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## **The Heavenly Lamb, Sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar, and the Song of the Lamb**

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# The Heavenly Lamb, Sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar, and the Song of the Lamb

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Meir Bar-Ilan

**Abstract:** *The symbolic image of the Lamb of God is well-known in the New Testament and The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. This image derives from the Old Testament, later adopted by early Christians. Words of Gad the Seer is an apocalyptic pseudepigraphal book written in pseudo-biblical Hebrew from a manuscript copied in the eighteenth century. After over thirty-three years of investigation, many aspects of this recently discovered text are coming to light. There are more than twenty similarities between this largely unknown book and the book of Revelation, though one was written by a Jewish man who became Christian and the other by a (non-rabbinic) Jew. This old yet newly discovered book will be presented briefly, and the concept of the Heavenly Altar and the song of the Lamb will be discussed. Some esoteric traditions' pseudepigraphic, rabbinic, and Hekhalot literature will be presented concerning what is sacrificed on the Heavenly Altar or goes up to God, giving the heavenly world a new look. The relationship of the Song of the Lamb to Revelation 15:3 and Jewish liturgy is also explored.*

**T**his paper discusses the role of the Heavenly Lamb as presented in *Words of Gad the Seer*, a long unknown Jewish Apocalypse,<sup>1</sup>

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1. The English translation of *Words of Gad the Seer* is found in Meir Bar-Ilan, ed. and trans., *Words of Gad the Seer* (self-published, 2016). The critical edition exploring many details of the text and its relationship to other documents is found in the 390-page Hebrew publication, Meir Bar-Ilan, דברי גד החוזה, 18 במאה ה-18 [The Words of Gad the Seer: From the Cambridge Manuscript 00.1.20 Copied in Cochon in the 18th century] (Rehovot, Israel: Shorashim, 2015). Several reviews of this book have

which may be compared or contrasted to the Heavenly Lamb in the book of Revelation on the one hand, and Rabbinic and Hekhalot literature parallels on the other. It will be shown that while the role of the Lamb seems to be passive in the book of Revelation, in *Words of Gad the Seer*, the Lamb is active because he sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar and praises the Lord in a song. Parallel traditions originating in Jewish tradition are presented, and the souls of the pious under the throne are discussed, as is the significance of the song of the Lamb and its implications for the dating of *Words of Gad the Seer* relative to the book of Revelation.

## Part 1: Sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar

Generations of husbandry relationships between man and his animal stock made sheep a natural symbol for man, as is evident in the Bible more than once or twice: Israel are sheep while God is the shepherd (e.g., Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 50:17; Psalm 23:1; 44:23).<sup>2</sup> This idea appears also in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Joseph 19; Benjamin 3),<sup>3</sup> though it looks like a Christian

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appeared: 1) Ephraim Nissan, "A Few Considerations on the Critical Edition of *The Words of Gad the Seer*" review of "*Words of Gad the Seer*, ed. Meir Bar-Ilan, [academia.edu/28793977/A\\_Few\\_Considerations\\_on\\_the\\_Critical\\_Edition\\_of\\_The\\_Words\\_of\\_Gad\\_the\\_Seer](https://academia.edu/28793977/A_Few_Considerations_on_the_Critical_Edition_of_The_Words_of_Gad_the_Seer), a shorter version also appears in *Fabula* 57, nos. 3–4 (2016): 295–302, [doi.org/10.1515/fabula-2016-0042](https://doi.org/10.1515/fabula-2016-0042); 2) Jose Faur, "Review of: Meir Bar-Ilan, ed., *Words of Gad the Seer*," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 19, no. 2 (2016): 301; 3) Simcha Rosenberg, "Book Review: *The Words of Gad the Seer*," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2017): 59–60, [jbqnew.jewishbible.org/uncategorized/book-review-words-gad-seer/](https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/uncategorized/book-review-words-gad-seer/); 4) Jeff Lindsay, "The Words of Gad the Seer: An Apparently Ancient Text with Intriguing Origins and Content," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 54 (2022): 147–76, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-words-of-gad-the-seer-an-apparently-ancient-text-with-intriguing-origins-and-content/](https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-words-of-gad-the-seer-an-apparently-ancient-text-with-intriguing-origins-and-content/).

2. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical citations are from *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text, Tanakh 1917 edition* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1917), [biblehub.com/jps/](https://biblehub.com/jps/).
3. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 824, 826, [archive.org/details/the-old-testament-pseudepigrapha-vol-1-charlesworth-1983/page/823/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/the-old-testament-pseudepigrapha-vol-1-charlesworth-1983/page/823/mode/2up). See also R. H. Charles, "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 354, 356, [archive.org/details/Charles\\_The-Apocrypha-of-the-Old-Testament-vol-2\\_1913/page/354/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/Charles_The-Apocrypha-of-the-Old-Testament-vol-2_1913/page/354/mode/2up).

intrusion into the text.<sup>4</sup> This metaphor of sheep or flock as symbolizing the people of Israel was in constant use in Jewish liturgy until this very day, whether by quoting biblical psalms or by several *Paytanim* (composers of liturgical songs), as is evident many times in the Jewish prayer book.<sup>5</sup> However, from a theological point of view, no philosopher took the burden of composing a tractate, or even a small discussion, on this symbol.

Unlike Jewish sources, Christian theologians from the very beginning employed the motif of sheep and lambs in particular. Instead of, or in addition to, sheep in plural, there appeared one single lamb, "the Lamb of God," referring to Jesus (John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 17:14, 19:9; 21:22–27; 22:3). This shift from plural to singular was probably intended to express the sacrificial aspect of the Lamb, since this metaphor can express the abstract idea of sacrifice and devotion until death.<sup>6</sup>

The book of Revelation was written towards the end of the first century, and endless books and papers are written about it. The author, John, was a seer who grew up as a Jew familiar with Jewish traditions and writings, mainly in Aramaic.<sup>7</sup> Later in his life he converted

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4. J. C. O'Neill, "The Lamb of God in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (1979): 2–30.

5. The concept that Israel is symbolized by sheep appears in a very figurative way in a unique Piyyut (from Byzantine times), set in the High Holidays, in which there is a description of Israel as a flock that goes one by one under the rod of the Shepherd. See Daniel Goldschmidt, ed., *Machzor Leyamim Noraim: Rosh Hashanah* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Koren, 1970), 169–72.

6. Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 173–75.

