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**“Abraham's Ten Trials and Biblical Literary Convention.”**

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**THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF THE  
JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY MOURNS THE LOSS OF  
RABBI JOSIAH DERBY**

*Talmid Chacham im met, mi yiten temurato*

Rabbi Josiah Derby, Rabbi Emeritus of the Rego Park Jewish Center, Queens, New York and Congregation Beth Shalom, Coconut Creek, Florida, died early Wednesday morning, December 18, 2002 (13 Tevet). He would have celebrated his 89<sup>th</sup> Birthday on December 25. Born in Berditchev, Ukraine he came to the United States in 1921. He earned first a BA and then an MA in mathematics from Harvard University, completing his studies in 1937. He attended the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and was ordained as a rabbi in 1943. During World War II, he served as chaplain with the US armed forces. He was descended from 900 years of rabbis (tracing his family lineage back to RASHI and was the seventh generation direct descendent of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, a prominent Hasidic master. In 1942, while a student at the Seminary, he became the rabbi of a community in Rego Park and was instrumental in establishing it as the Rego Park Jewish Center in Queens. While there, he envisioned and then helped found the Solomon Schechter Day School of Queens, the first Conservative day school in the country, which became the model for a national day school movement. He was a leader in the Conservative movement's educational efforts for over 30 years. In 1971, Rabbi Derby was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary. He retired from the Rego Park Jewish Center in 1983 and moved to Coconut Creek, Florida, where he once again founded a synagogue, Congregation Beth Shalom of Coconut Creek. Rabbi Derby served as the first rabbi of the congregation for two years and was then named Rabbi Emeritus.

Rabbi Derby was a lover of Bible studies from his earliest youth and was a scholar, teacher and lecturer of repute. He was a founding member of the Advanced Bible and Talmud Study Group of the Central Agency for Jewish Education of Broward County. In retirement he was able to devote his time to the pursuit of Bible studies and published over 34 articles in the Jewish Bible Quarterly. Another article will be published posthumously.

*Yehi Zichro Baruch*

**ABRAHAM'S TEN TRIALS  
AND A BIBLICAL NUMERICAL CONVENTION**

**SCOTT B. NOEGEL**

*An earlier form of this paper was presented at the Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference on December 19, 1999.*

INTRODUCTION

Our current scholarly understanding of numerical lists of persons and events in biblical and midrashic literature has benefited from a long process of inter-disciplinary inquiry. Already in 1911, A. Wünsche<sup>1</sup> systematized the numerical sayings of early rabbinic literature and placed them on a continuum derived from the wisdom traditions of the Israelites. F. Dornseiff, H. Zimmern, W. von Soden, and A. H. Gardiner<sup>2</sup> then sought antecedents for the Bible's numerical patterns in Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. A. Alt<sup>3</sup> later reassessed the comparisons with greater methodological caution, explaining the similarities by way of a common cultural context.

Alt was followed by W. Roth<sup>4</sup> who shifted the scholarly focus from origins to function by introducing form-critical methods to the discussion. However, the search for analogs continued. G. Nádor<sup>5</sup> posited a Neo-Platonic background for mishnaic numerical patterns and, in 1973, Y. Avishur<sup>6</sup> published on biblical and ancient Near Eastern numbers indicating wholeness; namely, threes, sevens, and tens.

In the same year, W. Towner's study on rabbinic numerical sayings appeared, and repositioned the question of continuity by asserting the importance of recognizing "the corpus of biblical numerical sayings as constituting the background and pre-history of the rabbinic enumerations, without insisting on a literal developmental relationship between them."<sup>7</sup> By moving to a model of recognizing oral imitation and/or literary modeling, Towner's study accounted for

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the obvious continuity between the biblical and midrashic numerical lists while appreciating differences in function, style, rhetoric, and ideology in the analogs.

