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CHLEB AŁOBY (OZ 9,4)

– PRAKTYKA AŁOBNA CZY ZNAK JEJ ZAKOŃCZENIA?

BREAD OF MOURNING (Hosea 9:4)

– MOURNING PRACTICE OR A SIGN OF ITS END?

Streszczenie

Ozeaszowy zwrot „chleb ałoby” (Oz 9,4) często łączy się z innymi podobnymi wypowiedziami prorockimi (Jr 16,7; Ez 24,17,22). Praktyka spożycia chleba w trakcie ałoby nie idzie jednak w parze z informacjami o postacie praktykowanym w trakcie jej trwania. Członkowie badaczy sądzi, że chodzi o w tym wypadku o rodzaj posiłku stanowiącego znak zakończenia okresu ałoby (Hi 42,11). W Pwt 26,14 wyraźnie nie odróżnia się go od innego zwyczaju – ofiarowywania pokarmu zmarłym (Tb 4,17; Syr 30,18; Ps 106,28; Bar 6,26) i – podobnie jak w wypowiedzi Ozeasza – traktuje takie posiłki jako nieczyste. Można to sugerować, że w istocie chodziło jednak o alternatywny wobec postu sposób zachowania się ałobników. Z drugiej strony nie da się wykluczyć również tego, że w istocie chodziło jedynie o pokarm spożywany przez ałobników jeszcze niedługo w trakcie ałoby, ale zachęcanych jednocześnie, aby już zakończyli (oznaka powrotu do „wiałych”).

Słowa kluczowe: chleb ałoby, post, ałoba, ofiary dla zmarłych

Abstract

Hosea's phrase "bread of mourning" (Ho 9,4) is often combined with other similar prophetic utterances (Jr 17,7; Ez 24,17, 22). However, the practice of eating bread during mourning is not consistent with information about fasting during mourning. Some researchers believe that this may be a kind of meal marking the end of the mourning period (Job 42,11). In Dt 26,14 it is clearly distinguished from another custom – offering food to the dead (Tb 4,17; Syr 30,18; Ps 106,28; Bar 6,26) and – as in Hosea's statement – such meals are treated as unclean. This may suggest that in fact it was an alternative way of behaving for mourners to fasting. On the

other hand, it cannot be ruled out that in fact it was only food eaten by mourners who were still mourning but were already encouraged to end it (a sign of returning to "the world of the living").

Keywords: bread of mourning, fasting, mourning, offerings to the dead

Introduction

Old Testament texts mention bread/meals several times related to mourning practices or offerings to the dead. The most expressive statements related to the first practice can be found in prophetic texts (Hos 9:4; Jer 16:7; Ez 24:17, 22; cf. also Job 42:11). In turn, in younger texts (Deut 26:14; Tob 4:17; Sir 30:18; Ps 106:28; Bar 6:26) there are the aforementioned mentions of meals related to offerings for the dead. At first glance, these two issues do not have much in common and should be treated separately. Nevertheless, the practice of eating bread/meals in connection with mourning for the dead is not entirely clear. We are not certain whether it occurred during the mourning period or rather marked its end? In some cases, it is also not certain whether the bread/meal in question is intended for the mourners themselves or rather for the deceased they mourned. In this article, we would like to analyze the statements mentioned above, hoping to find an answer to the question: what did the practice called "mourning bread" possibly mean and does it really have anything to do with offerings to the dead? We will use a diachronic approach in the analysis, which – we believe – will allow us to observe the possible evolution of this alleged practice.

1. kele em 'ônim (Hos 9:4)

They will not pour out wine to YHWH,
nor will they bring their offerings to Him.
(It will be) as the bread of mourning (kele em 'ônim) to them,
All who eat it will be defiled.
For their bread will be only for (satisfying) their appetite -
it will not enter the house of YHWH. (Hos 9:4)

Scholarly consensus holds that the passage from Hosea 4:4 to 11:11 (or 12:1–14:1) represents a collection of texts largely originating from the period of the Kingdom of Israel. Distinguishing the original contributions of Hosea from later editorial modifications presents

significant challenges. Some scholars, such as Macintosh and Neumann¹, argue that Hosea 9:4 (or specifically verse 4b) may be a later editorial addition. However, Walter Dietrich critiques such views as reflecting a "desperate research situation," asserting instead that Hosea 4–11 reveals the original, though not oral, nature of the Hosean tradition, with the historical core being Hosea 4–9².

In Hosea 9:4, the context involves a prophecy concerning the impending exile to Egypt and Assyria (cf. Hos 9:3, 6; 8:13). The passage indicates that the Israelites, specifically Ephraim, will dwell in a land deemed unclean, where all food will be considered inherently impure. The prophet, speaking on behalf of YHWH, declares that the sacrifices offered by the Israelites will be unacceptable (Hos 9:4). Additionally, Hosea 9:2, which mentions a lack of harvest, suggests that the cessation of annual religious feasts celebrating the produce of the land (including the grape harvest) is being foretold (cf. Num 15:1–19; Hos 9:5). Thus, Hosea 9:4a proclaims the end of libations (wine offerings³) and sacrifices (zeb ̂m) in the land of exile, while the latter part of the verse (4cd) elucidates the ramifications of this situation⁴. In Hosea 9:4, the food the Israelites will consume in exile is described as akin to "bread of mourning," rendering them ritually defiled. This food will merely satisfy their hunger or appetite, but it will not be acceptable for use in the temple of YHWH. This imagery evokes the prohibition found in Deuteronomy 26:14, where food eaten during mourning (be' n̂i) is considered unclean due to its association with death.