7. Martin MacNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), [archive.org/details/martinmcnamarathenewtestamentandthepalestiniantargumtothepentateuch/page/n1/mode/2up](http://archive.org/details/martinmcnamarathenewtestamentandthepalestiniantargumtothepentateuch/page/n1/mode/2up). See also Johannes C. de Moor and Eveline van Staaldoune-Sulman, "The Aramaic Song of the Lamb," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 24, no. 2 (December 1993): 266–79, [jstor.org/stable/24659938](http://jstor.org/stable/24659938); Johannes C. de Moor and Wilfred G. E. Watson, eds., *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, DE: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1993): 265–92; Rimon Kasher, *Targumic Toseftot to the Prophets* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1996): 109–11, 254; C. T. R. Hayward, "The Aramaic Song of the Lamb (The Dialogue between David and Goliath): A new translation and introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. R. Bauckham, J. R. Davila, and A. Panayotov, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 272–73.

to Christianity (presumably after the destruction of the temple). In the visions of John the Seer, the lamb became a kind of protagonist in a heavenly scene, waiting for his marriage with Jerusalem. This probably symbolized union with God, the foremost goal of any mystic. Any believer in Jesus is expected to achieve such a state.

In the book of Revelation 5:9, it is explicitly stated that the lamb is already slaughtered. Before we continue to discuss the Heavenly Lamb, it should be stressed that the sacrificial aspect of the lamb is already known from biblical writings that refer to a slaughtered sheep as a symbol of the Jewish people (Psalm 44:23): "Nay, but for Thy sake are we killed all the day; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter," similar to another verse (Zechariah 11:4): "the flock of slaughter." Hence, the entire Jewish people was considered to be a slaughtered (if not sacrificed) sheep. Hence, several ideas, old and new, are intermingled together; real became symbolic, the mundane became heavenly, and a whole people was projected in one slaughter, the slaughter of Christ. Thus, the Lamb of God originated as a symbol in the first century, if not earlier.

However, this Heavenly Lamb was not alone; he was part of a scene in which many earthly artifacts, which played a major role in the Jewish tradition, became heavenly, such as Heavenly Jerusalem, the Heavenly Temple, the Heavenly Altar, and others.<sup>8</sup> In a way, this heavenly scene involved multiple Platonic ideals interacting with each other.

Having considered the evolution of the Heavenly Lamb in the book of Revelation, we now turn to, until recently, an unknown book and the role of the heavenly beings in Jewish traditions and compare them to other rabbinic concepts.

### ***Words of Gad the Seer***

*Words of Gad the Seer* is a unique book in many ways. It is an apocalyptic book written in pseudo-biblical Hebrew and was copied in

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8. This idea appears in b. Hagigah 12b; b. Menahoth 110a; p. Berakhot 4:5, 8c; A. Aptowizer, "The Heavenly Temple in the Aggadah" [in Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 2, no. 2 (1931): 137–53, 250, [academia.edu/42266982/Avigdor\\_Victor\\_Aptowitzer\\_The\\_Heavenly\\_Temple\\_in\\_the\\_Agada\\_Tarbiz\\_vol\\_2\\_no\\_2\\_January\\_1931\\_137\\_153\\_250\\_Hebrew\\_](https://academia.edu/42266982/Avigdor_Victor_Aptowitzer_The_Heavenly_Temple_in_the_Agada_Tarbiz_vol_2_no_2_January_1931_137_153_250_Hebrew_); A. Grossman, "The Role of Jerusalem in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," ed. J. Prawer, in *Jerusalem Book: The Early Islamic Period 638–1099* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak Ben-Zvi, 1987), 236–48; J. A. du Rand, "The Imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–22:5)," *Neotestamentica* 22, no. 1 (1988): 65–86.

Cochin, India, in the eighteenth century. After many years of studying the text, I published the Hebrew text of 5,227 words in my 2015 critical edition<sup>9</sup> (and also translated the text into English<sup>10</sup>). The critical edition has a historical literary introduction, with fourteen introductions (one for each chapter). The manuscript is published with a full commentary, in which I strive to consider every aspect of the text (linguistically, historically, philosophically, geographically, and more). For now, it may be sufficient to say that there is no other document like *Words of Gad the Seer* in the entire Jewish tradition. Moreover, its first chapter has more than twenty parallels to the Book of Revelation, again without a precedent.

The hero of the book is King David, and in many aspects, this book is a hagiography, a genre unknown to Jews until the Middle Ages. The seer identified himself with Gad the Seer, a private prophet to King David, in a pseudepigraphic manner, as if the book was composed in the tenth century BCE, though a modern critical eye can say, after a glance, that this date is impossible. In my book the problems of dating the text are discussed, showing that the text might be composed at the end of the first century, or maybe even several centuries later. The exact time of this unique composition is still waiting for a decision.

### **The heavenly lamb sacrifices and praises the Lord**

There are three visions in the book, but here we will concentrate on the part of the first vision that should be taken as a good presentation for the whole book (the Hebrew text and English translation are in an appendix at the end of this paper). In his vision, the seer describes a heavenly scene where the Lord carries a lamb on his shoulder, like a shepherd, and the lamb is mourning what had happened to him: "Woe unto me! Woe unto me! Woe unto me!" Later, an angel puts a crown on the head of the lamb, and he gives the lamb "three branches of vine and twelve palms in his hand." The lamb is then described as follows (v. 30):

And the lamb took of the pure, that had been mixed with the impure, and brought it as a peace-offerings sacrifice on the altar before El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Bar-Ilan, דברי גד החזוה, [*The Words of Gad the Seer*].

10. Bar-Ilan, *Words of Gad the Seer*.

11. Each of the epithets of the Lord is known in Jewish tradition, though this list has no precedent.

The seer was notably short in his description as to what exactly were these peace-offerings of the lamb, but the scene is explicit: a Heavenly Lamb is sacrificing on the Heavenly Altar. This scene will be examined later, but we have to look at another act of the Lamb: praising the Lord. Unlike the few words that were devoted to the heavenly sacrifice, the seer gives an incredibly detailed description of the Song of the Lamb in not less than 135 words. The song begins with Isaiah 12:1–2, which resembles parts of Exodus 15:1–18, known as *Shirat Hayam*, or the Song of the Sea.

The wording of the song and its relation to the praise of the Heavenly Lamb in the book of Revelation<sup>12</sup> will be discussed below in “Part 2: The Song of the Lamb.” For now, suffice it to say that in the temple in Jerusalem, the sacrificing was accompanied with songs by the Levites.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, praising the Lord in heaven is nothing new, since this concept is rooted in the Bible (Isaiah 6:3), later to become known as the *Qedusha* (or *Sanctus*).<sup>14</sup> In sum, Gad the Seer had a vision where a Heavenly Lamb mourns over his loss, which, though it is not explicitly stated,<sup>15</sup> presumably was the destruction of the temple. Then he sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar and praises the Lord, a typical ritual of the earthly temple.

It is not clear what the exact sacrifices were, for we do not know what was in the seer’s mind who described the sacrifices as “the pure, that had been mixed with the impure” (v. 30). At least two explanations fit the description: 1) the pure is Israel, and the impure are non-Jews, hence, the sacrifices will be of or from the Jewish people;<sup>16</sup> and 2) the pure are the pious people, and the impure are the non-pious, those who are not committed to God.

