

READING ECCLESIASTES INTERTEXTUALLY

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EXAMPLES OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN *ECCLESIASTES RABBAH*:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS IN  
*ECCLESIASTES RABBAH* WITH METHODOLOGICAL NUANCES\*

Michail Kitsos

1. Introduction

Biblical exegesis is unavoidably associated with monotheism and its "sacred books." No other collection of "sacred literature" has been used so extensively, and in so many multifarious ways, as that produced by the Judaism of the Second Temple period, including early Christianity among its expressions. The books of the Hebrew and Christian canon comprised the foundation upon which Rabbis and Church Fathers based their exegesis.

While Christian thinkers used a variety of literary genres for scriptural exegesis, their Jewish counterparts displayed a more humble but equally effective genre of scriptural exegesis that is based on the Bible—"midrash."<sup>1</sup> According to Daniel Boyarin, midrash developed "the intratextual interpretive strategies which the Bible itself manifests,"<sup>2</sup> comprising a "radical intertextual reading of the canon, in which potentially every part refers to and is interpretable by every other part."<sup>3</sup> The midrashic interpretation of the Bible became the primary exegetical device through which Rabbinic Judaism conveyed its teachings. It would be sheer anachronism to claim the rabbis had a conscious understanding of "intertextuality." We should give them credit, though, because they grasped various methodological forms and elevated the collation of biblical passages to a primary methodological approach that would allow them to unlock the halakhic and aggadic messages of the biblical text

through Peshat and Derash methods of interpretation.<sup>4</sup> In midrashic exegesis, the Bible developed into the basis for every rabbinic exegetical venture and the method of "intertextuality" became the "rhetorical" device par excellence.

2. Forms of Intertextuality and Definitions

After exploring the position and the role of certain formulaic expressions, and figures of speech that always precede the intertextual verses in the Midrashim, I detected two major categories of intertextuality, monoform and multiform. The same function of intertextuality also appears in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, which will be the focus of the present chapter. Monoform intertextuality encompasses four forms that have one characteristic feature determined by the semantic context of the text. These forms are: (1) Dialectical; (2) Transformative; (3) Probative; and (4) Explicative. "Dialectical intertextuality" makes use of (a) questions-answers; (b) contradictory opinions placed one after the other in the fashion of a lively discussion; and (c) dialectical interaction between the biblical sources. "Transformative intertextuality" changes the original meaning of the quoted text, revealing its hidden or allegorical meaning through the Derash method of interpretation. In "probative intertextuality" the quoted verse supports the semantic meaning that the rabbis give to the base verse, and certain formulaic expressions introduce the biblical citation; (1) "as it is said/stated" (שנאמר); (2) "(and) another instance is" (ודכונחיה); (3) "that is what is written" (הוא דכתיב); (4) "since it is written" (לפי שכתיב); (5) "(for/as) it is written" (דכתיב); (6) "what means that which is written" (מא דכתיב); (7) "and it is written" (וכתיב); (8) "that is what [+ person] + says/said" (אומר/נאמר + [person] + ויהא ש); (9) "is it not written" (ולא כתיב). Finally, in "explicative intertextuality," the biblical verse illuminates and explains the base verse, shedding a light to what lies beneath the Peshat meaning of the text. In some cases, also, the intertextual verse merely enhances, and intensifies the contextual meaning of the base verse without transforming its content. Though one may ascertain functional similarities between "explicative" and "probative" intertextualities, especially in the way they both bolster semantically the rabbinic interpretation of the base verse, the former is distinguished from the latter by the absence of certain formulaic expressions—a unique characteristic of "probative intertextuality."

\* Thanks to Drs. Dionysios Benetos and Yaron Eliav for their trust and guidance.

1. Hirshman 1996, 21.

2. Boyarin 1994, 15.

3. Boyarin 1994, 16.

4. For a thorough examination of Peshat and Derash methods of biblical interpretation see Halivni 1991.



Multi-form intertextuality is composed of combined forms of mono-form intertextuality. The semantic context of a text defines which types of mono-form intertextuality will be intermixed, producing combinations of two or even three types. In *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* we find nine types of multi-form intertextuality: (1) dialectical-transformative; (2) dialectical-explicative; (3) dialectical-probative; (4) transformative-probative; (5) probative-explicative; (6) transformative-dialectical-explicative; (7) transformative-dialectical-probative; (8) transformative-probative-explicative; (9) dialectical-explicative-probative.

