

A ROCK IN THE PATH: POSSIBLE JEWISH READINGS OF MATTHEW 16:18

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Abstract

Matthew 16:18 has been object of countless studies, usually of dogmatic, structural or apologetic type. The author's proposal impacts in the possibility of other readings of this statement of Jesus from the comments of the Judaism of the first century and its ulterior developments. A special stress is made in the tannaitic midrashic literature, and in its targumic precedent, to capture the theological fabric of that moment. Such a focus will provide greater clarity to Jesus' image as Christ in the Judeo-Christian communities. The paper, in turn, vindicates the employment of haggadic material for a better understanding of the reality of the NT and, especially, of Christology.

Resumen

Mateo 16:18 ha sido objeto de numerosos estudios, de tipo dogmático, estructural o apoloético. El autor explora las posibilidades de una lectura diferente de la declaración de Jesús a partir de la literatura judía del siglo I y de su posterior desarrollo. Se aporta información acerca del concepto que se tenía de Jesús en las comunidades judeocristianas. El artículo vindica el empleo de dicha literatura para una mejor comprensión del NT y de la Cristología en general.

INTRODUCTION

There are certain texts in the Bible that, from centuries back, have superseded the limits of hermeneutics and have become teachings of a doctrine or pillars of a dogma. Deuteronomy 6:4 is one of them and, besides the contextualized readings of the OT specialists; it is a sign of Judaism. Something similar occurs with John 1:1. Object of translations and retranslations, this text has been the hobbyhorse of Arians of past years and present day. But, surely, one of the texts which has been more pondered and debated, even to exhaustion, is Matthew 16:18, as the foundational basis of ecclesiastical structures. In an academic imaginative exercise one might wonder: what would have become of this text if the Papacy of Rome, the Reformation, and Counter-Reformation had not existed? The purpose of this article draws toward this line, decoding the text from a perspective other than the doctrinally ecclesiastical, making a reading from the Judaic vision of the first century of our era.

I intend to resort to the presentation of midrashic and targumic material of a haggadic type in carrying out the purpose of this paper, avoiding the use of halakic ma-

terial.¹ Why? In the twentieth century, during the late seventies and early eighties, there arises a renewed interest of the specialists in Judaic literature, particularly regarding the narrative and homiletic sections. This interest will progressively affect the scope of theology. This movement is related to new techniques of literary and alogocentric criticism. David Stern² stands out from a large group of scholars (Daniel Boyarin,³ James Kugel,⁴ Gerald Bruns,⁵ Steven D. Fraade,⁶ or Martin Jaffee).⁷ His influence and writings remain even to our days. A new door had been opened to a new vision of Jewish literature and, therefore, of biblical hermeneutics.

Narrative and preaching reveal such refined theological thoughts as the nomologic exegesis or the allegoric interpretation. Steven D. Kepnes sees theology in the haggadic texts.⁸ He suggests that consciousness of Jewish theology, based on the narrative texts, has been progressively incorporated by the Jewish thinkers. He refers to Solomon Schechter, to Moshe Haim Luzzato, Martin Buber,⁹ Franz Rosenzweig,¹⁰ or Emil Fackenheim¹¹ as authors that include Aggadah and Haggadah in their theological lines of argument. He also states that the Haggadah is also hermeneutic and that it shows the hidden side of God in human events.¹²

¹ I designate as halakic literature (singular: halakah) that group of midrashes which is concerned with the regulation of the religious life and which use nomologic hermeneutic resources. In turn, I designate as haggadic literature (singular: haggadah) the group of midrashes which show the existence of the Jewish religiousness and which use homiletic hermeneutic resources. The term *Aggadab* will only be used for the Jewish legends and narratives.

² David Stern, *Midrash and Theory* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1998).

³ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 1990).

⁴ James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1990).

⁵ Gerald Bruns, "The Hermeneutics of Midrash", in *The Book and the Text* (Regina Schwartz; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 189-211.

⁶ Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991).

⁷ Martin Jaffe, "The Hermeneutical Model of Midrashic Studies: What it Reveals and What it Conceals", *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 72.

⁸ Steven D. Kepnes, "A Narrative Jewish Theology", *Judaism* 37 (1988): 210-17.

⁹ Martin Buber, *Moses* (New York: Harper, 1958), 14, 75-77; *The Tales of the Hasidim. Early Masters* (New York: Schocken, 1970), v.

¹⁰ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Boston: Beacon, 1972).

¹¹ Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper, 1970), 20.

¹² Kepnes literally states: "Rabbinic theology elucidates and explains and reflects upon God by supplementing biblical narratives with more narratives. These narratives are called midrashim-interpretations. Much rabbinic theology is aggadic and hermeneutical at the same time... I have said that Jewish theology is aggadic because aggadah allows for the expression of a hidden God, a God hidden in human events and in the narratives that relate and interpret these events." Kepnes, "A Narrative Jewish Theology", 213.

In the targumic area, it is inevitable to say that the interpretative achievements that these studies have contributed to the comprehension of the OT texts are numerous. Ever since the first treatises of Alexander Sperber,¹³ passing through Alejandro Diez Macho¹⁴ and his school (Luis Diez Merino,¹⁵ Miguel Pérez Fernández,¹⁶ Josep Ribera,¹⁷ Teresa Martínez Sáiz)¹⁸ up to the well nurtured congresses of *Vetus Testamentum*,¹⁹ we can observe that the interest towards this section of the Aramaic studies is becoming increasingly more intense.

