

Chapter 27

LITERAL OR ALLEGORICAL?

The following incident occurred when I was still a boy. It was, probably on a Shabbat morning around Chanukah time, when I was in Shul. I was sitting in the front row when the Minister of the Shul was giving his sermon. In it he said that the prayer “al hanisim” recited on Chanukah does not mention the miracle of the oil at the time of the Hasmoneans. I, who already knew that the reason for Chanukah was the miracle of the oil which lasted for eight days, was very, very surprised at this. I therefore immediately opened my siddur to see for myself. The Minister noticed this and deliberately looked towards me, and repeated that “al hanisim” does not mention the miracle of the oil. I also heard afterwards that he was offended that I had not believed what he had said.

Following this, for decades I would comment that anyone reading the Gemara stating the reason for celebrating Chanukah was because of the miracle of the oil, and if they then went on to look on the wording of “al hanisim,” would conclude that one was talking about two different Festivals!

I also in this connection recollect an incident which took place when I was in High School. The teacher was giving a lesson on the period of the Hasmoneans and mentioned the “legend” (or he used a similar word) of the miracle of the oil. I remember that one pupil was offended that the teacher used the word “legend” and commented on this to the teacher that was factual.

Another incident, not connected with Chanukah, but is whether one must take everything connected with period of the Creation of the World and Gan Eden literally or can one take it allegorically. If one would take this period allegorically, as a number of the Rishonim Rabbis who lived 500 to 1000 years ago did, what can one say regarding the period which immediately followed, namely Noah and the flood and if one would take the

flood allegorically, what about further subsequent events in the book of Bereshit and even later in the Torah. In fact, when one starts with taking Gan Eden allegorically, where does one stop?

One of the Rabbis of the 20th century, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook wrote a book in the style of the Rambam's "Moreh Nevuchim," and in it wrote that one does not have to take everything of the period of the Creation of the World and Gan Eden literally. When asked at what period can one no longer take things in the Torah allegorically, he replied that it would be up to the Jews to decide. He wrote this book of his in the early 20th century but it was not published during his lifetime. After he died, his son Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook continued publishing his father's writings but he first went through them deleting passages. However, this book was kept hidden, and this went on even after Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah died. A person who wrote a biography of Rabbi Avraham Kook as late as 2008 did not know of this book's existence! It was only in 2014 that it was finally published.

Now to return to my research on the miracle of the oil at the time of the Hasmoneans.

I have in the past tried to resolve the apparent conflict in the various sources of what in reality was the miracle of Chanukah. I then concluded that the miracle of the oil was factual but the reason that the miracle took this form was that Jews who had been influenced by the Greek way of life were returning to Torah and Mitzvot and this process did not take place in one go but stage by stage. Hence the number of candles, namely the light of Torah returned in stages, in the same way as the number of candles lit each subsequent night of Chanukah increases, and when this process was fully complete it would be like the Menorah which was fully alight.

About the summer of 2020 I decided that I would study this apparent conflict more deeply.

For any research one has to first of all to search out all the source material. In the not so distant past before Internet, for subjects on

Torah research, I would have to make a weekly trip, usually to the Israel National Library in Givat Ram Jerusalem, and order books in order to search for the relevant material, which I would then peruse in one of the reading rooms and then photocopy such material. At a later date, when there was already the Internet, I would first search it for suitable material. A site which I regularly utilised was called HebrewBooks, where there are now over 50,000 Jewish religious books, and I would then download and copy the relevant pages. If the material I required was not to be found on HebrewBooks, I would search elsewhere on the Internet for it and sometimes I was able to find it. Invariably there was still some material which I could not find and I would therefore have to make occasional visits to the Israel National Library, or on occasion to the library of Yeshivat Nir in Kiryat Arba, a library which incidentally I started when I was in Mitnachalei Hevron in the Military Compound in the late 1960s.

I also utilised the Jewish Encyclopedia published over one hundred years ago and which today is in its entirety on the Internet since it is now in the Public Domain. I would also utilise Encyclopedia Judaica of which I have a set of. Background information I sometimes obtained from Wikipedia.

However, at present, (summer 2020), due to the corona plague (Covid-19) I am confined to my house, and so there are a few references which I have to dispense with, as I did when I was writing this paper. The one exception was a book from the Kiryat Arba Municipal Library which is just opposite my apartment, a book written by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, and someone went there to borrow the required book for me. Other books I required were not in this library, and I thus had to do without them.

