A R T I C L E

Blake's Hebrew Calligraphy

By Abraham Samuel Shiff

Abraham Samuel Shiff (abe.sam.shiff@gmail.com) studies in the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program, the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Another paper, *Blake's Priestly Blessing: God Blesses Job*, is forthcoming in *Blake*. He has also published on Shakespeare.

1   THE exhibition at the Morgan Library and Museum of William Blake's World: "A New Heaven Is Begun" (Sept. 2009–Jan. 2010) provided an opportunity to examine closely Blake's Hebrew calligraphy.[1] Three works in the exhibition (see illus. 2.1, 3.1, and 3.6)[2] contain errors in forming Hebrew characters; some are deliberate to create clever visual illusions.

2   For clarity, several conventions are adopted for this article:
1. Images: Items from the Morgan are cited by accession number, and if exhibited also by exhibition number. The exhibited images are viewable on the museum's web site <http://www.themorgan.org/collections/works/blake>.[3]
2. Hebrew alphabet: For the convenience of readers without any knowledge of Hebrew, a numeric code is used (see table 1).
For example, English is read from left to right.
The first four characters of the English alphabet are
A B C D.
In contrast, Hebrew is read from right to left.
The first four characters of the Hebrew alphabet are
א ב ג ד. The encoded Hebrew becomes
04-03-02-01.
Some letters of the Hebrew alphabet change shape when located at the end of a word. The code "f" identifies a final character. For example, the four-letter English word "amen" is the three-letter Hebrew word "אמן" that encodes as

א מ ן
14f-13-01, where
14f indicates that the last letter of the word is character "נ" (14) written in its final form, which is "ן" (14f).

Table 1: Traditional Serif Hebrew Characters Converted to Code

alef	א	01	nun	נ	14
bet	ב	02	final nun	ן	14f
gimel	ג	03			
dalet	ד	04	samekh	ס	15
he	ה	05	ayin	ע	16
vav	ו	06			
zayin	ז	07	pe	פ	17
het	ח	08	final pe	ף	17f
tet	ט	09			
yod	י	10	tsadi	צ	18
			final tsadi	ץ	18f
kaf	כ	11			
final kaf	ך	11f	qof	ק	19
			resh	ר	20
lamed	ל	12	shin	ש	21
			tav	ת	22
mem	מ	13			
final mem	ם	13f			

Other Symbols:

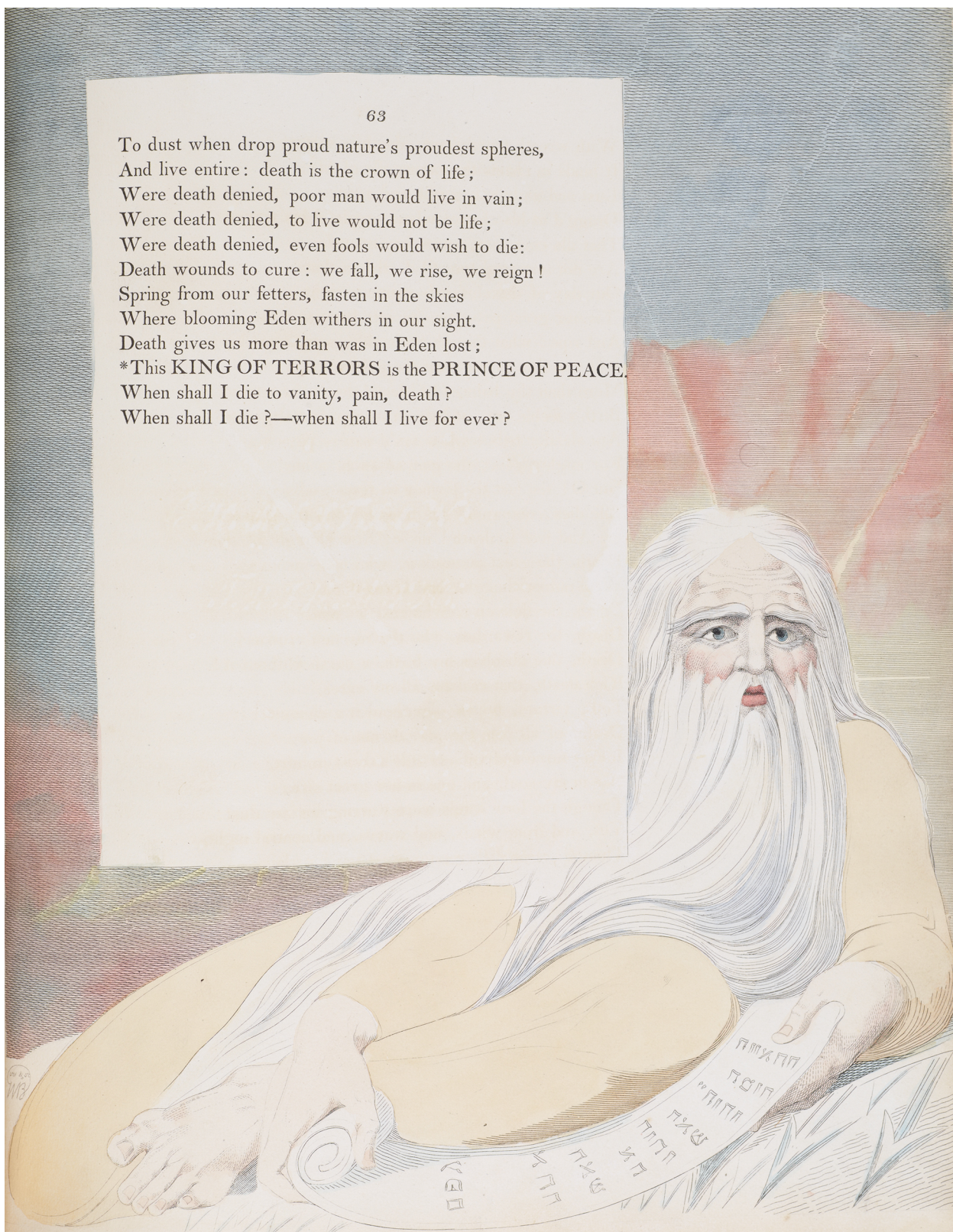|	
__	A double underscore indicates space before and after a word.
-	A hyphen separates the code numbers within a word.
…	An ellipsis indicates an incomplete word.
f	A lowercase "f" signifies a letter in its final form. There are five such letters.
?	A question mark indicates an incomplete or ambiguous letter.
R	An uppercase "R" flags a reversed letter.

(continued)

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To dust when drop proud nature's proudest spheres,
And live entire: death is the crown of life;
Were death denied, poor man would live in vain;
Were death denied, to live would not be life;
Were death denied, even fools would wish to die:
Death wounds to cure: we fall, we rise, we reign!
Spring from our fetters, fasten in the skies
Where blooming Eden withers in our sight.
Death gives us more than was in Eden lost;
*This KING OF TERRORS is the PRINCE OF PEACE.
When shall I die to vanity, pain, death?
When shall I die?—when shall I live for ever?

1.1. Edward Young, *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts* (London: Printed by R. Noble for R. Edwards, 1797), "Night the Third," p. 63. Not exhibited. Accession number PML 63943. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1973. Note the emanating radiance and pensive expression. Compare to the depiction of God in illus. 3.6.

1. *Night Thoughts*

3   When Blake illustrated Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797), he included an image of God holding a scroll with Hebrew characters (illus. 1.1). By enlarging and rotating the scroll I have made it possible to interpret the characters more easily (illus. 1.2).

These apparent words align with the right margin, as they should. They do not appear to form legible words, however, but to be scrambled for visual effect. Most surprising is that the letters are in reverse—wrongly engraved. Even though letters "א" (01) are reversed, they are drawn in classical Hebrew-style serif. In later drawings and engravings, Blake adopts an "N" shape for letter "א" (01). Serif Hebrew letters are composed of segments drawn broad and narrow, as seen in table 1. Here Blake made the broad elements, which are usually solid, in outline, as if hollow. In doing so, he may be mimicking a popular Hebrew lexicon that used "hollow" letters as a teaching guide (illus. 1.3).[4]

Although scholars search for meaning in the "words," what Blake engraved appears to be graffiti-like emulation of Hebrew.[5]

Line 1, 6 letters:
א
___?-?-?-R01-?-?___

Line 2, 4 letters:
מ
___?-R13-?-?___

Line 3, 6 letters:
___?-?-?-?-?-?___

Line 4, 3 letters:
א   ש
___?-R01-R21___

Line 5, 4 letters:
___?-?-?-?___

Line 6, 2 letters:
א
___R01-?___

Line 7, 3 letters:
א   ש
___?-R01-R21___

Line 8, 3 letters:
א
___R01-?-?___

Line 9, 3 letters:
ע   פ
___R16-R17-?___
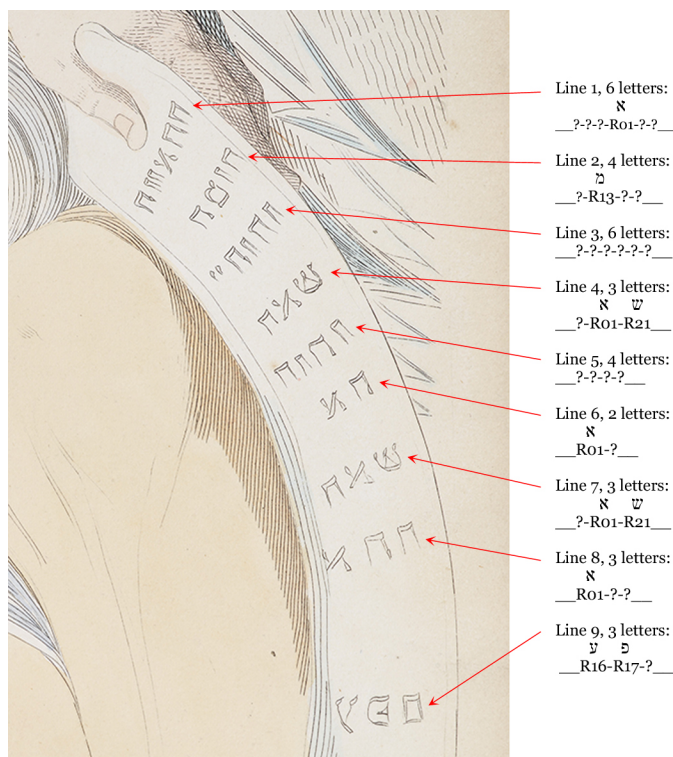
1.2. *Night Thoughts* p. 63, with the scroll enlarged and rotated. The ambiguous letters are flagged "?" and those that are obviously reversed are marked "R".