### 3. Forms of Intertextuality in Context

*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* makes extensive and exhaustive use of intertextual biblical quotations that derive from all three parts of the Hebrew Bible—Torah, Neviim, Kethuvim. The book of Psalms, though, is a special case due to its being the second most frequently quoted book in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* after the book of Genesis. What made the Rabbis so frequently use a book that does not belong to the Torah? What made Psalms stand out in the eyes of the compiler of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* and what are the meanings that the rabbinic thinking wished to convey by explicating Ecclesiastes through the intertextual use of Psalms? The book of Psalms makes an interesting story of intertextuality and interpretative function, which we shall examine through a succinct analysis of each type of intertextuality.

#### a. Dialectical Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:33 on Ecclesiastes 7:23—Psalm 8:5

Solomon's surpassing wisdom as attested through a series of comparisons is the theme of this midrashic passage, in which the pattern of question-answers and the arrangement of the biblical verses in a dialectical style give the impression of a vivid dialogue.

33. ALL THIS HAVE I TRIED BY WISDOM (VII, 23)... "It is written, And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east... (ib. 10)... For he was wiser than all men (ib. 11): than Adam. What, then, was Adam's wisdom? You find that when the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to create Adam, He took counsel with the ministering angels and said to them, 'Let us make man' (Gen. I, 26). They spoke before Him, 'Lord of the universe, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?' (Ps VIII, 5). He replied to them, 'The man whom I desire to create will have wisdom exceeding yours.' What did He do? He gathered all the cattle, beasts, and birds, set them before them, and said, 'Give names to these.'"

Ecclesiastes 7:23 comprises the conclusion in a series of maxims that reflect Qoheleth's pessimistic view of man's incapability of knowing his scope in life. The Rabbis eliminate the negative sense of the base verse and laud Solomon's wisdom by advocating Solomon's intellectual superiority. The Rabbis placed Solomon on a higher level of intellectual capacity and summoned up Ps 8:5 to support their teaching of man's superiority compared to the angels. The Rabbis through an ongoing "textual dialogue" build up the degree of Adam's wisdom only to quash it when they compare it to Solomon's. After they secure interpretatively the importance of Adam's wisdom through Ps 8:5, the Rabbis have at hand a conceptually neat passage that reinforces the extent of Solomon's wisdom. Solomon, the alleged author of the book of Ecclesiastes, surpassed in "sophia" the heavenly powers since he surpassed Adam. The passage is revealing for it ventures to whitewash Solomon and to substantiate his unique intellectual and mental capacity.

#### b. Transformative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 10:2 on Ecclesiastes 10:1—Psalm 55:24<sup>5</sup>

The parallelism between Eccl 10:1a, "Dead flies...putrid," and 10:1b, "so a little folly...wisdom," is apparent; just as the dead flies can contaminate the perfumer's anointment, so also an act of foolishness can overshadow wisdom. The author of the book of Ecclesiastes uses a simile to underline the importance of wisdom and to demonstrate its fragile nature. The rabbinic mind grasped the descriptively allegorical sense of the original verse that serves its interpretative agenda. The contextual transformation of Eccl 10:1 and Ps 55:24 reveals the transformative form of this type of intertextuality.

...Another interpretation of DEAD FLIES MAKE THE OINTMENT OF THE PERFUMER FETID AND PUTRID: it speaks of Doeg and Ahithophel. Yesterday they used vile language against David...but to-day they utter words which reflect their sense of shame. MORE PRECIOUS THAN WISDOM AND HONOUR is David's prophecy; A LITTLE FOLLY [on their part caused him to exclaim], But Thou, O God, wilt bring them down into the nethermost pit (Ps LV, 24).

