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Treading the Grapes of Wrath

The Wine Press in Ancient Jewish and Christian Tradition

I. The Biblical Wine Press

The “wine press” in Biblical literature arouses different images and responses.¹ The most obvious image and perhaps the original one is of abundance and bounty. Thus, for instance, when a slave is set free after six years of service.

¹ See M. Weiss, *The Bible From Within: The Method of Total Interpretation*, Jerusalem, 1984, 130. The image is not just ornamental, as was once commonly thought, but a didactic device which clarifies the subject matter at hand. There are, of course, also neutral motifs with no particular image or no specific response to the wine press. See, for example, the Parable of the Vineyard in Is 5 (and 5,2 on the wine vat). If one has a vineyard and cultivates grapes then there will also be a wine press or wine vat. The symbolism in Ch 5 of Is pertains to the vineyard and the fruit of the vine and not in particular to the wine press. We shall deal only with specific wine press imagery and not with grapes and vineyards (Cf., for instance, John 15,1–7). As we shall see, though, the Rabbis did make reference to the wine press in Is 5, even if it is only incidental to the main motifs there. The wine press is also tangential in the New Testament Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen in Mk 12,1–11 and Mat 21,33–43 (wine press: Mk 12,1; Mat 21,33. The Gospel of Thomas 65–66 for some reason leaves out the wine press). The wine press *per se* has no inherent symbolism or role in that parable and, therefore, is beyond the purview of our discussion. On this parable see D. Stern, “Jesus’ Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen”, in: C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (eds.), *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, New York-Mahwah 1989, 42–80, and A. A. Milavec, “A Fresh Analysis of the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen in the Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue”, in: Thoma, *Parable*, 81–117 and the vast amount of literature cited there.

“You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor and out of your wine press (*ykb*),² as the Lord your God has blessed you” (Dt 15,14).

The blessing of abundance can be dependent upon particular behaviour:

“Honor the Lord with thy substance...So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine.”³

This, however, was not necessarily so as in the case of the desecration of the Sabbath described by Nehemiah:

“In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in heaps of corn and lading asses therewith; as also wine, grapes and figs and all manner of burdens, which they brought in Jerusalem on the Sabbath day” (Neh 13,15).

The workers, however, or those doing the treading, did not always get to enjoy the benefits of an abundant grape harvest. Thus, Job uses the image of the wine press to describe an evil owner of a vineyard who forces his workers to toil under difficult conditions, but offers them no beverage:

“They tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst” (Job 24,11).⁴

² Three forms are used in Hebrew for wine press: *gat*, *yeqb* and *purah*. It was customary to explain the first term as the press in general, the second as the wine vat into which the juice of the pressed grapes flowed or was stored and the third term as a small surface for treading or a liquid measure of grape juice or wine. All three can actually refer to the entire press and for our purposes there is no need to differentiate between the Hebrew phrases or between the press in general and its component parts. The actual technique of treading grapes and producing wine is beyond the scope of our study. We are interested in Biblical imagery and the interpretation of this imagery later on. On the physical aspects of the wine press in Biblical times see H. Beinhart, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, III Jerusalem 1958, cols. 676–677 s.v. *wine* (Hebrew) and see in particular the picture in cols. 676–677. On later developments regarding the wine press and production of wine see R. Frankel, *The History of the Processing of Wine and Oil in Galilee in the Period of the Bible, the Mishnah and the Talmud*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tel-Aviv University 1984, I-II (Hebrew). On other crops connected occasionally with the *gat* see, for instance, Judg 6,11, but cf. Frankel, I, 218.

³ As was the case in the verse cited above, abundance motifs related to wine press are often in conjunction with grain and other crops. We shall, at times, make reference to these other crops, but for the most part, and as we have stated, we deal with wine press imagery. On harvest judgement motifs not dealing with the vineyard or wine see, for example, Is 17,4–6; Hos 6,11; Mic 4,12–13; Mk 4,29; Mat 13,39–40.

⁴ The most vivid description of the hard work involved in the treading of grapes is found in the *Geoponika* of Cassianus Bassus. See K. D. White, *Roman Farming*, London 1970, 46.

In general, though, the days of the “ingathering from your threshing floor and your wine press” (Dt 16,13) was also the time of rejoicing of the feast of Tabernacles of Sukkot.

The wine press also serves as a symbol of future bounty. Thus, the prophet Joel informs the people that after their repentance the plague of locusts will be removed

“and the floor shall be full of corn, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil” (Joel 2,24).

