

REVIEW

The birth of Tamar's twins in Genesis 38: 27–30 as implication for the re-birth of Kosovar's independence in 2008

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The Balkans has a long history drenched in turmoil. Kosovo's independence has been part of that historical context. As such, it is framed by the long-standing religious conflict between the Albanian Moslems and Serbian Christians. Both claim to have historically established claims to Kosovo. This document will stress how the story of Tamar's birth of twin sons in Genesis 38: 27-30 mirrors the re-birth of Kosovar's independence in 2008. Tamar's twin sons Perez and Zerah were born under confusing circumstances whereby the question of which son was born first posed two different interpretations. Similarly, both the Albanian Moslems and the Serbian Christians have asserted the first claim over Kosovo based on different interpretations of the historical record regarding who first occupied that land.

Keywords: Genesis, Tamar's, Perez, Kosovo's independence, Albanian Moslems, Serbian Christians

Introduction

The has a long rich cultural history drenched in turmoil. Kosovo's independence has been part of that historical context. As such, it is framed by the long-standing religious conflict between the Albanian Moslems and the Serbian Christians. Both claim to have historically established claims to Kosovo. I was a Fulbright Scholar to Kosovo in 2021 where I was assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora. During that time, i learned about the ongoing conflict between the Serbian Christians and the Albanian Moslems and how they recognize Tamar's unusual birthing (regarding child order) of twins in Genesis 38: 27–30 as being reflective of their mutually disputed claims for Kosovo.

Research elaboration

This document will stress how the story of Tamar's birth of twin sons in Genesis 38: 27–30 mirrors the re-birth of Kosovar's independence in 2008. Tamar's twin sons

Perez and Zerah were born under confusing circumstances whereby the question of which son was born first posed two different interpretations in relation to Zerah's arm being the first appendage to exit Tamar's womb but Perez being the first entire body to exit the womb. Thus, both sons had the foundation for arguing firstborn status. Similarly, both the Albanian Moslems and the Serbian Christians have asserted the first claim over Kosovo based on different interpretations of the historical record regarding who first occupied that land. Thus, firstborn status is equated with the first occupation of the land.

Within Genesis 38: 27–30, the story of Tara's challenging circumstances is described. As such, Tamar was impregnated by Judah (her father-in-law) after plans for Shelah, son of Judah, to impregnate Tamar—in place of Shelah's dead brother—did not materialize (1). This set the stage for Tamar giving birth to twins. Tamar discovered during the birthing that she was going to deliver twins. One boy (Zerah) extended his hand from the womb, and the midwife tied a red thread to it to denote which child was born first. He then returned his hand to the womb, and the other boy burst from the womb which led to his being named Perez (2). It should be clear that

which brother was first born had particular relevance during that point in history.

The firstborn son was named in accordance with this distinction. “The one who was actually born first was named Perez, meaning a breach. A breach is a breaking of custom, law, or promise, etc., Since Perez came out instead, he breached expectation” (3). His unusual birth created a legend of sorts. “To the name Perez neither in due time, nor the right place, but breaking through with a blow, he leaped out through his mother’s side” (4).

Tara giving birth to Perez is of particular relevance given the lineage between Perez and Jesus. “Perez is actually born first carries on the line of promise, for David (Ruth 4:18) and Jesus (Mathew 1:3) descend from Perez” (5). This lineage and unique birth circumstance is repeatedly acknowledged over time. “The prenatal struggle brings a violent chapter to a fitting end but Perez (“breaking out”) is reckoned the firstborn in the genealogies, and it was his line that led to David and so to Christ” (6).

Part of the intrigue of the story is that Tamar originated from Canaan. “Tamar, the Canaanite, through union with Judah, became ancestor of David, eventually of Jesus” (7). This points to the larger realization that Jesus entered this world from a tainted ancestral heritage. “Jesus is born fully into the human condition marked by ancestors who do not conform to social and legal prescriptions. The sexual mores of the Bible would not pass muster in certain Christian communities today and suggest that God’s embrace includes all manner of human experiences” (8).

