

## THE TRANSJORDANIAN ALTAR (JOSH 22:10-34) ACCORDING TO JOSEPHUS (*ANT.* 5.100-114) AND PSEUDO- PHILO (*LAB* 22.1-8)

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In the extended dénouement of the book of Joshua (chaps. 22-24), there occurs a final moment of tension sparked by the Transjordanian tribes' building themselves an altar, 22:10-34.<sup>1</sup> In this article, my focus is not, however, on the biblical Transjordanian altar story as such. Rather, I wish to examine two approximately contemporaneous *relectures* of the episode, i.e., those of Josephus in *Antiquitates Judaicae* (*Ant.*) 5.100-114<sup>2</sup> and Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (*LAB*) 22.1-7.<sup>3</sup> For both authors I shall attempt to ascertain how, why, and with what effects they have reworked the source account. By way of conclusion I shall present some comparative remarks on the two *relectures*.

### *Josephus*

#### 1. Introduction (*Josh* 22:10-15// *Ant.* 5.100-105a).

In my consideration of Josephus' altar story, I note first that it has the same immediate context as its biblical counterpart: it stands between Joshua's dismissal of the two and a half tribes (*Josh* 22:1-9// *Ant.* 5.93-99) and his farewell address(es) at Shechem (*Joshua* 23-24// *Ant.* 5.115-116).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See references to previous literature in J.S. Kloppenborg, "Joshua 22: The Priestly Editing of an Ancient Tradition," *Bib* 62 (1981): 347-371.

<sup>2</sup>I use the text and translation of H. St. J. Thackeray, R. Marcus, A. Wikgren, and L. H. Feldman, *Josephus* LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926-1965). *Antiquities* 5.100-114 appears in 5: 47-53, where translation and notes are by Marcus.

<sup>3</sup>I use the text of *LAB* edited by D. J. Harrington and J. Cazeaux, *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités Bibliques* I (SC 229; Paris: Cerf, 1976 [for 22.1-7, see pp. 176-181]) and the translation of this by D. J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 297-377, pp. 331-332. On *LAB* overall, see recently F. J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Josephus' version conflates (while also greatly reducing) the two separate and extended discourses of Joshua 23 and 24. It likewise provides (5.115a) a more flowing transition between the end of the altar episode and Joshua's farewell discourse. This reads: "Thereafter, having dismissed the multitude to their several provinces, Joshua himself abode at Sikima.

Overall, Josephus faithfully reproduces the basic story line of Josh 22:10-34 in 5.100-114. At the same time, his version exhibits expansions, abridgements, and modifications of the source account. These rewriting techniques already surface in Josephus' introduction to the episode in *Ant.* 5.100-105a. Josh 22:10 leaves readers in suspense regarding the Transjordanians' intent in constructing their altar. Anticipating the builders' later words (22:24-28), Josephus clarifies the point immediately: "they erected an altar . . . as a memorial to future generations of their relationship to the inhabitants on the other side."<sup>5</sup> Having introduced this clarification, Josephus then goes on to explain why, as Josh 22:11-12 relates, the other Israelites upon "hearing" of the Transjordanians' initiative, assembled "for war" against them. The Israelites did this, *Ant.* 5.101a informs us, because they lent credence to a "calumny" (δίαβολήν) that the altar was erected "with designs of sedition [νεωτερισμῶ] and the introduction of strange gods." Josephus likewise expatiates at length on the bare notice of Josh 22:12 about the Israelites coming together "to make war." In 5.101b-102 this datum gets worked up as follows:

They sprang to arms, with intent to cross the river and be avenged on those that had erected the altar and to punish them for this perversion of the rites of their fathers. For they held that they should take no account of their kinship<sup>6</sup> or of the rank of those thus incriminated, but of the will of God and the fashion in which He delights to be honoured. So, moved by indignation [ὕπ' ὀργῆς], they prepared to take the field.

Conversely, however, Josephus leaves aside 22:12's specification concerning the site of the Israelites' assembly, Shiloh, perhaps supposing that readers would supply this item on their own, given his repeated previous mentions of that city as Israel's headquarters in the period following the subjugation of the land (*Ant.* 5.68, 70, 72, 79).

The sequence of Josh 22:12-14 appears somewhat curious: The Israelites gather "for war" against the Transjordanians, but instead of marching forth, they dispatch a delegation to them. Josephus (5.103) elucidates the sudden change of plans with an insertion that highlights the role of the leaders in calming popular passions: "But Joshua<sup>7</sup> and Eleazar

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Twenty years later, in extreme old age, having sent for the chief notables of the cities . . . he recalled to them . . .".

<sup>5</sup>Italics indicate elements of Josephus' presentation which lack a parallel in the Bible.

<sup>6</sup>Note the irony: The altar was built as a "a memorial to future generations of their [the Transjordanians'] relationship to the inhabitants on the other side." Upon hearing of the construction, those "on the other side" respond, however, by resolving to "take no account of their kinship."