The prophet Amos tells of days which are coming

“when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed” (Am 9,13).

Here the wine press image refers to an early stage in the process; before the treader of grapes can finish his task, it will be time to sow anew.

If all goes well, the wine press should provide sustenance and blessing. If all does not go well, however, and often there is an element of Divine retribution involved, then the wine press can be a symbol of want and deprivation:

“threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail then” (Hos 9,2).

Or, as in the words of the prophet Haggai when describing economic conditions before the building of the Second Temple:

“How did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty” (Hag 2,16).

The treading of grapes was also normally a time of jubilation and the treaders were accustomed to accompany their work with shouts of joy. This motif, however, can also be turned into one of punishment and destruction:

“You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: The Lord will roar from on high, and from his holy habitation utter His voice; he will roar mightily against his fold, and shout like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth” (Jer 25,30).

The words of the prophet are most ironic. The joyful shouts of the wine treader were in imitation of the sounds of thunder and rain associated with Divine blessing and theoretically supposed to encourage the Divinity to shower his blessings on the grape crop and on the wine.⁵ Here God, as it were, uses the very shout meant to propitiate Him as a sign of his anger and punishment.

⁵ See the comments of N. H. Tur-Sinai, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, II, Jerusalem 1954, col. 807 s.v. *hedad* (Hebrew).

The transference of joy and abundance into punishment imagery is not restricted to Israel as was the case in Hos 9,2 cited above or to Judah and the destruction of the Temple in Jer 25,30. The negative transference was also used to describe retribution against non-Jews as is found in the prophecies against Moab:

“For the fields of Heshbon languish and the vine of Sibmah...O Heshbon and Elealeh; for upon thy summer fruits and upon thy harvest the shout is fallen. And gladness and joy are taken away out of the fruitful field. And in the vineyards there shall be no singing neither shall there be shouting. No treader shall tread out wine in the presses. I have made the vintage shout to cease” (Is 16,8–10).⁶

Up until now, the images have either been completely positive or positive ones transformed into punishment motifs. These images, as we have seen, refer to the fullness of the wine vat or to the joyful shouts of the grape treaders. The actual treading, however, often took on a primary negative connotation:

“The Lord has trodden as in a wine press, the virgin daughter of Judah” (Lam 1,15).

The treading of the wine press is a metaphor for the destruction of the population of Judah during the Babylonian conquest. Although the image is not all that explicit, it would certainly conjure up visions of blood and gore. The same is true for the description of the impending “day of the Lord” in the Book of Joel:

“Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread ye; for the wine press is full, the vats overflow. For their wickedness is great” (Joel 4,13).

Here the juice of the grapes is clearly the blood of the nations who are being punished for their wicked deeds. Thus, as was the case in the motifs described above, the negative images can also pertain to both Israel and the nations.

The clearest image of punishment is found in Is 63,1–6 which describes the vengeance wreaked upon Edom, the symbol of Israel’s enemies.⁷ The imagery is not just the gory treading of grapes, but also the wild spray of the juice staining the clothes of the Divine treader. The image is one of blood and gore everywhere. The Lord also seems to revel in this crimson fury:

⁶ See also Jer 48,33 on Moab: “No one treads them with shouts of joy; the shouting is not the shout of joy.” On the relative fertility of the region see Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 3.45–46.

⁷ On traditions describing the destruction of Edom see J.R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, JSOT SS 77 (1989) 184–186, and the literature cited there. On Bozrah see 45–46.

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with crimsoned garments from Bozrah? . . . Wherefore is Thine apparel red, and Thy garments like his that treadeth in the wine vat? I have trodden the wine press alone, and of the peoples there was no man with Me. Yea, I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in My fury. And their lifeblood is dashed against My garments, and I have stained all my raiment . . . And I trod down the peoples in Mine anger and made them drunk with my fury. And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

In spite of the importance of the Biblical images for Biblical literature itself, we do not intend to dwell on Biblical times. Rather, our intention is to examine the effect of Biblical wine press imagery on readers of later generations and particularly on Jewish and Christian writings of the Roman-Byzantine period.⁸ We shall examine the development of the Biblical motifs in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, in the midrashic works of the Rabbis and in the writings of the Church Fathers. We shall also especially try to show many of the homilies on the Biblical wine press may be understood in light of the Judaeo-Christian polemic of the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.⁹

II. *The Gittith*

Surprisingly, a good deal of the Rabbinic and Patristic material on the wine press centers around Biblical verses not cited above. This is not the result of negligence on our part. Rather, both the Rabbis and Church Fathers based many of their homilies on the same verses in Psalms which seemingly do not refer at all to the wine press. This similarity will, of course, occupy much of our time later on. For the moment, though, we shall cite those additional pseudo- wine press verses which served as the source for much ancient discussion:

1. “For the Leader (*lamenaseah*); upon the *Gittith* (*hagitit*).¹⁰ A Psalm of David“ (Ps 8,1).

