

From the Rabbi's Desk
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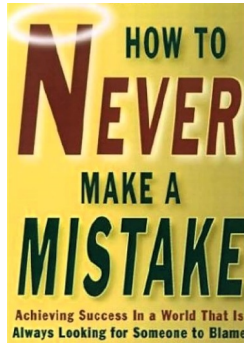
Stories with a Twist [59]

"Four Died as a Result of the Serpent's Counsel"

Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a-55b

With appreciation to Rabbi Fabian Werbin who brought the story to my attention

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Background to Our Story

Benjamin



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

Benjamin (*Binyamin*) in the Book of Genesis, is a son of Jacob, the second (and last) son of Rachel, and the founder of the Israelite Tribe of Benjamin, in the Biblical account, unlike Rachel's first son – Joseph, the father of Ephraim and Manasseh – Benjamin was born after Jacob and Rachel arrived in Canaan.

Amram



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

In the Book of Exodus, Amram (*Friend of the most high/The people are exalted*), is the father of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam and the husband of Jochebed

Yishai



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

Jesse or Yishay or Isai (meaning "God Exists" or "God's gift"; Latin: *Isai, Jesse*) is the father of the Biblical David, who became the king of the nation of Israel. His son David is sometimes called simply "Son of Jesse" (*ben yishay*).

Jesse was the son of Obed and the grandson of Ruth. He was a Bethlehemite.

Jesse lived in Bethlehem, in Judah, and was a farmer and breeder of sheep.

Jesse is important in Judaism because he was the father of one of the most famous kings of Israel.

Kileab (II Samuel 3:3)

2. And to David were sons born in Hebron; and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess;

3. And his second, Kileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maachah the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur;

4. And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;

5. And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.

Jacob



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

Jacob (*Yaaqov*), also known as Israel "struggler with God"; was the third Biblical patriarch and ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel, named after ten of his twelve sons, as well as the two sons of his son Joseph.

The Bible says he was the son of Isaac and Rebecca, the grandson of Abraham and Sarah and of Bethuel, and the twin brother of Esau. He had twelve sons and one daughter by his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. The children were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, daughter Dinah, Joseph, and Benjamin.^[2] Before the birth of Benjamin, Jacob is renamed "Israel" by an angel, the name after which the modern nation of Israel is named.

As a result of a severe famine in Canaan, Jacob resettled his whole family in Egypt, in the Land of Goshen, at the time when his son Joseph was viceroy. Jacob died there 17 years later, and Joseph carried Jacob's remains to the land of Canaan, where he gave them stately burial in the same Cave of Machpelah as were buried Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca and Jacob's wife Leah (Genesis 49:29-50:14).

Moshe



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

Moses was, according to biblical texts, a religious leader, lawgiver, and prophet, to whom the authorship of the Torah is traditionally attributed. Also called *Moshe Rabbeinu* in Hebrew ("Moses our Teacher"), he is the most important prophet in Judaism, and also considered an important prophet by Christianity, Islam, the Bahá'í Faith, Rastafari, and many other faiths.

David



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

David ("beloved") was the second king of the united Kingdom of Israel according to the Bible. He is depicted as a righteous king, although not without fault, as well as an acclaimed warrior, musician and poet (he is traditionally credited with the authorship of many of the Psalms).

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a-55b

אמר רב אמאי: אין מיתה בלא חטא ואין יסורין בלא עון.

אין מיתה בלא חטא – דכתיב: "הנפש החוטאת היא תמות בן לא ישא בעון האב ואב לא ישא בעון הבן, צדקת הצדיק עליו תהיה ורשעת הרשע עליו תהיה וגו'". אין יסורין בלא עון דכתיב: "פקדתי בשבט פשעם ובנגעים עונם".

מיתיבי; אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם, מפני מה קנסת מיתה על אדם הראשון? אמר להם: מצוה קלה צויתיו ועבר עליה. אמר ליה: והלא משה ואהרן שקימו כל התורה קלה ומתו! אמר ליה: "מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע לטוב וגו'!" הוא דאמר – כי האי תנא, דתנא, רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר: אף משה ואהרן בקטאם מתו, שנאמר: "יען לא האמנתם בי" – הא האמנתם בי – עדין לא הגיע זמנכם ליפטר מן העולם.

מיתיבי: ארבעה מתו בעטיו של נחש, ואלו הן: בנמיין בן יעקב, ועמרם אבי משה, וישי אבי דוד, וכלאב בן דוד.

Rav Ami said: There is no death without sin; were a person not to sin, he would not die. And there is no suffering without iniquity.

There is no death without sin, it is written: "*The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him*" (Ezekiel 18:20). And there is no suffering without iniquity, as it is written: "*Then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with strokes*" (Psalms 89:33).

The Gemara raises an objection from the following baraita: The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, why did You penalize Adam, the first man, with death? He said to them: I gave him a simple mitzva, and he violated it. They said to Him: Didn't Moses and Aaron, who observed the whole Torah in its entirety, nevertheless die?

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them, citing the verse: "*All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the*

clean, and to the unclean; to him who sacrifices, and to him who does not sacrifice; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he who swears, as he who fears an oath” (Ecclesiastes 9:2). Apparently, death is not dependent upon one’s actions. Everyone dies.

The Gemara answers: Rav Ami stated his position in accordance with this tanna, as it was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Even Moses and Aaron died due to their sin, as it is stated: *“And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation in to the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12).* Had you believed in Me and spoken to the rock as commanded, your time would not yet have come to leave the world. Apparently, even Moses and Aaron died due to their sins.

The Gemara raises an objection from what was taught in the following baraita: Four people died due to Adam’s sin with the serpent’s counsel, in the wake of which death was decreed upon all of mankind, although they themselves were free of sin. And they are: Benjamin, son of Jacob; Amram, father of Moses; Yishai, father of David; and Kilab, son of David.



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What is the meaning, in the context of our sugiya (thematic section), of “Four died as a result of the serpent’s counsel”?

? What is common to all “the four?”

? What is common to the “three ones” related to “the four”?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Draw your own conclusions, but please share them with us!