#### THE SEVEN-AND-TEN DEVICE

Since Towner's important study, biblical scholars have discovered yet another numerical device, one which they have loosely labeled the "seven and ten device." Gary Rendsburg explains: "In the Bible where rosters of ten occur, special prominence is given to the entries listed in the seventh and tenth positions."<sup>8</sup> His comment focused on the appearance of Amorites as seventh, and Jebusites as tenth, in the list of nations in Genesis 15. His note built upon the work of J. Sasson and B. Porten, who had found the device in Genesis 5 (where Enoch stands out in a list ending with Noah) and in the genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 (where Boaz is seventh and David tenth).<sup>9</sup>

A few years ago I added to these observations by demonstrating that the seven-and-ten device occurs not only in lists of nations and genealogical rosters, but in narrative structure, in particular in the Exodus account of the Ten Plagues of Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

To anticipate my examination of Abraham's ten trials, it will be useful to summarize the ways in which the Seventh Plague, "hail," stands out in the plagues narrative. It is given more verses than any plague except for the Tenth.<sup>11</sup> This scene also contains the longest uninterrupted Divine monologue in the plagues account: a total of seven (!) lines (Ex. 9:13-19). In the entire pericope, the word "hail" appears a total of 14 times (= 2 x 7). No other plague is mentioned as often. In addition, it is with the Seventh Plague that we first are told that Pharaoh repents of his deeds: '*I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked*' (9:27), and that he promises to let the Israelites go. The Seventh Plague, therefore, is a turning point in the narrative.

Further, with each preceding plague Pharaoh hardens his heart, but it is immediately before the Seventh that an explanation appears: '*. . . I have spared you for this purpose: in order to show you My power, and in order that My Name may resound throughout the world*' (Ex. 9:16). In addition, the hail comes with fire and lightning. Thus, the story combines three theophorically charged symbols (cf., Ex. 19:16, Josh. 10:11, Ps. 18:13, 148:8, Job 38:22).

Moreover, and this observation has import for Abraham's ten trials, the rabbis who were responsible for the annual reading cycle of the Torah apparently recognized the importance of the Seventh Plague. Note that the section marked *parshat va-era* ends at Exodus 9:35, the last verse of the chapter, and that the section marked *parshat bo* begins at Exodus 10:1; that is, the reading cycle places a division between the first seven plagues and the remaining three.<sup>12</sup> There also are many linguistic clues, key words, and significant variations in the introductory formulae which for reasons of space I omit here. Suffice it to say that as with the other biblical lists of ten, the importance of the plague of hail was cued by placing it in the seventh position.<sup>13</sup>

One additional feature of the seven-and-ten device is of note. The text in which one finds it, whether in lists or narrative, also connects the seventh and tenth items through linguistic or literary means. Thus, in Genesis 5:24 and 6:9, Enoch and Noah are linked. Both figures "walk with God" (the text for both being *hit-ha-lekh*). In Genesis 15:20-21, Amorites and Jebusites represent the two main pre-monarchic inhabitants of Jerusalem (as recalled in Ezekiel 16:3-4). The genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 connects Boaz and David in order to underscore David's connection to the redeemer in the story. In Exodus, the plagues of hail and of death of the first-born are linked by way of the narrator's remarks concerning the widespread nature of their devastation, their connection to grain (cf. Ex. 9:31, 11:15), and their shared uniqueness as events unparalleled in Egyptian history.

The tradition of Abraham's trials is ancient. It appears variously in Jubilees 17:17, 19:8, Mishnah *Aboth* 5:3 (second century BCE), and in the two recensions of the *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*<sup>14</sup> and in list form and parenthetically in other rabbinic writings.

Despite these partial references, with notable variations among them, there exist two complete versions of the legend. The first appears in the unfinished work *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (eighth century CE), hereafter called the PRE, Chapters 26-30. The second is in a homiletic manuscript of the fifteenth century CE published by L. Barth (see note).<sup>15</sup> However, I will focus on the legend as found only in the PRE, a work that Towner sees as making extensive use of numerical patterns belonging to considerably older traditions.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, G. Friedlander<sup>17</sup> has noted that despite the collection's later polemical redaction, some of its traditions pre-date the first century BCE (like the Creation legends and books of Adam and Eve). Thus, the relatively late date of the PRE should not deter our investigation. Moreover, my interest lies in the earliest versions of the PRE, which show a greater consistency in their treatment of the trials. There they typically appear as follows:

1. Assassins try to murder the infant Abraham.
2. Abraham is imprisoned for ten years.
3. Abraham must migrate to Canaan.
4. A famine drives Abraham to Egypt.
5. Pharaoh seizes Abraham's wife Sarah.
6. Abraham battles a coalition of eastern kings.
7. Abraham experiences a vision and performs a sacrifice that seals his "covenant between the pieces."
8. Abraham's circumcision.
9. Ishmael tries to kill Isaac.
10. The sacrifice of Isaac. (Barth, "Genesis," 258. See note 15.)