⁸ See W. Kayser, *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk*, Bern 1973, 122–123: “It is part of the scholar’s task to scrutinize in each case what is the effect of the image on the reader, what has been rendered vivid by it in the concrete context in which it was presented and what is its functional role in the whole creation” (English translation cited in Weiss, *The Bible from Within*, 133 [see n.1 above]).

⁹ On midrash, Church fathers and the Judaeo-Christian polemic see, for example, J. Schwartz, “The *Encaenia* of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple of Solomon and the Jews,” *ThZ* 43 (1987) 265–281; *idem*, “Gallus, Julian and Anti-Christian Polemic in *Pesikta Rabbati*,” *ibid.*, 46 (1990) 1–19.

¹⁰ We provide both the “scientific” transliteration as well as the common form which appears in most translations and the like. We shall continue to use the form *Gittith*.

2. "For the leader; upon the *Gittith*. (A Psalm) of Asaph" (Ps 81,1).
3. "For the Leader; upon the *Gittith*. A Psalm of the sons of Korah" (Ps 84,1).

lamenaseah does not really pose any difficulty and is generally translated as "for the use of (or by) the Leader (or Choirmaster)",¹¹ although as we shall see, both the Rabbis and Church Fathers did have different explanation for the phrase. The problem, however, is *Gittith*. The classical medieval commentators offered a number of different explanations which were accepted in varying degrees in modern exegesis and scholarship. Thus, for example, *Gittith* has been explained as a musical instrument which came from the Philistine city of Gath.¹² Others saw *Gittith* as a type of song, ostensibly sung while treading grapes at the *gat* or wine press.¹³ Another explanation was that David had been in the city of Gath when he theoretically composed these Psalms.¹⁴ The most commonly accepted explanation is that *Gittith* is connected in some form with the house of Obed Edom the Gittite where David kept the ark for a number of months before bringing it to Jerusalem.¹⁵ According to this view, the Psalms mentioned above were pilgrimage or harvest festival Psalms and the house of Obed Edom the Gittite was the

¹¹ See, for example, P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50 WBC XIX*, Waco, Texas 1983, 34. The LXX translates εἰς τὸ τέλος "to the end". This will become the accepted Christian interpretation.

¹² See, for example, the commentary of R. Solomon b. Isaac of Troyes (= Rashi, 1040–1105) on Ps 8,1 in the standard printed editions of Psalms with classical Jewish commentators. Cf. R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen KAT*, Leipzig 1914, 299, and Joseph ben R. Hayyim Ha-Kohen, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Jerusalem, 1971, 27 (Hebrew). Others felt that this was a type of singing indigenous to Gath. This view, though, is almost universally rejected. See, for example, W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms*, London 1953, 13.

¹³ See the commentary of R. David Kimḥi (1160–1235) in the standard printed editions. Kimḥi simply states that it is a type of song. Abraham Ibn Ezra, however, states that the "foolish ones" interpret the phrase as the song of the grape treaders. There is often, however, much truth in the views that Ibn Ezra was so quick to discard. See also A. Vizer, *The Psalms*, Jerusalem 1981, 9 (Hebrew), who suggests that the *Gittith* was an instrument played during the treading of grapes. Cf. also A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, NCB, Somerset 1972, 48–50. On the connection between singing and the treading of grapes see our discussion above and cf. Kittel, *Kommentar*, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Cited by Kimḥi in the name of "others say".

¹⁵ II Sam 6, 11–12. This view is also cited in Kimḥi as well as by Ibn Ezra and Saadiah (Psalms with a Translation and Commentary of the Gaon Rabbenu Saadiah b. Joseph Fayumi, translated into Hebrew by J. Kapah, Jerusalem 1966, 20). In modern scholarship this view is associated with S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Oxford 1962, II, 215. See also A. Hakham, *The Book of Psalms*, Jerusalem 1984, 30 (Hebrew).

starting point of a procession.¹⁶ In all the views mentioned above, however, the *Gittith* is at best connected only tangentially to the wine press or *gat*.¹⁷ We shall soon see that both Rabbis and Church Fathers were of a different opinion and unanimously associated the word with the *gat* or wine press.¹⁸ We shall also see what they had to say about these wine presses.

