

lamp

נֵר

1. Statistics

Torah: 17. Nebiim: 8 (נֵר in 2 Sam. 22:29 included). Ketubim: 19. Total: 44. נֵר also occurs as a proper name and as an element in proper names, cf. section 2b below.

2a. Literal Use

With the exception of Prov. 31:18 the literal use is confined to passages dealing with articles of sanctuary furniture. The texts with its figurative use, however, also contribute to the understanding of the literal use.

The lamp's function is to light, to illuminate (נֵר אֵר hiph., Num. 8:2; cf. Exod. 25:37; Ps. 18:29). It is a source of light (cf. נֵר אֵר, 'the light of the lamp', Jer. 25:10) and can be equated with 'light' (cf. the paralllism נֵר || אֵר [Ps. 119:105; Job 29:3; Prov. 6:23] and אֵר || נֵר [Job 18:6; Prov. 13:9]). The lamp is used in houses of man (Job 18:6; Prov. 31:18) and in the dwelling of God, in the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:37[2x]; 27:20; 30:8; 35:14; 37:23; 39:37[2x]; 40:4, 25; Lev. 24:2, 4; Num. 4:9; 8:2 [2x], 3; except Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2 always used in the plur.), the sanctuary of Shiloh (נֵר אֵלֹהִים, 1 Sam. 3:3), and in the Temple of Solomon (always in plur., 1 Kgs 7:49; 1 Chr. 28:15 [3x]; 2 Chron. 4:20f.; 13:11; 29:7). Evidently also in Zech. 4:2 (plur. 2x) holy lamps are meant.

The lamp is used to dispel the opposite of light (2 Sam. 22:29; Ps. 18:29; Job 18:6; 29:3; Prov. 20:20), the darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) of the night, including the haunting demons. Apotropaic power is attributed to the light. Even in the houses of the poorest a lamp as kept burning at night (Weippert 2002, 182). The presence of lamps in the sanctuary, intended to guarantee that also at night the deity would have a pleasant and safe abode, betrays a strongly anthropomorphic notion of God. The lamp also serves to find one's way in the darkness (Ps. 119:105; Job 29:3; Prov. 6:23) or to look for (חָפַץ qal or pi.) something or someone in dark or hidden places (Zeph. 1:12 [plur.]; Prov. 20:27; cf. Luke 15:8). To increase the effect of the light, the lamp is placed on a stand (→ מְנִרָה). Lamps and stand belong together and are often mentioned together (Exod. 25:37; 37:23; 39:37; 40:4, 24f.; Lev. 24:4;

Num. 8:2f.; 1 Kgs 7:49; Zech. 4:2; 1 Chron. 28:15; 2 Chron. 4:20f.; 13:11). To boost the intensity of the light more lamps are used. In Exod. 25:37; 37:23; Num. 8:2; Zech. 4:2 the number of seven lamps occurs. With exception of Zech. 4:2 (the seven lamps had seven spouts [מוֹצְקוֹת]) no information is given about the lamp's shape. Because in Exod. 25:37; 37:23 it is not explicitly stated that the lights are to be of gold (note also Exod. 25:38; 37:23), it is sometimes assumed that, like common lamps (see section 8), the Tabernacle lamps were of ceramic (e.g. Meyers 1976, 57). It has to be borne in mind, however, that metal lamps were luxury items. Because YHWH's house is furnished like the house of a prince, and because the lamps of the Temple of Solomon were made of gold (זָהָב; 1 Kgs 7:49; 1 Chron. 28:15 [+ כֶּסֶף, 'silver']; 2 Chron. 4:20f.), it is natural to think of lamps of gold. So 6 Exod. 38:17. The lamp burns oil (שֶׁמֶן הַמָּאֹר, → מָאֹר) by means of one or more wicks (→ פִּשְׁתָּה). For the care (עֵרֶךְ qal [Exod. 27:21; Lev. 24:3f.; Ps. 132:17; cf. Exod. 39:37]) of the lamp, the lighting of which is explicitly mentioned (עָלָה hiph. in Exod. 25:37; 27:20; 30:8; 40:4, 25; Lev. 24:2; Num. 8:2f.; בָּעַר pi. in 2 Chron. 4:20; 13:11), various utensils (→ כְּלֵי) were available, further particularised as 'containers and fuels of the lampstand's oil' (כְּלֵי שֶׁמֶן), Num. 4:9; cf. Matt. 25:3f.), 'forceps, tongs' (→ מְלָקְחוֹם), 'firepans' (→ מְחַתְּוֹת plur.), 'trimming knives, snuffers' (→ מְזַפְּרֵה).

Spreading of darkness as a result of the lamp's extinguishing (דָּעַךְ qal [Job 18:5f.; 21:17; Prov. 13:9; 20:20; 24:20]; כָּבַהּ qal [1 Sam. 3:3; Prov. 31:18] and pi. [2 Sam. 21:17; 2 Chron. 29:7]) has to be prevented by good care. According to Exod. 30:7f.; Lev. 24:3 (cf. also Num. 8:2f.), the care for the lights in the Tabernacle was entrusted to Aaron, the highpriest. In Exod. 27:21 that task is also assigned to his sons, the priests (cf. 2 Chron. 13:10f.).

