

The Use of Eschatological Lists within the Targumim of the Megilloth¹

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Abstract

Several of the Targumim of the Megilloth contain lists (songs, famines, kings, etc.) that culminate in the future Messianic age. For example, *Tg. Song* opens with the list of Ten Songs and *Tg. Ruth* opens with the list of Ten Famines. Such lists are well known from other midrashic texts and this article will consider how and why these lists are used in the Targumim of the Megilloth and will propose that these additions are not merely the result of an opportunity presented by the Hebrew text but are being used specifically to further the overarching exegetical agenda of the Targum in question.

Keywords

Targum, Megilloth, lists, Midrash, Ruth, Song of Songs

The Targumim of the Megilloth are some of the most exegetically expansive Targumim, containing haggadic and midrashic additions that significantly enhance and even alter the meaning of the underlying biblical text. One distinctive addition found in several of the Targumim of the Megilloth is lists (songs, famines, kings, etc.) that culminate in the future Messianic age. For example, *Tg. Song* opens with the list of Ten Songs and *Tg. Ruth* opens with the list of Ten Famines. Such lists are well known from other midrashic texts and many of the lists found in the Targumim

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of the Megilloth have parallels in other rabbinic sources.² In this study I will consider how and why these particular lists are used in the Targumim of the Megilloth. Furthermore, I will propose that these additions are not merely the result of an opportunity presented by the Hebrew text, but are being used specifically to further the overarching exegetical agenda of the Targum in question.

The Megilloth

While the Megilloth are now considered a unit within Jewish tradition, clear evidence of the collection and ordering of the Megilloth together within the Hagiographa is relatively late. The Babylonian Talmud *Berakhot* 57b lists four of the five scrolls as a group,³ but our earliest reference to the Megilloth as a unit is in the Leningrad Codex (1008 C.E.), albeit ordered following the presumptive chronology of the books' composition. The Rabbinic Bible (1525 C.E.) groups the Five Scrolls together and orders them according to the cycle of festivals as it occurs throughout the liturgical year, the order found in modern editions: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Qohelet, and Esther.⁴

Exactly when the Scrolls began to be used liturgically is also unclear and we can be fairly confident that there was no uniformity in their liturgical development. Elbogen offers a very practical reason for assuming the

² See Wayne S. Towner, *The Rabbinic "Enumeration of Scriptural Examples"* (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

³ The context is not a discussion of canon, but rather of dreams. The listing of all the Megilloth except Ruth together is significant. "There are three smaller books of the Hagiographa [significant for dreams]. If one sees the Songs of Songs in a dream, he may hope for piety; if Ecclesiastes, he may hope for wisdom; if Lamentations, let him fear for punishment; and one who sees the Scroll of Esther will have a miracle wrought for him," *b. Ber. 57b* (I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* [London: Soncino, 1961], 355-56). Babylonian Talmud *B. Bat. 14b* is the *locus classicus* for considering the canon. All the Megilloth are mentioned, however they are scattered through the rest of the Hagiographa in (the assumed) chronological order. See also *Sop. 14:3* (40b): "In the case of Ruth, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther, it is necessary to say the benediction, 'Concerning the reading of the *Megillah*,' although it is included in the Hagiographa" (A. Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud* [London: Soncino, 1965], 276). It is likely, however, that this text is medieval. Cf., D. Reed Blank, "It's Time to Take Another Look at 'Our Little Sister' Soferim: A Bibliographical Essay," *JQR* 90 (1999-2000): 1-26.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these issues see G. Stemberger, "Die Megillot als Festlesungen der jüdischen Liturgie," *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 18 (2003): 261-76.

reading of the Megilloth in the festival services with which they came to be associated. "The existence of rather ancient midrashim on them testifies to the relatively early introduction of the scrolls."⁵ By at least the Geonic period it seems reasonably certain that the Five Scrolls were considered a unit and, in all likelihood, being used by many communities as part of their festal worship. The fact that most scholars view the Targumim of the Megilloth as quite late suggests that these texts developed at roughly the same time as the biblical texts were being incorporated into synagogal worship.⁶

Exegetical Sphere

Once these texts became a part of the liturgy, and given the precedence set by the reading of Esther in *m. Meg.* 4:4, it seems likely that the Targum of the given text would also have been read *in toto*, either with the Scripture reading as part of the synagogal service, or as part of study during the period of the festal observation.⁷ The fact that each of the Five Scrolls are relatively short would also suggest that as the targumic tradition developed and was redacted we might expect to find that the Targum

⁵ Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 150.