The rabbinic interpretation changed the contextual meaning of Eccl 10:1, which describes how a deed can nullify wisdom. The compiler of *Eccl. Rab.* 10:2 uses the allegorical nuance of the original verse; Ps 55:24

5. For another instance of transformative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 9:13 on Eccl 9:11—Ps 68:13.



intensifies this function. "Doeg and Ahithophel" are likened to "dead flies" because of their stance towards David. The word "wisdom" prefigures David's prophecy, while the phrase "a little folly" is associated with Doeg and Ahithophel's behavior that sufficed to undo David's great wisdom as it is witnessed by Ps 55:24. Doeg and Ahithophel's actions against David made him pray to God and ask for their punishment. It was that deed which annulled David's wisdom. The rabbinic passage constitutes a diatribe against David, who is criticized through Eccl 10:1 for his behavior. Ecclesiastes 10:1 is considered authoritative enough to constitute the basis for a rabbinic attack on David.

c. *Probative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:10 on Ecclesiastes 3:8—Psalm 126:2*<sup>6</sup>

Ecclesiastes 3:8 is part of a series of antitheses constructed as textual pairs, extending from Eccl 3:1 to Eccl 3:8. Psalm 126:2 interprets Eccl 3:4a, "a time for weeping and a time for laughing." As we shall see, the intertextual verse (Ps 126:2) that follows the formulaic expression "for it is written" corroborates the rabbinic understanding of the base verse (Eccl 3:4), giving this type of intertextuality its probative function.

10. A TIME TO LOVE (III, 8): in the time of peace; AND A TIME TO HATE: in the time of war; A TIME FOR WAR: in the time of war; AND A TIME FOR PEACE: in the time of peace. R. Joshua of Siknin expounded the text in connection with Israel... A TIME TO WEEP:... AND A TIME TO LAUGH: for it is written, Then was our mouth filled with laughter (Ps CXXVI, 2)...

The Rabbis kept the sense of antithesis that permeates the biblical text; some observations need to be made, though. Under a textual prism, Eccl 3:4 and Ps 126:2 are related semantically. The motif of "laughter" is present in both verses. Psalm 126:2 describes an appropriate time for laughter that assumes the meaning of joy, which is associated with the restoration of Zion. The Psalmic verse exegetically supports Eccl 3:4 by verifying that there is indeed an appropriate time for joy. Additionally, the original meaning of both verses has been disregarded. Overall, the rabbis ventured to demonstrate the contextual proximity between Ecclesiastes and Psalms.

6. For other instances of probative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 1:11 on Eccl 1:5—Ps 19:5; *Eccl. Rab.* 2:12 on Eccl 2:8—Ps 105:37; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:10 on Eccl 3:8—Ps 121:4; *Eccl. Rab.* 8:11 on Eccl 8:8—Ps 18:6.

d. *Explicative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 8:7 on Ecclesiastes 8:3—Psalm 91:15*

The following passage highlights the admonitory character of the book of Ecclesiastes and recalls an educational lesson that includes guidelines on the way verses with blessings and curses should be read. In "explicative intertextuality," by connecting the base and the intertextual verses and omitting the interpolating text in between we get a semantically complete passage where the intertextual verse illuminates the base verse.

7. BE NOT HASTY TO GO OUT OF HIS PRESENCE (VIII, 3): R. Hiyya b. Gamda opened his discourse with the text, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord (Prov. III, 11). It has been learnt: [In dividing up a Scriptural reading in the Synagogue] one should begin and conclude with a verse which is auspicious; as the Mishnah declares: In the reading of the section of blessing a break may be made; but in the passage of curses there may be no break, but the same person reads it all. "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord," because I will be with him in trouble (Ps XCI, 15)...

The rabbis changed the original meaning of Eccl 8:3 and saw a reference to God and an exhortation that underlines the divine presence and its protective role. Prov 3:11 connects Eccl 8:3 and Ps 91:15, assuming a semantically ancillary role to them. Psalm 91:15 complements Eccl 8:3 contextually by assuring that the pursued person should not avoid God's presence. Proverbs 3:11 and Ps 91:15 are the proof texts that bolster the rabbinic understanding, according to which one should not be "hasty to go out of His presence" because God "will be with him in trouble." The Rabbis' exposition aimed to prove the contextual continuity and semantic harmony between the book of Ecclesiastes and that of Psalms.

e. *Dialectical-Transformative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:3 on Ecclesiastes 1:2—Psalm 144:4*

Ecclesiastes 1:2 exudes the pessimistic nature of the book of Ecclesiastes. The midrashic passage, though, ventures to demonstrate the conceptual proximity between Ecclesiastes and Psalms. This is achieved through a fabricated textual dialogue where David's thoughts are illumined by Solomon. The combined patterns of questions-answers, the arrangement of the biblical verses in the form of a dialogue, and the allegorical meaning of Ps 144:4 that matches conceptually to the contextual meaning of Eccl 1:2 create the dialectical-transformative intertextuality of the following passage.