While the importance of the tenth trial, the Akeda, and its sense of climax in the PRE will escape few readers, and is indeed the pinnacle of the Abrahamic cycle in the Bible as well, the importance of the seventh trial has gone unappreciated. With the biblical convention in mind, therefore, I offer evidence that suggests that the story of Abraham's ten trials as found in the earliest versions of the PRE utilizes the seven-and-ten device.

First: With the seventh trial, unlike the other nine, Abraham witnesses a theophany through "a vision [*ha-zon*]." It is here that a "vision" first appears in connection with Abraham, thus marking his prophetic role. It is here that God first reveals Himself to him (Barth, "Genesis," 258). It is thus a turning point in the narrative.

Second: The PRE shows a marked exegetical focus on Abraham's vision. It distinguishes Abraham's prophetic experience by noting that in contrast to other prophets, Abraham received, in Barth's words, a "double dose." Whereas other prophets receive only a vision, Abraham's experience comes in a "revelation" and a "vision [*be-mareh he-hazon*]." As Barth remarks, the accompanying exegesis suggests "the general idea that the form of the vision received by Abraham

is superior to other forms of prophecy and that this somehow signifies his distinction from and superiority to other prophets." Moreover, as Barth has shown, in all the lists that describe the harshest forms of biblical prophecy, "vision [*ha-zon*]" occurs in all of them. This suggests that Abraham's seventh trial involved enduring an especially harsh form of prophecy (Barth "Genesis," 254-258).

Third: As Barth observes:

In eight of the ten cases, an aggadically formulated rabbinic title or brief narrative statement introduces the trial's content. In four cases (I, III, IV, and VI), the citation of a biblical verse follows the introductory statement. In contrast to these techniques of naming or introducing a trial, both the *Homily* and *PRE* merely cite Genesis 15:1, as if the verse were sufficient to convey the conception and content of Trial VII (Barth, "Genesis," 250).

The eighth trial also opens with a proof text, but there are differences in the ways the exegetical statements connect with the citations that precede them. Unlike the eighth trial, the seventh offers an exegetical statement rather than an argumentative exegetical play in dialogue form. In addition, according to Barth, "the exegetical statement that follows the opening biblical citation does not directly indicate the nature of the trial" (Barth, "Genesis," 251). Thus, as with the seventh plague in Exodus,<sup>18</sup> the text flags the importance of Abraham's seventh trial through a variation in the introductory formula. Indeed, the ambiguity as to what exactly constitutes the nature or content of the seventh trial creates an enigma that further heightens its importance.

Fourth: Another way in which the PRE distinguishes the seventh trial is in its choice of proof text, Genesis 15, with its focus on the appearance of God as fire passing between the pieces. Fire, of course, plays an important legitimizing role in the Bible serving to mark God's presence at important events in Israelite history, whether at the burning bush or in the Exodus account of the seventh plague. The appearance of God as fire, therefore is significant, and it is this trial that first marks God's covenantal relationship with Abraham.

Fifth: A reason for seeing the seven-and-ten device at work in the PRE is that the seventh trial connects Abraham's vision with the Passover night. This underscores the importance of the vision by placing it as a propitious time, and by

calendrically linking Abraham's seventh trial to the Tenth Plague of Egypt. Since the Passover involves a period of seven days beginning on the fifteenth day of the month, its exegetical link to the seventh trial is propitious. Jewish exegesis assigns an entire array of events to Passover night, (see, e.g., the song that appears at the end of the Haggadah called "It Was at Midnight," which offers a poetic listing of such items). Nevertheless, its appearance here in the seventh trial in conjunction with so many other suggestive features is striking.

Sixth: Immediately after the seventh trial, Abraham is perfected through circumcision, through which he becomes  $\text{טָמִים}$  [*tammim* – "perfect, whole"]. As Avishur has shown, the number seven frequently represents wholeness or completion, the seventh day after Creation being an obvious example.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the placement of Abraham's perfection (i.e., his circumcision) after the completion of the seventh trial is suggestive.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Abraham's circumcision is said to have occurred on the Day of Atonement, thus placing it on the tenth day of the seventh month.

