

# THE PARONOMASIA OF SOLOMON'S SEVENTH PETITION

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ABSTRACT: The intricacy of the play on the roots *šbh* and *šwb* in 1 Kgs 8:46–48 has not been noticed. Four statements of deportation and four references to the enemy land alternate with three of return. In each case, the total of seven is deliberate and reflects certain features of the theology of the Temple and of the self-understanding of Israel in exile. Finally, the reference to prayer “in the direction of their land” offers a compromise between deportation and return and thus ends the oscillation in perspective and the puns.

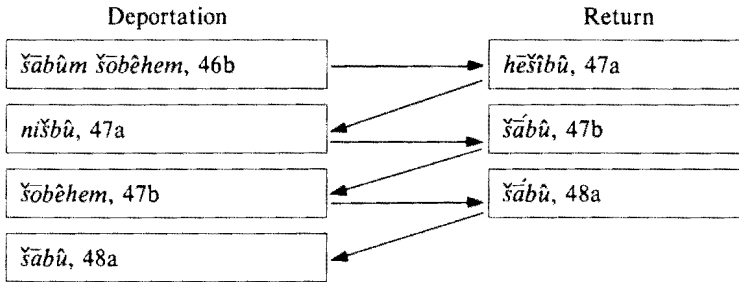
The feature of language most readily noticed in 1 Kgs 8:46–48 is the play upon the two roots *šbh* ‘to carry off into captivity’ and *šwb* ‘to return’:

<sup>46</sup>When they sin against you—for there is no man who does not sin—and you become enraged at them and hand them over to the enemy, and their captors carry them off (*šābûm šōbêhem*) to an enemy land, whether far or near; <sup>47</sup>and if they take (*hēšîbû*) it to heart in the land to which they have been taken

captive (*nišbû*), and they repent (*šābû*) and supplicate you in the land of their captors (*šōbêhem*), saying, “We have sinned, we have acted perversely, we have been wicked.” <sup>48</sup>And they turn back (*šābû*) to you with all their heart and all their soul in the land of their enemies who have carried (*šābû*) them off, and they pray to you in the direction of their land which you gave to their fathers and the city<sup>1</sup> which you have chosen and the House which I have built for the sake of your name . . .

1. Read *wəhā ʾr* with 2 Chr 6:38.

What has not been noticed is the intricacy of the paronomasia here. The statements of deportation and those of return (repentance) alternate:



In other words, the perspective of these verses oscillates between exile and sin on the one hand and repentance, with its connection to the Land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple, on the other. The root *šwb* intervenes between each attestation of the root *šbh* and its successor. The zigzag effect reaches a striking climax in v 48, where the two words are homographic, and homonymous except for the accent. It is as though the author wishes to say that on that accent hang the fortunes of Judah.

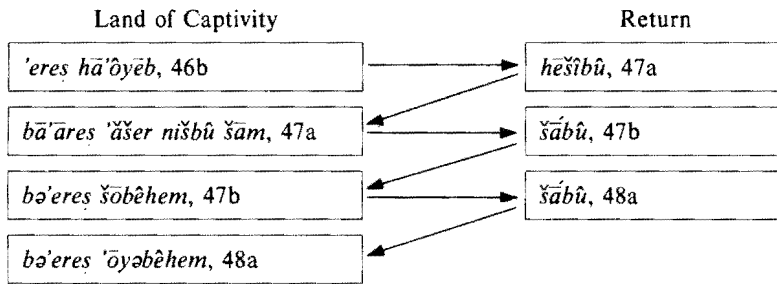
It will be observed from the diagram above that the perspective changes six times, for a total of seven positions.<sup>2</sup> In other words, four statements of deportation alternate with three of return. To be sure, the number of words involved is not seven, but eight, since the paronomasia begins with a double charge, *šābûm šōbêhem*, a verb with a cognate subject, in v 46b. If one considers the number of *words* to be the critical point, then it is unlikely that the pun, although intricate and rhetorically powerful, has any larger theological significance. If, however, one considers the number of positions from or to which the perspective changes to be the key to the structure of this passage, then the total of seven is of signal significance. Note that this complex pun occurs in the last of the seven specific petitions in Solomon's speech<sup>3</sup> on the occasion of the dedication of his Temple. This took place during the Festival of Booths, which lasts seven days (Deut 16:13–15) and occurs, as 1 Kgs 8:2 is careful to point out, in the seventh month. In fact, the construction of the Temple itself is said to have lasted seven years (1 Kgs 6:38), a statement which is surely to be connected with the intimate and deliberate association of Temple-building with the Sabbath (Blenkinsopp, 1977, pp. 59–69, and Weinfeld, 1977). This association

