

The Redemptive Seed Type-scene in the Davidic narrative arc:
 Raising up Seed for David as *Yibbum*
 in 2 Samuel 7:12

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Introduction: The Paternity of the Messiah

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

“‘The Lord said to my Lord,
 “Sit at my right hand,
 until I put your enemies under your feet”’?”

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matt 22:41–45 ESV)

Both followers and detractors of Yeshua agree that the Messiah would be “the son of David,” but Jewish disciples of Yeshua profess him to be both the son of David and the son of God. Detractors deny even his Davidic lineage. These diverging paths trace back to God’s promise in 2 Samuel 7:12 to “raise up” David’s seed as the Messiah, a passage that addresses the even deeper question raised by Yeshua: How can the Messiah be both David’s “son” and his “Lord”?

Based on their understanding of God’s promise to “raise up seed” in 2 Samuel 7:12, Jewish detractors of Yeshua conclude that Yeshua does not fulfill the requirements of Davidic lineage in order to be considered the rightful Jewish Messiah. The Jews for Judaism website, for example, states:

The genealogy of the New Testament is inconsistent. While it gives two accounts of the genealogy of Joseph, it states clearly that he is not the biological father of Jesus.¹

For most Jewish readers, the genealogical inconsistencies of Yeshua's lineage void his messianic claims. One of my Orthodox friends put it this way: "If Jesus is the son of Mary and the Holy Spirit, he cannot be the Davidic Messiah, for paternity is passed down neither through the mother nor through adoption. So, while we could, for the sake of argument, concede that he is the son of God, he cannot be the Messiah, the son of David."

Again, this Jewish belief in the Messiah's Davidic paternity is anchored in God's promise in 2 Samuel 7:12 to "raise up seed" for David. This promise, however, is not simply to beget or inaugurate as king. God's promise *וְהָקִמֹתִי אֶת-יֶרֶעְיָא* (*v'hakimoti et zeracha* —and I will raise up your seed) directly recalls Judah's words in Genesis 38:8 and his command to perform *yibbum* —perform your levirate duty and raise up seed!² Read in this way, God's promise to "raise up seed" is framed in the deeply Jewish context of *yibbum* and the raising up of a redemptive seed.

In this paper, I show that both traditional and modern Jewish readers naturally formulate such a redemptive framework when reading passages in the Davidic narrative arc, a framework which defines God's promise to David as an act of redemptive duty (*yibbum*) and right (*geullah*). This framework emerges as readers shape their discussions using the key words *toledot* (generations), *zarah* (seed), and *yibbum* (commanded levirate marriage to raise up seed for the deceased). Together, these key words evoke type-scenes of genealogical crisis which are resolved by the "raising up" of a redemptive seed. This seed is redemptive, for his primary mission of redemption (Ruth 4:14) is to bring life to his family (Ruth 4:15) by building its dynastic house and line (Ruth 4:12). Consequently, only a legitimate redeemer can raise up such a redemptive seed, whether it is Judah (Gen 38:8, 18), Boaz (Ruth 4:6), or God himself (Psa 19:14).

Evidently, the first Jewish witnesses of Yeshua understood his coming in light of this redemptive framework, presenting him as the Messiah whom God "raised up" for David (e.g. Luke 1:69, Acts 13:33), thus positioning his birth and paternity squarely within the norms of Jewish tradition and Torah prescription and precedence. While Jewish readers profiled in this paper display a cultural inclination to apply such a redemptive framework to the Davidic narrative, its application to 2 Samuel 7:12 and God's promise to "raise up" David's seed lies dormant. When it awakens, Jewish readers may be able to reconsider aspects of the messianic claims of Yeshua.

1. Method

Nearly twenty years ago while conducting ethnographic field work in an urban Jewish community, I realized that traditional and modern Jewish readers shared a common approach to

¹ www.jewsforjudaism.org, accessed on 4/14/20.

² The practice of *yibbum* is from the Hebrew verb *yabam*: יָבַם. While *yibbum* refers to the Torah-prescribed duty of a brother to form levirate marriage, it is enacted by the action of "raising up seed" as Judah first commands in Genesis 38:8

stories in the Davidic narrative—an approach not based on rote memorization but a shared cultural hermeneutic practice.

I published the cultural and structural bases for this hermeneutic practice in a dissertation employing sociolinguistic tools of analysis.³ In this current paper, I uncover the literary basis for this shared hermeneutic practice by re-analyzing the ethnographic data using the tools of literary analysis—leitwörter and type-scenes. To study the way in which traditional Jewish commentators talked about the leitwörter *toledot*, *zerah*, and *yibbum*, I use the Soncino versions of the Biblical texts in software published by Davka for the Talmud and the Midrash Rabbah. For this paper, the Hebrew Scriptures are taken from the Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC).

For modern Jewish readers, I analyze the contemporary conversations of Jewish readers collected from ethnographic recordings of a small group of Jewish readers who belonged to the same Modern Orthodox congregation in a major city in the United States. Even though these Modern Orthodox Jews constitute a small subgroup of the Jewish population, they provide us with useful insight into the larger community because they are both familiar with traditional views of the Hebrew Scriptures while having an openness to modern ideas and a willingness to diverge from tradition. Thus, ethnographic data from this single group of readers gives us insight into the larger Jewish community because it is:

- **Authentic:** These subjects are authentic members of their community, so their interpretations are an active reflection of their identity as Jews.
- **Spontaneous:** The collected conversation of this group of modern Jewish readers was unprompted and spontaneous, giving us a rare view into the assumptions, processes, and values behind their beliefs, as these readers were free to initiate, direct, and select relevant words and meaningful ideas.
- **Accountable:** Finally, Jewish subjects construct their identity and communal relations in their conversation. That is, they speak not as isolated individuals but responsible members of the community, ensuring their interpretations to be culturally recognizable and defensible.

Examining the actual readings of traditional and modern Jewish readers gives us insight into their approach to the Davidic narrative, but we will need the literary tools of leitwörter and type-scenes to analyze the structure and functioning of this understanding. According to Rav Yonatan Grossman, a leitwort is a word that “seeks to guide the reader in the process of reading the passage, alluding to something hiding beneath the surface of the text.”⁴ Leitwörter reveal both the textual *themes* and *functions* directing the attention of Jewish readers. Grossman suggests that a leitwort contributes to the “very cohesiveness of the text, giving the reader the

³ Derek Chong, *Reading the Bible in a Modern Orthodox Jewish Community* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007).

⁴ Rav Dr Yonatan Grossman. “Lecture #11: *Leitwort* – Part I.” *Literary Study of Biblical Narrative* Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (VBM). <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/biblit/11biblit.htm>.

feeling of one, continuous narrative” by serving a “structural function”⁵—that is, directing the reading process itself.

When a number of related leitworter combine in recurrent narrative episodes, a larger structure called a *type-scene* emerges. We will see that such is the case in the Davidic narrative arc, beginning with the Judah story and the convergence of the leitworter *toledot*, *zarah*, and *yibbum*. Lieve Teugels describes Biblical type-scenes as an organized, “patterned whole” containing “repeated textual units, such as key-words (Leitworter),” “themes,” and “sequences of actions.”⁶

Robert Alter observes that a common type-scene depicts the “barren” woman who “then gives birth to a hero.”⁷ Historically, many Jewish readers associate these type-scenes with the *Avot* (the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and add to them a redemptive aspect of “raising up seed” when the Davidic narrative arc begins in the Judah and Tamar story. We will see that such type-scenes, marked by the interplay of the leitworter *toledot*, *zarah*, and *yibbum*, help the Jewish readers in this study distinguish movements in God’s redemptive work. In the stories of the *Avot*, *toledot* and *zarah* mark genealogical milestones in the chosen line, pointing to the next figure who will continue the line. When the Biblical narrative shifts focus on the line of Judah, a new leitwort, *yibbum*, is introduced to add a redemptive element to the story. Thus, leitworter and type-scenes allow us to visualize the interpretive movements of these select Jewish readers and their unfolding view of God’s redemptive work, as they focus on the *Avot* and then examine the Davidic line of redemption:

Overview of God’s Promise of Redemption:

Framed by Type-scenes: Marked by leitworter ↓	Line of Avot Genesis 2:4- 37:2 genealogical type scene→	Line of Redemption Gen. 38:8, Ruth 4:1-18 genealogical redemption type scene →	Promised Redeemer 2 Samuel 7:12; Jeremiah 23:5, 30:7	The Redeemer Matthew 1
Toledot:	Terah → Isaac → Jacob	Perez		Yeshua Messiah
Zarah	Abra- ham → Jacob → Promise of Seed	Judah → Duty to Raise up Seed	David → Promise to Raise up Seed	David and God
Yibbum/Kum		Duty to Restore Line. Judah Law of Yibbum Deut. 25:5-6 Right to Redeem Boaz	God Redeems Line: God Raises Up Seed/ King	God Raises Up Seed for David by the Holy Spirit
Redemptive Result:		Son of Er, Judah:	Son of David, God	Son of David, God

As the chart above illustrates, we will see in this paper that both traditional scholars and modern readers, guided by the leitworter *toledot*, *zarah*, and *yibbum*, read in a way that retraces the path of God’s unfolding redemptive work to create a people, and designate a royal line from which would come the Messiah. In a general sense, the notion of “redemption” underlies Jewish understanding of God’s relationship with Israel, for redemption depicts the gracious act of God

⁵ Grossman, “Leitwort”, 4

⁶ Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of “The Wooing of Rebekah” (Gen. 24)* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2004), 51.