3. VANITY OF VANITIES (I, 2)... David used a phrase without explaining it and its exposition was given by his son Solomon;... David said, Man is like unto a breath (Ps CXLIV, 4). To what breath? If he were like the steam from an oven, there is substance in it; if like the steam of a stove, there is substance in it! His son Solomon came and explained it; for that is what is written, VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH KOHELETH [is man]...

The Rabbis noticed the semantic closeness between Ps 144:4 and Eccl 1:2 and claimed that David first had expressed the notion of futility through Ps 144:4. Solomon, though, explained the hidden meaning of Ps 144:4 by writing a treatise on futility, and in particular through Eccl 1:2. The midrashic text transmits the rabbinic understanding about man and his nature and achieves the longed-for connection between Eccl 1:2 and Ps 144:4 by explaining that just as man's life is like breath, that is, is fleeting, so also the world is ephemeral and permeated with futility. The theme of futility thus changes from a controversial one to one descriptive of life.

f. *Dialectical-Explicative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 6:11 on Ecclesiastes 6:12—Psalm 144:4*<sup>7</sup>

The rabbinic effort that aims to demonstrate the proximity between Ecclesiastes and Psalms is continued in this midrashic passage in which David is presented to explain the meaning of Solomon's thoughts. Again, the pattern of questions—answers and the dialectical development of the rabbinic text intensify the vividness of the narration. On the other hand, by interconnecting Eccl 6:12 and Ps 144:4 we get a text with conceptual coherence, where the intertextual verse explicates the contextual meaning of the base verse. It is this explicatory relation of the intertextual verse to the base verse that justifies the explicative intertextuality of the following passage:

11. FOR WHO KNOWETH WHAT IS GOOD FOR MAN IN HIS LIFE (VI, 12)?... Solomon used a phrase without explaining it and its exposition was given by his father David. Solomon said, FOR WHO KNOWETH WHAT IS GOOD FOR MAN IN HIS LIFE, ALL THE DAYS OF HIS VAIN LIFE WHICH HE SPENDETH AS A SHADOW? How is this to be understood? If life is like a shadow cast by a wall, there is substance in it; if like the shadow cast by a date-palm, there is substance in it! David came and explained, His days are as a shadow that passeth away (Ps CXLIV, 4)...

7. For other instances of dialectical-explicative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 3:17 on Eccl 3:14—Ps 132:12; *Eccl. Rab.* 7:31 on Eccl 7:23—Ps 39:1.

Ecclesiastes 6:12, which vividly describes man's transient role, persists with a pessimistic view on man's futile efforts to determine his scope on earth. The Rabbis ascertained the contextual closeness between Eccl 6:12 and Ps 144:4 and presented David (through Ps 144:4) in order to interpret Solomon (Eccl 6:12); man's life is as transitory as the shadow to which it is likened. The rabbis wish to create contextual affinity and semantic continuity between the books of Psalms and Ecclesiastes by highlighting their semantic ties.

g. *Dialectical-Probative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12:9 on Ecclesiastes 12:9—Psalm 31:20*<sup>8</sup>

In Eccl 12:9 Solomon is portrayed as a man of profound erudition and unrested spirit. The connection between Solomon's wisdom and the observance of the mitzvot serves the rabbinic "propaganda," which presents a book that exhorts pessimism and futility in a more positive light. Here, the rejection of afterlife that is hinted at in Ecclesiastes demands a return to the precepts of Judaism as these are expressed in the commandments. The midrashic passage propagandizes cogently in favor of "Qoheleth," whitewashing Solomon's persona.

9. AND BESIDES THAT KOHELETH WAS WISE (XII, 9). Towards the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes it is written, KOHELETH SOUGHT TO FIND OUT WORDS OF DELIGHT (ib. 10), i.e. Koheleth sought to discern clearly the reward bestowed for the performance of the commandments... The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Solomon, it WAS WRITTEN UPRIGHTLY, EVEN WORDS OF TRUTH, i.e. I have recorded it in 'The book of uprightness' [the Bible], viz. Oh, how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee (Ps XXXI, 20)."...