III. The Wine Press of the Rabbis

Midrash Psalms and Related Traditions

The majority of the Rabbinic material appears in Midrash Psalms on the *Gittith*, which as we have stated, was interpreted by the Rabbis as *gat* or wine press. In spite of the fact that there is some discussion as to the dating of the work, it is generally accepted that Midr. Ps. is an eclectic collection of homilies and comments which were roughly edited during Geonic times.¹⁹

¹⁶ See M. D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, JSOT SS 20 (1982) 41. There are 11 Korahite Psalms (42, 44–49, 84–85, 87–88) and 12 associated with Asaph (50, 73–83). Asaph was a founder of one of the three guilds of Levite Temple musicians (1 Chr 25, 1–2, 6–9).

¹⁷ See n. 12 above. Rashi was, of course, familiar with the view of the Rabbis, but, and uncharacteristically on his part, he went out of his way to state that their case regarding Ps 8 was not very strong. Among modern scholars or commentators, I have only been able to find one clear-cut reference to *Gittith* as a wine press. See the comments of the 19th century German Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch cited in Y. Saḥarov, *Sefer Otzar Tehilot Yisrael* Tel-Aviv 1956, 328. According to Hirsch, *Gittith* represents the act of treading the grapes. The wine press represents an image of Divine punishment and pain. The actual treading, though, is meant to purify, to separate the evil from the good. As we shall see, this view is found quite commonly in the Church Fathers as a secondary explanation for the wine press and apparently not related to polemics. It is doubtful, though, that Rabbi Hirsch was aware of these views. It does, however, say something of the mind set of the founder of modern Neo-Orthodox Judaism.

¹⁸ The LXX translates ὑπὲρ τῶν ληνῶν “for the wine presses”. This was conceivably the basis for the Christian interpretations which we shall examine. It is highly doubtful, however, that the homilies of the Rabbis were based on the reading of the LXX.

¹⁹ See L. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt*, updated and corrected by H. Albeck and translated into Hebrew by M. A. Jack (based on the 2nd 1892 edition) Jerusalem 3rd 1974, 131–132, 407–412. Zunz saw Midr. Ps. as an Italian midrash from the Geonic period. This view has long been discarded. See also the introductory comments of S. Buber to his edition of Midr. Ps., S. Buber, *Midrash Tehilim Ha-Mekhuneh Shoher Tov*, Vilna 1891, 3–8. Buber felt that the midrash was Byzantine in origin and came from Palestine. Albeck, in his comments on Zunz returned the ultimate dating of the work to the Geonic period. See also *The Midrash on Psalms*, translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic by W. G. Braude, New Haven 1959, I, XXV–XXXII.

The *midrash* clearly contains earlier material²⁰ and apparently a good deal of anti-Christian comments.²¹ It is our contention that the *midrashim* we shall presently examine are of this nature.²²

The midrash begins with a homily on Ps 8,1.²³

“For Him who triumphs,²⁴ at treading the wine press (*Gittith*). The phrase ‘treading the wine press’ is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: ‘Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come tread ye; for the wine press is full, the vats overflow (Joel 4,13).’ To whom will God say ‘Put ye in the sickle...tread ye, for the wine press is full’? R. Pineḥas taught in the name of R. Ḥilkiah: God will say this to the angles. But the Rabbis²⁵ maintained that God will say it to the children of Israel. Songs are not sung at the season of harvest, nor at the season of grape-gathering, nor at the season of olive-picking, but only at the season of treading the wine press, as it is said, ‘For Him who triumphs; at treading the wine press. A Psalm of David’.” (Midr. Ps. 8,1, 73 ed. Buber and translation, I,119, ed. Braude).

The *midrash*, as it is accustomed to do, begins by citing “another” wine press verse. Bringing the verse in Joel, however, establishes right at the start that the motif is to be one of punishment of the “nations”, as we have seen above. The question is, though, who shall inflict the punishment, the angels or the children of Israel. Although the answer to this question is not explicit-

²⁰ See Albeck on Zunz 132. See also Albeck’s comments on the use of earlier Palestinian midrashic material in Midr. Ps.