Without trying to solve the exact meaning of the vision with respect to what the sacrifices were, let us look at other parallels of this scene that might help us see the whole picture.

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12. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 269–79.

13. 2 Chronicles 29:27; 2 Maccabees 1:30; m. Tamid 5:6, 7:3; m. Middot 2:5; m. Rosh Hashana 4:4.

14. Meir Bar-Ilan, “Major Trends in the Formation and Crystallization of the Qedusha” [in Hebrew] *Da’at: a Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah* 25 (1990): 5–20, [jstor.org/stable/24193170?seq=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24193170?seq=1).

15. For mourning in the temple, see Joel 1:13–14; Meir Bar-Ilan, “The Significance and the Source of Megillat Ta’anit” [in Hebrew] *Sinai* 98 (1986): 114–37.

16. The idea that Israel is pure is relatively late, see m. Yoma 8:9 (and still the dichotomy is not there).



## Babylonian Talmud

In b. Menachot 110a, there is a discussion regarding the words of King Solomon to Hiram, King of Tyre, relating to the temple he was about to build, where he said, "This is an ordinance for ever to Israel" (2 Chronicles 2:3). The Talmud asked how it could be that the temple is "forever" since it was already destroyed and then gives an answer: "Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav<sup>17</sup>: Altar is built, and Michael, the Great Prince, is standing and sacrificing a sacrifice on it."<sup>18</sup> In other words, if eternity is not seen on earth, it appears in heaven. Now, since Rav came to Babylon from the Land of Israel around 220 CE, it is highly probable that this is a Palestinian tradition resembling that of Gad the Seer, though instead of a lamb the one who sacrifices is the archangel Michael, who is already known from the Bible as the Minister of Israel (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1).<sup>19</sup> Hence, Michael became a protagonist of Israel. According to this tradition, since there are no sacrifices on earth, Michael sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar (nothing is said about praising). However, what Michael is sacrificing, we do not know.

On that issue, in *Tosafot Shantz* (literally: "Addenda," but it is an exegesis), written by Rabbi Shimshon ben Abraham (c. 1150 – c. 1230) of Sens, France, disciple of Rabbenu Tam, we read, "There are different Midrashim [on this]: some say these are souls of the pious, and some say these are lambs of fire."<sup>20</sup> That would seem to be because there are no flesh and blood animals in heaven; in any event, we are talking about *symbolic* sacrifices. According to one tradition, souls of the pious are sacrificed, as will be discussed thoroughly later, while the

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17. Rav (also known as Abba Arikha) was a prominent third-century Jewish scholar in Babylonia. He founded an important academy in Sura, which became a major center of Jewish learning. Rav Giddel was Rav's disciple and also a respected scholar. Both were part of a group of Jewish sages called Amoraim, who interpreted and expanded upon earlier rabbinic teachings, contributing significantly to the development of the Babylonian Talmud.

18. In *Ein Yaakov* to Hagigah, R. Yaakov ibn Habib (fifteenth to sixteenth century) quotes a version where there is an addendum: "every day." This version is attested also in the Wad Alhagara print (Spain, around 1480) and Ms. Oxford 366, Vatican 171. The comparison can be done at [bavli.genizah.org/](http://bavli.genizah.org/).

19. R. Margalit, *Malakhei Elyon* [in Hebrew], 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1964), 108–35; Ellen White, Thomas Römer, "Michael (Angel)," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* 18 (2020):123–24, [hal.science/hal-03819188v1](https://hal.science/hal-03819188v1).

20. The English quotation is available in Otzar Midrashim, "The Wise One of Secrets," *Sefaria* (website), [sefaria.org/Otzar\\_Midrashim%2C\\_The\\_Wise\\_One\\_of\\_Secrets.2?ven=english|Sefaria\\_Community\\_Translation&lang=bi](http://sefaria.org/Otzar_Midrashim%2C_The_Wise_One_of_Secrets.2?ven=english|Sefaria_Community_Translation&lang=bi).

other tradition says they are lambs of fire. It is clear that every tradition is a bit different, and though “lambs of fire” can be taken as an allusion to chapter one of *Words of Gad the Seer*—in both cases, the sacrifices are of lambs—the imagery does not come from any common repository. Though we know of about twenty heavenly artifacts made of fire in ancient Jewish sources,<sup>21</sup> I could not find any Midrash that discusses heavenly lambs of fire (maybe the lost Midrash was lost to fire itself). The closest allusion to the text appears in the *Testament of Levi* 3:6, where it is said that in the second heaven, angels will bring “a sacrifice without blood.” Be that as it may, in the Talmud, the heavenly proficient is an angel, while in *Words of Gad the Seer*, it is a Heavenly Lamb. In both cases, the protagonist is a symbol for the Jewish people; they both became priests that serve the Lord in Heaven.<sup>22</sup>

One more comment should be added. In Hebrew, the root of “sacrifice” is *QRB* (קרב), which also means “(come) close/near,”<sup>23</sup> hence the sacrifice is a means of Israel getting close to God. All these traditions agree that the Jewish people are close to the Lord even when there is no earthly temple, and they all stress the idea that sacrifices are still occurring on the Heavenly Altar.

### **Souls of the pious are “sacrificed” on the Heavenly Altar**

As already noted, Rabbi Shimshon of Sens was aware of two traditions, the second with lambs of fire that resemble the account in *Words of Gad the Seer*, though different, and the other that identifies the heavenly sacrifices as the souls of the pious. This idea appears in the Ten Martyrs narrative, which is part of Hekhalot literature, and already been subject of study.<sup>24</sup> While the narrative of the Ten Martyrs

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21. M. Bar-Ilan, “The Throne of God: What is Under It, What is Opposite It, What is Near It” [in Hebrew] *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah* 15 (1985): 21–35, [jstor.org/stable/24185816](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24185816). In note 18 are mentioned tens of artifacts made of fire.

22. Exodus 19:6 already states that Israel among the nations is like priests among the laity (teachers of God’s will, elected by God).

23. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), s.v. “קרב,” [archive.org/details/browndriverbrigg0000brow/](https://www.archive.org/details/browndriverbrigg0000brow/).

24. Ra’anan Boustán, *From Martyr to Mystic* (Tübingen, DE: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Ra’anan S. Boustán, “Confounding Blood: Jewish Narratives of Sacrifice and Violence in Late Antiquity,” in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, ed. Jennifer W. Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 265–86, [rboustan.scholar.princeton.edu/publications/confounding-blood-jewish-narratives-sacrifice-and-violence-late-antiquity](https://rboustan.scholar.princeton.edu/publications/confounding-blood-jewish-narratives-sacrifice-and-violence-late-antiquity).

is well known for its role in the liturgy of Yom Kippur, the specific text was not known until recently, and it is worth dwelling on.