The term lenafš m (and the lexem *nefeš*) in Hosea does not signify the "dead soul"⁵ but rather denotes "appetite" or "desire for food."⁶ The bread (le em) itself becomes impure solely because it is consumed in an unclean land. This situation mirrors the defilement associated with contact with the realm of death, as in the case of staying in a mourning house

¹ Detailed discussion of various proposals: *The Formation of the Old Testament*, ed. Walter Dietrich, Hans-Peter Mathys, Thoas Römer, Rudolf Smend, ThW 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014), 407–410 (Walter Dietrich). The problem here is that verse 4a presupposes the fall of the Kingdom of Israel, while the phrase "house of YHWH" in verse 4b essentially refers to the temple in Jerusalem; Jörg Jeremias, *The Prophet Hosea*, ATD 24,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1983), 115–117. However, the discussion on dating this statement has not yielded a decisive conclusion; Jakob Wöhrle, *The Early Collections of the Book of the Twelve Prophets. Origin and Composition*, BZAW 360 (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 57; Susanne Rudnig-Zelt, *Hosea Studies. Redaction-Critical Investigations into the Genesis of the Book of Hosea*, FRLANT 213 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2006), 61A.

² *The Formation of the Old Testament*, 411.

³ Mentioning wine before the meal is unusual, but it might relate to the chiasm in verse 2; see Francis I. Andersen, David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, AB 24 (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 526.

⁴ Mayer I. Gruber, *Hosea: A Textual Commentary*, LHB/OTS 653 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 376.

⁵ See Matthew J. Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hos 9,4, and the Early History of the Soul", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 397–405.

⁶ Critically on this proposal, Gruber, *Hosea*, 378.

(cf. Num 19:11–16)⁷. Consequently, worship and sacrifices to YHWH in a foreign land are rendered invalid⁸. Should any such sacrifices be made, they would be comparable to "bread of mourning," implying their impurity and lack of cultic value. Many scholars interpret this analogy as referring to food consumed during mourning for the deceased. The proximity to death, or direct contact with a corpse, results in ritual impurity for those involved. Hosea uses this analogy to highlight the Israelites' future predicament, where their offerings, though satisfying their hunger, will be devoid of religious significance and unfit for the sacred precincts of worship.

In the context of Hosea 9:4, the term *kele em 'ônîm* is primarily understood as a metaphor comparing sacrifices made in an unclean land to "bread of mourning," suggesting that such sacrifices are rendered impure and devoid of religious value. This comparison underscores the ineffectiveness of these offerings, akin to how bread consumed during mourning is considered ritually unclean⁹. However, an alternative interpretation proposed by Andersen and Freedman¹⁰ suggests that *'ônîm* might not derive from the root *'nj* ("to make mourning"), but rather be a plural form of *'wen* ("vanity" or "false worship"). They argue that this term could be deliberately fashioned to resemble *'l hîm* ("gods"), and thus indicate a reference to offerings made to foreign deities. Although this interpretation presents a provocative alternative, it has not gained widespread acceptance among contemporary scholars.

Returning to the more commonly accepted view, it is important to recognize the variety of mourning practices in ancient Hebrew culture. These practices included tearing clothes, donning specific mourning garments (*aq*), shaving or leaving hair disheveled, sprinkling ashes or dust on the head, and engaging in other acts of ritual mourning¹¹. Additionally, the community played a role in comforting mourners, providing food and drink, which may have functioned as part of the mourning rituals or signified their conclusion¹². The

⁷ James L. Mays, *Hosea*, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 127.

⁸ Eberhard Bons, *The Book of Hosea*, NSK.AT 23/1 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 116.

⁹ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, NAC 19A (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1997), 192. Sometimes *kaf* is treated as a pleonasm (*kaf veritatis* cf. GKC §118x); see e.g. A.A. Macintosh, *Hosea. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1997, 2014), 344.

¹⁰ Andersen, Freedman, *Hosea*, 526–527.

¹¹ Bernhard Lang, Georg Hentschel, "Funeral Customs", in: *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. Bernhard Lang, Manfred Görg, vol. 3 (Zürich, 2001), 918–919; Philip S. Johnston, *Shadows of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Biblical Tradition*, trans. Paweł Sajdek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2010, orig. eng. 2002), 57–59; Silvia Schroer, "Funeral Rites and Mourning in Ancient Israel: Women's Power and Power Conflicts", in: *Death and Afterlife in Ancient Israel and Its Environment*, ed. Angelika Berlejung, Bernd Janowski, FAT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr&Siebeck, 2009), 299–321, esp. 301; Christian Frevel, "Death", in: *Handbook of Theological Terms for the Old and New Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung, Christian Frevel (Darmstadt: WBG, 2015), 422.

¹² Schroer, "Funeral Rites", 301.

mourner's behavior was intended to ritually align them with the deceased, approaching the realm of death during the mourning period, typically lasting seven days¹³. This cultural context helps to elucidate why offerings in an unclean land are compared to "bread of mourning," emphasizing their impurity and inappropriateness for sacred worship. The inclusion of fasting as a mourning practice in various biblical texts (Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:12; 3:35; 12:16; 1 Chr 10:12; Est 4:3; cf. Jon 3:7; Jud 4:13; 1 Macc 3:47)¹⁴ presents a complication for interpreting Hosea 9:4. This verse mentions meals during mourning, contrasting with the fasting tradition. Philip Johnston¹⁵ has suggested that the reference to eating bread or food during mourning might indicate a specific ritual or that the practice of fasting may have been supplanted by a communal meal at some point. However, Johnston notes that there is insufficient evidence to draw definitive conclusions about the nature of this ritual or whether it pertains to food consumed during mourning or offerings to the deceased. Saul Olyan¹⁶ proposes that variations in mourning practices might reflect differences between communities, implying that customs could have varied. Another consideration is that the mention of food in the context of mourning might refer to provisions made at the conclusion of the mourning period rather than during it. Due to the limited information available in Hosea's statement, it remains challenging to ascertain the specific mourning practice intended by the prophet. The diverse evidence suggests a complex picture of mourning customs, and further research may be needed to clarify these practices in ancient Israelite society.

2.1 hem (le em ?) 'al-' bel (Jer 16:7)

They will not break (vel bread) for them because of mourning¹⁷, to comfort them for the deceased, and they will not give them the cup of consolation for his father or his mother (Jer 16:7).