We can no longer refer only to Josephus, Philo, or the normative texts of the Mishnah or the Talmud, we have Qumran and, above all, we have the certainty that the

- ¹³ From his first article in the *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* Journal, Kepnes carries out an extraordinary activity of exegesis and translation of targumic material. Cf. Alexander Sperber, "Zur Textgestalt des Prophetentargums", *ZAW* 44 (1926): 175-76; *The Bible in Aramaic: The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).
- ¹⁴ After publishing his Discovery of the Tg. Neof. in 1956 (*EstBib* 16 (1956): 446-47, and later in *Sef* 17 (1957): 119-21) research in this area increased significantly in Spain. Roger Le Déaut and Martin McNamara (which later became prolific researchers of this discipline) would publish their theses on Tg. Neof. I in the Biblical Institute of Rome. Domingo Muñoz Alonso studied the relationship between the term Memra and the word Logos in the writings of John generating a new vision of the NT text. Cf. Agustín del Agua Pérez, *El método midrásico y la exégesis del Nuevo Testamento* (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo, 1985).
- ¹⁵ Luis Diez Merino, *Edición crítica del Targum Onkelos a Deuteronomio según la tradición bíblica* (Barcelona: Universidad, Secretariado de Publicaciones, 1975); *Targum de Job: Edición Príncipe del Ms. Villa-Amil n.5 de Alfonso Zamora* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984).
- ¹⁶ Miguel Pérez Fernández, *La lengua de los sabios* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1992); *Tradiciones mesiánicas en el Targum palestinense: estudios exegéticos* (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo para la Investigación Bíblica, 1981); *Los capítulos de Rabbí Eliezer* (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo para la Investigación Bíblica, 1984); *Literatura judía intertestamentaria* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1996); *Midrás Sifra: el comentario rabínico al Levítico* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1997); *Midrás sifre números* (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo para la Investigación Bíblica, 1989); *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). I recommend the literary review he makes of the targumic and rabbinic activities in the past decades in Miguel Pérez Fernández, "20 años de investigación española sobre lengua y literatura rabínicas (1981-2001)", *MEAH* 50 (2001): 113-31.
- ¹⁷ Josep Ribera Florit, *El Targum de Isaías: la versión aramea del profeta Isaías* (Valencia: Institución S. Jerónimo para la Investigación Bíblica, 1988); *Targum Jonatán de los profetas posteriores en tradición babilónica. Jeremías* (Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIC, Departamento de Filología Bíblica y de Oriente Antiguo, 1992); *Targum Jonatán de los profetas posteriores en tradición babilónica. Ezequiel* (Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIC, Departamento de Filología Bíblica y de Oriente Antiguo, 1997); *Crestomatía del arameo clásico-oficial* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, Área d'Estudis Hebreus i Arameus, 2001); *Targum de Ezequiel: introducción, traducción crítica y notas* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2004).
- ¹⁸ Teresa Martínez Sáiz, *Mekilta de Rabbí Ismael: comentario rabínico al Libro del Éxodo* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1995); *Sifre Deuteronomio: comentario tannaitico al libro del Deuteronomio* (Barcelona: Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya, Herder, 1997); *Traducciones arameas de la Biblia: los targumim del Pentateuco: versión crítica en edición sinóptica de los Targumim Neofiti y PseudoJonatán con variantes, glosas y notas* (Estella, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2004).
- ¹⁹ As is reported by Luis Diez Merino in his intense report "Los estudios targúmicos en la actualidad", *EstBib* 62 (2004): 347-90.

targumic texts are earlier than was thought. Our panorama of the NT has widened and we can savor the theology that underlies the targums, and from the midrashim that continued them, which is the theology of the synagogue and, possibly, of the streets of Palestine.²⁰

A ROCK IN THE PATH

The text in Matthew 16:18 has been an object of investigation of the great NT specialists.²¹ Oscar Cullmann,²² Joachim Jeremias,²³ O. Karrer,²⁴ Rudolph Bultmann,²⁵ Peter Lampe,²⁶ M. Wilcox,²⁷ C. Kahler,²⁸ P. Hoffmann,²⁹ from different approaches, devoted significant sections of their writings to this text.³⁰ And, from a structural perspective, the approach laid out by Jeremias consisting in three sections with three phrases each, stands out from the rest:³¹

17. Jesus answered and said to him:
 - a. Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah,
 - b. for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,
 - c. but My Father who is in heaven.
- 18 a. And I also say to you that you are Peter,

²⁰ For an excellent panoramic view of this issue see the article by Frédéric Manns, “Rabbinic Literature as a Historical Source for the Study of the Gospel’s Background”, *LA* 52 (2002): 217-46.

²¹ It is very interesting to observe that Strack and Billerbeck don’t mention anything about the theme of the rock. Cf. Hermann L. Strack y Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch: Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (München: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), 731-36.

²² Oscar Cullmann, *Peter. Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (London: SCM, 1962).

²³ Joachim Jeremias, *Golgotha* (Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1926).