<sup>7</sup>Joshua is, curiously, nowhere mentioned in MT Josh 22:10-34; he is cited in LXX 22:34 as the one who names the Transjordanians' altar. Josephus' version provides him with a

the high priest and the elders [ἡ γερουσία] restrained them, counseling them first to test their brethren's mind by a parley, and should they find their intent mischievous then and only then to proceed to hostilities. They therefore sent ambassadors to them." In Josh 22:13 the delegation comprises Eleazar's son Phineas plus ten chiefs, one from each of the Cisjordanian tribes. In Josephus, Phineas' entourage consists simply of "ten others highly esteemed among the Hebrews." At the same time, he introduces a specification concerning the purpose of the mission that itself echoes the previous advice of the leaders: "To discover what they [the Transjordanians] could have meant by erecting that altar on the riverbank." Josephus likewise elaborates the minimalistic transitional notice of 22:15 ("they came to the Reubenites, etc., in the land of Gilead and they said to them") with his "so the embassy having crossed the river and reached these people,<sup>8</sup> an assembly was convened,<sup>9</sup> and Phineas arose and said that . . .". In this formulation Josephus highlights the stature of Phineas: he alone speaks, rather than doing so simply as one among an eleven-man delegation.

## 2. *The Exchange (Josh 22:16-31// Ant. 5.105b-113).*

The long central segment of our episode relates the verbal exchange between the Transjordanians and the delegation. This opens (22:16-20// *Ant.* 5.105b-110) with the delegation's speech to the supposed miscreants. The biblical speech is formulated throughout in direct address; Josephus' parallel employs indirect address initially (5.105b), but then reverts to direct address (5.106-110).<sup>10</sup> In 22:16-18 the delegation's word starts off with a *Botenformel* ("thus says the whole congregation of the Lord"), followed by two accusatory questions, of which the second contains a

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prominent role in the episode such as one would expect him to exercise given his importance in the context.

<sup>8</sup>Josephus lacks the specification of Josh 22:15 about the site of the encounter ("the land of Gilead"). Recall his earlier nonreproduction of the mention of Shiloh as the place where the Israelites assemble for war in 22:12.

<sup>9</sup>Josephus' inserted reference to the "convening of an assembly" might reflect the influence of such Hellenistic historians as Dionysius of Halicarnarsus, in whose *Antiquitates Romanae* popular assemblies are regularly convened in the face of problems requiring deliberation. On the point, see W. C. van Unnik, "Josephus' Account of the Story of Israel's Sin with Alien Women," in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Prof. M. A. Beek on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. M. S. H. G. van Voss et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 253.

<sup>10</sup>On Josephus' tendency to substitute indirect for biblical direct address, as well as his occasional mixing of the two forms in a single speech, see C. T. Begg, *Josephus' Account of the Early Divided Monarchy (AJF 8.212-420)*, BETL 108 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 12-13, n. 38; 123-124, n. 772.

reminiscence of the Baal-Peor episode(s) (see Numbers 25). These questions, in turn, lead into a statement about the potentially negative consequences of the Transjordanians' deed for all other Israelites ("and if you rebel against the Lord today, He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow"). The greatly amplified opening segment of Phineas' speech according to Josephus (5.105b-109a) exhibits only tenuous links with its biblical *Vorlage* but does pick up on various earlier features of the historian's retelling of our episode. Specifically, the Josephan Phineas commences with a statement that highlights the gravity of the situation: "Their sin was too grave to be met by verbal reprimand and an admonition for the future." He then goes on, without biblical basis, to explain why, nevertheless, the Israelites have dispatched an embassy to the offenders. They did this, Phineas avers, so as not to make themselves guilty of rash recourse to arms, and, more positively, in view of their existing "kinship" (τὸ συγγενές) and in hopes that even yet "words might suffice to bring them to reason (σωφρονῆσαι)."

Switching now (5.106) to direct discourse, Phineas informs his hearers that the delegation has come to ascertain the Transjordanians' "reason" for building their altar (compare 5.104, "To discover what they could have meant by erecting that altar"). Here, one might recognize a faint echo of the question posed in Josh 22:16, "What is this treachery you have committed . . . by building yourself an altar?" Josephus' priest speaker then explains that by making such a preliminary inquiry, the Israelites are "covering themselves" for all eventualities. Should, in fact, the Transjordanians have "some pious motive" in building their altar—a possibility nowhere envisaged by the biblical delegation—the Israelites will not be liable to the charge of "precipitate" action against them. Conversely, if the response received confirms their suspicions, they will be justified in undertaking "righteous vengeance," a threat without parallel in Joshua 22 where only divine, not human, retribution is threatened by the delegation (see v.18b). Phineas goes on to say (5.107, again without biblical basis) that the Israelites' inquiry is appropriate, given how inconceivable it was that, after their past exposure to God's demands and their recent settlement in their divinely allotted "heritage," the Transjordanians "could have straightaway forgotten Him, and abandoning the tabernacle and the ark and altar of our fathers, introduced some strange gods<sup>11</sup> and gone over to the vices of the Canaanites." Even if, however, his hearers are guilty of such apostasy, they will not, Phineas assures them, be held liable if only they will repent, cease their "madness"

<sup>11</sup>Ξενικοὺς θεοὺς ἐπιφέρειν; compare *Ant.* 5.101: The Israelites hear that the altar was built "with designs of . . . the introduction of strange gods."

and evidence their adherence to the ancestral laws. Otherwise, however, they face the same fate as the Canaanites (5.108b; see 106 *fine*). Phineas further reinforces this threat by reminding the Transjordanians that given God's ubiquity there is no escaping "His authority and His vengeance."