⁷ Robert Alter. “Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention.” *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (2). 1978, 355-368. www.jstor.org/stable/1343017, 357, accessed 4/15/2020.

to claim a powerless people for himself. And, this dynamic was evident in the stories of the Avot, who by faith saw the chosen line continue by God's grace. However, beginning with Judah and the emergent line of David, a more direct "genealogical redemption" must take place for the line to continue. Judah, Boaz, and then God himself must intervene to "raise up seed" by levirate marriage for genealogical preservation. As illustrated by the actions of Boaz in Ruth 4, this act of "raising up seed" requires a rightful redeemer to raise up a seed to be the kinsman-redeemer of the household. Thus, the indexing of genealogical redemption by the resonant scenes of Judah "raising up seed" seed in levirate marriage (Genesis 38:8) and then Boaz "raising up" the name of the deceased (Ruth 4:10) should also occur when God promises to "raise up seed" for David (2 Samuel 7:12), informing readers that God acts as a redeemer to raise up David's seed as a kinsman-redeemer. While the readers of our study indeed recognize and define the process of genealogical redemption as it occurs in the stories of Judah and Boaz, they do not apply this framework of genealogical redemption to the messianic promise of 2 Samuel 7:12.



Encouragingly, the same interpretive processes that lead these readers to understand the Davidic narratives as genealogical redemption are those that point their attention forward to God's messianic promise—holding forth the promise that just the retelling of God's redemptive story of the Jewish people (using the language of *toledot*, *zarah*, and *yibbum*) will challenge some Jewish readers to reconsider God's messianic promise in 2 Samuel 7:12 as an instance of genealogical redemption. For, if God indeed is to raise up seed in an act of genealogical redemption like Judah and Boaz before him, then he promises to raise up a kinsman-redeemer who is both his literal son (2 Samuel 7:14) and a directly-born son of David (2 Samuel 7:12).

2. *These are the generations of Jacob: Framing the Judah narrative as genealogical necessity*

אֵלֶּה תִּלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב
Genesis 37:2

Toledot as a Leitwort

Leitworter guide readers to a coherent understanding of a textual passage by connecting the passage with recurrent biblical themes. For Jewish readers, *toledot* functions as such a leitwort because it traces the narrative of God's chosen line by evoking common themes of inheritance, blessings, and a designated heir. According to Sarah Schwartz, the *toledot* that precede a narrative passage point to an "important figure" in the story of this "chosen line," either the founder of the line or a selected descendant.⁸

The story of Judah and Tamar begins the Davidic narrative arc, and the leitwort *toledot* crucially frames this story as part of a larger genealogical narrative of the chosen line and points to a promised heir. The phrase אֵלֶּה תִּלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב (these are the generations of Jacob) in Genesis 37:2 marks the start of this story and guides Jewish readers to look for the heir of Jacob's

⁸ Sarah Schwartz. "Narrative *Toledot* formulae in Genesis: The Case of Heaven and Earth, Noah, and Isaac," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. Volume 16, Article 8. 2016, 1–3.

lineage. In this way, *toledot* crucially evokes a genealogical type-scene, highlighting the need for a worthy heir.

For both traditional scholars and modern Jewish readers, *toledot* plays a critical role in framing the stories of first the Avot and then the line of Judah. Taken together, the *toledot* mark God's genealogically redemptive path running from first (Genesis 2:4) to last, the line of Perez (Ruth 4:18), from whom comes David and the promised Messiah. We will see that the ancient scholars recognized that this genealogical pathway led to the Judaic line of promise and culminated in the messianic hope of restoration.

Traditional Jewish readings of *toledot*

Traditional Jewish readers use *toledot* as a “literary marker”⁹ to connect related passages and to focus on lineage and the hope for an heir in each generation, a generational hope that culminates in the Davidic Messiah. In Genesis Rabbah, rabbis commenting on Genesis 2:4 articulate this generational hope marked by *toledot*:

GENERATIONS (TOLEDOTH). All toledoth found in Scripture are defective, except two, viz. These are the toledoth (generations) of Perez (Ruth IV, 18), and the present instance. . . .

R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Samuel b. Nahman: Though these things were created in their fulness, yet when Adam sinned they were spoiled, and they will not again return to their perfection until the son of Perez [viz. Messiah] comes; [for in the verse] ‘These are the toledoth (generations) of Perez’, toledoth is spelled fully, with a waw. (Genesis R. 12:6)

Notably, these commentators use the “defective” morphology of *toledot* to set the boundaries of the narrative arc of God's chosen line, a narrative that itself frames the Davidic story and its messianic hope for the “Son of Perez.”

Reading *toledot Yacov* in Genesis 37:2 in this way, the sages seek to identify Jacob's heir and continuer of the line. Genesis Rabbah 84:6 states: “these are the generations of Jacob: Reuben?” This indicates that the initial impulse of the reader is to assume that the designated figure would be Reuben, Jacob's first-born. However, other rabbinic commentators state:

It has been taught: Joseph was worthy that twelve tribes should issue from him as they issued from his father Jacob, as it is said: These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph. (Mas. Sotah 36b)

These traditional readings of Genesis 37:2 indicate that while the leitwort *toledot* serves as a marker to instruct readers to start looking for an heir, it is insufficient to designate the identity of that heir. Traditional readers are left to speculate: Is it Reuben? Or Joseph? Moreover, Judah is also naturally a candidate, with rabbinic scholars stating: “Joseph is temporary” but “Judah is forever” (Genesis R. 95).

⁹ Schwartz, “Narrative *Toledot* Formulae,” 1.

It is likely that here, following the prompting of *toledot Yacov* in Genesis 37:2 to seek an heir, early rabbinic commentators began to envision two lines of favor emerging from both Joseph (Genesis 37:3) and Judah (Genesis 38:1), lines of greatness which would eventually give rise to two Messiahs: “Messiah, the son of Joseph” and “Messiah, the son of David” (Mas. Sukkah 52a).

Modern Jewish readings of *Toledot*

Thus, we see that *toledot* frames the Judah narrative within a genealogical context, which leads traditional Jewish readers to look for the lineage’s key figure. But will modern readers employ *toledot* similarly as a leitwort?

Indeed, we see that some modern Jewish readers mirror traditional scholars in the use of *toledot* as a leitwort. These modern readers read *toledot* as a leitwort beginning with its first use in Genesis 2:4, “these are the generations of the heavens and the earth.” Interestingly, these readers show that *toledot* functions as a leitwort because it is rooted in their personal and cultural lives:

Speaker 1: I just think that’s interesting that the heavens and earth have *generations*, and I guess what brought this to mind is that I was starting to prepare for a lesson I’ll be teaching in a couple weeks for the portion Toledot, Generations, and “*elleh toledot, toledot*,” all the *generations* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and here are “the *generations* of the heavens and the earth.”

Speaker 3: Right, I think I once heard a midrash on this and I don’t know if it was a midrash or what but that God created the world a few times and that this last creation was like the final product.

Because *toledot* resonates with their personal and cultural experiences as Jews, it naturally guides readers to read these *toledot*-fronted passages genealogically. In this way, these *toledot* passages matter because they are the story of their line. And, if *toledot* matters, then it has an important function as a leitwort. They will seek to determine what Grossman calls this leitwort’s “structural function,” even defining its explicit function as a text marker:

Speaker 2: I still think that this is the starting point, and now we’re going to talk about what came after, because then it’s saying that these are “the generations of the heaven and the earth” and what happened after the earth. . . .

Speaker 1: This is the marker of the beginning of the next story.

Thus, when these readers encounter *elle toledot Yacov* in Genesis 37:2, they recognize that it functions as a marker pointing to the next narrative. More specifically, they reason further that *toledot* points to an “important figure in the chosen line” as Schwartz predicts for narratives

which follow *toledot*.¹⁰ Without prompting, they remarkably retrace the paths of their rabbinic predecessors who also sought to identify the heir of Jacob:¹¹

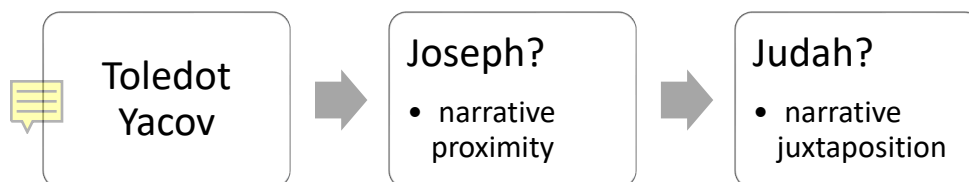
Speaker 5: If one brother surpasses his brothers for another reason he would be viewed as first because he would then be considered more his father's son. He'd be the one continuing the line of greatness from his forefathers. . . . Or, if one brother's family was somehow subservient to the other families, so in this case obviously Yoseph is going to be the one who's going to be considered to be at the head of the family gathering.

Speaker 1: The continuer of the line.

Speaker 4: And there's other times and other places in the Torah where it does talk about the other children of Jacob.

Like their interpretive forebears, some of these readers initially assume that this chosen heir will be Joseph due to his place in the nearest narrative account. Remember, their rabbinic predecessors also reasoned, "These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph" (Mas. Sotah 36b). However, as in Jewish literature, these modern readers also disagree about who this "continuer of the line" is to be. Speaker 4 reminds the group that there are "other children of Jacob" who would qualify for this distinction.

Thus, the "*toledot*" for both modern readers and traditional scholars points to a continuer of the line, but another leitwort and mechanism must specify who this continuer will be. We will see that another leitwort, *zarah*, serves that function.