In rabbinic exegesis on Eccl 12:9–10, Solomon's quest for useful sayings is equated to his quest for understanding the reward one gets from observing the commandments. This aims to present Solomon in accord with Torah teaching on the observance of the mitzvot. Psalm 31:20 buttresses the rabbinic understanding of Eccl 12:9–10 and evidences the bestowal of God's blessing upon those who fear him, namely, those who keep his commandments. Consequently, the Rabbis imply that Solomon is a wise king who occupies himself with the observance of the mitzvot and becomes himself a recipient of God's goodness.

8. For other instances of dialectical-probative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 1:31 on Eccl 1:12—Ps 73:22; *Eccl. Rab.* 5:12 on Eccl 5:10—Ps 39:5.



h. *Transformative-Probative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12:7 on Ecclesiastes 12:7—Psalm 78:70*<sup>9</sup>

In semantic concord with the first chapters of Genesis, Solomon expresses a cardinal belief in line with Jewish theology; after a person's demise, the human body returns to the elements of which it was composed, while the person's soul returns to God from whom it was bestowed. The change of the contextual meaning of Eccl 12:7 and the formulaic expression "as it is said" give to this type of multiform intertextuality its transformative-probative function:

7. AND THE DUST RETURNETH TO THE EARTH AS IT WAS (XII, 7). R. Phinehas and R. Hilkiah said in the name of R. Simon: When is it that THE SPIRIT RETURNETH UNTO GOD WHO GAVE IT? When THE DUST RETURNETH TO THE EARTH AS IT WAS;... R. Joshua b. Levi interpreted the text in connection with the Sanctuary. The prophet said to Israel, REMEMBER THEN THY CREATOR: remember who created you while His selection of you still endures, while the covenant of the priesthood still endures...while the covenant with the kingship of the house of David still endures, as it is said, He chose David also His servant (Ps LXXVIII, 70)...

Rabbi Joshua b. Levi alters the original meaning of Eccl 12:7 and reads it as a reference to the Sanctuary. The rabbinic exhortation that follows the words of the prophet forms an ethical message whose key point is Israel's remembrance of God. The covenant between God and Israel has eternal validity, and a series of biblical events in the midrashic text testifies to the constant renewal of this special relationship. Among those events, the most notorious is God's covenant with the Davidic kingship. It is through the Davidic dynasty that Solomon is considered a legitimate king who continues to act under God's binding covenant. This status gave Solomon legitimacy; hence, his book "Ecclesiastes" was produced under the auspices of God's special relationship with his lineage.

9. For other instances of transformative-probative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 1:3 on Eccl 1:2—Ps 92:1; *Eccl. Rab.* 2:11 on Eccl 2:8—Ps 19:11; *Eccl. Rab.* 2:26 on Eccl 2:21—Ps 33:6; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:19 on Eccl 3:16—Ps 82:6; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:19 on Eccl 3:16—Ps 48:11; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:21 on Eccl 3:18—Ps 44:23; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:5 on Eccl 4:6—Ps 85:3; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:7 on Eccl 4:8—Ps 122:8; *Eccl. Rab.* 5:11 on Eccl 5:10—Ps 89:1; *Eccl. Rab.* 7:41 on Eccl 7:28—Ps 105:8; *Eccl. Rab.* 8:3 on Eccl 7:1—Ps 82:7; *Eccl. Rab.* 9:6 on Eccl 9:11—Ps 130:4; *Eccl. Rab.* 9:14 on Eccl 9:12—Ps 73:9; *Eccl. Rab.* 9:22 on Eccl 9:14—Ps 106:23; *Eccl. Rab.* 9:24 on Eccl 9:14—Ps 41:2; *Eccl. Rab.* 10:9 on Eccl 10:8—Ps 136:15; *Eccl. Rab.* 10:18 on Eccl 10:18—Ps 18:10; *Eccl. Rab.* 10:19 on Eccl 10:19—Ps 19:9; *Eccl. Rab.* 11:1 on Eccl 11:1—Ps 72:16; *Eccl. Rab.* 11:1 on Eccl 11:1—Ps 105:39; *Eccl. Rab.* 12:7 on Eccl 12:7—Ps 89:37; *Eccl. Rab.* 12:7 on Eccl 12:7—Ps 89:38; *Eccl. Rab.* 12:7 on Eccl 12:7—Ps 19:11; *Eccl. Rab.* 12:10 on Eccl 12:11—Ps 80:2.