The seer in this account is called, as a literary device, by the name of Rabbi Ishmael (a historical figure who lived in the second century). While the seer is in heaven, the angel Gabriel is his guide, similar to other accounts of mystical experiences, and then the seer sees something and then receive the explanation by the angel as follows:<sup>25</sup>

And when R. Ishmael heard that, at once, he calmed down, and he was walking in Heaven to and fro and saw an altar near the Throne of Glory. He said to Gabriel: What is it? He answered: It is an altar. He said to him: And what are you sacrificing on it every day, are there bulls and fire above? He said to him: Souls of pious we sacrifice on it every day. He said: who sacrifices them? He said: Michael the Great Minister.<sup>26</sup>

This tradition answers the basic question facing the Talmudic tradition: What does it mean that Michael sacrifices in heaven since there are no bulls or fire in heaven? Hence, this tradition has the features of a commentary and seems to be later than the Talmud, as the whole Hekhalot literature is.<sup>27</sup> The final answer to the question here is that in Heaven, souls are sacrificed, that is, impalpable things (just as fire is).

At any event, this unknown Midrash assures Shimshon of Sens that there is a Midrash where it is said that on the Heavenly Altar pious souls are "sacrificed." This may be understood not as slaughtering or destroying them or their prayers but offering them up to the Lord to

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25. The role of an angel as "angelus interprets" has been evident in apocalyptic works since the prophet Zecharia (1:9, 2:2, 2:4, 4:4, 4:13, 6:4), later to be found in *1 Enoch* and other apocalyptic works. Though angels are mentioned thousands of times in rabbinic literature, this role of angel interpreter cannot be found in rabbinic literature.

26. G. Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern* [The Story of the Ten Martyrs], ed. Gottfried Reeg (Tübingen, DE: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), 40–42 (version 1).

27. G. Scholem and S. Lieberman believed that the Hekhalot literature, or part of it, comes from the days of the Tannaim. However, philological and literary analysis shows that this literature is later than the Amoraim, or at least partly overlaps them. See M. Bar-Ilan, "The Chain of Tradition in the Hekhalot Literature" [in Hebrew] *Da'at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah* 56 (2005): 5–37, [academia.edu/attachments/53285778/download\\_file?st=MTcyOTAxNTMwMCw3NC4xMzUuMTkyLjQ1LDQ0MjgyMzY%3D&s=work\\_strip](http://academia.edu/attachments/53285778/download_file?st=MTcyOTAxNTMwMCw3NC4xMzUuMTkyLjQ1LDQ0MjgyMzY%3D&s=work_strip).

make them close to Him. The idea behind this tradition is that the pious people are the most beloved by the Lord, and hence, they are brought to His presence as close as possible, while the non-pious people's souls are a bit remote from God. *Lex Talionis*: those who were close to God on earth are (will be) close to God in heaven, and those that are remote from God on earth are (will be) remote from God in heaven, in eternity.

### Offerings of souls, rights, and prayers of the pious

While Rabbi Shimshon of Sens was aware of pious souls only, there is another Midrash that elaborates the issue with two “additives” to those sacrifices. In the Midrash named “Hashem Behokhma Yasad Aretz” (from presumably the sixth to the ninth century), named after Proverbs 3:19 (“The Lord by wisdom founded the earth”), we read:

God said to Michael: Michael, since I have ruined my house and burnt my shrine and deserted my temple and destroyed my altar, do not sacrifice before me images of bulls nor images of lambs. Said he: Master of the World, and your children, what about them? Said He: Sacrifice before me the rights and the prayers of the souls of pious [people] concealed under the Throne of Glory,<sup>28</sup> and [souls of] school-children, and I atone the sins of Israel.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that the *darshan* (a qualified expounder of Scripture) here considered sacrificing bulls or lambs on the Heavenly Altar to be impossible. Either he had never heard the tradition in the Babylonian Talmud (in two different tractates), or perhaps he rejected it. With no bulls and lambs on the altar, according to this Midrash, the sacrifices in heaven are much more subtle: they are made of pious people's souls and their rights and prayers in addition, seemingly three different “objects.”<sup>30</sup> However, close reading of the text and realizing the background of the Midrash leads one to understand that this description is not about three different “objects” but rather to the sacrifice or offering of pious people's souls together with their earthly rights, or deeds. This

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28. This idea is explicit in b. Shabbat 152b. In a lost Midrash, it was stated that the souls are concealed in a chest. See Goldschmidt, *Machzor Leyamim Noraim: Rosh Hashanah* [in Hebrew], 83.

29. Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938), 63. See also Tractate Semachot: Hibut Hageber, ch. 1.

30. Prayers near the throne resemble prayers in the temple, an idea deeply rooted in any temple's role (1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chronicles 7:1).

becomes clearer after considering Tractate Semachot 8:7 (literally "joys," a euphemism for mourning), presumably from the fourth to sixth centuries. Two stories tell how pious people were buried:

[When one is buried] they put [in the grave] his ink well and his pen side by side of him, and one should not be worried about following the ways of the Amorites. . . .

When Shmuel the young passed away, they put in his coffin his key and his Pinax [a tablet for writing] since he had no son.<sup>31</sup>

Here, we see that the sages used to bury their comrades with their very intimate possessions, without being worried that they seem to be following a heathen practice.<sup>32</sup> Such objects showed identity or character of the deceased.<sup>33</sup> This evidence should be taken as a kind of "parallel" to the belongings of the pious souls. That is to say, the idea behind the tradition in midrash "Hashem Behokhma Yasad Aretz" is that when one prays, his prayer becomes a heavenly object. In the same line of thought, when one does a divine command, it does not fall into oblivion, rather it creates its counterpart in Heaven, just as the whole issue under discussion: Jerusalem, Temple, and Altar in Heaven. Hence, Michael sacrifices pious people's souls, the heavenly parts of one's body, and the heavenly "objects" that testify of their piety, the prayers of the pious and certain rights.

A similar tradition, with different phrasing, appears in b. Shabbat 32a: "And with regard to divine judgment, these are a person's advocates: Repentance and good deeds."<sup>34</sup> This tradition was enhanced by a later *darshan* in Masechet Semahot of Rabbi Hiya 1:5:

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31. Tractate Semachot 8:7, *Sefaria* (website), [sefaria.org/Tractate\\_Semachot\\_8.7?lang=bi](http://sefaria.org/Tractate_Semachot_8.7?lang=bi).

32. The expression is "Ways of the Amorites" (those who inhabited the Land of Canaan before Israel and followed idolatry). See: Y. Avishur, "Ways of the Amorites'—The Kanaan-Babylonian Background and its Literary Structure" [in Hebrew] in Chaim Rabin, ed., *Studies in the Bible and the Hebrew Language, Offered to Meir Wallenstein on the Occasion of his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Jewish Society for Bible Research in Israel, 1979), 17–47.