The dynamic associated with the competitive birth between Perez and Zerah became part of the legend that has parallels with other biblical brotherly conflicts. “The story of Cain and Abel, like the other stories of Genesis, shows us with overwhelming vividness who we are. We are each to some extent Cain. And each of us is in some degree Abel” (9). The book of Genesis is known for similar conveyances. “The account of the birth of her twin sons is reminiscent of Genesis 25: 24–26” (10). On a related plane, Tamar is recognized as a particularly controversial entity in relation to the birth story. “Tamar reflects intrigue regarding how the account of the birth of her twin sons is reminiscent of Genesis 25: 24–26” (11).

There are considerable degrees of interpretation at play within Genesis. For example, regarding the woman allegedly leading the man astray by offering him forbidden fruit, it is posited that “Genesis, however, portrays both woman and man as culpable ” (12). Such variation with interpretation is manifested in the plight of Tamar. There are varied interpretations to consider.

The story of this unusual birth is commensurate with the unusual path as described in the book of Genesis. “Chapters 38 (Judah and Tamar) is not part of the Jacob story but was inserted later” (13). The linkage with Jacob is of particular relevance. The narrative “turns to the providential developments in Joseph’s career that were preparing for

Jacob’s household a way out of the increasingly dangerous conditions depicted in chapter 38” (14). This theme of conflict between brothers within circumstances set in Genesis sets the stage for interpreting conflict between societal entities that occupy a singular land mass later.

Finding

The conflict between Serbian Christians and Albanian Moslems offers such a societal conflict in that they recognize the conflict between Perez and Zerah as a biblical illustration of the conflict that exists between them for control of (what is now) Kosovo. The Balkans exemplifies how varied cultural groupings that have long rich traditions can evolve over time. These evolutions not only allow for celebrations of the human condition, but they can also reveal dark and sinister histories steeped in centuries-old ethnic hatreds that periodically surface and wreak havoc across the land in ways that parallel biblical conflicts. Such is the case regarding the tug of war that has existed between Serbs and Albanians in (what is now, 2023) Kosovo.

With the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in 1992, this opened the door for Serbs to reassert their claim to Kosovo under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic. The Serbs viewed their occupation of Kosovo as a liberation, stressing the idea that they would regain with the sword (regarding their freedom) what was lost with the sword (15). The reconquest was a continual challenge. The Serbian forces that returned to Kosovo recollected the mistreatment they had known from the Albanians (16). These kinds of vendettas resonate with paralleled themes in Genesis regarding extensively long memories and resulting blood debts.

Both sides of the issue, Serb and Albanian, will speak of centuries-old battles as if they were yesterday. In June 1989, Milosevic conjured the essence of the Serbs who had fought during the earlier conflicts and then proclaimed that, after six centuries, there were still conflicts brewing, and though it had not evolved into open armed conflict yet, there may be a time when such fighting might happen (17).

In November 1989, Milosevic spoke to a gathering of hundreds of thousands in Usce, Belgrade. At that time, he stressed that Kosovo represented a unique position in the souls of the Serb citizenry and that is why Serbia sought to return Kosovo to the Serbian fold (Ibid). The Albanians assert a similar claim stressing their perspective and from this has simmered ethnic tensions that have periodically erupted over the centuries.

Estimates indicate about 90% of Serbians claim Christianity as their religion. A vast majority of Kosovar Albanians align with the Muslim religion (18). This religious distinction has provided a recognizable dividing line between the Serbs and the Albanians. It is a division that can be manipulated by political forces who seek to promote division regarding the message they are espousing. This

reinforces the adage that religious wars are the most vicious type of war in that combatants since biblical times have fought in the name of their religion as an expression of their way of life.

The Serbian military capabilities were stronger at that time given the militaristic priorities stressed in Serbia. In 1992, Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova expressed that he was not sure how powerful the Serbian military in the province was, but he recognized it to be very strong. Hence, he offered the view that they would rather not fight and stay alive so as to avoid being massacred (19). Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic was pleased that the Albanians acknowledged this reality. However, his glee was buffered later the same year when U.S. President George H.W. Bush conveyed a message for Milosevic stating that if the Serbians caused conflict in Kosovo, the United States would respond with military force against the Serbians that occupied Kosovo and the surrounding area (20). This put the Serbs on notice that their incursions against the Albanians would not be tolerated.