One paper I found was by a prominent Rabbi and it appeared in "Forum Otzar Hachochmah." I wanted to know whether this was the original source, or that he had published it in some journal. I managed to track down the Rabbi and he informed me that this was the original source.

My plan of action when writing this paper was to determine the compilation dates of the various sources who stated that the reason for Chanukah was the miracle of the oil, and conversely when material which did not mention the miracle of the oil were compiled. From this, one would be able to see what came chronologically first.

I found three sources mentioning the miracle of the oil, namely the Gemara in Masechet Shabbat, Megillat Ta'anit, and Megillat Antiochus.

I found that the portion of Megillat Ta'anit dealing with the miracle of the oil was written after the compilation of the Gemara and thus the relevant lines were taken from the Gemara and not vice versa, as one siddur had suggested.

To determine the date of the compilation of Megillat Antiochus was far more complicated and a large amount of research has been done on this subject but leading to vastly different results. Many of the source books for this research were written in various languages, especially English, and it appeared in various scholarly journals, almost always Jewish ones. Some of these were to be found on the Internet, although not on the site of HebrewBooks. In one case, a University had put all past copies of a certain journal which went back for over a hundred years. However, I searched and searched for a certain issue but could not locate it. I therefore contacted the University and they replied that they had accidentally missed out on this issue and they would make amends for this although it might take some time due to corona. The results of my research on the date of the compilation of Megillat Antiochus by almost all authorities showed that it was well after the period of the Hasmoneans.

The sources which did not mention the miracle of the oil were the prayer "al hanisim," the books of Maccabees which are to be found in the Apocrypha, and the extensive history written by Josephus.

The Rishonim write that "al hanisim" was written by Yochanan Kohen Gadol, namely at the period of the Hasmoneans.

I found that both Maccabee 1 and Maccabee 2 spoke of Chanukat Hamizbeach but did not even hint at the miracle of the oil. I also looked into the composition of these books in order to determine whether Maccabee 1 was originally written in Hebrew. To accomplish this, I utilised various histories written by early Christian scholars over 1,500 years ago. There I found that they held that it was originally written in Hebrew but this had been lost, and what remained was the Greek translation of the Septuagint. In contrast, Maccabee 2 was originally written in Greek. In recent years both these books have been translated into Hebrew and I utilised these translations. The relevant point is that these books written at the period of the Hasmoneans do not mention or even hint at the miracle of the oil. There is also a Maccabee 3 and a Maccabee 4 which are not in the Apocrypha but in the pseudepigrapha, but I found that they were not relevant to my research.

Another source was the history written by Josephus, about 200 years after the Hasmoneans. This work which included the period of the Maccabees also does not mention miracle of the oil. I could not obtain an authenticated Hebrew translation of the relevant part of Josephus and therefore made a paraphrase from the English translation.

The results of the above showed that books written at the time of the Hasmoneans, or relatively soon after, did not mention or even hint at the miracle of the oil. In contrast material written many hundreds of years later did mention it.

A similar phenomenon is to be found with the Golem of Prague. If one were to ask a random person about what did they know about the Maharal of Prague, they would very likely say the Golem. However, the numerous writings of the Maharal do not mention the Golem, nor do those who lived at that period. It was only over 200 years later that the Golem was associated with the Maharal. I learned this from a lecture by Rabbi Dr. Shnayer Leiman which appears on the internet under the site of YUTorah online. During my research I found that the contents of his lecture

also appears under his name in a paper in the journal “Tradition” published by the Rabbinical Council of America.

The following part of my paper was to try and resolve this conflict and I put forward many questions which I then tried to answer.

A crucial question is whether one can state that something, in this case the miracle of the oil, which is specifically written in the Gemara, is just an allegory. I then came across a lecture which was put on the internet of whether one can say that Ma’aseh Bereshit and Gan Eden and the serpent need to be taken literally. A number of the Rishonim hold that it can be just an allegory.

I concluded my paper that on one hand one can take the miracle of the oil literally, or alternatively take it as an allegory.

As with all my papers, I did not quote from every paper I had photocopied, and there were in fact numerous papers, that I had photocopied. To simplify matters and to save time, I put a tick at the top of every paper that I quoted from, and an X on the top the remainder. When I had finalised my footnotes, I would write at the top of each paper I had quoted from, the number of the footnote in my research paper.