יתפקד
תתפקד
אתפקד
יתפקדן
תתפקדן
נתפקד

1.3. Parkhurst's *Lexicon*: hollow and solid letters. © British Library Board, shelf-mark 12904.f.23.

4. John Parkhurst designed his Hebrew and English lexicon to teach Hebrew, as the title explains: … *Adapted to the Use of Learners, and of Those* [self-taught students] *Who Have Not the Benefit of a Master*. Illus. 1.3 is from the 1762 edition; later editions were published in 1778, 1792, and 1799, and all four are viewable in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (*ECCO*) <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>. Each edition has a section on Hebrew grammar containing hollow letters. In a footnote, Parkhurst instructs the student: "If the Reader will take the trouble to colour the *hollow* letters with *red* ink, in this and the following examples, he will make the Examples still more clear and distinct; and indeed this may be no unprofitable exercise to a Beginner" (1762, *ECCO* image 17; 1778, 45; 1792, 22; 1799, 24). For examples of hollow letters, examine the grammar section pages following the instruction. The last three editions also contain a chart with a title implying it is a writing guide (1778, *ECCO* image 38; 1792, 15; 1799, 17), but which actually portrays fragmented and distorted letters, as if to be a guide to *reading* print made by battered type. Blake may have used the fragments as models for some of his graffiti-like Hebrew characters, though it is only speculation that he saw and emulated Parkhurst's lexicon. Illus. 1.3 is an enlarged portion of a verb conjugation table (1762, *ECCO* image 19). Copies of Parkhurst may be seen in *Google Books* <http://books.google.com>.

5. Spector describes the "words" as "pseudo-hebraic" ("Blake's Graphic Use of Hebrew" 67). For attempts to decipher their meaning, see Young, *Night Thoughts* (Folio Society), commentary vol., 71-72.

4   Hebrew words are in a preparatory drawing for a plate never engraved (illus. 1.4).[6] The Hebrew enlarged is in illus. 1.4.1.

ם	א	כ		ר	ח	א	ב	י	ר
13f	01	11		20	08	01	02	10	20
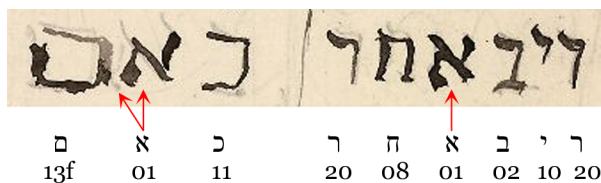
1.4.1. Hebrew inscription enlarged.

Clearly visible is the penciled outline for the left "א" (01). Beyond any doubt, Blake uses the classical serif style, but this is not proof that he had command of the Hebrew language. Of the competence perceivable in the composition, H. M. Margoliouth notes, "[Blake] seems to have been *provided* with some Hebrew, perhaps not very legible, of which he made a muddle" (emphasis mine).[7]

5   Hebrew words written without the diacritical symbols that indicate vowels can be ambiguous and challenging to translate.[8] Fortunately, the context is known. On the left side of

6. For reproduction of the complete set of watercolors, see the Folio Society edition; see also the British Museum web site <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.
7. "A Hebraist tells me … there are two Hebrew words, meaning 'hereafter pain' and referring to 'Awful Eternity! offended Queen!', which are fairly correct. … Here he [Blake] seems to have been provided with some Hebrew, perhaps not very legible, of which he made a muddle" (Margoliouth 49).
8. I thank Ari Cohen for his insightful assistance with this translation.

the block of text, between the first and second lines, Blake penciled an "X" (visible in illus. 1.4) identifying the words that he chose to illustrate:[9]

> TIME was! ETERNITY now reigns alone!
> Awful Eternity! offended Queen!

The offended queen is the crowned woman. She points upwards towards eternity while holding a book with Hebrew words—a metaphor for God[10]—and standing triumphantly on the face and throat of two vanquished figures—a metaphor for time.[11] Mindful of the context, we may now attempt a translation.

6   At first glance, there are two words, one on each page of the open book. Actually, this is a phrase of three words spread over the two pages.[12] We begin with the right page, as Hebrew is read from right to left. Parse the letters into two words, each of three letters. The rightmost word, "ריב" (__02-10-20__), means "strife." Next is "אחר" (__20-08-01__), which translates to "after."
The left page contains one word. Finding a meaningful translation consistent with the theme requires three manipulations to correct errors typical of a neophyte Hebraist. As written, "כאם" (__13f-01-11__) translates to "as a mother." Clearly, this is contextually inappropriate.
(1) Replace the "א" (01) with "ע" (16), as both have the English sound of A.[13]
(2) Replace the "ם" (13f), which has the English sound of M, with the near identically shaped "ס" (15), which has the English sound of S. The word becomes "כעס" (__15-16-11__), meaning "anger."[14] This is still not contextually acceptable. Another correction is possible.

(3) Replace the "ס" (15) with the same-sounding "ת" (22).[15] In the Ashkenazi dialect spoken by Jews in Blake's London who originated from Germanic and East European regions, the "ת" (22) is pronounced S as in "sav" (and not T as in "tav," as indicated in table 1).[16] To conceptualize this third and necessary correction, the Ashkenazi pronunciation is critical. Make this change, and the word becomes "כעת" (__22-16-11__), meaning "as time."
Together, the Hebrew phrase may be translated:[17]

<div align="center">

ריב אחר כעת

As time, after strife
</div>

The image portrays the offended queen pointing to eternity triumphant over vanquished *time, after strife* has concluded.

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9. See Young, *Night Thoughts* (Folio Society), commentary vol., xviii.

10. For Blake, God is eternal and awe inspiring. He associates Hebrew with God (see illus. 1.1, 3.1, 3.6, and 3.7).

11. Blake often depicts death in *Night Thoughts* by two different figures. One has a shaven head, sometimes with just a topknot, as drawn here. The other is an aged man with flowing hair and beard. In this composition, he uses both to represent time that brings death to all living beings. Blake uses well-known representations for death and time: see Quarles, "Book 3. Emblemes," 181, and "Hierogliph VI," 23.

12. Blake uses the same composition in placing a Hebrew slogan in a Job drawing (see the analysis of illus. 3.1, below).

13. The two consonants, "א" (01) and "ע" (16), have the same pronunciation in the Ashkenazi and Sephardi dialects. Neophytes to Hebrew often use one for the other. (Interestingly, the dialect spoken by Jews from Yemen maintains a tradition of different pronunciations for the two consonants.)

14. The Hebraist quoted by Margoliouth (see note 7, above) stopped at this point.

15. In both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi dialects "ס" (15) has the S sound. Not so with "ת" (22) (see next note).

16. In the Sephardi dialect, today prevalent in Israel, "ת" (22) is pronounced as T, as in "tav," with or without the diacritical mark dagesh, especially when a word ends with this letter. (The dagesh symbol is a dot placed in the center of a letter: Microsoft Word, symbol chart, Times New Roman font, Unicode hexadecimal representation 05BC.) In the Ashkenazi dialect spoken in Germanic lands and central Europe—and today by those trained in this tradition, as was the author—the rule for pronouncing the diacritical mark is observed, thus "ת" as S, as in "sav," and "תּ" as T, as in "tav." For example, the word "Sabbath" is written "שבת" (__22-02-21__), pronounced by the Sephardi speaker as shah-baht and by the Ashkenazi as shah-bahs.
Table 1 conforms to the Microsoft Office Word symbol chart's convention for assigning English names to Hebrew characters. The Times New Roman font, Unicode hexadecimal representation 05EA is assigned to "ת" and is labeled "Hebrew letter tav." FB4A is assigned to "תּ" and is labeled "Hebrew letter tav with dagesh." It is obvious that whoever assigned the English labels for the "sav" and "tav" used the Sephardi dialect.
For a linguist's explanation, see Bar-Adon, chapter 6, "On Some Basic Differences between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi Traditions of Pronunciation," 27-30.

17. The impression given by the phrase is that it is a simplistic translation of the English "Time, as after the strife," literally replacing each English word with a Hebrew equivalent, one by one, working from left to right as English is written and read, instead of creating a Hebrew translation from the sense of the English.
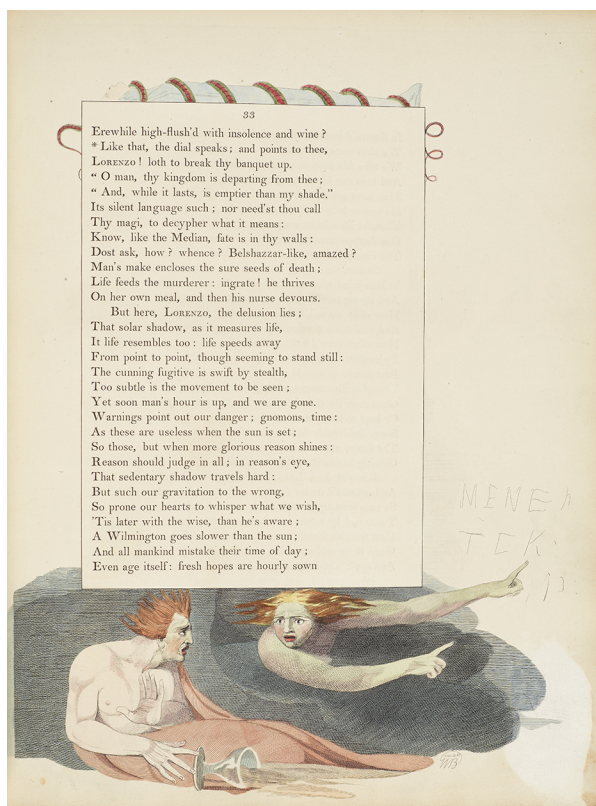
1.5. Edward Young, *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts* (1797), "Night the Second," p. 33. Not exhibited. Accession number PML 63943. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1973.

7   Blake had another opportunity to include Hebrew characters in *Night Thoughts* (illus. 1.5). That image illustrates an incident described in Daniel chapter 5, where strange words appear on a wall to announce the impending doom of the startled and alarmed King Belshazzar. The complete slogan is MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN (Daniel 5.25). In the engraving, however, Blake uses a few faintly drawn English characters to represent the slogan, instead of Hebrew letters.

8   One may infer that Blake was not in command of the Hebrew alphabet in 1797, because in *Night Thoughts* he uses Hebrew-like graffiti mixed with actual letters (although reversed) and Hebrew words with apparent errors. In 1803 he writes to his brother, declaring that he was then first learning Hebrew—"am now learning my Hebrew"—and demonstrating the first three letters of the alphabet: "אבג" (__03-02-01__) (illus. 1.6). He also writes, "I go on Merrily with my Greek & Latin … I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar & the Testament is my chief master …." It is tempting to speculate that Blake in later works forms the Hebrew "א" (01) as the Greek letter "nu" (N) because he studied Greek and read the Septuagint. The use of the N-shape must be deliberate, because we have here evidence of his ability to form the "א" (01) in its classical shape from the letter of 1803 and in the earlier *Night Thoughts* engraving and drawing.