¹³ This type of empathy towards the deceased was expressed only during the mourning period, up until the burial. After this period, the mourner was expected to immediately "return" to normal life, and signs of mourning were to disappear. Therefore, in later periods, more permanent elements, such as shaving the head or making cuts, were prohibited (Lev 19:28; Deut 14:1); Janusz Lema ski, "Is There a Biblical Prohibition Against Tattooing?", *Studia Paradyskie* 28 (2018): 29–44.

¹⁴ Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTS 302 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999), 27.

¹⁵ Johnston, *Shadows of Sheol*, 59.

¹⁶ Saul M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning Ritual and Social Dimension* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 31 note 11.

¹⁷ The noun ' *bel* – "mourning" appears in the book (cf. Jer 6:26; 31:13), but only here does it occur with the preposition ' *al* – "because of, in relation to". Kelvin G. Friebel (*Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign -Acts. Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, JSOTS 283 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999), 90 note 23) interprets the entire lexeme as follows: "in accordance with mourning (customs)".

The dating of Jeremiah 16:1–9 remains a complex issue, as this pericope, in which the prophet's personal experiences symbolize the nation's fate according to YHWH's will, is generally regarded as part of a later editorial layer of the book rather than the original Jeremiah text¹⁸. Within this passage, Jeremiah 16:5–7 alludes to the customs of mourning, specifically the practice of sharing bread and wine with mourners as an expression of empathy and solidarity, as reflected also in Lamentations 4:4¹⁹.

The verb *p ras*, meaning "to break," suggests an omitted noun, with *le em* ("bread") being a probable complement in the Masoretic Text (MT). This omission is plausible given the context of mourning, where the consumption of bread and wine would be customary. In verses 5–6, where participation in mourning rituals is explicitly prohibited, the grammatical structure of verse 7 introduces significant interpretative challenges. Verse 7 of MT includes a collective prohibition ("l hem" - "for them") consistent with verse 6, which states that both the great and the small will die. However, the MT's third-person plural references ("the cup of consolation will not be broken for them" and "the cup of consolation will not be given to drink") are problematic in the context of the verse. The Septuagint (LXX) renders *le em* ("bread") as *artos*, which aligns logically with the mention of both bread and wine. Furthermore, the singular pronouns in the LXX and the Vulgate, contrasting with the MT's plural form, complicate the interpretation. The LXX reads *en penthei aut n* ("in mourning for him"), suggesting that the singular interpretation is valid. Wilhelm Rudolph²⁰ addressed these inconsistencies by replacing MT's *l hem* with *le em* ("bread") and adopting the singular *'et* ("to him") instead of MT's plural *'tem* ("them"). This approach aligns with the LXX's interpretation and maintains consistency within the passage. Thomas Podella²¹ argues that the LXX's reading, which translates *en penthei aut n* ("in mourning for him"), supports the correction of MT's *l hem* to *le em* and the singular *'et*, reflecting the text's intended meaning more accurately. This interpretation harmonizes with the LXX and Vulgate readings while addressing the grammatical discrepancies in the MT. This consequently leads him to the following interpretation of verse 7:

¹⁸ Janusz Lemański, "Let him come to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8b). An Introduction to Old Testament Prophecy, vol. 1: Pre-Classical Prophecy. Major Prophets, SiR 28 (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, 2011), 122–128, esp. 127; *The Formation of the Old Testament*, 341–347 (Walter Dietrich).

¹⁹ Georg Fischer, *Jeremiah 1–25*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2005), 525.

²⁰ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, HAT 12 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 106.

²¹ Thomas Podella, *ôm – Fasting. Collective Mourning for the Hidden God in the Old Testament*, AOAT 224 (Butzon&Bercker Kevelaer, 1989), 100.

No bread is brought to them because of mourning, to comfort him over the deceased, and no cup of consolation is given to them to drink because of his father and his mother.

In this context, the singular terms inserted in square brackets—reflecting "mourner"—serve as interpretative additions to clarify that the text refers to providing sustenance to mourners.

Scholars such as Lech Stachowiak²², William Holladay²³, and Leslie Allen²⁴, along with Wilhelm Rudolph, argue for emending the MT from *l hem* ("for them") to *le em* ("bread") and interpreting the term *' bel* as referring to "mourner" rather than "mourning." This emendation aligns with the Vulgate and results in translations such as: "No one will break bread for the mourner to comfort him for the dead" (Stachowiak), "No one will break bread for the mourner to comfort him for the dead" (Holladay), and "People will not break bread for the mourners" (Allen).

Conversely, John Goldingay²⁵, while maintaining the MT, interprets the phrase as: "They will not share in their mourning, to comfort someone in death." He suggests that *l hem* should default to "bread" given that the verb *p ras* typically connotes "breaking bread" (cf. Lamentations 4:4)²⁶. Goldingay emphasizes that this prohibition reflects a gesture of empathy towards the mourners, akin to practices noted in Isaiah 58:7. This debate highlights the complexities in translating and interpreting ancient texts, especially regarding the specific nature of mourning practices and the cultural context of the period.

Jack Lundbom²⁷ provides a decisive interpretation of Jeremiah 16:7, stating: "and they will not break bread for them because of the mourning rituals, to comfort someone because of the deceased." Lundbom suggests²⁸ that the verb *p ras* can have an inclusive meaning in this context, a view supported by the Targums²⁹ and Rashi. He posits that both *l hem* ("for them") and *le em* ("bread") are necessary in the text, with the omission of *le em* likely resulting from

²² Lech Stachowiak, *The Book of Jeremiah*, P ST X/1 (Pozna : Pallottinum, 1967), 229.

²³ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 467: "One shall not break bread for the mourner to console him for the deceased."

²⁴ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Louisville, London: The Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 186, 188: "People will not break bread for the mourners."

²⁵ John Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 395: "They will not give a share to them in mourning to console someone for a death."

²⁶ Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 396 note g.

²⁷ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, AB 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 752: "And they will not break bread for them, regarding mourning rites to console one regarding the dead."

²⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 759.