⁶ The textual history and dating of these texts is extremely difficult, but there is a general consensus. *Tg. Song* most likely dates to the seventh or eighth c. C.E. (Philip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles* [The Aramaic Bible 17a; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003], 55). Levine suggests that there are early, perhaps even pre-Mishnaic, *halakhic* traditions in *Tg. Ruth*, but dates the final form to the seventh or eighth c. C.E. (Étan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth* [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973], 13). Similarly, although *Tg. Lam* contains early interpretive traditions the final form of *Tg. Lam* is certainly no earlier than the sixth c. C.E. and most likely dates the eighth c. C.E. (Christian M. M. Brady, "The Date, Provenance, and *Sitz im Leben* of Targum Lamentations," *JAB* 1 [1999]: 5-29). The date of *Tg. Qoh* is most likely the seventh c. C.E. (Peter S. Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet* [The Aramaic Bible 15; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], 15). Esther has two Targumim and dating them is as difficult as any of the other Targumim of the Megilloth, but both Targumim to Esther are also to be dated to the seventh c. C.E. (Bernard Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther* [The Aramaic Bible 18; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992], 21).

⁷ Alexander suggests that while *Tg. Song* may have been intended for public reading, "Tg. Cant. seems in fact to have functioned more commonly as an aid to private devotion," *Canticles*, 54. On the *Sitz im Leben* of the Targumim in general see Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 217-253 at 238-41.

is able to provide a sustained and directed interpretation of the work as a whole unit, rather than the more *ad hoc* interpretation found in larger targumic texts or the midrashic collections. This has already been demonstrated with respect to *Tg. Lam*⁸ and *Tg. Song*.⁹

There are, in fact, a number of exegetical similarities between the Targumim of the Megilloth, as Levine has noted in his introduction to *Tg. Ruth*.¹⁰ Given the dissimilarity between the five biblical texts, the appearance of these common exegetical techniques within their Targumim strongly implies a relationship between them. Levine lists fourteen such "affinities," all of which are exegetical in nature and the first in his list is "ten events in history, the tenth being eschatological."¹¹ It is this particularly exegetical maneuver, that of creating lists and specifically eschatological lists whose final item is related to the Messianic age, that is the subject of this study. These additions are not merely the result of an opportunity presented by the Hebrew text but are used specifically to further the overarching exegetical agenda of the Targum in question.

Eschatological Lists

The practice of creating lists is common within rabbinic literature and lists of ten are frequent.¹² They are varied and various in terms of content, context, and purpose. Such lists are found also in the Targumim. Within the Targumim of the Megilloth there are four such lists that conclude with an eschatological element, three which enumerate ten items and one that lists six.¹³ The first three are the Ten Songs in *Tg. Song*, the Ten Famines in *Tg. Ruth*, and the Ten Kingdoms in *Tg. Esth. II*. Each of these three lists is characterized by the fact that (1) they include ten items; (2) each end with an eschatological figure/event; and (3) each list serves as a prologue to the Targum in question. *Tg. Ruth* also contains a second

⁸ See Christian M. M. Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 4-16.

⁹ Alexander, *Canticles*, 13, and *passim*.

¹⁰ Levine, *Ruth*, 3. See below *passim*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See, for example, 'Abot R. Nat. A chs. 34-35 which contain ten lists of tens.

¹³ Some MSS of *Tg. Esth. II* 1:1 also contain a list of ten; the five righteous and the five wicked concerning whom the term אֲשֵׁר was written. The MSS are quite varied; most only have four righteous ones, but the list does not contain any eschatological element. See Grossfeld, *The Two Targums*, 99.

eschatological list that presents the Six Descendants of Ruth which culminates with the “king Messiah.”

Tg. Song

Tg. Song opens with the midrash of the Ten Songs, a listing of songs recited from the Creation of the world up to the final song that will be recited at the culmination of history when Israel shall return from her exile. This list has received more scholarly attention than any other that we are considering¹⁴ and is found in more than ten different sources.¹⁵ The earliest of these texts is *Mekilta deRabbi Ishmael*, dating from the late fourth or fifth c. C.E., and the latest is *Yalqut Makhiri* on Isaiah, from approximately the 14th c. C.E.¹⁶ The Targum begins as follows.

Songs and praises which Solomon, the prophet, the king of Israel, recited in the holy spirit before the Sovereign of all the World, the Lord.

Ten songs were recited in this world; this song is the most excellent of them all.