²⁴ O. Karrer, *Peter and the Church* (London: Burns-Oates, 1970).

²⁵ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

²⁶ P. Lampe, “Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen-Matt XVI,18”, *NTS* 25 (1979-1980): 227-45.

²⁷ M. Wilcox, “Peter and the Rock: A Fresh Look at Matthew XVI.17-19”, *NTS* 22 (1975-1976): 73-88.

²⁸ C. Kahler, “Zur Form-und Traditionsgeschichte von Matth. XVI,17-19”, *NTS* 23 (1976-1977): 36-58.

²⁹ P. Hoffmann, “Der Petrus-Primat in Matthäusevangelium”, in J. Gnilka, ed., *Neues Testament und Kirche* (Friburgo: Herder, 1974), 94-114.

³⁰ For more recent studies on Peter’s primacy see Bernard P. Robinson, “Peter and His Successors: Tradition and Redaction in Matthew 16.17-19”, *JSNT* 21 (1984): 85-104; Michael Card, “A Fragile Stone: the Emotional Life of Simon Peter”, *DG* (2003): 187-189; Schalk W. Cronjé, “A Study of the Theological and Ecclesiological Consequences of Jesus’ pronouncement in Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:18 concerning Peter as the Rock, the Keys of the Kingdom”, *APB* 14 (2003): 78-96; Jan Lambrecht, “The Rich Man (Mark 10,17-31 and Matthew 19,16-21)”, in *Understanding What one Reads - ANL* 46 (2003): 1-13.

³¹ Jeremias, *Golgotha*, 69.

- b. and on this rock I will build My church
 - c. and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
19. a. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,
- b. and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
 - c. and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

We could outline it under the following proposal:

Basic level	Co-participation level	Superior level
A	B	C
Simon Bar-Jonah	Reveal (not flesh and blood)	My Father
Peter	Build (in Christ)	Victory (in Christ)
The keys	Bind and loose (earth)	Bind and loose (heaven)

The structure of the pericope places the concept of the rock in the middle of the literary unit giving it an intense character of co-participation between the divine project and human presence. That which Peter has perceived in Caesarea Philippi³² is the opportunity for Jesus to offer a greater revelation that will take him towards the understanding of the function of the church.

THE READING OF THE LXX

The translation of the LXX presents a vital stage in the understanding of the OT texts. After the translation we find more than a transfer of vocabulary or culture; we find theological interpretation. This is the case of the translations of the term “rock” (צור) in said material. One would expect to find the term λίθος or something similar, but instead we find the word θεός 19 times (Deut 32:4,15,18,30-31; Ps 18:31,46; 28:1; 31:2; 62:2, 6-7; 71:3; 73:26; 92:15; 95:1; 144:1; Isa 30:29) and on one occasion the word κύριος (Isa 17:10). More than a translation, we encounter a theological confirmation.

Identifying Yahveh with the rock implies something more than a physical image of security and freshness. It is the foundation of the Yahwist religion, the very essence of the transcendent and immanent combined.

³² In the apocryphal and pseudoepigraphic tradition the area of Caesarea Phillipi stands out as a place where eschatological revelations are produced. Cf. J. T. Milik, “Le testament de Lévi en araméen”, *RB* 62 (1955): 398-406.

RECORDS IN THE TARGUMIC AND TANNAITIC LITERATURE

A. Abraham and the hewn rock

The usual interpretation of Isaiah 51:1 in the haggadic texts refers to Abraham the patriarch. He was seceded from Mesopotamia and was part of the pact with Yahveh. This is what Tanh. Buber *wayyērā*²³ indicates when it says:³³

He immediately destroyed them, as it is said: *“And he overthrew those cities”* (Gen. 19:25). Thus you have that it says: *“However the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed from its place”* (Job 14:18). The rock is Abraham, as it is said: *“Look to the rock from which you were hewn”* (Isa. 51:1).³⁴ It is he who went out from his place, as it is said: *“And Abraham journeyed from there”* (Gen. 20:1).³⁵

The people’s constitution is carried out with the participation of Yahveh and Abraham. That is why Abraham is hewn from his place and separated from the material form which he proceeded, thus acquiring his own identity.

B. Jacob and the foundation rock

There are several references to the activities of Jacob related to the rock. The patriarch is a model of the foundation structures of the children of Israel through himself and through his twelve sons.

The joining of the rocks

One very interesting story is the one of the journey from Beersheba towards Laban’s home found in Genesis 28. The experience in Bethel would awaken the Jewish imagery and the parabiblical commentaries were extended. This is how Tanh. Buber *wayyēsē*⁴ relates it:

“And he came upon a certain place” (Gen. 28:11). There is no meeting that isn’t a prayer, as it is said: *“You, therefore, do not pray for this people... nor beg me...”* (Jer 7:16). This is related with what David said: *“He shall neither slumber nor sleep... YHWH is your keeper, YHWH is your shade... The sun will not smite you... YHWH shall preserve you from all evil... YHWH shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and forevermore”* (Ps. 121:4–8).