²⁹ *Targum Jonathan*, vol. 2: *Later Prophets*, trans. and ed. Anna Ku mirek, Marek Parchem (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, 2023), 496–497.

haplography (either homoeoarcton or homoeoteleuton). Lundbom argues that in ancient Near Eastern customs, bread was traditionally broken rather than cut³⁰, reinforcing the inclusion of the term "bread" in the passage. He interprets this as referring to the practice of providing bread to mourners either in the mourning house or placing it on the grave, aligning with customs noted in Tobit 4:17, Sirach 30:18, Baruch 6:26, and Psalms 106:28. Lundbom leans towards the first option, suggesting that fasting was obligatory until the day of the funeral, with food being provided afterward. He also interprets *le em 'ônîm* ("bread of mourning") in Hosea 9:4 and later in Ezekiel 24:17, 22 as bread brought by neighbors and friends to avoid ritual impurity³¹.

Lundbom finds unnecessary the proposed emendations of *' bel* ("mourning rites") to *' b l* ("mourner"), as he believes the MT is coherent as it stands. However, he acknowledges that in Hosea 9:4, "mourning bread" is still deemed "unclean," which challenges the interpretation he proposes.

This brief review leads to the conclusion that Jeremiah 16:7 may indeed refer to bread associated with mourning rites, even if not explicitly mentioned in the MT. The question remains whether this bread was served in the mourning house or elsewhere. In verse 5, there is a prohibition against entering the *bêt marza*, often translated as "house of mourning." This term appears only once more in the Hebrew Bible, in Amos 6:7, where it denotes a place of revelry³². The term has been extensively analyzed³³, with evidence from Ugaritic texts suggesting that such establishments were common social venues for communal activities or drinking (cf. Song of Songs 2:4; Esther 7:8: "house [of drinking] wine")³⁴. John Goldingay³⁵ translates *bêt marza* as "house where a wake is kept for a corpse," while Marvin Pope³⁶ supports this funeral interpretation. Recent research indicates that these places likely served

³⁰ On this topic: Philip J. King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 108.

³¹ This was already suggested by Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. Tadeusz Brzegowy (Pozna : Pallottinum, 2004), 70.

³² Hence Koehler, *Baumgartner and Stamm*, vol. 1, 596: "festive gathering with revelry" (Am 6:7); "mourning meal" (Jer 16:5†).

³³ Christl Maier, Ernst M. Dörrfuss, "'To Sit, Eat, and Drink with Them': Amos 6:7; Jeremiah 16:5 and the Meaning of *marzea*," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 111 (1999): 45–57, esp. 51; Stefan von Schorch, "The Prophets and Carnival: *Marzeach – Maioumas – Maimuna*," *Vetus Testamentum* 53 (2003): 397–415; Estée Dvorjetski, "From Ugarit to Madaba: Philological and Historical Functions of *marz a*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 61 (2016): 17–39.

³⁴ Johnston, *Shadows of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Biblical Tradition*, 60.

³⁵ Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 395: "a house where there is a wake."

³⁶ Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB 7C (New York: Double day, 1977), 217–222, esp. 214.

broader social functions, such as clubs, associations, or public drinking houses, similar to the contexts in Jeremiah 16:5 and Amos 6:7³⁷.

3. *wele em ' n šîm* (Ez 24,17, 22)

Sigh [but] be silent! Do not mourn for the dead!

Tie a turban on your head, put your sandals on your feet
and do not cover your mouth (literally your whiskers).

You shall not eat the bread of men. (Ez 24,17)

And you shall do as I have done:

You shall not cover your mouth (literally your whiskers)
and you shall not eat the bread of men. (Ez 24,22)

The Book of Ezekiel is generally regarded as a cohesive literary and theological entity, suggesting that it was composed in its current form during a unified period, encapsulating the essence of the prophet's message³⁸. Nonetheless, like other prophetic texts, it is hypothesized to have undergone multiple stages of redaction³⁹. Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann⁴⁰, for instance, posits that the initial redaction of the Ezekiel tradition occurred in Jerusalem during the latter part of the 6th century BCE, with Ezekiel 24 being a part of this early phase. According to Pohlmann, verses 2 and 21b may represent a subsequent addition from the 5th century BCE, reflecting a "gola-orientierte" redaction. In this view, the symbolic act described in Ezekiel 24—specifically, the prohibition of mourning for one's wife (v. 17) and its symbolic communication to fellow exiles (v. 22)—belongs to the core of the original prophetic tradition⁴¹.

In ordinary circumstances, a prophet from a priestly background would adhere to traditional mourning practices, including removing headgear and sandals, and accepting meals from others. The prohibition on these practices, therefore, serves a purely symbolic purpose,

³⁷ Albertz Rainer, Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 458.

³⁸ Lema ski, "Let him come to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8b). An Introduction to Old Testament Prophecy, vol. 1, 162–164.

³⁹ *The Formation of the Old Testament*, 374–378 (Walter Dietrich).

⁴⁰ Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *The Prophet Ezekiel. Chapters 1–19*, ATD 22,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1996), 34–35.

⁴¹ Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *The Prophet Ezekiel. Chapters 20–48*, ATD 22,2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2001), 352.

acting as a "pantomime" to convey a message to his contemporaries. One of the symbolic actions mandated by the prophet, and subsequently to be conveyed to his exiled brethren, involves the prohibition of consuming *le em ' n šim*, translated as "the bread of people/husbands." This term, occasionally rendered as "bread of mourning" (German: Trauerbrot), has been subject to varying interpretations. Walter Zimmerli⁴² dismisses Erlich's suggestion that it refers to food provided by neighbors, a notion supported by the Targum (lhjm 'bjljn), the Vulgate (*cibos lugentium*), and similar references in Hosea 9:4 and Deuteronomy 26:14. Zimmerli argues that this bread symbolizes a gesture of solidarity and neighborly kindness meant to reintegrate the mourner into daily life and conclude the mourning ritual. On the other hand, Leslie Allen⁴³, drawing on interpretations by Wellhausen and Driver, proposes an alternative reading of *' n šim* as *' nušim*—meaning "bread of despair"—thus emphasizing a different aspect of the symbolic message. Moshe Greenberg⁴⁴, however, opposes textual emendations and alternative interpretations of the phrase. He appears to build upon Erlich's proposal, translating the term as "food from [other] people." Greenberg references medieval Jewish commentators, such as Rashi and Kimchi, who noted the custom of providing the first meal to mourners at the conclusion of the mourning period. Andrzej Jasi ski⁴⁵ also supports a literal translation of the phrase in Ezekiel 24:17, 22 as "do not eat the bread of men," interpreting it as food provided at the end of the mourning period⁴⁶—essentially a form of "bread of comfort" for the bereaved family⁴⁷.