3. *Raise up seed for your brother!* Focusing on the redemptive responsibility of the seed

וְהָקָם זָרַע לְאֶחָיו
Genesis 38:8

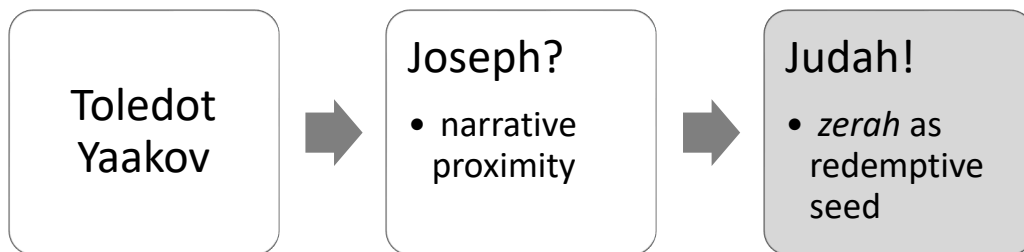
¹⁰ Schwartz, "Narrative *Toledot* Formulae," 3.

¹¹ These readers give no indication that earlier rabbinic writings informed their conclusions, as they are apt to do in other discussions. And, there is no record that their rabbinic predecessors sought to explicitly define this particular function of *toledot*, as these readers do here. Rather, the rabbis simply use the marker as in Genesis R. 84:6: "... generations of Jacob: Reuben?"

- **Zerah as a Leitwort**

If *toledot* functions as a leitwort that prompts the reader to look for a chosen heir, then it is *zerah* (seed) that confirms the redemptive identity of this heir. Like its Biblical synonyms “son” and “heir,” *zerah* is a key component in passages that promise blessings to a designated heir (e.g. Gen 17:19). Figuratively, it recalls the language of blessing to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). And it is part of the redemptive language of *yibbum* by which a redeemer “raises up seed” to continue the line of the deceased (Gen 38:8).

Unsurprisingly, both traditional commentators and modern readers invest *zerah* with messianic and redemptive meaning as it points to a chosen heir. Traditional scholars associate *zerah* with the messianic promise. And, when discussing Genesis 37–38, they frame their discussions of inheritance, redemption, and paternal legitimacy around *zerah*.



Biblical usage of *Zerah*

There are good biblical reasons why Jewish readers identify *zerah* with the notion of designated heir or the redeemer to continue the line.

In the broader narrative of the chosen line, the word *zerah* is consistently used by God to designate the promised heir to continue the chosen line. God designates Isaac, not Ishmael, as Abraham’s heir by promising an eternal covenant לְיִצְחָק (for his seed) in Genesis 17:19; Jacob, not Esau, is Isaac’s rightful heir, receiving God’s promise: וְלִיְצָחָק, וְיִצְחָק וּבְנֵי יִצְחָק (“and to your seed,” “your seed,” and “and in your seed”) in Genesis 28:13–14. And it is Judah, not Joseph, whose command to רָעָה וְהָקָם (“raise up seed”) by *yibbum* in Genesis 38:8 foreshadows God’s same promise to David: וְהָקִמְתִּי אֶת־יִרְמְיָהוּ (“I will raise up your seed”) in 2 Samuel 7:12.

Thus, we see God’s promises to the fathers focus on the designated *zerah*, the one to inherit God’s blessings. In the Boaz and Ruth story, *zerah* takes on a “redemptive seed” meaning (Ruth 4:12) as it is used interchangeably with its synonyms גֹּאֵל (“redeemer” in Ruth 4:14) and בֶּן (“son” in Ruth 4:17).

Traditional Jewish readings of *Zerah*

Biblically, *zerah* identifies God’s designated heir in the patriarchal narratives and the redemptive heir in the Davidic family story. In traditional Jewish literature, *zerah* functions as a leitwort for commentators to refer to the Messiah and delineate the messianic promise. Critically, *zerah* flags messianic passages in the Tanakh, revealing the early messianic understanding of these rabbinic commentators.

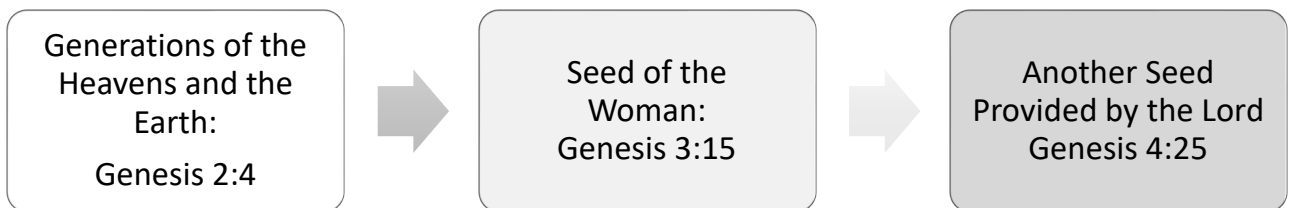
Such an understanding has been obscured in more recent rabbinic readings, which often reject earlier readings that accept messianic interpretations. For example, while modern rabbis

often dismiss Isaiah 53:4 as a messianic proof text, the Talmud in Mas. Sanhedrin 98b identifies Isaiah 53:4 as referring to the Messiah, whom it calls the “leper scholar.” Likely, *zarah* as a messianic marker helped the sages understand that the promised *yonek*, “young plant” (53:2) related to the promised “seed.” Moreover, the *zeroa* or “arm” of the Lord in 53:1 is a homonym for *zarah*, “seed.”

- **Directly naming the Messiah as *zarah***

In one example, a rabbinic commentator directly calls the Messiah *zarah*, and the lack of disagreement suggests that using *zarah* in this way was acceptable to the community. Ruth Rabbah 8:1 records Rabbi Huna quoting Genesis 4:25, “God hath appointed me another *seed*,” which he refers to as the Messiah.

What might be the basis of Rabbi Huna’s understanding of this “seed” as being the Messiah? Likely, it is the passage’s proximity to the first *toledot-zarah* pattern in Genesis 2:4 and 3:15. If “these are the generations of the heavens and the earth” points to the heir of the heavens and the earth and “her seed” designates this heir as the seed of the woman, then Rabbi Huna would understandably view the “seed” of Genesis 4:25 to be this promised heir.



- **Designating *zarah*-related passages as messianic**

The sages refer to the Messiah with names that often correlate with *zarah*-related words in their original Biblical passages. Lamentations Rabbah 1:51, for example, citing Psalm 18:51, says the Messiah bears the name “David” due to his identity as the “seed” of David who is worthy to bear the name of his ancestor.

In Sanhedrin 98b, the rabbis simply ask, “What is his (the Messiah’s) name?” Answers include:

Shiloh: Of all the sons of Israel, only Judah was marked by the command to “raise up seed” (Genesis 38:8) by *yibbum*, a reference that affirms that the Messiah comes from Judah’s line (Genesis 49:10).

Leper Scholar: The rabbis describe Messiah as a “leper scholar” who bears the “griefs and sorrows” of his people (Isa 53:4). However, this suffering “leper” is called a “young plant” who grows up and eventually suffers redemptively for his people (Isa 53:2). In this way, not only is this passage marked by a *zarah*-related word, but also by picturing the Messiah fulfilling the role of redeemer as well.

In Sukkah 52a, the rabbis use *zarah*-synonymous words to identify messianic passages: הַיָּחִיד (only son) and הַבְּכוֹר (firstborn) in Zechariah 12:10 and בְּנִי (my son) in Psalm 2:7.

Messiah the Son of Joseph: The sages, commenting on Zechariah 12:10 (cf. Gen 22:2), likely identify the Messiah here due to the seed-synonymous terms *yachid* (only son) and *habekor* (the firstborn). Attributing the Messiah to the line of Joseph may trace back to the referential ambiguity of Genesis 37:2, as we have already discussed. Regardless of the non-Davidic paternity attributed to this Messiah, it is notable that the sages recognize the possibility of the Messiah being slain, which aligns with the promise in Isaiah 53:4–5 that the Messiah suffers vicariously and redemptively.

Messiah the Son of David: The sages affirm the identity of the Messiah as the Son of David citing Psalm 2:7–8. However, focusing on this Davidic identity shifts from the textual focus on the Messiah being the “Lord’s son,” for Davidic paternity is not marked in the passage except for references to the kingship and the anointing which David shares with the Messiah. Rather, the Lord is the one to address this Messiah as *beni* (my son), claiming “today . . . I have begotten” you (the Messiah).

Rashi on Genesis 37: The Redemptive Seed:

So far, our survey of traditional Jewish literature suggests that *zarah* informed the messianic understanding of ancient rabbinic commentators, guiding their attention to the promised heir of David, the Messiah. Functioning as a marker of promise, *zarah* was likely seen as working in tandem with *toledot* to define stories such as that of Judah and Tamar in a redemptive frame.

This understanding of *zarah* as a messianic marker seems to be continued in the later writings of Rashi, whose commentary reveals such a redemptive meaning in his use of *zarah* as a leitwort. Rashi comments on two aspects of *zarah* when reading Genesis 38:7–9: the commandment surrounding *zarah*, and the redemptive results of *zarah* to perpetuate the name of the deceased.¹²

Rashi claims that both Er and Onan sinned in similar ways by “wasting seed.” Then, he comments on the command to “raise up seed.” Because the command to raise up seed is an act of redemption and defined by the law of *yibbum*, Rashi clarifies the paternity of the *zarah* and his lineage: “the son will be called by the name of the deceased.” Rashi exemplifies the tendency of commentators to assume the legal framework surrounding the redemptive act of “raising up seed” even if the law of *yibbum* is not directly mentioned. Likewise, modern readers will also assume the legal framework surrounding the act of raising up seed, addressing the leitwort *yibbum* directly only when they want to explicitly address the legal stipulations of this redemptive act.