The first song was recited by Adam when his sin was forgiven him and the Sabbath day came and protected him. He opened his mouth and said: “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day” (Ps 92:1).

The second song was recited by Moses, together with the Children of Israel, on the day when the Lord at the World divided for them the Red Sea. They

¹⁴ The most recent treatment of the targumic text is in Alexander, *Canticles*. See especially 15-16 and Appendix A (206-9) as well as the translation and commentary *op. cit.* For discussion of the broader tradition see Haggai Ben-Shammai, “נשכח יד בכתב גאון סעדיה” *Qiryat Sefer* 61 (1986-87): 313-32; and James L. Kugel, “Is There But One Song?” *Biblica* 63 (1982): 329-50.

¹⁵ See Alexander, *Canticles*, 206. Alexander lists the nine “major sources” as *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Shirta I* (Mek), *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* (MRS), *Midrash ha-Gadol to Exod 15:1* (MHG), *Leqaḥ Tov to Exod 15:1* (LT), *Yalqut ha-Makhiri to Ps 18:1* (YMP), *Yalqut Shim'oni to Exod* (YSe), *Yalqut Shim'oni to Josh* (YSJ), *Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim* (ASH), and Sa'adya's commentary to *Wayyosha'*. The list of songs can also be found in two secondary sources, a responsum of Hai Gaon, addressing a question regarding Sa'adya's treatment of the list, and *Yalqut ha-Makhiri to Isa 5:1*.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, dates of rabbinic works follow that of Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. Markus Bockmuehl; 2d ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

all opened their mouths in unison and recited a song, as it is written: "Then sang Moses and the Children of Israel this song" (Exod 15:1).

The third song was recited by the Children of Israel when the well of water was given to them, as it is written, "Then sang Israel this song" (Num 21:17).

The fourth song was recited by Moses the prophet when his time had come to depart from the world, and he reproved with it the people of the house of Israel, as it is written: "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak" (Deut 32:1).

The fifth song was recited by Joshua the son of Nun, when he waged war against Gibeon and the sun and the moon stood still for him for thirty-six hours. They ceased reciting [their] song, and he opened his mouth and recited [his] song, as it is written: "Then sang Joshua before the Lord" (Josh 10:12).

The sixth song was recited by Barak and Deborah on the day when the Lord delivered Sisera and his host into the hand of the Children of Israel, as it is written: "And Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang" (Judg 5:1).

The seventh song was recited by Hannah, when a son was granted her from before the Lord, as it is written: "Hannah prayed in prophecy and said" (1 Sam 2:1).

The eighth song was recited by David, king of Israel, concerning all the wonders which the Lord wrought for him. He opened his mouth and recited the song, as it is written: "David sang in prophecy before the Lord" (2 Sam 22:1).

The ninth song was recited by Solomon, the king of Israel, in the holy spirit before the Sovereign of all the World, the Lord.

The tenth song will be recited by the children of the exile when they depart from their exiles, as is clearly written by Isaiah the prophet: "You shall have this song of joy, as on the night when the festival of Passover is sanctified, and [you shall have] gladness of heart, like the people who go to appear before the Lord three times in the year with all kinds of musical instruments and [with] the sound of the pipe, [who go] ascend into the Mountain of the Lord, and to worship before the Mighty One of Israel" (Isa 30:29).¹⁷

The presence of this midrash in *Tg. Song* is predicated upon the two opening words of the biblical work: שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים. These are quite similar to the opening words of Exod 15:1 (אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת) upon which *Mek.* is commenting when this midrash is introduced in that work. In both cases the commentary begins by asserting that there is not simply "this song," but rather there are ten songs. In the case of *Tg. Song*, the assertion is made that this is the best song. "Ten songs were recited in this world; this song is the most excellent of them all." This assertion of excellence is based upon a reading of the Hebrew שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים as expressing a superlative.

¹⁷ Alexander, *Canticles*, 75-79. All translations of *Tg. Song* are from Alexander.

The Targum proceeds to list the nine other songs that make up the ten, beginning with the Song of Adam and culminating with the final song that “will be recited by the children of exile when they return from their exiles.”¹⁸ The list of Ten Songs thus depicts the history of Israel from Creation through to the Messianic age when all of dispersed Israel shall return to Zion “to worship before the Mighty One of Israel.” Alexander has noted that this is an overarching theme of the Targum¹⁹ and this opening list sets the tone for the Targumist’s exegetical agenda. The songs listed are:²⁰

The Song of Adam²¹

The Song at the Sea²²

The Song of the Well²³

The Song of Moses²⁴

The Song of Joshua²⁵

The Song of Deborah and Barak²⁶

The Song of Hannah²⁷

The Song of David²⁸

¹⁸ With the tenth song the Targumist invokes Isa 30:29, equating the feast mentioned by the prophet as that of Passover.