Another interpretation of *“and he came upon a certain place”* (Gen. 28:11). Is the place where the Holy Spirit rested upon Jacob. He prophesized that Israel was going to sin and that the Holy Spirit would part from them. (This is understood from *“the sun had set”* (Gen. 28:11). This is how we find it in the prophecy of Micah which points out *“the sun will set”* (Mic. 3:6). As it is said: *“And if they are prophets, and if the word of YHWH is with*

³³ Translated by the author. The original text of the Tanh. Buber is presented in the footnote.

³⁴ Cf. Tanh. Buber *pəqūḏē* 5; Midr. Ps 52,8; 53,2.

³⁵ מיד הפך אותם, שנאמר ויהפך את הערים האל וגו' (בראשית יט כה), הוי אומר ואולם הרי נופל יכול יצור יעתק ממקומו, ואין צור אלא אברהם, שנאמר הביטו אל צור חוצבתם וגו' (ישעיה נא א), שנאמר ממקומו, שנאמר ויסע משם אברהם וגו'.

them, let them pray now to YHWH..." (Jer. 27:18). "He came upon" shows that it is the prophecy. "And he came upon a certain place... because the sun had set" (Gen. 28:11). What does it mean that it is written: "The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them?" (Mic. 3:6). "And he took one of the stones of that place" (Gen. 28:11). He thought in his heart:

–My grandfather Abraham conceived from two women, to one righteous one and to another evil one, Isaac was righteous and Ishmael was evil. And my father Isaac conceived from one woman to one righteous and one evil. I, who will take four women, how many evil ones will come out of me?

The Holy One, blessed is He, encouraged him:

– Never! "You are all-beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you" (Song 4:7).

When dawn broke, he found that all the rocks were only one.³⁶ He rejoiced that his bed was intact, as it is said: "And Jacob rose in the morning..."³⁷ (Gen. 28:18). The Holy One promised him, blessed is He:

–For your life that, as the rocks have become one, so all your sons will be righteous! As it is said: "You shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the wild beasts shall be at peace with you" (Job 5:23).³⁸

This story had its parallel in Pirque R. El. 35,4:

Jacob returned to gather all the rocks and when he found them transformed into only one rock, he put it as a stele in that place. From the heavens fell the oil and he anointed it, according to what is said: "and he poured oil on top of it" (Gen. 28: 19). What did the Holy One do, blessed is He? He extended his right foot and drove the rock down to the depths of the abysses and there he set it as the keystone of the earth, just as man does when building the keystone of an arch. This is why it was called the foundation rock, because that is where the navel of the World is and from there the whole Earth begins to unwrap, and upon it the temple of YHWH is erected, as it is said: "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house" (Gen. 28:22). Jacob prostrated

³⁶ The fact that it was only one rock is interpreted as a sign that the twelve tribes worshiped God. Cf. Tanh. Buber *wayyēšē* 2; Pirque R. El. 35,4.

³⁷ According to the haggadic traditions five miracles took place during his trip to the land of Laban: The sun set in Moriah before time so he would have to stay there during the night, the twelve rocks became one, the journey to Haran was shortened and he arrived in only one day. He moved the stone of the well in Haran by himself and the waters of the spring watered all the fields.

³⁸ ויפגע במקום. אין פגיעה אלא תפלה, שנאמר ואתה אל תתפלל בעד העם הזה וגו' ואל תפגע בי (ירמיה ז טז), ועליו אמר דוד הנה לא ינום ולא יישן וגו', ה' שומרך ה' צלך וגו', יומם השמש לא יככה וגו', ה' ישמרך מכל רע וגו', ה' ישמר צאתך ובואך מעתה ועד עולם (תהלים קכא דהו"ח). ד"א ויפגע במקום, ששרתה עליו רוח הקודש על יעקב, וניבא שעתידין ישראל לחטא, ורוח הקודש מסתלקת מהן, (וזה דורש מן כי בא השמש, שכן מציינו בנבואת מיכה שכתוב ובאה השמש (מיכה ג ו) שהיא פורענות וסילוק נבואה), שנאמר ואם נביאים הם ואם יש דבר ה' אתם יפגעו נא בה' (ירמיה כז יח), מלמד שפגיעה זו נבואה. ויפגע במקום כי בא השמש, מהו שכתוב ובאה השמש על הנביאים וקדר עליהם היום (מיכה ג ו). ויקח מאבני המקום. חשב בלבו וקני אברהם משתי נשים הוליד צדיק ורשע, יצחק צדיק וישמעאל רשע, ויצחק אבא מאשה אחת הוליד צדיק ורשע, אני שאטול ארבע נשים, כמה רשעים יהיו ממני, א"ל הקב"ה ח"ו כולך יפה רעייתי וגו' ומהו אין בך (שה"ש שיר השירים ד ז), כיון שהשכים בבקר מצא את האבנים כולם אבן אחת, נתבשר שמתו שלימה, שנאמר וישכם יעקב בבקר וגו' (בראשית כח יח), א"ל הקב"ה חייך כשם שהאבנים הללו נעשו כולן אחת, כך בניך כולם צדיקים, שנאמר כי עם אבני השדה בריתך וחית השדה השלמה לך (איוב ה כג).

his face to the ground before the foundation rock and prayed before the Holy One, blessed is He, saying:

–Lord of all the worlds, if you will grant me to return in peace to this place I will offer before your presence sacrifices of thanksgiving and burnt offerings.

