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PREFACE

For many years I have been interested in the phenomenon of punning upon names in all the various literary modes represented in the Bible. A great deal of material accumulating in my notes indicated the central position held by this feature in the poetics of the biblical period, which therefore antedated the more extreme homiletic interpretation of names abundantly evident in the literature of the Sages and the midrashic collections. The literary technique of fitting one of the possible senses of a name to other material in a literary unit has been well documented in extrabiblical literature, both ancient and modern, and scholars have been increasingly inclined to regard puns, and particularly puns upon names, as a significant motivator in the working of literary discourse.

Many hundreds of puns upon names are to be found throughout the Bible. Some of them are explicated in so many words by figures in the narrative; many are overt and recognizable within the context; but very many are worked into the text in a clandestine manner. These last constitute a kind of riddle, offering a challenge to the reader to probe more deeply in order to uncover them with the help of various hints and directives supplied by the author. I therefore conceived the desire to study this phenomenon in all its ramifications, to classify and define its various manifestations, and to assess its contribution to biblical poetics.

This research involved careful and repeated consideration of every book of the Bible to extract as many puns upon names as possible, and also an examination of the Sages' interpretations, ancient exegesis and modern commentary, insofar as they deal with the matter. My teaching duties and the administrative tasks laid upon me, especially during the many years in
Biblical Names

which I have served as Chairman of the Department of Bible, prevented me from entering fully into this project until in 1985 I spent a Sabbatical year as a Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, where I could devote myself to collecting and considering my material. On my return to Bar-Ilan University I completed the first edition of my book, which appeared in Hebrew under the title of Midrashic Name Derivations in the Bible. The present English edition contains new material of considerable scope and importance. Particular thanks are due to Dr Phyllis Hackett, who worked with me on every stage of the translation and editing of the expanded English edition with the devotion, efficiency and attention to detail with which she translated my previous book, The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels.

While the main concern of this study is with puns upon names, in the nature of things it has occasionally seemed appropriate to examine at some length the contribution of the technique to the structure and message of a given literary unit. As an aid to the reader, the quotations from the Bible necessary in these cases have sometimes been presented in ketib male, that is (in accordance with the practice in modern Hebrew), with the addition of certain letters to make the vocalization clearer. The English translation provided at the same time has been formulated on the basis of a comparison of different translations, with particular attention to the needs of the present study. The following alphabet has been adopted for transliterated names and words: א, ב, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח, י, ק, ל, מ, נ, ס, ת, פ, צ, ק, ר, ש, ת.

In research of this type there must be many partners and assistants. Numerous points were clarified in the course of seminars given by me to Master's and doctoral students in the Department of Bible at Bar-Ilan University. My students have shed light on a variety of points discussed in the book. Friends and colleagues at Bar-Ilan and other universities have assisted me with their advice. Special appreciation is due to Professor M. Roston, Dean of the Humanities Faculty, Bar-Ilan University, Dr S. Vargen, Dr M. Zippor, Dr A. Frisch and Mr. R. Shachar. I have learnt a great deal from their comments in the course of my research.

I am most grateful to my own family, who came to my assistance in different ways: to my son Adi, who helped me to handle a personal computer and to prepare the manuscript for the printers; and to my wife Bath-sheba, who, as with my previous books, helped with proofreading and the preparation of an index.

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