Secretary of State Madeline Albright reflected on U.S. thinking at the time when the Albanian cause was championed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). She was sympathetic with the opposition to Milosevic and understood their goal of independence. She embraced the idea that force can be necessary at times for the moral result to prevail (21). The ensuing blood-letting by the Serbians against the Albanians was barely comprehensible. Large-scale ethnic cleansing persisted. The Serbian atrocities against the Albanians were relentless. Serbian military forces engaged in large-scale bloodshed in the countryside killing, looting, and torching homes. Most of these soldiers were prisoners who were released for this duty. Over a million Kosovo Albanians were displaced (22). It does not take much imagination to envision similar kinds of viciousness during the Crusades and related biblical era phenomena.

The mass media reporting of the Serbian atrocities served to generate international outrage against the Serbs. There was a horrible massacre perpetuated by the Serbian military that involved between 350 and 400 Albanian men and boys that were murdered in the village of Meja. Most of these bodies were exhumed along with many others that were retrieved. Over 800 were reburied. A month later, Milosevic and four of his subordinates were charged by the U.N.'s Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal in The Hague for these atrocities that occurred (Ibid). Again, the mass media reporting of such events set the stage for international reaction.

The United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization engaged in military action against the Serbs, and this resulted in Albanians eventually taking control of Kosovo. It was a vivid test of wills that has resulted in ongoing controversy. The Serbian government has asserted that, during the period after the fighting ended in Kosovo, the large towns were soon emptied of their Serbians. It did not take long for the Serbian presence to be practically non-existent (23).

Via proclamation of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) system, four primary principles were stressed. Principles 1 and 2 consisting of civil affairs, police force protection, and representative justice were run directly by UNMIK; commerce-oriented rebuilding was guided by the European Union (EU), and most of the institution building was handled by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (24). This framework allowed for a coherent governance process for Kosovo. The parallels with the recognition of Israel in modern times are striking when one considers the role the United States played with both circumstances and the religious contexts at play.

Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland, drew up a plan at the request of the United Nations regarding the future of Kosovo. In it, he spoke of a supervised independence within which he clarified that the best option for Kosovo would be independence that is supervised during a preliminary period of time by international observers (Ibid). The Ahtisaari proposal was commensurate with the plan put forward via the EU guidance and endorsed politically with regard to overall EU coordination and coherence in Kosovo. This included recognition of the rule of law (25). As with the conflicts that resulted in Tamar's threatened existence, one can see how these kinds of conflicts are more emotional than logical. This does take some sorting out to arrive at a commonly recognized understanding, not necessarily an agreement, regarding what the present state of affairs is in Kosovo and the adjoining areas.

The Kosovars have been eternally grateful for the role the United States has played in their protection from the Serbs, guidance with achieving independence, and support of Kosovars as they stand up for their country. In the capital city of Prishtina, one will see statues of Bill Clinton, Bob Dole, and Madeline Albright. Similarly, there are two prominent roadways named in honor of Clinton and Dole. The Kosovars have a lightheartedness about them that is recognized in the location of a dress shop named "Hilary's" near the Bill Clinton statue. The total population of Kosovo is roughly two million people. The governmental website reports that Albanians constitute 92% of the overall populace, roughly 5% Serbians, and about 2.5% others. In addition to this resident population, are about 8,00,000 people who compose the Kosovo diaspora (26).

The relationship between Kosovo and its 8,00,000 diaspora population has ramifications in this report. This relationship is formally managed by the Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora. It can be interpreted via the framework offered within the discussion of diaspora and diplomacy and further impacted by the management of nation branding efforts by the Kosovo government. In such a situation, notions associated with diaspora are re-engaged as a thriving transnational network that extends governance capabilities and are widely acknowledged by political authorities as a soft-power resource. This allows for acknowledgment of the

diaspora as being entities that are function in relation to diplomatic goals (27). This phenomenon serves to wrestle with the question of “who is a foreigner and with what effects?,” and this notion of the plight of the foreigner appears as an equally relevant variable for Tamar in Genesis. It very much frames her existence.