I then wrote up my first draft of my paper in Hebrew together with the extensive references/footnotes. I then checked every point and reference meticulously. Finally, I gave it to two people whose mother tongue is Hebrew to make grammatical corrections. One of my problems when writing Hebrew is, that since my mother tongue is English which does not distinguish between male and female, I make numerous mistakes in this respect. Most of my points needing correction are connected with this mixing up male and female words.

Finally, as usual, I photocopied the relevant portions of the source material and added it to the end of my paper. I also prepared a cover page. One of the things I always do is to put such a paper together with the source material on my website.



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Which Rishonim viewed maaseh bereishit as an allegory?

Asked 4 years, 10 months ago · Active 4 years, 10 months ago · Viewed 231 times



I have often heard that many rishonim were comfortable with the idea that at least the first week of creation could be read allegorically, not literally. What are the specific sources that support this idea?

6



parshanut-torah-comment hashkafah-philosophy creation rishonim literalism



1



edited Oct 8 '15 at 13:50



Loewian

16.1k 2 22 48

asked Oct 8 '15 at 13:42



Jeremy

8,380 24 55

2 judaism.stackexchange.com/q/20900/501 - Does Rambam take the 6 days of creation literally? and judaism.stackexchange.com/q/31408/501 - Rambam and Interpreting Bereishit as Allegorical - Danny Schoemann Oct 8 '15 at 14:01 ✓

2 I wrote judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/64338/ yesterday on Rashi and the Rambam. And if you accept R' Dessler's read of the Rambam, he too considers time during creation to be something other than what we think time is. Actually, it becomes hard to find a rishon who took the week literally! Also aishdas.org/aep/the-rambam-on-time-during-creation on the Rambam, including rishonim (Abarbanel, Raibag others) who commented on the Moreh. - Micha Berger Oct 9 '15 at 9:44 ✓

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Snake as Gen Eden

Rational approach to Reading Torah
77NEN

19 min - Gen 3 - Snake is ToS, and Scien differs
Chap why we read H Tor
Rabbinic age
Gen 3 - NICO or not

24 1258 / 210 ~~can be~~ must be NICO

28 1200, 2187 - ~~1258~~ 231
no walk, talking snake

31 - 1222 / 210
Rabbinic begin of Becher
not necessary, literal
Snake ~~is~~ ^{but} no conversation ~~between~~ between
Eve + snake



42 Shura Rake Mirsh
literal story - but i darsa matter

51 1210 212 in the 53e

56 63Rabbi Kooku. ~~1210~~ 212
It was said Credit story den - not against that
begin of 1210 a person is still
a JNEN

1222 / 210 Says ~~1210~~ Rabbinic did not
take beginning of Gen 3 literally

My summary of a lecture on "Rational approach to Reading Torah"

8042020

עבודת ספורנו - ויקיפדיה

ויקיפדיה
האנציקלופדיה החופשית

עובדיה ספורנו

רבי עובדיה ספורנו (נקרא גם הספורנו; איטלקית: Sforzo, נולד 1468, ה'רל"ח) או (ה'רס"ג - 1473, ה'רס"ד - נפטר אחרי 1550, ה'ש"נ) היה פריזן סקרא יטנזי-איטלקי, רב, רופא ואחד מראשי קהילת יהודי רומא וקהילה בלונדון. חיבורו החשוב והמפורסם ביותר הוא ביאור למורה שר הנודע פירושיו למספר ספרי סקרא טוספיים (בגם שיר השירים וקוהלת) ופירושו לפרקי אבות. פירושו ספורנו, מבוססים על הפסג ולשונו קצרה ובהירה.