Seventh: Another piece of evidence is the repeated use of sevens and units of seven in the seventh trial. In addition to the trial's connection to Passover, the root  $\text{חָזַן}$  [*hazah* – "envision"] appears seven times. It perhaps is no accident that early PRE versions preserve the exegetical comments of a total of seven rabbis in the seventh trial (see Judah HaNasi, Akiba, Acha ben Jacob, Mesharshyah, Joshua, Elazar ben-Azariah, and Eliazar ben-Arakh). Again, sevens and numerical schemes based on sevens appear abundantly in the plagues narrative, especially in the account of the Seventh Plague, where God speaks seven lines and the word "hail" appears fourteen times ( $2 \times 7$ ). It is significant, therefore, that the same schema occurs in Abraham's seventh trial.<sup>21</sup>

Eighth: Immediately prior to the announcement of Abraham's seventh trial, we find a blessing in the mouth of angels: *'Blessed are you, O Lord, the shield of Abraham'* (see Gen. 15:2). This benediction does not appear before any of the other trials. The placing of an angelic blessing as a segue to the seventh trial signals the significance of the covenant about to transpire. The exegesis accompanying the sixth trial similarly prepares the reader for the seventh by invoking the Tenth Plague. It notes that Abraham's battle with Chedorlaomer happened on the exact night and hour that the Tenth Plague of Egypt occurred (though

centuries apart), thus anticipating Rabbi Judah HaNasi's statement in the seventh trial that Abraham's nocturnal revelation occurred on Passover night.

Ninth: Another piece of evidence is the PRE's exegetical focus on the messianic age beginning with the seventh trial, which the rabbis place in the context of Abraham's prophetic view of the future. Exegetical interpretations of the three-year-old ram in the Covenant Between the Pieces move from earthly dominions, based on comparisons to Daniel, to a future war against the "Son" (some manuscripts read "House") of David. Rabbi Joshua's comment that were it not for Abraham's dividing of the pieces the world would not have been able to exist, highlights the cosmic importance of the seventh trial. Even the bird of prey  $\text{אֵייל}$  - *ayil*<sup>22</sup> that swoops over the pieces is so interpreted: "the raptor is none other than the Son of David." Other interpretations similarly add to the seven messianic exegetical comments on the seventh trial. The messianic exegetical statements continue through to the tenth trial. Prior to the seventh trial, no messianic exegesis occurs.

Tenth: The final reason for suggesting the presence of the device is the literary and linguistic links between the seventh trial and the tenth – the Akeda, in accordance with the biblical convention. Of all the trials, only the seventh and tenth require Abraham to sacrifice. Both the seventh and tenth trials devote exegesis to the horns of the sacrificial animal. In both cases, the animal is a ram. Moreover, Abraham's priestly role in the seventh trial is magnified in the tenth, when we are told that he raised the knife to slay his son like a "high priest."<sup>23</sup>

Both trials occur at twilight. In both God appears in the form of fire. In the seventh, the theophany passes between the pieces. In the tenth, "the place" seen from afar is identified with the Shekinah, appearing in a pillar of fire. As in the seventh trial, the tenth contains seven exegetical comments: Rabbi Judah (two times), Simeon (var. Ishmael), Zechariah, Berachiah, Hanina, and Isaac. Only the seventh and tenth trials elicit seven comments and in both are we explicitly told that God revealed himself to Abraham.<sup>24</sup>

The cumulative evidence suggests that the PRE's account of Abraham's ten trials illustrates the seven-and-ten device as found in the Hebrew Bible. As with the plagues of Exodus, the PRE underscores the seventh trial through numerical schemes, a focus on significant events and symbols, variations in repeated formulae, and by linking the seventh and tenth items in the list. Like the narrator's

glosses in the plagues account, the PRE's exegetical discussion is integral to the device, further serving to highlight the seventh trial.

While any explanation must remain speculative, one factor might have been the PRE's narrative and exegetical interest in paralleling Abraham's ten trials with the Ten Plagues of Egypt. Both the ten trials and the Ten Plagues involve endurance through ten trials, theophanies with fire, and the threat against a first-born son as part of their tenth trial. Both reference Passover night, employ the literary use of sevens (hail fourteen times, vision seven times), and variations in introductory formulae. Such parallels might have provided a vehicle via imitation through which the device entered the legend.