It is thus said: “Then Jacob made a vow” (Gen. 28:20).

There he left the well, and from there he resumed his journey and in the wink of an eye he arrived to Haran, as it is said: “Jacob resumed his journey” (Gen. 29:1), and it adds: “Jacob departed from Beersheba etc.” (Gen. 28:10), “But the Holy God is exalted in judgment” (Isa. 5:16). The angels replied saying:

–Blessed be you, YHWH, the Holy God.³⁹

The multitude of rocks (representing the twelve tribes) becomes one. That single rock is then anointed by heaven and, from then on, acquires mythological attributes. This foundation rock is located in the abyss, in the center of the world. Two elements of the story have a remarkable connection with the story of Mathew: a. the situation where it is found: in the abyss (Matt 16:18: καὶ πύλαι ἄδου οὐ κατισχύουσιν αὐτῆς); b. the space from where the whole earth is “unwrapped” (Matt 16:19: καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς).

The dependence of the targums of these readings is manifest. The text Tg. Ps-J. Gn 28,10-22, the one that contributes the least amount of add-ons after Tg. Onq. but that most affects the haggadic texts, reads:

*Five miracles were done to Jacob when he left Beer Sheba. First miracle: The hours of the day were shortened and the sun set earlier because the Word wished to speak with him. Second miracle: The four rocks that he used as a pillow he found transformed into only one rock in the morning... and this rock which I have set as a stele will remain prepared in the temple of the Lord and the generations will worship over it to the Name of the Lord. And I will set aside before you the tithe of everything you give me.*⁴⁰

The targumist identifies that foundation rock with the one that holds the Arc in the temple. It resembles Yoma 5,2: “After the Ark was taken away, there was a rock there since the times of the first prophets. It was called ‘foundation’. It was elevated three fingers above ground. (The brazier) was usually placed on top of it.”⁴¹

Much more colorful is that added by Tg. Neof. Gen. 28,10-22:

Five miracles were done to our father Jacob when he left Beer Sheba to go to Haran: First Miracle: the hours of the day were shortened and the sun set earlier because the Word wished to speak with him. Second miracle: the rocks that our father Jacob took and which he used as a pillow, when he got up in the morning he found that they had all become one single rock, which is the rock which he set up as a stele and upon which's upper part he poured oil... and this rock which I have put as a stele

³⁹ Cf. Miguel Pérez Fernández, *Los capítulos de Rabbi Eliezer*, 248-49.

⁴⁰ Cf. Teresa Martínez Sáiz, *Traducciones arameas de la Biblia*, 184-86.

⁴¹ Cf. Carlos del Valle, *La Mishná* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1981), 338.

will be a sanctuary for the name of the Lord, and of all that you give me I will set aside a tithe for your Name.⁴²

The anointing of Pirqe R. El. 25,3 has its basis in Frg. Tg. 110 Gen. 28,10:

*Five miracles were done to our father Jacob when he left Beer Sheba to go to Haran. First miracle: The hours of the day were shortened for him and the sun set before time because the Word wished to speak with him. Second miracle: The rocks which our father Jacob had gathered and had put under his head, when he got up in the morning he found all of them made one single rock: it is the rock that he set up as a stele which's upper part he poured oil on...*⁴³

Similar to Frg. Tg. 440 Gen. 28,10:

*Five miracles were done to our father Jacob when he left Beer Sheba to go to Haran. First miracle: The hours of the day were shortened for him and the sun set before time because the Word wished to speak with him. Second miracle: When our father Jacob went on his way from Beer Sheba to go to Haran, the earth shortened before him and he found himself in Haran. Third miracle: the rocks which our father Jacob gathered in the evening and set as a pillow of his head, when he got up in the morning he found all of them transformed into only one rock; this is the rock which he set up as a stele and poured oil on its upper part...*⁴⁴

Jonah's journey

The legend of this rock extends itself even to acquire fictional resemblance in the story of Jonah's great fish in Pirqe R. El. 10,3:

[To his fish] Jonah said:

—Look, I have saved you from the jaws of Leviathan. Show me all there is in the sea and in the abysses.

He showed him a great river of waters of the ocean, as it is said: “The abyss had surrounded me” (Jon. 2:6); he showed him the sea of the seaweed through which's center Israel passed, as it is said: “The seaweed had wrapped around my head” (Jon. 2:6); he showed him the place from where the swells and waves of the sea come from, as it is said: “All Your billows and Your waves passed over me” (Jon. 2:4); he showed him the columns of the Earth and its foundation, as it is said: “The earth with its bars closed behind me forever” (Jon. 2:7), he showed him the gehenna, as it is said: “Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, YHWH, my God” (Jon. 2:7); he showed him the infernal Sheol, as it is said: “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice” (Jon. 2:3); he showed him the temple of YHWH, as it is said: “Down I went to the roots of the mountains” (Jon. 2:7) —from here we have learned that Jerusalem is built upon seven hills-; he showed him the foundation stone, imbedded in the abysses, under the temple, and the sons of Korah standing upon it praying.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Cf. Pérez Fernández, *Los capítulos de Rabbi Eliezer*, 104. The author states that the sons of Korah descended alive to the Sheol and that they are still there proclaiming Moses' fidelity and the truth of the Law. The legend could have its origins in Tg. Ps-J. Num. 26,11.