i. *Probative-Explicative Intertextuality: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:36 on Ecclesiastes 1:16—Psalm 16:90; 21:3; 49:4; 51:19; 111:1*<sup>10</sup>

In biblical and post-biblical literature, the function of the heart is consistently considered the seat of a number of cognitive and spiritual functions. It is the heart's central role in man's spiritual state of being that the following passage praises. The repeated formulaic expression "as it said" strengthens the probative role of the intertextual verses which also serve an explicative function for the base verse:

36. I SPOKE WITH MY OWN HEART (I, 16). The heart sees... It hears... It speaks... It walks... It falls... It stands... It rejoices, as it is said, Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth (Ps XVI, 9)... It can be broken, as it is said, A broken and contrite heart (Ps LI, 19)... It desires, as it is said, Thou hast given him his heart's desire (Ps XXI, 3)... It meditates, as it is said, The meditation of my heart shall be understanding (Ps XLIX, 4)... It gives thanks, as it is said, I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart (Ps CXI, 1)...

The Rabbis replaced the original meaning of Eccl 1:16, which demonstrates the pointless pursuit of wisdom, with an aggadic statement on the heart's sundry abilities. Under the rabbinic exposition, Eccl 1:16 demonstrates the heart's function as a means of one's self-reflection. The Rabbis summoned up verses that present the heart as a personified entity which functions variously and assumes certain faculties; it rejoices (Ps 16:9), it grieves and sorrows (Ps 51:19), it has desires (Ps 21:3), it contemplates (Ps 49:4), and praises God (Ps 111:1). What triggered the Rabbis to interpret a verse from Ecclesiastes whose central theme appears clearer in other books of the Hebrew Bible is their repeated effort to give legitimacy and divine inspiration to the book by showing its conceptual proximity with the Psalter, which was never disputed in regard to its canonicity and authenticity.

10. For other instances of probative-explicative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 1:28 on Eccl 1:9—Ps 69:32; *Eccl. Rab.* 1:28 on Eccl 1:9—Ps 72:16; *Eccl. Rab.* 1:30 on Eccl 1:11—Ps 48:14; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:13 on Eccl 3:11—Ps 103:7; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:17 on Eccl 3:14—Ps 19:2; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:17 on Eccl 3:14—Ps 113:3; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:18 on Eccl 3:15—Ps 135:4; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:3 on Eccl 4:3—Ps 7:7; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:3 on Eccl 4:3—Ps 105:8; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:13 on Eccl 4:17—Ps 130:1; *Eccl. Rab.* 5:1 on Eccl 5:2—Ps 7:14; *Eccl. Rab.* 5:2 on Eccl 5:4—Ps 89:33; *Eccl. Rab.* 7:33 on Eccl 7:23—Ps 81:6; *Eccl. Rab.* 7:33 on Eccl 7:23—Ps 89:1; *Eccl. Rab.* 10:20 on Eccl 10:20—Ps 49:21.



j. *Transformative-Dialectical-Explicative Intertextuality*: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:22 on Ecclesiastes 3:20—Psalm 148:1<sup>11</sup>

The pessimistic view of Eccl 3:19–20, where death constitutes the common fate for both rational and irrational worlds, is a stumbling block for the Rabbis who believe in afterlife and thus venture to harmonize interpretatively Solomon's assertion with their own beliefs. In this tripartite type of multiform intertextuality we notice the *change* of the contextual meaning of Ps 148:1 that *explains* the rabbinic understanding of Eccl 3:20, while the pattern of question–answer adds vividness to the rabbinic exposition:

22. ALL GO UNTO ONE PLACE; ALL ARE OF THE DUST, AND ALL RETURN TO DUST (III, 20)... R. Eliezer says: All that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in heaven has its origin in heaven, and all that He created on earth has its origin in the earth. On what is this statement based? Praise ye the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the heights. Praise ye Him, all His angels... Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea-monsters, and all deeps; fire and hail, snow and vapour, etc., to the end of the Psalm (Ps CXLVIII, 1 ff.)...