Modern Jewish readings of *zarah* in Genesis 38

When we consider how our modern Jewish readers discuss *zarah* as a leitwort, we see a similar focus on the theme of redemption. These readers, like Rashi, understand the story of Judah and

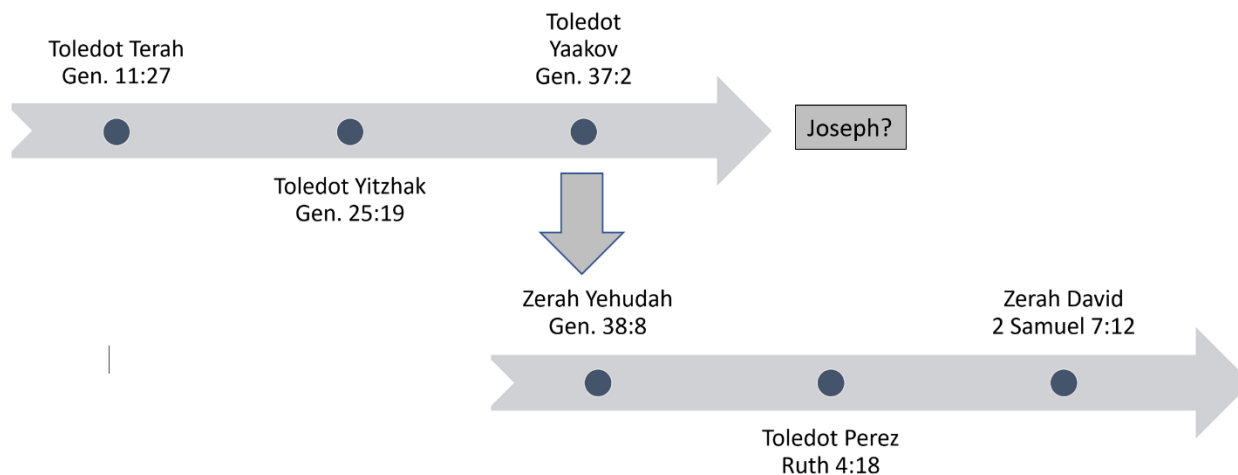
¹² https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8233/showrashi/true/jewish/Chapter-38.htm, accessed 4/14/20

Tamar as a redemptive narrative even as they depart from Rashi in key ways. This outcome suggests that at the very least, these readers employ similar leitwörter, which may suggest that they may share the same underlying approach as Rashi and traditional scholars. Likely, these modern readers see the leitwörter *toledot* and *zarah* working together in a framework for reading, as the kind of type-scene that Lieve Teugels describes as a “patterned whole”:

Type-scenes in their turn contain smaller “similarity patterns” (Sternberg) or repeated textual units, such as key-words (*Leitwörter*), recurrent motifs, themes, and sequences of actions.¹³

Read redemptively as a type-scene, Onan’s perverse act is not mere treachery but a waste of “seed,” breaching his lawful responsibility. And Judah’s unwitting impregnation of Tamar is not merely a tragic mistake but a redemptive success, as he himself “raises up seed” for his line’s survival. As a result, these modern readers, like Rashi before them, understand the story’s point to be the line’s redemption.

Thus, the readings of these modern Jews illustrate the way in which *zarah* helps the reader understand Judah’s place in the continuation of Jacob’s chosen line, as the “barren woman” type-scene of the Avot narratives transitions into a genealogically redemptive seed type-scene of David’s line. Starting with Judah, a genealogical crisis will require the redemptive “raising up” of seed in order to restore the line:



Starting with Judah and Tamar, the redemptive seed type-scene frames stories in the Davidic narrative arc, connecting Judah’s story with Boaz and Ruth and also God’s promise to “raise up” seed for David in 2 Samuel 7:12.

¹³ Teugels, *Bible and Midrash*, 51.

- **Citing Rashi: Identifying “wasting seed” as a sin.**

To begin their discussion of Genesis 38, these Jewish readers focus on the first shocking detail of the narrative, the Lord’s judgment of Judah’s son Er. But it is a quote from Rashi that prompts the group to settle on the leitwort *zarah* as the focus of their conversation:

Speaker 1: So, did you ever wonder what Er, Judah’s firstborn son, did that was *wicked* in the sight of God?

Speaker 5: Rashi says, “The nature of the sin of Er and Onan is given in verse 9. Er and Onan did not want Tamar’s beauty to be marred by pregnancy, so they *wasted* their *seed*. For this disgrace they suffered death. . . .

- **Genealogical Crisis: Failing redemptive responsibility by wasting seed.**

Once these speakers focus on Onan’s “wasted seed,” they begin to explore the idea of sin and lawfulness. They conclude that Onan’s sin is to fail his “procreating responsibilities” rather than simply wasting his seed:

Speaker 5: You could say that part of Onan’s sin is that he refused to do what his father told him to do or that he refused to fulfill all his responsibility to his brother to provide a child so that his brother’s name might be carried on.

Speaker 4: For Onan.

Speaker 5: For Onan. That he failed in his procreating responsibilities to his father and to his brother.

- **Differing from Tradition: Failing redemptive responsibility is the true sin of wasting seed.**

Notably, *zarah* as a leitwort guides the free-flowing discussion of these Jewish readers without locking them into Rashi’s conclusions. The group agrees that it was the shirking of redemptive “responsibility” rather than the mere act of “wasting seed” that condemned Onan, a solution that affirms even more directly the presence of a redemptive seed type-scene.

Speaker 5: You could say that part of Onan’s sin is that he refused to do what his father told him to do or that he refused to fulfill all his responsibility to his brother to provide a child so that his brother’s name might be carried on . . . (but) it says here, according to Rashi, that Er thinks he didn’t want Tamar’s beauty to be marred by the pregnancy.

Speaker 2: (You're) saying, the act of spilling his seed wasn't the sin; the act was disobeying his father or not living up to his responsibility. As opposed to the commentaries, which focus on the *wasting* of the *seed* rather than the disobedience of not living up to his responsibilities.

Speaker 4: So, potentially, once you've lived up to your other responsibilities, then to waste your seed is not that big of a deal.

- **Resolving Genealogical Crisis: Raising up the redemptive seed**

Finally, we see that operating in this redemptive seed type-scene, the leitwort *zarah* is the link that shifts the conversation from the crisis of wasted seed to the solution of raising up redemptive seed, as the group notes that Yehuda does not “waste” seed but successfully impregnates Tamar.

Speaker 4: and then Yehuda specifically doesn't *waste his seed*, and his daughter-in-law gets pregnant.

Speaker 2: You know, I think it's supposed to be ironic. He's the one who keeps pushing (**Speaker 4:** pushing other people) towards her, and he's the one who ends up getting her pregnant.

Thus, we see that in this first story of the Davidic narrative arc, the redemptive act of “raising up seed” is introduced. For these modern Jewish readers, framing the conversation according to *zarah* both condemns Onan's actions as irresponsible and supports Judah's actions as genealogically successful. The question, however, remains—does Judah act lawfully and legitimately to raise up seed?

These modern readers question not the propriety of Judah's impregnation of Tamar but the legality of his raising up seed to take on this redemptive responsibility himself. To resolve this question, these readers employ the leitwort *yibbum*, the command to “raise up seed” to redeem an endangered line.

4. And perform *yibbum*: Restoring the line by raising up seed

וַיָּבֵם אֶתָּהּ וְהָקָם זָרַע לְאֶחָיָהּ
Genesis 38:8 (cf. Ruth 4:18–22)

Yibbum as a Leitwort

As we have already seen, the leitworter *toledot* and *zarah* guide readers to envision God's work of genealogical promise in the stories of the Avot. Both traditional commentators and modern Jewish readers view *toledot* as an indicator of the inheritance story of key Biblical figures, such as Jacob, an indicator which then points to the leitwort *zarah* to identify the heir and continuer of the line. Now, at the generations of Jacob in Genesis 37:2, the narrative focus shifts from the

Avot to the lineage of Judah, which leads to David and the Messianic promise. And, a new leitwort guides readers to focus their discussions on the theme of genealogical redemption.

Running from Judah and Tamar to Boaz and Ruth, then to God's very promise of the Davidic Messiah, the theme of genealogical redemption is evoked by the leitwort *yibbum* and its prescribed action to raise up seed for a deceased kinsman. Initially, *yibbum* is intended to prescribe the brotherly duty to a deceased brother and his widow (Gen 38:8; Deut 25:5–6). However, as this legal prescription is applied to key figures in the Davidic narrative arc, it broadens to include related kin, such as fathers or even near relatives. The leitwort *yibbum* lays the legal foundation of genealogical duty, which is satisfied in the case of Boaz when a redeemer takes up the גֵּאֻלָּה (geullah—the right of the redeemer) and raises up seed. As the narrative moves from Judah to Boaz, the sense of duty to the widow is subsumed and fulfilled by the right of redemption.