Greenberg's argument⁴⁸ is particularly persuasive, as it is challenging to accept that scribes would have "mistakenly" altered the phrase from "bread of mourning" to "bread of men" in both instances (Ez 24:17, 22). Thus, the task remains to discern the precise meaning of the prophet's use of this unusual phrase. The interpretations offered by Greenberg, Jasi ski, and Homerski appear plausible. Although specific details are lacking, the context suggests

⁴² Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, BK XIII/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 568. Similarly, Pohlmann, *The Prophet Ezekiel. Chapters 20–48*, 351: "mourning bread"; Franz Sedlmeier, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24*, NSKAT 21/1 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 326: "consume mourning bread" and Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 784: "meal of mourning" (v. 17), "meal of mourners" (v. 22). The latter suggests emending *' n šim ' ōnīm*, indicated, in his view, in Tg ('bjljn) and Vulg. (*lugentium*). He also justifies it (790 note 29) by referring to Hos 9:4; Jer 16:5–7. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith also uses similar arguments, *Judaite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, JSOT.S 123 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 125. The sense "food [of mourners]" in verses 17 and 22 is also proposed by Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, NAC 17 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 237.

⁴³ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC 29 (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 54, 56: "bread of despair."

⁴⁴ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2005), 150, 156–157: "You shall not eat the food of [other] people."

⁴⁵ Andrzej S. Jasi ski, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: A New Commentary: Ezekiel 21–25* (Opole: Wydawnictwo WT UO, 2019), 427, 443.

⁴⁶ Jasi ski, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: A New Commentary: Ezekiel 21–25*, 428.

⁴⁷ Józef Homerski, *The Book of Ezekiel*, P ST XI/1 (Pozna : Pallottinum, 2013), 189.

⁴⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 157.

that the term refers to food associated with mourning rituals and meals provided by others to those in mourning. The exact nature of this food—whether it was ritually pure throughout the mourning period or provided solely at its conclusion to signal a return to normal life—remains unclear and beyond reconstruction.

4. wajj'klû 'immô le em (Job 42:11)

And all his brothers and all his sisters and all who knew him came to him and ate bread with him in his house and sympathized and comforted him for all the misfortune that YHWH had brought upon him, and each gave him a small coin and a gold ring. (Job 42:11)

Scholars today generally propose that the narrative portions of the Book of Job (Job 1–2; 42:7–17)—often termed the *Volksbuch* in *Kunstprosa*—might be of later composition relative to the poetic dialogues. This view contrasts with earlier assumptions that these narrative sections were contemporaneous with or even older than the poetic dialogues. It is suggested that these narrative sections, including Job 42:11–13, may have been supplemented and integrated with the poetic dialogues, incorporating significant later additions⁴⁹.

In Job 42:11, the narrative describes how Job's brothers, sisters, and acquaintances gathered with him, shared a meal, and offered him sympathy and comfort. The act of eating bread with Job (wajj'klû 'immô le em)—a phrase also found in Ex 18:12—serves a dual purpose. While the meal may still align with mourning customs (as seen in Jer 16:7; Ez 24:17, 22), its primary significance here is to signal a return to normalcy⁵⁰. Unlike previous mournful feasts, this shared meal symbolizes a reentry into everyday life and community. It serves to affirm Job's restored status and new beginning, reflecting the reversal of his fortunes as noted in Job 42:10. This communal meal contrasts with the feasts Job had hosted prior to his misfortunes (Job 1:5, 18), and it underscores the transition from a period of suffering and alienation to one of renewed acceptance and celebration (cf. Job 19:13–19). Thus, the shared meal represents not just comfort but a reintegration into the life Job had once enjoyed⁵¹.

⁴⁹ *The Formation of the Old Testament*, 514–516 (Hans-Peter Mathys). Compare also the theological justification for this opinion in: Konrad Schmid, Jens Schröter, *The Formation of the Bible: From the Earliest Texts to the Sacred Scriptures* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2019), 185.

⁵⁰ David J.A. Clines, *Job 38–42*, WBC 18B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1236.

⁵¹ Luis Alonso Schökel, José Luis Sicre Diaz, *Job* (Rome: Borla, 1985), 681; Antoni Tronia, *The Book of Job*, NKB.ST XV (Cz stochowa: Wydawnictwo w. Pawła, 2013), 558.

5. Bread/food for the dead

The Mosaic Law (Deut 26:14) and various later texts (Tob 4:17; Sir 30:18; Bar 6:26) indicate that the practice of placing food at gravesites was known in Israel. This evidence suggests that there was a custom of providing food in connection with mourning and funerary rites. In light of this, the interpretation of "bread of mourning" in Hosea 9:4 remains ambiguous—whether it refers to sustenance for the mourners or offerings intended for the deceased is not entirely clear.

5.1. Bread eaten during mourning and food for the dead (Deut 26:14)

I did not eat any of it (i.e. the third year tithe) during mourning,
and I did not take any of it out of the house in a state of impurity.
And I did not give any of it to the dead.
I have obeyed the voice of YHWH my God.
I have done everything according to what you have commanded me. (Deut 26:14)

As Eckart Otto⁵² notes, Deuteronomy 26:13–15, a passage likely composed after the Babylonian exile, addresses the topic of the “third year tithes” (Deut 26:12; cf. Deut 14:28–29). In this text, the focus shifts to the ritual purity of these tithes. The potential contamination arises from the food designated for the poor (vv. 12b–13) coming into contact with the sphere of death (v. 14). Consequently, the individual making the offering must affirm that these gifts remained uncontaminated by death and were not tainted by ritual impurity⁵³. The phrase *be nî*—translated as “during mourning”—should be interpreted in light of Hos 9:4a⁵⁴. This time, however, the focus is clearly on the bread/food mentioned earlier, which is brought for mourners (cf. Jer 16:7; 2 Sam 3:35), as the discussion of food offerings to the dead will come later. Alongside the mention of “removal” (b‘r II Piel cf. v. 13) of anything from the tithe in a state of impurity, the text primarily excludes situations involving the consumption of anything from the tithe food brought during mourning and also excludes offering any part of it as a gift

⁵² Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomy 23:16–34:12*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2017), 1899–1900.