33. Gedalia Alon, *Studies in the History of Israel* [in Hebrew] vol. 2 (Tel-Aviv: Hakkibuts Hameuhad, 1970), 99ff.; Y. L. Biyaler, "Broken Oil-Lamps in Graves from the Mishnah and Talmud Periods" [in Hebrew] in S. Belkin, ed., *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume: Studies in His Honor Presented by His Colleagues and Disciples on the Occasion of His Completing Four Decades of Pioneering Scholarship* (New York: Yeshivah University, 1964), 145–65.

34. Shabbat 32a, *Sefaria* (website), [sefaria.org/Shabbat.32a?lang=bi](http://sefaria.org/Shabbat.32a?lang=bi).

One about to go to court should bring an advocate (*paraklētos*). If one goes to a flesh and blood court, he needs to bring himself lawyers, all the more one who is about to go to court of the King of Kings, the Holy Blessed be He. And what are those lawyers that man should bring? Repentance and charitable deeds that are like a shield against calamity.<sup>35</sup>

In all, here is the same idea that good deeds go to heaven, though there is no altar mentioned and the deeds come to heaven when one goes to heaven only.

This idea seems to be rather old, as one can read from another source. In the vision of Baruch (3 Baruch 11–12), the seer goes to the fifth heaven, where he sees Michael with a huge bowl in his hand. He asked the angel that escorted him: what is in the hand of Michael the archangel, and where does it go? In the end, he answered: “This is where the virtues of the righteous and the good works which they do are carried, which are brought by him before the heavenly God.”<sup>36</sup> True, there is no altar, but the idea is that an earthly good deed has its counterpart in heaven, and it comes before the Lord as a flower.<sup>37</sup>

A similar idea concerning prayers that become heavenly objects is found in rabbinic tradition (Shemot Rabbah 21:4):

R. Pinhas, by the name of R. Meir, and R. Irimia, by the name of R. Hiyya bar Abba, said: when Israel prays, you do not find all of them pray together. Instead, every congregation prays on its own; this congregation comes first and then comes another. And after all the congregations end, the angel who is in charge over the prayers takes all the prayers that have

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35. Michael Higger, ed., *Masechet Semachot* (New York: Bloch, 1932), 214.

36. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 674–75, [archive.org/details/the-old-testament-pseudepigrapha-vol-1-charlesworth-1983/page/673/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/the-old-testament-pseudepigrapha-vol-1-charlesworth-1983/page/673/mode/2up).

37. The idea that flowers decorate the heavenly realm has presumably no source, though in the temple the golden lamp was engraved with flowers (of almonds), see Exodus 25:31–40, while the almond tree was a priestly emblem, Numbers 17:23. There were also engraved lilies at the top of the pillars in the temple (1 Kings 7:19) and a lily on the “sea of water” in the temple (1 Kings 7:26), which the massive bowl in 3 Baruch resembles. Beyond that, no organic flowers decorated the temple, hence the throne. In rabbinic Judaism, there are never flowers in synagogues. See also Pamela R. Frese, “Flowers,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed., Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (New York: Thomson Gale, 2005), 3135–37, for a general discussion of uses of flowers in various religions.

been prayed in all the congregations and makes them diadems, and put them at the head of the Holy, Blessed be He, as is written (Psalm 65:3) "O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee doth all flesh come," etc.

In this tradition from the third century, prayers are carried to the Lord not as flowers, as in 3 Baruch, but as diadems (such as a crown of interlaced flowers), similar to the tradition that God is crowned by His Angels.<sup>38</sup> At any event, it becomes evident that any mundane object has its counterparts in heaven, if not simultaneously (like in a Platonic world of ideas), and then certainly after its death or destruction. So, after death, there is a human soul in heaven, and after Jerusalem was destroyed, there is a heavenly Jerusalem with the same line of thought: Temple and the Heavenly Altar. Moreover, pious souls are sacrificed on the Heavenly Altar before the Lord and come together with their deeds and rights, which attest to the piety of the souls. All this, and more, happening in heaven with the assistance of angels, is a similitude of closeness to the Lord.<sup>39</sup>

### Souls of schoolchildren

As already noted, in Midrash "Hashem Behokhma Yasad Aretz," it appears that not only the souls of pious people are "sacrificed" on the Heavenly Altar but the souls of schoolchildren also, and a note on this will not be out of place. In Jewish tradition (as well as in more cultures), schoolchildren are considered pure beings without sin. Therefore, when a child passes away, it is clear that God did not punish him but instead wanted the child's soul to be next to him,<sup>40</sup> (or to punish the

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38. Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Idea of Crowning God in Hekhalot Mysticism and the Karaite Polemic" [in Hebrew], in J. Dan, ed., *Early Jewish Mysticism: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Mandel Institute for Jewish Studies, 1987), 221–33, [jstor.org/stable/23363661?searchText=&searchUri=&ab\\_segments=&searchKey=&refreqid=fastly-default%3A871255be55d6793c126a2741a7e2cb3e](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23363661?searchText=&searchUri=&ab_segments=&searchKey=&refreqid=fastly-default%3A871255be55d6793c126a2741a7e2cb3e).

39. See also Meir Bar-Ilan, "Observations on the Mahzor concerning the Angels" [in Hebrew] *Or Hamizrach* 35 (1986): 7–12.

40. It should be noted that in Mishnaic Hebrew, young priests are called "priestly flowers." See m. Middot 1:8, m. Sukkah 5:2, and more. For example, while m. Middot 1:8 (see Mishnah Middot 1, *Sefaria* (website), [sefaria.org/Mishnah\\_Middot.1.8?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Middot.1.8?lang=bi)) has the Hebrew phrase "פרחי כהונה" which is often translated as "priestly initiates," it literally is "priestly flowers." Flowers or "פרחי" (*pirchei*) is metaphorically used in rabbinic Hebrew to denote young initiates or novices.



child's parents).<sup>41</sup> It seems that this tradition is the way one may be comforted. Both souls, of a schoolchild as well as the pious, are pure, so they are "sacrificed" or offered to the Lord on the Heavenly Altar to show their closeness.