With regard to the time of burning of the lamps in the Tabernacle the information is diverse. In Exod. 27:20 and Lev. 24:2 mention is made of permanent light (נֵר תָּמִיד; for the conspicuous sing. [to be regarded as a collective, cf. Lev. 24:4, or as the incorporation of an ancient tradition according to which originally there stood just one lamp in the sanctuary, cf. 1 Sam. 3:3] see the discussion in Houtman 2000, 462f.). However, Exod. 27:21;

30:7f.; Lev. 24:3 give the impression that the light burned only at night, from evening till morning (cf. 1 Sam. 3:3; 2 Chr. 3:11). It has been proposed that continuous burning was necessary because light from the outside could not reach the inner sanctuary. It is further contended that in ancient Israel there was the custom to have a lamp burning in the house day and night. If that were the case, the existence of an analogous practice in the sanctuary would be quite plausible. It is doubtful if such a custom of letting a lamp burn continually really existed (see Galling 1923, 33-37). What is possible is that people liked to have a lamp burning all night. Particularly the well-to-do could afford that (Prov. 31:18). For the sanctuary it was an ordinance to have the lamp burning through the whole night. The true meaning of Exod. 27:20 seems to be that there must always be enough oil, so that without interruption, each night anew, the light can burn again. Negligence brings on the wrath of YHWH (cf. 2 Chron. 29:7). It must be assumed that, as with regular homes, the sanctuary was naturally light enough by day (cf. also 1 Kgs 8:12).

2b. Figurative Use

The lamp, i.e. the burning lamp, is used as a metaphor for the Torah of YHWH (Ps. 119:105), and for the instruction of the Wisdom teacher (Prov. 6:23). It is a symbol of the social (Jer. 25:10; cf. 4 Ezra 10:22; Rev. 18:23) as well as of the individual happiness and prosperity (Ps. 18:29; Prov. 13:19a) which have to be attributed to YHWH's 'lamp', God's benevolent and salutary presence (2 Sam. 22:29; Job 29:3; cf. the characterisation of YHWH as אֹרֶי־יִשְׂרָאֵל in Isa. 10:17, and as אֹרֵי יְיָ in Ps. 27:1). Cf. also Prov. 31:18, where the lamp has a literal as well as a figurative sense (permanent wellbeing). Generally the text of Prov. 20:27 with the lamp of YHWH (נֵר יְהוָה) as a metaphor for 'the human spirit' (נִשְׁמַת אָדָם), is considered corrupt (נֹצֵר 'he who heeds' instead of נֵר is proposed; cf. Job 7:20; Prov. 24:12). The lamp also is a symbol of the king as the source of blessing for his people, of whom the nation's wellbeing depends (נֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל, of David in 2 Sam. 21:17, → beginRנֵר; cf. the characterisation of the king as רֵיחַ אֶפְיֵנו, 'the breath of our nostrils' in Lam. 4:20), and a designation for the royal descendant on the throne who keeps the

dynastic light burning (Ps. 132:17; cf. the use of → נֵר). Similarly Babylonian and Assyrian deities and kings could be designated as the *nūru* ‘light, lamp’ of world (*CAD* (N), 347-351). The Old Aramaic light-goddess Aya is called *Nr* (*KAI*, Bd. 1, 245).

The lamps of Zeph. 1:12 may be regarded as a designation of the eyes of YHWH (cf. Zech. 3:9; 4:10). The extinguished lamp is a symbol of the misfortune and the end of the wicked (Job 18:6; 21:17; Prov. 13:9b; 20:20; 24:20), who have no descendants and no future (cf. also Rev. 2:5). In the sanctuary the radiant light of the lamps offers a fitting environment to him who is all brightness and glory (cf. Isa. 60:1-3; Hab. 3:4, 11; Ps. 50:2; 104:1f. and e.g. 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 1:5). It is assumed that נֵר as a personal name (1 Sam. 14:50f.; 1 Chron. 8:33, etc.) and as an element of a personal name, אָבִינֵר (1 Sam. 14:50) or אֲבִינֵר, Abner (‘the father is a lamp’ or ‘Ner is the father’, 1 Sam. 14:50f. etc.), and נֵר־יְהוִי or נֵר־יְהוָה, Neriah (‘my lamp is YH, Jer. 32:12, 16; 36:14, 32 etc.), is also a metaphor of happiness and prosperity (Noth 1928, 167f.; Fowler 1988, 81).

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

The name Neriah is attested on ostraca, for example from Lachish (1,5) and Arad (31,4). See the evidence in D. Kellermann, *TWAT*, Bd. 5, 621; Aḥituv 2008, 56, 135, 177.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: נֵר is a derivative of the common Semitic root *nwr/nyr* ‘to give light’ (Leslau, *CDG*, 401, 410; Klein, *CEDHL*, 410, 427; *HAHAT*, 797).