⁵³ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013), 731–732.

⁵⁴ Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, HSM 39 (Atlanta: Scholar Press, Brill, 1989), 102–103; Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Form of Religious Life*, SHCANE 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 209.

to the deceased (ancestor cult?)⁵⁵. Perhaps behind this latter practice lies some echo of the Mesopotamian ritual of providing sustenance to the spirits of the dead (Akkadian *kispu*)⁵⁶. However, the legislator's intent here is not to dispute these customs but to ensure the ritual purity of the tithes brought to the temple for the benefit of the poor (especially the Levites⁵⁷) and thereby to ensure the donors' effective participation in this practice⁵⁸. For the issue being examined, the mention of consuming food during mourning is significant, a practice also observed during the period of the so-called Second Temple, which was clearly distinguished from the food offerings made to the dead.

5.2. Bread on the grave of the righteous (Tob 4:17)

Put (literally: pour out) your bread on the grave of the righteous, but do not give to sinners. (Tob 4:16)

The Book of Tobit, a didactic narrative from the late post-Babylonian exile period (circa 3rd/2nd century BCE)⁵⁹, serves as a moral and instructional guide. Specifically, Tobit 4 contains a series of paternal admonitions concerning proper conduct, including the significance of charity and merciful behavior towards the poor, as highlighted in verses 16–17. This passage reiterates the previous appeal in verses 7–11, underscoring the vital role of mercy and benevolence⁶⁰.

The term *ekcheon tou artou* used in the text can refer to the "bread" of mourners (cf. Jer 16:7; Ezek 24:17, 22; Bar 6:31) or food distributed to the needy⁶¹. However, textual variations complicate the interpretation. The Septuagint (LXX) utilizes the term "bread," whereas the *Vetus Latina* (VL) and the Vulgate include both "wine and bread." The difficulty

⁵⁵ On this topic: Lewis, *Cults*, 101–104; Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition*, FAT I/11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 199–200.

⁵⁶ On this topic: Akio Tsukimoto, *Studies on the Dead Care (kispum) in Ancient Mesopotamia*, AOAT 216 (Kevelaen: Butzon & Bercher/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 228–242; John McGinnes, "A Neo-Assyrian Text Describing a Royal Funeral," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 1 (1987): 1–12; compare also Podella, *ôm-Fasten*, 97–98.

⁵⁷ Reinhard Achenbach, "Impurity through Contact with the Dead: On the Origin of an Ancient Israelite Notion," in *Death and Afterlife in Ancient Israel and Its Environment*, ed. Angelika Berlejung, Bernd Janowski, FAT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck, 2009), 351–369, esp. 351–354.

⁵⁸ Dagmar Kühn, "Remembrance of the Dead in the Old Testament," in *Death and Afterlife in Ancient Israel and Its Environment*, ed. Angelika Berlejung, Bernd Janowski, FAT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck, 2009), 481–499, esp. 494–495; Otto, *Deuteronomy 23:16–34:12*, 1900.

⁵⁹ Helmut Engel, "The Book of Tobit," in *Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Erich Zenger et al., STh 1,1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 278–288, esp. 283–286.

⁶⁰ Michał Wojciechowski, *The Book of Tobit*, NKB.ST XII (Cz stochowa: Wydawnictwo w Pawła, 2005), 86.

⁶¹ Carey A. Moore, *Tobit*, AB 40A (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 173.

with interpreting *bread* in this context lies in its apparent incompatibility with the concept of "pouring."⁶² Nonetheless, the verb in question might be understood more flexibly to imply actions such as "scattering" or "crumbing."

The guidance provided by Tobit echoes themes found in the Wisdom of Ahiqar, which emphasizes the practice of "pouring out" wine, further illustrating the nuanced customs surrounding the distribution of food and drink in charitable contexts:

My son, pour out your wine on the graves of the righteous (Sirach 13/B)

My son, pour out your wine first on the graves of the righteous, rather than drink it with the wicked (Sirach 13/c)⁶³.

The biblical text in question might reflect either a mistranslation or an expansion in later versions such as the LXX or the Vetus Latina (VL) and Vulgate. Specifically, the Aramaic term *la amrak* ("your wine") could have been misinterpreted as the Hebrew *la meka* ("your bread")⁶⁴ in the translation process. In the context of food or liquid offerings to the dead, such an interpretation is contentious. Tobias' advice to his son appears to touch upon practices that align more closely with pagan customs rather than Israelite traditions (though there are exceptions, such as in Sirach 7:33)⁶⁵. This can be contextualized as a reference to secular practices⁶⁶ or rituals related to honoring the dead, rather than actual offerings to them

⁶² Moore, *Tobit*, 173.

⁶³ Max Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen: Zum Fortgang weisheitlichen Denkens im Bereich des frühjüdischen Jahweglaubens*, OBO 26 (Freiburg, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 375. Accessed 14 November 2023, https://www.academia.edu/8700104/Max_Kuechler_Fruehjuedisches_Weisheitstraditionen..

⁶⁴ Frank Zimmermann, *The Book of Tobit: Jewish Apocryphical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 70.