In Midrash Alpha-Betoth (presumably from the eighth to ninth centuries), Qof-Het, it is stated:

In the future, He (the Lord) will take the Throne of Glory from its place to the next world, and will bring from its underneath thousands of thousands and myriad of myriads all the souls of abortive children that passed away while being in the bellies of their mothers, for sins of their fathers and mothers, and show them to the pious, and tell them: My children, would you like that these souls will resurrect?<sup>42</sup>

This tradition goes hand in hand with the former one: souls of pious and souls of schoolchildren are sacrificed on the Heavenly Altar, and the remnants are under the Heavenly Throne. No wonder that, according to other Midrashim, it is told that: "Every day Metatron is sitting three hours in Heaven and gathers all the souls of abortive children . . . and brings them underneath the Throne of Glory, and makes them sit, class by class, and teaches them Torah," etc.<sup>43</sup>

### **A contradictory tradition**

There is yet another tradition, or may it be called a contra-tradition of a text that is very strange, from more than one aspect. According to Pseudo Ben-Sira, version B (assumed to be composed in Southern Italy around the ninth to tenth centuries):

During the time that this [the earthly temple] was built, a priest sacrificed and burned incense, and Michael, who is in charge, also was sacrificing and burning incense up-there souls of pious. But now, because of sins that caused, and there are no sacrifices down-there, as if [truly] there are no

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41. This idea appears in b. Shabbat 32b, but it concerns fathers only who do not fulfill their vows. According to other sages, the death of a child is caused because the father did not study the Torah. Compare Deuteronomy 24:16, 2 Kings 14:6, Ezekiel 18, and 2 Chronicles 25:4.

42. S. A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashoth* [in Hebrew], vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Machon Ktav Va-Sefer, 1980), 452.

43. For this tradition in four different sources, see Bar-Ilan, "The Throne of God," 21–35, esp. note 46.



sacrifices up there, and God in the future will bring them back.<sup>44</sup>

Who invented this tradition and why is unclear, but one should recall that the tales of Ben Sira are already known as subversive under rabbinic tradition, and this is another example of the character of this book.

### Pious people's names on the Lord's cloak

For completeness, let us look at another tradition, different and similar to the former. In a Midrash on Psalms 9, there is this *derasha* (a sermon):

R. Abbahu, in the name of R. Elazar, said: Every pious that the nations of the world kill, the Holy, blessed be He, writes on his porphura (cloak),<sup>45</sup> as is written (Psalm 110:6): "He will judge among the nations, He filleth it with dead bodies." And the Holy, blessed be He, tells the nations of the world: Why have you killed my pious? (such as R. Hanina son of Teradyon) and all those who are killed over my Holy Name? And they (the nations) deny and say: We have not killed them! Immediately the Holy, blessed be He, brings his porphura, and judges them, and gives their verdict (of execution), that is (Psalm 9:13): "For He that avengeth blood hath remembered them."<sup>46</sup>

Formerly we saw the pious souls on the Heavenly Altar that is beneath the Throne of Glory, but now we see that their names are close to the Lord since they are embroidered on His cloak.<sup>47</sup> Almost the same idea appears in 1 Enoch 104:1–2, where Enoch tells the pious people that their names are written before the Lord.

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44. Eli Yassif, *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle-Ages* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 288.

45. *Porphura* derives from the Greek πορφύρα, which means *royal purple*. This expensive color became a royal emblem from antiquity to the high Middle Ages and beyond.

46. Translation is that of the author based on the Hebrew of Midrash Tehillim 9.14, in Solomon Buber, ed., *Midrash Tehilim ha-mekhuneh Shoher tov* (Vilna, Lithuania: Ha-Almanah veka-Ahim Romm, 1891); also see Midrash Tehillim 9.14, *Sefaria* (website), [sefaria.org/Midrash\\_Tehillim.9.14?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](http://sefaria.org/Midrash_Tehillim.9.14?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en).

47. See G. Scholem, *Demons, Spirits and Souls: Studies in Demonology* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Machon Ben-Zvi, 2004), 235n61; G. Scholem, *Devarim Bego* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976), 277.



**Figure 1.** *The Adoration of the Lamb*, detail from the Ghent Altarpiece, 1432 by Jan van Eyck.

In sum, the idea that the pious are close to the Lord—either as their souls being sacrificed on the Heavenly Altar, or they are underneath the Throne of Glory, or their names are written on the Lord's cloak (or else)—originated in early times. However, these traditions died out for more than one reason.

### **Gad the Seer and the pure vs. impure sacrifice**

In twelfth to thirteenth century France, Rabbi Shimshon of Sens, when commenting on the Talmud, knew two different traditions: one is attested in esoteric Jewish tradition and the other, so it seems, reflects *Words of Gad the Seer* in a way. In the Ashkenaz (southern Germany and northeast France) tradition, it was known that lambs of fire are sacrificed in Heaven by Michael, while in *Words of Gad the Seer*, some animal is sacrificed (without the designation “of fire”) not by an angel but rather by a Heavenly Lamb.

Now let us go back to the text of *Words of Gad the Seer* that initiated the whole discussion:

And the lamb took off the pure, that had been mixed with the impure, and brought it as a peace-offering sacrifice on the altar before El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts. (v. 30)

In the text, it is not clear what was in the mind of the seer. My assumption has been that he was thinking of Jews who are sacrificed

in Heaven resembling those who were sacrificed (i.e., who were killed on earth). However, that may not be the only explanation.

The dichotomy between the pure and the impure might be related not to the differences between Jews and non-Jews but rather to the differences between pious and impious people (all Jews). In light of the aforementioned sources, it might be that the seer saw the Heavenly Lamb who sacrificed peace offerings that were nothing else but the souls of the pious.

Having considered the Heavenly Altar and the sacrifices of the Heavenly Lamb, we now consider the connections of the Song of the Lamb that is sung with ancient Jewish liturgy and the book of Revelation.

## Part 2: The Song of the Lamb

In Revelation 15:3, we read, "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." What is the common denominator between the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb?

In *Words of Gad the Seer* vv. 32–45, the Heavenly Lamb praises the Lord in what the text identifies as "the song of the lamb" (v. 31). In addition to citing two verses from Isaiah 12, *Words of Gad the Seer* draws upon three verses in Exodus 15 that clarify Revelation 15:3 (see table 1).

**Table 1.** The Lamb praises the Lord.

<i>Words of Gad the Seer</i>	<b>KJV Exodus 15</b>
For the Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my redeemer. (33)	The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation. . . . (2)
I will sing unto the Lord, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the Sea of Reeds. (34)	Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. (4)
Verily, who is like unto Thee, O Lord? Verily, who is like unto Thee, glorious in holiness? — but not in impurity! (40)	Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness. . . . (11)

This common language suggests that the Heavenly Lamb and Moses share a common liturgical practice, especially when we consider the citation of Exodus 15:11. This verse is particular in Jewish liturgy since it is recited daily, morning and evening, before the *Amidah*, the Jewish main liturgy.<sup>48</sup> The text says that Moses and the children

48. The *Amidah*, also known as the Standing Prayer or the *Shemoneh Esrei*

of Israel exclaim in unison, “Who is like unto thee,” etc., and although there is no Rabbinic source that calls for reciting this verse nor the related verse that concludes the “Song of the Sea” (15:1–18) (“The LORD shall reign for ever and ever” [v. 19]), it is obvious that the text is a kind of *Qedusha*, or *Sanctus*, that deserves to be called “the hidden *Qedusha*.”<sup>49</sup> When one recalls that in the Bible and post-biblical sources, the people of Israel are called “sheep,” it becomes evident that Moses, as a shepherd, and his sheep praised the Lord, as did the Heavenly Lamb in *Words of Gad the Seer*, with a doxology: “Who is like unto thee,” etc.