9   To support an argument advanced later, I here make note of the variety of errors in publishing the Hebrew characters that Blake wrote to his brother (see illus. 1.6); some of these errors have been brought to the attention of Blake scholars by Arnold Cheskin.[18]
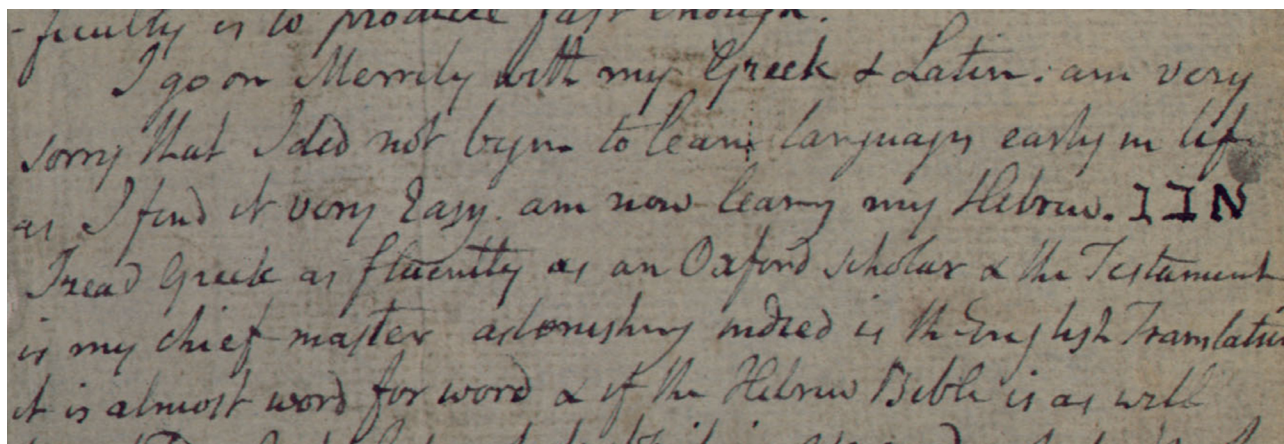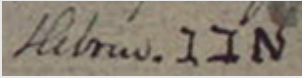

1.6. Detail of Blake's letter to his brother, 30 Jan. 1803. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. For the whole letter, see <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rosenwald.1793>, images 5-8 (the Hebrew is in image 8).

18. See Cheskin 178, 180.

Table 2: Proofing Errors in Publishing Blake's Hebrew "ABC" "אבג"

Note: Red indicates error

#		Code	Date	Editor	Publisher
0		__03-02-01__	1803	Blake	Autograph
1		__11-02-01__	1921	Keynes	Grolier Club
2		__02-06-10-01__	1925	Keynes	Nonesuch
3		__02-06-10-01__	1927	Wilson	Nonesuch
4		__11-14f-10-01__	1932	Wilson	Peter Davies
5		__14-06-10-01__	1948	Wilson	Hart-Davis
6		__03-02-01-♦__	1956	Keynes	Hart-Davis
7		__03-?-01-?__	1957	Keynes	Nonesuch
8		__03-02-01-10__	1965	Erdman	Doubleday
9		__03-?-01__	1966	Keynes	Oxford U
10		__03-02-01__	1968	Keynes	Hart-Davis
11		__02-06-10-01__	1969	Wilson	Cooper Square
12		__14-02-01__	1971	Wilson	Oxford U
13		__03-02-01__	1978	Bentley	Clarendon
14		__03-?-01__	1979	Johnson	Norton
15		__03-11-01__	1980	Keynes	Clarendon
16		__03-11-01__	1982	Erdman	U California
17		__03-11-01__	1988	Erdman	Anchor

(continued)

Commentary

0. See illus. 1.6. Blake ends his English sentence with a period, followed by the three Hebrew letters for ABC, "אבג" (__03-02-01__), all properly formed and without punctuation.

1. Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of William Blake* (New York: Grolier Club, 1921), "Appendix III: Letters Hitherto Uncollected, Letter 23," 451. The leftmost letter is wrong.

2. Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Writings of William Blake*, 3 vols. (London: Nonesuch Press, 1925) 2: 242. Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University. Instead of the ABC that Blake wrote, the Nonesuch edition inexplicably uses the four-letter Hebrew word for "Job" (see illus. 3.5).

3. Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927) 142. Wilson apparently copied the 1925 Keynes (Nonesuch). Could this be an error by the same Nonesuch editor?

4. Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (London: Peter Davies, 1932) 144. The typesetting of the 1932 edition is an egregiously erroneous reproduction of the 1927 Wilson (Nonesuch).

5. Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (London: Hart-Davis, 1948) 149. The error of using Job's name is perpetuated in this edition with an attempt to reproduce the 1927 Wilson (Nonesuch). However, the error is compounded because the leftmost letter is wrong for Job's name.

6. Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Letters of William Blake* (London: Hart-Davis, 1956) 83. Hart-Davis corrects the leftmost-character error of the 1921 Keynes (Grolier) edition, but inexplicably adds a superscript symbol that is in the shape of a diamond, indicated by the red arrow. Blake has no character or symbol to the right of his rightmost letter. In Hebrew, the traditional full stop (period) may be a single diamond subscript, or two diamonds one above the other (as in a colon). Since Hebrew is read from right to left, the full stop would properly be placed to the left of the leftmost letter. Did the typesetter intend the letter "י" (10) and use a diamond instead?

7. Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Complete Writings of William Blake: With All the Variant Readings* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1957) 821. Poorly printed, as if done with battered type. The letter left of center could be either "ב" (02) or "כ" (11). The rightmost is not a superscript diamond—possibly just battered type "י" (10).

8. David V. Erdman, ed., *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, commentary by Harold Bloom (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 696. Erdman adds a fourth, superfluous character on the extreme right.

9. Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Complete Writings of William Blake: With Variant Readings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) 821. The three letters are printed with battered type, making the center ambiguous, either "ב" (02) or "כ" (11).

10. Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Letters of William Blake*, 2nd ed. (London: Hart-Davis, 1968) 65. The three letters are correct.

11. Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969) 53. The same error as in the 1927 Wilson (Nonesuch).

12. Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) 169. This edition of Wilson has been modified to attempt what Blake actually wrote, except that the leftmost character is wrong.

13. G. E. Bentley, Jr., ed., *William Blake's Writings*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 2: 1570. The three letters are correct.
Further note is made that in 1: 666, where the *Laocoön* is described, Bentley's representation of Blake's Hebrew for "Jesus" is wrong. Blake engraved two letters in reverse, but the letters are correct (see illus. 3.7b). Bentley has it as "ישצ" (__18-21-10__). The typesetter mistakenly used "צ" (18) instead of the "ע" (16) that Blake engraved backwards, and the error was not recognized. See also illus. 3.2a3.

14. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, eds., *Blake's Poetry and Designs: Authoritative Texts, Illuminations in Color and Monochrome, Related Prose, Criticism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979) 465. The center letter is poorly printed, as if with battered type, and could be either "ב" (02) or "כ" (11).

15. Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Letters of William Blake: With Related Documents*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 53. The center letter is incorrect.

16. David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 727. A double error is introduced. The center letter is wrong, and it is printed with a diacritical symbol—the dot in the center of the letter, the dagesh—which Blake did not use.

17. David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1988) 727. The center letter is incorrect.

2. *Christin Nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour*

10 We next consider a drawing from the Passion cycle: *Christ Nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour* (illus. 2.1). Behind the head of Christ is a person with Hebrew on his costume in two places: over the forehead on the miter, and on the hem of the robe draped over the left forearm. The head-piece identifies the person as the high priest, whose official vestments included a miter with a gold plate. As described in Exodus 28.36, engraved on the plate were the words

$$\text{ק ד ש ל י ה ו ה}$$
$$\_\_05\text{-}06\text{-}05\text{-}10\text{-}12\_\_21\text{-}04\text{-}19\_\_.$$

The right word means "holy" (consecrated), and the left contains the tetragrammaton[19] and translates as "to the Lord."[20]

2.1. *Christ Nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour*. Exhibition image 66. Accession number EVT 9. Thaw Collection, Pierpont Morgan Library.
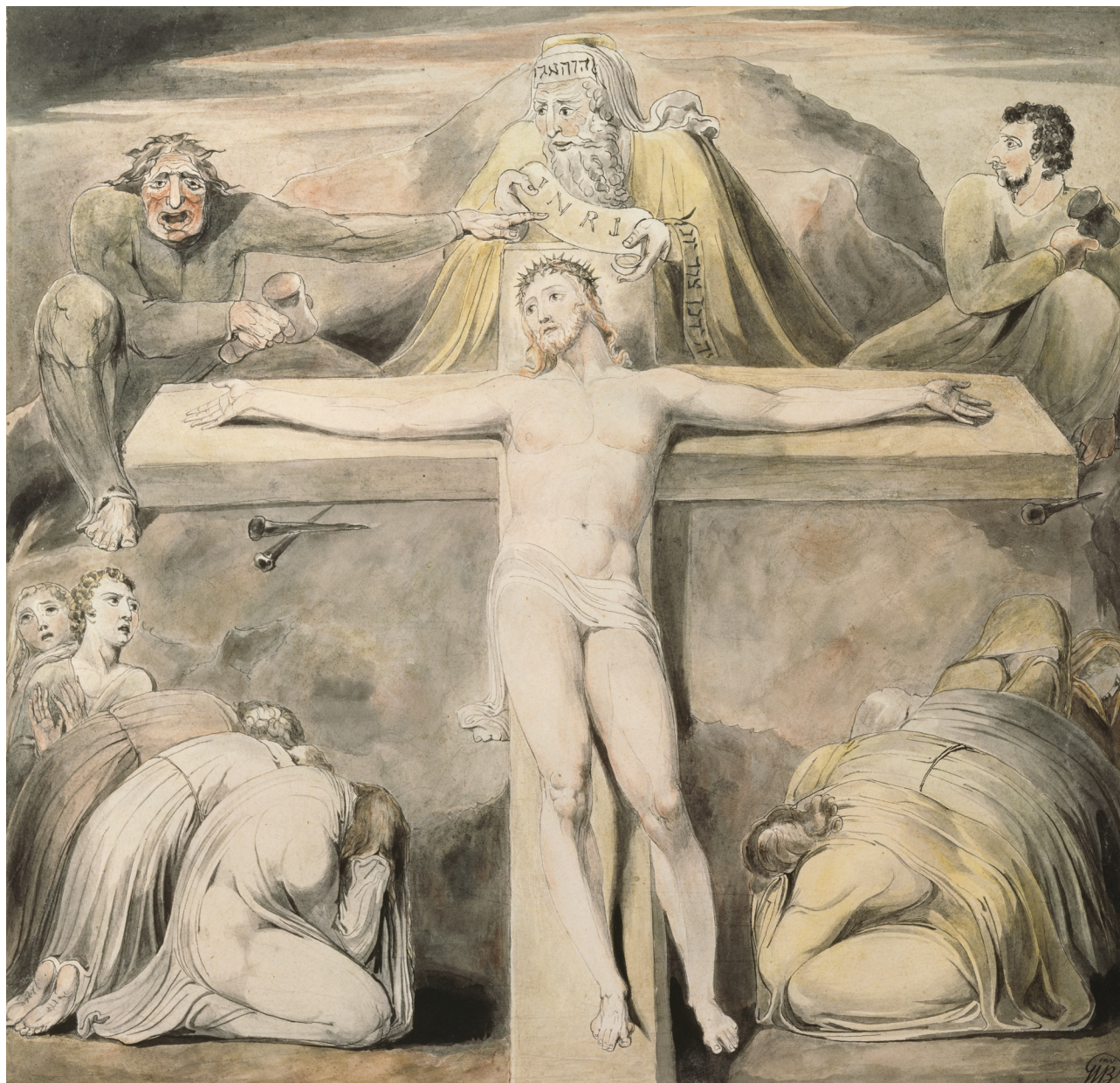
19. Tetragrammaton is defined in table 3, note a.
20. See the monograph on priestly vestments by Haran in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

Blake drew something different: five distinct letters are flanked by two ambiguous characters (illus. 2.2).

2.2. *Christ Nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour*. The high priest's miter.