5. Ancient Versions

⊕ and other Greek versions: Prov. 20:20; 24:20 λαμπτήρ – *GELS-L*, 277: ‘lantern, lamp, torch’; *LSJ*, 1028: (1) ‘stand or grate for pine and other wood used for lightning rooms’ (2) ‘lantern’; Prov. 13:9; 20:27 φῶς – *GELS-L*, 511: ‘light, day-light, illumination’; *LSJ*, 1916: ‘the light of a torch, lamp, fire etc.’; in all other instances (in Zeph. 1:12 plur. for Ⓢ sing.) λύχνος (so α’, σ’, θ’ also in Prov. 20:27; 24:20) – *GELS-L*, 286: ‘lamp’; *LSJ*, 1068: ‘portable light, lamp’.

ט^T: In all instances בוֹצִינָא – Tal, *DSA*, 86: ‘candle, lamp’.

ט: ט^O, ט^{PsJ}, ט^N in all instances בוֹצִינָא plur. (also in Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2; sing. in ט) – Levy, *CWT*, vol. 1, 86: ‘ein aus Linnen (בוֹצִי, od. Flachs) bereiteter Docht’ (cf. Greek βύσσος); ‘Leuchte’; Jastrow, *DTT*, 147: ‘wicks’; ‘candle, lamp, light’; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 88: ‘lamp, light’; ט^J 2 Sam. 21:17 מַלְכוּתָא → נֵר, section 5; 2 Sam. 22:29 נְהוּרָא – Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 96: ‘Licht’; Jastrow, *DTT*, 881: ‘light’; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 342: ‘light’. Zeph. 1:12 נְבַרְשָׁא – Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 87: ‘Flamme, od. Lampe, Leuchter’; Jastrow, *DTT*, 871: ‘lamp, candle’; ט^K 18:29; 119:105; 132:17; late Rabbinic Targum Job 18:6; 21:17; 29:3 (in none of the cases 11Q10 has been preserved): שְׂרָנָא – Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 517: ‘Licht, Leuchte’; Jastrow, *DTT*, 1628: ‘light, lamp, lantern’. No Targum of Proverbs exists, only a late Midrash. In all remaining instances the Targumim have בוֹצִינָא (see above).

ס: In all instances ס renders šrg’ – Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 597: ‘lamp’. Part of 1 Chron. 28:15 and 2 Chron. 4:20-21 are lacking. According to the Leiden edition, ס has a singular in Zeph. 1:12 and Zech. 4:2b where ט has a plural.

ט: *lucerna* – Lewis & Short, *LD*, 1079: ‘lamp, oil-lamp, light’.

6. Judaic Sources

Cf. Krauss, *TA*, Bd. 1, 68-71. The cultic lamps are dealt with in Judaic sources, but their data do not contribute to the elucidation of their form and meaning in the Hebrew Bible. According to later tradition, also during the day a light was burning in the sanctuary. Josephus, *Ant.*, III.199, relates that three of the seven lamps remained lit. Rabbinic tradition mentions only one lamp that was kept burning and used to light the other lamps at night (m.Tamid, III, 10[9]; VI, 1). Complete quenching of the lamp was regarded as ominous (b.Joma, 39b). It would seem that the later practice was influenced by the tradition about the tent shrine. The existence of a permanently burning light in the second temple is explicitly mentioned by Pseudo-Hecataeus (in Josephus, *Apion*, I, 199). Also the synagogue had one or two permanent lamps. In 11Q19 (= 11QTemple^a) נֵר plur. occurs in col. IX.12 and XXII.1

(see also 11Q20^b V.22).

7. Illustrations

→ מְנִרָה and Avitzur, 104; *EM*, 921-2, and see further section 8.

8. Archaeological Remarks

The lamp was invented in prehistoric times (Salonen, *Hausgeräte*, vol. 1, 131-3). It was a shallow bowl (for the oil), sometimes with the rims bent inward and with one or more (cf. Zech. 4:2) notches – the rim pinched outward, creating a spout – for one or more wicks (of flax) (→ פִּשְׁתָּהּ). It is known that from the end of the 7th century in Palestine there was in use a closed lamp with two openings, a spout for the wick and a shallow cavity with a circular hole for pouring in the oil. Sometimes the lamps had a small base and normally were of pottery, but lamps made of stone and metal were in use as well. For descriptions and illustrations see Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, 269-73; Bd. 7, 230-2; *BRL*², 198-201; Barrois 1939, 451-453; Smith 1961; 1964; 1966; Kennedy 1963; Israeli & Avida 1988; Weippert 1988, 335f., 410-2, 640-5; Adler 2004; Sussman 2007.

9. Conclusion

The lamp was a shallow bowl containing olive- or castor oil, sometimes with the rims bent inward and with one or more notches for one or more wicks. Usually it was of ceramic, but as luxury items also metal lamps were in use. Often the lamp denotes the burning lamp. In that case נֵר can acquire the meaning ‘light’.

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