Such an explanation, however, requires that we posit an awareness of the seven-and-ten device by the author of the PRE as it appears in Exodus, or, an earlier associative relationship between the trials and the device and/or between the trials and the plagues. It is worth recalling that Genesis 15, the very chapter that serves as the centerpiece of Abraham's seventh trial, also contains the seven-and-ten device in its list of nations. Moreover, the Mishnah (*Aboth* 5:3) places Abraham's ten trials in a list of biblical tens including the ten generations of Adam to Noah and the Ten Plagues of Egypt; the biblical accounts of both exhibit the seven-and-ten device.<sup>25</sup>

Alternatively, we could see either or both the biblical material and Abraham's ten trials as sharing a similar combination of two separate devices; a narrative organizational interest in sequences of ten, and a penchant for underscoring sevens. R. Gordis<sup>26</sup> noted decades ago that the heptad plays an important role in both biblical and midrashic literatures, and that it can serve to define a literary unit even when the number seven is not explicitly indicated. The famous rabbinic dictum that "all sevens are blessed"<sup>27</sup> perhaps encapsulates this.

Given the oral transmission of the legend and its variations, especially in accounts where the order of the trials differs, one must avoid postulating any generic or otherwise unqualified relationship between the biblical and midrashic numerical device, or any developmental sequence of form between them. Indeed, despite their formal resemblance and some functional overlap, it is difficult to ascertain how such a device came to be known by the author of the PRE.

Regardless of our difficulty in ascertaining the model of transmission, the employment of the seven-and-ten device in the PRE's narrative of Abraham's ten

trials attests to the antiquity of the tradition and to an appreciable amount of continuity with biblical literature. While this study does not attempt to offer an interpretive paradigm for every list of ten in rabbinic literature, it does, I suggest, offer a unique look into the earliest versions of the *Pirke d'Rabbi Eleazar*.

## NOTES

1. August Wünsche, "Die Zahlensprüche in Talmud und Midrasch," *Zeitschrift für Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesselschaft* 65 (1911) pp. 57, 100, 395-421; 66, (1912) pp. 414-459.
2. Franz Dornseiff, "Das Orientalische Priamel" *Greifswalder Beiträge* 10 (1935), reprinted in his *Kleine Schriften I: Antike und alter Orient Interpretationen* (Leipzig, 1956), pp. 379-393; F. D. Heinrich Zimmern, *Zur Herstellung der grossen babylonischen Götterliste An = (ilu) Anum* (Leipzig, 1911); W. von Soden, "Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft," *Die Welt als Geschichte* 2 (1936) pp. 411-467, 609-557; A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1947).
3. Albrecht Alt, "Die Weisheit Solomos," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 76 (1951) pp. 139-144.
4. Wolfgang M. W. Roth, "Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament: A Form-Critical Study," *Vetus Testamentum* Supl. 13; (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965).
5. Georg Nador, "Some Numerical Categories in Ancient Rabbinical Literature: The Numbers Ten, Seven, and Four," *Acta Orientalia* (Budapest) 14 (1962) pp. 301-315.
6. Y. Avishur, "The Forms of Repetition of Numbers Indicating Wholeness (3, 7, 10) - in the Bible and in Ancient Semitic Literature," *Beersheva* 1 (1973) pp. 1-55 (Hebrew).
7. Wayne Sibley Towner, *The Rabbinic 'Enumeration of Scriptural Examples': A Study of a Rabbinic Pattern of Discourse with Special Reference to Mekhilta D'R. Ishmael* Studia Post-Biblica (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973) p. 23.
8. Gary A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XV," *Vetus Testamentum* 42 (1992) p. 269.
9. J. M. Sasson, "A Geneological Convention in Biblical Chronography?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90 (1978) pp. 171-185; "Generation, Seventh," in K. S. Crim, ed., *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement Volume*; (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978) pp. 354-356; B. Porter, "The Scroll of Ruth: A Rhetorical Study," *Graetz College Annual of Jewish Studies* 7 (1978) pp. 23-49.
10. Scott B. Noegel, "The Significance of the Seventh Plague," *Biblica* 76 (1995) pp. 532-539. Recently, Victor Horowitz also discovered the seven-and-ten device in a twelfth century BCE *Hinke kudurru* inscription from Babylon. Victor Hurowitz, *Divine Service and Its Rewards: Ideology and Poetics in the Hinke Kudurru* (Beer Sheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1997) pp. 101-102. In the *kudurru's* list of ten maledictions, Ninurta is in seventh position and Nusku in tenth. The name Nusku also appears ten times in the inscription.
11. The seventh is given 22 verses (Ex. 9:13-35) and the tenth, 43 (11-12:33). This also was noted by B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974) p. 158, and M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) p. 80. M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969) noted only

the length of the third triplet, not the plague pericope alone; see N.M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) p. 176.