Blake's letters are

$$\text{...? ג א ה ו ה ?...}$$
$$\text{...?-03-01-05-06-05-?...}$$

which may be parsed as

$$\text{...? ג א ה ו ה ?...}$$
$$\text{...?-03-01\_\_05-06-05-?....}$$

Perhaps he intended to write "נ" (14) instead of what appears clearly to be "ג" (03).[21] Also, if the ambiguous letters on either side are "י" (10), the phrase will read

$$\text{י ה ו ה א נ י}$$
$$\text{\_\_10-14-01\_\_05-06-05-10\_\_.}$$

The right word is the tetragrammaton and the left translates as "I," for the two-word phrase "I am the Lord."[22] Literally interpreted, this would have the high priest proclaim himself to be God—certainly not a Jewish theological concept, but blasphemy, as Blake would have known.[23] Alternatively, perhaps Blake wrote "ל" (12) instead of "י" (10) as the right ambiguous letter[24] in an attempt to have the right word represent (as a contraction) "to the Lord." Literally translated, the phrase becomes the awkward "I am to the Lord."[25]

11 If we set aside consideration of any theological purpose that Blake had in mind in writing this slogan, it appears to represent the same theme as in *Job's Evil Dreams* (illus. 3.1). There, Satan points to the slogan "Your God gave from heaven," which is Blake's way of depicting God's authority and permission to test Job, with Satan as his agent. Blake may here be assigning to the high priest the role of a satanic-like agent of God in the crucifixion. Whatever the purpose, Blake uses the high priest's vestments as a slogan board, just as he makes use of the tablets of the Ten Commandments in the Job drawing.

12 I now consider the second slogan. The high priest wears a robe with a string of characters on the hem draped over his left forearm (illus. 2.3).

$$\text{...נ ו ? ר ו צ ? נ ך ר ? ה י...}$$
$$\text{...14 - 06 - ? \_ 20 - 06 - 18 \_ 11f - 14 - 20 - ? \_ 05 - 10...}$$

2.3. *Christ Nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour*. The high priest's robe, with the hem enlarged and rotated.

21. The justification for this assumption is the obvious error in illus. 3.2e, where "ג" (03) is used in place of a textually required "נ" (14). See also how Blake forms the "ג" (03) in the letter to his brother (illus. 1.6).

22. I am indebted to Ari Cohen for this suggestion.

23. Did Blake use this opportunity to slur the high priest? Spector explains: "Although difficult for someone of the twentieth century to comprehend, the most significant aspect of eighteenth-century Christian Hebraism was its anti-Semitism" ("Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist" 180). See also Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"*: "Though at one with Paine, Godwin, Fuseli, and the others [of his circle], as to politics, he was a rebel to their theological or anti-theological tenets. Himself a heretic among the orthodox, here among the infidels he was a saint, and staunchly defended Christianity—the spirit of it—against these strangely assorted disputants" (1: 94). Gilchrist does not report details of the theological debates. Any discussion about Christianity would necessarily draw upon its Judaic roots.

24. See the comment on illus. 3.2a on the manner in which Blake forms the letter "ל" (12). Note that the line that Blake drew is as dense as the adjacent letter, and may not be what appears at first glance as the edge of the plate.

25. A third suggestion is that the apparent "ג" (03) is actually a poorly executed "ב" (02), making the left word "אבי" (__10-02-01__), which means "my father." The slogan would then read "The Lord my father." However, Blake's obvious error demonstrated in illus. 3.2e makes this possibility unlikely. I am indebted to Carin and Ben Dachs for this suggestion.

The monograph in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (see note 20, above) describes and illustrates the priestly vestments, as specified in the Bible: there is no robe, nor are there embroidered characters. For Blake, the hem appears to be yet another convenient call-out or balloon space to place one more slogan, although this slogan is not obvious. The words at the start and end are incomplete, as if lost in the folds of the robe, and some characters are ambiguous. One word is distinct, however: "צור" (__20-06-18__), which translates to "rock."

This suggests that Blake was depicting a common phrase, recognizable from just the segment visible. If the phrase was from the Old Testament, a Hebrew Bible concordance should identify it. A concordance search yielded thirty-eight entries for the word "צור" (__20-06-18__) and fourteen for "צורי" (__10-20-06-18__), "my rock."[26] No match was found.

The *William Blake Archive* <http://www.blakearchive.org> suggests that the slogan on the hem is an abstract representation of the phylactery worn on the left arm during certain Jewish prayer services.[27] The wearing of phylacteries is a biblical command (Deuteronomy 6.8) as a devotional reminder during prayer of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. The phylactery contains passages from the Bible: Deuteronomy 6.4-9 and 11.13-21, and Exodus 13.1-16.[28] No sentence there contains the word "צור" (__20-06-18__), which Blake depicts so clearly and centrally. Perhaps he quotes from the New Testament, or from some commentary, or one of his own works, translating the words into Hebrew.

3. Job Series

13 We next examine *Job's Evil Dreams*, one of the twenty-one drawings for the Thomas Butts Job series, which contains eight Hebrew words (illus. 3.1).

3.1. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Exhibition image 26. Accession number 2001.73. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

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26. Wachsman 1602-03.

27. In e-mail correspondence dated 7 March 2010, the *Blake Archive* graciously provided an advance draft of an editorial note suggesting the phylactery theory: "The Hebrew letters are written vertically, bottom to top, on the priest's cloak where it falls below his left arm, possibly as an unconventional substitute for the phylactery conventionally worn on the left arm." The complete note is now published; see the *William Blake Archive*, Drawings and Paintings, Water Color Drawings, Illustrations to the Bible, object 33, editors' note on line 02.

28. P. Birnbaum 5n-6n.

In the upper center background, partly obscured by Satan's cloven-hoofed leg and the snake coiled around his torso, there is a representation of the Ten Commandments on two conjoined tablets, with Hebrew in sans-serif characters. Blake wrote the letters sans serif in his typical flowing manner. Serif offers certain visual clues to identify one letter from another that are lost in sans serif, thus demanding great caution in forming the letters. Even if we allow for artistic liberties, he formed many incorrectly.[29] Of course, he was in the early stages of his Hebrew studies at this time, if indeed he continued to study much beyond the 1803 date of the letter to his brother (illus. 1.6).

14 The crucial contextual guide to recognizing the letters that Blake wrote is the words of the Ten Commandments as given in Exodus 20.2-14. Although the commandments vary in wordiness in the biblical text, tradition represents each with two words. Tradition also places five two-word representations on each of the two tablets (see table 3).

Table 3: The Ten Commandments

	Exodus 20		Two words in Hebrew	Commandment
			Right Tablet	
1.	2	[a]	א נ כ י י ה ו ה ___05-06-05-10___10-11-14-01___	I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out ….
2.	3-6		ל א י ה י ה ___05-10-05-10___01-12___	Thou shalt have no other gods before me ….
3.	7		ל א ת ש א ___01-21-22___01-12___	Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy ….
4.	8-11		ז כ ו ר א ת ___22-01___20-06-11-07___	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ….
5.	12		כ ב ד א ת ___22-01___04-02-11___	Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days ….
			Left Tablet	
6.	13 (1 of 4) [b]		ל א ת ר צ ח ___08-18-20-22___01-12___	Thou shalt not murder.
7.	13 (2 of 4)		ל א ת נ א ף ___17f-01-14-22___01-12___	Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8.	13 (3 of 4)		ל א ת ג נ ב ___02-14-03-22___01-12___	Thou shalt not steal.
9.	13 (4 of 4)		ל א ת ע נ ה ___05-14-16-22___01-12___	Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy ….
10.	14		ל א ת ח מ ד ___04-13-08-22___01-12___	Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house ….

a. God is known by many names in the Bible. Those who strictly adhere to the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," use traditional euphemisms in writing

(continued)

29. Spector argues that "since Blake *probably* had a Hebrew text before him as he worked [on *Job's Evil Dreams*], had he wished, he could have reproduced this source [the Ten Commandments] exactly. The picture's irregularities, then, are *probably* deliberate rather than accidental" ("Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist" 201; emphasis mine). Having thus dismissed consideration that Blake made errors, Spector hypothesizes his rationale for drawing as he did.

15 Illus. 3.2 shows Blake's tablets enlarged. If we bear in mind that Hebrew is written and read from right to left, the right tablet (to the viewer) should contain five two-word representations of the first through fifth commandments. Blake's has only one word. The left tablet should begin with the sixth commandment. The sixth is actually the second line. Commandment seven and a portion of the eighth are the third and fourth lines, respectively.

3.2. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Enlargement of the tablets.

My analysis of the calligraphy begins with the left tablet, setting aside the first line, which will be discussed last. Blake depicts on the second line the two-word convention for the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (illus. 3.2a):

__08-18-20-22___?01-12__
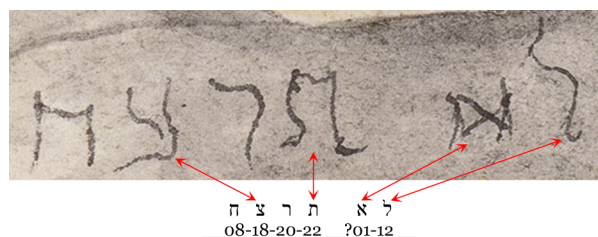
3.2a. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Left tablet, second line.

Note letter "ל" (12). Here and elsewhere, Blake does not carefully form the top horizontal segment. It tends to be a squiggly zigzag shape.[30]

Letter "א" (01) shows two overlaid angle strokes, one correct and the other an error. Examination by microscope[31] shows that the erroneous diagonal was drawn first and then overlaid by the correct stroke (illus. 3.2a1-2).

Correct

Incorrect
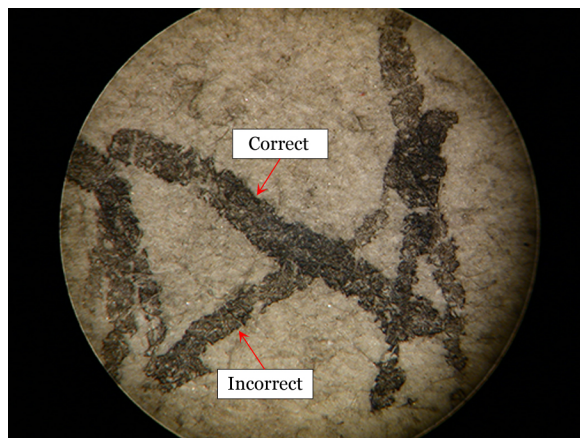
3.2a1-2. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Magnification of "א" (01) on left tablet, second line.

At the instant of drawing the letter, Blake demonstrates ambivalence. The obvious confusion with forming the first letter of the alphabet indicates that at the time of creating the Job series he was not a practiced writer of Hebrew.

Analysis of nearly every other letter reinforces this impression. Letter "ח" (22) is distorted. Properly formed, it contains four segments: a top horizontal stroke, an attached vertical stroke descending on the right side, and a vertical stroke descending on the left side with a small additional horizontal stroke at the base turning away from the body of the letter (consider a leg with an attached foot). In sans serif, the foot is the only visual indicator that it is not the similar "ה" (08). Blake drew both vertical strokes with feet attached. Is this artistic embellishment at the expense of legibility or confusion over how to form the letter?