⁶⁵ "Be generous to every living person, even to the dead do not withhold signs of affection" (Sir 7:33). This statement might be understood as a reference to "bread of mourning," a practice later prohibited but preserved in folk customs (cf. Ezek 24:17; Sir 30:18) – so Patric W. Skehan, Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 207. Alternatively, it might refer only to mourning the dead and ensuring a decent burial (Sir 38:16–17; Tob 1:10, 19; 12:12) – so Johannes Marböck, *Jesus Sirach 1–23*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2010), 133. Finally, it could suggest prayer for the dead and offerings made for them (cf. 2 Macc 12:43 Sir 7:17) – so Joseph Fitzmyer, *Tobit: Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2003, reprint 2013), 176–177 – or expressing solidarity with the dead not by offering food that they can no longer eat (cf. Sir 30:18), but through almsgiving to the living, especially the poor (Tob 4:17) – so Josef Schreiner, *Jesus Sirach 1–24*, NEB (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2002), 54.

⁶⁶ Moore, *Tobit*, 173, citing Edwin C. Bissell, *The Book of Tobit: The Apocrypha of the Old Testament with Historical Introductions and Notes, and Explanatory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), 130.

(cf. Ps 106:28; Hos 9:4; Is 8:19; Sir 30:18; Wis 14:15)⁶⁷. Here, bread or wine on graves might symbolize food used during funeral feasts rather than offerings to the deceased⁶⁸.

Beate Ego⁶⁹ argues that while the Deuteronomistic tradition generally marginalized such customs (cf. Deut 26:14; Jub 22:17), in Greco-Roman culture, such rituals—where libations were poured on graves—were well-established. Tobias' advice, therefore, might reflect an adaptation of these practices, suggesting that even if negative, offering something to the dead was preferable to doing so with sinners.

Alternatively, some scholars propose⁷⁰ a metaphorical interpretation, relating to the interruption of meals for burial activities (cf. Tob 1:17–20; 8:10–18). In this view, the practice described could symbolize a form of almsgiving rather than an actual offering to the dead⁷¹. The Syriac version of the Wisdom of Ahiqar supports the notion of almsgiving as a more plausible interpretation.

5.3. "The dead do not eat" (Sir 30:18/ Ps 106:28/ Bar 6:26)

Delicacies placed before closed mouths are like food placed on a tomb. (Sir 30:18)

Then they joined themselves to Baal Peor
and ate the offerings of the dead. (Ps 106:28)

If one sets an idol upright, it cannot move by itself, and if one bends it down, it cannot straighten itself. As before the dead, gifts are placed before them. (Bar 6:26)

The Book of Sirach, written around 200 BCE, reflects various attitudes towards customs related to the dead. In Sirach 30:18, the sage criticizes the practice of placing delicacies before those who cannot consume them, likening this act to placing food on a tomb, which he deems equally futile. This critique is set in the broader context of Sirach's attitude

⁶⁷ Moore, *Tobit*, 173.

⁶⁸ Meinrad M. Schumpp, *Das Buch Tobias übersetzt und erklärt*, EHAT 11 (Munich: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1933), 96–97; Helen Schlingel-Straumann, *Tobit*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2000), 103.

⁶⁹ Beate Ego, *Tobit*, IEKAT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 173.

⁷⁰ Nathan MacDonald, "Bread on the Grave of the Righteous (Tobit 4:17)," in *Studies in the Book of Tobit: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Mark Bredni, LSTS 55 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 99–103.

⁷¹ Schumpp, *Das Buch Tobias*, 97; Küchler, *Frühjüdische*, 375–376; Schlingel-Straumann, *Tobit*, 103.

towards ritual practices involving the dead. Burkard Zapff⁷² has proposed that the term *epi tof (i)*—translated as "on the tomb" or "grave" in the LXX (Septuagint), and corresponding to *‘l qbr’* in Sirach and *circumpositae sepulchro* in the Vulgate—should be corrected based on the version from manuscript B (a Hebrew manuscript from the Cairo Genizah). This version refers to "idols" instead. Skehan and Di Lella⁷³ critique this proposal, arguing that despite the ingenuity of linking *gillûl* (from manuscript B) with *g l l* (the rolled stone closing the tomb), there is no clear explanation for this change. They maintain that the LXX and Syriac versions deserve respect, and it is unclear how manuscript B arrived at the term *gillûl*. Retaining the LXX/Syriac/Vulgate versions, the sage's comparison highlights the futility of offering food to entities that cannot consume it: both closed mouths and graves symbolize an inability to partake in the offerings. This parallels the critique found in Tobit 4:17⁷⁴, which also reflects skepticism towards the practice of offering food to the dead. The text implies that while the custom of making food offerings to the dead might have persisted, Sirach views it as ineffective and pointless.

Additionally, in Psalm 106, dated to the mid-5th century BCE⁷⁵, the term *zib ê m tîm*⁷⁶ ("offerings of the dead") appears. This phrase is used in the context of the events at Baal-Peor (vv. 28–31; cf. Num 25:1–13; Deut 4:3), where Moabite gods are described as "dead." Some scholars debate whether this term refers to offerings made to false gods or funeral sacrifices related to the cult of the dead⁷⁷. The phrase *zib ê m tîm* is a hapax legomenon, a unique occurrence, and draws on the context of offerings in Numbers 25:2, where sacrifices to gods are mentioned. The interpretation of the term *zib ê m tîm* in Psalm 106 necessitates a nuanced understanding of its meaning. This phrase could be translated as "sacrifices of the dead," implying a comparison between offerings made to deities considered dead and those offered to actual dead individuals. The primary debate centers around whether the term refers to gods viewed as dead or to sacrifices directed toward deceased ancestors as gods⁷⁸. The prevailing interpretation views the term as referring to sacrifices made to dead idols or foreign

⁷² Burkard M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51*, NEB (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2010), 192. Also Georg Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/en Sira*, ATD. Apokryphen Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 217–218: translation and commentary.

⁷³ Skehan, Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 379.

⁷⁴ Skehan, Di Lella, *The Wisdom*, 381.

⁷⁵ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Erich Zenger, *Psalms 101–150*, HThKAT (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2008), 124.

⁷⁶ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, BK XV/2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 904.

⁷⁷ Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, HAT I/15 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 467; Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, vol. 3: Psalms 90–150*, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 289.