R. Eliezer expresses the idea of the existence of two worlds as the place from where the created world originates. He alters the pessimistic tone of Eccl 3:20 and uses the Psalmic verse to support the idea of man's twofold nature; "man" is composed of body and soul and, therefore, bridges both worlds. In order to accomplish his goal, R. Eliezer uses Ps 148:1–14, whose main theme is God's exaltation by his creatures in heaven and on earth, and which seems to support the concept of the existence of the intelligible and the visible worlds. Through R. Eliezer's interpretation, Solomon's provocative pessimism is eliminated to fit the rabbinic belief in afterlife.

k. *Transformative-Dialectical-Probative Intertextuality*: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 8:11 on Ecclesiastes 8:8—Psalm 104:4<sup>12</sup>

In the following midrashic excerpt, death, before which man stands powerless, assumes angelic hypostasis. This is the Rabbis' understanding of the word רוח in Eccl 8:8, as they disassociate it from its biblical context and associate it with the heavenly powers. The transformation of

11. For other instances of transformative-dialectical-explicative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 10:20 on Eccl 10:20—Ps 6:11; *Eccl. Rab.* 10:20 on Eccl 10:20—Ps 18:1.

12. For other instances of transformative-dialectical-probative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 1:34 on Eccl 1:15—Ps 118:20; *Eccl. Rab.* 2:24 on Eccl 2:18—Ps 37:25; *Eccl. Rab.* 4:3 on Eccl 4:3—Ps 30:4.

the contextual sense of Eccl 8:8, the dialectical style of the midrashic passage, and the formulaic expression "as it is said" that introduces the intertextual verse and buttresses the rabbinic understanding of the base verse create the multiform intertextuality of the following midrashic text:

11. THERE IS NO MAN THAT HATH POWER OVER THE WIND (VIII, 8). The Rabbis say: A man has no power over the wind of the Angel of Death to make him withhold it from him. Whence do we know that the angels are called 'winds'? As it is said, Who maketh winds Thy messengers (Ps CIV, 4)...

The Rabbis saw an arcane connection between the "winds" and the celestial powers and used Ps 104:4 to corroborate their hermeneutical approach; according to the rabbinic exposition, God makes the "winds," that is, the angels, his messengers. Apparently, the original meaning of Ps 104:4 has also been disregarded. The rabbinic necessity to present Qoheleth as speaking of the celestial powers and not of man's indisposition before death dictated the change on the base meaning of both biblical verses and resulted in concealing another dark and hermeneutically "problematic" point of the book of Ecclesiastes.

l. *Transformative-Probative-Explicative Intertextuality*: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:8 on Ecclesiastes 1:4—Psalm 99:6<sup>13</sup>

Ecclesiastes 1:4 constitutes part of a section that speaks of the repetitive motion of life which is indicative of futility. The compiler of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* overlooked the contextual meaning of Eccl 1:4 and wrote a discourse on the equal worth of Jewish leaders past and present. The Rabbis transformed the meaning of Eccl 1:4, and used Ps 99:6, which they introduced with the expression "it is also written," in order to *explain* the base verse. This severalfold function of the base and the intertextual verses validates the present type of multiform intertextuality:

ONE GENERATION PASSETH AWAY, AND ANOTHER GENERATION COMETH. THE SUN ALSO RISETH, AND THE SUN GOETH DOWN...

8. R. Abba b. Kahana said... The generation which comes should be esteemed by you as the generation which has passed... R. Johanan said: It is written, The Lord that made Moses and Aaron, etc. (I Sam. XII, 6)... It is also written, Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among

13. For other instances of transformative-probative-explicative intertextuality, see *Eccl. Rab.* 1:4 on Eccl 1:3—Ps 68:10; *Eccl. Rab.* 3:13 on Eccl 3:11—Ps 103:7; *Eccl. Rab.* 5:4 on Eccl 5:6—Ps 17:15; *Eccl. Rab.* 7:21 on Eccl 7:14—Ps 17:15; *Eccl. Rab.* 10:20 on Eccl 10:20—Ps 95:11.



them that call upon His name (Ps XCIX, 6)... This is to teach you that whoever is appointed leader of the community, though he be the lowliest of the lowly, is the equal of the most celebrated of the former celebrities...