Letter "צ" (18) is curious. At first glance, it appears to be the expected צ-shape. However, when the image is magnified, Blake's ambiguity becomes obvious. It appears to be a distorted "ע" (16). The stick figures below (illus. 3.2a3) demonstrate how the letters differ in construction.

"צ" (18)   Blake   "ע" (16)

Letter "צ" (18) is drawn with a long diagonal descending from the upper left to the lower right to meet with the rightmost end of a horizontal base. A short diagonal from the upper right touches the long diagonal near midpoint. Letter "ע" (16) does not have a horizontal base. The long diagonal descends from the upper right and then angles acutely to the lower left. A shorter diagonal line begins upper left and descends at an angle towards the right until it meets the long diagonal coursing to the left. Compare the stick figures for letters "צ" (18) and "ע" (16) to Blake's letter in the drawing under magnification.[32] It is not the pattern expected from an experienced hand.

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30. Blake's propensity to form this letter without a horizontal top is important in the analysis of the calligraphy in *Christ Nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour* (illus. 2.2).

31. Nikon SMZ-U Zoom 1:10. Thaw Conservation Center of the Morgan Library and Museum.

32. The magnification feature is one of the strengths of the Morgan's online exhibition.

17   The third line, of two words, is the seventh commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (illus. 3.2b). Blake wrote:

Correct   Reversed

ל א ת נ א ף
__17f-01-14-22__R01-12__
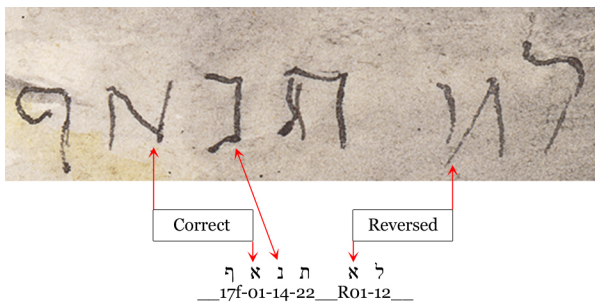
3.2b. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Left tablet, third line.

The letter "א" (01) is twice used. Careful comparison of the "א"s demonstrates that the right instance is reversed, while the left is properly formed. Blake often reverses this letter, which has three elements: an angled stroke that runs from the upper left to the bottom right and two vertical strokes of uneven sizes joined to each side of the angled stroke. Blake uses the "N" shape drawn sans serif. The reversed letter is perfectly recognizable because of the three elements, but the ambiguity in the proper presentation of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet in this line is glaringly obvious. Letter "נ" (14) is distorted almost to the point of confusion. When properly drawn, the top horizontal segment is shorter than the bottom. With the two horizontal strokes identical, it may be confused with sans-serif letters "ב" (02) and "כ" (11); with the base angled down towards the left, there is room for confusion with "ג" (03). From the context, "נ" (14) is the intended letter. Here, and in examples to follow, Blake shows a propensity to slant what should be a horizontal baseline.
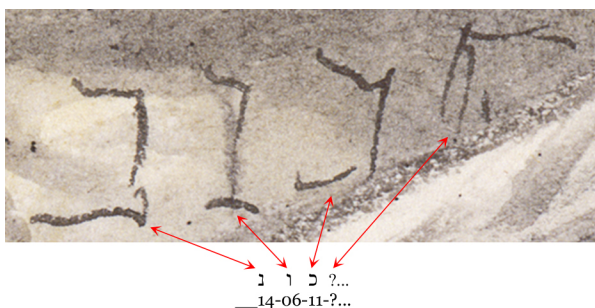
18   The eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," is line four (illus. 3.2c). There Blake wrote a fragment of a word with distorted letters, the end of the second word of the commandment.

נ ו כ ?...
__14-06-11-?...__

3.2c. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Left tablet, fourth line.

The complete commandment is

ל א ת ג נ ב
__02-14-03-22__01-12__.

From context, the partial character "?" in illus. 3.2c must be "ת" (22), and the "כ" (11) is a distorted "ג" (03) whose lower-right extension is truncated, apparently by artistic design because of the overflowing edge of Satan's garment. Nevertheless, the apparent "ו" (06) is a distorted "נ" (14), and the last letter, which appears to be "נ" (14), is actually a poorly executed "ב" (02).
The ninth and tenth commandments are not depicted.

19   Before we consider the first line of the left tablet, it is necessary to analyze the single word on the right tablet, which appears immediately beneath Satan's outstretched, pointing hand (illus. 3.2d). Blake wrote four letters:

ש מ י ח
__08-10-13f-21__

3.2d. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Right tablet, line of text.

The first letter (reading from right to left) is certainly "ש" (21), even though when examined under magnification it is hesitatingly drawn, and the center vertical segment, which should angle downwards to the left, is angled towards the right.
At first glance, the second letter appears to be "ם" (13f), obviously an error because "ם" is a final letter. From context, it cannot be the very similar "ס" (15). Blake intended "מ" (13).
The last letter, "ח" (08), shows a hesitatingly drawn line at its base when magnified, as if Blake was indecisive about the bottom, which, if closed, converts the apparent "ח" (08) to "ם" (13f).
The corrections yield

ש מ י ם
__13f-10-13-21__,

which translates into the word "heaven." There is no such word, however, in the two-word abbreviations of any of the first five commandments. As will be made clear below, Blake has written "heaven" for another purpose.

20 For the left tablet's topmost line (illus. 3.2e), Blake wrote:
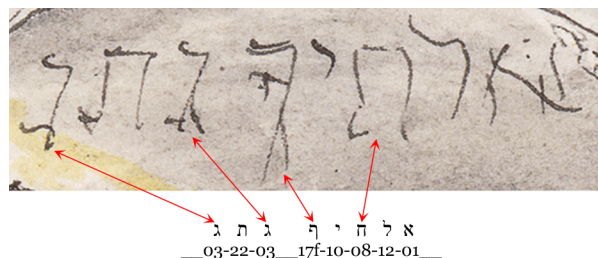
3.2e. *Job's Evil Dreams*. Left tablet, top line.

To correct his calligraphy, we replace the "ח" (08) with the similar "ה" (05), the poorly shaped "ף" (17f)[33] with the similar "ך" (11f), the clearly formed "ג" (03) with the very similar "נ" (14), and the last letter of the second word, "ג" (03), with "נ" (14) in its final form, "ן" (14f).
The corrected words now read

אלהיך נתן
__14f-22-14__11f-10-05-12-01__,

which translates as "Your God gave," or, alternatively, "Your God gives."[34]
With artistic license, Blake actually wrote a three-word slogan across the two tablets. Beginning with the lone word on the right tablet, and continuing with the two words at the top of the left tablet, the slogan translates into the almost grammatically correct phrase "Your God gave [gives] from heaven." Blake precisely depicts the plain text of the Bible—Satan declares his authorization to inflict tribulations on Job by pointing to the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which represent God.[35] He then adds imagery not in the Bible—Satan points to his assistants who inflict the tormenting nightmare.[36] Blake deliberately made the slogan appear to be a commandment—a visual illusion.

21 Later, when Blake prepared a set of the Job drawings for John Linnell, he did not attempt to duplicate this ambitious use of Hebrew (illus. 3.3). The clever illusion and slogan in the Butts drawing never appeared in print. When the Job set was engraved (illus. 3.4),[37] one line of indistinct Hebrew-like graffiti replaced the many lines of Hebrew in the Butts drawing. Now, the tablets alone—without words—serve Blake's purpose, as Satan points to them to declare the true source of Job's tribulations and his authority as agent to inflict torments.

33. What I describe as a poorly shaped "ף" (17f) Spector perceives to be a "ך" (11f) with a vowel point (qamats) shaped like a "ָ" under the top horizontal stroke (Microsoft Word, Times New Roman font, Unicode hexadecimal representation 05B8). First, and especially in sans serif, it is the small dangling appendage attached to and hanging from the left edge of the top horizontal stroke that differentiates the "ף" (17f) from the "ך" (11f), and it is this appendage that Blake apparently misplaced and mangled. Second, a vowel point must stand apart: no portion should touch any part of the letter. The assumed vowel is attached to the letter, as the magnified drawing clearly shows. Therefore, it is part of the letter and not a vowel point. Third, observe the letter's vertical stroke bifurcated at its bottom where it should be a single line in both the "ף" (17f) and "ך" (11f). This is just another poorly formed letter. Further, it is usual for multiple letters in a word to be vowelled, when vowels are used at all (although, as Spector points out, there are exceptions). See "Blake's Graphic Use of Hebrew" 69.
34. Blake omits vowel symbols. The context permits either version.
35. He graphically portrays the literal story told in the first two chapters of Job (the authorization is indicated in italics). Satan challenges God: "'But put forth *Thy hand* now, and touch all that he hath, surely he will blaspheme Thee to Thy face.' And the Lord said unto Satan: '*Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand*'" (Job 1.11-12 [Soncino edition]). In the plain text we read of Satan, as God's "hand," killing every person belonging to Job, sparing only those who are more useful as tormentors if kept alive, and destroying his wealth (flocks and herds of animals). Job withstands the challenge. Satan returns to God for more authority: "And the Lord said unto Satan: '… he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou didst move *Me against him*, to destroy him without cause.' And Satan answered the Lord, and said: '… But put forth *Thy hand* now, and touch his bone and his flesh, surely he will blaspheme Thee to Thy face.' And the Lord said unto Satan: '*Behold he is in thy hand; only spare his life*.' So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot even unto his crown" (2.3-7).
The plain text makes it clear that Satan does nothing of his own volition, without God's permission and authority. First, God grants Satan permission to test Job, and sets a limit—you may not touch him physically. Thereafter, God extends that authority to permit physical torment, with a new limit—you may not kill him. Satan is the "hand" put forth as God's authorized agent. Blake graphically portrays the story by showing Satan pointing towards the source of Job's travail, God, metaphorically represented by the tablets of the Ten Commandments.
36. In *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, plate numbered 11 (illus 3.4), Blake describes in a title line what he engraved (emphasis in italics): "Satan himself is transformed into an *Angel* of Light & his Ministers into *Ministers of Righteousness*." As a footnote, Blake quotes Job 7.14: "With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me & affrightest me with Visions" (the Soncino edition has "Then Thou scarest me with dreams, And terrifiest me through visions"). In this lament, "thou" refers to God, not to Satan.
37. The plates carry the engraved date 1825, but they were published in 1826.

3.3 (above). *Job's Evil Dreams*. Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.422. Photo: Allan Macintyre. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

3.4 (left). *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, plate numbered 11. Not exhibited. Accession number PML 63939. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1973.