After this free variation on the delegation's words (Josh 22:16-18), Josephus (5.109b) "reconnects" with the source's v. 19. In that biblical text the Transjordanians are first admonished that if their land is "unclean," they should resettle "in the Lord's land." Josephus too represents Phineas as invoking the possibility of a move west by the Transjordanians. At the same time, however, he motivates this possibility differently, just as he adds a statement about what would then happen with their present territory. His version of 22:19a thus reads: "But if ye regard your coming hither [to Transjordan] as a hindrance to sober living [τοῦ σωφρονεῖν, see σωφρονῆσαι, 5.105], there is nothing to prevent us from making a redistribution of the land and abandoning this district to the grazing of sheep."

Apparently, the delegation does not intend its proposal in 22:19a all that seriously, since in v. 19b there is an immediate switch to a more general, concluding appeal, that the Transjordanians not "rebel" against the Lord nor implicate the entire people in their sin, as had happened with Achan's offense (v. 20; cf. Joshua 7). Josephus' version ends with Phineas warning his hearers, "Ye would do well to return to sanity [σωφρονήσαντες] and to change you ways while your sin is still fresh." The appeal is made, not with reference to the Achan episode (so 22:20), but with a final word of warning that plays up the danger for the Transjordanians and their loved ones should they disregard it (5.110b).

In 22:21 the two and a half tribes answer the delegation *en bloc*; Josephus differentiates: His respondents are "the presidents of the assembly [προεστῶτες τῆς ἐκκλησίας, see ἐκκλησία, 5.105] and the whole multitude." The biblical Transjordanians begin (v. 22a) by twice invoking "The Mighty One, God the Lord!" Thereafter, they call down upon themselves the retribution of both the Israelites (v. 22b) and God himself (v. 23) if they have done wrong with their altar building. Josephus replaces this opening with a series of negative assertions by the speakers: "They began to disclaim the crimes wherewith they were charged, saying that neither would they renounce their kinship [συγγενείας],<sup>12</sup> nor had the altar any revolutionary intent [νεωτερισμόν]."<sup>13</sup> He has them

<sup>12</sup>This term echoes Phineas' reference to the Israelites' "looking rather to their kinship" at the start of his speech in 5.105.

<sup>13</sup>This term harks back to the phrase used in Josephus' account of the false report the Israelites hear concerning the purpose of the Transjordanians' altar building, i.e., ἐπι νεωτερισμῷ (5.101).

continue with a double positive confession, whose content he draws from the opening and closing words of their response in 22:22-29: "They recognized but one God [see the acclamation of v. 22a] . . . and the brazen altar before the tabernacle whereon the sacrifices should be offered" (see the concluding phrase of v. 29, "the altar of the Lord . . . that stands before his tabernacle").

The core of the tribes' answer (22:24-28) is an extended explanation of what they did and did not intend with their altar building. Josephus' version (5.112b) omits the Transjordanians' initial statement (vv. 24-25; see also 27b) concerning their "fear" that some day their descendants would be denied a part in the Lord's worship by the Israelites on the grounds of the Jordan's constituting the God-given limit of the holy land. Such a statement, Josephus may have surmised, would not serve to ingratiate the speakers with their audience. Instead, he has them immediately affirm that their "suspect" altar was not erected "for worship" (22:26, "not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice"). Shifting thereafter from indirect to direct discourse (see 5.106), Josephus represents the Transjordanians as adducing a twofold, positive motivation for their initiative. First, the altar is meant "as a symbol and token for eternity of our kinship [οἰκειότητος] with you" (compare "a witness between us and you," 22:27αα, 28bβ). In addition, the altar bespeaks the Transjordanians' "obligation to think soberly [σωφρονεῖν]<sup>14</sup> and to abide by the laws of our fathers [τοῖς πατρίοις ἐμμένειν]"<sup>15</sup> (compare 22:27αβ, where the altar attests that "we do perform the service of the Lord"). Accordingly, the altar is not at all "a beginning of transgression as you [the Israelites] suspect" (compare 22:29a, "far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord").