Thus, we will see that *yibbum* as a leitwort a legal framework that will both ground and then guide readers to apply a redemptive framework to understand the line of David as it runs from Perez to David. As a result, the reader acquires a template of redemption which can resolve the genealogical crises awaiting David's line in 2 Samuel 7:12 and Jeremiah 22:30. More importantly, this redemptive template defines the Davidic Messiah as the designated Redeemer of David's house and line, thus framing the Messianic promise of 2 Samuel 7:12, Jeremiah 22:5, and Jeremiah 30:9:

2 Samuel 7:12: The Line of Redemption Promises a Davidic Redeemer.

Type-scenes→	Line of Avot	Line of Redemption:		Promised Redeemer:		The Kinsman-Redeemer:
	Genesis 2:4-37:2	Genesis 38:8	Ruth 4:1-18	2 Samuel 7:12	Jeremiah 23:5, 30:7	
Toledot:	Toledot Terah, Isaac, Jacob:		Toledot Perez			Son of David, Son of God
Zerah:	Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:	Seed of Judah		Seed of David	Branch of David	
Yibbum/Kum:		Duty (yabam) to Raise up Seed	Redemptive Right (geullah) to Raise up Seed	God Raises up David's Seed	God Raises up Davidic King	

As the chart above indicates, the leitworter *toledot* and *zerah* continue the line of promise to Judah, who starts the lineage that eventually leads to David and culminates in the promise of the Messiah. By focusing readers' attention on the legal aspects of duty and paternity surrounding Judah's act of raising up seed himself, *yibbum* lays a framework of legal expectation which is satisfied by the right of redemption in the story of Boaz and Ruth. In this way, a framework of

genealogical redemption defines the story of David as God promises a Messiah (2 Samuel 7:12) and reaffirms this promise to the later prophets (Jeremiah 23:5, 30:9).

Rather than direct references to the word itself, *yibbum*-related passages are more readily seen in the prescribed action of *yibbum*—to raise up either seed (Genesis 38:8 and 2 Samuel 7:12), the name (Deuteronomy 25:5-6 and Ruth 4:10) or variations of these. Thus, in response to a genealogical crisis, a kinsman, later clarified to be a kinsman-redeemer in the Boaz and Ruth story, takes up the responsibility to “raise up” for the deceased a redeemer to restore the family line.

Yibbum, as it is cited in Genesis 38:8 and then codified in Deuteronomy 25:5–6, lays out key elements that ultimately find their fulfillment in the story of Ruth:

- **Provision:** the command to fulfill the brotherly duty of levirate marriage is defined as a duty “to her”, the widow of the deceased (Gen 38:8). Similarly, Deuteronomy 25:5 specifies that the act of *yibbum* to “go into her” is accompanied by the duty to “take her as his wife.” Thus, a key aspect of *yibbum* is to fulfill the duty of provision for the widow—the law protects her and assures that she will be provided with the son whom she needs to secure her well-being and share in the land.
- **Revivification:** While the duty to the widow is the focus of *yibbum*, the actual action of *yibbum* is marked by the word קום (*kum*), to raise up, either “seed” (Gen 38:8) or the “name” (Deut 25:6) as a duty to the deceased brother. Apparently, the purpose of *yibbum* is to revive, to give life to the genealogical right of the deceased brother, that is, his name and heir. Deuteronomy 25:6–10 explains that the goal of *yibbum* is to restore the brother’s name so that it is not “blotted out of Israel,” so that the brother’s house is built up. Thus, the theme of revivification associated with *kum* foreshadows resurrection, so that God’s promise to “raise up seed” for David implies both conception as well as a resurrection which reverses the finality of death (2 Sam 7:12).

Genesis 38:8	Deuteronomy 25:5-6	Ruth 4:10	2 Samuel 7:12	Jeremiah 23:5-6.	Jeremiah 30:9
וְהָקֵם זֶרַע (v'hakem zera- raise up seed!)	יָקוּם עַל שְׁם (yakum al shem- raise up (to) name)	לְהָקִים שֵׁם (l'hakim shem- (to) raise up the name)	וְהָקִימֹתִי אֶת זֶרְעִי (v'hakimoti et zeracha- I will raise up your seed)	וְהָקִמֹתִי לְדָוִד צֶמַח (v'hakimoti l'david tsemach- I will raise up for David a branch)	דָּוִד מַלְכָּם אֲשֶׁר אָקִים (david malkam asher akim- David their king whom I will raise up)



- **Personification:** Finally, *yibbum* ensures the integrity of the lineage by the raising up the deceased brother’s “seed” or “name.” As the chart above illustrates, the action of *yibbum* to raise up alternates between “seed” (Gen 38:8; 2 Sam 7:12) and “name” (Deut 25:6; Ruth 4:10) until it transitions to “branch” and “David their king” (Jer 23:5, 30:9). Of the two, the promise of “seed” is more literal, recalling the original language of fruitfulness in which “seed” reproduces its own “kind” (Gen 1:11–12). This promise to continue a

kindred line by raising up seed is clarified even further in the promise to raise up the “name” of the deceased, promising to preserve not just the likeness but also the character of the deceased. This intention of *yibbum* to revive the “name” of the deceased comes to fruition in promises such as Jeremiah 30:9, where God promises to restore “David” and his character back into the line in the person of the promised Messiah.

Thus, *yibbum* serves as a leitwort which leads to the forming of a framework of genealogical redemption due to its resistance to precise application. While the two biblical passages in which it is found stipulate that surviving brothers fulfill the duty, the two actual cases of its application, Judah and Boaz, are not brothers but a father and a near relative. This imprecision leads readers to delineate the responsibilities of these kinsmen and the paternity of their offspring. It leads them to conclude that the duty of *yibbum* is satisfied when one assumes the right of redemption, as Boaz does. And, it links Genesis 38:8 with Ruth 4, duty with redemptive rights. Thus, *yibbum* and *geullah* work together to frame the act of “raising up seed”:

Modern biblical commentator Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg understands that the “offspring” of Judah and Boaz were conceived by similar “marriage” arrangements—that is, levirate marriage.¹⁴ When the rabbinic commentators in Lamentations R. 1:50 discuss the messianic passage of Jeremiah 30:9, they use the language of *yibbum* to discuss the “name” of David “raised up.” And, when our modern Jewish readers seek to define the lawfulness of Judah’s action to raise up seed through Tamar, they look to the story of Boaz and even use the leitwort *yibbum* to discuss the paternity of the son raised up by Boaz. Because the duty of *yibbum* finds its fulfillment in the right of redemption, the book of Ruth leaves us with a final picture of both the qualified redeemer as kinsman and also the seed raised up as being himself a redeemer:

- **Redeemer raises up seed:** Boaz is recognized as the rightful “redeemer” to raise up seed to “perpetuate the name of the dead and his inheritance” (Ruth 4:5–6). So, read in a redemptive seed type-scene, Boaz is not simply the rescuer of Ruth and Naomi but a suitable redeemer of the line.
- **Redemptive seed:** And the “seed” that Boaz raises up is itself viewed redemptively. The seed contains the hope of redemption—to bear the responsibility for perpetuating the line of blessing and for restoring life to the people of his family (Ruth 4:14–15).

Thus, discussions of the “redemptive seed” type-scene are framed by larger questions which both ancient commentators and our modern Jewish readers grapple with: “Who is qualified as a redeemer to raise up seed to continue a broken line, and what is the paternity of the seed and his resulting lineage?” And, “What is the paternity of this seed, who was raised up by a kinsman-redeemer?”

Traditional Jewish readings of *yibbum*

¹⁴ Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, *The Five Megilloth* (London: Soncino, 1984), 136.

As a leitwort, *yibbum* is not as prominent in either the traditional literature or modern conversation as *toledot* or *zarah*. Still, traditional scholars demonstrate that they agree that the act of *yibbum* is the lawful way to raise up the messianic seed. Discussing Jeremiah 30:9, the rabbinic sages indicate that their messianic understanding incorporated several key aspects of *yibbum*:

What is the name of King Messiah? . . . The Holy One, blessed be He, will *raise up another David* for us, as it is written, But they shall serve the Lord their God, and *David* their king, whom *I will raise up* unto them: not ‘I raised up’, but ‘I will raise up’ is said. R. Papa said to Abaye: But it is written, And my servant David shall be their prince [*nasi*] forever? — E.g., an emperor and a viceroy. (Lamentations R. 1:50, emphasis added)

- **God’s right as redeemer to raise up seed for David:** The commentators in Lamentations Rabbah recognize that the Lord has the unquestioned right to “raise up” a descendant of David. That is, the Lord is qualified to perform *yibbum* as David’s redeemer (Psalm 19:14).
- **God raises up an heir to rule in place of David:** Commenting on Jeremiah 30:9, the sages acknowledge that God was the one to raise up David’s offspring not only to reinsert the life and likeness of David into the line but also to reassert his status and rule as king. Thus, the *yibbum*-associated act of raising up seed or name is here seen by the rabbinic commentators as also functioning in the appointment of the heir as king to rule in David’s place.
- **The heir personifies David:** By hoping in God’s promise to raise up “another David,” the sages reveal a hope for a Messiah who is not simply a blood descendant of David but who personifies and embodies the person of David in a unique way so that he is considered “another David.” They recognize that God considers the Messiah to stand in for his “servant David.”

This embodiment of David necessitates a direct “raising up” of seed. We have seen how Judah himself has to “raise up seed” to bypass the wickedness of Er and Onan. Likewise, God promises David that he himself will “raise up your seed . . . who will come from your own body” (2 Sam 7:12), presumably ensuring that the seed directly embodies his father David’s likeness. Doing so bypasses the unworthy lineage of Jeconiah, whose descendants were banished from the throne (Jer 22:30). What Judah demonstrates within a generation and these successive Davidic kings over the course of fourteen generations is that a line’s degeneration can make the “likeness” of the founder irrecoverable. In these cases, *yibbum* and its process of raising up the seed or name of the deceased is the only way to restore integrity to a fallen line, as the founder’s “seed” is reintroduced for a fresh start.

Modern Jewish readings of *yibbum*

If traditional Jewish readers are concerned about the promise of *yibbum*, our modern readers focus on the parameters of *yibbum*, asking the question, “Are Judah’s actions a legitimate instance of *yibbum*?” And, if they are, “What are the halakhic implications for his seed’s paternity and lineage?”

