

King Solomon and the Two-headed Man

by Ahimaaz, Court Historian



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BENAIAH, THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD, WAS STANDING beside the throne and peering towards the entrance-way. “You won’t believe this next case,” he said, shaking his head. “It’s bizarre.”

“And a priest of the Temple suing GOD—that wasn’t bizarre?” said King Solomon, referring to the case he had just dismissed. “People are nuts!”*

The bailiff had called for the next case; and seven men were filing into the hall. Their mode of dress, style of beard, and demeanor were unremarkable. One of them, however, had a physical trait so distinctive that spectators were straining to get a better look. For the man had two heads.

The seven men arranged themselves in a row before the throne. One of them stepped forward and bowed.

“Sire,” he said, “we are the sons of Gilgil the Cainite. I am the eldest, Jared by name. We beg you to settle a dispute that has arisen in regards to our inheritance.”

* This may have been the first time GOD was sued; but it would not be the last. In the eighteenth century Rabbi Aryeh Leib (known as “the Grandfather”), of Spola in the Ukraine, brought suit against GOD. The region had been experiencing a famine; and many were without food. Rabbi Leib assembled the judges of the Rabbinical Court, came before them as a litigant, and presented his suit.

Jewish law, he pointed out, obligated a master to support his servants and their families. He then quoted a passage from Leviticus: “For unto Me the children of Israel are servants; they are My servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord thy GOD.” And he demanded that GOD abide by the law and support His servants.

The judges found in favor of Rabbi Leib. A few days later, an unexpected shipment of grain arrived; and bread was distributed to the needy.

“Go on.”

“Our father, Gilgil, was a two-headed man, who came to this country during the reign of your father. King David granted him land in the north; and there he farmed and prospered. Marrying a local woman, Gilgil begat seven sons. Six of us resemble our mother, having been born with just a single head. But the seventh son—our brother Pilpil—is two-headed like his father.

“Last winter Gilgil passed away. He had specified that his estate—comprised of land, cattle, and gold—was to be divided equally among his sons. So its disposition is clear: There being seven of us, each gets a seventh of the estate. One of us, however, disputes that arithmetic. Namely, Pilpil here.” He indicated his two-headed brother.

“We do indeed dispute it!” said Pilpil’s left head. “We are *two* sons, not one.”

“So we get *two* shares,” said the right head. “Two-eighths of the estate.”

“Nonsense,” said the eldest son. “You are no different from the rest of us—your physical anomaly notwithstanding—and are entitled to no greater share.”

The five other sons nodded in agreement.

“Such is our dispute, O King,” said the eldest son. “Settle it for us. Explain to Pilpil that—though endowed with two heads—he is only one person.”

“Not true!” said the left head. “There are two of us—are there not?”

“Absolutely!” said the right head. “Gimme five!”

Pilpil slapped his hands together, and exchanged grins with himself.

“Did your father Gilgil ever intimate that he considered himself to be two persons?” asked Solomon.

“Not at all,” replied the eldest son. “Oh, he would sometimes attribute his success as a farmer to being able to work twice as hard as single-headed people. But that was just a joke he liked to make.”

“I see,” said Solomon. And leaning back in the throne, he pondered the case—frowning his brow, clutching his chin, murmuring to himself.

Finally he said: “Gentlemen, I must cogitate further on

this matter. My finding is postponed until tomorrow. Be here in the morning; and I shall render judgment.”

The sons of Gilgil filed out of the throne room. Upon reaching the lobby, they resumed their dispute: each of Pilpil’s heads arguing with different brothers.

The bailiff announced that no more cases remained on the docket. Solomon adjourned court, put his seal on documents, and departed the hall.

Engrossed in thought, he made his way to the new wing of the palace. There he tugged open a bronze door and entered the Tower of Learning.

The Tower of Learning was a noteworthy addition to the palace. In designing it, Solomon and his architect, Ab-hiram, had worked closely together. A turret with many windows, and thus an abundance of light, the Tower loomed over the palace like a watchtower. Outwardly, it was forbidding—fortresslike despite its windows; inside, it was comfortable and even cozy.

On the lowest level was an office for Joseph, the boyhood friend of Solomon’s, who served as librarian. Joseph’s desk was overflowing with scrolls and loose papers. The walls of the Tower were lined with cubbyholes—thousands of them; and these were filled with scrolls, codices, and clay tablets. For the Tower of Learning housed the library of King Solomon. In this citadel he had gathered the wisdom of the world. There were collections of Egyptian lore; treatises in cuneiform, from Sumer and Babylon; translations of works from ancient Atlantis. As Israelite traders traveled to other lands, they would bring back—at Solomon’s behest—any literary works they could find; and the Tower had filled with these treasures. In addition, the annals of the Hebrews—records dating back to the time of Moses—were kept here.

A spiral staircase provided access to the tiers of cubbyholes. It also led to Solomon’s study: a round chamber at the top of the Tower. The chamber was furnished with a desk and chair, a supply of snacks, and a window seat—comfortably cushioned—that overlooked the city. Here King Solomon read, wrote, and cogitated. A trapdoor in the ceiling led to a platform, on which he conducted astronomical

studies—or simply contemplated the heavens.*

Joseph had been dozing at his desk. Jolted awake by Solomon's entrance, he rose hastily and bowed. Solomon waved off the formalities.