Moreover, this specific verse has another liturgical role that should not be overlooked in an enigmatic text named *Pereq Shira* (or “Chapter of Song”). The text of about 1,500 words has no specific role in Jewish liturgy and appears in a few prayer books only.<sup>50</sup> The date of this text is unknown, but it looks like a post-Talmudic text, and one may guess it comes from the eighth to tenth centuries. The text lists some eighty items (or their Platonic ideals) created by the Lord, and each recites a biblical verse that praises the Lord, mostly from Psalms and Isaiah. The list begins with cosmological objects, such as Sky, Earth, Day, and Night, while each praises the Lord with a different verse. After “natural” beings finish their praises, there are floral items and some fifty different animals. There is no room here to discuss how Donkey or Elephant praise the Lord, but it suffices to say that the “Thin Cattle,” a generalized name for goats and sheep, praise the Lord as in Exodus 15:11: “Who is like unto thee?”

Without trying to solve the riddle of *Pereq Shira*,<sup>51</sup> it is enough to note that in two different Hebrew sources, each enigmatic in its way,

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(“Eighteen Benedictions,” though it now contains nineteen), is traditionally recited during daily prayer services (morning, afternoon, and evening) and on Shabbat and holidays (though with only seven benedictions), with some variations.

49. Bar-Ilan, “Major Trends in the Formation and Crystallization of the Qedusha.”

50. Seligman Baer, *Seder Avodat Israel* (Rödelheim, 1868; rep. Tel-Aviv, 1957), 547–52, [archive.org/details/Seder\\_Avodat\\_Yisrael\\_Polin\\_1868/page/n571/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/Seder_Avodat_Yisrael_Polin_1868/page/n571/mode/2up).

51. Joseph M. Baumgarten, “Perek Shira,” *An early Response to Psalm 151*, *Revue de Qumran* 9, no 4 (December 1978): 575–78; Ephraim Nissan, “Animals Calling Out to Heaven: In Support of the Hypothesis of an Alexandrine Egyptian Connection to the Animals Praising Heaven in Pereq Shirah (A Chapter of Hymns). Some Evidence from Egypt’s Greek Magical Papyri,” *MHNH* [International Journal of Research on Ancient Magic and Astrology] 14 (2014): 167–96.

*Pereq Shira* and *Words of Gad the Seer*, a Heavenly Lamb praises the Lord with "Who is like unto thee?," a verse used by Moses and the children of Israel in the Song on the Sea, akin to daily Jewish liturgy.

The above leads to the realization that John the Seer was likely thinking of a song from Moses, and the Heavenly Lamb in *Words of Gad the Seer* sang out in accordance with a Jewish tradition where a Heavenly Lamb recites, "Who is like unto thee?" My commentary to *Words of Gad the Seer* noted that there are more than twenty similarities to the Revelation of John, though I made no determination regarding who took from whom and offered no definite date of the book. However, after viewing Song of the Lamb in *Words of Gad the Seer* and its connections to Exodus, Jewish liturgy, and Revelation 15:3, the situation is much more straightforward: *Words of Gad the Seer* pre-dates (or at least is contemporary with) John the Seer. This is because Revelation 15:3 makes more sense if it is alluding to a known Song of the Lamb such as that found in *Words of Gad the Seer*. (Evidence suggesting a common milieu is considered in my critical edition of *Words of Gad the Seer*.<sup>52</sup>)

Not less important, in the Palestinian Talmud (Berachot 1:5, 3d) it was stated that there were Jews who recited Isaiah 12:6: "Cry aloud and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion" in their prayer. This statement is verified in the Genizah fragments, which show that this verse was used as a doxology.<sup>53</sup>

In antiquity, Jews used verses from Isaiah 12 and Exodus 15 in their liturgy, and according to *Words of Gad the Seer*, not only Jews but the Heavenly Lamb praise the Lord with verses from Exodus 15. Gad the Seer confirms Revelation 15:3 and clarifies it: both Moses and the Lamb sang the same verses, such as, "For the Lord is my strength and song" (v. 2) and "Verily, who is like unto thee, O Lord?" (v. 11).

## Conclusion

Gad the Seer did not live isolated from the world. His vision, at least to some degree, likely reflects his history and background. The author's visions as well as his way of handling biblical texts, such as blocks of text from the Bible, reflect antiquity. However, a few words in the text

52. Bar-Ilan דברי גַּד הַחֹזֶה [The Words of Gad the Seer], 39–43.

53. See Naphtali Wieder, *The Formation of Jewish Liturgy in the East and the West: A Collection of Essays* [in Hebrew], vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1998), 285–89.

are an obstacle to making a definitive date.<sup>54</sup> After studying this text for more than forty-three years, I still cannot give its date as a definite conclusion, though consideration of the Song of the Lamb points to an origin prior to the book of Revelation. The dating is only one of the enigmas that surround this text.

This paper began by studying the scene described in *Words of Gad the Seer* where the Heavenly Lamb offers a sacrifice on the Heavenly Altar and several other traditions were put forward to explain that scene.

According to *Words of Gad the Seer*, on the Heavenly Altar, peace-offerings are sacrificed, and in rabbinic esoteric traditions, other “artifacts” are sacrificed, such as pious people’s credits, prayers, and souls. In passing, we learned that these pious people are buried under the Throne of Glory.

Also, according to *Words of Gad the Seer*, we learn that the Heavenly Lamb sings a song that connects to Jewish liturgy and Exodus, helping us to better understand the meaning of “the song of the lamb” mentioned in Revelation 15:3. The ancient *Words of Gad the Seer*, though enigmatic, is shedding light on the Lamb of God and John the Seer’s allusion to the Lamb’s song.

**Appendix:**  
***Words of Gad the Seer*, vv. 13–45**  
**(part of the first chapter)**

**Table 2.** The Lamb of God in the first vision.

	English translation	Original Hebrew
13	And, lo, the Sun came out of Heaven in the shape of a man, with a crown on his head, carrying over his right shoulder, a lamb, rejected and despised. <sup>55</sup>	והנה השמש יצא מתוך הרקיע כתואר אדם ונשא שה נדח ונבזה על כתפו הימין וכתר על ראשה
14	And on the crown on his head three shepherds are seen, shackled with twelve shackles	ועל הכתר למעל בראשה נראה חעיים שלשה נצמידים בשנים עשר צמידים

54. Meir Bar-Ilan, “The Date of *The Words of Gad the Seer*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 3 (1990): 477–92, [jstor.org/stable/3267053](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3267053).  
55. Compare to the Servant of the Lord who is despised and then characterized as a lamb (Isaiah 53:3–7).