The Transjordanians conclude (5.113a) their explanation of the altar's legitimate purpose with a solemn invocation of the Deity: "And that such was our motive in building this altar be God our all-sufficient witness [μάρτυς]." This avowal anticipates the wording of 22:34, where the Transjordanians<sup>16</sup> designate their altar as a "witness . . . that the Lord is God." Having thus appealed to God, Josephus' Transjordanians conclude their reply with an appeal to their fellows which has no parallel in the source as such. This runs:

<sup>14</sup>Cf. 5.109, where Phineas alludes to the possibility that residence in the Transjordan could be "a hindrance to sober living (τοῦ σωφρονεῖν)." The Transjordanians are here affirming that their altar is, in fact, envisaged as a help to such living.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. 5.108, where Phineas urges the Transjordanians to show that they "revere and are mindful of the laws of" their fathers. In 5.112 they respond that precisely by their building their controverted altar they have manifested their attachment to the ancestral code.

<sup>16</sup>Thus MT; in LXX it is Joshua who so designates the altar.

Wherefore, have a better opinion of us and cease to accuse us of any of those crimes, for which we would justly deserve to be extirpated who, being of the stock of Abraham (τοῦ Ἀβράμου γένους ὄντες),<sup>17</sup> embark on new-fangled [νεωτέροις, see νεωτερισμόν, 5.111] ways that are perversions of our customary practice.

### 3. *Dénouement* (Josh 22:30-34// Ant. 5.114).

Up to this point, Josephus has consistently expanded the source's altar story. His parallel to the story's conclusion, vv. 30-34, by contrast, is limited to a single, brief paragraph (5.114). Specifically, 22:30-31 first notes that the delegation was "well pleased" with the Transjordanians' response and then records a speech by Phineas in which he acknowledges their innocence which has "saved the whole people from the hand of the Lord." Josephus compacts this whole sequence into a transitional phrase: "Phineas, having commended them for this speech . . .". Next, 22:32 recounts the return of Phineas and the chiefs to the Israelites to whom they render a report. Josephus' parallel focuses attention on the two Israelite leaders: Phineas "returned to *Joshua* (see 5.103) and reported their answer to the people." This focus continues in the historian's version of 22:33. In the biblical verse "the people of Israel" are the ones who, "pleased" by the delegation's report, "bless the Lord" and renounce the idea of "making war" (22:12) on the Transjordanians. Josephus, on the contrary, speaks only of a reaction by Joshua. Israel's leader, "rejoicing that there was to be no need to levy troops or to lead them to bloodshed and battle against kinsmen [συγγενῶν, cf. the cognate forms in 5.103, 105],<sup>18</sup> offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to God for these mercies." On this note Josephus concludes our episode, leaving aside the reference in 22:34 to the naming of the altar, having already anticipated this in 5.113.

In concluding on Josephus' version of the altar story, I would call attention to a number of overarching emphases and concerns which may have influenced him to incorporate the story and to elaborate upon it.<sup>19</sup> For one thing, Josephus' version insistently highlights a contrast that permeates his writings, i.e., between reprehensible "innovation" (characteristically designated by terms of the νεω- stem, see 5.101, 111, 113) and laudable adherence to "ancestral" (5.101, 107, 108, 112) ways in

<sup>17</sup>With this self-designation the Transjordanians echo the statement made by Joshua in his farewell speech in *Ant.* 5.97: "We are all of Abraham's stock (Ἀβράμου . . . ἔσμεν)."

<sup>18</sup>This notice might be seen as a concretization of the reference in 22:33 to the Israelites' "blessing God."

<sup>19</sup>Several of these factors are touched on by L. H. Feldman, "Josephus's Portrait of Joshua," *HTR* 82 (1989): 351-376.

religious matters.<sup>20</sup> Already the biblical story offers Jewish readers an ideal of unity and fraternity: Both branches of the people share a common respect for God's demands and a solicitude for the maintenance of their ties. The Josephan reworking, with its many references to "kinship" (5.102, 105, 112, 114) and to Joshua's "rejoicing" at not having to take military action against the Transjordanians (5.114), accentuates, as do many other contexts of *Ant.*, this ideal. It does so undoubtedly in reaction to the horrendous civil strife Josephus had personally experienced during the Jewish War.<sup>21</sup>

The preceding emphases in Josephus' altar story seem intended primarily for his Jewish readership. There is, however, a further distinctive feature which he likely introduced with the interests and literary culture of his Gentile audience in mind. Josephus goes beyond the Bible in highlighting the role of the individual leader (Phineas, Joshua) in the happy resolution of the altar affair. More specifically, he represents Joshua as taking the lead in pacifying the Israelites' war fever (5.103), just as he depicts Phineas as sole speaker, successfully calling on the Transjordanians to "be reasonable" (5.105, cf. 5.109). Such a presentation—also operative in Josephus' account of Moses' dealings with the people—would promote Gentile readers' identification with and appreciation of the heroes of Jewish history given its echoes of Thucydides' and Virgil's portrayals of leaders calming popular passions.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, Josephus seems to have recognized the biblical altar story's potential for inculcating points he wished to make to both his "publics" and set about reworking the story so as to make those points stand out even more clearly.