²¹ See, for instance, Zunz and Albeck, 131 and 410 n. 58. See also the references cited in ed. Buber 18 on such common motifs in Midr. Ps. as decrees and oppression, the four kingdoms, Edom and the messiah.

²² See, for instance, R. Loewe, “The Jewish Midrashim and Patristic and Scholastic Exegesis of the Bible,” *Studia Patristica, Texte und Untersuchungen*, 63,1 (1957) 500. Loewe sees the Rabbinic exegesis of Ps 1 as a possible response to early Christian views. See also D. Stern, “Rhetoric and Midrash: The Case of the Mashal”, *Prooftexts*, 1 (1981) 272–273. Stern sees Midr. Ps. 79,1 as a response to accusations made in the third and fourth centuries by Christians against Jews that with the destruction of the Temple God rejected them.

²³ We basically use ed. Buber (see n. 19) and the translation of Braude (see n. 19). When necessary, we have checked manuscript versions on microfilm at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem. We shall, of course, make reference to these versions if we deviate from Buber or Braude.

²⁴ We have accepted Braude’s translation of “triumph” based on the verb *nsh*, since this is clearly correct within the context of the homily, as we shall shortly see.

²⁵ See Buber’s comment on p. 73. A number of manuscripts read “Rav” instead of Rabbis. Rav, of course, was the third century C.E. Babylonian sage who spent time in Palestine and then returned to his native Babylonia. He, of course, would have little to do with the Byzantine period, but for the most part we examine homilies in their entirety and not isolated segments which later on were put together to form the homiletical unit. Even if the correct reading is Rav, the editor (or editors) of the work may have used his statement within the greater context which we are discussing and this, therefore, is really no problem for us. Both R. Ḥilkiah and R. Phinehas were late fourth century Palestinian sages.

ly stated, one gets the impression from the continuation of the homily that it is Israel who serves as the agent of vengeance. The verse in Psalms also implies that there will be singing and, thus, the punishment will be accompanied by joyful song.

Up until now, though, there is nothing inherently anti-Christian in the homily. The continuation is more explicit:

“By ‘harvest’ is meant the fall of Babylon, as it is said... by ‘grape-gathering’ is meant the fall of Greece... by ‘olive picking’ is meant the fall of Media... by ‘treading the wine press’ is meant the fall of Edom, as it is said, ‘I have trodden the wine press alone (Is 63,3)’.” (*ibid*)

The *midrash* now introduces the fall of the “Four Empires”. This motif appears quite early and is originally pre-Roman. The Empires have also varied from time to time. The Jews, however, transformed Edom into Rome which was later transformed into Christianity.²⁶ The introduction of the punishment verse from Isaiah makes the punishment a joint effort. The verse in Joel made Israel the executor of Divine wrath, at least according to the second view. The verse in Isaiah implies that it is God alone who does the treading. This contradiction is not all that important. Who treads is not as significant as who is being trodden.

The homily then continues with a digression based on Joel 4,13 which at first glance has nothing to do with the motifs mentioned above.²⁷

“In Scripture, you find redemption described by four metaphors: as grape-gathering, as a harvest, as a pregnant woman and as spices. If any of these be taken prematurely, the owners will get no profit from them. Hence it is written of a harvest, ‘Put ye in the sickle for the harvest is ripe’ (Joel 4,13)...”

The parallel version of this part of the tradition, however, in *Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim* has an important addition:

“R. Aḥa in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi said, ‘I the Lord will hasten it in its time’ (Is 60,22). If you were not worthy – it (= redemption) shall come ‘in its time’. If you were worthy - ‘I will hasten it’.”²⁸

²⁶ See D. Flusser, “The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel”, *Israel Oriental Studies*, 2 (1972) 153 n.22 and the bibliography cited *ad loc.* and 157 on Edom = Rome. On Edom = Rome = Christianity see Schwartz, “The *Encaenia* of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre”, (see n. 9), 279 n.73.

²⁷ It is for this reason that Yalqut Shimoni (Yalqut Psalms 639), the medieval collection of *aggadot* and *midrashim*, adds *gat* to the list mentioned in the tradition. Cf. also Mishnah Avot 4, 20: “If one learns from the young, to what is he like? To one that eats unripe grapes, or drinks wine from his wine press.” The beverage in this case could hardly even be called wine.

²⁸ *Midrash Rabbah, Shir Ha-Shirim: Midrash Hazit*, 8,16 (181, ed. Dunskey).

God and Israel will join in “treading”. The redemption of Israel will come in its own time, dependent upon Israel’s behavior. A hastened redemption or redeemer does no good, as the Christians will discover at the time of their downfall.