⁷⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892, 1986), 467, believed that this referred to gods, but previously "offerings to the dead" concerned care for the souls of the deceased and were associated with "funeral meals."

deities, a common motif in biblical texts where such gods are depicted as lifeless and powerless (cf. Lev 26:30; Ps 115:4–8; 135:15–16; Is 8:19; 44:9–20; Jer 10; Bar 4:2; Wis 13:10)⁷⁹. This perspective aligns with the broader biblical tendency to denounce idol worship by portraying these deities as inanimate. However, the exceptional nature of the term *zib ê m tîm* raises questions about its specific application. In the Book of Jubilees (22:17) we read: "They offer sacrifices to deceased ancestors and pay homage to demons. They eat meals on graves, and their deeds are empty and worthless" (cf. 1 Cor 8–10)⁸⁰. There is an explicit reference to sacrificing to dead ancestors, which suggests that this term could alternatively denote sacrifices made to deified ancestors—a practice documented in Canaanite culture (cf. Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat 1.17 and 16–17)⁸¹ and potentially reflected in some biblical texts (Deut 26:14; Is 8:19; 2 Sam 28:13)⁸². The interpretation of this term remains debated. Some scholars propose that it might also reflect a practice where Israelites, influenced by foreign cults, associated child sacrifice⁸³ with the worship of foreign gods (cf. 1 Kgs 16:34; 2 Kgs 16:3).

The *Letter of Jeremiah*, dated to the early 2nd century BCE⁸⁴ and often considered a separate text from the Book of Baruch (Bar 6), provides a polemic against idolatry. It argues that idols, akin to the dead, are inanimate and lack any influence over human fate⁸⁵. This comparison underscores the author's view that idol worship and the practice of offering food to the dead are both meaningless⁸⁶. This stance parallels the critique found in Sirach (cf. Tob 4:17; Sir 30:18–19)⁸⁷, reinforcing the view that both practices are ultimately futile.

6. When and who ate the “bread of mourning”?

⁷⁹ Gianfranco Ravasi, *Il libro dei Salmi: Commento e attualizzazione*, volume III (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1985), 186.

⁸⁰ *The Book of Jubilees*, trans. Andrzej Kondracki, in *Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, ed. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz (Warsaw: Vacatio, 1999), 259–342, quote on 300.

⁸¹ *Epic of Ugarit about Keret and Achaat*, trans. Antoni Tronina, in *Scriptura Lumen: Biblia i jej oddziaływanie: Ewangelia o Królestwie* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2009), 563–621, esp. 600.

⁸² Ravasi, *Il libro dei Salmi*, 186; John Goldingay, *Psalms. Volume 3: Psalms 90–150*, BCOT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 232–233. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 101–150*, AB 17A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 73, strongly supports this interpretation.

⁸³ Nancy de Claissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2014), 804.

⁸⁴ Janusz Lemański, "Seek Good, Not Evil, That You May Live" (Am 5:14a): *Introduction to Old Testament Prophecy*, vol. 2: *Twelve Minor Prophets. The Book of Baruch. The Letter of Jeremiah*, SiR 31 (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, 2012), 324.

⁸⁵ Lech Stachowiak, *Lamentations. The Book of Baruch*, P ST X/2 (Poznań: Pallottinum, 1968), 141–142.

⁸⁶ In other words, he considers them powerless and finds offerings to them senseless; Heinrich Gross, *Lamentations – Josef Schreiner, Baruch* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986), 80; Michał Wojciechowski, *The Book of Baruch*, NKB.ST XXIV/II (Cz. stożkowa: Wydawnictwo w. Pawła, 2016), 133.

⁸⁷ Compare with Baruch 6:26, Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions*, AB 44 (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 344.

The prophetic texts (Hos 9:4; Jer 16:7; Ezek 24:17, 22) imply that they are referring to a meal associated with mourning practices for the deceased. While some of these passages are subject to textual criticism debates (particularly Jer 16:7 and Ezek 24:17, 22), it is plausible that the mourning customs, despite their usual association with fasting, might have occasionally included meals during the mourning period. The key issue is determining whether the meals provided by others (as noted in Ezek 24:17, 22) were consumed throughout the mourning process or if they signaled the conclusion of mourning (cf. Job 42:11). The context of these texts does not make this distinction clear, and without additional information, a definitive answer remains elusive.

Post-Babylonian exile customs indicate a known, albeit controversial, practice of offering food to deceased ancestors (Deut 26:14; Tob 4:17). However, Deuteronomic tradition in Deut 26:14 explicitly separates such practices from the consumption of meals during mourning. Later traditions reflect this tension: some texts suggest that offering food to the dead could be seen as almsgiving (Sir 7:33), while others dismiss it as futile behavior (Sir 30:18; cf. Ps 106:28; Bar 6:26). According to the post-exilic regulation in Deut 26:14, it is clear that mourning practices in the Second Temple period did include meals. Yet, the available evidence does not clarify whether these meals were consumed during or after the mourning period. Both Hos 9:4 and the editor of Deut 26:14 categorize such food as unclean. Even if provided by others (Ezek 24:17, 22) and offered to mourners, the context of these meals within the mourning ritual—characterized by behaviors imitating the deceased's journey to Sheol—rendered the food ritually unclean.

Conclusion

Hosea's term "bread of mourning" (Hos 9:4) is frequently examined alongside other prophetic texts (Jer 16:7; Ezek 24:17, 22) that discuss similar practices. However, there is a discrepancy between the mention of eating bread during mourning and the prevailing information about fasting during this period. Some scholars propose that this reference might indicate a meal marking the end of the mourning period (cf. Job 42:11). In contrast, Deuteronomy 26:14 differentiates this practice from offering food to the dead, as seen in texts such as Tobit 4:17, Sirach 30:18, Psalms 106:28, and Baruch 6:26. Deuteronomy, along with Hosea, categorizes such meals as unclean, suggesting that these meals might represent a behavior of mourners distinct from fasting practices. This interpretation implies that "bread of mourning" could

denote a meal that was an alternative to fasting, possibly signaling a transition out of mourning. Alternatively, it might simply refer to food consumed by mourners still in the mourning phase but moving towards its conclusion, symbolizing a return to normal life.

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