¹⁹ “The analogy between the Exodus from Egypt and the final exodus of the Jews from the exile at the beginning of the Messianic redemption is picked up again and again in Tg. Cant.” Alexander, *Canticles*, 77.

²⁰ For each song I will list the biblical passage referenced in *Tg. Song* along with the other traditions that included that particular song in its list of ten and the biblical text they reference, if any. For a complete table of each source and which “songs” they cite see Alexander, *Canticles*, 208-9. For a list of abbreviations see n. 15.

²¹ Ps 92:1—ASH, YMi, *Tg. Song*.

²² Exod 15:1—Mek, MRS, LT, MHG, ASH, YS, YMp, YMi, HG, *Tg. Song*.

²³ Num 21:17—Mek, MRS, LT, MHG, ASH, YS, YMp, YMi, HG, *Tg. Song*.

²⁴ ASH, YMi.

a. Deut 31:24—Mek, MRS, YS, YMp.

b. Deut 32:1—LT, *Tg. Song*.

c. Deut 31:30—MHG, HG.

²⁵ Josh 10:12—Mek, MRS, LT, MHG, ASH, YS, YMp, YMi, HG, *Tg. Song*.

²⁶ Judg 5:1—Mek, MRS, LT, MHG, ASH, YS, YMp, YMi, HG, *Tg. Song*.

²⁷ 1 Sam 2:1—*Tg. Song*

²⁸ ASH, YMi.

a. 2 Sam 22:1—Mek, MRS, LT, MHG, *Tg. Song*.

The Song of Solomon²⁹The Song of the World to Come³⁰

Alexander has demonstrated quite clearly that this first verse, understood by the Targumist as a title, serves as an introduction to *Tg. Song* and the Ten Songs establishes the framework that will be followed in the Targumist's exposition of Song of Songs.³¹ The entire Targum follows the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel from the Exodus (song two in the list of Ten Songs and *Tg. Song* 1:3-5:1) to the coming redemption of Israel in the Messianic Era (song ten and *Tg. Song* 7:12ff). Yet if this is the exegetical plan and schema of *Tg. Song* why did the Targumist begin his list of songs *before* the Exodus, reaching all the way back to Creation and the Song of Adam?

Alexander finds this perplexing since *Mek.*, our earliest source for this midrash and a source clearly known to our Targumist,³² begins his list of Ten Songs with the Song of the First Passover and ends with the Song of the World to Come. Since, Alexander argues, *Tg. Song* traces Israel's history from the Exodus to the Messianic Age *Mek.*'s form of the midrash of the Ten Songs would seem perfect for the Targumist's purposes. And yet *Tg. Song* alters *Mek.*'s list and begins with the "Song of Adam." Alexander concludes,

It is true that the Targumist manages to work in the Song of the First Passover obliquely by making Isa 30:29 the Song of the World to Come, but it is still puzzling why he chooses to jump chronologically backwards to the cre-

b. Ps 30:1—YS.

c. Ps 18:1—YMp (Ps 18.1 is the base text of this version of the list), HG.

²⁹⁾ a. Ps 30:1—Mek, MRS, MHG, YMp, HG.

b. Song—ASH, YMi, *Tg. Song*.

c. Ps 30:1—LT. LT does not actually ascribe Ps. 30 to anyone, but it maintains the position in the list immediately following the song of David, as we found in all the other sources, so it is reasonable to assume that the reader is intended to understand the author to be Solomon.

d. 1 Kgs 8:12—YS.

³⁰⁾ Isa 42:10—Mek, MRS, LT, MHG, ASH, YS, YMp, YMi, ThG, *Tg. Song*.

³¹⁾ Alexander, *Canticles*, 15-6.