After this “digression”, the homily returns to Joel 4,13, bringing the wine press as a symbol of redemption and triumph:

“‘Come tread ye; for the wine press is full’ (Joel 4,13). All the Prophets saw the winepress [as the symbol of redemption]. So the prophet Joel saw it, for he said, ‘Put ye in the sickle...the wine press is full’. So Isaiah saw it...So Asaph saw it, for he said, ‘For Him who triumphs; at treading the *Gittith* (= wine press)’ (Ps 81,1). And so David saw it, for he said, ‘For Him who triumphs; at treading the *Gittith* (= wine press). A Psalm of David’ (Ps 8,1).” (*ibid.*, translations, I,119–120).

The homily returns to the initial verse under discussion. David, by seeing and telling of the wine press foretold the ultimate victory of the Jews over Edom.

Midr. Ps. concludes its discussion of Psalm 8 in general by returning to the first verse of the chapter:²⁹

“Another comment on ‘For Him who triumphs, at treading the *Gittith* (wine press)’ (Ps 8,1). The verse refers to the punishment of Gog and Magog and of the four kingdoms upon whom God will tread as in a wine press, as it is written, ‘Wherefore is Thine apparel red, and Thy garments like his that treadeth in the wine vat?’ (Is 63,2).” (Midr. Ps. 8,8,79, ed. Buber; translation, I, 128–129, ed. Braude).³⁰

This seems to be nothing more than a reiteration or different means of stating what we have seen above. This time, though, the proof-text is from Isaiah and not from Joel and, therefore, it is quite clear that it is God who is doing the treading and punishing.

The homily then proceeds with a long digression on the judgement of the nations, making use of verses from Isaiah and Joel 4. It concludes by stating that the ultimate recognition of God is dependent on His punishing the nations.³¹

²⁹ This comment theoretically should have come immediately after the homily which we have discussed. See, however, Zunz-Albeck, 132–133. There are many problems related to the order of individual *midrashim* and homilies. All this, however, is beyond the purview of our discussion.

³⁰ See Buber’s comments on p. 79. This does not appear in all the manuscripts. Even so, from the continuation of the homily, it is clear that it deals with the judgement and punishment of the nations.

³¹ For another expression of this motif see Schwartz, “Gallus, Julian and Anti-Christian Polemic in Pesikta Rabbati”, (see n.9 above).

“And when will He be known as the Lord God? When the Holy One, blessed be He, is seen in the wine press (*gat*). When God says ‘Come, tread ye; for the wine press is full’ (Joel 4,13). His triumph will be acknowledged, as it is said, ‘For Him who triumphs; at treading the *Gittith* (wine press)’.” (*ibid.*, translation, I, 129–130)

The final comment of Midr. Ps. 8,8 is more or less parallel to that of 8,1. The wine press represents four periods of exile. The comment above stressed the redemption. The final comment here stresses exile connected to the wine press, but it is clear that each period of exile is followed by redemption:

“The term *Gittith*, occurring four times in Scripture, stands for the four periods of exile: 1. For Him who triumphs;³² upon the *Gittith*. A Psalm of the sons of Korah (Ps 84,1); 2. For Him who triumphs; upon the *Gittith*. A Psalm of Asaph (Ps 81,1); 3. the *gat* in the Book of Joel, ‘Come, tread ye; for the wine press is full’ (Joel 4,13); and 4. ‘For Him who triumphs; upon the *Gittith*. A Psalm of David’ (Ps 8,1).” (*ibid.*)

To sum up the comments of the Rabbis in the two homilies on Ps 8,1, the wine press is basically a symbol of punishment for the nations and especially Edom (= Christians) and of redemption, both in the past and in the future. The punishment motifs are dependent on the prooftexts of Is 63,1–6 and Joel 4,13. The triumph and victory seems to be based on explaining *lamenaseah* as triumph (from the root *nsh* and an acceptable meaning of *menaseah*). The verses in Psalms (8, 81 and 84) offer the combination of triumph with wine press and, therefore, it is these verses which serve as the basis for the homily, in spite of the fact there are other positive wine press verses, as we have seen above.

