

## THE APPLE OF HIS EYE

Tom McDaniel

The expression or idiom *bābat<sup>c</sup>ênô* (בַּבַּת עֵינוֹ) “the apple of his eye,” occurring in Zechariah 2:7, is also found in Arabic and Syriac. The Hebrew word for the fruit called an “apple” is *tappûah* (תַּפּוּחַ), which is totally unrelated to the word *bābah* (בַּבַּה) appearing in Zechariah 2:7. The Hebrew word *bābah* (בַּבַּה), used in this idiom may be derived from (1) a word for “baby, babe,” indicating the “baby of the eye,” or (2) from the word *bābā* (בַּבָּא) meaning “gate,” indicating the “gate of the eye.” The Greek translation of Zechariah 2:7 used the word κόρης (*korēs*) meaning “damsel, maiden, daughter,” but translated “pupil” when used with reference to the eye. The Vulgate of this verse has *pupillam oculi eius* “the pupil of his eye.” The English “pupil” is the diminutive of *pupa* “girl, doll,” so called because of the image which is reflected in another person’s eye — which appears like a tiny doll. (The English word “apple” indicated in Old English and Middle English “fruit, apple, the eyeball, or anything round.) The “apple of the eye” meant nothing other than the “round [center] of the eye.”

In Deu 32:10 the expression “the apple of his eye” also appears, but a different word is used for the “apple.” There it is *’ishôn<sup>c</sup>ênô* (אִישׁוֹן עֵינוֹ), the meaning of which is clarified by same expression in Arabic, *’însân<sup>c</sup>al<sup>c</sup>ayin* (إنسان العين), which means “the image that is seen [reflected] in the black of the eye, what is seen in the eye, like as in a mirror, when a thing faces it . . . the pupil or the apple of the eye, or the black of the eye” (Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon*, 115). The derivation of the word *’ishôn* (אִישׁוֹן) could be related to the word *’îsh* (אִישׁ) “man.” But I think it is a noun related to the word *’ashash* (אֲשַׁשׁ) “to glitter, to be dark.”

In Psalm 17:8 the expression appears as *’ishôn bat<sup>c</sup>āyin* (אִישׁוֹן בַּת־עַיִן), which adds the word *daughter* of the eye,” like the Greek expression noted above, “the daughter of the eye.” Thus, “the apple of the eye” can be expressed three different ways in Hebrew, and all three were used to express affection. Jerusalem and Zion was considered to be the objects of God’s affection.