תוכן עניינים

תולדות חייו

השקפתו

עם ישראל והעמים
יחסו להשכלה
ספריו
לקריאה נוספת
קישורים חיצוניים
הערות שוליים

תולדות חייו

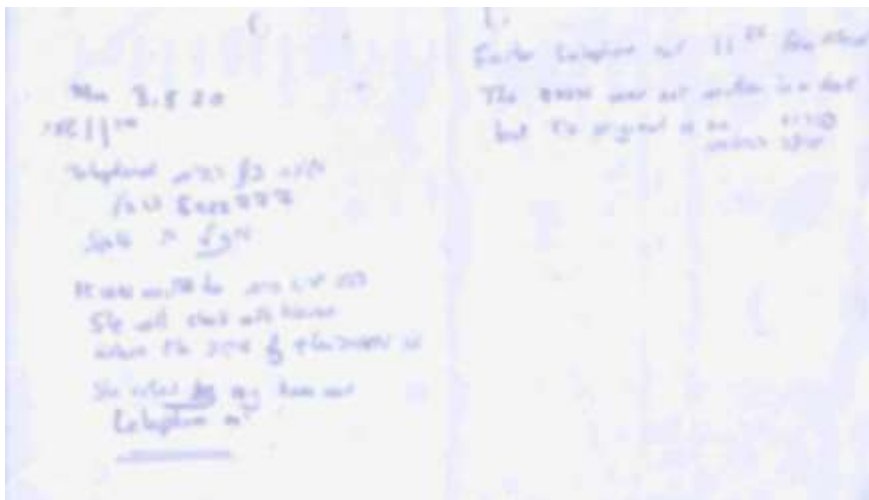
רבי עובדיה ספורנו נולד בין השנים 1468 (ה'רל"ח) - 1473 (ה'רס"ג) בעיר צ'ונט, אביז, ר' יעקב ספורנו, נזכר בתשובות המגרי"ק. בנוסף ללימודי דת למד ספורנו גם לימודים כלליים ומבולגם פילוסופיה, מתמטיקה, בלשנות ורפואה. הוא שלט בלטינית ובערבית אך ידיו עדיין היה בעברית, עבודה חיבר ספר דקדוק לבקשת מרסל Tossignano.

ההיסטוריס והפילוסוף הגרמני יוזפף רויזליון, מראשי הבראונים וממחללי הרפורמציה הפרוטסטנטית יחד עם ידו מרסין לוצר, למד את השפה העברית אצל רבי עובדיה, בעת שביקר וחינך באיטליה בין השנים 1498-1500.

בעיר הולדתו סבל רבי עובדיה מרדיפות אנטישמיות. ב-1524 הוא נזכר כאחד מראשי "קהל רומא" שנפגשו עם דוד הראובני. אי סולן לנודד בין שרי איטליה עד שהתיישב בבולוניה עם אחיו תנאל. בבולוניה יסד בית דפוס עבור ושימש כרופא. בבולוניה הביע לשיא פרסומו וזכה לשאלות חכמים מכל רחבי איטליה טלל מפארה הסמוכה שהייתה ידועה בחכמה. שמו הגיע עד העיר אגרי השני, מלך צרפת, לו הקדים את ספרו הפילוסופי "אור עינים" ושלח לו את פירושו לספר קהלת.

האריך ספורנו נפטר לאחר שנת 1550 (ה'ש"נ).

Example of background material found on Wikipedia



My enquiries regarding the paper in "Forum Otzar Hachochmah"



Chaim Simons <chaimsimons@gmail.com>

Revue des Etudes Juives

3 messages

Chaim Simons <chaimsimons@gmail.com>
To: libraryhelp@utoronto.ca

Sun, Aug 2, 2020 at 11:33 AM

Dear Librarian

I was happy to see that you had put online the past editions of "Revue des Etudes Juives". I personally have made use of this journal from your website, and I am sure that many other researchers have done likewise, and are therefore grateful to you for this.

However, there is one paper in this journal that despite searching, I have been unable to locate and would therefore be very grateful if you could please assist me.

Details of the paper:
volume 30
page 217
author Samuel Kraus
subject matter (I do not know the exact title) The Scroll of the Hasmoneans - Scroll of Antiochos

With thanks and best regards

Rabbi Dr. Chaim Simons



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Library Help <libraryhelp@utoronto.ca>
To: Chaim Simons <chaimsimons@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 6, 2020 at 4:39 PM

Dear Rabbi Simons,

Thank you for contacting us about issue 30 of *Revue des Etudes Juives*.

You're right that we have digitized and made these texts available on the Internet Archive, and the issue you're looking for appears to be missing. We unfortunately don't have the capacity to scan this volume right now, since all of our library buildings are closed due to the COVID crisis. However, once our scanning services resume we'll make sure to scan and upload this item.