There are, as we remember, two other verses in Psalms which mention the *Gittith* and the homilies discussed above have cited these verses. Midr Ps. does not have an independent homily on Ps. 81,1. It does, however, return to deal with the wine press in a homily on Ps 84,1.³³ The first half of the homily seems to be nothing more than a re-hashing of common motifs, citing the appropriate verses from Is 63,1–7 in order to establish the proper atmosphere of punishment and then connecting the wine press to victory and triumph. Whoever sees this wine press, the sign of victory, gives forth a song of praise. As above, Isaiah, David, Asaph and the sons of Korah saw the wine press.

It is the second part of the homily which introduces a new element which fits in quite well the anti-Christian motifs which we have mentioned above:

³² Likewise here we accept the translation of “triumphs” which is implicit in the meaning of the homily. This is also true regarding Ps 81,1.

³³ Midr. Ps. 84,1, 370, ed. Buber; translation, II, 64, ed. Braude.

“How beloved are Thy Tabernacles (= Temple), O Lord of hosts (Ps 84,2)’. How much in them is so beloved of Thee that for their sake Thou, O Lord, will tread in this wine press! Any one who stretches out his hand against the Holy Tabernacle, him the Holy One, blessed be He, will put into the wine press. As scripture says, ‘A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the Temple, the voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to His enemies’ (Is 66,6). ‘A voice of noise’ because of what our enemies did in His city (= Jerusalem); ‘a voice from the Temple’ because of what they did in the Temple...” (Midr. Ps. 84,1, 370, ed. Buber; translation, II, 64, ed. Braude).

This Temple motif is clearly anti-Christian. The Jewish sages of the Byzantine period were quite sensitive to the Christian “take-over” of Jerusalem and Temple traditions and made a number of intellectual and ideological attempts to combat this phenomenon or at least to strengthen the morale of the Jewish community in the face of demographic and historic change which they were powerless to halt or prevent.³⁴ Here the *midrash* states that anyone who attempts to harm the Temple will end up in the Divine wine press. This should have offered at least some consolation to the Jews having to witness the increasing Christianization of Jerusalem.³⁵

There are two more short wine press traditions in Midr. Ps. The first is in the name of the third century C.E. Palestinian sage R. Joshua b. Levi who states that the downfall of the wicked is always preceded and followed by words of thanksgiving. The “thanksgiving” verses he cites are not really that important for our purposes. What is important, though, is that he cites Ps 8,1 as a description of the “downfall of Edom.”³⁶ The early date of R. Joshua b. Levi need not upset our views regarding the anti-Christian nature of the traditions described above. It just means that the anti-Edom wine press motif existed in the third century and this is no surprise. There is no reason, though, why the editor of Midr. Ps. should not have understood this *midrash* as we have understood the others.

The last wine press tradition, however, has absolutely nothing to do with polemics, Judaeo-Christian, pagan or otherwise and this is an extremely important point regarding the continuation of our discussion. This tradition is based on Ps 62,3, ‘He only is my rock and salvation, I shall not be moved into the great place.’ The *midrash* associates the “great place” with *Gehenna*

³⁴ See in detail the two studies cited in n.9 and the literature cited *ad loc.*

³⁵ On the small Jewish community in Jerusalem during the Roman-Byzantine period and on the Jewish community in Judaea in general at this time see J. Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement in Judaea After the Bar-Kochba War Until the Arab Conquest*, Jerusalem 1986 (Hebrew).

³⁶ Midr. Ps. 7,12, 69 ed. Buber, translation, 111, ed. Braude.

or the “valley of decision” in Joel 4,14, mentioned after ‘the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great’ (Joel 4,13). In this homily, the overflowing vats represent sins and sinners in general with no ethnic or religious connotation. Trust in God and avoid *Gehenna*. Do the opposite, wallow in the juices of the wine press of sin and you end up damned.³⁷ The core of the homily is not the wine press and it has nothing to do with the motifs we have discussed above. Not every wine press motif is polemical. Interestingly enough, though, this secondary wine press motif was also quite popular among the Church Fathers, as we shall see later on, although they did of course tend to add Christological elements, and it is not impossible that the author(s) or editor(s) of Midr. Ps. was aware of these views. If indeed they were, then it did not appear to have bothered them.

To sum up the wine press traditions in Midr. Ps., the dominant motifs are the punishment of Edom and the redemption of Israel. The redemption is subsequent to and dependent upon the punishment and anyone who desecrates the Temple will suffer the wrath of God in the wine press. Ironically, God’s might is only realized when he treads and punishes Edom and the nations. All of this is clearly anti-Christian. It is also interesting to note in spite of the ultimate, final redemption, no reference is made in Midr. Ps. to the Biblical motifs of abundance and plenty, ideas which apparently were not important in Midr. Ps.’s understanding of the functions of the wine press.