³²⁾ See Alexander, *Canticles*, 207, and the notes *passim*.

ation by beginning with the Song of Adam—a move that appears to have forced him to introduce the anomalous “Song of Hannah.”³³

This may be puzzling but the addition of both the Song of Adam and the Song of Hannah can be satisfactorily explained. The simplest answer as to why the Targumist went back to Creation for his first song may be that he wanted completeness. After all, the Targum presents the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel and one could certainly argue that Bible presents the history of Israel and her redemption beginning with the dawn of human history and God’s interaction with Adam and Eve. Furthermore, when we consider Ps 92, the basis of the first song, and its interpretation in midrashic tradition we find that the Song of Adam is an excellent starting point for our Targumist’s purpose. The Targum reads,

The first song was recited by Adam when his sin was forgiven him and the Sabbath day came and protected him. He opened his mouth and said: “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day” (Ps 92:1).³⁴

The best source available for the tradition of Adam uttering Ps 92 on the first Sabbath is to be found in *Pirke R. El.* 18 which dates to the eighth or ninth c. C.E. According to the tradition, Adam was driven out of the Garden on the evening between the sixth and seventh days, but when the Sabbath came it sought to defend Adam before God.

The Sabbath day arrived and became an advocate for the first man, and it spake before Him: Sovereign of all worlds! No murderer has been slain in the world during the six days of creation, and wilt Thou commence (to do this) with me? Is this sanctity, and is this blessing? as it is said, “And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it” (Gen 2:3). By the merit of the Sabbath day Adam was saved from the judgement of Gehinnom. When Adam perceived the power of the Sabbath, he said: Not for nought did the Holy One, blessed be He, bless and hallow the Sabbath day. He began to observe [first editions: “to sing”] (the Sabbath) and to utter a psalm for the Sabbath day, and he said: “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day” (Ps 92:1). Rabbi Simeon said: The first man said this psalm, and it was forgotten throughout all the generations until Moses came and renewed it according to his name.³⁵

³³) Ibid.

³⁴) Alexander, *Canticles*, p. 76.

³⁵) Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke deRabbi Eliezer* (New York: Hermon Press, 1965), XVIII, 125-26.

Due to the “merit of the Sabbath day” Adam was saved from destruction. The “merit of the righteous,” as Alexander has pointed out, is a key theological theme of *Tg. Song*.³⁶ For this reason Adam bursts forth in song, praising God and thereby appropriating the Sabbath for himself and is thus reconciled to God.

Psalm 92 is a hymn praising God for his mighty works and speaks of the psalmist’s enemies being defeated and the righteous flourishing. *Pirqe R. El.* reads verse one as, “it is good to confess³⁷ (להודות) to the LORD” and thereby equates the Sabbath with the repentance of Adam.

The first man said: Let all the generations learn from me, that whosoever sings and utters psalms to the name of the Most High, and confesses his transgressions in the court of justice and abandons (them) will be delivered from the judgement of Gehinnom, as it is said, “It is good to confess to the Lord.”

It is thus appropriate that the Targumist should begin his list of songs with the Song of Adam, Ps 92, and all its accompanying exegetical traditions. It certainly adds to the theme begun by *Mek.* with the strong message of the need for man’s confession and God’s forgiveness and the song of Adam does seem more appropriate for the beginning of a history of God’s people. More importantly, Ps 92 and the Song of Adam fit into the exegetical agenda of *Tg. Song*.

Alexander has pointed out that the Targumist interprets the Song of Songs as a series of cycles of Israel’s “communion, estrangement, and reconciliation.”³⁸ This reconciliation is achieved through the merits of the righteous. The mere reference to this midrashic tradition of Ps 92 concerning Adam contains all of these elements: the communion of Adam and Eve with God in the Garden, their estrangement due to their rebellion, and Adam’s salvation from Gehinnom by the merits of the Sabbath. It is therefore likely that the Targumist was quite intentional in beginning his list with the Song of Adam.

The other primary change to this list as compared with *Mek.* is the seventh song being attributed to Hannah. No other sources of the Midrash of the Ten Songs includes the Song of Hannah at any point; *Tg. Song* is unique in this respect. Alexander believes, as I already noted, that it is the

³⁶) Alexander, *Canticles*, 21-2.

³⁷) Translated as “to give thanks” in most English versions.

³⁸) Alexander, *Canticles*, 27.

result of the Targumist having begun his list at Creation that requires him “to introduce the anomalous ‘Song of Hannah.’”³⁹ It is likely that there is an even stronger reason to suppose that the addition of this song is quite intentional on the part of the Targumist. (Remember, this first verse is viewed as a title by the Targumist and therefore he might feel able to introduce quite a bit of “introductory” material that would not otherwise fit into his tight exegetical schema.)