The letter of the law of *yibbum* stipulates a brother to “raise up seed” to perpetuate the line of the deceased (Deut 25:5–7). But what happens if a non-brother who is a relative, even a father, is the one to perform *yibbum*? In their discussions, our readers conclude the following, concerning the cases of both Judah and Boaz:

- **Torah defines the normal, halakhic case: brothers**

Having determined that Judah himself has fulfilled the redemptive responsibility to raise up seed to perpetuate Er’s line, our readers begin to discuss the legality of his actions, turning to the Torah to define the normal case of brothers:

Speaker 4: and then Yehuda specifically doesn’t waste his seed, and his daughter-in-law gets pregnant.

Speaker 2: You know, I think it’s supposed to be ironic. He’s the one who keeps pushing (**Speaker 4:** pushing other people) towards her, and he’s the one who ends up getting her pregnant.

Speaker 4: But *according to the law*, it’s not necessarily supposed to be the father, and generally if an older brother dies, and he doesn’t have children.

Speaker 1: Not supposed to be the father.

Speaker 2: But he’s the one pushing people towards the woman.

Speaker 4: But so what is. But what happens according to halakhah? Normally, if there is a younger son, then the younger son is supposed to marry the wife, and I don’t remember what happens if there isn’t a younger brother.

Speaker 1: Then she goes back to her father’s house.

In this first stage of their conversation, these readers cite the legal baseline of what Torah prescribes. Torah prescribes the normal case of halakhic practice—that is, it is a brother who must fulfill the redemptive responsibility to marry the wife.

- **Biblical precedent suggests what is theoretically possible:**

Having established what is normally prescribed by the Torah as halakhah, the readers then look at the precedent set by the story of Boaz and Ruth as what is “theoretically” possible. In light of the story of Boaz, it is possible for a relative who is not a brother to act redemptively to perpetuate the line.

Speaker 4: It doesn't have to go to the cousin or the uncle.

Speaker 1: No, although *theoretically* it could be, because in the story of Ruth . . .

Speaker 2: Uh, Boaz is not a brother, but he's a *relative*, and he says "There is another *relative* that's closer, who could fulfill before me, so he has to release that responsibility before I can marry you."

Speaker 4: umm hmmm.

Determining that a "relative" such as Boaz has the right of redemption when there are no brothers available, these readers then discuss the resulting paternity of Boaz's seed, Obed.

- **The leitwort *yibbum* solves the problem of paternity:**

For these readers, Torah has prescribed the "normal" case of a brother raising up seed for the deceased brother, and biblical precedent establishes the "theoretical" possibility of a relative raising up seed. However, it is the leitwort *yibbum* that allows them to determine the paternity of this seed raised up by a non-brother.

Speaker 4: Right, but when looking at the *lineage of David*, don't they say Boaz? Son of blah blah blah, *son of Boaz*, I think, I'm not for sure.

Speaker 1: pretty sure . . .

Speaker 4: They don't say son of—I forget—Naomi's son's name.

Speaker 2: Maybe it's considered a *combination*; I mean it's still; the duty of *yibbum* still . . .

Speaker 4: *Yibbum*, that's what it is called . . . right.

Speaker 2: But the duty of *yibbum* does seem to be that the woman's line is continued through her husband's line, although I don't think it's considered *exclusively* this man, *the dead man's son*.

Speaker 4: Don't they, isn't that the name, like son of the dead man? *Ben*, that's what I thought. I remembered, so it would be *ben*.

Speaker 5: I think that would be only if it's the brother.

Speaker 4: Only if it's the brother.

At this point, these modern Jewish readers introduce the leitwort *yibbum* here to untangle the complexity of the seed's paternity. But are they correct to apply this legal framework even if Boaz never mentions the word itself? As was stated previously, applying the framework of *yibbum* occurs in response to a genealogical crisis, in which case the action to raise up seed is undertaken. Both these conditions are met, as Boaz specifically announces that he has taken Ruth to "raise up the name" of the deceased.

Using *yibbum* to address the problem of Obed's paternity guides these readers to conclude that in the case of non-brothers who raise up seed, such as Boaz, the paternity of the seed is a "combination" due to the fulfillment of this "duty of *yibbum*." They arrive at this conclusion by using *yibbum* as a guide to interpret this passage in Ruth. Apparently, *yibbum* applied to the progeny of such a redeemer would be considered both the son of the redeemer who raises up seed, hence, the "son of Boaz," and also the deceased, whose name has been perpetuated (Ruth 4:5). Because Boaz is not a brother, the son is not "exclusively . . . the dead man's son," as would have been the case if a brother had raised up seed.

Thus, when Judah, as a father, raises up seed himself, *yibbum* names the paternity of the seed as a combination of fathers, being named by Judah and his deceased son (albeit remembered in infamy due to his wickedness). Judah is not a brother, so the child is not exclusively named for the deceased. When such a redemptive seed framework is applied to God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12, it restores the messianic hope of a seed who is both the son of David and the son of God. In an unlikely turn of events, God pledges to raise up seed in order to resolve the future genealogical crisis of the line's termination at Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:30), thus affirming God's role as Redeemer to David and his future line.

- **Determining the limits of *yibbum* and duty:**

Having applied the legal framework of *yibbum* to determine the paternity of the son, these readers now focus on the qualifications of Boaz as the one raising up seed. It is here that they begin to distinguish the limits of duty, as prescribed by *yibbum*, and the privileges of kinship, understood as the rights of redemption. In this way, these readers start to shift from a duty-based to a redemptive understanding of Boaz and his actions.

Speaker 5: Boaz says he has to get permission from the close relative because she would then technically fall under the household of this closer relative.

Speaker 1: I'm sorry, I did not hear that whole thing because I was looking at the legal argument.

Speaker 5: I'm just wondering, if Boaz had to get permission from the closer relative not because the closer relative had the responsibility or right to marry her but more so because she doesn't have a father-in-law or husband anymore. By default, she would have been subsumed into the household of the closer relative.

Speaker 4: That might be the case if it was a Jewish woman. Were they Jewish women?

Speaker 1: No, they were Midianite, and so the famous “Your God is my God” speech.

Speaker 2: Maybe, if the dead man has brothers, the oldest brother has the responsibility, and if he doesn’t want it he has to get out of it through *chalitza*. After that, there’s no more obligation.

The first two speakers frame the conversation by focusing on the “technical” and “legal” aspects of *yibbum*, which specify the “responsibilities” of relatives to the deceased brother and his widow. However, by the end of the conversation, Speaker 2 suggests that beyond brothers, who are required to perform *chalitza* to shirk their duty to the widow, there is “no more obligation.” In other words, if the framework of *yibbum* only directly covers brothers, then there is needed another framework by which the levirate act of raising up seed is understood.

- **From Duty to the Redeemer’s Rights and Privileges**

Having agreed that the brotherly obligation does not apply, the discussants introduce the notion of privilege as they begin to talk about the act of redemption and the redeemer’s role. Interestingly, they focus on the way that the redeemer’s role involves taking Ruth in marriage. As we have seen, acquiring the widow in levirate marriage is the first duty associated with *yibbum*. So, if the widow is acquired in this redemptive transaction, the requirements of *yibbum* are fulfilled.

Speaker 5: The next brother doesn’t have to?

Speaker 2: I’m thinking if there are no more brothers. Beyond brothers, I don’t think there’s an obligation. Meaning, you don’t have to get out of anything. Maybe they have a sort of privilege to marry her. Maybe its preferable, which is why Boaz would have to ask. Because this guy doesn’t do *yibbum* and need to get out of it.

Speaker 1: Ruth is a kind of afterthought, or the bonus acquisition. Because Boaz actually says to this other kinsman that Naomi has to sell this piece of land which belonged to Elimelech, so “If you will redeem it, but if you are not willing to redeem it, then I’ll redeem it, because you’re the closest. There’s no one to redeem it but you, and I come after you.

And, the guy says, “I’m willing to redeem it” and then Boaz says, “Now along with the property (laughter) you also get Ruth the Moabite!” So then the redeemer says,

Speaker 4: “On second thought”

Speaker 1: “Go ahead.”

From this point in the conversation, these readers focus on the redeemer and his role to redeem both the land and the widow of the deceased. This shift is significant, because these readers recognize that it is now the theme of redemption which frames the narrative of Boaz and Ruth.

- **The Redeemer Raises up the Name of the deceased:**

Our readers conclude their session by filling out the picture of the redeemer’s role when levirate marriage is involved. Not only does the redeemer acquire the wife of the deceased kinsman, but he resultingly perpetuates the name of the deceased (literally, ‘raises up the name’). Thus, the redeemer fulfills the dual obligations of *yibbum* to both the widow and the deceased kinsman.

Speaker 5: You can have the land, but then you also have to take on the responsibility of another wife....

Speaker 1: He does say, “If you take the property, you have to take Ruth. You must also acquire the wife of the deceased so as to perpetuate the name (literally, ‘to raise up the name’) of the deceased upon his estate. So, if you take the land, you have to take the wife of the deceased and perpetuate his name (literally, ‘to raise up the name’).” But then the redeemer says, “I think my wife won’t appreciate that.”

Speaker 4: (laughs) It doesn’t say that!

Speaker 1: Basically, he does: “Lest I impair my own estate,” meaning, “My wife will never stand for that.”

Speaker 2: “She’s going to kill me!”

Speaker 1: “My wife will kill me!”

Speaker 4: Back to antiquity, Jewish men were afraid of their wives.