With global modernization and increased opportunities for travel and immigration, the focus on diaspora populations is receiving significant attention and is resulting in varied forms of outreach by home countries. Over 30 states presently maintain full government ministries that promote diaspora functions; they have varied capacities and capabilities. There is common ground regarding function and expectations (28). This has been the case in Kosovo. The Kosovar Albanian diaspora has evolved into a very energized collection of people with organizational representation. It performed a significant function in the promotion of the KLA in the late 1990s and sponsored a thorough international campaign in support of varied forms of support for the KLA (Kennedy).

The proliferation of focus on diaspora populations in other countries such as India has not only spawned opportunities but has also produced areas of disagreement. Voting rights that can be subject to varied understanding are often controversial. They can lead to tensions between the state and actors representing the diaspora. When there have been many years of advocacy and active political participation by Indian expatriates (“overseas Indians”), the government was known to advance legislation to promote e-voting rights for overseas citizens. Corresponding legislation has been problematic and offered controversy locally and internationally (29). Similarly, the Kosovo diaspora has had an impact on elections in Kosovo.

So, it can be said that the current understanding of diaspora is serving to redefine what citizenship is and has the potential to be. Much has been written with regard to the primary functions of diaspora that analyze state policies, focusing on ways in which policies will impact matters having to do with sovereignty and citizenship. There are primary domains such as economic policies, transnational political relations, conflict resolution, humanitarian planning, and planning for how new communication technologies are changing the framework for diaspora diplomacy (30). It would be interesting to speculate about possible outcomes for Tamar if she would have been able to claim similar kinds of affiliation with Canaan that could benefit her.

Present-day scenarios offer opportunities for reframing common conceptions. All things considered that there has been a corresponding evolution, whereby diaspora diplomacy is seen as offering potentials that did not exist as much in the past. The evolution of diaspora-oriented programs helps to emphasize how diaspora possibilities can be managed in concert with Western models of government and economy (31). This kind of political climate will engender change.

In conclusion, this report has described how Tamir’s birth as conveyed in Genesis 28: 27–30 features an unusual birth re-ordering whereby Zerah partially exited the womb but did not complete his exit from the womb until after Perez had fully exited the womb. That is, Zerah extended his arm from the womb and withdrew his arm back into the womb, and this was followed by Perez fully exiting the womb before Zerah completed his exit from the womb. This situation exemplifies other competitive brotherly themes that have played out in other biblical scenarios. This competitive relationship between brothers is recognized as having parallels in the Balkans via the relationship between different ethnic groups. Tamir’s unique birthing of twins is recognized by the Serbian Christians and Albanian Moslems as offering a framework for interpreting the conflict between those two peoples. A primary similarity involves how both scenarios depict humans living in close proximity but exhibiting tenacious claims to their birthright to the point of physical confrontation.

The conflict between the Serbian Christians and the Albanian Moslems has resulted in more death and destruction, but the situation depicted in Tamir’s birthing offers a framework for understanding how elements of shared humanity should be able to embrace each other, or at least peacefully co-exist, but have elected to fight (to the death in some circumstances) to prevail in their claim and control of the Kosovo region. Taken together, this exemplifies how biblical scripture offers insight into the evolution of historical developments and present-day circumstances.

The use of language to convey meanings in international settings is based on a significant assumption. The assumption is that meanings we associate with our utterances will be shared by those that hear our utterances. That is, what we assume we are conveying will in fact be understood. It is so easy to assume this will happen that we take it for granted to a large degree.

An international setting is a unique type of organization with unique variables that compose it. As such, each international construct has unique practices with language. It is worthwhile to consider the language norms and practices of the setting you are involved with. Words are substitutes for images. Images convey meanings and emotions. If you convey meanings and emotions that are unclear or inaccurate, then you are doing yourself and those you serve a disservice and run the risk of creating more confusion than clarity.

Language is an interactive process established and modified to compensate for societal evolution. It is a form of interaction that uses commonly agreed-upon meanings that are associated with written symbols and sounds conveyed via oral channels. As society changes, so does the language it speaks. A culture that experiences continual change, such as the American culture, will have a language that will experience continual change.