The seventh song was recited by Hannah, when a son was granted to her from before the Lord, as it is written: “Hannah prayed in prophecy and said” (1 Sam 2:1).⁴⁰

The fact that the canonical status of the Song of Songs (as well as Proverbs and Qohelet) was at one time in great debate led the Targumist, as with other rabbinic sources, to assert the inspiration and therefore appropriateness of these texts. *Tg. Song* begins “Songs and praises which Solomon, *the prophet*, the king of Israel, recited *in the holy spirit* before the Sovereign of all the World, the Lord.”⁴¹ The Targumist has bolstered this presentation of Solomon’s prophetic credentials by including Hannah’s song in his list of Ten. Solomon is thus presented as being in line with the prophets who preceded him.

Considering the list as a whole, the Targumist refers to Moses as “the Prophet” in the fourth song, in the seventh song Hannah speaks in prophecy while alluding to the birth of the prophet Samuel, in the eighth song David is said to have sung “in prophecy before the Lord,” and in the ninth song, the Targumist again asserts Solomon’s inspiration.

The ninth song was recited by Solomon, the king of Israel, in the holy spirit before the Sovereign of all the World, the Lord.⁴²

The ninth song is set forth briefly, but the description of Solomon having been inspired is decisive and is followed in the next verse as “Solomon the prophet” begins his exposition of the text. Clearly the Targumist is

³⁹) Ibid.

⁴⁰) Alexander, *Canticles*, 77.

⁴¹) Likewise *Tg. Qoh*, “The words of prophecy which Qohelet, that is, Solomon, the son of David the king who was in Jerusalem, prophesied,” (Knobel, *Targum of Qohelet*, 20). Cf. *Cant. Rab.* 1:1 and *Qoh. Rab.* 1:1.

⁴²) Alexander, *Canticles*, 77.

identifying Solomon as having received these words from God and the addition of Hannah's Song is an effort to provide a fuller prophetic context into which Solomon is to be placed.⁴³ Thus Solomon and his song is placed firmly within a legacy of prophecy.

The list of the Ten Songs clearly serves as an introduction to the *Tg. Song* and sets the Targumist's tone and agenda. The presence of the Song of Adam and the Song of Hannah, though unexpected when this list is compared to its antecedent in *Mek.*, also serves specific purposes within *Tg. Song*. The list as an entity functions as most of the eschatological lists we will examine by setting forth the *Heilsgeschichte* of Israel that will culminate in the establishment of God's order, in this case, characterized by the return of Israel from the nations to worship the Lord in Jerusalem.

Tg. Esth. II

The second Targum of Esther is a notoriously problematic text. Its date and provenance are difficult to discern and its commentary seems too wide-ranging and opportunistic to contain any kind of programmatic exegesis. *Tg. Esth. II* is in fact so periphrastic and contains so many midrashic traditions while largely ignoring the usual targumic conventions that it almost justifies Sperber classifying TgEsth "a misnomer for Midrash."⁴⁴

The fact that the list of Ten Kings does not occur in *Tg. Esth. I* or *Est. Rab.* means that we are unable to make any firm statements regarding the relationship of this midrashic tradition to the book of Esther.⁴⁵ A list of ten kings and kingdoms is a fitting addition since the book of Esther itself

⁴³ See also *Tg. Song* 1:2 where the Targumist refers to Solomon himself as "the prophet." I would also note that Hannah provides a biblical example of someone who did not ordinarily prophesy and yet at that one time spoke "in the holy spirit."

⁴⁴ Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 4a:169. Grossfeld does point out that *Tg. Esth. II* exhibits many targumic translation characteristics, but those are more exceptions than the rule with regards to *Tg. Esth. II* (*The Two Targums*, 8-12). His chart on the relationship between *Tg. Esth.* and Jewish exegesis on the following pages is even more illustrative of the character of the text.

⁴⁵ The closest parallel to this particular list is found in *Pirqe R. El.* 11, "Ten kings ruled from one end of the world to the other." Grossfeld, *The Two Targums*, also lists the differences between these two lists in Table 1 on p. 204. Note that in his table Grossfeld inverts kingdoms seven and eight; they should read Rome and Greece, as above and in his translation.

is in many ways preoccupied with this notion as evidenced by the fact that some form of *מֶלֶךְ occurs 251 times in the book.⁴⁶ The Targum reads as follows:

Now it came to pass in the days of Xerxes, he is Xerxes, *one of the ten kings who ruled and were destined (to rule). Now these are the ten kings. The first kingdom that rules is that of the LORD of Hosts—may it be speedily revealed to us. The second kingdom is that of Nimrod, the third is that of the Pharaoh, the fourth kingdom is that of Israel, the fifth is that of Nebukhadnezzar, king of Babylonia, the sixth that of Xerxes, the seventh that of Rome, the eighth that of Greece, the ninth that of the son David, the Messiah, the tenth that of the LORD of Hosts again, may it be speedily revealed to all the inhabitants of the earth.*⁴⁷

The reference in the opening of Esther to “the days of Xerxes” (בִּימֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ) is the trigger for the introduction of this list into the Targumist’s commentary. As noted, given the book of Esther’s preoccupation with queens, kings, and kingdoms it is not surprising that we should find such a midrashic tradition inserted here. What is not as clear is whether it serves as an introduction to the work as a whole in the same manner that the Ten Songs does for *Tg. Song*. It certainly does not seem to provide an historical framework for the subsequent interpretation of the text since *Tg. Esth. II* regularly moves back and forth across the historical time line, moving from Nebuchadnezzar to Xerxes to Cain (1:2) to Solomon and so on, stringing one midrash after another.

What this list does have in common with the others we are examining is that it covers the entire range of history, from its inception to its completion, and the list contains 10 items.⁴⁸ In the case of this list, the first and last kingdoms are really one and the same, that of the Lord of Hosts. This is particularly interesting since the Targumist does not end with the Messianic Age but sees that as merely (presumably) a time of restoration of Israel’s status and so he looks beyond it to the time when the Lord’s kingdom/rule will be established once and for all.

Regardless of whether or not *Tg. Esth. II* follows a clear literary structure outlined by this list, the insertion of this list of kingdoms, like the kingdoms described in Dan 7, is intended to demonstrate to the audience

⁴⁶ I want to thank Moshe Bernstein who pointed this out to me. There are 251 instances of *מֶלֶךְ in the text as opposed to only 167 total verses.

⁴⁷ Grossfeld, *The Two Targums*, 96-97.

⁴⁸ All but one list under consideration have ten items, see *Tg. Ruth* below.

that their current place in history is just prior to that of the coming of the Messiah. The lists of kingdoms beginning and ending with the kingdom of the Lord of Hosts is an exhortation of encouragement to the audience and, in this list particularly, a reminder that it is God who ordains history and will complete it. The presence of the list at the beginning of the Targum, while not providing a template for the interpretation of the entire biblical text, establishes for the Targumist's audience the tone and context within which Esther should be interpreted.

Tg. Ruth

The book of Ruth opens with a formula similar to that of Esther. ויהי בימי שפט השפטים "In the days when the judges ruled," but it is the reference to the famine that provides the opportunity for the Targumist to consider the history of God dealing with his people. Famine was a common reality of the biblical world and famines were often mentioned in the biblical text. It was thus relatively straightforward for the Targumist to create a list of Ten Famines.

It happened in the days of the judge of judges that there was a severe famine in the land of Israel. Ten severe famines were ordained by Heaven to be in the world, from the day that the world was created until the time that the king Messiah should come, by which to reprove the inhabitants of the earth. The first famine was in the days of Adam, the second famine was in the days of Lamech, the third famine was in the days of Abraham. The fourth famine was in the days of Isaac, the fifth famine was in the days of Jacob, the sixth famine was in the days of Boaz, who is called Ibzan the Righteous, who was from Bethlehem, Judah. The seventh famine was in the days of David, the king of Israel, the eighth famine was in the days of Elijah the prophet, the ninth famine was in the days of Elisha in Samaria. The tenth famine is to be in the future, not a famine of eating bread nor a drought of drinking water, but of hearing the word of prophecy from before the Lord.⁴⁹

The origins of this midrashic tradition are not likely related specifically to the book of Ruth since a near-identical list of famines can be found in other, earlier midrashic texts.⁵⁰ As with the other lists considered in this

⁴⁹ D. R. G. Beattie, *The Targum of Ruth* (The Aramaic Bible 19; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 18.

⁵⁰ *Gen. Rab.* 25:3, 40:3, and 64:2; *Ruth Rab.* 1:4; and *Midr. Sam* (Buber) 28:3.

study, the list of famines begins in the time of Adam and culminates in the final days, moving from the creation of history to its completion.