The concern of this passage is to defend the position, status, and reputation of the rabbinic office. The rabbinic message is indicative of its purpose; an appointed leader of a community, irrespective of his ethical status, is on the same level of worthiness with the most celebrated rabbinic authorities of the past. Ecclesiastes 1:4, under the Rabbis' conspicuous interpretative manipulation, assists in their apologetic effort to highlight the importance of their class.

m. *Dialectical-Explicative-Probative Intertextuality*: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:13 on Ecclesiastes 1:7—Psalm 18:12<sup>14</sup>

The rabbis ignored the original meaning of Eccl 1:7 and initiated a discussion on the understanding of the phenomenon of rain. They similarly overlooked the position of Ps 17:12 in the biblical context as part of a series of verses that describe a theophany. The Rabbis incorporated in their exposition contradictory opinions that give the impression of a dynamic dialogue. The intertextual verse follows the formulaic expression "as it is written," demonstrating the rabbinic understanding of Eccl 1:7, and explicating the newly acquired meaning:

13. ALL THE RIVERS RUN INTO THE SEA (I, 7). From whence does the earth drink?... R. Eliezer says: It drinks from the waters of the ocean... R. Joshua said to him, 'But are not the waters of the ocean salty!' He answered, 'They are sweetened by the clouds... Where are the waters distilled? In the skies.' R. Joshua, on the other hand, says: The earth drinks from the upper waters... The clouds raise themselves from earth to heaven and receive the waters as from the mouth of a bottle... And [the clouds] distil it as through a sieve and one drop does not touch another; as it is written, Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies (Ps. XVIII, 12)...

The rabbis eradicated the notion of futility that runs through Eccl 1:7 and proved exegetically that the book of Ecclesiastes not only constitutes a handbook of ethical behavior, but also includes data of scientific interest.

14. For other instances of dialectical-explicative-probative intertextuality, see Eccl. Rab. 3:19 on Eccl 3:15—Ps 145:9; Eccl. Rab. 4:3 on Eccl 4:3—Ps 106:23; Eccl. Rab. 5:1 on Eccl 5:2—Ps 37:15; Eccl. Rab. 7:4 on Eccl 7:1—Ps 13:6; Eccl. Rab. 7:8 on Eccl 7:16—Ps 90:3; Eccl. Rab. 7:16 on Eccl 7:8—Ps 145:9; Eccl. Rab. 8:8 on Eccl 8:4—Ps 103:9.

#### 4. Conclusions

The frequent use of intertextual verses not merely in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* but in virtually all the midrashim signals something deeper than a mere rabbinic methodological and interpretive caprice: it demonstrates the rabbinic consensus that the Tanakh constitutes the absolute source for rabbinic intertextual exegesis. More specifically, the sundry forms of intertextuality manifest the rabbinic effort to render the midrashic texts appealing to their audience. Most importantly, though, the importance of the different forms of intertextuality, as I ventured to expose, derives from the fact that intertextuality is not merely a monodimensional literary "tool," but a multidimensional one that touches every aspect of the interpretive venture. This conclusion can change the way we understand the function of intertextuality and can reveal much about its dynamics and adaptability within the texts in which it appears. These dynamics are apparent in the case of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*; the various types of intertextuality associated with the book of Psalms show the extent of rabbinic dedication to defend, protect, and justify the multifarious character of the book of Ecclesiastes, which was seen not only as a handbook of ethical teachings for the edification of the faithful, but also as an instructive, pedagogical and scientific resource. Such an extensive range of themes and topics renders the book of Ecclesiastes, for the Rabbis, an important work of wisdom literature—authentic, valid, and authoritative. The extensive use of the book of Psalms by the compiler of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* could be justified by the fact that the rabbinic tradition attributed it to David. The blood relationship between David and Solomon comprised an excellent reason for the compiler of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* to base and demonstrate, through the process of intertextual exegesis, the semantic ties between their works. The book of Psalms assisted the Rabbis as they used it widely to render Ecclesiastes equally worthy and valid and thus to make the case for its canonicity as well. Intertextuality served the aforementioned rabbinic exegetical efforts substantially, and, in so doing, it has proven to be, not monotonous, but richly variegated, as is already evident in the Bible itself. There, however, it assumes the form of conceptual intertextuality, a topic which I hope to analyze in the future.



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