These readers end their discussion by relating the topic back to their own personal experiences. Though they end on a humorous note, it is significant that by the end of the conversation, they effectively reframe their discussion of the levirate acts of acquiring the widow and raising up seed for the deceased in terms of redemption, concluding that the redeemer satisfies the legal obligations of *yibbum*.

Even though their conversational shift from *yibbum* (duty) to *geullah* (right of the redeemer) focused on Boaz, their conclusions also apply to Judah, who, like Boaz, was not a brother but a father. Apparently, the right of redemption's more inclusive parameters of kinship qualify both Boaz, a near relative, and Judah, a father, to act as kinsman-redeemers to raise up seed. Thus, to apply their conclusions to their original question, Judah raises up seed to continue his line as a kinsman-redeemer. Because *yibbum*'s stipulations of paternity do not apply to a non-brother, the redeemer both retains paternity and raises up the name of the deceased, Er. Likewise, Boaz retains paternity while perpetuating the name of Mahlon as a father as well. Finally, when God promises David in 2 Samuel 7:12 to act in his rightful role as Redeemer¹⁵ to raise up his seed, he and David share in the paternity of this seed.

Completing the Redemptive Seed Type-scene

Having concluded that the levirate act prescribed by *yibbum* (duty to the deceased and his widow) and its fulfillment in *geullah* (right of redemption) allows for a dual paternity when "seed" is raised up by a non-brother, including fathers of a line, these modern readers complete our picture of a redemptive seed type-scene which underlies Jewish readings of the Davidic narrative:

- **Genealogical promise:** Key moments in the Davidic narrative arc are often marked by *toledot*, which signals to the reader that a designated heir must be identified to head the family and to continue the line of blessing.
- **Genealogical crisis:** The line may be threatened when a suitable heir is not able to continue the line (e.g. the deaths of Er and Onan) or when there are competing lines of promise (e.g. Joseph and Judah). In David's line, the crisis takes place in the far future when his line is threatened by the exclusion of his descendant, Jeconiah.
- **Redemptive solution:** In these crises, the duty of *yibbum* and the right of redemption can be invoked so that a suitable redeemer "raises up seed" for the deceased in order to perpetuate the line and produce a redeemer for the line (Ruth 4:14).
- **Redemptive seed and its paternity:** When the one performing the levirate act of raising up acts as a redeemer, a kinsman who is not a brother, then the designated *zarah* is named as the son of two fathers—the one whose name is being perpetuated and the one raising up seed.

By the end of Ruth 4, a profile of the son/seed who is to be redeemer (Ruth 4:14) emerges. This Kinsman-Redeemer, raised up by levirate marriage, is tasked with both restoring life and building the line and house (Ruth 4:12). This profile of a Kinsman-Redeemer expands in scope when the messianic Seed of David is now tasked with the role of a redemptive King who will

¹⁵ David explicitly calls God his "Redeemer" in Psalm 19:14. Moreover, God qualifies as a kinsman, being the father of Israel (Hos 11:1) as well as its creator and hence, Redeemer (Isa 43:1). In fact, the story of God's redemptive work first to the Avot then to David and his line increases in precision and focus, as we see here.

restore life to his people and build up David's house as the seat of his throne to rule the nation and shepherd his people. As the redemptive action of *kum*/raise up runs through the Davidic narrative arc, its focus in the messianic promises grows from “seed” to “Branch” to a “King” who is the very personification of David:

From Genealogical Redemption to Redemptive King

Passage:	Genesis 38:8	Deuteronomy 25:5-6	Ruth 4:10	2 Samuel 7:12	Jeremiah 23:5-6.	Jeremiah 30:9
	Line of Redemption			Promised Redeemer		
Raise Up:	Seed	Name	Name	Seed	Branch	David (name) their King
	וְהָקֵם זֶרַע (v'hakem zera- raise up seed!)	יָקוּם עַל שְׁם (yakum al shem- raise up (to) name)	לְהָקִים שֵׁם (l'hakim shem- (to) raise up the name)	וְהָקִימֹתִי זֶ אֶת־רַעְדִּי (v'haki-moti et zeracha- I will raise up your seed)	וְהָקִימֹתִי לְדָוִד צֶמַח (v'hakimoti l'david tsemach- I will raise up for David a branch)	דָּוִד מַלְכָּם אֲשֶׁר אֲקִים (david malkam asher akim- David their king whom I will raise up)
						
Role:	Family Role: Son		Redemptive Role: <i>Son/ Seed/ Redeemer</i>	National Role: Redemptive King		
	Seed is for brother (v.8)	Name of brother is raised up in Israel (v.6)	Seed (v.12); son (v.13); redeemer who restores life (v.14) and builds house (v.12).	Seed (v.12) magnifies name (v.9), builds house for David (v.11) and God (v.13); rules as king (v.12).	Branch for David (v.5) rules as king bears the name “Lord” (v.6).	David their King will be served by the people (v.9).



5. I will raise up your Seed: From Redemptive Seed Type-scene to Gospel Template

וְהָקִימֹתִי אֶת־רַעְדִּי אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ

2 Samuel 7:12

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Sam 7:12 –13)

We started this paper's journey by considering divergent views in the Jewish community regarding 2 Samuel 7:12, a verse that defines for both followers and detractors of Yeshua the role and identity of the Messiah. To this point, we have seen that both ancient commentators and modern Jewish readers are guided by the interplay of leitwörter, which lead them down a

patterned reading path as they navigate the passages of the Avot then the Davidic line, which culminates in the messianic promise of 2 Samuel 7:12 and the related promises in Jeremiah 23:5 and 30:9.

2 Samuel 7:12: The Line of Redemption Promises a Davidic Redeemer.

Type-scenes→	Line of Avot	Line of Redemption:		Promised Redeemer:		The Kinsman-Redeemer:
	Genesis 2:4-37:2	Genesis 38:8	Ruth 4:1-18	2 Samuel 7:12	Jeremiah 23:5, 30:7	Matthew 1:1-25
Toledot:	Toledot Terah, Isaac, Jacob:		Toledot Perez			Yeshua Messiah
Zerah:	Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:	Seed of Judah		Seed of David	Branch of David	Son of David
Yibbum/Kum:		Duty (yabam) to Raise up Seed	Redemptive Right (geullah) to Raise up Seed	God Raises up David's Seed	God Raises up Davidic King	By Holy Spirit, God raises up Seed from David's body

Starting with the first instance of the leitwort *toledot*/generations in Genesis 2:4, the word marks key moments in the formation of God's chosen line. A particular father's inheritance and blessing is assigned to a designated heir, who is identified by the leitwort *zerah*. In this way, the Avot are designated as the continuers of the generational line as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are given *zerah*-related promises in the passage framed by genealogical promise.

While these type-scenes of genealogical promise continue through the Davidic line, the leitwort *yibbum* (and its action, *kum*) in the story of Judah modifies this type-scene to become one of genealogical redemption. As demonstrated to some extent in the ancient literature but more clearly in modern readings, the genealogical crises and resolution of Perez and Obed are conceived in terms of first brotherly duty (*yibbum*) then its fulfillment as redemptive right (*geullah*) and the action of raising up (*kum*) of seed or name.

Messianic Jewish followers of Yeshua look to Ruth chapter 4 as a passage that points to Yeshua as the messianic "Kinsman-Redeemer."¹⁶ The Jewish readers in our study demonstrate an interpretive trajectory that points in the same direction, as they make sense of the actions of Judah and Boaz to raise up seed as defined by both duty and then redemptive right. As depicted by the chart above, it appears that Messianic Jewish believers, ancient rabbinic commentators,

¹⁶ <https://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/messianic-prophecy/the-messiah-would-be-our-kinsman-redeemer/>, accessed 10/29/20.

and our sampling of Jewish readers agree that Judah's line is the line of redemption. In this regard, remember that Genesis R. 12:6 cites the leitwort *toledot* to trace the line of promise running from Creation to Perez and the Davidic line and culminating in the messianic hope of restoration. Similarly, our modern Jewish readers show that they read stories in the Davidic narrative with genealogy and redemption in mind

Speaker 4: Why is David the king that everyone remembers? Was he that much better than every other leader?

Speaker 2: I think part of it is that he starts this dynasty and that part of the tradition is that Messiah comes from David, so . . .

Speaker 4: These are the generations of David.

Speaking in this way, these readers demonstrate that the genealogical and redemptive frameworks they've acquired to this point are still operant as they continue reading stories in the Davidic narrative arc. Reading the Davidic story redemptively is consistent with the way traditional and modern Jewish readers read the narratives of the Avot and the Davidic line. So, applying that redemptive framework now to God's promise of the Davidic Messiah, which uses the same redemptive language that we see in Genesis 38 and Ruth 4—*zarah*, *shem*, and *kum*—is merely a continuation of a consistent way of reading. In fact, the Messianic Jewish community's embrace of Yeshua as their Kinsman-Redeemer affirms that such a redemptive framework, derived from Ruth 4, is not a break but a continuation of this redemptive way of reading.

When a line faces a genealogical crisis, the raising up of seed ensures the continuity of the line, and also marks the identity of the son conceived in this levirate fashion in profound ways. As our modern Jewish readers recognized, the stipulations of *yibbum* regarding brothers dictates that the progeny of a brother who fulfills his duty to his deceased brother will be exclusively named as the son of the deceased brother. When a redeemer is qualified as a kinsman rather than a brother, however, the seed he raises up is regarded as the son of both the redeemer and of the deceased. Thus, Obed is considered both the son of Boaz and Mahlon, on behalf of whom Boaz acts (Ruth 4:10). In this way, when God promises David to "raise up" his seed (2 Sam 7:12), his redemptive action ensures that the seed to be raised up would be both the Son of God and the Son of David.