For instance, there are words that did not exist 10 years ago. A common means of new word evolution is through technological advancements. The growth of the computer industry spawned new expressions such as modem, personal computer, user-friendly, virtual reality, and internet. Similarly, cultural changes can produce new phenomena evidenced in expressions such as slacker, Generation X, skin-head, and latch-key children. As international interaction increases so does language evolution (i.e., Karaoke from the Japanese).

Word meanings are constructed from denotative meanings and connotative meanings. *Denotative* meanings, in their simplest form, are dictionary definitions. Denotative meanings are the objective literal definitions that are assigned to a word. For instance, the denotative meaning of the “United States” is 50 states joined together under a common union, governed by the U.S. constitution. *Connotative* meanings are the subjective meanings associated with a word. These connotative meanings are the meanings individuals associate, from their personal experience, with the word. The aforementioned provides a denotative definition of “United States.” A connotative definition of “United States” could vary greatly depending on the perspective of the definer.

During the Cold War of the 1950-1980s, the “United States” most likely connoted evil images to citizens of the former Soviet Union. This view prevailed because of the nuclear threat we posed to them. Citizens of Kuwait in 1991 had a more positive connotative meaning assigned to the “United States” because the United States had just liberated Kuwait from Iraq.

The aforementioned example, regarding connotative meanings, illustrates the importance of understanding that our word choice can perpetuate meanings beyond the literal definition. Though we cannot focus on all the possible connotative meanings of our words, we do need to be aware of possible misunderstandings that can arise when the denotative meaning we intend with a word may have an emotionally charged connotative meaning assigned by the listener.

All cultures are divided into smaller subcultures. These subcultures, that comprise the larger culture, can be defined from a variety of perspectives. In the U.S. culture, for example, there are geographical subcultures (i.e., deep south, easterners, etc.), occupational subcultures (i.e., teachers, ministers, military, etc.), racial subcultures (i.e., European-American, African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American, etc.), religious subcultures (i.e., Catholic, Lutheran, etc.), and other types of subcultures. We can belong to a variety of subcultures.

Sublanguages are the unique language systems that exist within subcultures. Each subculture practices its own unique use of language. A vast majority of U.S. subcultures will speak English but their use of English will vary depending on the group. The “southern accent” and word usage of

the deep south is a little different than what is found in New York City. The military subculture use of “sir” and “ma’am,” as a preface to most statements, is not found in the general U.S. population. The use of numbered codes in the police subculture is unique. Different religions practice different language norms.

Conclusion

Language taboo is a language that is deemed inappropriate by society. Profanity is a standard type of language taboo. Hate speech evidences a newer type of language taboo category. There is language taboo that deals with behavior that threatens the safety of others (i.e., yelling “fire” in a crowded theater if there is no fire or joking about carrying a gun while boarding an airliner). What is taboo in a culture reflects the sensitivities of that culture.

What is taboo in one culture will not necessarily be taboo in another culture. During my 1989 visit to South Africa, I found the open discussion of the (then) political prisoner Nelson Mandela to be taboo. During my visits to China in the 1980s, I found discussion of Chinese politics, between Chinese and foreigners such as myself, to be taboo. However, discussion of Nelson Mandela and Chinese politics, during the same time period in the United States, was not taboo.

There are three common sources of language taboo: tastefulness, religion, and sexual relations. *Tastefulness* deals with the avoidance of unpleasant topics such as death (i.e., preference for terms such as “passed away” or “expired” instead of died). *Religion*, as an origin of language taboo, is exemplified in one of the ten commandments of Christianity (“Thou shalt not use the Lord’s name in vain.”) That is, one should not use the name of God in profanity.

Concern with *sexual relations* is recognized in the avoidance of certain sexual references (i.e., preference for phrases such as “made love” or “slept together” instead of more graphic phrases that describe sexual intercourse). An alternative to language taboo is *euphemism*. A euphemism is a socially acceptable term used to replace taboo language. In the 1960s, students over the age of 30 years might have been referred to as “older students.” Now, the “older” label is considered inappropriate, so terms such as “non-traditional students,” “adult students,” and “mature students” have evolved as euphemisms. Euphemism use is also exemplified with terms such as restroom, men’s room, and powder room instead of toilet.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that this research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author contributions

JS is the sole author and, as such, is accountable for all the content of this manuscript.

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