Tg. Ps-J. Exod. 28,30 clarifies that it is the rock that closes the mouth of the great abyss from the beginning and that on it is engraved the divine Name. Namely, it's Tanh. Buber *qəḏōšim* 10:

Just as the navel is placed in the middle of man, so the land of Israel is the navel of the World, for it is said: "who dwell at the navel of the earth" (Ezek. 38:12). The land of Israel is situated in the center of the World; Jerusalem, at the center of the land of Israel; the sanctuary, in the middle of Jerusalem; the *heykal*, in the middle of the sanctuary; the Ark, in the center of the *heykal*; and the foundation rock, before the *heykal*. From it does the World unfold.⁴⁶

This "foundation rock" will be compared in the tannaitic literature in two ways: the rock upon which the world is supported and the rock with which the world was created. In the latter case it is situated in the center of the earth which corresponds with the Most Holy Place. The Ark of the Covenant was placed upon this rock. According to Yoma 54b creation is supposed to have started there. The subsequent midrashim give this space certain magical properties.

Some commentaries, less frequent than the previous ones, mention Jacob the patriarch as the foundation rock. This is the case of Exod. Rab. 46,6:

TABLES OF STONE. Why of stone? Because most of the penalties of the Torah are stoning, and for this reason does it say TABLES OF STONE. Another explanation of TABLES OF STONE is that they were given for the sake of Jacob by whom he was called 'a stone', as it says, From thence, the shepherd, the stone of Israel (Gen. XLIX, 24). Another explanation of TABLES OF STONE is this: 'Unless one hardens his cheeks like stone, he will not acquire the Torah.'

It's interesting to observe that no hermeneutic interpretation is made of the text in its personal application to Jacob. It would seem that the writer was more interested in highlighting the idea of the rock as a singular element than as an example of the unity which Jacob generates.

C. Moses and the rolling fountain-rock

During the tannaitic period there was a legend referring to the rock which sprouted in the desert and that followed the Hebrews. This fountain-rock is related to Miriam and is mentioned in the text of Num. Rab. 1,2:

And again, the well was due to the merit of Miriam, who sang by the waters of the Red Sea; as it is said: And Miriam sang (wa-ta'an) unto them: Sing ye to the Lord (Ex. XV, 21), and by the waters of the well, Then sang Israel this song, Rise up, O well, sing ('enu) ye unto it (Num. XXI, 17)... And the well was due to the merit of Miriam. For what does Scripture say? And Miriam died there, and was buried there (Num. XX, 1). And what is written after that? And there was no water for the congregation (Num. XX, 2).

⁴⁶ Cf. Pérez Fernández, *Los capítulos de Rabbi Eliezer*, 249.

How was the well constructed? It was rock-shaped like a kind of bee-hive, and wherever they journeyed it rolled along and came with them. When the standards [under which the tribes journeyed] halted and the tabernacle was set up, that same rock would come and settle down in the court of the Tent of Meeting and the princes would come and stand upon it and say, Rise up, O well (Num. XXI, 17), and it would rise. After that I brought you quails.⁴⁷

This legend could be due to the song sung by the people which implies certain movement (הִזְאֵת עָלַי בְּאֵר עֲנִי-לִּיהָ).

D. David and the cornerstone

Both in Isaiah 28:16 and in Psalm 118:22 the image of a carved cornerstone is used, which is used to build the essential base of the temple. Exod. Rab. 37,1 refers to these illustrations to identify David with the cornerstone:

AND BRING THOU NEAR UNTO THEE AARON THY BROTHER (XXVIII, 1). Thus it is written, Out of them shall come forth the corner-stone, out of them the stake, out of them the battle bow (Zech. X, 4). Observe now that when the peoples of antiquity wished to appoint a king over them, they used to bring one from any place and then appoint him over them, as it says, And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom; and the name of his city was Dinhabah,... and Joab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead, etc. (Gen. XXXVI, 32 f). With Israel, however, it was different, for they produced from their own midst their leaders, kings, priests, prophets, and princes, as it says, 'Out of them shall come forth the corner-stone.' This refers to king David, for it says, The stone which the builders rejected is become the chief corner-stone (Ps. CXVIII, 22).⁴⁸

The text puts forward that the leaders of Israel don't come from other nations but from the very insides of their own. King David is set as an example and he's compared with the cornerstone of Psalm 118:22.

E. Daniel and the stone cut out without hands

In many eschatological studies it is said that the Jewish world barely has any commentaries on the book of Daniel, which is far from true. The Tanh. Buber *tōldōt* 20 text is an evidence of this. The story is of outstanding hermeneutic significance:

It is written: "*A song of ascents. I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence comes my help?*" (Ps. 121:1). It is also written: "*Who are you, o great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain*" (Zech. 4:7). What does "*Who are you, o great mountain*" mean? This is the Messiah King. Then why is it said of him "*O great mountain?*" Because he is greater than his forbearers, as it is said: "*Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted*" (Isa. 52:13). "*He shall prosper*", more than Abraham. "*He shall be raised high*", more than Moses. "*And greatly exalted*", more than the angels that minister. More than Abra-

⁴⁷ David Kantrowitz, *Judaics Classic Library* (v. 2.2; Brooklyn, NY: Judaica, 2001), Num. Rab. 1,2.