"Joseph, I'm looking for some information. During the early years of my father's reign, a two-headed man may have visited the court."

"I vaguely recall a reference to such a man."

"Can you locate it?"

"Let me check the index."

Joseph's main duty was to catalog the wealth of literary material that had accumulated. But he had also undertaken the task of indexing the annals. Checking through a scroll labeled *B*, he squinted and hummed to himself.

"Ah, here it is. 'Bicephaloid received at court. Year Eleven of David's reign, month of Adar.' Roll 132. Let's take a look."

He went up to the next level, located a scroll, and blew dust from it. Bringing it down, he handed it to Solomon.

"This roll goes back to when Jehoshaphat was court historian," said Joseph. "Adar would be towards the middle."

Solomon climbed to his study. Sliding into the window seat, he untied the scroll. And he was soon reading about Gilgil, the two-headed man.

The entry was as follows:

In the eleventh year of David's reign, in the month of Adar, some desert nomads came to Jerusalem. They had with them a strange captive: a two-headed man who had been found wandering near the Salt Sea. This prodigy was dressed in goatskin, carried a pack on his back, and had a bewildered look on both of his faces. He was taken before King David, who looked with amazement upon him and asked him his name and country.

The two-headed man introduced himself as Gilgil the Cainite. He was from the land of Tebel, he said. And he gave

* The fourth-century Pilgrim of Bordeaux describes a ruin that he visited in Jerusalem: "Here is also the corner of an exceedingly high tower. . . . Under the pinnacle of the tower are many ruins, and here was Solomon's palace. There also is the chamber in which he sat and wrote [the Book of] Wisdom."

an account—now one head speaking, then the other—of his people and of himself.

The Cainites, explained Gilgil, were the descendants of Cain. The early Cainites had surpassed even their ancestor in wickedness. So GOD had banished them from the earth and confined them to Tebel—a cavern-world far underground. And GOD had laid a further curse upon them: *their children would be born with two heads*. To the descendants of Cain—who had slain his brother—the heads were intended as a reminder: that men were meant to live in harmony with one another.

Gilgil described Tebel. It was a vast cavern in the earth, with its own small sun; water that seeped from above; and a thin layer of soil. So the Cainites were able to eke out an existence as farmers. They did find Tebel, with its dim light and sky of stone, to be a melancholy place. But they were resigned to their fate.

Yet the Cainites clung to a remembrance of the outer world. And growing up, Gilgil had listened avidly—“with all four ears”—to descriptions of it. How he had yearned to visit that world! Finally, he had decided to attempt the journey. A certain tunnel was said to lead eventually to the surface. Loading a pack with food, water, and wood for a torch, Gilgil had murmured a prayer and entered the tunnel.

For days he had trekked along it. Though beset with fear and doubts, he had pressed onward, torch in hand. The upward slope of the tunnel was encouraging; and the air seemed to be getting fresher. Now and then, the tunnel would branch in two; and Gilgil’s heads would argue about which way to go. But he had not faltered in his resolve. And at last light had appeared ahead. The outer world!

Emerging from a cave near the Salt Sea, Gilgil had been dazzled by the sunlight. He had stood there, stunned by the beauty of the landscape and the brightness of the sky. And he had lamented the sins of the Cainites, which had caused them to be banished from this world.

Gilgil described his capture by the nomads and concluded his tale. And the King asked him questions. What was it like having two heads? Nothing special, said Gilgil. What sort of beasts inhabited the cavern-world? Moles, bats, and the like. Did the Cainites worship GOD? Gilgil replied that most of them did. They had abandoned their wicked ways and returned to the Lord. But a curious fact was this: Occasionally

one head was pious and the other was not. One would bow before the Lord, while the other would not.

King David asked him his plans. And Gilgil begged permission to remain in our country. Having seen the splendor of the outer world, he was loathe to return to Tebel. The King granted his request, gave him a parcel of land as a gift, and wished him well.

And that is the story of Gilgil, the two-headed man from inside the earth.

And King David sang afterwards:

“O Lord, how manifold are Thy works
In wisdom hast Thou made them all!
Men of snow and fire-maidens
Hummingbirds and giants tall

“Giraffes and genies, minotaurs
Two-headed men from underground—
Is there no end to such strange creatures?
Thy wondrous works indeed abound!”

And it was agreed that he sang true.

Solomon lay aside the scroll. And he sat in the window, watching clouds float by and cogitating.



Word of the case had spread; and the next morning the hall was packed with spectators. The sons of Gilgil had yet to appear; and Solomon was waiting in the lounge. Benaiah poked his head in.

“That bucket of water you asked for?” he said. “I put it behind the throne.”

“Is the water cold?” asked Solomon.

“The coldest I could find. But what’s it for?”

“You’ll see.”