22 In *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, only two plates have Hebrew, each with two words. The first is the title page (illus. 3.5), in which artistically embellished serif characters reflect the style of the English letters.
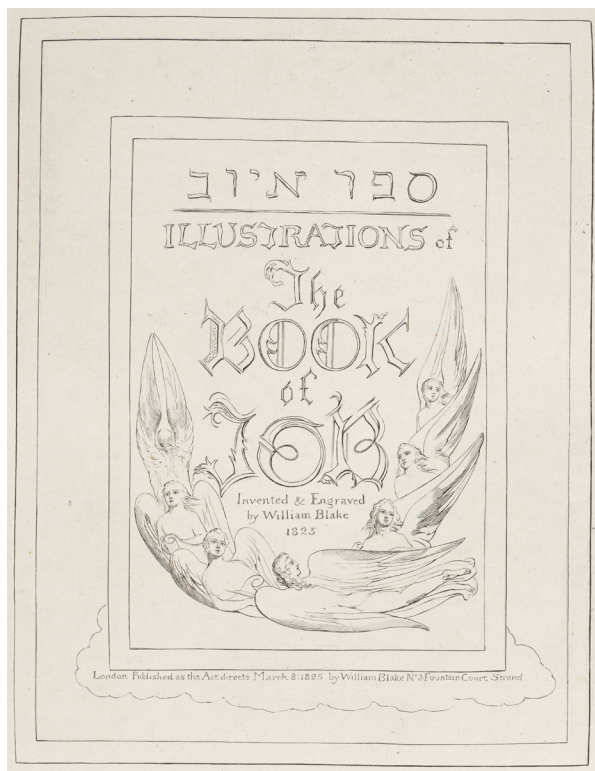
3.5. *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, title page. Not exhibited. Accession number PML 63939. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1973.

Although this license causes a distortion to the base of one letter, no ambiguity results because the letter remains distinct and the context is unmistakable. The word on the right translates as "book" and that on the left as "Job," for "Job's Book," or, as Blake properly has it, "The Book of Job." Careful examination of the Hebrew shows that letter "פ" (17) has an erroneous embellishment (illus. 3.5.1). Extended to the right beyond the vertical stroke, the baseline matches that of letter "ב" (02). This is improper, because the extension is a feature unique to "ב" (02) to differentiate it from the similar "כ" (11), especially in sans serif. This may be artistic license, or not understanding the import of the flourish. It is also possible that Blake mimics a style not used today (see the discussion of illus. 3.6.2j, below). He uses the "N" shape for "א" (01).

The title page offers a unique opportunity to appreciate Blake's artistic embellishments of Hebrew letters by comparison with the English word immediately below (illus. 3.5.2).

3.5.2. *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, title page. Hebrew and English enlarged.

Note the drooping, angled baseline of the letter "L," the distortion of the letter "T," and the embellishments and distortions of "U," "S," and "N": flamboyant artistic license, all. Did Blake express the same license when forming non-serif Hebrew letters, even at the expense of legibility?

ס פ ר א י ו ב
___02-06-10-01___20-17-15___

Erroneously extended embellishment
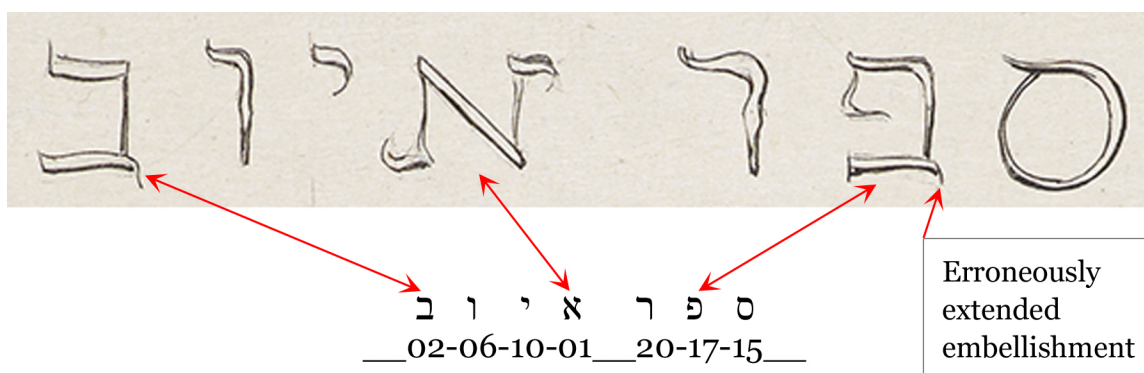
3.5.1. *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, title page. Hebrew enlarged.

3.6. *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, plate numbered 2. Exhibition image 63. Accession number PML 63939. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1973.

23 The third plate in the *Job* series, numbered 2 (illus. 3.6), contains two Hebrew words, one of which by context is apparently misspelled. The words are in the top border, immediately beneath "The Angel of the Divine Presence" (illus. 3.6.1):

מ ל ך י ה ו ה
__05-06-05-10___11f-12-13__

3.6.1. *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, plate numbered 2. Top border enlarged.

The left word is the tetragrammaton, which Blake apparently used to represent the English words "Divine Presence," although the Hebrew is usually translated as "Lord" (and commonly transliterated as "Jehovah"). The three-letter right word is problematic, because it translates as "king," not "angel." The two-word phrase, if considered alone, is not a problem ("Lord the King" or "Jehovah the King"). If Blake intended the Hebrew to represent "The Angel of the Divine Presence," however, he should have engraved the four-letter word for "angel," which contains the three letters used for "king":

מ ל א ך
__11f-01-12-13__.

24 Before we consider the riddle that is wrapped in this enigma of Blake's calligraphy, observe carefully the letter "מ" (13). For whatever reason, Blake here uses a cursive form of the letter. Curiously, he is not consistent, because the letter "ל" (12) remains serif. Compare his letters for "king" (illus. 3.6.2) to the same word from a twentieth-century book whose type is set in cursive (illus. 3.6.2a). By using symbols formed by the fewest possible strokes, Hebrew cursive facilitates speedy handwriting. Letters take on simplified and sometimes radical changes of shape, as indicated by the red arrows (left to right): 01, 11f, 12, 13, 04, 21, and 02. "Rashi" is the name given to the cursive style shown in illus. 3.6.2a. Used in writing medieval manuscripts and publishing biblical and Talmudic incunabula, this typeface continues in

Paper flaw

11f-12-13

ה כ ב ו ש ו ד ר ך ה מ ל ך ה ו א ג"כ כ א פ י ל ה
__05-12-10-17-01-11__11__[38]__-03___01-06-05___11f-12-13-05___11f-20-04-06___21-06-02-11-05__

3.6.2 (top left). *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, plate numbered 2. Blake's cursive "מ" (13) and serif "ל" (12).
3.6.2a (bottom). *The Book of the Congregation of Israel* "ספר כנסת ישראל" (Warsaw: Simon Rothenberg "שמעון רוטינבערג", 1911) 9 (author's library). This ubiquitous cursive typeface is often termed semi-cursive.
3.6.2b (top right). Author's handwriting. The word "king" in Rabbinic style.

38. The double quotation mark figure in the illustration indicates that the letters on either side form a contraction of a common phrase, which the reader is expected to recognize and comprehend from context. It is "גם כן", meaning "also, as well." The typesetting mimics handwritten cursive, which contains many such contractions to speed writing.

use to this day. The sentence is from a book at hand selected to demonstrate "king." (Also, compare the cursive Rashi letter "ר" (04) in illus. 3.6.2a with the "T" in "Illustrations" in illus. 3.5.2. Blake apparently mimics Rashi.)[39] In illus. 3.6.2b, I have written the word "king" in another cursive style in common use, where the letter "מ" (13) takes the shape of a squeezed "N." Blake's "מ" (13) matches neither cursive style.

25 Specimens of "מ" (13) near contemporary with Blake are in illus. 3.6.2c-j. Examples c-h are handwritten. Again, none matches, for two reasons: first, Blake has an embellished flat base extending to the right, and second, he has suppressed the protruding small stroke that should be on the upper-left portion of the letter pointing upwards. He is doing something different.
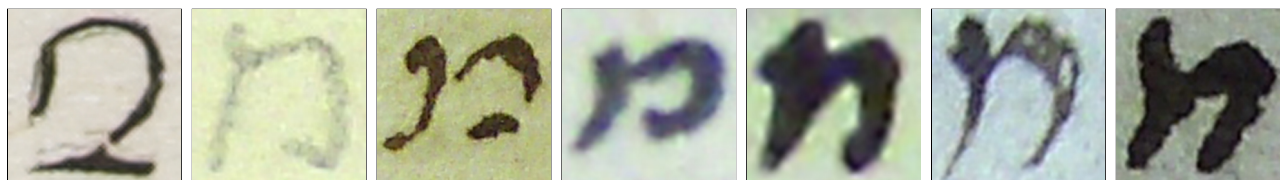
| Blake's "מ" | 3.6.2c | 3.6.2d | 3.6.2e | 3.6.2f | 3.6.2g | 3.6.2h |

Handwritten specimens of cursive (near) contemporary with Blake.

3.6.2c. Written in pencil on the inside back cover of Gerald Fitz-Gerald, *The Hebrew Alphabet: On a Scale of Equal Parts Showing the Serviles and Radicals at One View. A Hebrew Grammar, for the Use of the Students of the University of Dublin* (Dublin: R. E. Mercier & Co., University Press, Trinity College, 1799). Dorot Jewish Division of the New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL).

3.6.2d. Written in the margin of Gregory Sharpe, *An Hebrew Lexicon: Containing All the Primitive and Many Deriv'd Words, Containing Their Various Significations in Hebrew and English, Free from the Masoretic Points … and the Five Letters on That Language* (London: John Millan, 1745) 14. NYPL.

3.6.2e. From marginalia in Christian Simon Schröder, *Seder 'Olam Rabah ve-Z uta u-Megilat Ta'anit* (Hamburg: Christian Simon Schröder, 1757), leaf 22a. Special Collections of the Mendel Gottesman Library of Hebraica/Judaica of the Yeshiva University (hereafter YU), New Rare 87-049.

3.6.2f. From a manuscript, Jacob Vivante, *Sansan le-Yair* (Florence, Italy, c. 18th-19th century), leaf 2a. YU, MS. 1290.

3.6.2g. From a manuscript, *Compendium of Selected Prayers* (Italy?, 1723), preface. YU, MS. 1294.

3.6.2h. From a work critically attacking the then newly emerging Hassidic movement, Solomon Gottlieb Stern, *Kotenot Passim* (1832), leaf 52. YU, MS. 1380.

Illus. 3.6.2i-j are from a book published in 1735.

Blake's "מ" (13)   3.6.2i "מ" (13)   3.6.2j "פ" (17)   Blake's "פ" (17) (from illus. 3.5.1)

Extension
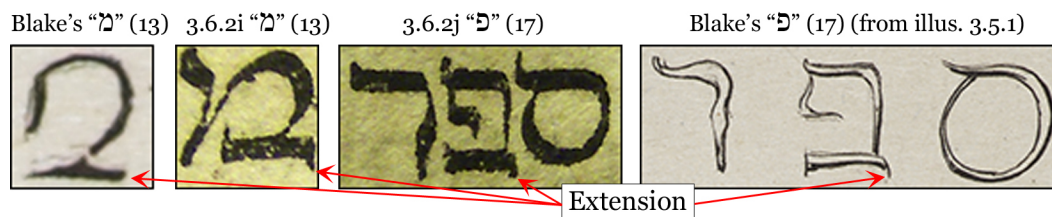
3.6.2i-j. Joh. Simonis, *Arcanum formarum nominum hebrææ linguæ, sive de significatione formali tractatus philologicus*, vol. 1 (Halæ Magdeburgicæ: Impensis Orphanotrophei, 1735), "Sectio I. Præliminaris," 14. NYPL.

Specimens of this style appear in title pages of books printed in 1787 and 1802, and it was in use as early as 1527. See Orr-Stav 16-17 and Rosenfeld 343 (pl. 560) and 431 (pl. 817).

