

Part I

Why is Harvonah "zachur latov?" What makes him so much better than all of the other eunuchs in the Megillah? Luckily, this question is covered in the Talmud in Masechet Masechet 12b, as follows:

"Rabbi Motek said: Harvonah comes from Haruv = carob. Harvonah was the sweetest of the eunuchs, who gave sweets to everyone."

Rashi comments that all the world knows that after the end of the megillah, Harvona invented hamantaschen – in Old French, "les hamantaschens."

Tosafot disagree and claim that such a sweet idea couldn't have had its origin in a non-Jew. Instead, they quote Rabeinu Tam as saying that Harvonah was actually the chief baker in Shushan, but the recipe itself came from Esther.

Modern commentators note that this means that chocolate hamantaschen, rather than being a modern invention, are actually VERY authentic, and the eating of chocolate on Purim may be a Biblical commandment, based on interpreting the phrase in Exodus 12:8 "al m'rorim yoch'luhu" to be referring not to maror on Pesach but to chocolate on Purim before sugar was available.

"Rabbi Ma'avak said: Harvonah comes from Herev = sword. Harvonah was the most blood-thirsty of the eunuchs."

Rashi notes that originally, Harvonah's violent impulses were directed at Jews, but since he changed through the course of the story – as evidenced by his suggestion to hang (or perhaps impale) Haman on the stake prepared for Mordechai – he is an excellent example of teshuvah and should be remembered for good.

Tosafot note that Harvonah's so-called "teshuvah" is really only prompted by his own self-interest once the power shifts into the hands of the Jews, and they quote 17 other places in the Talmud where it is stated that "teshuvah" that benefits one's political position is invalid. They go on to suggest that Rashi was somewhat delusional when he wrote his comment and that they never really thought much of ol' Zeyde anyway.

Modern commentators take Tosafot to be saying that the idea that Harvonah should be remembered for good is really a euphemism for having his name blotted out, since the rabbis often say "good" when they mean "bad," "right" when they mean "left," and "treif" when they mean "kosher." They then order out for BLT's on kosher rye bread.

"Rabbi Mahloket said: Harvonah was originally Ha-rivon from Riv = argument. Harvonah was the most argumentative of the eunuchs."

Rashi interprets this to mean that he always brought up difficult or inconvenient facts, much like some of the amoraim in the Talmud.

Tosafot say, and I quote, "That's our guy!"

Modern commentators argue about what the meaning of "was" was, and they refer to an obscure Rabbi Clinton, about whom little is known.

Part II

Following the third interpretation, I want to offer for our consideration a text that the Harvonah Memorial Foundation has recently put on their website. Apparently this newly reconstructed text is an early, "rough draft" of the 10 Commandments as it was known in ancient times, and this may change our understanding of this foundational text of the Abrahamic religions and bring about the fall of Western Civilization, unless the Harvonah Memorial Foundation is given adequate funding in the next federal budget cycle. In any case, research supported by the Harvonah Memorial Foundation, based on ancient Ugaritic texts discovered late at night in a Philadelphia dumpster, suggests that this text comes from what Bible critics are now calling the "FU" source, which joins the P, J, D, and E sources that no one much understood anyway. The following are translations of this earlier, much more authentic version of the 10 Commandments:

1. I am the Lord your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt, you ungrateful wretches.
2. You shall have no other gods before Me. Next to me is okay. And behind me, to the left, to the right, whatever. Just not before me.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your G-d in vain. Or in the rain. Or in Spain. Not sure about on the plain; I'll get back to you.
4. Remember Shabbat. No, strike that, guard Shabbat. No, remember. No, guard. Okay, just agree to no threshing on Shabbat and we have a deal.
5. Honor your father and your mother. And your mother's father. And your cousin's father's mother. And your next-door neighbor's sister's aunt's boyfriend's mother. You won't live any longer; it'll just seem longer.
6. You shall not murder unless you have a really good reason.
7. You shall not commit adultery more than once a week.
8. You shall not steal anything really tacky
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, but you can lie all you want about people who live across town.
10. Of course you shall covet anything that is your neighbor's! You're only human!

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Hag Sameah!