12. For a similar understanding of such text divisions, see G. A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 1986) p. 25.

13. Due to the sense of climax that accompanies the Tenth Plague, scholars typically have viewed the Seventh Plague (hail) as part of one dramatic build-up incorporating Plagues One through Nine. See for instance, Childs, p. 160; Sarna, p. 77; J. B. Coffman, *Commentary on Exodus: The Second Book of Moses* (Abilene, TX: A.C.U. Press, 1985) p. 119. To my knowledge, the only scholar to recognize the double climax was Greenberg, p. 172, n. 1, though he did not offer an explanation thereof and he did not pursue the matter.

14. For a recent edition of the recensions based on available manuscripts see Menahem Kister, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan: Solomon Schechter Edition* (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997) (Hebrew).

15. Lewis Barth, "Genesis 15 and the Problems of Abraham's Seventh Trial," *Maarav* 8 (1992) pp. 245-263. Hereafter, references to this article will be cited in the text in parenthesis. See also Lewis Barth, "The Lecture for the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah: A Homily Containing the Legend of the Ten Trials of Abraham," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 58 (1987), pp. 1-48 (Hebrew), p. 1.

16. Towner, p. 17.

17. Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971). Specifically, with the Venice, Prague, Amsterdam editions. The Luria edition was printed in Warsaw and probably represents censor activity.

18. Noegel.

19. Avishur.

20. It might be of redactional interest that at least one commentator on the Mishnah places Abraham's circumcision in the seventh slot. See, e.g., Bartinura, *Pirkei Aboth* 5:3. The same interest in sevens and lists of sevens occur in the *Pirke de Rabbi Nathan*; however, in his works, we find numerical schemes based on other numbers as well.

21. Anthony J. Saldarini, *Scholastic Rabbinism: A Literary Study of the Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* Brown Judaic Studies, 14. (Chico, CA.: Scholars Press, 1982). Saldarini credits these numerical arrangements to influence from Greco-Roman literature (p. 79). While this cannot explain the numerical interests in tens in the biblical period, it could account for the lists based on numerical sequences other than sevens and tens.

22. David Talshir, "Transformations in the Meaning of  $\text{לַשׁוֹנֵנוּ}$  and  $\text{לְשׁוֹנֵנוּ}$ " *Leshonenu* 62 (1999) pp. 107-124 (Hebrew), argues that  $\text{לַשׁוֹנֵנוּ}$  is a collective for "birds of prey," hence my loose rendering, "raptor."

23. As with his circumcision, the event apparently took place on the Day of Atonement (as suggested also in *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:9ff).

24. Another possible link between the trials is a benediction. I have referenced the benediction preceding the seventh trial already. In the tenth trial we find: "Blessed are You O, Lord, who revives the dead." While there are other benedictions in the PRE, benedictions that constitute a midrash on *Shmoneh Esrei* (or *Tefila* prayer), the only other benediction in the trials themselves appears immediately prior to the seventh trial. Thus, the benedictions serve to bookend the text from the seventh to the tenth trials.

25. The Mishnah also lists the ten generations from Noah to Abraham. While the biblical text simply lists the ten figures, Pseudo-Philo holds that the birth of the seventh in that list, Serug, provoked his father Reu to prophecy: "From this child he shall be born in the fourth generation that shall set his dwelling over the highest, and he shall be called perfect and spotless, and shall be the father of nations, and his covenant shall not be dissolved, and his seed shall be multiplied forever." Does this tradition preserve the importance of the seventh in this list of ten? Note that it also links the seventh and the tenth by way of the prophecy concerning the birth of Abraham. One also might ask whether the inclusion of the exegetical comments on Abraham's ass and the ram caught in the thicket point to these lists of ten. Both appear in the list of ten items created at twilight in *Mishnah Aboth* 5:6.

26. Robert Gordis, *Poets, Prophets, and Sages: Essays in Biblical Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1971) pp. 95-103. See, for example, Gordis' observation (p. 100) that *Mishnah Aboth* 2:7 contains a saying of Hillel cited in ten clauses. Between the five and the ten, there is a statement with six sections, followed by an Aramaic utterance which is the seventh and concluding number of the heptad.

27. *Wayyiqra' Rabba* 19:2; *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* (ed. S. Buber) 154b-155a.

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	Ecclesiastes	1 - 10
July	Esther	1 - 10
	Daniel	1 - 12
August	Ezra	1 - 10
	Nehemiah	1 - 13