Given the framework provided by Ruth 4, the son raised up redemptively personifies the name of his father. In this way, the seed of David so embodies the character and essence of his father that he is called "David their king" (Jer 30:9). Likewise, through the redemptive act of being "raised up," Yeshua is the direct descendant of David. Recall that the genealogical crisis facing David's line occurred when Jeconiah and his seed were disqualified from the throne. So, God raises up a son of David worthy of his name, to restore his integrity to the house.

If Yeshua bears the name of David, his father, in what sense does he bear the name of God? Recall the conundrum of the Messiah's paternity, which Yeshua raises in Matthew 22:45—if David calls the Messiah "Lord," how can he be his son? If David and his Messianic heir were sons of God in name only, there would be no substantive difference between David and his son.

Only a redemptive raising up of seed results in a Son of David who is also the Son of God due to the stipulations of *yibbum*.

Conclusion

Together, these leitwörter frame the stories of the Davidic narrative arc in terms of genealogical redemption. Starting with the stories of Judah and Boaz, the line of the Messiah continues only when a rightful redeemer “raises up seed” for a deceased kin in levirate marriage with a woman of the house. And, such a seed is raised up to be a kinsman-redeemer, rebuilding the house and line. Boaz illustrates that such a kinsman-redeemer, raised up according to the “redemptive right” (*geullah*) of a non-brother, is the son of two fathers. Guided by these leitwörter, the Jewish readers profiled in this study came to such an understanding of genealogical redemption. But, their application of this framework of genealogical redemption stopped at the story of Boaz in Ruth chapter 4. Evidently, neither they nor other Jewish readers apply this framework of genealogical redemption to the other passages in the Davidic narrative arc.

However, the same leitwörter which led these readers to acquire this framework of genealogical redemption continue through the rest of the Davidic narrative arc to define God’s promise of the Davidic Messiah. God himself adopts the role of the line’s redeemer as he promises to “raise up” (קום-- *kum*) seed¹⁹ (2 Samuel 7:12, Jeremiah 23:5) or David’s name (Jeremiah 30:7) in the kind of genealogical redemption accomplished first by Judah (Genesis 38) and then Boaz (Ruth 4). And, as the story of David’s messianic line unfolds, the necessity for God’s direct genealogical redemption becomes clearer. The debasement of David’s line culminates in its termination at Jeconiah, whose “seed” are banned from the throne (Jeremiah 22:30), leaving no legitimate heir to continue David’s line of kingly descent. Only God, intervening as David’s rightful redeemer (Psalm 19:14), can raise up David’s line, for only he can raise up “seed” coming from David’s own “body” (2 Samuel 7:12).²⁰

Thus, the idea of genealogical redemption which the readers of this study articulated as they read Ruth 4 provides a clearer picture of how God promises to intervene to “raise up seed” for David.

¹⁸ The leitwort *yibbum* lays the legal foundation for the duty of levirate marriage as a means of producing an heir. This “duty” transitions into the “redemptive right” (*geullah*) by which a kinsman-redeemer can also “raise up seed” (*kum*) by levirate marriage.

¹⁹ In Jeremiah 23:5, God promises to raise up a righteous “Branch” for David, connoting a seed which has matured and become fruitful. Perhaps this transition shifts the promise from an “heir” to an ascendant Son who “reigns as king.” Thus, we see a shift in focus of the promise from “son” to “king,” from conception to inauguration as the consequence of being “raised up.”

²⁰ The rationale behind genealogical redemption is to “raise up” and establish the “name” of deceased in the line (Deuteronomy 25:16). That is, when a line is deprived not just of a father’s genetic posterity but also his moral integrity, as was the case when both of Judah’s sons were struck down for their sins, the “name” or character of the father must be re-introduced. Hence, Judah not only re-inserted his genetic presence but his “name” and character into his line. Thus, God’s promise to raise up David’s “seed” from his own “body” (2 Samuel 7:12), he directly raises up a direct son of David. What way does David’s own “body” provide “seed” for this redemptive act? Interestingly, David testifies that God has preserved his “tears” in a bottle (Psalm 56:8), allowing for a Messianic Seed who is literally a “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3-4).

Rather than by normal means of marital procreation, God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12 is unique because it promises:

1. **A Responsible Redeemer:** only God himself can fill the role of the responsible redeemer to "raise up seed" for David, for the prophetic warning of Jeremiah 22:30 precludes any human descendant of Jeconiah's line from providing an heir. And, God has the right to act as David's Redeemer, a right which David himself recognizes in Psalm 19:14. In this way, God's promise to be the "father" of the Davidic Messiah (2 Samuel 7:14) is legally permissible when he assumes his rightful role as a kinsman-redeemer, a right which is Torah-prescribed rather than theologically external to Jewish law.
2. **Levirate Marriage:** Not only is the possibility of God as the "father" of the Davidic Messiah consistent with Biblical precedent, but the Messiah's birth by a virtuous, non-married woman²¹ is fundamental to genealogical redemption. The duty of yibbum allows for a levirate arrangement so that an unmarried woman may give birth to the redemptive seed. In this way, Tamar maintained her "righteousness" (Genesis 38:26) even though she was impregnated while unmarried. Like Tamar, Mary was a virtuous young woman of David's house (through betrothal) who conceived by levirate marriage, an arrangement dictated by the duty of yibbum and legitimized in the act of redemption.
3. **Dual paternity:** As our modern Jewish readers concluded, a "seed" raised up for the deceased by a kinsman-redeemer has a "combination" of fathers—the father who performs the act of raising up seed and the deceased, for whom seed was raised up. Textually, we saw that both the duty of yibbum and the redemptive right of geullah legitimize the paternity of both fathers. When God promises to "raise up seed" for David (2 Samuel 7:12) according to genealogical redemption, he ensures that both he (v.14) and David (v.12) are legitimate fathers of the seed. Thus, it is not unprecedented for Yeshua to be both the Son of God and the Son of David. This sonship is not mere cultural convention but rather due to a literal birth as a result of genealogical redemption.
4. the **Role of kinsman-redeemer:** the seed raised up is born into the role of kinsman-redeemer, one who is responsible to build the house of the deceased; to bring life to the family; and, in the case of the Davidic kingship, rule on the throne. Thus, Yeshua's role as the kinsman-redeemer Messiah is not to build a "house of cedar" (2 Samuel 7:7) but to restore David's dynastic house, making it an eternal house (v.16; cf. Ruth 4:12); to bring "life" to his people by paying the propitiation by sin's punishment (v.15; cf. Ruth 4:15); and by ruling on David's eternal throne (2 Samuel 7:13). These roles of the kinsman-redeemer are intrinsic to the act of genealogical redemption, implicit both in the picture of redemption in Ruth 4 as well as the promise of genealogical redemption in 2 Samuel 7:12. So, when Yeshua performs these roles in fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures, he does so according to redemptive precedent rather than a newly framed New Testament

²¹ The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 prophesies that an עַלְמָה (almah—virtuous young woman cf. Genesis 24:43) would conceive. While the word is literally a "young woman," its implied meaning is virtuous and virginal young woman. For this reason, Rebekah is called an almah (Genesis 24:43). Not only was she physically young but also virginal. If she had illicit sexual relations, she would no longer be an almah but a zonah. Or, once married, she becomes a wife.

theology.

When God promises David in 2 Samuel 7:12 that he would, as a kinsman-redeemer, raise up the Messiah as a kinsman-redeemer, he grounds the messianic promise firmly in the act of genealogical redemption. In this way, Messianic Jews are uniquely positioned to grasp the rich reality of the Messiah as their kinsman-redeemer. On the one hand, their Jewish brethren similarly understand the scripture-spanning promise of genealogical redemption, yet they have yet to apply this understanding to God's messianic promise in 2 Samuel 7:12. On the other hand, Gentile followers of Yeshua recognize him as the Messianic Redeemer, though this understanding is based more on theological ideas of debt and payment rather than the family context of genealogical redemption. Thus, the Messianic Jewish community has much to offer in their understanding of the Messiah as their kinsman-redeemer and the kin-relationship which marks their discipleship:

(Yeshua)... is our redeemer – and even more so, our kinsman-redeemer. He is our kinsman, our family, by virtue of being human as well as divine. And by being born Jewish, he is especially a kinsman to the Jewish people.²²

How might the Messianic Jewish community help their brethren understand that God promises a genealogical redemption in 2 Samuel 7:12? The prophet Isaiah communicates God's words of comfort to draw the Jewish nation back to himself, saying:

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. Isaiah 43:1

Perhaps the path to understand God's work of genealogical redemption in the person of the Messiah is simply this. As Jewish readers use the leitwörter toledot, zarah, and yibbum/ kum/ geullah to recount the way that God has "created" and "formed" them as his chosen people, they may begin to apprehend God's work of genealogical redemption, that he is their Redeemer who raises up their Messiah as a kinsman-redeemer, a kinsman-redeemer named Yeshua.

Writer's Background:

I serve as the pastor of discipleship at Morningstar Christian Fellowship, a diverse congregation in the Greater Toronto Area. For nearly a decade, I conducted field work in the Chicagoland

²² <https://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/messianic-prophecy/the-messiah-would-be-our-kinsman-redeemer/>. Accessed on 11/16/2020.

Jewish community, which culminated in a dissertation on the communal basis of Jewish hermeneutic practices during Torah discussion. During this time, I gained a deep respect for the piety of the Jewish people and their longing for their Mashiach. My hope is that this paper might help some have their longing fulfilled.

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