⁴⁸ Ibid, Exod. Rab. 37,1

ham of whom it is written: *"I have raised my hand to YHWH, God"* (Gen. 14:22). *"Raised high"*, more than Moses of whom it is written: *"That You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child'"* (Num. 11:12). *"And greatly exalted"* more than the angels that minister, as it is written: *"And their rims are both high and fearful"* (Ezek. 1:18). Of whom does he come from? From Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel from David, as it is said:

– *"The son of Solomon was Roboam,... and Anani"* (1 Chr. 3:10–24). Even until here does scripture go into detail. Who is *"Anani?"* This is the Messiah King, as it is said: *"I was watching in the visions of the night and I saw that with the clouds (Anani) of heaven"* (Dan. 7:13).⁴⁹ What is the meaning of *"seven?"* What is written about the Messiah? As it is written: *"For those who despised the day of small things, they shall rejoice. And they will see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. These seven are the eyes of YHWH which go to and fro in all the land"* (Zech. 4:10). Thus it is said: *"Who are you, o great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain"* (Zech. 4:7). This is what is written about him: *"But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity"* (Isa. 11:4). *"And he shall bring forth the capstone"* (Zech. 4:7). This is the rock of Jacob, as it is said: *"And Jacob got up in the morning, and he took the rock..."* (Gen. 28:18). Thus says Daniel: *"You were watching until a rock was cut out (without) hands"* (Dan. 2:34). It is also written: *"Then they were all crushed at once... but the rock that hit the image became a great mountain..."* What is the meaning of *"mountain?"* *"Who are you, o great mountain?"* (Zech. 4:7). Where does it come from? From the path of the mountains, as it is written: *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings...!"* (Isa. 52:7). In that hour Israel will reason and exclaim: *"A song of ascents. I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence comes my help?"* (Ps. 121: 1–2).⁵⁰

The text begins by asking to whom does the "great mountain" of Zechariah 4:7 refer to and then it declares that it is the Messiah King. We can see that he doesn't mention a collective body (Israel as the Messiah) but an individual person. A person that is far more superior than Abraham, Moses, and even the angels (see the similitude with the comparisons in the epistle to the Hebrews).

⁴⁹ With this text we can infer an implicit argumentation between the preface of the section and Daniel 2. "Anani" is the name of the Messiah in Tg. 1 Chr. 3,24. Cf. Tg. Exod. 12,42.

⁵⁰ כתיב שיר למעלות אשא עיני אל ההרים מאין יבא עזרי (תהלים קכא א), וכתיב מי אתה הר הגדול לפני זרובבל למישור (זכריה ד ז) מהו מי אתה הר הגדול, זהו מלך המשיח, ולמה קורא אותו הר הגדול, שהוא גדול מן האבות, שנאמר הנה ישפיל עבדי ירום ונשא וגבה מאד (ישעיה נב ג), ירום מן אברהם, ונשא מן משה, וגבה ממלאכי השרת, מן אברהם שכתוב בו הרימותי ידי אל ה' (בראשית יד כב), ונשא מן משה, שנאמר כי תאמר אלי שאהו בחיקך כאשר ישא האומן את היונק (במדבר יא יב), וגבה מן מלאכי השרת שנאמר וגביהן וגובה להם וגו' (יחזקאל א יח), ממי הוא יוצא [מזרובבל, וזרובבל] מדוד, שנאמר וכן שלמה רחבעם, ... וענני שבעה (דה"א דברי הימים א' ג, י עד כד). ועד כאן פרט [לך] הכתוב מי הוא ענני זה [מלך] המשיח, שנאמר חזה הוית (בחיוזו עם לי לא) [בחזווי ליליא] וארו עם ענני שמיא וגו' (דניאל ז ג), ומהו שבעה [מה] שכתוב במשיח, שנאמר כי מי בז ליום קטנות ושמהי וראי את האבן הבדיל ביד זרובבל שבעה (הנה) [אלה] עיני ה' המה (משוטטות) [משוטטים] בכל הארץ (זכריה ד י), לכך נאמר מי אתה הר הגדול לפני זרובבל למישור, אותו שכתוב בו ושפט בצדק דלים והוכיח במישור וגו' (ישעיה יא ג). והוציא את אבן הראשה (זכריה שם ד י'), זו אבן של יעקב שנאמר וישכם יעקב בבקר ויקח את האבן וגו' (בראשית כה יח), וכן דניאל אמר חזה הוית עד די התגזרת אבן (חלא) [די לא] בידין וגו' (דניאל ב לד), וכתיב באדין דקו (בחזא) [כחזא] וגו', [ואבנא די מחת לצלמא הות לטור רב] (שם שם דניאל ב' לה), ומהו לטור (רם) [רב], מי אתה הר הגדול, ומהיכן הוא בא, דרך ההרים, שנאמר מה נאו על ההרים רגלי מבשר (ישעיה נב ז), באותה שעה ישראל מסתכלין ואומרין אשא עיני אל ההרים וגו' עזרי מעם ה' וגו'.