	English translation	Original Hebrew
15	and these shackles were of gold coated with silver. And the voice of the lamb was heard, great and dreadful like the voice of a lion <sup>56</sup> roaring over his prey: "Woe unto me! Woe unto me! Woe unto me! My image has been diminished, my refuge has been lost, my lot and destiny has turned me over to my spoilers, and I was defiled until evening by the touch of impurity."	וצמידים זהב מצופים בכסף ונשמע קול השה גדול ונורא כקול הארי השאג על הטרף אוי לי אוי לי אוי לוי נחסרתי מתוארי נאבד מנוסי מנת חלקי וגורלי נתנני ביד משוסי ונטמאתי בנגיעות הטומאה עד ערב
16	And it came to pass when the voice of the lamb was over, and, lo, a man dressed in linen came with three branches of vine and twelve palms in his hand.	ויהי כאשר תם קול השה והנה זה בא איש לבוש בדים ובידו שלשה שריגי גפן ושנים עשר תמרים
17	And he took the lamb from the hand of the Sun and put the crown on its head, and the vine branches and palms on his heart.	ולקח את השה מיד החרס וישם את הכתר בראשו והשריגים ותמרים על לבו
18	And the man, dressed in linen, cried like a ram's horn, saying: "What hast thou here, impurity, and who hast thou here, impurity, that thou hast hewed thee a place in purity, and in my covenant	והאיש לבוש בדים קרא כקול שופר ואמר מה לך פה טומאה ומי לך פה טומאה כי חצבת לך מקום בטהרה ובבריתי
19	that I have set with the vine-branches and palms."	אשר הקמתי עם השריגים ותמרים
20	And I have heard the lamb's shepherd saying: "There is a place for the pure, not for the impure, with me, for I am a holy God, and I do not want the impure, only the pure.	ואת אשר אמרתי לרועה השה לאמור הנה המקום אתי לטהור ולא לטמא כי אלהי קדוש אני ואין לי חפץ בטמא כי אם בטהור
21	Though both are creations of my hands, and my eyes are equally open on both.	האף שזה וזה מעשי ידי ועיני פקוחות על שניהם בכלל
22	But there is an advantage to the abundance of purity over the abundance of impurity just like the advantage of a man over a shadow.	אבל יש יתרון משפעות טמא לשפעות טהור כיתרון הצל מהאדם
23	For the shadow does not come except by man, and only by the existence of the man is the shadow given to the tired and exhausted, to pure and impure, this matter is even so.	כי הצל אינה באה אם על יד אדם ומתוך כך האדם ניתן הצל לעיף ויגע לטהור וטמא ולולי הכח אין הצל כך הדבר הזה

56. The symbolic figure of the lamb is "reinforced" by the figure of the lion (which does not appear in *Words of Gad the Seer*), and this leads to rethink the idea of O'Neill (above, n. 1) about the origin of the Testament of Joseph 19 (though, no doubt, the symbol of the virgin is Christian).



	English translation	Original Hebrew
24	For all gates of intelligence have been turned around since the death of the eight branches of the vine.	כי כל שערי בינה נהפכים מיום מות חית אב הגפן
25	As is found in words of righteousness, in the true book but because of the wanderings of the sheep and their rest and divisions — intelligence is stopped up	כאשר נמצא בדברי יושר בספר האמת ובמסעות הצאן ובמנוחותם ובמחלקותם הבינה נסתם
26	until I do greatly in keeping grace.”	עד שאגדול לעשות בנציות החסד כאשר קראתי לחזקה לאמור
27	I saw that impurity was driven from the Moon and was given to the hand of consuming wrath, ground finely to dust and scattered by the daily wind.	ראיתי שהטומאה נדחפת מהירח ונתנה ליד המכלה והמקציץ נטחנת דק לעפר ונפזרת ברוח היום
28	And the day burneth as a furnace to transfer impurity and to erase the transgressions.	והיום בער כתנור להעביר הטומאה ולהסיר החטאות
29	And the lamb was put on the (moon) [Sun] for ever and ever.	והשה ניתן בהירח עד עולמי עולמים
30	And the lamb took of the pure, that had been mixed with the impure, and brought it as a peace-offerings sacrifice on the altar before El Shaddai, Jealous Lord of hosts.	והטהור אשר נבלל בתוך הטמא לקח השה והביא ממנו זבח שלמים ליהוה על מזבח אשר לפני קנאות אל שדי צבאות
31	And I heard the sound of the song of the lamb, saying:	ושמעתי קול שירות השה לאמר
32	“I shall give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, for though Thou wast angry with me, You relented.	אודך יהוה כי אנפת בי ותשוב
33	For the Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my redeemer.	עזי וזמרת יה ויהי לי לישועה
34	I will sing unto the Lord, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the Sea of Reeds.	אשירה ליהוה כי גאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה באין סוף
35	Rise up, Intelligence; Rise up, Power; Rise up, Kingship; Rise up, Majesty and Glory!	קום בינה קום גבורה קום מלכות קום הוד ותפארת
36	Rise up to help the Lord!	קומו לעזרת יהוה
37	For God has saved one who had strayed and obliterated the impurity from the Earth.	כי אלהים הושע הנדח והסר הטומאה מהארץ
38	He fought my fight and brought into the light my righteousness by His help.	הוא רב ריבי והוצא לאור צדקתי ועזרתי
39	My help cometh from Shaddai who made heaven and earth.	עזרי מעם שדי קונה שמים וארץ



	English translation	Original Hebrew
40	Verily, who is like unto Thee, O Lord? Verily, who is like unto Thee, glorious in holiness? – but not in impurity!	אבל מי כמכה באלים יהוה אבל מי כמכה נאדר בקדש ולא בטומאה
41	For You are great over all, raised over all, You spoke and acted.	כי כל הגדלת כל חממות דברת ועשית
42	For You declared the end from the begin- ning, and You sealed everything with Your words and turned my heart and tormented me.	כי הגדת האחרון מראשית וחתמת דברך בכל והפכת ללב
43	For Your seal is on me, my Lord, and these are three branches of vine and twelve palms that are on my heart.	ויסרת אותי בך כי ביה אדני חותמי ואלה שלושה שריגי ושנים עשר תמרי אשר על לבי
44	You gave me grandeur, You erased vanity to fear man, and You gave me a pure heart forever.	נתת לי פאר הסרת הבל לערוץ אנוש ולב טהור נתת בי עד עולם
45	For that I will praise Thee at all times, and thank You among the nations, for You have redeemed me greatly for my King and did favor to David the anointed and his seed for ever and ever."	על כן אזמריך בכל עת ואודך בגוים כי הגדלת ישועתי במלכי ועשית חסד למשחיתי לדוד ולזרעו עד נצח נצחים



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