There was a stir in the hall as the sons of Gilgil came filing in. The last to enter was Pilpil. In an apparent attempt to bolster his claim, he was wearing a bicolored tunic: half of a brown tunic and half of a green one, sewn together. His heads were conversing—one with the other—in an animated

fashion.

The sons of Gilgil arranged themselves before the throne. Pulling out a brush, Pilpil began to groom his hair—first one head, then the other. The heads continued to jabber.

“So where’s King Solomon?” said the left head. “Let’s get on with this!”

“What’s your hurry?” said the right head.

“I want my inheritance. Don’t you? Hey everybody—two heads are better than one!”

“Absolutely!” said the right head.

The eldest son gave Pilpil a sharp look. “Be quiet. Show some decorum. This is a courtroom.”

The left head made a face at him and whispered into the ear of the right head. The right head threw itself back and laughed.

The herald blew the trumpet and announced King Solomon. And emerging from the lounge, Solomon took his place on the throne. An expectant hush fell over the spectators.

Addressing the sons of Gilgil, Solomon reviewed the facts of the case. Then he had a stool brought out and told Pilpil to sit on it. Pilpil exchanged amused looks with himself, and plopped down on the stool.

“Sir or sirs,” said Solomon. “You claim to be two persons. I am going to conduct a test that may elucidate the matter. Are you ready?”

“I am,” said the left head.

“And I,” said the right head.

“Benaiah, blindfold both heads.”

Benaiah tied on blindfolds. Waving his hand in front of each blindfold, he tested them.

“I’m not sure I like this,” said the right head.

“Relax,” said the left head.

“The issue before us,” said Solomon, “is a simple one. Is Pilpil here one person or two? Each of his heads seems to have a mind of its own—or at least, a degree of independence. But is he two distinct *persons*? Indeed, what exactly *is* a ‘person’? What is the nature of a person? What are the boundaries and parameters? After much thought, I have come up with a litmus test—a criterion by which to deter-

mine how many persons are present in this man.

“That criterion is as follows. If one head is aware of what is done to the other, *they are part of a unified whole*—and therefore a single person. On the other hand, if one head is unaware of what is done to the other, they constitute two separate persons. All right, Mr. Pilpil, let’s find out.”

Solomon went behind the throne and came out with the bucket of water. He tiptoed up to Pilpil. The blindfolded heads were facing in opposite directions. One was humming a tune; the other was grinning.

Without warning, Solomon raised the bucket and poured water on the grinning head.

Simultaneously, both heads flinched and shrieked.

“Oh?” said Solomon. Again he poured water on the head.

“Hey, stop that!” cried the head.

“Enough, enough!” cried the other head.

Solomon ordered the blindfolds removed. And returning to the throne, he delivered his verdict.

“My judgment is this,” he said. “Mr. Pilpil is found to be one person. So he’s entitled to only one share of the estate. I am tempted to confiscate that share, to cover the costs of these proceedings. But we’ll let him have it. Court’s adjourned.”

The sons of Gilgil filed out of the hall. Dripping wet, Pilpil left a trail of water as he departed. Both heads were grumbling loudly about the decision.

Solomon put his seal on a document, then joined Benaiah in the lounge. “That *was* bizarre,” he said, pouring himself a glass of fruit juice.

“Does he really believe he’s two persons?” asked Benaiah. “Or was it just an act to grab an extra share of the inheritance?”

Solomon shrugged. “Who knows? In any case, Mr. Pilpil is not a trustworthy source of information. That’s why I decided to ignore him, and to turn my attention to his father.”

“You went to the annals.”

“And read Gilgil’s story—closely. Two details caught my attention. One was found in his description of the journey through the tunnel. Gilgil remarked that his heads would

sometimes disagree as to which way to go.”

“The heads were at loggerheads! They disagreed with each other.”

“Just so. Now that suggested two distinct persons. Two opinions—two minds—two *individuals*. And there was something else. Gilgil mentioned that, among his countrymen, one head might be pious while the other was not. That, too, implied separate persons.

“Initially, then, I concluded that Pilpil was indeed two persons. If he could disagree with himself, he had to be a twosome.

“But as I sat and thought about it, I changed my mind. For I realized there was something *familiar* about two conjoined heads that disagreed. Wasn’t it similar to a situation we all find ourselves in? Isn’t everyone at times undecided—unsure of himself—of two minds in a matter? And don’t we all waver in our piety—argue with ourselves about matters of religious faith? Of course we do! To be human is to be uncertain. A two-headed man is no different from you or me—his ambivalence is simply more apparent.”

Benaiah rolled his eyes. “No different from you, maybe.”

“Anyhow, I decided he was just one person. But the problem was to prove it. I needed a test whose results would be dramatic and irrefutable. Hence the bucket of water.”

“I didn’t quite grasp the logic of that test,” said Benaiah. “But I’ll say this—you got your money’s worth with the water.”

“How so?”

“You poured it over one of those silly heads—and both of them were startled!”

“They were indeed.”

“What a sight it was,” said Benaiah with a chuckle, “to see you tiptoeing up to him with that bucket of water. And then dumping it on the rascal. The things you get to do as king!”

Solomon shrugged. “It’s a living.”