The Messiah is of Davidic dynasty through Zerubbabel. In order to justify this fact it presents the entire list of descendants of David (1 Chr 3:10-24) up to Anani. And again it asks the question: Who is Anani? The answer is surprising and it is situated in the context of the book of Daniel. Anani is the name of the Messiah and thus it appears, to the eyes of the midrashist, in Daniel 7:13. He then returns to the initial argument seeking a common term between Daniel and Zechariah. It is from Zechariah that he arrives to Jacob, and therefore the Messiah is the foundation rock of the vision of the patriarch. The same rock that falls in Daniel 2:34 is the rock that is related to the beginning of the line of argument.

The text concludes with the good news of Isaiah 52:7 and the eschatological answer of Israel. There is no doubt about it, the Messiah depicts the previous legends about the rock.

CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The confirmation of the stories and legends that were possibly going around Palestine during the first centuries of our era gives us suggestive associations:

Peter and the hewn rock

When reading the story found in Matthew 16:18 it is inevitable not to make a parallel comparison between Abraham's experience and that of Peter. Abraham is asked to leave his land and family and Peter in turn is asked to follow Jesus, Abraham encounters certain tests of faith as well as Peter, Abraham errs by lying and betraying Yhwh and Peter lies and betrays Jesus, Abraham recognizes God as the Living God and Peter recognizes Jesus as the Son of the Living God. Peter is a small rock hewn from the rock and Abraham, according to the midrashic stories, is severed from his land. Abraham commences a nation, Peter initiates a spiritual nation.

Under no circumstances would a tannaitic Jew think of Peter as the rock. The OT texts and the parallel ones of the LXX wouldn't have permitted it so. The rock refers to the divinity. The comparison with Abraham, in that context, was much more probable.

Jesus as the foundation rock

The use of the term πέτρα in the story found in Matthew 16:18 is associated with the Hebrew expression צור that obviously refers to God. This term (πέτρα) is used in the LXX to refer to the rocks (Num 24:21; Judg 20:47; 21:13; Ps 26:5; 60:3) and in the NT only in Matthew 27:60. This last verse is inevitably associated with the sign of Jonah (Matt 12:40).

On the other hand, it would be interesting to study in greater depth the relationship between the story of Jonah's journey to the abyss and Jesus' mysterious expression:

“and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (καὶ πύλαι ᾗδου οὐ κατισχύουσιν αὐτῆς).

Jacob sees how the rocks in Bethel are unified and Jesus unifies all men in his twelve disciples, the rock is anointed and Jesus is the Messiah, the rock is the center of the Temple and Jesus is the center of salvation (He rebuilds the temple in three days – Joh 2:19-20).

Jesus as the rolling fountain-rock

1 Corinthians 10:4 takes on a clearer new dimension in the light of Num. Rab. 1:2. Who was “the spiritual rock that followed them” (γὰρ ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθοῦσης πέτρας)? Paul indicates that it was Christ (ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός). The rocks that well out water in the desert are a common image in several OT stories and they present the intervention of Yahveh in the history of his people. In the NT, Jesus represents those fountains, as He attributes himself these very comparisons (Joh 4:10, 11, 13-14; 7:37-38).

Jesus as the cornerstone

Peter himself interprets that Jesus is the cornerstone that was rejected by the builders and that ends up being the foundation of the structure of the temple (Act 4:11; 1 Pe 2:4-8). This comparison is picked up by Paul (Eph 2:20) to speak about the building of the church. In none of these writers can we identify any interest to justify that the cornerstone is Peter. Au contraire, the idea that the foundation of the building upon which the church is built is Christ is reinforced time and again.

Jesus as Anani/the Son of Man

The story of Matthew 16:18 had begun with a question: “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” (13) The phrase, common to Jesus,⁵¹ actually belongs to Daniel 7:13-14. Could we find ourselves in the same string of thought of Tanh. Buber *tōldōt* 20? The Matthean pericope ends with an eschatological warning that specifies how the coming of the Son of Man will be. The rock cut out without hands appears in the time of the end and is identified with the Messiah king.

These readings lead us to ask ourselves a few questions regarding our own approach to the Gospels. First of all, there is an ideological fabric that has not been studied related to the non-legal Jewish rabbinic literature. We must include the targums and haggadic midrashim in this literary environment, because they show the lines of thought proper of the synagogue.

⁵¹ Only in Matthew 11:19; 12:8, 32; 13:37; 17:9,19,22; 18:11; 19:28; 20:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39; 24:44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64.

Second, Jesus speaks primarily to his contemporary listeners, using their very own words and in their own ideological context. Having a correct knowledge of the NT way of thinking is, therefore, more than a simple lexicographic collectionism; it is the internalization of the commentaries, sermons, and legends of that historical period. It is living the messages as alive and interrelated texts.

Third, the current reading of the Gospels must set aside the systematic and apologetic interests of the theologian in order to reach the nucleus of the meaning of the words of Jesus. After reaching the life that comes from them, a mechanism of updating and actualization will spontaneously emerge, which is real theology, and not the other way around.

Fourth, God acts in our hermeneutic process, clarifying our perspective and illuminating our lives. Just like Isaiah 28:16 puts it: "Therefore, thus says the Lord God: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, a precious cornerstone as a sure foundation; he who puts his faith in it shall not be shaken".