Exaggerated ornamentation embellishes all letters in this unusual serif-style typeface. It is possible that Blake knew and mimicked this style because his letter "פ" (17) in illus.

3.5.1 has the same extension of the baseline towards the right as the character in illus. 3.6.2j. Nonetheless, Blake's "מ" (13) significantly differs from illus. 3.6.2i.

39. Residing in London, he would have had the opportunity to examine Hebrew typography in books printed with Rashi-style letters, if only by browsing the shelves of booksellers.

26 There is yet one more comparison to make. Christian D. Ginsburg (1831–1914) was born in Poland a few years after Blake died and received a traditional Jewish religious education. After emigrating to England as a young man in 1846, he converted to Christianity, entered the circle of the London Christian Hebraists, and eventually became a noted biblical scholar.[40] Although the word in illus. 3.6.2k was written some five decades after Blake died, it may be compared with Blake's style because Ginsburg studied Hebrew when a child, making him a virtual contemporary. The five-letter word translates as "in the wilderness." It was selected because the letter "ב" (02) appears twice, with the right instance adjacent to the letter "מ" (13). Lastly, I place Blake's and Ginsburg's "king" side by side in illus. 3.6.2l.

Blake's "מ" (13)

3.6.2k   Ginsburg

ב מ ד ב ר
___20-02-04-13-02___

3.6.2l   Ginsburg

Blake
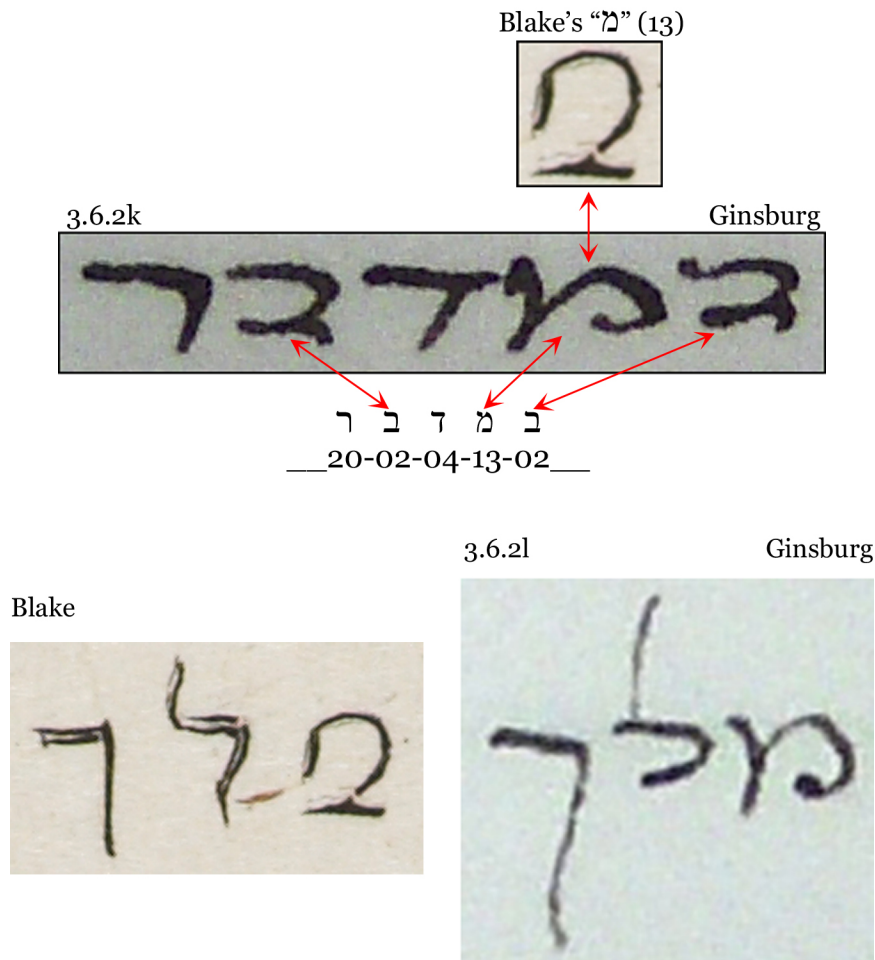
3.6.2k-l. Christian David Ginsburg, *Masorah* (c. 1880) 57 and 75. YU, MS. 721. The manuscript contains English, Greek, and Hebrew written in Ginsburg's precise micrographic hand.

Without question, Ginsburg was a skilled Hebraist who knew how to form Hebrew characters. Not so Blake. The impression given by the comparison is that Blake engraved "ב" (02) instead of the intended "מ" (13).[41]

27 The next step of the analysis compares the *Job* plate (illus. 3.6) with another famous work by Blake, the *Laocoön* (illus. 3.7), which has the same slogan, "The Angel of the Divine Presence." Blake incorporated Hebrew four times in the *Laocoön*.

40. For a biographical sketch of Ginsburg, see Bloch 583n.
41. Examination of London archives may uncover examples contemporary with Blake of the same version of "ב" (02) as used by Ginsburg.

3.7b

3.7d

3.7c

3.7a

Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on. but War only   Read Matthew CX 9 & 10

by pretences to the Two Impossibilities Chastity & Abstinence Gods of the Heathen

He repented that he had made Adam

(of the Female, the Adamah)

& it grieved him at his heart

Art can never exist without

Naked Beauty displayed

The Gods of Greece & Egypt were Mathematical Diagrams   See Plato's Works

The Angel of the Divine Presence

מלך יהוה

from Generated Organs gone as soon as

Permanent in The Imagination;

All that we See is Vision

as Nothing by the

Natural Man

The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art

The whole Business of Man Is The Arts & All Things Common

Divine Union Deriding And Denying Immediate Communion with God The Spoilers say Where are his Works That he did in the Wilderness Lo what are these Whence came they These are not the Works Of Egypt nor Babylon Whose Gods are the Powers Of this World. Goddess, Nature Who first spoil & then destroy Imaginative Art For their Glory is War and Dominion

Empire against Art   See Virgils Eneid. Lib VI. v 848

What can be Created Can be Destroyed Adam is only The Natural Man & not the Soul or Imagination

Hebrew Art is called Sin by the Deist Science

Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists. Their Works were destroyed by the Seven Angels of the Seven Churches in Asia. Antichrist Science

Science is the Tree of Death

The Tree of Life is Jesus

Satans Wife The Goddess Nature is War & Misery & Heroism a Miser

For every Pleasure Money Is Useless There are States in which all Visionary Men are accounted Mad Men such are Greece & Rome Such is Empire or Tax See Luke Ch 2 v 1

What we call Antique Gems are the Gems of Aarons Breast Plate

Is not every Vice possible to Man described in the Bible openly All is not Sin that Satan calls so all the Loves & Graces of Eternity

The unproductive Man is not a Christian much less the Destroyer

Christianity is Art & not Money Money is its Curse

The Cherubim of Moses & Solomon The Hosts of Heaven

Cherubim Practise nothing can be done to Practise is Art

If you leave off you are Lost

Without Unceasing Practise nothing can be done Practise is Art

The Gods of Priam are the Cherubim of Moses & Solomon: The Hosts of Heaven

Good & Evil are Riches & Poverty a Tree of Misery propagating Generation & Death

Evil

Good

Fasting &c. all relate to Art

Prayer is the Study of Art

Praise is the Practise of Art

Fast & Pray for this World but for another world do the works of God; not prayers

The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination. that is God himself The Divine Body יֵשׁוּ Jesus we are his Members

It manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision)

The outward Ceremony is Antichrist

A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian You must leave Fathers & Mothers & Houses & Lands if they stand in the way of Art

The True Christian Charity not dependent on Money (the lifes blood of Poor Families) that is on Caesar or Empire or Natural Religion Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason the Root of Good & Evil In The Accusation of Sin

Israel deliverd from Egypt is Art deliverd from Nature & Imitation

Spiritual War

ᛁ᛫ & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact, or History of Ilium

Art Degraded Imagination Denied War Governed the Nations

Drawn & Engraved by William Blake

3.7. *Laocoön*, copy B. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive* <http://www.blakearchive.org>.

יהֹ & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact. or History of Ilium

י ה
___05-10___

A two-letter name for God, in perfectly formed serif letters, is at bottom left (illus. 3.7a, above). In the upper left is the Hebrew for Jesus, with two letters reversed (illus. 3.7b).[42]


ישוע Jesus
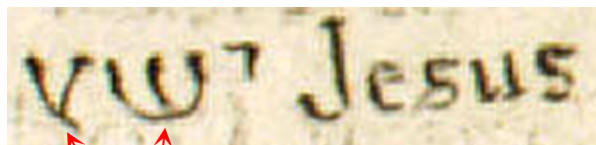
ע שׁ י
___R16-R21-10___

Except for the top horizontal segment of letter "ת" (22), which is reversed (red arrow), otherwise perfectly formed serif letters, right of center, identify the attacking serpent as Lilith, the female temptress-serpent-demon (illus. 3.7c, right). Top center, very prominently engraved under the English slogan "The Angel of the Divine Presence," are two words (illus. 3.7d): the tetragrammaton on the left, and "angel" on the right, but with a reversed "א" (01) and a nearly cursive "מ" (13).

ל י ל י ת
___R22-10-12-10-12___

The Angel of the Divine Presence
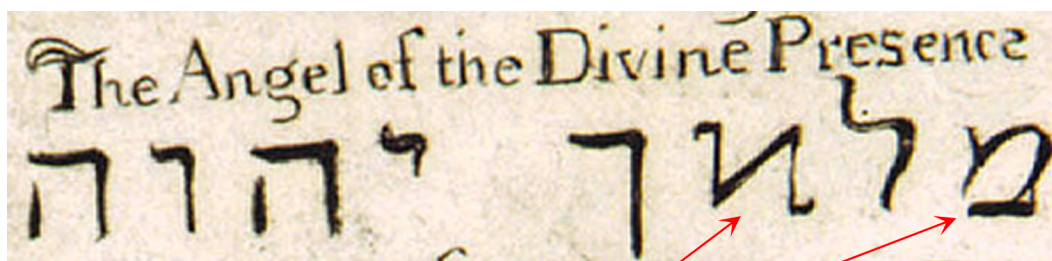
מ ל א ך י ה ו ה
___05-06-05-10___11f-R01-12-13___

28   Finally, with all the above in mind, it is now possible to consider (a) the riddle posed by Blake's misspelling "angel" in the *Job* plate by omitting letter "א" (01) when he has it correct in the *Laocoön*; and (b) the enigma of the reversed letter "א" (01) in a word that is so prominently and centrally displayed in the *Laocoön*.

I begin by quoting Spector as representative of the scholarly discourse:

> Blake's work is *full of such inconsistencies*, not only within single drawings, but among individual drawings as well. For example, at the top of "The Laocoön" is the heading "The Angel of the Divine Presence," followed by a corrupt

42. The name Jesus is spelled with four letters, "ישוע" (___16-06-21-10___), as Spector points out ("Blake's Graphic Use of Hebrew" 78). The letter "ו" (06) functions as a vowel indicator. With the vowel omitted, the three letters ___16-21-10___ mean "to save, to deliver," as defined in Parkhurst's lexicon (Parkhurst, 1762, *ECCO* image 157). Blake may be using the Hebrew to represent the concept of Christ as savior. However, he may have intended the actual name of Christ, because the Protestant theologians of his era promoted the study of Hebrew without vowels (points), a concept expressed in the full title of Parkhurst's lexicon (see Works Cited and Parkhurst, 1762, *ECCO* image 1).