I'm sorry to not have a more immediate solution, but I hope that this helps somewhat. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Best,
Kristy

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From: Chaim Simons <chaimsimons@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, August 2, 2020 4:33 AM
To: Library Help <libraryhelp@utoronto.ca>
Subject: Revue des Etudes Juives

[Quoted text hidden]

Chaim Simons <chaimsimons@gmail.com>
To: Library Help <libraryhelp@utoronto.ca>

Fri, Aug 7, 2020 at 9:39 AM

Thank you for your e-mail. I fully appreciate the situation.
Chaim Simons
[Quoted text hidden]

The books of 3 and 4 Maccabees – What are they?

There are five books of the Maccabees. First and Second Maccabees are part of the deuterocanonical books used by the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, and Anglican Church. The creators of the Septuagint, an early Greek translation of the Old Testament created about 200 to 300 years before Jesus, called 1 and 2 Maccabees "useful writings" but not inspired Scripture.

In 3 Maccabees, the story of Jewish persecution under Ptolemy IV Philopator (222—205 BC) is told. It was probably written between 100 BC and AD 30, though the date of writing and author are uncertain. Contrary to its title, it does not describe the actions of the Maccabees. It is considered canon in the Armenian Bible.

The book of 4 Maccabees is more philosophical rather than historical. In it, the idea that pious reason trumps

Golem of Prague.

Not mentioned at time of Mahariil
but only hundreds of years later

Shows how ~~events~~ Supernatural
events are only a few hundred
of years later.

Notes I wrote on the Golem of Prague

2

אין אחר השם

הנס בנושא פח השמן גם מוזכר בספר בשם "מגילת תענית" ונבדוק אם מקורו שם היה לפני או אחרי שמוזכר בגמרא.

כתוב בגמרא שחנניה בן חזקיה וסיעתו כתבו הספר "מגילת תענית": בגמרא, "מגילת תענית" מוזכר מספר פעמים ונוסף לזה שזה גם מוזכר פעם אחת במשנה: דהיינו ספר זה נכתב בתקופת התנאים או אפילו לפניהם.

מגילת תענית היא חיבור בשפת הארמית. תאריך חיבורו כנראה בסוף ימי בית שני. תוכנו הוא 35 ימים שבהם אירעו ליהודים מאורות משמחים. תקופתם הם מימי עזרא עד קצת לפני חורבן בית שני.

אחד מאירועים שמוזכר שם קרה בתאריך עשרים וחמשה בחודש כסלו, דהיינו חנוכה. שם כתוב "בעשרים וחמשה בו חנכת יומין תמניא ודלא למספד" בדפוסים של הספר הזה, יש המשך בעברית של נס פח השמן, בדיוק בלשון שמופיע בגמרא: לכן קל להגיע למסקנה שהגמרא העתיקה זה ממגילת תענית.

אולם זה אינו נכון. במגילת תענית המקורי, יש אחרי כל תאריך רק כמה מילים בארמית על מה שקרה באותו יום. לכן מגילת תענית המקורי אינו מזכיר נס פח השמן. מה שמופיע היום במגילת תענית אחרי כל אירוע היא פירוש (סכוליון) בשפת העברית, הם כוללים לפעמים דברים מהגמרא ולפעמים מן המדרש. מפני שהפירוש הזה כולל דברים מהגמרא, ברור שהם נכתבו אחרי תקופת האמוריים.

לכן הקטע שנמצא היום על נס פח השמן אינו מועתק בגמרא אלא להיפך, מגילת תענית העתיקה זה מהגמרא.

אנגלית: Jewish 11:1230

אין יקניו ויקניו
מקור
תענית
(48)

- 5 שבת יג
- 6 תענית פרק ב' משנה ח
- 7 מגילת תענית (נארשא, תרליין)
- 8 מגילת תענית פרק תשיעי כסלו (א י)
- 9 מגילת תענית שם
- 10 נכתב כנראה בטעות בסידור "סדר עבודת ישראל", (חרב יצחק בן אריה יוסף דוב (ולגמון בער), שוקן תרצ"ז) מעשה הנס הזה יסופר גם בגמרא שבת דף כ"א כי על פי מגילת תענית פרק ט"ז עמ' 444 הארה 1, דהיינו שחגמרא העתיקה ממגילת תענית.

מקור זמני
מגילת תענית
Jewish 11:1230
Magillat Ta'anit

Sample page from First Draft of Paper