2. If one reads *šibyām* instead of *šōbêhem* in v 47b with 2 Chr 6:37, the point is not affected.

3. The others are vv 31–32; 33–34; 35–37a; 37b–40; 41–43; and 44–45.

would have become especially important during the Exile, when the Judeans awaited the respite from their suffering which the reconstruction of the shrine in Jerusalem was to symbolize. Note that P views the Exile as a kind of inverted Sabbath or Sabbatical Year, in which the Land rests while the people toil in punishment (Lev 26:3–4). W. Zimmerli (1969, pp. 995–996, 1018) has remarked a tendency to see the return from the Exile as a Jubilee (e.g., Isa 61:1), and it is most probable that Jeremiah's prediction of seventy years of Babylonian hegemony (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10) is a related phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it should be observed that the pattern of four plus three for a total of seven is not unique to this passage. It also appears in the canonical form of Amos 1:3–2:5, in which YHWH condemns seven nations, each “for three sins . . . and for four,” before turning to Israel, whose transgressions will occupy the rest of the book.<sup>5</sup>

Also corresponding to the three statements of return are four references to the land ('eres) of their captivity:



Once again, an occurrence of the root šwb intervenes between each two mentions of the territory in which Judah is exiled; the ideas of enmity and reconciliation alternate, as is appropriate in a meditation upon the phenomenon of repentance, and once more, the perspective changes six times, for a total of seven positions. The references to the foreign land exhibit another form of literary patterning as well. The first and last references, which precede the word 'enemy', constitute an *inclusio* around the other two, which precede, in contrast, a word denoting 'captivity' (šbh). The closure of the *inclusio* in v 48a enables the author to shift the focus rather dramatically to something new, the land of return, 'which you gave

4. But the fact that the consonants of the two roots involved in the pun are identical with the first two consonants both of the word for “seven” (šeba') and of the word for “Sabbath” (šabbāt), although intriguing, is probably coincidental.

5. But it is not necessary for the word “seven” to appear in order to establish the existence of a deliberate heptad. This is shown in Gordis, 1943.

to their fathers' (v 48b). All forms of *šbh* and of *šwb* have now passed; all that remains is to achieve a condition of stasis after the dizzying oscillation between deportation and return which the paronomasia has brought about. V 48b accomplishes this by accepting a compromise between the two opposing perspectives represented by the two roots involved in the pun: Israel 'in the land of their enemies' (v 48a) will pray 'in the direction of their own land' (*derek 'aršām*, v 48b).<sup>6</sup> The nation's prayers will reach the holy Land/City/Temple, even though she herself must linger in exile. This compromise puts an end to the seven-fold oscillation between the centrifugal and the centripetal movements and to the elaborate paronomasia which conveys it and highlights it.<sup>7</sup>

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6. The point of this note is not affected by the issue of whether 1 Kgs 8:46–53 is a later conclusion to Solomon's prayer, as most scholars believe, or an integral part of an Exilic composition that extends from v 22 through v 61. I argue in detail for the latter position in Levenson, 1981. On the identity of the Exilic source involved, see Levenson, 1975.

7. The root *šbh* recurs in v 50, but without any pun on *šwb* or close contact with the paronomasia of vv 46–48. It is improbable that *šibtākā* in v 49 (from the root *yšb*) represents anything more than alliteration with the words involved in the elaborate pun in the previous three verses. Note that *mākōn* or *məqōm šibtākā* is formulaic in this prayer, occurring in vv 30, 39 and 43 as well.