Hebrew version in which the *alef* [letter "א" (01)] of the word "angel" is reversed …. In contrast, the identical phrase heads the … Job illustration, but here, Blake omits the *alef* entirely, leaving us with … the Hebrew word for "king".… *If we assume* that Blake did not simply forget to include the *alef*, especially since he knew the word, then *we must conclude that the corruption was deliberate*, though the explanation for the alteration may defy our powers of analysis.[43]

The truth is sometimes to be found in the simplest theory (Occam's razor). It may be, as G. E. Bentley, Jr., suggests, that Blake made errors when doing Hebrew.[44] How this could have occurred is suggested in a letter by John Linnell where we learn that the "borders [of the *Job* plates] were an afterthought, and designed as well as engraved upon the copper *without a previous drawing*" (emphasis mine).[45] Because Blake worked on the *Job* borders extemporaneously, it is possible that he did the same when adding words to the *Laocoön* plate. Rosamund Paice so argues.[46] This may be the cause of the errors—surely, Blake was capable of human mistakes, no different from the many editors who attempt to reproduce his "ABC" "אבג" (see table 2). However, for those who cannot accept fallibility in Blake, I propose a more elaborate and speculative explanation.

29 Who is, and where is, the angel in the two engravings? The answer is obvious in the *Job* plate (illus. 3.6), where Satan is front and center.[47] What could be more evident? Now examine the *Laocoön* (illus. 3.7). How is Satan depicted? He is clearly off to the side, entangled and helpless in the coils of Lilith, and identified as one of the two children of God (illus. 3.7a). Here, he is a minor character in the composition, unlabeled.[48] Consider the four figures, as Blake perceives them: God is not an angel—God is the creator; Lilith is a demon, certainly no angel; Adam is a man, also not an angel; Satan is the angel. Now examine the placement of the slogan (illus. 3.7d). It is not over the head of whichever of the two "sons" represents Satan, but directly above God, as it is in the *Job* engraving (illus. 3.6). Blake placed the Eng-

lish above the Hebrew, and the Hebrew above God, in both. Why above God, when it clearly refers to an angel, which could only be Satan? The answer, I suggest, is to consider that the Hebrew refers not to Satan at all, but only to God.

30 We now consider the illusion in each engraving. The *Job* engravings were published in 1826, and, by current judgment, the *Laocoön* is dated afterwards.[49]
Job: A person whose primary language is English will instinctively read from top left to bottom right, and on encountering the phrase "The Angel of the Divine Presence" will probably assume that the words immediately below are a Hebrew translation. The Hebraist will form the same assumption, then immediately realize upon reading the Hebrew that it has a different interpretation:

$$\text{מ ל ך י ה ו ה}$$
__05-06-05-10__11f-12-13__
LORD   KING

The Hebraist, expecting the equivalent of the English "The Angel of the Divine Presence," instead perceives "Lord the King" (or "Jehovah the King") and will be confounded. The meaning becomes clear, however, if the Hebrew phrase is associated with the image of God ("Lord the King") immediately below, and not with Satan, as implied by the word "angel" in the slogan above.

31 In this plate (illus. 3.6), Blake depicts three lines from the biblical plain text. Job 1.6, quoted in small letters at the very bottom of the plate,[50] sets the stage. We see two parallel scenes: Heaven above, Earth below. In Heaven, a radiant God sits enthroned, an open book in his lap, attended by the "Sons of God," all in contemplative study. On Earth, duplicating the heavenly tableau, a righteous Job with book in hand converses with angels, surrounded by his family, all in contemplative study.[51] God calls Satan to account for his whereabouts; the latter replies that he was traveling the world (1.7: "And the Lord said unto Satan: 'Whence comest thou?' Then Satan answered the Lord, and said: 'From going

43. Spector, "Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist" 202. Emphasis mine, except for the word "*alef*." See also 225n40.

44. Bentley, *William Blake's Writings* 1: 664n.

45. Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise* 396.

46. Paice argues that the words were added late in Blake's life: "The uneven spacing, and the mistakes, of the surrounding text suggest that it probably was scratched and/or engraved straight into the plate. … This suspicion is supported by the fact that the inscriptions (including the signature line) appear to have been cut with a graver, and not etched" (57).

47. Blake places Satan centrally in every *Job* engraving in which he appears.

48. Lilith is labeled (illus. 3.7c), but Satan and Adam are not.

49. For the history of the *Laocoön* and an analysis of the imagery, see Essick, *Separate Plates* xxvii, 98-101. However, for the most recent scholarship on its dating, see the *William Blake Archive*, which assigns a print date after the *Job*: "The central image of the statue may have been executed as early as c. 1815 …. The inscribed texts surrounding the statue were almost certainly added at a much later date, c. 1826-27." "Print Date: c. 1826-27" (Illuminated Books, *Laocoön*, introduction and copy information for copy B, accessed 8 March 2010). Bentley dates it "1826?" (*The Stranger from Paradise* 463).

50. As Blake engraves it: "There was a day when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord & Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord."

51. The heavenly scene is in Job 1.6. Blake includes the earthly scene because of Job 1.8.

to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it'").[52] Blake depicts this by showing a pensive God looking at Satan, who is in mid-stride. Next, in Job 1.8, God asks Satan: "Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a whole-hearted and an upright man, one that feareth God, and shunneth evil?"[53] Blake shows this by words and image: the words are in an arc at the top of the plate, and the image shows God pointing down towards Job.[54] He further emphasizes God by engraving phrases above and below that refer to God in one manner or another. The composition of this plate, therefore, has God at the top and Job, a mortal on Earth, necessarily at the bottom. Only midpoint remains for Satan. Blake does not place Satan there because of his prominence and importance, but because of compositional demands. Satan is subordinate to God, who is paramount, and the focus is on God's role in the Job story. This is the context necessary to understand the Hebrew slogan.

32 Now we consider the three central title lines. All are about God. In an arc, Blake engraved "Hast thou considered my Servant Job," the question posed by God. The second line identifies whom it is that God is addressing (see illus. 3.4, describing Satan as an "Angel"). The third, in Hebrew, labels the image of God. Associating Hebrew with God is not a new theme for Blake; three decades earlier, in *Night Thoughts*, he shows God with a scroll of Hebrew letters (see illus. 1.1), and the Hebrew slogan on the open book represents God, to whose heavenly realm the triumphant queen points (see illus. 1.4).

The perception of a wrong translation is just an illusion caused by considering only the second and third lines without the overall context. It matters not if Blake deliberately or inadvertently created the illusion. If deliberate, the English reference to an angel would be a red herring to mislead the Hebraist. If inadvertent, we may imagine Blake's surprise when a Hebraist complained that he erred because

the Hebrew for "angel" (מלאך) is misspelled. Whichever, it is an illusion of a translation. By the overall context, Blake intended "king" (מ), and that is what we see.

33 *Laocoön*: The Hebrew words with the largest letters act as a headline or banner to attract the eye. The non-Hebraist, for whom the words convey no meaning, will probably assume that the Hebrew is the equivalent of the English engraved immediately above: "The Angel of the Divine Presence." The Hebraist will immediately understand the two Hebrew words as a phrase to mean "The Lord's Angel" (or "Jehovah's Angel"), a translation perfectly consistent with the English.

מ ל א ך י ה ו ה
__05-06-05-10__11f-R01-12-13__
LORD   ANGEL

However, the Hebraist will simultaneously recognize that something is wrong, because the "א" (01) is reversed. The reversal is a clue. Upon deliberately reconsidering the word with the offending letter deleted, the Hebraist will suddenly perceive "king" (מלך) in place of "angel" (מלאך). The translation becomes "Lord, the King," a title consistent with the central figure of the *Laocoön*, whom Blake conceptualizes to be a representation of God.

Spector supposes that Blake could not have erred because he knew the Hebrew words for "angel" and "king" ("Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist" 202). If not by error, then he did it for a purpose. I offer two suggestions for the reversed letter in the *Laocoön*. Perhaps Blake intended the Hebrew to convey a double meaning: "angel," as a translation of the English slogan above, and "king," as a label for the image below. It could, however, be another red herring to reinforce the illusion of a translation. Ignore the offending reversed letter, and the word becomes "king." The critical concept is to recognize that the Hebrew banner is immediately above God, not above Satan, just as we see in the *Job*.[55]

52. Soncino edition.

53. Soncino edition.

54. Thereafter, in Job 1.9-12, Satan issues the challenge that God should test Job, and God authorizes Satan to so do (see note 35, above).

55. Linnell studied Greek and Hebrew; his biographer, Alfred Thomas Story, tells of his learning Hebrew (and Greek) after conversion to the Baptist communion in 1812 in order to study the Bible. His teacher was Thomas Palmer, his future father-in-law, described as having "a good knowledge of Hebrew." Story is of the opinion that "[Linnell] does not appear to have carried his studies very far … at that time, and they were probably soon relinquished." In 1843, he resumed serious study and gained a degree of competence (Story vol. 1, ch. 5; vol. 2, ch. 7). On the relationship between Blake and Linnell, Story says: "A similarity of thought between the two men soon led to a very close intimacy between them, and they remained fast friends until the death of the elder closed as kindly a chapter of friendship as is anywhere to be met with in the annals of art or literature" (vol. 1, ch. 12).

The modern revision of Story's biography by Linnell's great-grandson offers this comment about Linnell's meeting Blake for the first time on 24 June 1818: "The two men seem to have taken to each other at once. Linnell was then twenty-six and Blake sixty-one. Their friendship lasted until Blake's death, ten years later in 1827. Linnell was obviously fascinated by this man whose art and writings reflected so strongly a special image of God. He was surprised to discover that Blake too had learned Greek and Hebrew, and this immediately put their discussions about religion on a special footing" (D. Linnell 53).

The implication of all this is that at the time that Blake was engraving the *Job* and the *Laocoön* Hebrew slogans, Linnell had some command of Hebrew (the extent of which is unknown). One may suspect that they discussed the Hebrew as work on the plates progressed. If discussions did occur, and if Linnell understood the difference in the Hebrew spelling of "king" and "angel," then what Blake engraved was for a purpose. In the absence of documentary evidence, however, the vetting of Blake's Hebrew by Linnell remains just an enticing speculation.

Blake's motive for introducing Hebrew wordplays into his art is argued in a forthcoming paper, *Blake's Priestly Blessing: God Blesses Job*.

Conclusion

34 These few samples of Blake's Hebrew calligraphy may not be statistically representative or relevant. Considered in and of themselves, the images from the period before 1803 indicate a lack of command over the written character. Although the Butts watercolors demonstrate Blake's great artistic mastery, they do not demonstrate mastery of the Hebrew alphabet. The Hebrew words from the *Job* and *Laocoön* engravings are properly formed, but imply a confusion in the spelling of the words "angel" and "king," if not part of a deliberate illusion. Blake may also be distorting Hebrew characters for an ulterior purpose in support of a personal theology. His graphic representations of Hebrew show only what the eye can see, and tell no tale of how they came into being. If these specimens are typical of Blake's written Hebrew, however, then they may be a measure of his command of the language.

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