahaziah's name is implied by a linguistic substitute, which bears a synonymous significance or

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson sharpens this point by associating the construction of the model of the Aramean altar in the book of kings with a legitimate ritual procedure. See: Williamson, *Israel*, 115

<sup>2</sup> Curtis / Madsen, *Commentary* 461.

<sup>3</sup> Ackroyd, *Interpretation* 247; see also: Gonçalves, 48; Smelik, *Representation* 179-182; And more recently: Eitan, *Character* 43-69 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> **אָחַז** **הַדְּלֵת** **וְאָחַז** **עֵינָיו** Ne 7:3; BDB, 28. This may also hold true in **אָחַז** **שְׁמֵרָת** **עֵינָיו** (77:5). The former is probably a case of an Aramean influence.

<sup>5</sup> As implied by Prof. David Talshir (personal communication).

similarity to the Midrashic etymology – the word **תפש**.<sup>6</sup> This is to say, the word, which expounds the name, is the synonym understood from its pronunciation.

However, what can we say about Ahaz in Chronicles? According to *Leviticus Rabba* 11.7, the act of Ahaz in 2 Chr 28:24 receives the following interpretation: “What did He do (King Ahaz)? He arose and closed the synagogues and the houses of study. This is what is written, *Bind up* (**צור**) *the testimony, seal up instruction among my disciples* (Isa. 8: 16). Rab Huna said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: Why was he called Ahaz? – because He seized (**אחז**) the synagogues and the houses of study”. If so, how do we know that **ויסגר** in 2 Chr 28:24 refers to the name of Ahaz?

In order to answer this question, let us first consider Liebermans instructive explanation of the word **צור**, which appears in *Leviticus Rabba* as a synonym for **אחז**. It emerges that the word **צור** (bind) is also used with the significance of **לנעול** (to lock up). In the Palestinian Talmud (jPea I,1,15d) we find: **איזיל צור כנישתא עלוי** – “Go and Close the synagogue on him”. The meaning of **אחז** is also to lock up, as in *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* (7:8): “They (Egyptians) closed up (**אחזו**) the water (places) on them that they should not immerse”. Lieberman concludes: “We can now understand that the Hag-gada associated the name **אחז** with its synonym **צור**, interpreting the verse **צור תעודה** to mean: close the synagogue, as in the phrase **צור כנישתא**”.<sup>7</sup>

This insight can be further supported by the fact that the same phenomenon occurs in other Semitic languages as well. In Akkadian, for example, the verb *ṣabātu* (to grasp, to hold on) also expresses closing or blocking, entering or leaving.<sup>8</sup> Thus, together with the Chronicle’s aim in our mind, it seems that we can suggest that the Chronicler made a deliberate use of the verb **סגר** to imply to the name of Ahaz.

### Summary

This paper argues for the existence of a Midrashic reading for the name of king Ahaz in Chronicles.

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag argumentiert für das Bestehen einer midraschischen Lesart für den Namen des Königs Ahaz im Buch der Chronik.

<sup>6</sup> Garsiel, Names 111.

<sup>7</sup> Lieberman, Greek 169.

<sup>8</sup> See: CAD, “*abātu*” 4b, 20.

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