Some of these motifs are found in other midrashic works.³⁸ Rabbinic references to various verses in the punishment corpus of Is 63,1–6 usually invoke some type of retribution motif, whether against the nations in general or Edom in particular.³⁹ None, however, are as developed as the homilies in Midr. Ps.⁴⁰ The red apparel of God in Is 63,2 was especially popular. Thus,

³⁷ Midr. Ps. 62,2, 307, ed. Buber; translation, I, 519–520, ed. Braude.

³⁸ Unfortunately, there are no extant Rabbinic works on Isaiah or Joel (Yalkut Shimoni and the like are derivative and contain little new or independent material). We shall, however, examine later on the Aramaic *targumim* of relevant wine press verses.

³⁹ This is, of course, not always the case. See, for example Mekhilta, D’Pasha Bo 14, 52, ed. Horovitz-Rabin. Is 63,1 is cited to show that the *Shekhinah* accompanied Israel in exile to Edom. There is no punishment at all here and it is likely that it is not coincidence that this is an early Tannaitic *midrash* as opposed to the later *midrashim* which we have examined so far. We shall have more to say on this type of phenomenon later on. Cf. also Gen. Rab. 99,11, 1282, ed. Theodor-Albeck. Is 63,3 (“alone”) is cited in order to show that God does not need help when he goes to war. There is no mention as to the identity of the enemy.

⁴⁰ Occasionally, though, a short comment can be quite poignant. See, for example, BT Sotah 45b: “And Goliath was his name, from Gath. Rav Joseph taught: (the derivation of his name was that) everyone used to ‘tread’ his mother like a wine press.”

for instance, God will wreak vengeance on Edom (literally red in Hebrew), who was particularly fond of all and everything that was red, while He too will be dressed in red.⁴¹ None of these traditions, however, specifically mentions the wine press and it is necessary for the reader to be aware of the fact that the verse in Isaiah actually refers to a press.⁴²

Moreover, in these other Rabbinic traditions, even when the wine press is mentioned as part of the punishment motif, the idea is not really developed any further nor is any use made of the other “gory” wine press verses which could have served to elaborate on the anti-Christian or anti-nation animus. Thus, for example, the four rivers mentioned in Gen 2, 10–14 as going out of Eden were explained by the Rabbis in terms of the four nations.⁴³ The Euphrates (or *Perat* in Hebrew) is identified with Edom and Is 63, 3, ‘I have trodden the wine press alone’, is cited regarding the future destruction of Edom. As just stated, however, the *midrash* does not expand upon this idea. Midrash Esther, which by the nature of the subject matter of the Biblical book serving as its source is not too keen on non-Jews, also cites Is 63, 3 on God treading the wine press alone and states that this is the result of the evil deeds of the nations.⁴⁴ It might be argued that the traditions above regarding Edom may indeed refer to Christians⁴⁵, but it is doubtful that Esther Rabbah has anything to do with the Judaeo-Christian polemic. In any case, it would seem that so far, the most vivid and developed use of the punishment wine press motif is reserved for those traditions which, in our view at least, are clearly of an anti-Christian and polemical nature. (continued)

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⁴¹ See, for instance, Gen. Rab. 63, 30, 696–697, ed. Theodor-Albeck; 75, 4, 882, ed. Theodor-Albeck; Tanh. Buber, Va-Yishlah 4, 163; Pesikta de Rav Kahana, “I Will Greatly Rejoice in the Lord” (Is 61, 10), 330, 469, ed. Mandelbaum.

⁴² See also BT Hullin 92a which cites Is 63, 3 (‘And their lifeblood is dashed against My garments, and I have stained all my raiment’) as proof of Israel’s coming redemption and BT Berachot 58a which brings the same verse supposedly, within a discourse of R. Shila, regarding the fall of Rome. In both cases the verse is cited tangentially to the discussion at hand and the short exegesis on Is 63 is taken for granted.

⁴³ Genesis Rabbah 16, 4, 146–148, ed. Theodor-Albeck; Leviticus Rabbah 13, 5, 281–284, ed. Margoliot and the additional parallels cited by Theodor-Albeck and Margoliot *ad loc.*

⁴⁴ Midrash Esther Rabbah 1, 6.

⁴⁵ The tradition on the four rivers, though, is in the name of the third century sage R. Joshua b. Levi, making it possible that he was simply referring to Rome.