The listing of these famines echoes the famous and obvious pattern of the book of Ruth. Ruth begins with famine and ends with plenty and in the middle there is its antithesis as Naomi tells the women of Bethlehem, "I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:21). Nachman Levine has a detailed study of this list and its role within *Tg. Ruth*.⁵¹ In it he argues that in the case of this list the number ten has its precedent in the book of Ruth itself which begins with reference to ten names of people associated with famine and barrenness and ends with reference to ten names associated with plenty and redemption. And of course the book of Ruth concludes with a listing of ten generations that culminates with the birth of David. While we have already seen that two other Targumim among the Megilloth open with an eschatological list, in *Tg. Ruth* the position and nature of this list is particularly relevant to the biblical text being rendered. The Targum, by beginning with a list of ten, provides an opening that parallels the end of the work, and the choice of listing famines is most fitting for this book that revolves around this theme.

It is particularly important to note that we are told right at the beginning of this list for what purpose God had sent these famines: they were to "reprove the inhabitants of the earth." Each instance is thus a judgment by God upon the individuals or communities in question. This dictates that the final famine of "hearing the word of prophecy from before the Lord" (a paraphrase of Amos 8:11) is not and cannot be *in* the Messianic Era,⁵² but must *precede* the coming of the "king Messiah." It is the starvation and privation which both punishes and prepares the community for their redemption. The arrival of the Messiah and his lineage is, of course, intimately tied to the story of Ruth and *Tg. Ruth* contains another, shorter eschatological list.

Tg. Ruth 3:15 reads:

[Boaz] said, "Bring the scarf which you are wearing and hold it." [Ruth] held it, and he measured out six *seabs* of barley and put them on it. *Strength and*

⁵¹ Nachman Levine, "Ten Hungers/Six Barleys: Structure and Redemption in the Targum to Ruth," *JSJ* 30 (1999): 312-24.

⁵² Contra Levine who says that "the tenth final hunger [is] in the time of the King Messiah," ("Ten Hungers," 312).

*power were given to her from before the Lord to carry them and immediately it was said to her prophetically that there would descend from her six of the most righteous men of all time, each of whom would be blessed with six blessings: David, Daniel, and his companions, and the king Messiah.*⁵³

This midrash is also found in *b. Sanh.* 93ab and *Ruth Rab.* 7:2 and arises out of the discussion of whether or not Ruth could physically carry six *seahs* of grain, thus the list is confined to only six individuals.⁵⁴ The connection with her descendants is obvious and to be expected. That it comes at this moment in the story confirms prophetically what Boaz's gift means, that they will marry and that Ruth will have children. The addition underlines that at the time of Ruth the spirit of prophecy was still active, perhaps with the lack of prophecy during the earlier "famine" at the beginning of the Targum and the time of the audience/community receiving the Targum. The culmination of this prophecy and Ruth's line is, of course, the king Messiah. The community is thus living during the time of the tenth and final famine. The message to the Targumist's audience is that the famine of prophecy is an indication that the Messiah is coming soon and his arrival is the fulfillment of Ruth and Boaz's union.

Conclusion

Each of these lists that we have examined concludes with the advent of the Messiah and the restoration of God's order. The content of each list has a similar purpose: they are intended to encourage their own community to steadfastness, to hold firm whatever kingdom or famine may hold sway with the knowledge that the Messiah will soon arrive. In the case of *Tg. Ruth*, the fact that prophecy has ceased is itself a sign that it is almost "the time when the king Messiah will come." In all of our lists, the emphasis upon the coming Messianic era places them within a certain context, most likely that of the apocalyptic revival of the early Middle Ages.⁵⁵ As with earlier apocalyptic works such references were intended to encourage the community to remain faithful and to see themselves as living within a key moment of history, where the Lord's deliverance was

⁵³) Beattie, *Ruth*, 28.

⁵⁴) For more discussion of the number six and this Targum see Levine, "Ten Hungers," *passim*.

⁵⁵) See Alexander, *Canticles*, 23, 56-57.

just around the corner and their own righteous behavior could hasten its arrival.

Three of the four lists we have examined serve to open and introduce the Targum in question. Such lists at the beginning of a Targum can indeed help to frame and mold how the reader understands the subsequent work. This means, of course, that a majority of the Targumim of the Megilloth open with an eschatological list, a fact that is at the very least interesting and may suggest a common exegetical approach to these texts, something that is only possible if their present form was achieved after the Megilloth themselves were considered a unit within Jewish tradition. Since the Five Scrolls are themselves very diverse in content and message, the fact that the opening interpretation of three of the Scrolls share a common exegetical form and perspective is highly suggestive and bears further study.