#### *Pseudo-Philo*

Pseudo-Philo's altar story (*LAB* 22.1-7)<sup>23</sup> gives it a new context vis-à-vis both the Bible and Josephus. Specifically, he places the story immediately after his parallel, in 21.7-10, to Josh 8:30-35 (cf. Deut 27:1-7), which relates various cultic-legal initiatives undertaken by Joshua at Gilgal and Mount Ebal. *LAB* 22.1-7 (// Josh 22:10-34) itself is followed directly, not by Joshua's<sup>24</sup> first farewell discourse as in the Bible (Josh 23) and

<sup>20</sup>On the point, see A. Schlatter, *Die Theologie des Judentums nach dem Bericht des Josefus*, Beiträge zur Forderung Christlicher Theologie 26 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932), 51-52.

<sup>21</sup>On this feature, see Feldman, "Joshua," 372-373.

<sup>22</sup>See Feldman, "Joshua," 356, 361-362.

<sup>23</sup>On this passage, see C. Perrot, *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités Bibliques*, Sources Chrétiennes 230 (Paris: Cerf, 1976), 141-143; Murphy, 104-107.

<sup>24</sup>In *LAB* 21.7 Joshua builds his altar at "Gilgal," a site not mentioned in either Josh 8:30-35, where the altar is constructed rather on Mt. Ebal, or Deut 27. In 21.7 Joshua erects "large

Josephus, but by a series of notices on the legitimate cult places Shiloh and Gilgal in 22.8,<sup>25</sup> which lack any biblical parallel as such. Only thereafter does Pseudo-Philo present his version of Joshua 23; see *LAB* 23. The implications of this new context for the interpretation of Pseudo-Philo's altar story will be considered below.

Pseudo-Philo commences (22.1) his version of the story with a parallel to Josh 22:11, the Israelites' "hearing" of the Transjordanians' initiative.<sup>26</sup> Already here, Pseudo-Philo diverges from the source. Among the "hearers" Joshua (absent in MT 22:10-34) is singled out by name. The report that reaches the Israelites is also different: The Transjordanians have not merely built an altar; they are also offering sacrifices upon it and have instituted a priesthood.<sup>27</sup>

In Josh 22 the Israelites react to what they hear by assembling at Shiloh (v. 12), whence they dispatch to "the land of Gilead" a delegation led by Phineas (v. 15). Here again, Pseudo-Philo drastically reworks things, eliminating any mention of a delegation or role for Phineas.<sup>28</sup> In its place he mentions the consternation of the Israelites at what they hear, as well as the coming of the Transjordanians themselves to Shiloh, where the ones to address them are "Joshua and the elders."

*LAB* 22.2 is Pseudo-Philo's loose parallel to the delegation's address in Josh 22:16-20. It comprises: an opening accusatory question (cf. 22:16); invocation of an earlier admonition by Moses to the Transjordanians (apparently inspired by Num 32:6, 14-15)<sup>29</sup> about not "growing corrupt in their deeds"; and reference to the consequences of their disregard of that

stones" on Mt. Ebal as directed in Deut 27:4 (in Josh 8:30-32 the "stones" in question would seem to be those of the altar itself rather than a distinct construction).

<sup>25</sup>The renewed mention of the altar at Gilgal in 22.8 appears problematic in the context of the verse which otherwise focuses on Shiloh. Some authors propose eliminating the reference by emending to "Shiloh." See Perrot, 143-144.

<sup>26</sup>Pseudo-Philo thus has no parallel either to 22:1-9 (Joshua's dismissal of the two and a half tribes) or to 22:10 (statement about their erecting an altar).

<sup>27</sup>Conceivably, Pseudo-Philo's "inspiration" for this elaboration of the Transjordanians' offense is 1 Kgs 12:31-33, which mentions Jeroboam's institution of a reprobate priesthood and offering of sacrifices upon the altar earlier erected by him in Bethel. Very frequently in *LAB* a biblical event is retold in terms reminiscent of a happening elsewhere in Scripture; see Murphy, 23.

<sup>28</sup>The nonmention of Phineas anywhere in *LAB*'s version of Joshua 22 is rather surprising, given the priest's subsequent prominence; on Pseudo-Philo's Phineas, see Murphy, 243.

<sup>29</sup>The concluding words of the Mosaic admonition, as cited by Joshua in 22.2, "(beware that you) destroy all this people," likewise echoes Josh 22:18b, "If you rebel against the Lord today, he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow."

admonition, i.e., the Israelites' "enemies" threatening to destroy them. In this reformulation of the speech of 22:16-20 all explicit mention of the offending altar disappears. Also passed over are the "invitation" of v. 19a (the Transjordanians might abandon their possibly "unclean" land and move west), as well as the biblical allusions to Peor (v. 17), and Achan's sin (v. 20).

Like Josh 22:21-29, Pseudo-Philo gives the Transjordanians an extended speech of self-defense in 22.3-4, albeit quite different in content. His version starts with a rather obscure elaboration of the speakers' affirmation about the Lord's "knowing" (22.3a). This elaboration, which speaks of God's communicating his own "light" to humans, incorporates language drawn from the hymn of Dan 2:22 ("he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him"). It likewise makes use of the terminology of "enlightenment," characteristic for *LAB* as a whole.<sup>30</sup> In Josh 22:22b-23 the Transjordanians invoke both human and divine punishment upon themselves if, in fact, they have built their altar for sacrificial purposes. Pseudo-Philo, who has already had the Israelites learn of their fellows' sacrificing upon the altar (22.1), now portrays the Reubenites as simply asserting that God "knows" their deed was not done "out of wickedness."

Josh 22:24-28, as noted above, is the core of the Transjordanians' speech of self-defense. Here, they explain that their altar-building reflected a concern lest their children be excluded from participation in worship at the one legitimate sanctuary. Also Pseudo-Philo's Transjordanians attribute their initiative to concern about the religious welfare of their posterity. The threat to that welfare, as Pseudo-Philo formulates it (22.3b), would, however, emanate, not from later, exclusionarily minded (Cisjordanian) Israelite generations, but from the Transjordanians' descendants themselves. In particular, their fear is that their children would feel themselves so "far from the Lord," given their lack of an altar like that available to their counterparts across the Jordan, as to be unable to "serve" him. To counteract the emergence of such sentiments among their posterity, the Transjordanians have, they assert, constructed their altar to promote their own "zeal for seeking the Lord."

The biblical Transjordanians' speech ends in Josh 22:29 with their reaffirming the nonsacrificial character of their altar, which thus is no rival to the one before the tabernacle. By contrast, in Pseudo-Philo, the speakers, having explained their motivation in establishing an actual altar of sacrifice, conclude by placing themselves in the Israelites' hands. They

<sup>30</sup>See M. Philoneko, "Essénisme et Gnose chez le Pseudo-Philon: Le symbolisme de la lumière dans le *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*," in *The Origins of Gnosticism*, ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 401-408.

do this confiding in their hearers' "knowledge" of two realities, i.e., "that we are your brothers and that we stand guiltless before you." Thus in Pseudo-Philo the Transjordanians admit to the "crime" of which they are (falsely) suspected in the Bible, even while maintaining their "guiltlessness."

Josh 22:31 records Phineas' brief speech approving the response of the Transjordanians. Pseudo-Philo, in 22.5-6, greatly amplifies the answer made to the altar-builders, attributing it rather to Joshua. Unlike the biblical Phineas, Joshua finds nothing to commend in the Transjordanians' words. He begins his response (22.5) with a pointed rhetorical question: "Is not the Lord . . . more powerful than a thousand sacrifices?" He then asks why they have not taught their sons "the words of the Lord" that they themselves had learned "from us." Their failure to do so has had seriously negative consequences: lacking the Law to meditate upon, those sons of theirs were "led astray after an altar made by hand (*sacrarium manufactum*)," <sup>31</sup> just as Moses' people went astray into idolatry when left to themselves during his stay on the mountain.<sup>32</sup> It is only because of God's mercy that the Transjordanians' "foolishness" (*insipientia*) had not led to the people's "assemblies" (*synagogē*) being "derided" and their sins made public.

In *LAB* 22.6 Joshua passes from accusation to injunction: The Transjordanians are forthwith to "dig up" their "altars" (*sacraria*, note the pl.) and teach their sons the law and constant "meditation" thereon,<sup>33</sup> so that God may be their lifelong "witness [*testimonium*]"<sup>34</sup> and judge." Thereafter, having invoked the Lord as "witness and judge" also between himself and them, Joshua concludes by setting out the alternative fates awaiting the altar-builders, depending on their true motivation. This reads: "If you have done this act out of cunning because you wished to destroy your brothers,<sup>35</sup> I will be avenged upon you; but if you have done it out of ignorance, as you say, because of your sons, God will be merciful

<sup>31</sup>On this phrase in relation to similar formulations in turn-of-the-era Judaism, see Perrot, 142.

<sup>32</sup>The reference here, of course, is to the Golden Calf episode of Exodus 32, which Pseudo-Philo retells in *LAB* 12, while Josephus passes it over completely.

<sup>33</sup>Pseudo-Philo's wording here ("have them meditate upon it day and night") echoes the Lord's directive that Joshua "meditate on the book of the law day and night" in Josh 1:8.

<sup>34</sup>Pseudo-Philo "reapplies" the "witness language" used of the altar in Joshua 22 (see vv. 27, 28, 34) to the Deity himself.

<sup>35</sup>This phrase echoes the Transjordanians' appeal to their status as the Israelites' "brothers" in 22.4.

to you."<sup>36</sup> Pseudo-Philo rounds off the "exchange segment" of the episode with a notice on the popular response to Joshua's discourse: "All the people answered, 'Amen, amen.'"<sup>37</sup>

The sequels to the "exchange," as narrated by Pseudo-Philo in 22.7, completely diverge from the concluding segment of the source story in Josh 22:32-34. That they do so is only to be expected, given that the source passage's reference to the return, the report of the delegation, and the naming of the altar, which is permitted to remain, do not accord with Pseudo-Philo's own previous presentation, in which no delegation is mentioned and Joshua demands the altar's "destruction." In place of the biblical data, Pseudo-Philo first has Joshua and the Israelites offer sacrifices for the pardon of the Transjordanians, pray for them, and finally dismiss them "in peace." The Transjordanians, in turn, "destroy" their altar, as directed by Joshua, and then join their sons in "fasting and lamenting." Their lament opens with an appeal to God's "knowing" (*tu scis*) that their "ways" were not inspired by "wickedness" (*in iniquitate*).<sup>38</sup> It then proceeds to a final reaffirmation of innocence on their part: "We have not strayed from your ways, but all of us serve you for we are the work of your hands." Earlier the Transjordanians had claimed to "stand guiltless" before the Israelites" (22.3); here, Joshua's intervening censure notwithstanding, they continue to make that claim, now with God himself as the addressee. Such confidence in their own rectitude does not, however, deter them from ending up their lament with the plea: "Now have mercy [*miserere*]<sup>39</sup> on your covenant with the sons of your servants."

As is obvious from the foregoing comparison, Pseudo-Philo's "altar story" diverges markedly from the biblical one in numerous respects (context, role of Joshua, absence of Phineas, site of the exchange, purpose of the altar, and its ultimate fate). What is not so obvious is the situation being addressed by *LAB*'s "revised edition" and its intended message(s) for

<sup>36</sup>With this formulation Joshua leaves the determination of the Transjordanians' guilt or innocence (and corresponding fate) in God's hands. Thereby, he exemplifies that readiness to subordinate one's thoughts and actions to God which is a key ideal of Pseudo-Philo. See Murphy, 237.

<sup>37</sup>Is there a reminiscence here of the recurrent formula of Deut 27:15-26, "All the people shall [answer and] say 'Amen'"? In 21.7-10, the passage immediately preceding his altar story of 22.1-7, Pseudo-Philo seems to draw, not only on Josh 8:30-35, but also on Deut 27:1-8. In any case, the same double acclamation by the whole people recurs in *LAB* 26.5 in response to the curse Kenaz pronounces over the sinners he is about to put to death.

<sup>38</sup>The Transjordanians' affirmation harks back to their statement in 22.3: "The Lord our God knows (*scit*) that none of us . . . have done this act out of wickedness (*in verbo iniquitatis*)."

<sup>39</sup>Note the echo of Joshua's closing statement in 22.6: "If the Transjordanians have indeed acted in good faith, God will be merciful (*misericos*) to you."

that situation. I confine myself to a few observations on the matter.

1. When read in context, *LAB* 22.1-7 presents an illegitimate altar/cult which stands in contrast to the legitimate ones cited in what precedes and follows (Gilgal, Shiloh, Jerusalem). As such, the altar episode in Pseudo-Philo's version exemplifies a failure, by some of his hearers, to heed Joshua's immediately preceding exhortation in 21.10 ("The Lord grant . . . that you do not depart from his name. May the covenant of the Lord remain with you and not be broken, but may there be built among you a dwelling place for God"). In light of that failure, the rightfulness of the divinely authorized cultic initiatives taken at Gilgal, Shiloh, and Jerusalem, as related in the context of 22.1-7, stands out all the more.<sup>40</sup>

2. A second point is closely related to the first. The Transjordanians act out of genuine religious concern; they do what they deem necessary to ensure that their descendants will continue to worship the Lord. In so doing, however, they disregard the Lord's law regulating the establishment of cultic sites; see Deut 12. Their disregard for the law is sharply censured by Joshua, who (22.5) affirms that the Lord is "more powerful than a thousand sacrifices" (i.e., is quite capable of seeing to the continuation of his worship in the future and has no need of presumptuous human initiatives designed to guarantee this). Pseudo-Philo's Joshua likewise holds out to the Transjordanians a positive alternative to their well-intentioned but illicit endeavor taken on their children's behalf: They should inculcate a constant attention to the divine law in their children.<sup>41</sup>

3. In the course of the opening speech he ascribes to Joshua in 22:2, Pseudo-Philo has him refer to "our enemies abounding" due to the Transjordanians' self-corruption and predict that "those gathered against us will crush us." This prediction is never explicitly revoked even when the Transjordanians eliminate their offending altar. In this connection one might note also Joshua's statement in 22.5 that, were it not for God's mercy, the Transjordanians' "foolishness" would have led to *all* the people's assemblies ("synagogues") being "derided" and *all* their sins "made public." Here, the formulation suggests that the people, thanks to the Transjordanians' offense, have already suffered a certain derision by the disclosure of their wrongdoing to some unspecified party. One is left wondering who Pseudo-Philo has in mind when introducing such "enemy references" into Joshua's words.

<sup>40</sup>Perrot raises the possibility that *LAB* 22.1-7 may be intended as an implicit polemic against postexilic sanctuaries other than Jerusalem (141).

<sup>41</sup>Human presumptuousness in religious matters, sincere but nevertheless culpably misguided, is a recurrent theme throughout *LAB*; see Murphy, 231, 248-252.

4. Joshua reckons with the possibility that God may "be merciful" to the offenders (22.6; cf. 22.5). Subsequently (22.7) Pseudo-Philo devotes a long and biblically unparalleled paragraph to describing the appeals made for such mercy both by the other Israelites and by the Transjordanians themselves. What is noteworthy, however, is that the outcome of these appeals is not reported; we are not told that God did in fact forgive or have mercy on the law-breakers. The matter is simply left open.

What might these distinctive features of Pseudo-Philo's altar story—the last two in particular—indicate about the situation he is addressing and his word for that situation? I suggest that those features can readily be correlated with a widely proposed setting for *LAB*, i.e., the decades immediately after the catastrophe of A.D. 70,<sup>42</sup> when the Roman enemy had "crushed" (22.2) the Jewish rebels, leaving the "synagogues" open to "derision" by the pagan environment. To the survivors of the catastrophe Pseudo-Philo's altar story suggests an explanation of why things had ended as they did, in punishment for their disregard of the Law, however well-intentioned this may have been. On the other hand, the story as retold by Pseudo-Philo has something positive to offer the survivors. They and their children have lost the possibility of sacrifice; an effort to revive the practice on their own initiative elsewhere than in Jerusalem would be radically misguided. Of even greater worth than sacrifice is, however, "meditation" on God's law. This "higher way" is still open to the survivors, and through the voice of Joshua, Pseudo-Philo calls them to teach it to their children. In addition, while Pseudo-Philo's story makes no definite promises of restoration, it does hold out the possibility of eventual divine mercy and pardon for the Jewish War's survivors and invites them to appeal for such, as their ancestors had done. In sum, I suggest that the concern to respond to the contemporary situation of his people had a major impact on Pseudo-Philo's reshaping of the biblical altar story.

### *Conclusions*

I conclude with some summary, comparative remarks on Josephus' and Pseudo-Philo's approximately contemporary retellings of the altar story of Joshua 22. First of all, the two postbiblical historians' versions do evidence some "minor agreements" against the source: their highlighting the role of Joshua, who is associated with "elders" (5.103; 22.2) and offers sacrifices at the end of the episode (5.114; 22.7). The two versions likewise have in common their explicit use of kinship/brotherhood language (see

<sup>42</sup>On the dating of *LAB*, see Murphy, 6; he himself opts for a pre-70 date.

5.102, 111, 112, 114; 22.3, 4)<sup>43</sup> and the pejorative terminology they employ in reference to the Transjordanian altar, i.e., "madness" (5.108) and "foolishness" (22.5).

On the other hand, Josephus and Pseudo-Philo go their own ways in relating the altar story. Josephus retains the biblical context of the episode and reproduces the source's basic story line. In so doing, he introduces clarifications and highlights various features already present. Pseudo-Philo, on the contrary, adopts a much freer approach to his source, not hesitating to set it within a new context or to openly "contradict" it. How are these differences to be explained? Josephus' relatively "faithful" retelling of the biblical episode is in line with the pledge made at the beginning of *Ant.*: "The precise details of our Scripture records will . . . be set forth, each in place, as my narrative proceeds, that being the procedure that I have promised to follow throughout this work, neither adding nor omitting anything" (1.17). Pseudo-Philo (whose work begins *in medias res* with the genealogy of Adam) makes no such pledge and obviously feels himself at liberty to alter, not simply the wording, but also the content of the scriptural record. In addition, the difference in primary intended audience of the two works has to be considered. As the Proemium of *Antiquities* makes clear, Josephus is writing primarily for Gentiles. Recognizing the biblical altar story's potential to interest cultivated Gentile readers, he takes over the substance of the narrative, even while accentuating its depiction of Phineas as the persuasive orator and crowd-calmer in the manner of the great leaders of Greco-Roman history. Pseudo-Philo, it would appear, was writing mainly (if not exclusively) for Jewish readers, possibly those who had recently experienced (or were imminently facing) an all-encompassing political and religious trauma. In attempting to provide some orientation to such readers, Pseudo-Philo ventures to drastically recast the source story along the lines indicated above.

The foregoing proposals are based on a comparison of a single narrative in Josephus and Pseudo-Philo. Accordingly, they would require, of course, to be refined by similar comparisons of other parallel passages in the writings of the two authors.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>The accentuation of the theme of the people's unity, endangered but ultimately maintained, in both Josephus' and Pseudo-Philo's altar stories corresponds to the concern for intra-Jewish harmony evident throughout *Ant.* and *LAB* (on this, see Murphy, 259-260). That concern may reflect a shared background for the two works, i.e., the Jewish divisions during the war against Romans and their disastrous consequences.

<sup>44</sup>For a survey of the numerous agreements and disagreements on points of detail between Josephus and Pseudo-Philo, see L. H. Feldman, "Prologomenon," in *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, ed. M. R. James (reprinted New York: KTAV, 1971), lviii-lxvi.